

Browne's excellent translation of the "Tarikh-i Jadid", which is another "manufactured" history, and therefore of little value in itself. It is, however, provided with excellent notes containing excerpts from the "Noqtatu'l-Kaf". Further narratives are found in the notes to the "Traveller's Narrative" and in Prof. Browne's other book, "Materials for the Study of the Babí

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Religion" all of which give different versions of the important events in the history of the movement. Thus the missionary was left with a confused mass of material which hampered rather than helped him. The best book on the doctrines of the movement is a German work, "Die Babí-Beha'í", published by Dr Hermann Roemer as far back as 1912. Since then a vast amount of Baha'í literature (chiefly consisting of 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings) has appeared. Dr Roemer's book, excellent though it is, is of far more value to the student of comparative religion than it is to the missionary. The only books available in Persian are totally unfit to use, consisting as they do of attacks on the personal lives and characters of Baha'í believers. However much truth there may be in these books, it is grossly unfair to argue from the particular to the general, and, in any case, no religion can be judged by the lives of its adherents, unless we choose to judge it by its best representatives, and even then our judgment will not be fair, I have, therefore, ignored all such books, and though the historical portion of this book must, and does, contain narratives which show the Baha'í leaders in an unpleasant light, I have sought to omit all but those that have a bearing on the historical development of the movement.

This book is based, for the most part, on a study of the original texts (see Bibliography), and full references are given, which will, I hope, prove of real value to missionaries. The translations are my own, except where English translations are quoted, as shown by the references. In the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words I have not troubled to follow any fixed rule, and as no distinction is made in Persian between various

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Arabic letters of similar sounds, I have contented myself with merely marking the long vowels.

I have to acknowledge my gratitude to the many friends, English and Persian, who have helped me in various ways, and I owe a special debt of gratitude to my friend the Rev. W. M. Miller, of the American Mission, who very kindly allowed me to read the manuscript of his book which is now in the press. My indebtedness to the late Prof. Browne and to Dr Roemer is fully acknowledged in the text of the book. Finally my thanks are due to the Rt. Rev. J. H. Linton, D.D., Bishop in Persia, for reading and correcting the MS. of

this book and contributing a Foreword and to my wife for seeing the book through the Press.

J. R. Richards

Shíráz, August 1932.

Foreword

The study of Baha'ism is an essential part of the effective preparation of every missionary working in these days in the Near and Middle East. At the same time most missionaries have admittedly found it an almost insuperable task to get at the historical facts and the religious principles of Baha'ism in a convenient and reliable form. Not every missionary on the field has the ability or the opportunity to hunt out such an exhaustive library of Baha'í literature as Mr. Richards possesses, and a list of which he gives us in his bibliography. As head of the Persia mission of the Church Missionary Society I am glad to put on record our indebtedness to one of our own missionaries for having in so unique a way put missionaries, and many others as well, in possession of the historical facts relating to the founders and the spread of Baha'ism, and the vital elements in its teaching.

There is no other book on Baha'ism of which I am aware that gives in the same compass, and with the same reliability and lucidity, just what everyone—missionary, traveller or official—who has contacts with Baha'ism ought to know.

I have been present and listened to Mr. Richards holding discussions with some of the leading Baha'í propagandists in Persia, and I am not surprised that they have found him so searching in his exposure of

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their teaching and their methods that they have taken as drastic steps as they are able in order to prevent their literature from reaching his hands.

Readers will be struck by his fairness in stating their case, and at the same time his trenchant criticism of the historical methods of Baha'í writers. Instances are the story of Qurratu'l-'Ayn and of Mírza Yahya.

The chapters on the Teaching of the Bab, and of 'Abdu'l-Baha are invaluable for all who would understand this faith. Mr. Richards traces its departure from Islamic teaching, reveals its glaring inconsistencies, e.g. concerning the Life after Death and the survival of personality; its opportunism, as, for example, in its attitude towards modern science and its ambiguous teaching on polygamy, etc.

It is a favourite argument with Baha'ís that a man may become a Baha'í and still retain his Christian, Jewish or other faith. But Mr. Richards convincingly shows that Baha'í teaching on all the vital

doctrines of the Christian faith is defective and unsatisfactory, for Baha'ism has no true belief in a Personal God; and the conclusion which Mr. Richards reaches is justified, that "Baha'ism is a denial of all that is fundamental in the Christian religion." Its great weakness lies in its lack of driving power. "Changed hearts are more necessary than even trained minds. ... Baha'ism may urge that the mind be trained, but it cannot change the human heart." "The redemption of the world demands a redeemed humanity." And there Baha'ism utterly breaks down.

J. H. Linton,
Bishop in Persia.

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The Problem of the Baha'í "Inquirer"

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the Babí Religion". The abbreviations used when giving references are given in parentheses.

(a) Arabic and Persian works

Baha'u'llah Al Kitábu'l-Aqdas—the complete text of the "Aqdas", followed by a selection of Tablets, dated AH 1308. (Aqdas)

Súratu'l-Haykal—a collection of selected Tablets dated AH 1308. (Sur.)

Kitáb-i Mustatáb-i Íqán—a controversial work in support of the Bab's claim.

Dated AD 1900. (Iqan.)

Zekru'l-Asrár—better known by the title of Haft Vádí. A book of pure Sufism, dated AH 1312. (Haft Vadí.)

Kalimát-i Maknúneh—undated. Sufí in character, translated into English under title of "Hidden Words", and contained in the volume "Baha'í Scriptures". Much quoted by Baha'ís. (Kalimat.)

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Ad'iyat-i Hazrat-i Mahbúb—a book of Prayers, contains also Tablets to be read at weddings, and various other Tablets, among them Baha'u'llah's Will and Testament. (Ad'iyat.)¹

'Abdu'l-Baha An-Núru'l-Abhá fí Mofávezát-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá—talks by 'Abdu'l-Baha on a variety of subjects. One section devoted to Christian subjects. Leyden, Holland, 1908. Held in high esteem, and much quoted by Baha'ís. English version available, for which see below. (Mof.)

Mokáteb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, Cairo, 1910.

Mokáleb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. II, Cairo, AH 1330

Mokáteb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. III, Cairo, 1921.

The collected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha. (Mok.)

Khatábát-i Hazrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá fí Eurobá va Ameríká, Vol. I—a record of 'Abdu'l-Baha's addresses delivered in the West. Khat.)

Javábnámeh-i Jám'iyatta'l-Abhá bercue

cjrá'i-i Sulh-i 'umúmi—'Abdu'l-Baha's
peace teachings. Cairo, AH 1337

Badí'u'llah Al-Ta'límu'l-Bahá'íyat—a tract
printed at

Haifa bearing no date, dealing with the
Mohammad 'Ali dispute. (Ta'lím.)²

Mírza Abu'l-Fadl Kilábu'l-Fará'ed—a reply to certain
Gulpayganí criticisms of the Baha'ís by Sheikh
'Abdu's-Salam. Cairo, AH 1315 (Fara'ed.)

Ad'iyah-i-Hadrat-i-Mahbúb.
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Gulpayganí criticisms of the Baha'ís by Sheikh
'Abdu's-Salam. Cairo, AH 1315 (Fara'ed.)

Kitábu'd-Duraru'l-Bahá'íyat. Cairo, AH
1318

Sharh-i Aiát-i Mo'arrakkeh va Fazlu'l-
Khatáb1—devoted to the interpretation
of Bible passages. Shanghai, 1925.

Rasáleh-i Istidlálíyeh—written in
support of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The Bible
interpreted. Cairo, AH 1314 (Rasaleh)

Sheikh Munázerátu'd-Díníyeh—a handbook for
Mohammadu'n Baha'í missionaries containing
Nateq questions and answers to be used in
dealing with Moslems, Jews, Christians,
Zoroastrians, Babís and atheists. Vol. 1,
Cairo, AH 1342 (Mun.)

Aqa Mírza Na'ím Kulliyát-i Na'ím—a book of Baha'í verse.
Isfahaní Bombay 1927. (Kulliyat.)

Hají Mohammad Táríkh-i Shukadá i Yezd—a Baha'í
Taher Malmírí account of the Yezd persecution. Cairo,
AH 1342 (Shuhada'.)

Mírza Mahmud Kitáb-i Badá'í'ul-Ásár, Vol. I, Bombay,
Zarqani 1914.

Kitáb-i Badá'í'ul-Ásár, Vol. II, Bombay,
1921.

These two volumes contain a full
account of 'Abdu'l-Baha's visits to the
West.

Mírza 'Abdu'l- Al-Kavákebu'd-Duarriyeh—the official
Hosein Avareh Baha'í history. Cairo, 1923. (Avareh.)

Mahfel-i Khademín- Durús-i Masá'el-i Táríkhí ráje'be Amr-i
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Eláhí—a teacher's handbook containing

instruction for children. Teheran, AH
1302. (Durus.)

Sharh-i-Ayat-i-Mu'arrakh wa Fadílu'l-Khitab.

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passages. Printed in Bombay in AH 1312
according to title-page, or 1313 according
to colophon. Author's name in the
unreadable "Khatt-i Badí".

Istekhráj az Mofávezát-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá—
a tract purporting to be a translation of
an excerpt from "Some Answered
Questions"—the English version of the
Mofávezát. The title is misleading, for
the tract is a translation of the article on
Baha'ism in the Encyclopaedia of
Larousse (Questions, p. vii, footnote),
and is in no sense an excerpt from the
Mofavezat. (Istekhraj.)

Kitáb-i Asráru'l-Gheibíya'l-Asbábu'l-
Madaniyat, Bombay, AH 1310. An English
version, entitled "The Mysterious Forces
of Civilization," was published in
London in 1910.

Dars-i Akhláq—doureh-i avval va
dovvum—a teacher's handbook
containing excerpts from the writings of
Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, short
Tablets, and explanations of some of the
"Aqdas" laws.

'Abdu'l-Bahá va al-Bahá'íyat—a volume
of prose and verse by various writers, of
whom Mírza Abu'l Fazl is the most
important. ('A.B. va B.)

(b) Manuscript literature

Mírza 'Alí Commentary on Súrah Yusúf.

Mohammad, the Commentary on Súrah Kausar.

Bab

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Baha'u'llah Kalimát-i Maknúneh. See above.

D'á'í Shafá'i—also contained in the
Ad'iat, a prayer for healing which can be
used as a charm.

Aqa Mírza Nairn Baharíyeh-i Na'im—a selection of

Isfahaní poems.

Laura Clifford Dalíran-i Rabbání—a Persian translation
Barney of Miss Barney's play "God's Heroes"—a
drama with Qurratu'l-'Ayn as heroine.

Translator's name not given.

'Abdu'l-Baha Qabáleh-i Nekáh—the Baha'í in
marriage contract and service, drawn up
by 'Abdu'l-Baha, written by 'Alí Akbar
Rohaní, and dated AH 1348 (Qabaleh.)

Kiláb men al-Bá qabl-i Há—a collection
of Tablets written by 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Anonymous Durúsu'd-Díyánat—graded lessons for
children.

(c) Persian manuscripts published and
edited by the late Prof. E. G. Browne

'Abdu'l-Baha Maqáleh-i Shakhsi-i Saiyáh—"Traveller's
Narrative," Vol. 1, Cambridge, 1891.

Mírza Janí Noqtalu'l-Káf—No. 15, Gibb Memorial
Series, Leyden and London, 1910.

Contains also an excellent Summary-
Index to the "Beyan," and a scholarly
Introduction in English. This

Introduction has been published
separately in Persian under the title
Muqaddameh-i Noqtatu'l-Káf, Bombay,
AH 1329 (Noq.; Muq.)

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(d) Miscellaneous

Sálnámeh-i Bahá'í—Calendar for the
85th year, Beyanic reckoning. Also
contains a summary of Baha'í teaching, a
short selection of poems by Na'ím, and
an account of the conversion to
Baha'ism of Queen Marie of Rumania.

Sálnámeh-i Bahá'í—Calendar for the
87th year of the Beyanic cycle.

Mahfel-i Rohaní-i Circular Letter to the Baha'í Assemblies
Haifa of the East dated May 1924—written in
support of Shouqí Effendí,1 and giving
an account of the activities of an
opponent of Shouqí.

Shouqí Rabbání, the Tablets dated May, September, October
Guardian of the 1924; May, October and November 1925;
Cause June, July and October 1926; February
and August 1927; Khurdad 1304 and 1305.

(Persian dates are given when Tablets
are quoted in this book.)

Baha'í Publishing Committee, Akhbár-i Amrí—the News-Letter of the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia. Teheran Various numbers dated August 1924; February, March and November 1928; January and February, April and June 1929.

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Prof. E. G. Browne Traveller's Narrative, Vol. II—an excellent translation of the Maqaleh-i Saiyah, with copious notes. Cambridge 1891. (Trav.)

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Shawqí Afandí Rabbaní (1897–1957). His preferred spelling was Shoghi Effendi.—M.W.T.

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Laura Clifford Some Answered Questions—the English Barney version of the "Mofavezat," on the whole a faithful translation, but some minor differences are noted in the text of this book. (Questions.) Published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., London, 1908. Strikes, an Appendix to the above. Chicago, 1913.

Horace Holley Bahá'í Scriptures—Selections from the (Editor) writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. The Glossary is of no value, being full of mistakes. (Scrip.)

(f) Works by American Bahá'ís

Horace Holley Bahai, the Spirit of the Age—chiefly interesting as showing the tendencies in Western Baha'í thought. The first part of the book is devoted to an attempt to give the prophets of the movement a 'cosmic significance'. The Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha are represented as a Cosmic Trinity—Love (Bab), Will (Baha) and Knowledge ('Abdu'l-Baha). The historical passages are of no value. Kegan Paul, 1921.

Myron H. Phelps Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendí—a typical Baha'í history. (Phelps.)

Ruth White Abdul Baha and the Promised Age—an
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York, 1927.

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Ruth White The Bahai Religion and its Enemy, the
Bahai Organization—an attack on the
Baha'í Organization under Shouqí
Effendí. Interesting for the light thrown
on the state of affairs within the
movement. The Tuttle Company,
Rutland, Vermont, 1929. (Organization.)
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Fraudulent—an Appendix to the above.
Contains expert's report on photostat
copy of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will. Tuttle
Company, 1930. (Appendix to
Organization.)

(g) Works by other writers

Prof. E. G. Browne Materials for the Study of the Bábí
Religion—gives an account of the spread
of the movement to the West. Excellent
Bibliography. Cambridge 1918.
(Materials.)

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Roemer the origin of the Babí-Baha'í religion.
Available only in the original German.
Invaluable to the student. Potsdam,
1912. Obtainable from the Quell-Verlag
der Ev. Gesellschaft, Stuttgart. (Roemer.)

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monthly magazine published in
Washington, D.C. (S. of W.)

Reality Publishing Reality, a Bahá'í Magazine—only one
Corporation copy in the present author's possession.

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Assembly of the

amongst Baha'ís. Published monthly, it

Baha'ís of the

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W. St. Clair-Tisdall The Original Sources of the Qor'an.

N. P. Williams The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin.

The Mahdí in Islám

It is commonly, but wrongly, held that Islam presents a united front to its opponents, and that there is a real unity in Islam which is lacking in Christianity. We, as Christians, are deeply conscious of our divisions, and are really desirous of seeing reunion made possible, but no such desire is found among Moslems, for the simple reason that the hatred and bitterness engendered when Islam first became divided have perpetuated themselves in the Moharram ceremonies of the Shí'ah sect.

The Sunní-Shí'ah schism can truly be said to be the continuation in a new field of an old feud between two rival factions which was ancient history in Mecca when Mohammad was born.

Somewhere about AD 440, Koshai, a member of the Qoreish tribe, acquired for his family the guardianship of the Ka'bah, the

central shrine of Arabian idolatry, and, after he had brought together some of the scattered families of the Qoreish tribe, and had made some improvements in the city, he had become, in virtue of the dignities connected with the custody of the Ka‘bah and the pilgrimage to it, the chief spiritual and temporal ruler of Mecca. After his death there were many disputes among his descendants, and eventually the

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various offices were divided among his grandchildren. The prerogative of providing food and water for the pilgrims passed to Hashim, and the leadership in war to ‘Abdu’l-Shams. Hashim was succeeded by his son ‘Abdu’l-Muttaleb, and, although he met with much opposition from Umaiya, the son of ‘Abdu’l-Shams, yet he managed to retain his position as head of the Qoreish tribe, Mohammad was a lineal descendant of Hashim, whilst his ablest opponent in Mecca was Abu Sofian, a grandson of Umaiya, who submitted to Mohammad the day before the capture of Mecca, and thus brought into Islam the element of factional rivalry which was in the Khalifate of Othman to end in civil war, and to lead to the division of Islam into the two great sects of Sunnis and Shi‘ahs. The Sunnis accepted the Umaiya succession to the Khalifate in the person of Mu‘awiyah, accepting the principle that the Khalif is elected by the people, but the Shi‘ahs restrict the right of succession to the Hashimites, and so we find the old pre-Islamic factional rivalry that divided Mecca continued in Islam in the struggle between ‘Alí the descendant of Hashim and Mu‘awiyah the descendant of Umaiya. We are not concerned with all the points of difference between the Sunní and Shí‘ah beliefs, but it is very essential that we should understand the Shi‘ah doctrine of the Khalifate. The Shi‘ahs give the title of Imams to their Khalifs, the first of whom was ‘Alí, and they do not acknowledge the first three Khalifs, Abu Bekr, Omar and Othman, but regard them as usurpers. Their contention is that the Imams are divinely appointed. Before the creation of the world, the “Nur-e Mohammadí”—Light of Mohammad—was created from the Divine Light, but

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first appeared in the world with Mohammad, from whom it passed on to the true Imams, who alone are the lawful successors of the Prophet. The true Imams, who are ‘Alí and his successors, are, like the Prophet, sinless and immaculate. The Imamate is therefore not an office in Shí‘ah Islam, but a fundamental article of faith.

One other consequence of this schism must now be mentioned—one that is of supreme importance to our theme—namely, different beliefs about the Mahdí. Both Sunnis and Shi‘ahs believe in the, Mahdí, the Guided One who is to come, but whereas the Sunnis are content to know him simply as the Promised One

who will come in the latter days before the return of Christ (who, according to the Traditions, will return to earth and revive true religion), the Shi'ahs claim him as a descendant of 'Alí, who has already appeared on earth as an Imam.

The Shi'ah belief in the Imamate and their doctrine of the Mahdí are so inextricably bound up that they must be considered together. The Shi'ahs declare that the Mahdí has already appeared on earth and that he did not die, but became "hidden", leaving his followers and taking up his abode in the fabulous city of Jabalsa, and that he will appear again at the end of the world and rule. But who is the Mahdí? On this vexed question Shi'ah Islam has become divided into numerous sects, all holding different views as to the Mahdí. This will best be seen by following very briefly the succession of the Twelve Imams.

According to Shi'ah teaching, 'Alí was succeeded by his son Imam Hasan, who, say they, was murdered as a result of political intrigue (but historical probability

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would suggest a harem intrigue), and he was succeeded by his brother Imam Hosein, who was slain at Kerbela in an inglorious attempt to seize the Khalifate. It was at his death that Shi'ah Islam first became divided. Whilst some followed 'Alí, the son of Hosein, others followed Mohammad Khanifeh, the third son of 'Alí ibn Abu Taleb, and brother of Hasan and Hosein, regarding him as the Imam. They declare that he did not die, but became "hidden" and that he will come again as Mahdí. When 'Alí ibn Hosein died, his followers hailed his son, Mohammad ibn 'Alí ul Baqer, as Imam, and he, again, was regarded by some of his followers as Mahdí, though tradition tells us that he himself denied it. After his death the claim was once more made for his son, Ja'far ibn Mohammad us-Sadeq, but he again denied that he was Mahdí. It was at his death that the most important schism in Shi'ah Islam took place. He had four sons, the eldest of whom was called Isma'íl. Isma'íl predeceased his father, and the succession came to Musa. It would seem that the succession of Musa had been recognised by the majority of the Shi'ahs during the lifetime of Isma'íl, for the latter was caught in a state of drunken intoxication, and was disinherited by his father. Some of Isma'íl's followers remained loyal to his family even after his death, and so when Imam Ja'far died they claimed the succession for Mohammad, the son of Isma'íl, and seceded. They declare that after Imam Ja'far there begins a succession of "hidden" Imams, and that there never can be a time when the world is without an Imam. There is always an Imam in the world, though he may be in seclusion. These followers of Isma'íl are called the Isma'íliyah.

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The followers of Musa passed by the claims of Isma'íl, only to

become divided themselves at the death of their leader, for whilst one section claimed that Musa was the Mahdí, the majority accepted the succession of his son, Imam Reza ibn Musa. In Baha'í literature much importance, is given to a tradition that Imam Reza, when questioned as to the coming of the Mahdí, declared that it would not be in accordance with popular expectation. Another schism now took place, for the Sufis regard Imam Reza as the last of the Imams, and do not accept his successors. The main body, however, accepted the succession of his son, Imam Mohammad Javad, and of his son, 'Alí ibn Mohammad, and, later still, of Hasan 'Askarí ibn 'Alí. Imam Hasan 'Askarí was succeeded by his son, Mohammad ibn Hasan 'Askarí, better known as Mohammad Abu'l-Qasem, the Twelfth Imam. According to Shí'ah teaching, he is the Mahdí, and having become "hidden", dwells in one of the two fabulous cities, Jabelsa and Jabulqa. There would seem to be considerable doubt as to whether the Twelfth Imam ever existed outside the minds of those who accepted him. Ja'far, the brother of Imam Hasan 'Askarí, declared that the latter died heirless, for which piece of gratuitous information the Shi'ahs have bestowed upon him the somewhat opprobrious title of Ja'far Kazzab (Ja'far the Liar). It will be seen later that Baha'í writers are not slow to take full advantage of this weakness in the Shí'ah tradition, and, when it suits their purpose, they deny that there ever was such a person as Imam Mohammad Abu'l-Qasem. Finally, it behoves us to consider the origin of the Sheikhí sect, from which Babism derived its origin.

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Abu'l-Qasem, the Twelfth Imam, succeeded his father in AH 1260, and for a period of sixty-nine years he is said to have held intercourse with his followers through a succession of men who were called "Doors", and who acted as mediums of communication between the secluded Imam and his followers. At the end of this period, the Twelfth Imam disappeared altogether, and the last of the "Doors" did not appoint a successor, but declared that "God hath a purpose which He will accomplish." The Sheikhí doctrine revived the office of "Bab", or "Door", and thus made possible the claim of Mírza 'Alí Mohammad.

Sheikh Ahmad Ahsa'í, the founder of the Sheikhí sect, was a devout ascetic, who held himself to be under the direct guidance of the Imams. He was born in AD 1753 (Avareh says AD 1743), but we have no authoritative account of his life. The following facts are taken from an account given to the late Professor E. G. Browne by a Persian friend, and published by him in his edition of the "Traveller's Narrative".¹

Sheikh Ahmad was a native of Bahrein who left his native land and went to Irak (i.e., Kerbela and Najaf, the Shí'ah Shrines) at the

direction of his spiritual guide, and, taking up residence there, soon became famous as a teacher. His fame having reached Persia, he was invited to visit that country by Fath 'Ali Shah, and accordingly went to Teheran, thence to Kermanshah, and, finally proceeding to Yezd, he remained there twelve years. He performed the pilgrimage to Mecca several times, and on the last occasion of doing so he died two stages from Medina, at which town he was buried.

Vol. II, Note E.

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The account given in the "Qasasu'l-'Ulama", which is quoted by Prof. Browne, differs somewhat from the above in that it states that he came direct from Bahrein to Yezd, where he stayed some time before going on to Kermanshah. From the latter place he proceeded to Kerbela, where he finally took up his abode.

Returning to Persia on a visit towards the end of his life, he passed through Qazvín, where he visited the house of Hají Mulla Taqí, the maternal uncle and father-in-law of the famous Qurratu'l-'Ayn. Avareh, whilst mentioning this visit to Qazvín, is content with the bare statement that whilst on a journey to Persia Sheikh Ahmad met Fath 'Alí Shah, and that he visited and resided at Yezd, Khorasan, Teheran and Kermanshah, and that Fath 'Alí Shah was so taken with him that none dared utter a word against him. Sheikh Ahmad died in AD 1826.

It remains for us to consider very briefly the Sheikhí doctrine of the "Fourth Support" (Kokn-i Raba'). The Shi'ahs hold that the "Supports" (Arkan) or essential principles of religion are five in number, viz.: (1) Belief in the Unity of God; (2) Belief in the Justice of God; (3) Belief in Prophethood; (4) Belief in the Imamate; (5) Belief in Resurrection. The Sheikhís, however, accept only three of these—namely, the first, the third and the fourth. They decline to accept the other two, on the ground that they are not separate principles, but, according to them, the second is included in the first, and the fifth in the third. To the three principles that they accept they add a fourth—namely, that there must always be among the Shi'ahs some one Perfect Man, whom they call the "Shí'ah-i Kamel"—the "Perfect Shí'ah"—who is the medium

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or channel of grace between the absent Imam and his followers.

The title "Fourth Support" belongs therefore to this article of belief, and was not originally used as a designation of the office of the medium. In course of time, however, the title has come to be used of the medium, and not of the article of faith. Thus we see that the Sheikhí doctrine of the "Fourth Support" is the revival of the old teaching of the "Doors". This prepared the way for the coming of Mírza 'Alí Mohammad Shírazí, and when he declared himself to be the "Bab"¹ there were many among the Sheikhís who accepted him.

Babí and Baha'í historians give Sheikh Ahmad Ahsa'í the title of "Mobasher-e Zuhur", or "Evangelist of the Manifestation".

Avareh declares that Sheikh Ahmad had repeatedly warned his disciples that they should watch for the coming of the Promised One, but he makes no attempt to substantiate his statements, and as the title of "Fourth Support" means, in the language of the Sheikh, a doctrine or an article of belief, and not a person, Avareh's statement cannot be accepted without confirmation.²

There is one other aspect of Sheikh Ahmad's teaching which has a bearing on our theme. Avareh tells us that whilst he accepted the Shí'ah doctrine of the person of the Twelfth Imam being the Mahdí, Sheikh Ahmad did not interpret that doctrine as do the Shí'ah theologians, but differed from them in his teaching as to the return of the Mahdí. He did not believe in the existence of the fabulous city of Jabelsa, but declared that the abode of the Promised One is in heaven, and not

"Door".

Avareh's reliability as a historian will be discussed in the next chapter.

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on earth. "The grave from which the 'Qa'em' will rise is the grave of his mother's womb." ¹ Here again Avareh gives no references, but, whether this formed part of the Sheikh's teaching or not, the argument is greatly used by Baha'í writers.

Sheikh Ahmad was followed by Hají Seyyid Kazem of Resht, Prof. Browne gives us the following facts concerning his life. A native of Resht, when twelve years old he was living at Ardabíl, near the shrine of Sheikh Safí'ud-Dín Ishaq, a descendant of the seventh Imam. One night in a dream he was directed to put himself under the guidance of Sheikh Ahmad Ahsa'í, who was then residing at Yezd. Accordingly, he proceeded thither, and enrolled himself among the disciples of the Sheikh. Eventually he attained such eminence that at the death of Sheikh Ahmad he was recognized by all as the leader of the Sheikhí School. He died in Baghdad in 1843 or 1844.

Hitherto the Sheikhís had been a united body, but they now became divided. Seyyid Kazem had not nominated a successor; indeed, according to Babí-Baha'í historians, he had hinted that the traditional state of things under which he and his master Sheikh Ahmad had assumed the guidance of the faithful was with his declining life drawing to a close, and that a brighter light was about to shine forth from the horizons of the spiritual world. The writer of the "Taríkh-e Jadíd"² declares that during the last two years of his life Hají Seyyid Kazem had restricted his discourses to discussing the promised Proof, the signs of his coming and their explanation, declaring that the Coming One

"Qa'em" is a title commonly given to the Mahdí, and means "He who

will arise”.

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would be a Hashimite by birth, and not versed in the learning of men. Mírza Janí, too, tells us that Seyyid Kazem had made known the signs whereby the “Bab” might be recognised. He even goes so far as to assert that the Seyyid had designated Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad more specifically as the Coming Proof, but as Mírza Janí bases this statement on a curious coincidence rather than on any definite statement of the Seyyid’s, it has little historical value.¹ Nor does the statement of the writer of the “Taríkh-e Jadíd” increase our confidence in the assertion of Avareh that Sheikh Ahmad had warned his disciples to be on the watch for the coming of the promised Proof, if Seyyid Kazem, who survived his master by seventeen years, did not until the last two years of his life make that all-important subject the centre of his teaching. Avareh makes another remarkable statement which deserves to be mentioned. He declares that Hají Seyyid Kazem had three classes of disciples: (1) those in distant towns and villages who were attracted by the fame of his teachings, but had no opportunity of attaining to any real knowledge of them; (2) those who were privileged to attend his lectures but did not enjoy his friendship and confidence; (3) those who belonged to the privileged inner circle of his disciples and enjoyed his full confidence, nothing being withheld from them. This inner circle, according to Avareh, accepted the Bab to a man. That the Bab had visited Seyyid Kazem we know, and Avareh therefore implies that the Seyyid had recognized him as the Coming One, and had made known his discovery to this favoured inner circle. In the next chapter we shall see that Avareh makes this

Vide “New History”, pp. 340 ff.

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statement in more explicit terms, and definitely declares the Sheikhí chiefs to be but heralds of the Bab. Baha’ís to-day definitely regard them as such, and hold them in high respect, giving them the title of “Do Najm-e Sate”.¹

Arabic Najman Sati‘an, Persian Du Najm-i-Sati‘, “The Two Bright Stars”.
The coming of the Báb

The discovery by the late Prof. E. G. Browne of a copy of the “Noqtatu’l-Kaf” in the National Library, Paris, in the spring of 1892 was an event of far-reaching importance to all students of Baha’ism. It is to this discovery that we owe the fact that to-day we are in a position to trace the development of the Babí-Baha’í movement from its very beginning. The writer of this book was Mírza Janí, a native of Kashan in Persia, who was himself martyred in the year AH 1268 (AD 1852), two years after the death of the Bab.

He had been acquainted with all the leading Babís, including Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel, Qurratu'l-'Ayn, Baha'u'llah and the Bab himself, and was therefore well qualified to write the history of the movement. Writing at a time when Babism was as yet undivided, and suppression of the truth was unnecessary, Mírza Janí is our one authority for the history of the movement up to the death of the Bab, and the events of the two years that immediately followed. Its importance cannot be exaggerated, for, as we shall see in the course of this chapter, the histories which succeeded it so alter and amend the facts that they cannot be regarded as histories, and must be classed as polemical works. In this chapter it will be shown how the history of the

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movement has been changed gradually by a succession of writers, but the reasons for these changes will be considered in a later chapter. The "Noqtatu'l-Kaf" was superseded by the "Taríkh-i Jadíd",¹ but although this history changes and alters and adds to the "Noqta-tu'l-Kaf", yet it did not meet with the approval of Baha'í chiefs at Acre, so it did not get beyond the manuscript stage. Here again we owe a debt of gratitude to the late Prof. Browne for preserving this manuscript for us, and for publishing an English translation with excellent notes, to which the reader is referred for an account of the origin of the manuscript and the events that led to its composition. This was superseded by another history, the "Traveller's Narrative", written by 'Abbas Effendí ('Abdu'l-Baha), which has also been published by Prof. Browne. This was for a time the "official" history, but later it was felt to be inadequate, and Avareh undertook the task of writing a new and completer work. This new history, called the "Kavakebu'd-Durríyeh"² is now regarded as the official history. The author, Mírza 'Abdu'l-Hosein Avareh, has since left Baha'ism, and now occupies himself with writing books against his old religion. In one of these books, the "Kashfu'l-Hial",³ he declares that this history was manufactured at the request of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Furthermore, in a letter to the present author Avareh declares that he wrote only what he was told to, and declares that "one half of the contents of that book is made up of stories manufactured by Baha himself and by Baha'ís." There are other smaller histories which need not be mentioned here, but which will be introduced when the need arises.

Nuqtatu'l-Káf, "The Point of the Kaf". Táríkh-i-Jadíd ("New history") or

New History of Mírzá 'Alí Muhammad the Báb, by Mírza Husayn of Hamadan.

al-Kawákib al-Durríya.

Kashf al-Hiyal, "Uncovering the Deceptions" by 'Abdu'l-Husayn-i-Ayatí (Avarih).

As to the value of these various histories, the reader can form his own conclusions from the narrative which follows.

There is some doubt as to the year of the Bab's birth. Both 'Abdu'l-Baha and Avareh agree in fixing the date as the first of Moharram AH 1235, which corresponds with October 20, AD 1819 (but Avareh has October 30). Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel's statement to Prof. Brownel that the Bab was twenty-four and entering on his twenty-fifth year at the time of his Manifestation, agreeing as it does with the Bab's own statement in the "Seven Proofs"—if he really was the author of this work²—would seem to fix the date of his birth as the first of Moharram AH 1236.³ Mírza Janí has very little to tell us of the youth of the Bab, but he states that he was remarkable even as a boy, and he relates a story to illustrate the uncanny knowledge he possessed.⁴ The writer of the "Taríkh-i Jadíd" is silent on the subject, but Avareh relates numerous stories of the Bab's wonderful boyhood. ⁵

Mírza 'Alí Mohammad, the Bab, was the son of Seyyid Mohammad Reza and Fatimeh Begum, both of whom could, we are told, trace their descent from the Imam Hosein. His father having died whilst the Bab was still a child, his maternal uncle, Mírza Seyyid 'Alí, a merchant, took the child to his home in Shíraz, and here it was that he spent his boyhood. The only real interest attached to his boyhood is concerned with the question of his education. As is well known, Moslems in general claim that Mohammad was illiterate (though Rabbi Geiger declares that the word "ummi" means

"Trav.", Vol. II, notes.

Cf. "Materials", p. 204.

AD October 9, 1820. The Bab was born on 1 Muharram 1235, 20 October 1819.—M.W.T.

Noq., p. iii.

Avareh, pp. 31 ff.

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not illiterate, but Gentile, as opposed to Jew), and that the Qor'an must therefore be regarded as a miracle. Both the Bab and Baha'u'llah claim that their writings are proof of their mission, and the same claim is made on behalf of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The question is, therefore, important. 'Abdu'l-Baha tells us that the Bab attended no school and was helped by no teacher,¹ but this is not quite true, for the Bab himself mentions the name of his teacher in the "Beyan", but declares himself devoid of formal learning. Avareh devotes a chapter to Sheikh Mohammad, the Bab's teacher, whom he calls Sheikh 'Abed (the Pious) on account of his great piety. In this chapter he tells us that Sheikh 'Abed was famed for his learning, and was the best available teacher, whilst the Bab was his best

pupil.² Indeed, the old man was so impressed with the wisdom of the boy that when the latter declared his mission, he immediately believed on him. Avareh also implies that the Bab remained in school until he became of age (a very indefinite statement meaning anything between the ages of fifteen and eighteen), when he was taken to Bushire by his uncle. Mírza Janí tells us that the Bab was eighteen years of age when this took place,³ so, if Avareh's statement is correct, he received a fair education. His knowledge of Arabic was, however, poor, and was often called in question in later years, so he can hardly be said to have received a good education. When the Bab's knowledge of Arabic Grammar is questioned, Baha'ís generally declare that the Prophets are not tied down by rules of grammar, but the latter are made by them. Historically an argument

Mof., pp. 19 f.

Avareh, pp. 31 f.

Noq., p. 109.

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could be built on this answer which no Moslem could refute, for the Qor'an is perfect not because it conforms to all the rules of Arabic grammar and composition, but because the latter are based on Qor'an usages. The Ezelí writer of "Hasht Behesht" gives a very original reply to those who would criticize the Bab's grammar; he declares that Accidence and Syntax are two fixed habits from which men have been freed in the Beyanic Dispensation, for these are the "Harut and Marut" of the Qor'an.¹ Both Avareh and Mírza Janí deny that the Bab was a pupil of Seyyid Kazem of Resht in Kerbela, and there seems no reason to doubt this statement, but in any case the Bab was only a few months in Kerbela. It seems clear, therefore, that the Bab was a man of very ordinary education, but of considerable natural ability.

In Bushire the Bab became a partner in his uncle's business, and later, according to 'Abdu'l-Baha, he started a business of his own. Mírza Janí tells us that all the merchants were amazed at the skill of one so young, and that he became famous for his piety and generosity. But the fullest account is that given by Avareh, of which the following is a summary. Whilst in Bushire, Mírza 'Alí Mohammad once more became the subject of popular attention on account of his remarkable piety. Indeed, he spent most of his time in prayer and meditation, to the detriment of his business. At this time, too, he began to compose books and treatises on various subjects, such as the coming of the promised "Proof". He held the doctrines of the Shí'ah sect in high respect, even testifying to the truth of the existence

"New Hist.", p. 422. Harut and Marut are two angels said to be imprisoned in a well in Babylon.

of the “Qa’em”, though it became evident later that his interpretation of these doctrines differed from that of Moslems in general. But most important of all is the statement that Avareh here makes that in the course of his researches he discovered a letter of the Bab’s own composition, and addressed to his uncle in Shíraz, which bore the date of AH 1259, and from which it would seem that Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad was already regarded by a certain section of his acquaintances as the possessor of a unique “station” or rank. The following purports to be a quotation from the said letter. “The Cause is not yet ripe (of age), and the moment has not yet arrived, therefore should anyone attribute to me opinions contrary to the usual doctrines and beliefs of Islam both I and my immaculate ancestors will be displeased with him, both here and in the next world.”¹ AH 1259 was the year of Seyyid Kazem’s death, and it is generally held that the Bab first made his claim in the following year in Shíraz,² after the death of Seyyid Kazem. We have already seen that the claim is generally made that Seyyid Kazem had recognized him as the coming “Proof”, but Avareh strikes an altogether new note when he declares that friends in Bushire had begun to attribute a high station to him. Seyyid Kazem died in AH 1259, and it would be interesting to know whether this letter, if such ever existed, was written previous to that event or afterwards. Strange, then, that Avareh omits to mention this! And yet not strange when we remember what Avareh tells us of his own character as a historian.

Mírza Janí states that the Bab remained five years in Bushire, and then gave up his business and proceeded to

Avareh, p. 36.

Noq., p. 110.

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Najaf, where he remained for about a year. Avareh gives a totally different account of his movements, and declares that at the age of twenty-two the Bab went to Shíraz to choose a wife, and shortly afterwards married a girl named Khadíjeh Begum, who bore him a son in the course of the following year. The child, to whom they gave the name of Ahmad, died shortly afterwards, whereupon the Bab decided to make a pilgrimage to Kerbela, where he remained a few months.² It would seem probable that Avareh is correct, in this case, for we know from other sources that the Bab did get married about this time, and that he had one son who died.³ Mírza Janí tells us that the Bab remained some three months in Kerbela, and that he occasionally attended the meetings held by Seyyid Kazem, and he also tells us of the very respectful attitude that the latter adopted towards him.⁴ Avareh is therefore not alone in declaring that the Sheikhi leader regarded the Bab as his successor, but it is

not easy to understand why even Mulla Hosein of Bushraweyh, a prominent Sheikhí, should demand proof before he would accept Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad as his guide, nor is it easy to understand why the Sheikhís scattered in search of a leader when Seyyid Kazem died, if the latter really had pointed to Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad as his successor.

From Kerbela the Bab returned to Bushire, where he remained until a few months after the death of Seyyid Kazem, when he closed his business and returned to Shíraz. In the following year, AH 1260, on the 5th of Jamadiul-ula,⁵ he declared himself to be the Bab.

Noq., pp. 109 f.

Avareh, pp. 36 f.

“Trav.,” Vol. II, p. 250.

Noq., pp. 104 f.

May 23, 1844.

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According to Mírza Abu’l-Fazl Gulpayganí, he published about this time an article in an Egyptian magazine containing a Tradition in which the name “Bab” was mentioned, and which people interpreted in different ways. Some said that it meant the “Door (Bab) of Knowledge”, others said it meant the “Door of Heaven”, whilst a third opinion was that it meant the “Door of Truth”, and this it was which led to Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad’s followers being called “Babís”. Mírza Abu’l-Fazl is alone in making this statement, and his purpose is not quite clear. Does he mean us to understand that the title of “Babís” was given to the followers of Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad through a misinterpretation of the latter’s claim?¹ The tendency amongst all Baha’í writers of a recent date is to declare that the Bab from the very first claimed to be the Mahdí.² In view of these statements, the claim of Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad will be considered before we proceed with the further history of his life. We saw above that the Shí‘ah Moslems believe that the Twelfth Imam became “hidden” in the year AH 260, and that for a period of sixty-nine years he is said to have communicated with his followers through a succession of four men. This period is called the “Lesser Occultation” (Gheibat-i Sughra), and came to an end in AH 329, when Abu’l-Hasan, the last of the four, refused to appoint a successor. Then began the period known as the “Greater Occultation” (Gheibat-i Kubra), when the Imam was completely cut off from his followers. The title of “Bab” (Door, or Gate) was given to each of the four men who had acted as mediums of communication with the absent Imam during the

Vide “A.B. v. B.,” p. 8.

Avareh, p. 39.

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period of the Lesser Occupation. When the Sheikhí doctrine of the

“Fourth Support” revived the belief in the existence of a medium of communication with the Imam, the title of “Bab” was also revived, and it was given to both Sheikh Ahmad Ahsa’í and to his successor Seyyid Kazem of Resht. Furthermore, the title had the sanction of tradition, for in the Traditions it is recorded that Mohammad himself applied it to ‘Alí, saying: “I am the City of Knowledge, and ‘Alí is the Door (Bab).” That this was the sense in which Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad applied the title to himself cannot be doubted, for, according to Mírza Janí, he quoted this very Tradition when asked what was meant by the “Bab” during his examination by the mullas at Tabríz.¹ How did Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad come to make this claim? Seyyid Kazem of Resht had died without nominating a successor, and his disciples were looking, not for the coming of the Mahdí, but for a successor to their late master. In short, they were looking for another “Bab”. It was no accident that Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad first made his claim to one of the Sheikhí leaders, as would seem from the writings of most Baha’ís, rather was it significant of the true nature of that claim. It definitely connected Babism with Sheikhism, for Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad did not at first claim to be the “Mahdí” of Shí‘ah Islam, but only to be the “Bab” for whom the leaderless Sheikhís were searching. It would seem from Mírza Janí’s account that Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad did at first consider the possibility of declaring himself to be the “Mahdí” at Kufa, but as the missionaries whom he had sent out were badly, and in some cases, cruelly treated, he

Noq., p. 134.

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changed his mind, and declared himself instead at Mecca, where his claim soon became generally known, and he gives the narrative of one who saw him there.¹ Are we to understand from this that the claim to be the “Mahdí” was actually made at Mecca? This can hardly be the meaning, for Mírza Janí later tells us that this latter claim was first made by the Bab in a letter which he wrote from his prison in Chihrík to Mulla Sheikh ‘Alí (better known as Jenab-i ‘Azím) after the death of Hazrat-i Quddus.² According to Mírza Janí, there were three stages in the claim made by Mírza ‘Alí Mohammad. First of all he was the “Bab”, or “Gate”, then he became the “Zekr” or

“Reminder”; then, thirdly, he became the “Noqteh” or “Point”. When the Bab first made his claim in Shíraz and was accepted by Mulla Hosein of Bushraweyh, he gave the latter the title of “Babu’l-Bab” (Gate of the Gate), but later, when he himself became the “Zekr”, he gave the title of “Bab” to Mulla Hosein. It would further seem that for a time Mulla Mohammad ‘Alí of Barfurush (better known as Hazrat-i Quddus) became the “Noqteh” (Point), and it was not until his death that the Bab was recognized as the Mahdí. We shall have

cause to mention the claim of Hazrat-i Quddus again in more detail during the course of this chapter, so no references need be given here.

It would therefore seem to be fairly clear that Avareh's statement given above has no historical foundation, and that the first claim made by Mírza 'Alí Mohammad was a definite result of the Sheikhí expectation. It is also interesting to note that the late Prof. Browne has published a letter, which he declares to be undoubtedly

Noq., p. 111.

ibid., p. 209.

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in the Bab's own handwriting, and said to be written by the latter towards the end of his life, in which he recants and denies that he ever made any claim,¹ but as the said letter does not materially affect the issue, no further mention will be made of it.

In tracing the history of the movement, a certain amount of repetition is unavoidable, and events which have already been referred to must once again be mentioned here.

At the death of Seyyid Kazem of Resht, his disciples resorted to the mosque at Kufa to seek guidance in the choice of a spiritual director. They then dispersed each on his own way, Mulla Hosein of Bushraweyh going to Shíraz, where he renewed acquaintance with Mírza 'Alí Mohammad, whom he had previously met at Kerbela. To him the young man declared himself to be the Bab, but Mulla Hosein would not accept him without some proof being given first. The Bab then produced his Commentary on the Surah of Joseph, and thus convinced the good man that he was indeed the much-sought Master. As a result of his acceptance, the Bab bestowed on him the title of "Babu'l-Bab", and made him the "Harf-i Avval"² in the Babí hierarchy of nineteen, known as the "Hurufat-Hayy".³ Having made several important converts in Shíraz, and dispatched missionaries provided with copies of the new sacred books, on the verses or "signs" (ayat) of which he based his claim, to the King and clergy of Persia, as well as to other Moslem lands, the Bab set out for Mecca accompanied by his uncle, Seyyid 'Alí, and Mulla Mohammad 'Alí of Barfurush.

"Materials", p. 256.

First Letter.

"Letters of the Living".

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The first result of the Bab's claim was to divide the Sheikhí sect into two camps. Hitherto they had been united, but now one section accepted the Bab, whilst the majority accepted Hají Mohammad Kerím Khan as their leader, and became the Bab's most

bitter opponents.

At Mecca the Bab's claim soon became known, though how and where there he made the claim we do not know. Avareh tells us that the claim was openly made near the Ka'bah, and that it soon became the subject of general conversation.¹ Modern Baha'í writers of the American school have taken up this story with enthusiasm, and worked it into a very dramatic scene. But they are not content to say that the Bab here claimed to be the "Mahdí": they even declare that he foretold the coming of Baha'u'llah! "But listen! What amazing news is this? For now, in tones as of a great bell, the Preacher is announcing that He, Himself, has been sent by God as a Herald, to prepare the way for the coming of a Great One, still behind the Veil."² Such stories are not history, but, unfortunately, they are the only accounts read by some people. Avareh tells us that during the first five months following the Bab's declaration of his mission, eighteen Sheikhi leaders accepted his claim, and that these became the "Letters of the Living".³ Avareh is certainly wrong here, for Mirza Yahya Subh-i Ezel, who was the fourth among the "Letters" in rank, could not possibly have become a believer at this time, as will later be shown; but that the Bab rapidly made disciples at first is a matter of little doubt.

Avareh, p. 43.

Florence E. Pinchon, "The Coming of the Glory", S. of W., Vol. XIII, No. 10.

Avareh, p. 43.

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On arrival at Bushire in AH 1261 (AD 1845) the Bab sent missionaries to Shiraz, whilst he himself remained at Bushire. One of these missionaries was the famous Mulla Mohammad 'Alí of Barfurush, whilst another was Mulla Mohammad Sadeq, who is also known as Jenab-i Muqaddas. Mirza Jani gives us but a brief account of the events that took place in Shiraz, and though he does tell us of the treatment meted out to these missionaries,¹ yet his account of it is only a casual reference. Mirza Hosein of Hamadan gives a far fuller account, and, if we can accept his version it would seem that the mullas did not complain without reason, for Mulla 'Alí Akbar Ardastani, the third of the missionaries, acted as "mu'ezzin" in the mosque in which Mulla Mohammad 'Alí used to perform the prayers, and in the call to prayer he used to insert a new clause: "I bear witness that 'Alí Mohammad His servant is the Remnant of God."² The mullas could hardly be expected to let such an innovation be introduced without taking action, so they appealed to the Governor.

We have many conflicting accounts of this period of the Bab's life, so that given by Mirza Jani will be used here, and any departures from it will be noticed as they occur.

When the news arrived that the Bab was in Bushire, the Governor of Shíraz sent twelve men to bring him to Shíraz in chains. In Shíraz he was allowed to live at home, but orders were given that after three days none were to be allowed to see him, neither was he to leave the house except to go to the bath. He was also prevented from writing or receiving letters. Yet, in spite

Noq., p. 113.

“New Hist.”, pp. 200 f.

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of all these injunctions, men from near and far came to him with questions, and a way was found to answer them. His opponents, learning of this, informed the Governor, and on the latter's instructions, the house was one night raided. The Bab and his uncle, Seyyid ‘Alí, were taken before the Governor, who addressed them very discourteously, confiscated all their goods, inflicted the bastinado on Seyyid ‘Alí, and committed the Bab to the custody of the Chief Constable (“Darugha”). By far the most important event in connection with the Bab's stay in Shíraz was the conversion of Seyyid Yahya of Darab. Mírza Janí, who knew Seyyid Yahya personally, gives us the Seyyid's own account of his conversion. When news of the Bab's claim was noised abroad, people were constantly asking the Seyyid what he thought of the matter, so he decided that he would see the Bab for himself before he gave an opinion, and hence he went to Shíraz, where he became a convert to the new faith.¹ It is interesting to note that ‘Abdu'l-Baha declares that Seyyid Yahya was delegated by the then King, Mohammad Shah, to visit Shíraz and inquire into the matter of the Bab,² whilst Avareh goes still further, and declares that the Shah provided him with a horse for himself, and also gave him the sum of one hundred tomans in cash for expenses of the journey.³ There can be little doubt but that the true story is that given by Mírza Janí, and that the other story is an invention to add still further to the glory of the Bab. In view of the Seyyid's character, his conversion was in any case a triumph for the Bab, but if the Seyyid were really the royal messenger, how

Noq., pp. 120 ff.

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 7.

Avareh, pp. 52 f.

2. The coming of the Bab 27

much more remarkable would be that triumph! After his conversion, Seyyid Yahya became an indefatigable missionary, and we shall have cause to mention him again in the course of this chapter. Yet another important convert made during this period was Mulla Mohammad ‘Alí of Zanzan, who also became a prominent Babí leader. He became a convert through reading some of the Bab's writings, and immediately started preaching the new

doctrine.

Whilst the Bab was confined in the Chief Constable's house in Shíraz an outbreak of the "White Plague" occurred, and the Chief Constable's son fell sick and was nigh unto death's door. The Bab prayed for him, and he recovered. As a result, the Chief Constable believed in the Bab, and thus it was that the latter was enabled to escape to Isfahan. Mírza Janí tells us of a number of remarkable happenings in connection with this journey, which, however, need not be recorded here. Sufficient it is to say that he credits the Bab with the power to work miracles, and his history contains accounts of many of these, whereas in later histories no mention is made of them.

It would seem that the Bab reached Isfahan towards the beginning of the summer of AD 1846, and sent word to Manuchihr Khan, Mu'tamadu'd-Dawla, the Governor of Isfahan, informing him of his approach. The Governor sent word to the Imam Jum'a of Isfahan bidding him invite the Bab to his house. This the Imam Jum'a did, and so the Bab became his guest for the first part of his stay at Isfahan. The most outstanding event of this period was the gaining by the Bab of the Mu'tamadu'd-Dawla's friendship, for the Georgian eunuch was a man of great power and influence. He

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it was who tried to arrange a meeting between the Bab and the chief mullas, and, when the latter became hostile, caused the Bab to be lodged in his own garden. Mírza Janí tells us that he actually offered to take the Bab to Teheran, and to obtain for him one of the Shah's daughters in marriage, and so put him in a position to make his claim openly and fearlessly.¹ The Bab refused this offer, and the Governor then placed all his property and money at his disposal. Shortly afterwards Manuchihr Khan died, and the Bab immediately wrote to the Prime Minister, Mírza Aqasí, stating that the late Governor had made over to him all his possessions, and demanding that these should therefore be handed over to him; a request to which the Prime Minister paid no attention whatever.²

The death of Manuchihr Khan brought with it a complete change in the fortune of the Bab. Gurgín Khan, the acting-Governor of Isfahan, sent for him, and, without even giving him an opportunity to bid farewell to the wife he had recently married in Isfahan, sent him from the town under escort. It is unnecessary to give a full account of the journey, but it is important, because henceforth the Bab remained a prisoner. He was first of all taken to Maku, and whilst there he occupied himself in writing books, and the "Seven Proofs",³ as well as most of the "Beyan", were now written. From Maku he was moved to the castle of Chihrík, and it was from there that he was summoned to appear before the 'Ulama (Mullas) of Tabríz, at which meeting Naseru'd-Dín Mírza, the then Crown Prince, presided. Baha'í historians as a matter of policy

always exonerate the Shah and his sons from any complicity in the Bab's

Noq., pp. 118 f.

ibid., p. 119.

But see p. 14.

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death, but that was not the attitude of the original Babís towards them. Mírza Janí in his account of the Bab's Examination at Tabríz refers to the Crown Prince by the opprobrious epithet of "haramzadeh",¹ but 'Abdu'l-Baha calls him "the heaven-cradled Crown Prince".² As a result of this examination the punishment of the bastinado was inflicted on the Bab, and he was sent back to Chihrík. Shortly afterwards Mohammad Shah died, or, to quote the more picturesque language of Mírza Janí, "Mohammad Shah went to hell",³ and Naseru'd-Dín Mírza was crowned as Shah in 1848 at Teheran. About this time took place the conference of the Babí chiefs at Badasht in Mazandaran. What exactly did happen at Badasht we do not know, but from Mírza Janí's account it would seem that the conduct of the Babí chiefs scandalized some of their followers even.⁴ The writer of the "Taríkh-i Jadíd" gives a completely different story from that of Mírza Janí, and pictures the Babís as going to Mazandaran to suffer martyrdom.⁵ 'Abdu'l-Baha does not even mention the name of Badasht, but Avareh declares that the purpose of the Conference was two-fold—to effect the Bab's rescue, and to consider what attitude must be taken towards the teachings of Islam.⁶ Avareh further tells us that it was at this conference that Baha'u'llah first became prominent and his authority was first recognized, but there is no historical justification for this statement, as is evident from comparison with the narratives of earlier writers. The conduct of the Babí chiefs provided some justification for the charge made against them that they held their goods

Bastard.

Noq., p. 137, and "Trav.," Vol. II, p. 20.

Noq., p. 138.

ibid., pp. 144 ff.

"New Hist.," p. 47.

Avareh, p. 127.

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and even their women in common, and the speech of Hazrat-i Quddus as recorded by Mírza Janí¹ would seem to assert that the Bab has the right of disposal of all property of his followers, and even of their women-folk. He would also seem to assert that the Bab had given to him the famous woman Qurratu'l-'Ayn, for that is the obvious meaning of the sentence "even as the Master who hath given his servant and his handmaid to one another."² It was at this

conference that Mulla Mohammad 'Alí of Barfurush first took the title of "Hazrat-i Quddus", and by this title, we are told, he intended to signify that he was a "return" of the Prophet Mohammad.³ The meeting at Badasht ended in disorder, for a number of Babís, disgusted at the conduct of their chiefs, left, and the inhabitants of the district, attracted by the continually increasing noise in the camp, attacked the Babís and plundered them.⁴

We cannot in the course of this chapter give a full account of the insurrections that broke out soon after this conference in different parts of the country, but it is necessary to correct many wrong impressions that are current, due chiefly to the "idealized" histories written by Baha'ís. Insurrections broke out in three places—at Mazandaran, Níríz, and Zanja. A study of Mírza Janí's history shows that in all three cases the conduct of the Babís was the direct cause of the trouble. Much is made of the cruelty with which they were treated, and of the treachery on the part of the Government officers, which terminated the insurrections at all three places, and although nothing can justify the severity

Noq., pp. 151 f.

ibid., p. 152.

ibid., p. 153.

ibid., p. 154.

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with which they were treated, it must yet be borne in mind that the Babís, too, committed many atrocities. In Mazandaran they sacked a village called Deh-i Nazer Khan, slaying one hundred and thirty persons and carrying away sufficient provision for two years. This severe punishment was in their opinion merited by the fact that the villagers had previously made professions of faith, and were therefore to be accounted renegades.¹ How cruel they could be is again clearly seen from their treatment of Farrukh Khan at Zanja. He had been, or had pretended to be, a Babí, but he took up arms against them, and was captured by them. They revenged themselves on him by flaying him alive and then roasting him. ² It must also be borne in mind that the Babís were definitely hostile to the Government, and were determined to set up a theocracy in Persia, as will be more clearly seen in the next chapter.

There could be but one result of these open rebellions in different parts of the country, and in 1850, on July 8, the Bab was put to death at Tabríz, together with a young disciple named Mírza Mohammad 'Alí, a native of Zanvaz near Tabríz.

The next event of any importance was the attempt made in 1852 to murder Naseru'd-Dín Shah, in which a number of Babís took part. As Mírza Janí himself perished in the persecution which followed, we are deprived of his account of this event, and are compelled to revert to books written by Baha'ís. The accounts they

give are so varied that it is impossible to know the truth. Avareh declares that the plot was hatched by about twenty Babís, and that six took part in the attempt,³ whilst Mírza Hosein of Hamadan declares that

Noq., pp. 161 f.

“New Hist.”, p. 155 n.

Avareh, pp. 313 f.

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the attempt was made by “two or three ignorant and uninstructed men, impelled by the promptings of the devil, and their own selfish passions.”¹ ‘Abdu’l-Baha gives yet another account, for he declares that the attempt was made by a young man named Sadeq, who, horrified by the execution of the Bab, to whom he was very devoted, became obsessed with the idea of revenge, and being ignorant of the fact that the Bab was put to death without the knowledge of the Shah, he determined to kill the latter.² The immediate result of this “great error and grave presumption and crime”, as it is called by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, was a severe persecution of the Babís, and a large number of them were put to death with fiendish cruelty. One of the victims was the famous Qurratu’l-‘Ayn, mentioned above in connection with the Badasht Conference, and with a brief account of her life this chapter shall close.

This remarkable woman was one of the most famous of the disciples of the Bab, and was one of the “Letters of the Living”. She is said to have visited Kerbela during the life of Seyyid Kazem of Resht, and Mírza Janí tells us that it was the Sheikhi leader who gave her the title of Qurratu’l-‘Ayn.³ When, on the death of Seyyid Kazem, Mulla Hosein of Bushraweyh set out for Shíraz, she wrote him a letter declaring her faith in the coming Manifestation. Mulla Hosein showed her letter to the Bab, and the latter immediately made her one of the “Letters of the Living”. She seems to have paid a second visit to Kerbela, and to have held a number of mixed meetings for men and women. She did not, however, cast off the veil, for the

“New Hist.”, p. 315.

“Trav.”, Vol. II, pp. 49 f.

Noq., p. 140.

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men sat behind a curtain. So great was her influence that she succeeded in imposing a severe religious discipline upon her followers, and Mírza Hosein of Hamadan would have us believe that it was this which led to the Governor’s attention being drawn to her,¹ but the real reason is that given by Mírza Janí, who tells us that she now laid claim to being a “return” of Fatimeh, the daughter of Mohammad.² She was forbidden to leave Kerbela until the authorities at Baghdad should come to a decision about her, but she

ignored the order and proceeded unmolested to Baghdad, but was finally ordered to leave Turkish territory, and so she returned to Persia. It was her intention to go to Teheran, but her father sent and caused her to be brought to Qazvín. Efforts were made to reconcile her to her husband, Mulla Mohammad, the son of her uncle, Hají Mulla Taqí, but these utterly failed. “Jenab-i Tahereh” (Her Highness the Pure), as she had been called by the Bab, would have nothing to do with her husband, because he had not accepted the Bab. Shortly afterwards her uncle and father-in-law, Hají Mulla Taqí, was murdered, and she was suspected of complicity in the crime, but the charge against her was dismissed. It was, however, impossible for her to remain in Qazvín, so she set out for Khorasan, and was, as we saw, present at the Conference at Badasht, where her relations with the famous Hazrat-i Quddus caused some scandal. Mírza Janí also tells us that Mulla Mohammad openly divorced her before she left Qazvín. From Badasht she went to Nur, for it would seem that Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel met her at Barfurush, and at the bidding of Hazrat-i Quddus escorted

“New Hist.”, pp. 271 f.

Noq., p. 140.

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her thither, Avareh gives us a totally different account, for he declares that after the Mazandaran insurrection, Baha’u’llah took her to his house in Teheran, where she remained under his protection until he left on his pilgrimage to the Shrines; then she returned to Qazvín, where she was eventually arrested.² A similar statement is made by Mírza Abu’l-Fazl,³ but neither can be taken seriously, for both statements undoubtedly arose from the Baha’í practice of suppressing all possible reference to Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel (see Chapter VI). Baha’u’llah’s meeting with her took place before the Mazandaran insurrection, and the services he rendered her are recorded for us in detail by Mírza Janí.⁴ Whether she went back to Qazvín we do not know, but it would seem improbable, for Subh-i Ezel declared that she remained at Nur until her arrest, when she was taken to Teheran.⁵ In Teheran she was put in the custody of Mahmud Khan, the “Kalantar”, where she remained until her death in 1852.

As an example of the later attempt to centre the history of the movement around Baha’u’llah, it is interesting to read the account of this remarkable woman given by ‘Abdu’l-Baha in a speech in New Hampshire in 1912. He said: “Qurratu’l-‘Ayn was a Persian woman without fame and importance; unknown, like all other Persian women. When she saw his Holiness Baha’u’llah she changed completely, visibly, and looked within another world. The reins of volition were taken out of her hands by heavenly attraction. She was so overcome that she forsook

Noq., pp. 154, 241.

Avareh, pp. 305 f.

“A.B. v. B.”, p. 12.

Noq., p. 240.

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 313.

2. The coming of the Bab 35

everything, and went forth to the plain of Badasht, no fear in her heart, dauntless, intrepid, openly proclaiming the message of light that had come to her. The Persian Government stood against her. They made every effort to quiet her, imprisoned her in the Governor’s house, but she continued to speak. Then she was taken and killed. To her last breath she spoke with fervid eloquence, and so became famous for her complete attraction in the path of God. If she had not seen Baha’u’llah, no such effect would have been produced.”¹

A comparison of this statement with the true account as given above serves as a good example of the Baha’í method of treating history, which will be discussed more fully in another chapter. One sentence in the account given by Mírza Janí shows clearly in what relation Baha’u’llah stood to Qurratu’l-‘Ayn. The Persian sentence which describes the meeting of Baha’u’llah with her is as follows: “Va dar arz-i rah khedmat-i Jenab-i Tahereh rasídand”, which can be translated, “And on the way he arrived at the service of Her Highness the Pure”. The idiomatic use of the word “khedmat” (service) in this sentence proves beyond all doubt that in Mírza Janí’s opinion Baha’u’llah was her inferior in rank.²

“S. of W.”, Vol. III, No. 18.

Noq., p. 240.

The teaching of the Báb

The Bab was the author of many books and treatises, consisting for the most part of commentaries on various Surahs of the Qor’an, books of prayers, and so on, but for the purpose of this chapter the only book of real importance is the “Beyan”. The word “Beyan” is used throughout this chapter, and, indeed, throughout this book, in the sense in which it is generally used to-day—i.e. it is used as a proper name for what may be termed the Bab’s “Bible”. We are not here concerned with the original meaning of the term “Beyan”, for that has neither bearing on, nor importance for, our main subject, but if the reader is interested in the use made of the term by the Bab, he will find it fully discussed by Prof. Browne,¹ whose use of the term “Persian Beyan” corresponds with our use of the term “Beyan” in this book. Like so many other of the first products of the Babí-Baha’í religion, the “Beyan” is almost unknown to-day except as a name for a book no longer obtainable. Very few copies exist, and it is almost impossible to obtain one. The only importance of the book to-day is historical, for it shows us the origin of modern

Baha'í teaching and the nature of its development. Here again we owe a great debt to the late Prof. Browne, for he has put a summary of the

“Trav.”, Vol. II, pp. 343 ff.

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teachings of the Bab, with the “Beyan” references, at our disposal. This summary is found in the introduction to his edition of the “Noqtatu'l-Kaf”, and it provides the basis of part of this present chapter. The “Noqtatu'l-Kaf” is also out of print, but fortunately the Persian introduction has been published as a separate booklet, so, wherever it is possible, references are given to the latter volume. The “Beyan” was intended by the Bab to consist of nineteen books each containing nineteen chapters (vide Appendix I), but the book was never completed, and it would seem that the Bab purposely left it incomplete,¹ and that he deputed Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel to complete the work.²

The Bab believed his meditations to have been inspired of God, but the inspiration was subjective, and not objective, as was that of Mohammad. The Bab himself declared that he laid no claim to “revelation from an angel”, which was the claim of Mohammad.³ In Islam “revelation from an angel” is technically called “Vahí”, and is purely objective, the words being the actual words of God Himself, so this is revelation at its highest. Subjective revelation is known as “Ilham”, and is therefore inferior to the objective. The Moslem regards the Qor'an as “Vahí”, and the Gospel as “Ilham”, so, whilst the Bab expected the “Beyan” to displace the Qor'an, he, strangely enough, put it on a par with the Gospel, which he must have regarded as inferior to the Qor'an. For the sake of convenience, his teaching will be considered under different heads, and only those doctrines which have a

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 353, f. 4.

Noq., p. 244.

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 4.

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bearing on the later development of Baha'í teaching will be discussed here.

1. God and the Prophets

God is eternal and unapproachable. All things come from Him and exist by Him. He is incomprehensible, and unknowable. Knowledge of the “Life” or “Being” (Zat) of God is impossible. The term “knowledge of God” means knowledge of Him through His Manifestations (the Prophets); “meeting God” (resurrection) means meeting the Manifestations; “I take refuge in God” (a favourite ejaculation among Moslems) means taking refuge in the Manifestation. Man knows God only in the Manifestations, and all references to God in Holy Scripture must be interpreted in this

sense. Distinct from God there is a Primal Will, who becomes incarnate in the Prophets. This Primal Will spoke in all the Prophets from Adam down. He spoke in the Bab, and will speak again in "Him whom God shall manifest".¹ This Primal Will is the Creator of all things, and its relation to existing things is that of cause to effect, or of fire to heat. This Will is the "Point" of the Manifestation, and as each one of the Prophets is a "Point" of a Manifestation, all the Prophets can be said to be one. Adam, the first of the Manifestations, is one with the last of them. This doctrine of the Prophets was later to become the central doctrine of Baha'ism, and is the main theme of the book "Iqan". It is generally known as the doctrine of "Shamsu'l-Iom" (Sun of the Day),² or "Shamsu'l-Haqiqat" (Sun of Reality), which latter term also originated in the teaching of the Bab. There

Vide Sell. "The Faith of Islam", pp. 146 f., text and footnote. Shamsu'l-Yawm.

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is neither beginning nor end to the Manifestations, and even after the coming of "Him whom God shall manifest" there shall be other Manifestations. Each Manifestation is, however, an advance on the previous one, for while containing in himself the previous Manifestation, he also brings something new. Revelation is therefore progressive, but there neither is, nor can there be, a final Revelation.¹

2. Revelation

As we saw above, no revelation can be said to be final, and no Prophet can be said to be the last who will come. This is a direct contradiction of the Moslem doctrine that Mohammad is the Last of the Prophets, and the Qor'an the complete and perfect and final revelation. This latter is one of the fundamental doctrines of Islam, and is found in the Qor'an itself,² so that Babism is a departure from Islamic teaching rather than a development of it. As every revelation is more advanced than that which preceded it, each new revelation can be said to abrogate the former one, so the Gospel abrogated the Law, and the Qor'an abrogated the Gospel, and the "Beyan" now abrogates the Qor'an. But the "Beyan" cannot be regarded as final; indeed, it is incomplete at the best, for we are told, "The Beyan is to-day in a state of seed, but in the day of 'Him whom God shall manifest' it will arrive at the degree of fruition." The Bab himself has no illusions as to the value of the "Beyan" for he declares, "A thousand perusals of the 'Beyan' are not equal to the perusal of one verse of what shall be revealed by

Muq., Section 3, pp. 41 ff.

Surah Ma'idab, verse 101; Surah A'raf, verses 184 f.

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'Him whom God shall manifest'." The "Beyan", like all the

revelations granted hitherto, is but a stage in the preparation of the world for the coming of “Him whom God shall manifest”.¹

3. The Resurrection

We saw above that the expression “to meet God”, which also means “resurrection”, means nothing more than meeting the Manifestation. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that resurrection in the sense of the word as used by both Christians and Moslems is denied by the Bab. He declares that the resurrection spoken of in the Scriptures must not be interpreted literally, for the term is not meant to be more than a pictorial representation of the awakening of souls that are spiritually dead. Such an awakening, or resurrection, accompanies the manifestation of every Prophet. Heaven is faith in the Manifestation in this life, which will be rewarded by knowledge of God in the next. Hell is the denial of the Manifestation, for everyone that denies enters the fire of God, and remains there until the coming of “Him whom God shall manifest”. Purgatory is the period that intervenes between the coming of two Manifestations. Hitherto none but the Manifestations have understood the meaning of the terms heaven and hell.²

It is important to notice that denial of the resurrection does not necessarily mean denial of life after death. Nowhere is the Babí-Baha’í teaching more unsatisfactory than it is here. We shall see later that the teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha on the question of

“Trav.”, Vol. II, Note V.

Vide Muq., p. 46.

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life after death are not only vague, but also confused.¹ The reason is obvious to all who read the teachings of Baha’u’llah. It would seem that the latter took over the teaching of the Bab about resurrection, and yet retained a belief in the survival of personality, for he says: “Blessing be upon the spirit which departs from the body purified from the doubts and superstitions of the nations. Verily it moves in the atmosphere of God’s desire and enters into the supreme paradise. All the angels of the supreme paradise attend and surround it, and it will have fellowship with all the Prophets of God and his Saints, and speak with them and tell them what happened to it in the Cause of God the Lord of the Universe.”² Can we conceive of the survival of personality and not believe in a resurrection body? Baha’u’llah, who is so definite in his statements about the life of the soul in the world to come, would seem to know nothing of the form in which the soul survives. “As to your question about its form, it cannot be described, and is not needful to be expressed.”³ If the Babí doctrine of the resurrection be accepted, then life after death can only mean that the soul survives as a disembodied spirit. More important still is the fact that the general

teaching of Baha'u'llah would deny the survival of personality, for the aim which he holds before the believer is absorption in the Deity—"Fana"—which implies extinction, and the above passage is only one of the many inconsistencies which are characteristic of his teaching, and which appear again in the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. It is therefore true to say that the teachings of the

Chapter X below.

"Scrip.", p. 226.

ibid., p. 227.

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Babí-Baha'í religion raise problems rather than solve them, for where they should be definite, there they are vague and inconsistent.

4. "He whom God shall Manifest"

We now come to the most important part of the Bab's teaching, for the claim of Baha'u'llah was made possible by the fact that the Bab himself foretold the coming in the future of another greater than himself. There can be no question as to the importance which the Bab himself attached to this aspect of his teaching, for even the "Beyan" is said to be of very little value compared with the teaching of "Him whom God shall manifest". The whole of the "Beyan" revolves around the saying of "Him whom God shall manifest". "All the splendour of the 'Beyan' is 'He whom God shall manifest.'" All who believe in him believe in God, for faith in him is faith in God. To take refuge in God is to take refuge in him. The letters of the "Beyan" if they be entered in his book will be saved from fire, otherwise they will not profit by remaining in the "Beyan". Every good name revealed in the "Beyan" is said to refer to him. The "Beyan" is the balance of truth until the day of "Him whom God shall manifest", and that day will see the perfection of the "Beyan" and the reaping of its fruits. The resurrection of the "Beyan" comes with the manifestation of "Him whom God shall manifest", as does also the day of the general resurrection, when all shall arise and come forth from their graves (in the sense given in paragraph headed (3) above). Belief in the Bab and the "Beyan" is belief in him. "He whom God shall manifest" contains in himself all the perfection of God, for he is the source of the divine names

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and of the divine attributes. Before the beginning of time he was, and when time is no more he will be in the heaven of purity. He is absolute, and answerable to no one for his actions, and none has the right to question that which he does. In him is the excellence of all existing things. The "Beyan" and believers in the "Beyan" need him more than the lover needs his beloved. As the touchstone separates the pure gold from the impure, so he separates the believers from the unbelievers. There hath not appeared, nor shall

there appear, one like unto him in the art of producing “verses” naturally and without effort, which means that he shall excel in literary production, the generally accepted proof of prophethood. It is enjoined upon all Baha’ís that they should respect him, and as a token of this respect the first month in the Babí calendar of nineteen months is dedicated to him. Whenever his name is mentioned, every believer must stand up; and whenever a meeting is held, a vacant place must be reserved for him. The time of his coming is known only to God, but when he does come it will be suddenly and unexpectedly. That the Bab warned his disciples not to deny him when he came is true, but it is equally true that he did not expect him to come for a considerable period of time. “If he comes at the end of ‘ghaias’ and all the people have entered (the Babí religion), then not a single person will remain in hell. If he does not come until the number ‘mustaghas’ and all enter then, not a soul shall remain in hell.¹ But more than ‘mustaghas’ it shall not be, not even were God to will it.” These words need an explanation; the words “ghaias” and “mustaghas” are symbols, and the key to their meaning is contained in the arithmetic

Between Ghiyath (abjad 1,511) and Mustaghath (abjad 2,001).

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arrangement of the Arabic alphabet, known as the “Abjad”, according to which “ghaias” stands for 1511 years, and “mustaghas” stands for 2001 years. Obviously, therefore, the Bab expected him to come between 1511 years and 2001 years after him. This will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.¹

5. Rij‘at

Closely connected with the Babí doctrine of the resurrection, as well as with the doctrine of the Prophets, is the teaching about “Rij‘at” or “Return”. According to this doctrine, Mohammad, Fatimeh, the Twelve Imams and the Four “Gates” have all returned to the life of the world with such as believed in them and such as did not believe. What exactly is meant by “rij‘at” it is difficult to ascertain. Mírza Janí himself seemed to be vague as to its meaning, for though he gives the doctrine an important place in his book, yet he can give only a negative explanation of it, and declares: “It is neither incarnation, nor transmigration, nor absorption; it is as it is, and none knoweth it save those who have ‘returned’.” Hazrat-i Quddus was a “return” of Mohammad, whilst the Bab, when he was the “Reminder”, was a “return” of ‘Alí.² In the same way, Qurratu’l-

‘Ayn probably claimed that she was a “return” of Fatimeh.³ But perhaps the meaning of the term is best explained by a story told of Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel. When the news was brought to him that Hazrat-i Quddus was dead, Subh-i Ezel was taken violently ill with a very high fever which lasted three days, after which “signs

Vide Muq., pp. 47 ff.

Noq., pp. 152 f.

See previous chapter.

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of holiness appeared in his blessed form, and the meaning of 'rij'at' became clear."1 From this it would seem that the qualities which had marked Hazrat-i Quddus now became apparent in Subh-i Ezel. That there was a certain amount of justification for the belief that the Babís held the doctrine of transmigration of souls is evident from a story told about Seyyid Basír, who, hearing a dog barking, said, "That dog is a 'return' of such an one, whom God has punished because of his sins." To prove the truth of his statement, he told his audience that they would find the dog in a certain house, and, on inquiries being made, he was seen to have told the truth. This was but one of the many mysteries said to have been revealed by him.2 Baha'u'llah took over this doctrine of "rij'at", and it forms the basis

of his teaching about the Prophets. One example will suffice to show his method of teaching this doctrine. Speaking of the way in which Christians and Jews refused to accept Mohammad, he says: "Consider how from this verse we are to understand that the men of the age of that Exalted One (Mohammad) were the same men who in the age of previous prophets had striven and fought to spread the knowledge of the law and to preach the word of God. Whereas the men of the age of Jesus were not the men of the age of the Exalted One, and, moreover, the man they had formerly known was Moses the possessor of the law, and Jesus the possessor of the Gospel. Yet, why then does Mohammad say, 'When that man whom they had known came to them, who was Jesus or Moses, they did not believe him'?"3 Thus he teaches that Moham-

Noq., p. 243.

ibid., p. 258; "New Hist.", pp. 334-338.

Iqan, pp. 125 f.

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mad was a "return" of Jesus, and the men of his age were in the same way "returns" of the men of the age of Jesus.

6. The calendar

The Bab devised a calendar of nineteen months of nineteen days each (see Appendix I), the first month being dedicated, as we saw above, to "Him whom God shall manifest". Each month bears a name, but these names are not peculiar to the months, for they are also given in the same order to the nineteen days of each month. Thus, as the first month is entitled "Baha", so the first of each month is also called "Baha". It would seem that the Babí era began on No Ruz (March 20th), 1844,1 the Persian New Year, and not on the day of the Bab's manifestation, as would be expected, and in the

“Beyan” it is decreed that the No Ruz should be celebrated as a festival. To make the Babí year coincide with the solar year, five intercalary days are inserted before the last month. Baha’u’llah took over this calendar, and it is in general use among the Baha’ís to-day, and so is important because all their feasts and fasts are fixed according to it.²

7. The Báb’s outlook on the future

It is perfectly clear that the Bab expected his religion to become the national religion of Persia, for he declares that tolerance must be shown when the Babís come into power. He even hopes that by the day of “Him whom God shall manifest” all mankind will have entered his religion. It would therefore seem that

Naw-Ruz varies between the 20th and 21st of March each year. For a full discussion of the origin of this calendar the reader is referred to Roemer, p. 27 and footnote, and to “Trav.,” Vol. II, Note 2.

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the Bab expected a long time to pass before the coming of “Him whom God shall manifest” indeed, there is every reason to believe that he did not expect the latter to come for at least two thousand years.¹ It would seem, however, that Mírza Janí regarded Subh-i Ezel as “He whom God shall manifest”, and that he credited the Bab with holding the same view (see next chapter), but this could not have been the general view, for the book “Iqan”, whilst testifying to the Babí expectation of a brilliant future for the new religion, shows that the Babís under Subh-i Ezel were all looking to the coming of “He whom God shall manifest” in the future.

In conclusion, it need only be pointed out that the “Beyan” code was a very strict one, and Babís very soon began to desire some modification of its laws, and this undoubtedly helped to pave the way for Baha’u’llah’s teaching. The “Beyan”, although, according to its own teaching, imperfect, is yet all that the believer needs, and no other books are to be read unless they elucidate the “Beyan”.²

In many ways the claims made for the “Beyan” resemble those made for the Qor’an. Unbelievers are challenged to produce a book like unto the Qor’an,³ which comprises all the secrets of heaven and earth.⁴ All creatures working together could not produce the like of the “Beyan”, which is incomparable and inimitable and includes all things.⁵ As the Qor’an contains passages which none can understand but God,⁶ so, too, the “Beyan” is incomprehensible save to such as are divinely aided.⁷ As the Qor’an is said to confirm the

Muq., pp. 33 ff.

Noq., Index lx.

Surah Tur, 34; Surah Hud, 16 f.

Surah Naml, 77; Surah Yunus, 62.

Noq., Index lviii f.

Surah Al ‘Imran, 5.

Noq., Index lviii.

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earlier Scriptures, so the “Beyan” is in essence identical with the Gospel and Qor’an.²

Yet, in spite of these claims, the “Beyan” is almost unknown today, and its interest is purely academic. Finally, it is interesting to note that the Bab, whilst claiming that all the creatures working together could not produce the like of the “Beyan” is yet compelled to utter a warning that the grammar of the “Beyan” is not to be criticized!³

Surah Yusuf, 111.

Noq., Index lix.

Noq., Index lviii.

The coming of Bahá’u’lláh

We now come to a new era in the history of the movement, an era which sees the decline of Babism and the growth of Baha’ism. The centre of the movement moves from Persia, first of all to Baghdad, and finally to Acre. The whole atmosphere now changes, and instead of a sect hated, yet feared, united by a common purpose and a common faith, we find a party of exiles divided by bitter rivalries and fierce quarrels. True there are occasional glimpses of the courage which faced death with a smile, but for the most part the martyr has given place to the common assassin, and the gallant and open fighting of the Babís gives place to the intrigues and cowardly assassinations which are now committed in the name of religion.

As we saw above, the majority of the Babí chiefs had either been killed in the different rebellions, or had perished in the severe persecution which followed the unsuccessful attempt on the Shah’s life. The Bab had perished, Hazrat-i Quddus and the Babu’l-Bab were no more. Had the Bab nominated a successor? That is the question which must now occupy our attention. Fourth in the Babí hierarchy was a young man named Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel, whose acquaintance we have already made. The history of this period

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centres round Mírza Yahya and his brother Mírza Hosein ‘Alí, better known as Baha’u’llah, who was eventually to wrest the leadership from his brother.

Mírza Yahya and Mírza Hosein’ Ali were half-brothers, both being sons of Aqa Mírza ‘Abbas, better known as Mírza Buzurg of Nur, but by different wives. We know very little about their youth, but it seems to be fairly certain that Mírza Hosein ‘Alí was born in 1817 (on October 1, according to Avareh), and that Mírza Yahya was born in 1830–1. It would seem that Mírza Hosein ‘Alí was the son of a concubine,¹ a fact which is unintentionally attested by Avareh, who makes the same statement about Subh-i Ezel.² Subh-i Ezel was

the son of a woman of distinguished parentage, who died whilst he was still a child.³ Mírza Buzurg then committed the child to the care of his second wife, or concubine, the mother of Mírza Hosein 'Alí'. At first she neglected the child, but one night she saw a vision concerning him, and that completely changed her attitude, and she treated him with more love than she had ever shown to her own children, ministering to him faithfully and reverently until he reached his fourteenth year, when the Manifestation of the Bab took place. This story was told to Mírza Janí by Baha'u'llah,⁴ who added the following account of the youth of Mírza Yahya. After the death of Baha'u'llah's mother in that same year (Mírza Yahya's fourteenth year), he undertook the instruction of Mírza Yahya, and found him a boy of unusual modesty, gravity, and courteousness of demeanour, whose goodness was transparently clear, but at the time he little thought

Noq., p. 238. The parents of Baha'u'llah (b. 2 Muharram 1233; 12 November 1817) were Mírza 'Abbas-i-Nurí (or Mírza Buzurg Nurí) and his second wife Khadíjih Khanum. Mírza Yahya Nurí (c. 1831–1912) was a younger half-brother of Baha'u'llah. His mother was the concubine Kuchik Khanum.—M.W.T.

See Chapter VI.

Noq., p. 238.

ibid., p. 239.

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of the station the boy would one day come to occupy. Mírza Yahya studied Persian, but made little progress in Arabic. His handwriting (nasta'íq) was good, and he had a real fondness for mystical poetry.¹

Of the youth of Baha'u'llah, Mírza Janí has nothing to tell us, but Baha'u'llah himself tells us that he received no school education, and that he did not study the sciences as men generally did,² but this does not mean that he was not privately educated, as was Mírza Yahya. As in the case of the Bab, so here, we can say that it is more correct to credit him with a very ordinary education than to say that he was uneducated. Both 'Abdu'l-Baha³ and Avareh⁴ speak of the remarkable youth of Baha'u'llah, and of the way in which he was admitted into the councils of statesmen and learned divines, all of whom were amazed at the wisdom and knowledge of one so young. Avareh tells us that Baha'u'llah, who was twenty-seven years old when the Bab declared his mission, immediately showed himself partial to the new faith, and became an ardent teacher and preacher of its tenets. Mírza Janí has nothing to tell us of the youth of Baha'u'llah, but he makes it perfectly clear that the young man was an ardent Babí, and that he held him in high regard.⁵ When the Bab appeared, Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel was but a boy, but he could not help hearing of the new Manifestation, because his elder

brother used to bring his Babí friends home with him. For the story of his conversion we are indebted to Mírza Janí, who heard it from the lips of Mírza Yahya himself.⁶ It would seem that the boy used to listen to the conversations

Noq., p. 239.

Sur., p. 89.

“Trav.”, Vol. II, pp. 56 ff.

Avareh, pp. 456 f.

Noq., p. 239.

ibid., p. 339.

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of Baha'u'llah and his Babí friends and to reading; by them of the Bab's writings. The continual repetition in the course of a prayer of the words “O, O my God!” enthralled his heart and attracted him to the Bab, who was the writer of the prayer. His faith was established and perfected by the reading of some of the Bab's explanations of the Traditions of the Imams. When the Bab (or “Zekr” as he then was) ordered his followers to go to Khorasan, Mírza Yahya also decided to go thither, but Mírza Hosein ‘Alí heard of it, and immediately sent and prevented him, on account of his youth. Shortly afterwards his relatives went to Mazandaran, and Mírza Yahya accompanied them, and after the collapse of the Badasht conference we find him at Barfurush, in the company of Hazrat-i Quddus, whom he had met on the way, and who had shown him great kindness. At Barfurush he met Qurratu'l-‘Ayn, and at the command of Hazrat-i Quddus he conducted her to an appointed place. During the siege of the Castle of Tabarsí he went with Baha'u'llah and some others to help Hazrat-i Quddus, but was arrested on the way, and imprisoned for a while. That Mírza Yahya was very attached to Hazrat-i Quddus, and that the attachment was mutual, is very obvious from Mírza Janí's account, and it would seem that when news came of the death of Hazrat-i Quddus, the young man was some days in a high fever, after which “signs of holiness” appeared in him, and it was believed that he was a “return” of Hazrat-i Quddus. It is clear that Mírza Janí regarded this event as the beginning of a new dispensation, and he distinctly declares that the Bab rejoiced in this new development, which marked the “decline of the sun of ‘the Reminder’,

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and the rising of the moon of Ezel.” From what follows, Mírza Janí makes it abundantly clear that the Bab nominated Mírza Yahya as his successor, for he sent him some of his own personal effects, including rings, garments, and papers, and also wrote a testamentary deposition definitely nominating Mírza Yahya as his successor, and bidding him write the eight (unwritten) “Vahids” of the “Beyan”, and to abrogate the “Beyan” should “He whom God

shall manifest” appear, and put into practice that which would be given him by inspiration. From this Mírza Janí himself understood that the Bab meant men to understand that Mírza Yahya was “He whom God shall manifest”.² That the Bab did appoint Mírza Yahya as his successor cannot be disputed, and the letter making the appointment, together with a translation, has been published by the late Prof. Browne.³ That Mírza Hosein ‘Alí, Baha’u’llah, regarded his half-brother as the successor of the Bab is also perfectly clear from Mírza Janí’s narrative, for, as we saw above, the story of Mírza Yahya’s youth came from Baha’u’llah himself, and the very expression “But I did not know that he would become the possessor of a ‘station’,” which he uses with reference to Mírza Yahya, clearly proves his attitude towards his brother. Mírza Janí himself perished in the persecution of 1852, so that we must seek another source of information for the period which follows. Before we come to consider the story of Baha’u’llah, it is necessary to follow very briefly the movements of Mírza Yahya after the death of the Bab. At the time of the Bab’s martyrdom he was residing

Noq., pp. 243 ff.

ibid., p. 244.

“New Hist.”, p. 426.

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at a village near Teheran, but when Mírza Aqa Khan of Nur became Prime Minister, he was compelled for his own safety to leave that neighbourhood. Thus it came to pass that he was at Nur when the attempt was made on the Shah’s life, and so escaped arrest. A reward was offered for his capture, but in the guise of a dervish he managed to escape, and after many adventures he arrived in Baghdad in 1852 or 1853.

We saw above that Baha’u’llah, together with Mírza Yahya and some other Babís, were arrested on their way to the Castle of Tabarsí, After a time they were released, and Baha’u’llah went on a pilgrimage to Kerbela and Najaf, and so escaped the persecution, but after his return he was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the attempt on the Shah’s life, and was thrown into prison. After four months’ imprisonment his innocence was proved and he was released, but his property was confiscated. Then, with the permission of the Shah, he left Persia, and with his family went to Baghdad, arriving there a short time before Subh-i Ezel, according to the latter,¹ or a short time later, according to others.² The Ezelí historians tell us that Mírza Yahya assumed the leadership in Baghdad, and sitting behind a curtain taught his followers, none but his relatives being allowed to see him.³ But Baha’í historians, led by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, tell a very different story, and contend that Baha’u’llah was the leader. All these later histories are, however, unreliable, and discussion of them will be

postponed to the next chapter, where it properly belongs, whilst this chapter

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 375.

ibid., p. 355.

“Hasht Behesht”, quoted “Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 355.

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will be confined to an attempt to ascertain the true historical facts. As we saw above, Mírza Janí’s history makes it abundantly clear that after the Bab, Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel was generally accepted as leader, and that Baha’u’llah also acknowledged his leadership. We are not here concerned with the claims that were made at this time by a number of persons—claims which did not disturb Mírza Yahya in the least—for none of them is of any importance to our theme. What we have to do is to consider when and how it was that Baha’u’llah came to make his claim to be “He whom God shall make manifest”. It would seem from Mírza Janí’s account that Baha’u’llah was suspected of harbouring designs to set up a standard on his own account whilst the Bab and Hazrat-i Quddus were still alive, and for that reason was sent from Mazandaran to Teheran, to prevent him creating further disturbances in an already disturbed region.¹ We have no further evidence of his harbouring any such intentions until we come to the Baghdad period, when we have his own statement testifying to the fact that he was once more suspect. It would seem that after Subh-i Ezel had retired into seclusion, the management of practical affairs fell into the hands of Baha’u’llah, and it would appear from the Ezelí account that he now attracted to his side a number of men to whom some slackening of the severer code of the “Beyan” was not unwelcome. Certain of the old school of Babís, perceiving the tendency to innovation and relaxation, remonstrated so vigorously with him that he left Baghdad in wrath, and went towards Suleimaniyeh,² in the neighbourhood

Noq., p. 243.

Sulaymaniya.

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of which he remained among the Kurds for nearly two years. During the whole of this period his whereabouts was unknown to the Babís at Baghdad, but when at last it was discovered, Subh-i Ezel wrote a letter to him inviting him to return.¹ The truth of this narrative is proved by Baha’u’llah’s own statement in the book “Iqan”, which he wrote after his return to Baghdad. He says: “I swear to God that I had no intention of returning from this voluntary exile, nor did I hope to see this journey end. For I did not desire to be a cause of discord among my friends, or a cause of schism among the brethren. I did not desire to bring loss or grief of heart to anyone. Beyond this I had no thought (in going away), and

I certainly had no intention of proclaiming a (new) cause, but men spoke idly, according to the thoughts of their own imaginations. Such was the position until the order for my return was issued from the seat of authority, and reluctantly I yielded and came back.”² This statement confirms that of the Ezelí historian, and proves beyond all doubt that the later Baha’í histories are spurious. From his own clear statement it is obvious that Baha’u’llah was once more suspected of planning to found a new cause. What exactly happened it is impossible to tell, but it is certain that the older Babís became thoroughly alarmed, and took immediate steps to prevent the threatened schism. It is clear, too, that Baha’u’llah was anxious to clear himself, and that he submitted to the authority of Mírza Yahya when the latter ordered him to return. The value of the book “Iqan” cannot be exaggerated, for it provides us with our only authoritative statement of Baha’u’llah’s position at this time. The book is

“Trav.”, Vol. II, Note W.

Iqan, p. 211.

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a defence of Babism, and is important an account of the interpretations of Christian Scriptures it contains, and because it enables us to reconstruct Baha’u’llah’s outlook on the future at the time when he wrote the book. He is convinced that Babism has a bright future, and declares himself unable to describe, and mankind unworthy to comprehend, the kingdoms that are to become subject to the rule of the Bab.¹ The time is not far off when the signs of his kingdom will be evident in all countries.² The “Beyan” is the book of the age, and all Babís should consecrate themselves to the service of the Cause.³ He is ready to give his life for the Bab,⁴ whose rank is higher than that of any of the Prophets, and whose mission is loftier and higher than the comprehension of the saints.⁵ It was his perfect love for the Bab that inspired him to write the “Iqan”, with the hope that the poor of the world would be led thereby to share in the riches of the Bab, and the ignorant to partake of the knowledge he brought.⁶

From internal evidence we know that the “Iqan” was written two years after his return to Baghdad,⁷ so the date of its composition was AH 1274 (AD 1857–8), and not AH 1278, as has often been stated. So we know that five years previous to his final departure from Baghdad (AH 1279) Baha’u’llah was apparently a true Babí, and, by his own confession, loyal to Mírza Yahya. But it is possible that even then he was but biding his time, for he expresses the hope that the Babís will not reject the Hidden One who is to come.⁸

The influx of Babís from Persia to the neighbourhood of the Supreme Shrines (Kerbela and Najaf) began to

Iqan, p. 103.

ibid., p. 65.

ibid., p. 166.

ibid., p. 212.

ibid., p. 205.

ibid., p. 53.

ibid., p. 211. Possibly written about 15 January 1861 (AH 1277).

ibid., p. 208.

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alarm and disturb the Shí‘ah Divines who resided there, and they therefore sought a way to put an end to it. A meeting of the leading divines was convened, but it came to nought, for Sheikh Murtaza al-Ansarí, one of the most famous of the Shí‘ah divines of his day, refused to condemn the Babís, on the ground that he was not sufficiently versed in their doctrine to pass judgment on it. That this meeting was convened we cannot doubt, for Subh-i Ezel also testifies to it, corroborating the story of Sheikh Murtaza’s refusal to condemn the Babís.¹ ‘Abdu’l-Baha tells us that, having failed in this, they sought another way, and sent a mulla skilled in debate to meet Baha’u’llah, and to demand a sign of him. Baha’u’llah then offered to work any miracle they desired on the one condition that they accept him afterwards, and, fearing to put him to the test, they departed, taken aback by the unexpected response.² That this story cannot be true is proved by the evidence of the “Iqan” given above, and also by the fact that in his lengthier account, given in the “Traveller’s Narrative”, ‘Abdu’l-Baha does not mention the incident. The original version of the story is undoubtedly that given in the “New History”, according to which the challenge to the mullas was not issued by Baha’u’llah in Baghdad, but by a Baha’í apologist at a meeting in Teheran, said to have been convened by the Shah.³ As Prof. Browne points out, Baha’u’llah must have been at Acre when this meeting was held, if it ever was held: we are therefore justified in assuming that ‘Abdu’l-Baha adopted the story to suit his own purposes.

“Trav.,” Vol. II, p. 86, footnote.

Mof., pp. 22 f.

“New Hist.,” pp. 172, 178.

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The Babís now began to have trouble from another source. The Persian Consul in Baghdad, Mírza Buzurg Khan, became their enemy. Baha’í historians, led by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, declare that he was a drunkard, and that he was a mere tool in the hands of the mullas,¹ but the Ezelís, on the other hand, declare that the reason for his hostility was twofold—firstly that the Babís refused to bribe him in order to gain his goodwill, and, secondly, that Baha’u’llah, who already had two wives, took as a third a young girl whom Mírza

Buzurg himself wished to marry.² The Babís were now so persecuted that they enrolled themselves as Turkish subjects, hoping that thereby they would escape from their tormentors.³ The Persian Government now brought matters to a head. The existence of a strong band of Babís near the Supreme Shrines was a constant menace to the peace of Persia, for the Babís were definitely opposed to the Government, and the coming of hosts of Persian pilgrims to the shrines enabled them to engage in extensive propaganda work. Pressure was therefore brought to bear on the Ottoman Government with a view to the removal of the Babís to a place more distant from the Persian frontier. It was therefore decided to move them to Constantinople.

Baha'u'llah and his party left Baghdad on April 20, 1863. Almost all Baha'í writers declare that he halted at the Garden of Rezvan beyond the Tigris, where he declared himself to be "He whom God shall manifest". Behiah Khanum, a daughter of Baha'u'llah, declares that the claim was not openly made, but that it was in the nature of a confidential statement to 'Abdu'l-Baha

"Trav.", Vol. II, pp. 84 f.

ibid., footnote.

ibid., p. 88.

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and four of the most intimate disciples.¹ Mírza Jawad declares that this was the second declaration, the first having been previously made in writing,² but there does not seem to be any justification for this statement. Avareh, who places the event in 1864, distinctly states that Baha'u'llah now made a public proclamation of his mission in the presence of a large gathering of the nobility of Baghdad, who had come to bid him farewell.³ It is impossible to discover what really did take place at this time, but it could not have been of any importance, for 'Abdu'l-Baha, in his "Traveller's Narrative", which was the first official history of Baha'ism, does not even mention the name of the garden.⁴ But, on the other hand, Baha'u'llah himself, in a "Tablet" to a man named 'Alí Naqqí, writes:

"Blessed art thou in that thou wast privileged to be present in the Garden of Rezvan, on the Festival of Rezvan, when God, the Merciful, showed forth His glory to the world." ⁵ It would therefore seem probable that Baha'u'llah did at this time confide to a few friends his intention of setting up a standard of his own, and that from now on he set about preparing the way for his claim, which, however, he did not venture to make until he was certain of winning the support of the main body of Babís who accompanied them to Constantinople.

There can be no doubt as to the time when he made the public declaration, for we have the unanimous witness of many writers,

including Mírza Abu'l-Fazl, Dr Kheiru'llah, Nabíl, and Behiah Khanum, that the claim was made in Adrianople in the year 1866.

Phelps, p. 30.

“Materials”, p. 16.

Avareh, pp. 358 ff.

He was compelled to ignore this incident because he declares that even the Bab had recognised Baha'u'llah's claim.

Sur., pp. 172 f.

The beginnings of the Bahá'í Religion

The journey from Baghdad to Constantinople seems to have taken from three to four months, and was made by way of Karkuk, Mosul, and Samsun, whence it was continued by steamer. The travellers were met by Government carriages, and driven to the Government guest-house, but this proving small for them, Baha'u'llah and a number of others were moved to another house, which was more spacious. Here they were the guests of the Ottoman Government, which appointed Shamsí Bey to entertain them. Mírza Yahya, who had travelled apart from Baha'u'llah's party, was the recognized head of the sect, but as nearly all the existing histories were written by Baha'ís, they attribute the leadership to Baha'u'llah. The Babís were now guests of honour, and were treated with the utmost respect. After a short stay at Constantinople, they were removed to Adrianople, which was now appointed as a residence for them. Here again they were at first treated with the utmost consideration, and 'Abdu'l-Baha declares that “the materials of comfort were gathered together, neither fear nor dread remained, they reposed on the couch of ease, and passed their time in quietude.”¹ Before continuing with the story of their sojourn at Adrianople, another account

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 92.

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of the events related above, written by an American Baha'í, will be given. It is interesting because it shows the type of narrative that is circulated amongst Westerners, and which may help to explain why some of them are attracted to the movement.

“Slowly the caravan, consisting of Baha'u'llah, his family, and some seventy followers who refused to leave him, moved forward on the long trek to Constantinople. Throughout the day, by the side of His Father's wagon rode 'Abdu'l-Baha. At night He guarded His tent, never all through that journey relaxing in the most watchful vigilance. Now scene after scene of suffering and persecution followed. Confinement in utterly inadequate quarters. Questioning and hostility from the clergy and authorities. Then further banishment through the heavily-falling snow, again in a state bordering on destitution, to Adrianople. Here in this important city of Roumelia, imprisoned again in verminous, overcrowded rooms.

But through it all the majesty of the Prisoner shone more and more clearly. As calamities increased, only the brighter grew His radiance, spiritual influence and authority. An authority that even His bitter enemies acknowledged and feared.”¹

The period immediately following the settlement at Adrianople is perhaps, at first sight, one of the most difficult from the point of view of the historian. But this is not really true, for though we have two different stories of the main events of the period, the very fact that one of those stories is deliberately intended to contradict the other is obvious proof that one or the other must be true. What we have to decide, there-

Florence Pinchon cited in “S. of W.”, Vol. XVIII. No. 11, pp. 329 f.

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fore, is to which of these stories we are to give credence. The two stories will therefore be given, beginning with the Baha’í version. The story given by Mírza Jawad is as follows. Whilst at Adrianople Subh-i Ezel, jealous of the growing fame and honour of Baha’u’llah, and, incited by Hají Seyyid Mohammad Isfahaní, began to claim that he, and not Baha’u’llah, was the successor of the Bab. Mírza Yahya was at this time living apart from Baha’u’llah, but his expenses were paid by the latter. Things became more and more embarrassing, until at last, on the publication by Baha’u’llah of the “Tablet of Command”,¹ the smouldering fire burst into flame. This Tablet announced that Baha’u’llah was “He whom God shall manifest”, and was sent to Mírza Yahya by messenger. As a result, relations between the brothers became strained, and Mírza Yahya began to consider means of doing away with his brother. First of all he invited Baha’u’llah to tea, and gave him a poisoned cup. Baha’u’llah drank part of it, and gave the rest to one of Mírza Yahya’s wives. Both became ill, and Baha’u’llah’s life was saved by the prayers of a physician named Dr Chupan. Having failed in his attempt, Mírza Yahya sought another way, and, entering a bath attended by Mohammad ‘Alí of Isfahan, a barber by trade, he tried to persuade the latter to cut Baha’u’llah’s throat when he came to the bath. Mohammad ‘Alí on leaving the bath reported the matter, and the story became public property. Baha’u’llah now left the company and went to live in a house apart. Having failed twice, Mírza Yahya now sought another way of creating trouble, and, incited by Seyyid Mohammad Isfahaní, he sent

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some of the women of his household to the Governor to complain that Baha’u’llah was not giving them the allowance apportioned to them by the Government.

When Baha’u’llah heard this story, he drove both Mírza Yahya and Seyyid Mohammad away from him, whereupon the latter went

to Constantinople to complain to the Government. There he met Aqa Jan Bey, nick-named “Kaj-Kolah” (Skew-cap), and together they plotted to get Baha’u’llah into trouble. As a result of this intrigue the Ottoman Government put Baha’u’llah under arrest, and a week afterwards he and his family, together with a large band of followers (the number varies according to different writers from sixty-eight to eighty), were removed to Acre, whilst Subh-i Ezel and some of the disciples of Baha’u’llah were sent to Famagusta in Cyprus.¹

The Ezelí story is that after the arrival of the party at Adrianople, Baha’u’llah, incited by Mírza Aqa Jan Kashaní, gradually began to make public his claim to be “He whom God shall manifest”, and began to send letters and epistles in all directions. Then began a series of assassinations on the part of the Baha’ís. All the prominent Ezelís who withstood the claims of Baha’u’llah were marked out for death. In Baghdad, Mulla Rajab ‘Alí and his brother, Hají Mírza Ahmad, Mírza Mohammad Reza, and several others, fell one by one victims of the assassin’s knife. Then an attempt was made to poison Subh-i Ezel. Baha’u’llah caused poison to be put in one side of a dish that was set before Mírza Yahya and himself. The dish had been flavoured with onions, and Subh-i Ezel, disliking

Vide “Materials”, pp. 20 ff.—the date as given by Mírza Jawad has been omitted in the above, because it is obviously impossible.

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it, did not partake, but Baha’u’llah ate a little of it, and the poison having diffused, he was presently attacked with vomiting. Baha’u’llah then assembled his companions and told them that Subh-i Ezel had tried to poison him. Shortly after this it was arranged that Mohammad ‘Alí Isfahaní, the barber, should cut Subh-i Ezel’s throat at the bath, but the latter, suspecting danger, refused to allow him to come near, and after leaving the bath separated himself entirely from Baha and his followers. Hají Seyyid Mohammad of Isfahan and Aqa Jan Bey, who held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Turkish army, discovered how matters stood, and reported to the Ottoman Government. The Government decided to separate the brothers by sending them to different places, so Mírza Yahya and his family, together with four of Baha’u’llah’s followers, were sent to Famagusta, whilst Baha’u’llah, together with his family, about eighty of his followers, and four of the followers of Mírza Yahya, were ordered to Acre in Syria. One of the latter, Mírza Nasrullah was poisoned in Adrianople, and the other three, Hají Mohammad Isfahaní, Aqa Jan Bey, and Mírza Reza Qulí of Tadrísh, were assassinated shortly after their arrival at Acre. One of the assassins was Mohammad ‘Alí the barber.¹

It seems to the present author to be obvious that two such contradictory stories, containing identical charges, must of

necessity be accounts which owe their origin to some historical occurrence which was a matter of common talk at the time. Which story are we to accept? The balance of truth would seem to

Vide "Trav.", Vol. II, Note W.

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lie with the Ezelís, and the present author, for reasons that will now be given, is disposed to accept their story. The Baha'í story that Mírza Yahya tried to oust Baha'u'llah from the leadership is an obvious fabrication, for we know that the former was the true leader. Furthermore, we have seen that Baha'u'llah since the event at the Garden of Rezvan had been planning to oust his brother, and that it was at this time that he made his claim. He would certainly be in a much stronger position if Mírza Yahya were out of the way. That a number of Ezelís were murdered is a fact of history, and we know from the writings of Baha'u'llah that he did not disapprove of these crimes, for he declares that their deaths proved that the "curse of God was upon infidels", and even names one of the Ezelís murdered at Baghdad, Mírza 'Alí Mohammad Isfahaní.¹ It is also very significant that Mohammad 'Alí the barber was an ardent follower of Baha'u'llah, and was later one of the assassins of the Ezelís at Acre. These murders are readily acknowledged by the followers of Baha'u'llah, who,² however, exempt Baha'u'llah from any responsibility. There is also the significant fact that the murderers of the Ezelís at Acre were later released at the request of 'Abdu'l-Baha.³ The Baha'í attitude towards such murders is made perfectly clear by 'Abdu'l-Baha, who distinguishes between human revenge and divine retribution, which latter term covers all punitive acts committed by the Prophets. Some of the Prophets issued commands for the slaying of many, but there were no human motives behind those commands—

Sur., p. 208.

"Materials", pp. 54 ff.

"Trav.", Vol. II, p. 370.

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they were inspired solely by divine justice. This teaching, taken in conjunction with Baha'u'llah's declaration quoted above, would seem to prove beyond all doubt that they were not troubled by the ethics of assassination. Again, it is worthy of note that neither 'Abdu'l-Baha in his "Traveller's Narrative" nor Avareh in his history makes any mention of these events, and it is very unlike either to omit to put on record anything that could be said to the detriment of Mírza Yahya's character. Finally, there is the character of the historians to be reckoned with, and it is clear from the various accounts that we have already considered that the Ezelí historians are more reliable than their opponents.

These stories have been considered in detail because it is

important that we should understand the background of the new faith that was now to be preached. Baha'ism was born in Adrianople, and baptized in the blood of its opponents. From a background of intrigue and hatred, of treachery and bloodshed, there came forth a new faith which was later to adopt as its slogan the words "Universal Peace!"

In the next chapter we shall consider the problem which now faced Baha'u'llah, and the way in which he tackled it. Mírza Yahya now vanishes from the stage, for, far away in Cyprus, he could take no active part in the direction of affairs, and the way was left clear for Baha'u'llah. Acre now becomes the centre of interest, and here the new religion was developed until it completely ousted Babism. When first the Baha'ís, as they will henceforth be known, arrived at Acre they were lodged in the military barracks, which

Mok., Vol. I, p. 360.

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were then empty. Here they undoubtedly suffered many hardships on account of the climate and the bad quality of the water, and a number of them died during that summer. Later a supply of fresh water was arranged, and matters improved, so that the general health of the party ceased to be a matter of worry. After the murder of the Ezelís, Baha'u'llah himself was arrested, and was in prison for some days, and was afterwards moved with his companions to a building belonging to the military, where they remained for a little over six months.¹ After about two years in the military barracks, Baha'u'llah had been given a house in the town,² so this second confinement cannot be regarded as imprisonment "for his faith". Much is made of this period in Acre, the "Most Great Prison", but in fairness to the Ottoman Government it must be pointed out that the Baha'ís were given as much freedom as was possible, and that the periods of real imprisonment were in each case due to disturbances caused by the Baha'ís themselves. For nine years after his release from prison Baha'u'llah did not leave Acre, but Mírza Jawad makes it perfectly clear that he could have gone had he wished.³ The only two events of any importance that, marked the beginning of the Acre period were, firstly, a schism in the ranks of the Baha'ís, which was so fierce that Mírza Jawad does not care to discuss it; and, secondly, the coming of Mírza Badí' in 1869, and the bearing by him to Persia of Baha'u'llah's letter to the Shah. Mírza Badí' succeeded in, giving the letter to the Shah, but it cost him his life, for he was immediately arrested, and, after torture, was put to death.

Baha'u'llah

"Materials", p. 57.

ibid., p. 50.

ibid., p. 58.

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spent the last years of his life at Acre living in the palace of 'Udí Khammar, a short distance outside the town, which he rented in 1880.¹ Here he was visited by pilgrims from East and West, and here he remained until his death on May 28, 1892. He was buried in a house to the west of the palace of 'Udí Khammar, which then acquired the dignity of a shrine. His followers never speak of his death, preferring to regard it as his "ascension". Thus passed away a remarkable man—a man of such tremendous personality that he was able in the course of a short time to win a large body of disciples from a religion which at one time seemed as if it would sweep all before it. The personality of Mírza Yahya undoubtedly helped him, for the latter, a recluse by nature, was out of touch with the main body of his followers. The difference between the two men is clearly shown in Prof. Browne's account of his interviews with them,² from which we see how, by clever staging of the scene for his audiences, Baha'u'llah was able to increase the effect that his personality had on those who met him. He was a great man, but thoroughly Oriental, and to understand his influence we must understand the background against which he lived. Set against a Western background he would stand out as a man who would hesitate at nothing in order to achieve his purpose, a man to be feared rather than revered. But the East has its own ideas as to what qualities go to make a Prophet, and so Baha'u'llah was a Prophet.

"Materials", p. 58.

"Trav.", Vol. II, Introduction.

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When Mírza Yahya was sent to Famagusta in Cyprus the field was left clear for Baha'u'llah. In Adrianople he had been remarkably successful, for he had won the allegiance of almost all the exiled Babís. A greater problem faced him now. How was he, an exile, to win over the Babís of Persia to his cause?

Mírza Yahya Subh-i Ezel had been generally accepted as the successor of the Bab, and as such he was still regarded in Persia, and Baha'u'llah's first task was to explain away Mírza-Yahya. Mírza Janí's history was in existence, but only in manuscript form, and the first task was to suppress that history, and to re-write it in a form more favourable to Baha'u'llah's claims. So well was the first part of the task accomplished, that were it not for the fact that the Comte de Gobineau had brought one copy of the "Noqtatu'l-Kaf" to Europe, the book would no longer be in existence. The first Baha'í history to be written was the "Taríkh-i Jadíd" (New History), which was based on the "Noqtatu'l-Kaf", but which did not include the story of the rise of Mírza Yahya, and his appointment as the Bab's successor. It is now definitely stated that Baha'u'llah was the successor of the Bab, and stated in such a way as to suggest that

attempts were being

made to put Mírza Yahya in his place.¹ This history did not meet with the approval of the Baha'í chiefs at Acre, so it never got beyond the manuscript stage. 'Abdu'l-Baha then undertook the task of writing another version, and the "Traveller's Narrative" was produced. 'Abdu'l-Baha was nothing if not thorough, and he does not mince matters, but makes a very good attempt to explain away Mírza Yahya by relating the following very plausible story.

"Now since a great celebrity had been attained for Baha'u'llah in Teheran, and the hearts of men were disposed towards him, he, together with Mulla 'Abdu'l-Karim, considered it expedient that, in face of the agitation among the doctors, the aggressiveness of the greater part of (the people of) Persia, and the irresistible power of the Amír-Nizam, whereby both the Bab and Baha'u'llah were in great danger and liable to incur severe punishment, some measure should be adopted to direct the thoughts of men towards some absent person, by which means Baha'u'llah would remain protected from the interference of men. And since, further, having regard to sundry considerations, they did not consider an outsider as suitable, they cast the lot of this augury to the name of Baha'u'llah's brother Mírza Yahya.

"By the assistance and instruction of Baha'u'llah, therefore, they made him notorious and famous on the tongues of friends and foes, and wrote letters, ostensibly at his dictation, to the Bab. And since secret correspondences were in process, the Bab highly approved of this scheme. So Mírza Yahya was concealed and hidden, while mention of him was on the

"New Hist.", pp. 246 ff.

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tongues and in the mouths of men. And this mighty plan was of wondrous efficacy, for Baha'u'llah, though he was known and seen, remained safe and secure, and this veil was the cause that no one outside (the sect) fathomed the matter or fell into the idea of molestation, until Baha'u'llah quitted Teheran at the permission of the King, and was allowed to withdraw to the Supreme Shrines."¹ It is worthy of note that 'Abdu'l-Baha, who, in order to achieve his purpose, is compelled to declare that Baha'u'llah went into hiding (in the sense that he hid behind a lie), tells a different story when writing for Western inquirers. To them he declares, "Not for one moment was he (Baha'u'llah) in concealment; he mixed openly with his enemies. He was occupied in showing forth evidences and proofs, and was recognised as the herald of the word of God. In many changes and chances he endured the greatest misfortunes, and at every moment he ran the risk of being martyred."²

The story thus concocted by Baha'u'llah, though hardly creditable to Baha'u'llah, was an excellent explanation of Mírza Yahya's appearance on the stage of history, and it met with great success. Mírza Abu'l-Fazl in his brief account of the movement does not even mention the name of Mírza Yahya, who by that time was completely forgotten.³

Although it has no immediate bearing on the question under discussion, it is interesting to note that Avareh adopts a totally different method in writing his history, a method far superior to that of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The latter occasionally substitutes the name of Baha'u'llah

"Trav.", Vol. II, pp. 62 f.

Mof., p. 21; Questions, p. 33.

See "A.B. v. B."

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for that of Mírza Yahya, and then adapts stories told by Mírza Janí without further change,¹ but Avareh takes Mírza Janí's narrative and simply substitutes the name of Baha'u'llah for that of Mírza Yahya, so we find that Baha'u'llah was the son of the favourite wife, and Mírza Yahya the son of the concubine. The remarkable vision mentioned by Mírza Janí was seen at Baha'u'llah's birth, and not at that of Mírza Yahya, and it was to Baha'u'llah that the Bab sent his ring and writing materials.² That Avareh was able to follow this method was due to the fact that when he wrote his book even the name of Mírza Yahya was known to very few.

Baha'u'llah's second method of approaching his task was equally successful. While at Adrianople he had written a number of Tablets to prepare the way for his claim, and he adopted the same method after reaching Acre. From there he wrote his Tablets to the Kings of Europe, to the Pope, to the Shah of Persia, and to various individuals of less renown. He was further helped by the fact that the Bab had warned his followers to be on their guard lest they reject "Him whom God shall manifest" and had told them that one of the proofs of his claim would be his remarkable ability to produce "verses". Baha'u'llah was already known as a writer, for the book "Iqan" had immediately become popular, and the large number of Tablets he now produced were held up as indisputable proof of the truth of his claim.

Nor must we forget the part played by the assassin's knife.

Whether the Ezelís were assassinated with his knowledge or not, those assassinations helped to

e.g. "Trav.", Vol. II, p. 41.

Avareh, pp. 353 ff., 285.

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forward his claim. The removal of the Ezelís at the Supreme Shrines, and at Baghdad, was necessary, for both these places were

important points of vantage. Every year they were visited by hosts of Persians, and these, returning to their homeland, would carry news of the new Manifestation, and the tidings they carried would have far more weight if it could be said that all the Babís who had gone into exile had accepted the new Manifestation. So Baghdad, the Shrines, and Acre, all became the scenes of murders, and Baha'í influence reigned supreme in all. But he had other problems to solve, and the first of them was concerned with the Babí attitude towards the Government. The Babís were, as we saw above, irreconcilably hostile to both the Government and the then Royal Family of Persia. All this must now be changed, for Baha'u'llah was more ambitious than the Bab. He dreamed of a Baha'í world, not of a Baha'í Persia. Consequently, whereas Babism was intensely national and exclusive, Baha'ism must be a universal religion. The new histories played their part in creating a new "atmosphere". The Shah is no longer blamed for the persecution of the Babís, and he had no knowledge of the execution of the Bab until it had actually taken place. In any case, he was powerless to help, for the opposition of the mullas and members of his Government was too strong. The new attitude adopted towards the Royal house can be summarised in the brief statement that, whereas Mírza Janí was convinced that Mohammad Shah went to hell,¹ the writer of the "New History" believed that he went to the mansions of Paradise.² There must be no more fighting, being

Noq., p. 138.

"New Hist.," p. 291.

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killed is preferable to killing. He announced this change of attitude to the King in the "Lawh-i Sultan" (Tablet to the King), which was conveyed by the unfortunate Mírza Badí'. In this Tablet Baha'u'llah humbly throws himself and his followers on the King's mercy, and apologetically explains why they became Ottoman subjects. He condemns sedition and strife as displeasing to God, and requests the King to let him come face to face with his opponents, that the King himself may judge between them. The full text of this letter, which is too long to quote, will be found in the text of the "Traveller's Narrative".¹

Then what of the attitude of the Babís towards men of other creeds? That, too, needed to be changed. The Bab taught that all true Christians had accepted Mohammad; the rest of the Christians had many good qualities, yet they are of the Fire (i.e., children of hell-fire). He applauds their cleanliness and some of their other qualities, and bids the Babís follow their example in these things.² Yet, in spite of all this, only those who practise useful trades and professions are to be allowed in the lands of believers.³ Furthermore, unbelievers are not allowed to dwell in five of the

Persian provinces.⁴ Unbelievers are not to be killed, but their property may be confiscated, and marriage with them is forbidden.⁵ All this must now change, and those who accept Baha'u'llah must be ready to regard men of all creeds as their brothers, for are they not all "the fruit of one tree, and the leaves of one branch?"

At first sight it would seem that the task which faced

Pp. 108 ff.; for the original see Sur., pp. 96 ff.

Noq., Index lxi.

ibid., Index lxiv.

ibid., Index lxxiv.

ibid., Index xci.

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Baha'u'llah was an almost impossible one, but further consideration shows that the Babí doctrine, in spite of its narrowness, did contain the germ of the new universalism. The Bab by his doctrine of revelation and of the Prophets had paved the way for the Baha'í conception of a world-religion. The Primal Will spoke in all the Prophets, and they were all sent to prepare the way for "Him whom God shall manifest". The doctrine of "Rij'at" implied that Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad were in a very real sense one, and if this is true, does it not mean that there is a bond of union between the various creeds? Furthermore, if all the different Revelations were but stages in the preparation of the world for the coming of "Him whom God shall manifest" then He is the fulfilment of all prophecy, and the perfecter of all religions. The fundamental principles of all religions are therefore one, however much the accidentals may vary. Thus Baha'u'llah, if once accepted as "He whom God shall manifest", would be regarded as belonging not to one religion, but to all religions, and there was no real difficulty in the way of promoting the new teaching.

It remains for us to consider how far Baha'u'llah was capable of carrying out the self-appointed task of converting Babism into a universal religion.

A favourite objection to Christianity in the East is that it has no code of law. The Moslem cannot understand a religion that has no code of law, for the Qor'an is not only his Bible, it is also his text-book of law and final authority in all legal matters. The Christian finds it hard to appreciate this objection until he realises how every phase of Moslem life is provided for in the religious laws. The difficulty of the Moslem

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is the difficulty of the Pharisee when he heard the teaching of Christ. Saul the Pharisee had to break away from the bondage of the Law before he could become Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ, Christ did not bequeath unto His Church a code of law, but He sent

His Spirit to dwell in the hearts of men, and under the guidance of that Spirit men of every age have framed their own laws. A law that is decreed and fixed for all time is the negation of progress, and results in bondage, but “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” It has been said that Baha’u’llah found himself in a position very similar to that of St. Paul when he began his mission,¹ but this is not exactly true. Paul was preaching Christ, and rejoicing in his new freedom in Christ. Baha’u’llah was preaching himself, and trying to proclaim a liberty from the bondage of laws that he himself had found irksome, but without knowing of any substitute for them, with the consequence that all he could offer was a modified code of law. Paul preached that the Jesus whom he had persecuted was indeed the Lord. Baha’u’llah preached that the Bab, for whom at one time he had been ready to give his life, was only a herald, and that he himself was Lord. The two men cannot really be compared, because St. Paul had an experience of Jesus Christ underlying his every thought, his every deed—he was in a very real sense a “new creature”.² St. Paul had entered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, Baha’u’llah remained in the bondage of law. Baha’u’llah failed in the task he had set himself, because he found it impossible to break away from the past with its legalistic conception of religion. A slave

Phelps. *Introd.*, xxviii.

2 Cor., v. 17.

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of the old idea that a Prophet must needs be a law-giver, he drew up a new code of law, which was to supersede the “Beyan,” and to abrogate all the other Scriptures. This new code of law, which is contained in the book “Aqdas”, is based on the Qor’an and the “Beyan” both of which it modifies.

No summary of the “Aqdas” will be given here, because the book is of little importance to-day, and is quite unknown to Western Baha’ís. (A complete summary will be found in the Rev. W. M. Miller’s *History of Baha’ism*,¹ which is, at the time of writing this chapter, in the press.) It must be borne in mind that the laws of the “Aqdas” are definitely meant to supersede the civil law. In a Baha’í country the government is to be in the hands of the religious leaders. Justice is to be administered by the ecclesiastical courts; fines are to be paid to them; taxes are to be controlled and disposed by them. In short, it is intended to introduce that very form of government which has been such a failure in Islam, and from which nation after nation is struggling to free itself in the East.

Then what of the international problem? How is the peace of the world to be secured? How are all men to be united, and national and religious pride, which are such productive causes of strife, to be banished? Nowhere is the weakness of Baha’ism more

apparent than it is here, for it lacks driving power to put its teachings into practice. The teaching that mankind is an essential unity, and that all men are brothers is centuries old; what is needed is a power to enable men to realise that unity. Baha'ism lacks that power. Education, which is made compulsory by Baha'u'llah, will never solve the problem. Ignor-

Baha'ism: Its origin, history, and teachings, 1931. The English translation, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, was published in 1992.

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ance is admittedly at the root of many evils, but it must not be forgotten that what education does is to increase the capacity of the individual for good or evil. Behind education there must be a power making men love the good and hate the evil before it can avail to save the world. Changed hearts are more necessary than even trained minds; love of the good must be inculcated before capacity for good can find a way of expression. Baha'ism may urge that the mind be trained, but it cannot change the human heart. Baha'u'llah had not realised how deeply rooted the evil was, and so his remedies are useless. He directs that one of the existing languages should be chosen and adopted as a universal language,¹ believing that thereby men would better understand one another, and that unity would follow. What mankind needs is a common heart, not a common tongue. The division of the world is not decided by language, nor is variety of speech at the root of it. When nations are divided into classes totally out of sympathy with each other, when brother rises against brother, and selfishness holds sway, what has Baha'u'llah to offer? To a world torn and divided he can only confess failure, and call on the kings of the earth to accomplish that which is beyond his power. "Be united, O ye kings, unity will remove the spirit of contention, and your subjects and they that are around you will enjoy peace, if ye be wise. If one of you should rise against another, then rise against him. That is justice."² War to end war is all that he can offer. Could anything be more superficial, more meaningless, than his declaration that "Weapons of war are forbidden to you, except

Aqdas, p. 65.

Sur., p. 85.

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in times of necessity"? Surely such a statement is proof enough of the weakness of Baha'ism. The redemption of the world demands a redeemed humanity, and that Baha'ism cannot achieve.

Then what of his social regulations? They are all drawn up in view of conditions existing in the East in Baha'u'llah's own time, and show that he had no idea of Western conditions of life and the needs of men living under those conditions. His laws cover a wide field, from feasting to fasting, from murder to prayer, from hunting

to the cutting of the hair. Some of these laws will be considered in a later chapter, but the majority of them will be ignored. How impossible they are for the West will be abundantly clear from the following examples. For the first offence a thief must be banished to another town, for a second he must be imprisoned, and for a third he must be branded on the forehead, that all men may know him for what he is.² He who purposely sets fire to a house must be burnt to death, and a murderer must be punished by death, or, should the court so desire, the sentence can in either case be commuted to one of life-imprisonment.³ A man may not marry more than two wives,⁴ though from the point of view of comfort one is better! The marriage laws are very comprehensive, and even decide what a man should do were he to quarrel with his wife when on a journey! The only prohibition is that a man is forbidden to take unto himself one of his father's wives.⁵ What water one may use, or not use, for washing; what vessels one may use, or not use, for food—everything is decided by the “Aqdas”. Yet

Aqdas, p. 34.

ibid., p. 27.

ibid., p. 22.

ibid., p. 22.

ibid., p. 36.

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Baha'u'llah tells us that he did not come to legislate for men's bodies, but to give life to souls.¹ Here again there is nothing to help men, nothing that can satisfy their needs. Men ask for bread, Baha'u'llah offers a stone.

The “Aqdas” laws are in some ways superior to those of the Qor'an, in other ways they are inferior, but, whatever value we may set on them, they are an indication of the true nature of Baha'ism. They prove that the Baha'í religion is a legalistic system, and not a religion of the Spirit. No other Prophet is to come for another thousand years,² so for that period the world is to be governed by the rules of the “Aqdas”. Baha'u'llah could not conceive of religion without a code of law. Brought up as a Moslem, he became a Babí by choice, but, though he found the severe code of the “Beyan” irksome, he was yet unable to break away from the influences that had moulded his ideas and his life. He did not even dare to be original, but took the “Beyan” and the Qor'an as his patterns, contenting himself with modifying them, but remaining true to their spirit. So the “Aqdas” remains a monument of the failure of Baha'u'llah to perform his self-appointed task.

Sur., p. 182.

Aqdas, p. 13.

The doctrine of the person of Bahá'u'lláh

It has been said by many writers that Baha'u'llah claimed to be

God. This charge was first made against him by the Ezelís,¹ and in course of time the idea spread that Baha'u'llah claimed to be God incarnate, and this teaching has become an article of faith for some Baha'ís to-day. It is important, therefore, that we examine the teachings of Baha'u'llah, for only then can we come to a true understanding of the claims he made for himself.

Whilst there is much in his writings which would at first seem to justify the belief that Baha'u'llah did claim to be God, a careful study serves to show that he did not actually make any such claim. It is a mistake to take the sayings of Baha'u'llah out of their setting, and to interpret them literally. It should also be borne in mind that there is a vast difference between Western thought, with its background of Christian teaching, and Eastern thought, with an Islamic background, and Christian ideas should never be read into words of Baha'u'llah.

The passages in which Baha'u'llah sets forth his claim can be divided into two main classes—namely, passages which declare him to be Moses, Jesus, or

“Trav.”, Vol. II, p. 359.

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Mohammad returned, and passages which seemingly hail him as God.

Underlying all passages of the first class are the doctrines of “Shamsu'l-Iom” and “Rij'at” (see Chapter III above), and as these afford no real difficulty, they need not be discussed here, but the following examples will serve to show the nature of these passages. “O people of the earth, the day of help came, and the preacher of Sinai appeared.”¹ “Say, O people of the Gospel, the door of heaven opened, and he who had ascended came forth.”² In order to understand these passages it is necessary to remember that in Baha'ism Christ holds no higher place than do the other Prophets, so that in claiming to be Christ returned Baha'u'llah is only claiming that he is a Prophet.

As we shall see in a later chapter, his followers did come to regard Baha'u'llah as God, but their belief was based on a wrong interpretation of the claims he made. Baha'u'llah claimed to be “He whom God shall manifest”, and all the statements he makes concerning himself should be read in the light of the “Beyan” teaching about the promised Manifestation. The very name “He whom God shall manifest” bears witness that he is not to be regarded as God, but as sent by God. In making this claim he does declare himself to be greater than the Prophets, but that is in accordance with the “Beyan” which declares that all the Prophets came to prepare the way for “He whom God shall manifest”. The reader is advised to read the “Beyan” teaching, given above,³ before continuing with this chapter. The “Beyan” teaches that in “Him

whom God shall

Aqdas, p. 101.

ibid., p. 100.

Chapter III.

7. The doctrine of the person of Baha'u'llah 87

manifest" is all the perfection of God, so Baha'u'llah declares that "In my person is nothing seen but the Person of God; in my beauty nothing but the beauty of God; in my existence nothing but the existence of God; and in my being nothing but the Being of God." 1

The "Beyan" declares that all believers need him even as a lover needs his beloved, and Baha'u'llah declares that "This is he for whose countenance those in the eternal heaven, and those who have taken their place in the most glorious Mansion, do yearn." 2 "He whom God shall manifest" is the source of the Divine names and of the Divine attributes, so Baha'u'llah is "the source of the light of the names of God, and the manifestation of all the attributes of God." 3 According to the "Beyan", the promised Manifestation will be absolute and answerable to no one for that which he does.

Baha'u'llah therefore says, "Truly, if I desire that all things should at once become mirrors of my name, I can bring it to pass", 4 and "if we abrogate anything that is written in the 'Beyan', none has the right to ask 'Why?' or 'Wherefore?'" 5 "He whom God shall manifest" was before time was, and shall be when time is no more, so it is that Baha'u'llah says, "We entered the school of God whilst you were yet asleep. ... God, truly, formed this school before the creation of heaven and earth, and we entered it before 'K' was placed on its foundation 'N'." 6 The letters "K" and "N" form the Arabic imperative

"Kun" (Be!), the fiat of the Creator. Again he tells us, "Fear God, and deny not him by whom the Cause of God was promoted from the very beginning to which

Sur., p. 21.

ibid., p. 4.

ibid., p. 34.

ibid., p. 40.

ibid., p. 81.

Aqdas, p. 61.

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there was no beginning, and by whom every Apostle (Prophet) was sent down." 1

It is impossible to consider all his sayings about himself, but whilst the majority can be explained by what has been said above, others would, at first sight, seem to need a different explanation. Sometimes in Tablets to individuals he makes puns on their names, as an example of which we may quote the following: "O 'Abdu'l-Khaleq (Slave of the Creator), behold and consider, when

the ‘Khaleq’ (Creator) came, the ‘makhluq’ (creature) shunned him.”² The word “Khaleq” is one of the names of God given in the Qor’an, so as he claims to be the source of the Divine names, his use of it is explained. In other places he refers to himself as “the Father” or “the Father whom Isaiah foretold”³ and as “the Lord of Hosts”.⁴ The explanation of all such sayings is found in the teaching of the Bab that all references to God in Holy Scripture must be interpreted as referring to the Prophets, who are His Manifestations. This is borne out by Baha’u’llah’s own statement in the book “Iqan” that the knowledge of the Prophets expresses God’s knowledge, their power His power, their dominion His dominion, their beauty His beauty, their manifestation His manifestation. Their station is that of “I am He and He is I”,⁵ so if one of the perfect Manifestations declares that he is God, it is true. ⁶ Furthermore, he declares that all the Manifestations were created before the creation of heaven and earth.⁷ Thus, it is only by deliberately ignoring their setting that

Aqdas, p. 146.

ibid., p. 215.

Sur., pp. 53, 57, etc.

Aqdas, p. 140.

Pp. 80 f.

P. 149.

“Scrip.”, p. 207.

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we can interpret his teachings to mean that he claimed to be God. Before we come to consider the true nature of his claim, we must consider one more passage, which will serve to show his method of adducing proofs from the Qor’an. According to the passage in question, he claims to be “the same who has been called Jehovah in the Law, the Spirit of Truth in the Gospel, and the Great News in the Qor’an.”¹ His application to himself of the name Jehovah is explained by what has been said above, whilst the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha make it perfectly clear that the Spirit of Truth must be interpreted to mean a person, ² so that the term “Great News” alone needs an explanation. This term is taken from the opening verse of Surah 78, which is called “Naba” or “News”, and refers, it would seem from the context, to the resurrection. We have already seen that the Bab taught that the day of “Him whom God shall manifest” is the day of the general resurrection, in the sense that it is a day of spiritual awakening, so that Baha’u’llah’s application of the term “Great News” to himself is in perfect keeping with his claim to be the promised Manifestation. Finally, the following passages are sufficient evidence that Baha’u’llah himself did not regard his use of passages such as those we have considered as implying that he was God. “Truly, I was as a

dead body when His command came to me. The will of thy Lord, the Merciful and Compassionate, changed me.”³ “I swear to God that I had no intention of manifesting myself, or of uttering a word, but God’s will overcame my will, and He caused me to appear.”⁴ Again he tells us that

Aqdas, p. 103.

Mot, p. 83.

Sur., p. 90.

Aqdas, p. 158.

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he was but an ordinary man when the winds of God the most Holy blew upon him and endowed him with knowledge.¹ Thus Baha’u’llah appeared and claimed to be “He whom God shall manifest”, and what that claim implied will be evident from the following summary of his teaching concerning himself. He is the source of the Divine Names and of the Divine Attributes.² He is absolute and answerable to no one.³ He was before time was, and shall be when time is no more.⁴ The “Beyan” was sent down by him,⁵ in order to declare his name,⁶ and its very letters go to form his words.⁷ All the Prophets were sent down by him,⁸ and through him is the light of God reflected to man.⁹ In his hand is the government of all things,¹⁰ for he is the treasury of God’s purpose and the dwelling place of God’s will.¹¹ He is the straight way, and the balance by which everything both great and small is weighed.¹² Unto him is given perfect knowledge of all that ever has been or ever shall be.¹³ For his sake was the world created,¹⁴ and he was created for the service of God.¹⁵ He enjoys a peculiar position granted him by God, and is chaste above all others.¹⁶ He was created of the light of God’s beauty,¹⁷ and one hair of his head is of more value in the sight of God than all things in heaven and earth.¹⁸ He is God’s interpreter in the Kingdom,¹⁹ and the guide to the way of God. 20 Prayers are of no avail unless there is faith in him, but faith in him gives hope of forgiveness even to those who totally

1. Sur., p. 89. 2. *ibid.*, p. 34, 3. *ibid.*, p. 181.

4. Aqdas, p. 61. 5. *ibid.*, p. 191. 6. *ibid.*, p. 114.

7. *ibid.*, p. 191. 8. *ibid.*, p. 146. 9. Sur., p. 30.

10. *ibid.*, p. 16. 11. *ibid.*, p. 19. 12. Aqdas, p. 137.

13. Sur., p. 31. 14. *ibid.*, p. 74. 15. *ibid.*, p. 143.

16. Aqdas, p. 18. 17. Sur., p. 5. 18. *ibid.*

19. Aqdas, p. 81. 20. Sur., p. 39.

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neglect both prayer and good works. He came to call men to Eternal Life,² to save the world, ³ and to reform it.⁴ His sole purpose is to free the creatures of God from the chains of hypocrisy and

superstition.⁵

The word “taqlíd”,⁶ here translated hypocrisy for lack of a better word, really means following the example of, or imitating a religious leader. In Shí‘ah Islam every man is either a “mujtahed” or a “muqalled”; he is either qualified to interpret the law and to lead others, or he is compelled to follow some person who is qualified. So every “muqalled” must choose a “mujtahed” who will then be his “taqlíd”, and his pattern in everything, and he “acts” his religious life according to the pattern set him by his chosen guide. Thus the word “hypocrisy” in its original sense of “acting a part” is as near the meaning as we can get. Thus although Baha’u’llah claims that he has come to save the world, there is a big difference between his claim and that of Christ. To Christ salvation meant salvation from sin and its attendant horrors, to Baha’u’llah it meant salvation from superstition, and from priestcraft, for the outcome of the doctrine of “taqlíd” is a priest-ridden people. We shall see in another chapter that Baha’u’llah did not succeed in his purpose, so a full discussion is not necessary here. It was inevitable that Baha’u’llah should give great importance to the need of salvation from superstition and priestcraft. A large number of Traditions have grown up around the person of the Mahdí, and when the Bab made the claim that he was the Promised One, he was rejected by the majority of

Sur., p. 41.

ibid., p. 79.

Aqdas, p. 166.

ibid., p. 167.

ibid., p. 168.

The Baha’í Faith encourages ijtihád, rather than taqlíd.

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Moslems because he did not fulfil the general expectation as to the way of his coming. Baha’u’llah declares that no Prophet must be rejected on the ground that he does not fulfil all that has been said about him, rather must all such sayings be adjudged true or false, according as to whether they are fulfilled by him or not.¹ It must be admitted that the Shí‘ah beliefs concerning the Mahdí are for the most part superstitious in the extreme, and there was every justification for the Baha’í refusal to accept them, but, on the other hand, it must not be forgotten that the word “superstition” did not convey the same meaning to Baha’u’llah as it does to us to-day. We find, for instance, that he himself wrote certain prayers which are in the nature of charms, the use of which would be condemned by us as superstitious. He included within the meaning of the term all interpretations of prophecy that were not favourable to his own claims. In Islam (Shí‘ah) interpretation is a science in itself, and the right to interpret belongs to the “mujtaheds” alone.² In

condemning the current interpretations of the Traditions, and of the Qor'an, he was also compelled to condemn the "mujtaheds" as false guides. So, too, the clergy of all the great religions are accused of misleading the people, and of spreading superstitious ideas. Baha'u'llah's claim therefore results in the doctrine that he, and he alone, is in a position to interpret Holy Scriptures, and men of all creeds are freed from superstition and priestcraft when they accept him. All interpretations of Scripture which differ from his are superstitions, so he is the infallible interpreter. His gospel is therefore the gospel of the infallibility of

Aqdas, p. 36.

Mujtahid, pl. Mujtahidun.

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Baha'u'llah. This is further borne out by his own statement: "In one sense the name 'Infallibility' is true of one whom God hath guarded against sin, transgression and unbelief, infidelity, polytheism, and the like. But 'The Most Great Infallibility' is applied only to One whose station is sanctified above commands and prohibitions, and purified from sin and forgetfulness. Verily He is a light which is not followed by darkness, and a rectitude which is proof against error. If He declares water to be wine, or heaven to be earth, or light to be fire, it is true and there is no doubt therein; and no one has the right to oppose Him, or to say 'why' or 'wherefore'; and he who disputes with Him is, verily, of the opposers in the Book of God, the Lord of the creatures!"¹

"Scrip.", pp. 240 f.

'Abdu'l-Bahá and the spread of Baha'ism

After the death of Baha'u'llah his followers became divided into two camps. Whilst the majority followed 'Abbas Effendí, best known by his title of 'Abdu'l-Baha, a small number followed his half-brother, who was called Mohammad 'Alí. It is not our purpose to enter into a lengthy discussion of the events of this period, but some account must be given, for the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha contain so many references to the schismatics, that to understand them it is necessary for the student to have some knowledge of the course of events. At the outset it is well to realise that Baha'u'llah in his "Testament" did definitely nominate 'Abdu'l-Baha as his successor, with Mohammad 'Alí as the next in succession.¹ The accusations made against him are therefore concerned with the claims made by 'Abdu'l-Baha when he came into office, and the rights which he regarded as his in virtue of his position. There are other charges made against him, such as those of depriving his brothers of their allowance, and of trying to abduct the widow of his brother Zia'u'llah by force,² but as it is impossible to know the truth, or untruth, of these stories, they need not be considered here. The real cause of the schism was that 'Abdu'l-Baha's

conception of his duties seemed to some of the more con-

Ad'iat, p. 418.

“Materials”, p. 85.

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servative Baha'ís to be in excess of his rights as set forth in the writings of Baha'u'llah. The quarrel was certainly very bitter, and 'Abdu'l-Baha is accused of assaulting Mírza Aqa Jan (Khademu'llah), who had been Baha'u'llah's chief adviser, and of seizing his papers, holy portraits, and Tablets when he (Mírza Aqa Jan) died. The followers of Mohammad 'Alí called themselves “Unitarians” (Muvahhedín), but their opponents referred to them as the “Covenant-breakers” (Naqesín-i Mísaq), by which name they are constantly called in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

The position became so serious that the Ottoman Government was compelled to interfere, and the brothers were confined in Acre. Another brother, Badí'u'llah, was at first a supporter of Mohammad 'Alí, but later went over to the side of 'Abdu'l-Baha, declaring that he had come to the conclusion that the trouble was entirely due to Mohammad 'Alí, who was out to further his own ends.¹ Badí'u'llah made one attempt to settle the dispute between the brothers, and wrote a letter asking all the members of the family to meet and to thrash the matter out. This letter has been printed and published in the form of a pamphlet, and is a valuable index of the state of things within the movement at this time. Badí'u'llah sees the inconsistency of the Baha'í position, and appeals to the family to unite in spreading the teachings of Baha'u'llah, He pointedly asks, “Is it fitting that we should turn our backs on the holy commandments, and that our actions should be contrary to their teachings? How can we possibly call the people of the world to unite and to put away all strife, when we ourselves are

“S. of W.”, Vol. III, No. 7, p. 17.

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divided and at loggerheads with each other.” Mohammad 'Alí would have nothing to do with the proposal, so Badí'u'llah and his family went over to 'Abdu'l-Baha.

The quarrel was not confined to verbal wrangling, but so bitter did it become that even murders were committed. Even were the right with 'Abdu'l-Baha, his conduct at the time would be, to say the least, very inconsistent with his teachings. Even if he knew nothing of the murder of Mírza Yahya, the Unitarian at Jedda—which is doubtful in view of his having foretold the man's death—he certainly must be regarded as having approved of the act.² His writings, too, show a bitterness towards them which is in strange contrast to his teachings about love. Furthermore, he attributes the same feelings to Baha'u'llah, for he tells us to refer to all the Tablets of Baha'u'llah, and says, “Verily, in a thousand places he

[Baha'u'llah] utters prayers, saying, 'O God, destroy the Covenant-breakers, and overcome those who oppose the Testament.'"³ We have only to read the Tablets of Baha'u'llah to see that in a thousand places he curses the Covenant-breakers.⁴ Men have said that 'Abdu'l-Baha is a despot, and that he turns people out, and, like the Pope, excommunicates them, but nothing could be further from the truth. All those who have left the sect have done so of their own accord, and as a result of their own misdeeds they were excommunicated. To criticize 'Abdu'l-Baha for his attitude towards them is to criticise Baha'u'llah himself, for he it was who forbade his followers to have anything to do with the Covenant-breakers.⁵ All his writings bear the mark of his hatred

Ta'lim, p. 9.

"Materials", pp. 155 ff. Mirza Yahya died of old age in Famagusta on 29 April 1912 at the age of about eighty.—M.W.T.

Mok., Vol. III, p. 86.

ibid., Vol. III, p. 414.

ibid., Vol. III, p. 415.

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of the Unitarians, and it is evident from the few sayings quoted above that though he preaches that men should love their enemies, he himself found it impossible to feel anything but hatred for his opponents.

He was in the right in so far as he really was nominated by Baha'u'llah as the next in succession, and the American attempt to make the title given to him by Baha'u'llah prove his right over Mohammad 'Alí is both unnecessary and unjustifiable. The title given to 'Abdu'l-Baha, Al-Ghusnu'l-A'zam, means "the Most Mighty Branch", whilst that given to Mohammad 'Alí, Al-Ghusnu'l-Akbar, means "the Most Great Branch", both adjectives being superlatives. Furthermore, the two words are from totally different roots, and to translate them as "the Greatest Branch" and the "Greater Branch" is to ignore the meaning of the words in an attempt to exalt 'Abdu'l-Baha at the expense of Mohammad 'Alí.¹

Baha'u'llah in the book "Aqdas" declares that anyone coming forward and laying claim to the prophetic office before the completion of a full thousand years is a liar and a prevaricator,² and to prevent any attempt at "interpreting" this verse he adds that, "Any man who interprets this verse, or comments upon it in any way that departs from the clear meaning of the verse as it was sent down, will be cut off from the Spirit of God, and the mercy of God." Having himself interpreted the "Beyan" to suit his own ends, he had no intention of letting another make a similar use of his book! The charge against 'Abdu'l-Baha which concerns us most is that he did claim to be the bearer of a new Revelation. It is not proposed to consider the

“Scrip.”, p. 261.

“Aqdas”, p. 13.

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various charges made by Mírza Javad, for though he professes to quote a number of the sayings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha,¹ he gives no references, the reason being that the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha were not then to be had in book form, and he was quoting from isolated Tablets. ‘Abdu’l-Baha had a fertile pen, and a large proportion of Baha’í literature consists of Tablets written by him, and from these we can gather what were the charges made against him, and what position he did claim for himself.

Dr Kheiru’llah, the first Baha’í missionary to America, taught a doctrine which, though based on Baha’í teaching, was in no sense a true representation of the beliefs of the sect. According to this teaching, Baha’u’llah was God incarnate, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha was Jesus Christ returned. There is no justification for saying that this was ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s own teaching, but inasmuch as he accepted and hailed Dr Kheiru’llah as a pioneer missionary, he must be regarded as acquiescing in the doctrines taught by him. Dr Kheiru’llah’s position is also somewhat difficult to appreciate, for though he taught that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was Jesus Christ, and that he was the Son of God, for Baha’u’llah was God,² he yet went over to the side of Mohammad ‘Alí, giving as one of his reasons the fact that ‘Abdu’l-Baha laid claim to divinity, and as another the fact that his actions were those of a double-faced man.³ This teaching spread, and it obviously became an obstacle to some people, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha finds himself compelled to deny it: “I am not Christ, I am not Eternal God, I am but the servant of Baha.”⁴ This denial

“Materials”, pp. 76 ff.

ibid., pp. 137 f.

ibid., p. 111.

Mok., Vol. III, p. 189.

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gives us an indication of the way the teaching of Kheiru’llah became exaggerated, and some even said that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was Eternal God! How frequent and persistent were the charges made against him is obvious from the frequency with which he is compelled to deny them: “I have never made, nor do I make, any claim (for myself), nor have I hitherto uttered a word that would imply any relationship with the Blessed Threshold”;¹ “‘Abdu’l-Baha has no Cause to the obedience of which he could call men, save that of spreading the teachings of Baha’u’llah (lit., the breezes of God)”;² “If

he should desire a position for himself, which God forbid, what greater position could he have than that of being a branch of the Ancient Stock?”³ The “Ancient Stock” is a name given to himself by

Baha'u'llah, each one of his sons being a Branch. Who, then, is 'Abdu'l-Baha? He is the slave with the ring in his ear and the emblem of servitude on his shoulder. He is but the "dust of the Threshold", and his station is that of "guardian" or "doorkeeper"—in fact he is just what his name implies, the Servant of Baha,⁴ and his one hope is that his Servitude will become acceptable.⁵

At first sight it would seem that all the accusations of his opponents are devoid of foundation, but there is no smoke without a fire, and we can expect to find some truth underlying these accusations, even if we decide that they are gross exaggerations, so it is necessary that we seek to understand what were the privileges and rights that seemed to 'Abdu'l-Baha to belong to

Mok., Vol. I, p. 346.

ibid., Vol. III, p. 71.

ibid., Vol. II, p. 255.

ibid., Vol. II, p. 252.

"Scrip.", p. 284.

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him in his humble capacity of "doorkeeper" and "servant".

"All that emanates from the Centre of the Covenant ('Abdu'l-Baha) is right, and under His (Baha'u'llah's) protection and favour, while everything else is error."¹ "All must obey him; all must turn to him; he is the expounder of my Book and he is informed of my purposes. All must turn to him. Whatsoever he says is true, for verily, he knoweth the texts of my Book. Other than he, none knoweth the Book."² This last passage, which is said to be from the "Testament" (Book of the Covenant) of Baha'u'llah, must be regarded as evidence of the position which 'Abdu'l-Baha claimed for himself, for the words are not found in the "Book of the Covenant", and therefore are not the words of Baha'u'llah, as he would have us believe. It would certainly seem that 'Abdu'l-Baha was not above manufacturing proofs for upholding his claim, nor can we wonder at this when we remember that he had previously undertaken the task of providing a "history" that would bear out his father's claim. Again he tells us, "They (the believers) must obey the Centre of the Covenant, and must not deviate one hair's breadth from obedience to him He [Baha'u'llah] has shown the interpreter of the Book [Aqdas], and has closed the doors of outside interpretation. Everyone should thank God that in this Blessed Cause He has tranquillised all, and has left no place for hesitation. Therefore obedience and submission must be shown, and the face turned completely to him."³ Of the authority the "Servant" claims there can be

"Scrip.", p. 547.

ibid., p. 282. See *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 323.

"S. of W.", Vol. III, No. 7, p. 17. Tablet to Mr. Remy.

little doubt, for he demands implicit obedience. “[The Station of Servitude is] not a servitude liable to interpretation; but an unconditional and unqualified servitude. This is the real fact. Whosoever expresses any other interpretation, I will not be pleased with him. This is my advice to you. This is my counsel to you. This is my desire. This is my good pleasure.”¹

Thus from his own writings it is clear that ‘Abdu’l-Baha claimed to be the sole interpreter of Baha’í Scripture, and that this claim meant that he must be regarded as infallible, and that implicit obedience must be rendered to him.

How far was he justified in making this claim? The passage in the book “Aqdas” on which the claim is founded is as follows: “Refer what you do not know from the Book to the Branch that springeth forth from this upright Stock.”² This passage is ambiguous, for whilst it can be read to mean that ‘Abdu’l-Baha has the right of interpreting the book, it can also be read to mean that all matters not dealt with in the book are to be referred to him. It is therefore a matter of doubt whether he really had the right to interpret the “Aqdas”, but, if he did have it, there were conditions to be observed. “He who interprets anything which has been sent down from the Heaven of Revelation in such a way as to deprive it of its clear meaning, verily he is of those who corrupt the words of God Most High.”³ That ‘Abdu’l-Baha did interpret the “Aqdas” in such a way as to deprive it of its clear meaning is evident enough from his writings. In the “Aqdas” we are told that the inheritance laws are compulsory: “It is God’s appointed law. Do not digress from it to suit

“Scrip.”, p. 285.

“Aqdas”, p. 60.

ibid., p. 37.

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your own purposes, but follow what you have been ordered to do by the Source of Light.”¹ The clear meaning of this verse is that the law is to be binding upon every believer, and that none has the right to dispose of his property as he thinks fit. God has appointed a law, the believer must obey. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, however, declares that the inheritance laws of the “Aqdas” are to be enforced only when a man dies intestate, and that every man has the right to dispose of his property as he thinks fit, which is obviously a direct contradiction of the “Aqdas” law.² We are thus forced to the conclusion that he did exceed his powers, and the charges brought against him were not without some foundation. Right of interpretation does not include the right to alter and amend, for the slightest alteration is a corruption of “the words of God Most High”. We saw in a previous chapter that in the “Aqdas” the only prohibition as regards marriage

is that a son may not marry his father's wives. 'Abdu'l-Baha declares that this does not mean that he is free to marry any other woman, but that the more distant the relationship between a man and woman the better it is, and that when men become steadfast in the Baha'í religion marriage between near relatives will become of rare occurrence.³ Instances can be multiplied of the way in which he "interprets" his father's laws, but the above are sufficient to make his method clear.

Another "Aqdas" verse declares that "Anyone who speaks in such a way as to differ from that which is sent down in the 'Tablets' is not from me." ⁴ This verse is more comprehensive, and provides a test which

"Aqdas", p. 10.

Mok., Vol. III, p. 372.

ibid., Vol. III, p. 370.

"Aqdas", p. 41.

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is to be applied to all the teachings given by any of Baha'u'llah's followers. Not only is the "Aqdas" protected against speculative interpretation, but there is no room for originality within the movement. The "Tablets" of Baha'u'llah are to be the balance in which the teachings of his successors are to be weighed. He who dares to be original is not of Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Baha was nothing if not original, and he changed the whole nature of the movement. It can hardly be maintained that his opponents realised from the beginning that the official teachings of the sect under 'Abdu'l-Baha would undergo a complete transformation, but they must be given credit for realising the probable trend, of affairs under the new leader. They may not have been just in all the charges they made against him, but history proves that they knew their man.¹

Whilst this bitter quarrel was being waged at Acre, Baha'í missionaries were busily engaged in the propagation of the new faith in America. The first of these missionaries was Dr Kheiru'llah, whom we have already mentioned above, and whose life and teachings are fully discussed by the late Prof. Browne.² A Syrian by birth, and a Christian, he was educated at the American University of Beirut, and became a convert to Baha'ism in 1890, whilst residing in Egypt. In 1892 he went to America, and in the following year he began to teach the new religion. The teaching given by Dr Kheiru'llah was in no sense a true representation of the teachings of Baha'u'llah, for he introduced new elements into the system which have left their mark on all the later teachings of the American branch of the movement. It was as a direct result of his teachings

See, further, Chapter XIII.

cf. "Materials".

that Baha'í doctrine in America took on the allegoric apocalyptic form in which Baha'u'llah is represented as the Incarnation of God the Father, and, although he condemned some of the doctrines of the Christian Scientists,¹ yet there was much in his teaching that would prove attractive to members of that sect, and it was from among them that the new teaching won many of its converts.² It is impossible to estimate the true value of the work done by Dr Kheiru'llah, but it is a significant fact that either he or some of his converts introduced the movement into at least eleven of the eighteen states in which there were Baha'í assemblies in 1926. But if the movement in America owed its success to Dr Kheiru'llah, it is also true to say that to him it owed the first severe check that it encountered. In 1898 he visited 'Abdu'l-Baha at Acre, and the result of that visit became evident when, after his return to Chicago, he went over to the side of Mohammad 'Alí, taking a large number of his converts with him. Thus it was that almost from the very start American Baha'ism became divided, and there can be little doubt but that the secession of Dr Kheiru'llah was a severe check to the growth of the movement in that country. Many attempts were made to win him back, and a number of missionaries were sent by 'Abdu'l-Baha to work a reconciliation, but all in vain. By far the most interesting of these emissaries was Mírza Abu'l-Fazl of Gulpaygan, who remained in America for some three years, and carried on the work abandoned by Dr Kheiru'llah.³

The movement was introduced into France by Hippo-

“Materials”, p. 137.

Roemer, pp. 149 f.

“Materials”, pp. 146, 151 ff.

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Dreyfus, a Jew, and the character of the teaching varied accordingly. The general tone of the movement is rationalistic, and we find, for the first time, that a claim is made that the new religion is in perfect harmony with Science.¹ Thus the movement spread into other European countries, and Western Baha'ism came into being. This new development worked a complete change in the character of the movement. 'Abdu'l-Baha was not slow to realise the possibilities, and he was wise enough to accept the new elements which came into the movement from America and France, and moulded his own teaching accordingly. He realised full well how essential it was to let these branches develop along their own lines, and his Tablets show how careful he was to avoid interfering in any way, and how wisely he refrained from introducing into the West the teachings then current in Eastern Baha'ism. It was only when American Baha'ís started visiting him in Acre, and asking him direct questions on doctrine, that he allowed himself to speak.² In the meantime, he

had been kept fully informed of developments in the West, and he framed his doctrines accordingly.

With the spread of Baha'ism, Acre became a place of pilgrimage for Baha'is from East and West, and it enabled him to keep in touch with leading Baha'is from every country in which the new movement had taken root.

He himself was confined to the town of Acre until 1908, when he was released after the Turkish Revolution. He did not, however, make use of his freedom and leave Acre, but decided to remain there. Roemer has

Roemer, p. 150.

ibid., p. 149.

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pointed out that policy made it necessary for him to remain in Acre. The Bab and Baha were both buried in Acre, which was therefore the central shrine of the Baha'í world. (The Bab's body is said to have been rescued by some of his followers, and buried in a secret place, from which it was afterwards brought to Acre.) Acre had become famous as the "Most Great Prison" and the glory of martyrdom which had surrounded his residence in Acre made it an ideal place for his purpose. Moreover, the place was a gate into Palestine, a land holy to Christians, Jews and Moslems. Was it not mentioned in Scripture? "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope"¹ is interpreted by all Baha'is as a reference to Acre. It was equally convenient as a gate to the East, and were he to leave the town he would be giving Mohammad 'Alí an excellent point of vantage.²

In 1911 he visited London and Paris, and returned to Syria by way of Egypt. In the following year he visited America, and remained there seven months, travelling all over the country, and preaching and lecturing whenever possible. In Chicago he dedicated the ground for the "Mashrequ'l-Azkar", or Baha'í Temple, which is to be symbolical of the universality of Baha'ism. On the return journey he revisited England and France, and paid his only visit to Germany and Austria, whence he returned to Haifa, calling once more in Egypt. That he was disappointed in the results achieved by these journeys is evident from his writings, and though they did serve to give the new religion publicity, yet very little was achieved through them.

Hosea 2:15. See 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 162.

Roemer, pp. 146 f.

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He did not again leave Haifa and Acre, but the Great War brought him once more into prominence, and he was awarded a knighthood by the British Government for his work in organising

agricultural operations near Tiberias, whereby much was done to relieve the famine-stricken population. He died on November 28, 1921, and was buried in a mausoleum erected by himself on Mount Carmel. Jews, Moslems and Christians attended his funeral, and paid tributes to him, whilst messages of condolence were sent from many famous people, including Mr Winston Churchill and Viscount Allenby.

The new Baha'ism and the West

As we saw in the last chapter, there began under 'Abdu'l-Baha a new era in the history of Baha'ism, an era which saw a complete change in teaching and outlook. Hitherto Baha'ism had been to all intents and purposes a new development of Islamic thought, but with the spread of the movement westward, and particularly with its spread to America and France, there had come in new tendencies and new ideas which were to change the whole character of the movement. Another factor which helped to bring about the change in the movement was the personal character of the new leader. He inherited much of his father's forceful personality and commanding presence, whereby he exerted a remarkable influence on his followers. We saw how Baha'u'llah was able to win over the disciples of Mirza Yahya to his own side, in spite of the fact that they knew the latter to be the true leader; now we shall see how 'Abdu'l-Baha was able to make the main body of Baha'is accept him, in spite of the fact that the claim he made for himself was unjustifiable in view of the plain teaching of Baha'u'llah. Ambitious and capable, he turned his attention to the West, fully determined to make the most of the new door opened to him by Dr Kheiru'llah. The exaggerated claims made for

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him by the latter undoubtedly served a purpose, for it drew the attention of the West to him, whilst the position claimed by him, and granted him by his followers, gave him tremendous prestige wherever Baha'ism spread.

Baha'u'llah had drawn up his teachings in accordance with the life to which he was accustomed—the life of the East. When the movement spread westward, 'Abdu'l-Baha was wise enough to let it adapt itself to its new surroundings, whilst he himself looked on and observed its development. He followed it with an intelligent interest, and took pains to acquaint himself with Western movements and Western thought. The scientific discoveries made, and being made, were demanding a revision of religious thought. Age-old conceptions were being overthrown, and men were setting themselves to a fearless and thorough investigation of the very foundations of religion. On all sides was seen the growth of a revolt from narrow sectarianism, and a new appreciation of the good in other creeds. New ideas were spreading, and the old economic

system was breaking down. New facilities for travel were making the world more neighbourly, for they brought the nations into closer contact with each other. The age of national isolation was forever past. In short, the new inventions and discoveries were changing the whole conditions of life. We know how scientific discoveries troubled the religious world, and an echo of that was found in the development of the Baha'í movement in France, where the new religion was set forth as a system which harmonised religion and science. There was, too, a growing consciousness that religion must be adapted to meet the new conditions of

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life. Even to-day the same problem is facing the Church, so rapidly have the conditions of life been changing. Here was an opportunity that seemed to augur well for the new religion, and there came to 'Abdu'l-Baha the vision of a Baha'í world.

Before we come to consider the principles of the new religion as set forth by 'Abdu'l-Baha, it is of interest to note what were the fundamental principles according to Baha'u'llah. Thus, and only thus, can we appreciate the great change that now takes place, and understand how far the movement advanced under 'Abdu'l-Baha. Baha'u'llah gives five "foundations" upon which rests the administration of peoples. They are:

1. The ministers of the House of Justice must promote the Most Great Peace, in order that the world may be freed from onerous expenditure. (This "House of Justice" must not be confused with the Universal House of Justice, which will be discussed in the course of this chapter. It is interesting, too, that though he does tell us later that wars bring trouble and distress, Baha'u'llah was appalled most of all by the immense expenditure they entailed.)
2. Languages must be reduced to one, and that one language must be taught in all the schools of the world.
3. All must adhere to the means which are conducive to love and unity. (Surely nothing could be more delightfully vague than this "foundation"!)
4. Men and women must place a part of what they earn by trade, agriculture or other business in charge of a trustworthy person, to be spent in

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the education and instruction of the children. That deposit must be invested in the education of children under the advice of the trustees of the House of Justice.

5. Complete regard should be had to the matter of agriculture. Although this matter is mentioned in the fifth, yet in reality it is endowed with the first station (i.e. it is a matter of first importance).

Following on these he gives a number of "glad-tidings" which

are equally interesting. Some of these must be regarded as explaining the foundations. These glad tidings are fifteen in number, and are as follows:

1. Religious warfare is abolished. (In the Qor'an believers are enjoined to make war against the infidels in the name of God.)
2. All nations of the world are allowed to consort together. (This means that the Islamic teaching which forbids intercourse with all non-Moslems, who are ceremonially unclean, is abrogated.)
3. The study of languages is enjoined, and the kings, or the counsellors, of the earth must consult together, and appoint one of the existing languages, or a new language, as a common language which must be taught in all the schools of the world.
4. All the kings of the earth must rise to protect and assist the Baha'í community, and vie with each other in serving it.
5. Baha'ís must be loyal to the Government of whatever country they may reside in.
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6. This is the tidings of the Most Great Peace.
7. Men are permitted to have their choice in the matter of habiliment, and in the cut of the beard and its dressing.
8. Monasticism is abolished, and with it celibacy, and permission is given to all monks and priests to marry, that they may beget children.
9. Confession of sins to a priest is forbidden. Sins must be confessed to God alone.
10. Permission is granted to read books. (In the "Beyan" all books except the "Beyan" and those which explained it were forbidden.)
11. The study of all sciences and arts is allowed, as long as they are profitable and conducive to the welfare of mankind.
12. It is incumbent on every believer to engage in some one occupation or trade.
13. The affairs of the people are placed in charge of the men of the House of Justice.
14. Pilgrimages to tombs are not necessary; it is better to give to the House of Justice the money that would be so spent.
15. "Although the republican form of government profits all the people of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the Signs of God. We do not wish the countries of the world to be deprived thereof. If states combine the two into one form, their reward will be great before God."

There is nothing essentially religious in any of these principles or "good tidings". It is obvious at once that some of them are mere modifications of the Qor'an, or of the "Beyan", others are directed against prac-

tices of the Churches with which he came in contact. To Western ears the seventh of the “good tidings” sounds absurd; it is clearly the voice of an Oriental speaking to his fellows. But perhaps the most significant thing about these “good tidings” is that they are an indirect confession of the weakness of Baha’ism. To be effective it has to appeal to the kings of the earth to give their support in order to put these decrees into practice.¹

We cannot in the course of a short chapter try to trace the gradual growth of the new teachings as set forth by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, but must confine our study to the “finished article” as found in present-day Baha’í literature.

In a pamphlet entitled “9”—which number corresponds to the numerical value of the name “Baha”—we find that the basic Baha’í principles are twelve in number.

1. The oneness of the world of humanity.
2. Independent investigation of truth.
3. The foundation of all religions is one.
4. Religion must be the cause of unity.
5. Religion must be in accord with science and reason.
6. Equality between men and women.
7. Prejudice of all kinds must be forgotten.
8. Universal peace.
9. Universal education.
10. Solution of the economic problem.
11. A universal language.
12. An international tribunal.

See “Scrip.”, pp. 139–144.

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The writer of the pamphlet states that, “These twelve basic Baha’í principles were laid down by Baha’u’llah over sixty years ago and are to be found in his published writings of that time.”¹ It is the purpose of this chapter to show that all of these principles did not come from Baha’u’llah, but mark a departure from, as well as development of, his teachings.

It will be noticed first of all that the Islamic and Babí element which was so marked in the teachings of Baha’u’llah has now disappeared. The distinctly Oriental ideas have also been displaced by others which are essentially Western. We seem to move in an altogether new atmosphere. Some of the principles are taken over directly from the teachings of Baha’u’llah, others are new and appear for the first time. One is a development of Baha’u’llah’s teaching on a more ambitious scale. Those principles which are drawn directly from the teachings of Baha’u’llah need not be considered here, as they are of no particular importance to our study.

The international tribunal is a development of the House of

Justice of Baha'u'llah. The House of Justice was primarily intended to control the affairs of the Baha'i community, and, according to the "Aqdas" each Baha'i community was to appoint representatives, who must be nine or more in number, to form such a house.² The House of Justice conceived by Baha'u'llah was in no sense an international tribunal, but a purely denominational court.

Baha'u'llah, as we saw, looked to the kings of the earth for support in establishing peace, and advocated war as a means to end war.

The

"9", published by the American Baha'i Assembly.

"Aqdas", p. 11.

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international tribunal is 'Abdu'l-Baha's development of the House of Justice. From where, then, would this international tribunal derive its authority? The answer is obvious—from the Baha'i community. The election of members is in the hands of the Baha'is of the world, but as yet ('Abdu'l-Baha's own life-time) such an international tribunal is impracticable.¹ This court or tribunal cannot be formed, it would seem, until the Baha'is are strong enough numerically to control the governments of the world. It is the executive committee of a Baha'i world. If Baha'ism can rid the world of all its evils, the task of that tribunal will be an easy one, but what earthly use is a tribunal that cannot be formed until the world has become Baha'i? It cannot help a sick world. It would seem that the restoration of a sick world to health is left to others, and when the task is completed the tribunal guarantees to look after the now healthy world.

Independent investigation of truth never was a principle of Baha'u'llah's teaching. Baha'u'llah claimed to be the infallible interpreter of all Scriptures, and the infallible teacher of mankind. None has the right to question his statements, but if he declares water to be wine, the believer must unhesitatingly accept his statement. In the same way, 'Abdu'l-Baha allows no room for independent investigation; whatever he says is true, and must be accepted by all believers. The true teaching of Baha'ism does not allow independent investigation, but demands servile submission and unquestioning acceptance of the doctrine of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. Baha'u'llah claimed to free men

Mok., Vol. II, pp. 304 f.

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from priestcraft, but instead of freedom he offers them bondage. 'Abdu'l-Baha feared independent investigation and deterred his followers from giving Baha'i literature to any but those likely to be won over.¹

We have already seen that the fifth of these principles came into the movement when it spread to France. It is interesting to notice

that 'Abdu'l-Baha in his Paris addresses constantly refers to the discoveries and inventions whereby man has conquered land, sea and air. Yet his writings show that he utterly failed to appreciate the principles of science, and that his use of scientific doctrines was purely opportunistic. He accepted or rejected the teachings of science according to the need of the moment. Francis Bacon once said, "Nature can only be controlled by being obeyed", and this is the principle on which modern science works. 'Abdu'l-Baha utterly failed to recognise this truth. He declares that man breaks the laws of Nature at will, and quotes as examples the conquest of sea and air, and the harnessing of electricity to serve the needs of man. 2 To 'Abdu'l-Baha the laws of Nature were fixed, and all these wonders of modern science signified man's violation of law. He did not realise that the word "law" when applied in this sense means no more than an observed uniformity in the behaviour of things, and the universe is in no sense "governed" by these laws of Nature. Science is very largely engaged in discovering these laws, and in formulating them. The conquest of sea and air, the harnessing of electricity, all the wonders of modern science were made possible by our increased knowledge of these laws. Men are

"S. of W.", Vol. III, No. 7, p. 18; Mok., Vol. III, p. 448.

Khat., Vol. I, pp. 196, 228.

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controlling Nature by obedience to her laws, not by violating them. Again, 'Abdu'l-Baha proves how little he cared about modern science by the use he makes of its teachings. Writing to a Westerner, he accepts the theory of evolution,¹ but when an Oriental is disturbed by that theory, he has no hesitation in rejecting it, and declaring it to be vanity or imagination on the part of European scholars.²

The teachings of Baha'u'llah know nothing of the doctrine of the equality of men and women. In all his legislating there is a distinctly Islamic conception of the rights of woman. A man is allowed to have two wives, according to the "Aqdas", and both the divorce and inheritance laws allow privileges to men which are denied to women. Education of girls is enjoined, but this does not justify the statement that equality of the sexes is a principle of Baha'ism. The idea is foreign to the mind and thought of Baha'u'llah, and is a Western conception which came in with the spread of the movement. It is interesting to note that a Persian tract printed in Shiraz declares that in Baha'ism no man has the right to have more than one wife at a time, and no woman has the right to have more than one husband at a time,³ and this statement purports to be a translation of the English words "Monogamy is universally recommended".⁴ The implication of the teaching of the tract, which was printed for purposes of propaganda in Persia, is

that the equality of the sexes is recognised in Baha'ism, and it is interesting because it points to the trend of modern thought in

Mok., Vol. III, p. 388.

ibid., p. 257.

Istekhraj, pp. 4 f.

Questions, viii.

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Persia, and the Baha'í attempt to win over Persian womanhood.

We have already seen that Baha'u'llah's laws were drawn up with a view to Eastern conditions, and they contain nothing that might be said even to suggest a solution of the economic problems of the West, yet the writer of the little booklet "9" declares that the economic problem "has been thoroughly solved in the teachings of Baha'o'llah." The outlook of Baha'u'llah is made perfectly clear by his own teaching. We saw how much stress he laid upon agriculture, and this will easily be understood by all who have seen his native Persia, with its vast stretches of desert, and its primitive methods of cultivation. No one can deny the importance of agriculture, but the great problems of the West are industrial, whilst those of the Near East are still mainly agricultural. We have from the mouth of 'Abdu'l-Baha some teaching as to the solution of the economic problems of the West. Dealing with the question of strikes, he said that "It is and will be for a long time the subject of great difficulties." Strikes are caused by the rapacity of capitalists, or the excesses, avidity and ill-will of the workmen. But behind these is a greater cause—the laws of the present civilisation. The whole article cannot be discussed here, but it is significant that he follows Baha'u'llah in that he appeals to the civil power to solve the problem. The Government must interfere in such disputes and put matters right. As far as the Baha'í religion goes, it would seem that the only solution it can offer is in the law that the wealthy should give over a certain part of their fortune annually for the maintenance of the poor and unfortunate. "That is the foundation of the Religion

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of God, and the most essential of the Commandments." 1 Now that no such law is enforced by the Government, it will, he says, be a thing much praised if a man does that by the natural tendency of his good heart. A study of this article serves to show how little fitted 'Abdu'l-Baha was to deal with such problems, and how absolutely devoid of power the Baha'í religion is.

These twelve principles are at first sight very imposing, but when we examine them, we find that they are without any foundation. They are but a gay cloak wrapped around a skeleton, colour without life.

Far more important for an understanding of the spread of the

movement are the “missionary” Tablets he wrote. They give us a glimpse of his activities and methods. We have already noticed his missionary journeys, but it remains for us to consider the methods by which he followed up the successes he had gained. From the beginning he realised the possibilities of America as a centre for the movement, and he writes to the Baha’ís there urging them to make their country the centre of Baha’í missionary effort.² He encourages them to work, pointing out that Armenia was won to Christ through the efforts of one man.³ He points out strategic positions that ought to be occupied, such as Panama, which commands two oceans,⁴ and singles out individuals for praise.⁵ He calls for missionaries from Europe and America to go round the world preaching the new religion, and promises them great success.⁶ He deplores the fact that after twenty-three years Baha’ism has not spread as it should in America.⁷ He urges the formation of missionary

“Strikes”, pp. 317 f.

Mok., Vol. III, p. 43.

ibid., p. 43.

ibid., p. 17.

ibid., pp. 21, 22, etc.

ibid., p. 33.

ibid., p. 42.

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schools, and warns his followers against indulging in heated arguments.² He incites them to publish literature, and to translate Baha’í books,³ and gives them instructions as to how to teach the new religion.⁴ He restrains them from doing anything that might hinder the progress of the movement, and discourages the Baha’ís of ‘Ashqabad (Russia) from making a special Baha’í burial-ground, declaring that such a cemetery would be a hindrance to the missionary success of the movement, but comforts them by foretelling a time when such cemeteries will be permissible.⁵ There is scarcely a country in the world which is not mentioned in these Tablets.

These Tablets are interesting, too, because they show us his method in dealing with his followers from among the Christians. The language of these Tablets is perfectly distinct from that which he used in his writings to Persian Baha’ís. It is obvious at once that he took the Epistles of St. Paul as his pattern when writing to Christians. The phraseology throughout is definitely Christian. He makes mention of them regularly in his prayers,⁶ and bids them value the time,⁷ assuring them that a crown is laid up for them. ⁸ When St. Paul found Christ he resolved to know nothing but Christ, and he hopes that that spirit will be found in them.⁹ Here is no talk of ‘Amru’llah (Cause of God), but of Malekutu’llah (Kingdom of

God). They are constantly promised the help of the Holy Spirit, and are encouraged to be like the good husbandman, phrases which occur too often to make references

Mok., Vol. III, p. 32.

ibid., p. 33.

ibid., p. 23.

ibid., p. 250.

ibid., p. 287.

ibid., p. 8.

ibid., p. 94.

ibid., p. 16.

ibid., p. 390.

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necessary. Over and over again they are told to be like the morning star.¹ They are not to think for the things of the world, but are to lay up treasures in heaven.² He urges them to missionary work, quoting the great commission of Christ in a slightly changed form,³ and bids them go forth to heal the sick, restore the blind and raise the dead.⁴ They have entered the Kingdom of God, and have been baptised with the water of life, the fire of the love of God, and the Holy Spirit.⁵ Women have Mary Magdalene held up to them as an example,⁶ and men have the apostles as their pattern.⁷

By this lavish use of Scriptural terms he succeeded in concealing altogether the true nature of the movement. The cause to which they are called is made out to be the cause of Christ. It is their privilege to be called to bring in the Kingdom of God. They are not asked to give up anything they value, but are told that every true Christian is a Baha'í.⁸ The result of this teaching is that Baha'ism in the West is totally distinct from the movement in the East. In the West we find that Baha'ís retain their membership of their Churches, and regard themselves as true Christians, little realising what Baha'ism really is. Yet, in spite of all, Baha'ism is on the wane in Western countries, and census statistics show that its day is past. 'Abdu'l-Baha dreamed of a Baha'í world, but that dream will never be realised. Like Baha'u'llah, he set himself a task which he was unable to perform. He failed to understand what it is that mankind needs,

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 24, 62, etc.

ibid., pp. 47, 56.

ibid., pp. 4, 11, 16, etc.

ibid., pp. 56, 94, etc.

ibid., pp. 88 f.

ibid., p. 79.

ibid., p. 89.

Mok., Vol. I, p. 354.

and did not realise that he had not the wherewithal to satisfy those needs. Like Baha'u'llah, he conceived of salvation as intellectual, whereas what men need is something more than that, something that goes deeper than that. What men want is a power that will change the human heart, a power that can save them from themselves. Men need to know God, and knowledge of God was beyond the power of 'Abdu'l-Baha to give. Brought up in an environment of dissimulation and dissension, he never came under the influence of true religion. He saw how Baha'ism was made, he had helped to make it, and he tried to re-make it to suit the new conditions. Intellectually capable, he lacked the training and the background necessary for such a task, and his teaching is at the best shallow, and often opportunistic. He lived in an atmosphere of make-believe, and that atmosphere influenced the whole of his teachings. His spiritual teaching is vague, lifeless, and forced. He drew his water from another's well, but never drank deeply of it himself. He utters sayings which our Lord hallowed by His death, but he never fathomed the meaning of them, and did not try to live them. This will be seen more clearly when we consider his teaching about love. He failed to help others because he had nothing he could give them to satisfy their needs. He, again, offered a stone to a world that cried for bread.

Another cause of the failure of the new movement undoubtedly lay in the exaggerated claims made on his behalf, and on behalf of Baha'u'llah, which repel, rather than attract, the Western mind. The West accepts Jesus as Lord because experience testifies to the truth of His claim. The basis of Western religion is not a "revealed" book, but a living experience.

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Furthermore, the doctrine of infallibility is repulsive to the Western mind. Finally the history of Baha'ism, with its bitter schisms and dissensions, was bound to repel many people, and it is perhaps safe to say that when the schism spread to America, it sealed the fate of the new religion.

The teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Part I: God, man and immortality

It will be impossible in the course of one short chapter to enter into a full and detailed study of the Baha'í teaching on these three important questions, but an attempt will be made to show what is the real nature of these teachings, and what is their religious value. Modern Baha'ism is the religion of 'Abdu'l-Baha, for, though Baha'u'llah is still regarded as the founder and Prophet of the sect, it is the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha that underlie all its doctrines. Dr Hermann Roemer has shown us that the teachings of Baha'u'llah were very largely built on a Sufí foundation, and that some of his writings were undoubtedly based on older Sufí works. His book "The Seven Valleys" is purely Sufí in character, and is undoubtedly

based upon the great Sufi classic, the “Seven Valleys” of Faridu’-Din.¹ The teachings of Sufism are very largely pantheistic in character, and though ‘Abdu’l-Baha was undoubtedly influenced by the new ideas that came into the movement as it spread westward, he yet retained in his teaching a strong pantheistic element. This will become clear when we consider his teaching about God. Before we come to consider that teaching, it is im-

Roemer, pp. 81 f.

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portant to realise what were the prevalent tendencies in Western religious thought at the time.

The hypothesis of evolution was the guiding principle of physical science during the last century, and it naturally influenced the religious thought of the day. We have already seen that when Baha’ism spread to France, it was claimed for the new religion that its teachings were in harmony with the scientific doctrines of the day. The Sufi element in the new religion was not altogether out of harmony with the new tendencies that were appearing in modern theology. The general tendency of religious thought in the eighteenth century was deistic, with the emphasis on God’s transcendence. The nineteenth century brought in a revolution in religious thought, and the tendency now became pantheistic, with the stress on the immanence of God. “A cosmic evolution, if it is to be interpreted theistically, demands not a transcendent static but an immanent dynamic God, a God who is present and active in His world.”¹ Roman Catholic Modernism was based, as Dr Garvie points out, on a philosophy of immanence, and the New Theology associated with the name of Dr R. J. Campbell undertook a re-statement of the Gospel on the basis of the principle of the divine immanence. It was at such a time that Baha’ism spread to the West.

a) God

It has been said that “religion is the divinity within us reaching up to the divinity above.” The problem of God can be approached from several directions, but we are concerned with two only, the philosophical and the religious. The main concern

Garvie, p. 15.

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of philosophy is knowledge of God, resulting in mental peace and satisfaction. The purpose of religion is the making possible of friendship and harmonious relations with God. It aims at something more than mental satisfaction—it aims at life. Man seeks through religion to bring himself into harmony with the will of God. Philosophy is theoretical, religion is practical. The God of Philosophy is the impersonal Absolute, the God of Religion is essentially personal. He is the Living God. “One, therefore, to whom, at least analogically (to borrow a term of scholasticism), we

must attribute will, feeling, thought, and whatever, in short, is essential to a personal life. At the very outset, therefore, we are faced with the charge of anthropomorphism. We are told that we make God after our own image and ascribe to Him attributes of our finite individuality, and characteristics of our human life such as can, in the nature of things, find no place in any intelligible concept of Deity. We are guilty of the folly of colouring ultimate reality with the imperfections of our shadow life.”¹ But, to quote Relton again, “If it be true that He made us in His image, we cannot be far wrong in assuming that He is not so totally unlike us as to render all human analogies meaningless when we seek to form some conception of His Being and Character.”² None will deny that there are difficulties in connection with this view of a personal God. When we argue from the human to the Divine, we are certainly working from the imperfect to the Perfect, from the finite to the Infinite, and we have to be careful not to transfer the imperfections and limitations of our finite personality

Relton, pp. 10 f.

ibid., p. 73.

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into our thought of God. But this objection has been answered by Lotze in the words, “We are not so much complete persons, as on the road to personality. Perfect personality is in God only; to all finite minds there is allotted but a pale copy thereof; the finiteness of the finite is not a producing condition of this Personality, but a limit and a hindrance to its development.”¹ This belief in a personal God is of the very essence of religion. Belief in Revelation postulates belief in a personal God, who purposes that man should become like unto Him, and belief that man is so constituted that he can respond to God’s advances. If we hold these two beliefs, then we have reasonable grounds for believing that God will take steps to reveal Himself to man.

Baha’ism claims to be a revealed religion, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha does not believe in a personal God. The human mind cannot comprehend God. That which man comprehends and calls God has no existence outside the mind of man. ² The peoples of the world are “revolving around imaginations, and are worshipping the idols of thoughts and conjectures.”³ The Creator and the creature have nothing in common, and no resemblance or likeness exists between them. That which we attribute to the creature we must deny for God.⁴ Yet all things reveal God, and the existence of man from the beginning is essential, for without the existence of man the perfection of God is not revealed. Every existing thing reveals one of the names of God, but man’s true nature reveals the perfection of God. Did man not exist, the creation would have neither meaning nor purpose, for the purpose of its existence is

Quoted by Relton, p. 78.

Mok., Vol. II, pp. 380 ff.; Vol. II, pp. 30 f.

Mof., p. 13.

Khat., Vol. I, pp. 90 f.; Mof., pp. 216 f.

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to show forth the perfection of God. A creator without a creature is impossible. If we could imagine a time when no beings existed, this imagination would be a denial of the Divinity of God. 2 "If there was a time when God did not manifest His qualities, then there was no God, because the attributes of God presuppose the creation of phenomena."3 As the existence of God is everlasting and eternal, so, too, the universe has neither beginning nor end.4 Though the world of contingency exists, yet in relation to the existence of God it is non-existent and nothingness. The existence of beings in comparison with the existence of God is but illusion and nothingness; it is an appearance like the image reflected in the mirror. But though an image which is seen in a mirror is an illusion, the source and the reality of the illusory image is the person reflected whose face appears in the mirror.5 The God of 'Abdu'l-Baha is therefore the Absolute of speculative philosophy introduced into religion. He is the God of Pantheism. There is an element of truth in Pantheism, for the human mind is reluctant to exclude God from any part of His creation. But God is not dependent upon His creation He is complete without it. "The All is God. This excludes Divine Personality. God is the All. This rejects finite individuality as in any sense having an existence in its own right over against the All of which it is but a transitory appearance."6 Such a belief can have no real religious value, for it denies the possibility of an ethical relationship between God and man. "There is no cure for Pantheism like

Mof., pp. 149 f.

ibid., pp. 136 f.

"Scrip.", p. 402.

Mof., pp. 136 f.

ibid., pp. 205 f.

Relton, p. 82.

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a sharp fit of penitence."1 It is when we can conceive of God as a Father that we have a true conception of sin. "I can only declare my conviction that to regard sin as an offence against a personal authority, and still more to regard it as an affront to a loving Father, is a more intelligible and a more ethically significant way of thinking about it than it is to conceive it after the analogy of a physical defilement or an automatic mechanism."2 Baha'í writers make much of the fact that Baha'ism has no anthropomorphic conception of God,3 but they fail to realise how much they lose.

What has the Absolute of Philosophy to offer to a man bowed down by the burden of sin? What is there in this teaching to satisfy the deep longings of the human soul for fellowship with God? If God ceases to be a Person for the mind, the love of God becomes meaningless for the heart. "God so loved the world" is the one message that can satisfy the needs of man. It is when men can kneel and say "Our Father" with hearts overflowing with love, when they can cast their burden upon Him, and rise up refreshed and strengthened by the consciousness of His forgiveness, that they can face each new day with thankful hearts and quiet minds. The man who is conscious of sins forgiven does not need proofs of the existence of God, for God is alive to him—a living, loving Father. What, then, can we say of 'Abdu'l-Baha? His teachings provide the answer; he failed to satisfy the longings of the human heart, and that failure is marked by the fact that he had to adduce proofs for the existence of God. To a sin-burdened

Mackintosh, p. 176.

Webb, "God and Personality", p. 250; quoted by Mackintosh, p. 176. Vide Questions, p. 4, footnote.

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humanity needing love, redeeming love, he offered scientific proofs of the existence of God.¹

b) Man

As is to be expected, his teaching about man is largely concerned with the origin of the species. The theory of evolution which caused so much unrest in religious circles was also a source of difficulty to 'Abdu'l-Baha. We saw above that, according to his teaching, man must have existed from the very beginning. Did man not exist, the creation would have neither meaning nor purpose, for the purpose of the creation is to show forth the perfection of God. If it is proved that there was a time when man was in the animal world, or when he was merely an animal, the perfection of existence would have been destroyed.² "If there was a time when God did not manifest His qualities, then there was no God,"³ and, as the world without man could not show forth the perfection of God, to deny that man existed from the beginning is to deny the existence of God. The Pantheism of 'Abdu'l-Baha made it impossible for him to accept the theory of evolution, for it would imply that God is a growing God or a developing being. He was, therefore, faced with a real difficulty. We have already seen that he is inconsistent in his teaching on this subject, flatly denying the truth of the theory in one Tablet, and admitting in another that there have been stages in the development of man,⁴ which is surely an indication of the difficult position in which he found himself. But even in his denial there is a suggestion of a compromise,

"Scrip.", pp. 290 ff.; Mof. pp. 3 f.

Mof., pp. 134 f.

“Scrip.”, p. 402.

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 257 and 388.

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and this is an indication of his true teaching. He finds it impossible to disprove the theory, and is compelled to seek a solution in the form of a compromise. He admits the possibility of change in the form and body of man; indeed, he goes further, and declares that it is certain that the human embryo did not at once appear in this form, nor did it at once become a manifestation of the words, “Praise be to God, the best of Creators.” It passed gradually through various conditions and different shapes until it reached its present form, and signs of reason and maturity appeared. But from the beginning of man’s existence he is a distinct species. He may have had organs that have now disappeared, but he was man all the time. There never was a time when he was an animal.¹ It was a clever attempt to solve the difficulty, but it did not succeed. It maintained that man existed from the very beginning, and at the same time allowed room for a theory of evolution, but it did not solve his problem. According to this teaching, man did not from the first possess reason, nor was he from the first a manifestation of the words “Praise be to God, the best of Creators”, so there was a time when God did not manifest His qualities, there was a time when existence was imperfect, and this is tantamount to denying the existence of God as ‘Abdu’l-Baha conceives Him. This becomes still clearer when he admits that it is possible that man came into existence after the animal,² thus directly contradicting his own statement that man must have existed from the beginning. Only two solutions to the problem were open to him—he could either deny the theory of evolution altogether, or he could accept it, and modify

Mof., pp. 139 f., 147 f

ibid., p. 147.

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his teaching of God so as to allow the possibility of growth and development in God. Western ideas made the first alternative impossible, whilst the second would appeal to neither East nor West.

We come now to his teaching of the nature of man. However much man may have in common with the lower animals as regards sense perception, he is yet distinct from them. He possesses a power which is shared by none of the animals. The sciences, arts, inventions, trades and discoveries which stand to the credit of man are all the results of his use of this power.¹ Furthermore, he is able to comprehend those things which have no external existence, such as reason, spirit, virtues, love and grief. He is lord over the animals,

and can bend them to his will. One ten-year-old Arab boy can subdue two or three hundred camels, and with one shout make them come or go as he pleases. One Indian of frail physique can subdue the huge elephant. Man is lord of Nature, and bends it to his will.² All existing things are tied by the laws of Nature, and cannot digress one inch from their appointed path, but man is master of Nature, and, in direct opposition to its laws, he sails the sea and flies in the air.³ He is privileged above all the animals in that he possesses reason and knowledge.⁴ He was created to reveal the Divine Perfection, and all the attributes of God have their counterpart in him.⁵ Yet the existence of man in relation to the existence of God is non-existence. It is but illusion and nothingness. It is an appearance like an image in a mirror. The image is an illusion,

Mof., p. 141.

ibid., p. 144; Khat., Vol. I, pp. 196, 228.

Khat., Vol. I, pp. 246 f.; Mof., p. 144.

Khat., Vol. I, p. 226.

Mof., pp. 134 f.; Khat., Vol. I, pp. 244 f.

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the reality is the thing reflected.¹ Finite individuality has therefore no value of its own. How different is the teaching of Jesus! The Gospel of Jesus is in a very real sense the gospel of the value of the individual soul. When Jesus looked on the multitudes, he was moved with compassion, for He saw, not a crowd, but individuals in need of love, and He loved them. How very little the individual counts in the creed of 'Abdu'l-Baha will become clearer still when we consider the following teaching. Man's nature is twofold. The physical nature he inherits from Adam, but the spiritual nature is inherited from the Reality of the Word of God, which is the spirituality of Christ. The physical nature inherited from Adam is the source of all imperfection, but the spiritual nature is of the bounty of the Holy Spirit, and is a reflection of the Sun of Reality.² The spiritual nature of man is from above; it is, as it were, a ray from God. It is not in the body, it cannot be said to enter or leave it, but its relation to the body is that of the sun to the mirror. In other words, the spiritual nature of man is only a reflection of the Divine, and has no individuality. It is not in any way affected by the condition of the body, and death simply means the end of the connection between it and the body, in the sense that the connection between the sun and the mirror is ended when the latter is broken, or the sun ceases to shine upon it.³ According to this teaching, individual existence must be regarded as ceasing with death, for it is a mere transitory appearance, "an illusion and nothingness," to quote 'Abdu'l-Baha's own words once more.

Mof., pp. 205 f.

ibid., pp. 89 f.

ibid., p. 173; Mok., Vol. I, p. 174.

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c) Immortality

If we accept the teaching given above, we must conceive of immortality as an attribute of the cosmic spirit rather than as pertaining to the individual soul, for the latter is but a transitory appearance of the former. 'Abdu'l-Baha's teaching, however, is not consistent, and the subject must therefore be considered more fully. This will best be done by considering some of the various questions which arise from a belief in immortality.

i. Eternal life

When we speak about eternal life and entering the Kingdom of Heaven, we are using phrases which must not be interpreted literally. The Kingdom is neither temporal nor local; it is a spiritual world, a divine world, the centre of God's sovereignty. Place and time surround the body, not the mind and spirit. The spirit is placeless, and earth and heaven are both one to it. The meaning of eternal life is the gift of the Holy Spirit, it is the life of the spirit, which is placeless. Entrance into the Kingdom is through the love of God, through holiness and chastity, through truthfulness and purity, through steadfastness and faithfulness, through self-sacrifice and detachment from the world.¹ When the disciples of Christ received the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is eternal life, they detached themselves from the world, and even forgot their own existence²—in other words, they attained to ecstatic union with the Deity. Eternal life is found in this union, which means the losing of individuality, and the suppression of self.

ii. Life after death

Death, we saw, is simply the breaking of the connection between soul and body. The

Mof., pp. 181 ff.

ibid., pp. 81 f.

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body is as a cage, and the soul or spirit is as a bird. Death means the breaking of the cage, and the freeing of the captive soul.¹ There is, then, no need to prove that the soul does not die with the body, for reason shows clearly that it cannot. To imagine that because the cage breaks, the bird must die, is foolish. The condition of the body does not affect the soul, or spirit, at all. The body may be crippled and subject to all imperfections, but the soul will be free from them. But when the body is "wholly subjected to disease and misfortune", it is deprived of the bounty of the spirit; like a mirror which, when dirty or broken or dusty, cannot reflect the rays of the sun. Elsewhere he describes the "bounty of the spirit" as the "bounty (or

grace) of the Kingdom”, which emanates from God and is reflected in the reality of the creatures. Furthermore, this bounty specifies and individualises itself according to the capacity, worthiness, and intrinsic worth of things.² But this does not mean that there are individual souls: it simply means that the bounty of the spirit as reflected in man is to be distinguished from that reflected in the animal. All things have not the same power of manifesting this bounty, but each creature reflects it according to its capacity and intrinsic worth. The soul, which is an emanation from God reflected in the reality of the creature, is no more affected by the condition of the physical man than is the sun’s ray by the dirt or dust on the mirror, so it cannot be said to have any real individuality, and is certainly not affected by death. It is by nature immortal and eternal. In view of this teaching, it is difficult to understand how he can conceive of life after death as

Mof., p. 171.

ibid., p. 218.

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possible for the individual. True, he does tell us that man cannot imagine the nature of that life,¹ but from various teachings scattered throughout his writings it is clear that he did have a belief in the survival of the individual. He tells us that all souls will not be equal. When souls make their appearance in the carnal world they are all equal, good and pure, but in this world distinctions appear, and these will become manifest after death, when some will find a high station, others a medium, others a low.² Life without growth is impossible, so in the next life there must be progress. But all souls will not develop to the same degree, for each one will develop according to the station in which it finds itself. Peter, however much he may develop, will never reach the same position as Christ,³ for they occupy different stations. How, then, will the soul of man make progress in the after-life? There are three ways in which it is possible—through the grace of God alone, or through the intercession and sincere prayers of other human souls, or through charitable deeds and good works which are performed in its name. ⁴ This teaching of the survival of individual souls is somewhat unexpected, and would seem to the present author, who, however, lays no claim to any profound understanding of philosophical thought, to be thoroughly inconsistent with the rest of his teaching, yet it is not without interest, and is therefore worthy of some consideration. Prayers for the dead are made by all true Moslems, for Mohammad is said to have made them incumbent upon his followers. “God most certainly exalts the degree of a virtuous servant in Paradise,

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 388 ff.

ibid., Vol. III, p. 405.

Mof., p. 176.

ibid., p. 181.

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and the virtuous servant says, ‘O my Lord, from whence is this exalted degree for me?’ and God says, ‘It is on account of your children asking pardon for you.’”¹ In Shi‘ah Islam the practice of good works in the name of the dead is very common. It is held that by such works it is possible to remit some of the punishment incurred by the dead as a result of their sins. Behind all such teaching lies a legalistic idea of religion. Every man has a duty to perform, but by doing more than is his duty he can claim an extra reward. Such good works make God man’s debtor, and therefore they accumulate merit. This merit is transferred to the dead, who thus reap the reward of these good works. This doctrine has much in common with that of the Roman Church, which teaches that “after providing what is needful to make satisfaction for sin and for the attainment of eternal life, there may be an overplus. Thus arises the treasury of merits, primarily of Christ, but also of the saints, from which the Church may rightly derive indulgences.”² ‘Abdu’l-Baha derived his doctrine from the common practice in Islam, which is based on a legalistic conception of religion, so we see that, like his father, he failed to break away from his Moslem environment.

Finally, it is important to notice that he discards the teaching of the resurrection of the body. St. Paul could not be satisfied with the Greek teaching of the immortality of the soul—nothing would satisfy him but the belief in the survival of full personality, and so he believed in a Resurrection Body, and that belief is an essential part of the Christian faith. The Babí-Baha’í

Hughes, “Dictionary of Islam”, Article: “Prayers for the Dead”.
Mackintosh, pp. 137 f.

10. The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha : Part I 139

teaching about the Resurrection is a revolt against materialistic conceptions, but is such a revolt not based on wrong ideas of matter and spirit? Can man be satisfied with any doctrine which falls short of that of the Christian Church? “Materialism, you say? Materialism? Without doubt; but either our spirit is likewise some kind of matter, or it is nothing. I dread the idea of having to tear myself away from the flesh; I dread still more the idea of having to tear myself away from everything sensible and material, from all substance. Yes, perhaps this merits the name of materialism; and if I grapple myself to God with all my powers and all my senses, it is that He may carry me in His arms beyond death, looking into these eyes of mine with the light of His heaven, when the light of earth is dimming in them for ever. Self-illusion? Talk not to me of illusion—let me live!”¹ “Listen to Unamuno, the man of flesh and

blood,” says Relton; yes, listen, it is the voice of a man giving expression to the longings of the human soul; it is the agonizing demand of human personality for the certainty of survival of death. It is not the voice of a man, it is the voice of man. Is there anything in this teaching of ‘Abdu’l-Baha that can respond to that cry? There is nothing. If we accept ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teaching we make the resurrection of Christ of no account, we deny its implications, and deny ourselves that comfort and hope which cost God so much to give us. It is not necessary here to discuss what is meant by the Resurrection Body, but it is important that we should realise how much we throw away when we discard the belief in it. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of

Unamuno, quoted by Relton, p. 160.

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God” but that does not imply that only a disembodied soul survives. “Thou fool” said St. Paul, and he meant it. The present author can truly say that a study of Baha’í teachings has made him realise as he never did before the wonder of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the splendour of the Christian hope of the resurrection to Eternal Life.

iii. Rewards and punishments

Christ was a man, and Caiaphas was a man; Moses and Pharaoh, Abel and Cain, Baha’u’llah and Yahya all were men. But what a contrast they offer! The first-named of each pair show to what heights man may rise, whilst the second show to what a degree of baseness he may sink. Man is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light. If he follows the divinely appointed Guide or Prophet he can grow in light, but if he does not, his condition becomes one of utter darkness. Thus it is that, whilst some souls grow, others sink lower and lower. The progress of man both in this world and the next is therefore dependent on his acceptance of the divinely appointed Guide.¹ The terms “reward” and “punishment” are misleading. That which they are meant to denote is a spiritual state or condition which defies definition.² The body is only the instrument of the soul. The sword is not punished for shedding innocent blood, nor is a spear punished for wounding a captive foe, for both are instruments, not agents. Rewards and punishments are therefore to be understood as referring to the soul alone.³ The greatest possible torment is separation from God, ⁴ so

Mof., pp. 179 f.

Mok., Vol. II, p. 160.

ibid., Vol. I, pp. 458 f.; Vol. II, p. 71.

Mof., p. 199.

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it would seem that the term “reward” is used to signify nearness to

God, whilst “punishment” implies separation from God. Those who have not received divine instruction through a Prophet are sinning in ignorance, so God forgives them, 1 whilst those who do not know God, but have good principles and good characters, are worthy of pardon. Nevertheless, good actions alone, without the knowledge of God, cannot win for man eternal salvation, and entrance into the Kingdom of God.² What, then, does forgiveness mean? It would seem that entrance into the Kingdom is barred even when they have been forgiven.

All this teaching is necessarily vague and unsatisfactory, because he has no true belief in a personal God, and no real appreciation of the meaning of finite individuality. Forgiveness, punishment, eternal life, salvation, knowledge of God are all terms which are more or less devoid of meaning if we deny the doctrine of a personal God and of the value of finite individuality. His teachings are therefore of very little value, and are best explained by referring to the circumstances in which they were given. They are almost without exception answers given to questions raised by people brought up in a Christian environment, and, consequently, possessed of Christian ideas. Behind the questions was a background of Christian ideas, behind the answers was a background of Oriental Pantheism and Moslem legalism, and the attempt to harmonise them ended in mere confusion of thought.

Mof., p. 200.

ibid; pp. 179 f.

The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
Part II: The Trinity, Jesus Christ,
the Holy Spirit and baptism

In the West it is the custom for Baha’ís to retain membership of whatever branch of the Christian Church they may have belonged to before their acceptance of Baha’ism. Horace Holley, who is Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’ís of the United States and Canada, declares that “one may be a Baha’í and retain active membership in another religious body.”¹ Similarly, Miss Musgrove, who is in charge of the Meeting Room at Walman House, Regent Street, London, is herself a member of a Christian Church. When interviewed by the Rev. F. Lawrence, she said, “You need not give up such membership to join the Baha’í movement.” Mr. Lawrence, who visited Walman House on behalf of the present author, declares that “she was very emphatic that the ‘movement’ must not be called a ‘religion’.” It is not the purpose of the present chapter to consider Baha’í propaganda methods in the West, but it is important to bear these statements in mind when considering ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s teaching on some of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith.

“Census”, pp. 10 f.

a) The Trinity

Man cannot possibly comprehend or imagine the Divine Reality. God is essentially One, and division or plurality in the Godhead is impossible. When we speak of God manifesting Himself, we mean that He reveals His beauty and perfection in a Perfect Man, just as the sun reflects itself in a mirror. Christ was such a mirror, so God was seen in Him. But God did not come down, any more than the sun can be said to come down into the mirror. All the creatures reflect God, all are mirrors, but only the Prophets are perfect mirrors, and in them is seen the Divine Perfection. 1 Thus Christ is no greater than any other Prophet, and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is denied. Christ and the Holy Spirit are two reflections of the Divine Reality. The Holy Spirit is the grace of God, and Sonship is the state of Christ's heart, whilst the Holy Spirit is again the station of the Spirit of Christ.²

'Abdu'l-Baha's outlook is that of the ordinary Moslem, who holds that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is incompatible with a belief in the Unity or Oneness of God. To him the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation would imply that God had "come down," and that during the period of Christ's life on earth God was localised. His denial of the doctrine of the Trinity is therefore based on ignorance of its meaning.

b) Jesus Christ

The influence of the Qor'an upon his teaching about Christ is very marked. According to the Qor'an, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost.³ The Holy Ghost took the form of a man, as an image is pro-

Mof., p. 168.

ibid., pp. 86 f.

Khat., Vol. I, p. 82.

11. The teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha: Part II 145

duced in a mirror, and he addressed Mary. What exactly are we to understand by this? An image is not produced without a mirror. Are we, then, to understand that the Holy Ghost was "reflected" in a human mirror? Is it meant to imply that Christ, though born of Mary by the Holy Ghost, was yet in a sense the child of a human father? He does not explicitly deny the Virgin Birth of Christ—on the contrary, he argues for its possibility—but the only definite statement he makes is that Christ was born and came into existence by the Holy Spirit,² and in view of his explanation given above of the Qor'an statement that the Holy Spirit talked with Mary, this cannot be taken as a definite statement of his belief in the Virgin Birth. He states quite definitely that there is no virtue in virgin birth, for if being without a father is a virtue, Adam is greater than all the Prophets, for he had neither father nor mother. In the Old

Testament it is said, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul," and so he tells us to observe "that Adam came into existence from the Spirit of life." Furthermore, it is written in St. John's Gospel that "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." From which it is evident that the holy reality, by which is meant the real existence of every great man, comes from God, and owes its being to the breath of the Holy Spirit. If to be without a human father is the greatest human glory, then Adam is greater than Christ. But Adam

Mof., pp. 66 f.

ibid., p. 69.

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was less than Abraham, for the substance of Adam's physical life was mere earth, whilst that of Abraham was pure sperm, and it is sure that pure sperm is superior to earth!¹ The implication of this teaching would seem to bear out the interpretation of his teaching given above, according to which Christ was the child of a human father. It is clear that he interprets the teaching that Christ was born through the agency of the Holy Ghost as equally applicable to any great man. He declares the possibility of virgin birth, but the general tone of his argument as to its value shows that he considered the doctrine absurd.

Christ was baptised in the Jordan by John. He was not in any need of baptism, but as He desired that this institution of John should be used at the time by all, He Himself conformed to it in order to arouse the people and to fulfil the old Law.² In the time of Christ the Mosaic Law was no longer suited to the needs of mankind, so He abrogated it, and thus it was that He broke the Sabbath.³ Here again the influence of Islam is clear. According to the Moslem doctrine, every Prophet abrogates the Laws of the previous Prophet, so Christ abrogated the Law, and Mohammad abrogated the Gospel. Jesus Himself declared that He came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it, a statement which 'Abdu'l-Baha, with his Moslem training, could not understand. Nowhere in the Gospels do we read that our Lord broke the Sabbath. True, He was charged with doing so, but actually He kept the Law scrupulously. What Jesus really did was ignore the "Oral Law" which had come to be regarded as equally binding with the "Written Law",

Mot., pp. 68 f.

ibid., p. 70.

ibid., p. 72.

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and thus it was that He could accuse the Scribes and Pharisees of

leaving the commandments of God, and holding fast the tradition of men.¹

When Christ said, "I am the bread of life," He meant that He was offering men heavenly food. Eating that food means the receiving the divine grace and partaking of the divine light. In the same way, when Christ speaks of "blood" He means the spirit of life. Again, it is written, "Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"² so it is obvious that to eat is to draw near to Jesus, and to drink is to believe in Him. The disciples had taken many meals from the hand of Christ, so why should the Last Supper be distinguished above the rest? When Christ said of the bread and wine that they were His body and blood. He was with them in person, He was present in the flesh, and could not have meant them to take His words literally. What He meant was, "I have given you my bounties and perfections, and when you have partaken of this bounty eternal life is yours, and you have had a share and a portion of the heavenly food."³ Christians are therefore wrong when they interpret these words of Jesus to refer to His impending death, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is therefore meaningless. We have already seen that he denies the truth of the Incarnation, and by implication, of the Virgin Birth. Now we see that he virtually denies the Atonement. What, then, of the Resurrection? What of the Ascension? The Resurrection is not bodily resurrection. When we speak of the three days in the tomb, of the Resurrection

St. Mark 7:8.

St. John 6:35.

Mof., pp. 74 ff.

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and Ascension as if they were actual historical occurrences, we are mistaken. All are spiritual conditions. After Christ's death the disciples were scattered, and so the teachings, the bounties and the perfections of Christ were hidden from the world, and the cause of Christ was as a body without life. But after three days the disciples recovered their assurance and steadfastness, and began to serve the cause of Christ and to spread His teachings. The Reality of Christ once more became resplendent, His teachings were spread, and His bounties were revealed. His religion, which had been as a dead body, became alive once more. Such is the meaning of the Resurrection, and the Ascension has a similar meaning. ¹

In conclusion, we have to consider his teaching as to the second coming of Christ. The first time that Christ came, He came from heaven, but because He was apparently born from Mary's womb, the Jews failed to realise this. He gave a number of signs which are to be fulfilled when He comes again, but they are not to be taken literally, for, whilst it is true that He will come from heaven, He will

be born into the world from the womb of a mother. But Baha'u'llah has already explained this, as will be seen, in the book "Iqan"² Reference to the book "Iqan" shows that Christ has already come in the person of Mohammad.³

How, then, can Baha'is retain membership in a Christian Church? The position is best summed up by quoting the teaching of the Apostles' Creed, and bracketing the clauses which cannot be accepted by any Baha'i without denying the teaching of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Mof., pp. 79 ff.

ibid., pp. 84 f., 99 ff.

ibid., pp. 21 ff.

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"And in Jesus Christ (His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost), born of (the Virgin) Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried (He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead)." His teaching is a denial of all that is fundamental in Christianity.

c) The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the mediator between God and man. As the mirror reflects the light of the sun, so the Spirit reflects the divine light.¹ It is the Spirit that enables man to attain to eternal life, to grow in knowledge and spirituality, and to make inventions and discoveries.² It is adorned with all the divine perfections.

Whenever the Spirit appears in the world, the life of the world is renewed, the darkness of ignorance fades into light, and a new age is inaugurated.³ So far it would seem that the Spirit is endowed with personality, and that He is a mirror of all the divine perfections. But the fact that the Spirit is said to appear in the world periodically implies that it is not immanent and active in the world, and we are compelled to associate the coming of the Spirit with that of the Prophets. This becomes clear when we consider his teaching as to the nature of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the divine grace, which shines forth like rays from the station of the Manifestation. Christ was a centre from which shone forth the rays of the Sun of Reality, and from Him the divine grace shone forth

Mof., p. 109.

Khat., Vol. I, p. 91.

Mof., pp. 109 f.

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upon the disciples, for the Reality of the disciples also acted as a mirror. This is what is meant by the teaching that the Holy Spirit alighted upon the disciples.¹ All the Prophets were centres from

which the divine grace was shed abroad.² The Holy Spirit cannot be said to ascend or descend, to enter or to leave, for such terms can be applied only to material bodies. When the Holy Spirit is spoken of as if it were endowed with personality, the reference is to some person who is a mirror of the Spirit, so, when Christ foretells the coming of the Spirit of Truth, He is indicating the coming of another person who will be a mirror of the Spirit.³

It would seem, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is not really the mediator between God and man; rather is it the thing mediated—the divine grace. The Prophets are the true mediators. Thus, when the world is bereft of a Prophet or Manifestation, there is no mediator between God and man, and the world is bereft of the divine grace or bounty. We are therefore forced to the conclusion that during the long intervals between the coming of the various Manifestations man is cut off from God! It is the Spirit that enables man to attain to normal life, and to make progress, but the Spirit is not always present in the world, and man is deprived of the life-giving flow of the divine grace. Such is the teaching of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, the prophet not of hope, but of despair.

d) Baptism

It is true that Jesus was baptised, but that does not mean that baptism is necessary to-day. Jesus said

Mof., pp. 82 f.; not found in the English version.

ibid., pp. 96 f.

ibid., pp. 82 f.

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that baptism must be by the Spirit and fire, and another time He said it must be by the Spirit and water. Baptism by fire is impossible, so it is obvious that the words of Jesus must not be taken literally. He did not mean baptism by the elements fire and water; He meant baptism by the Spirit, by knowledge, by the fire of the love of God. It is by this baptism that the human heart is cleansed, and man is made a partaker of the Holy Spirit. Baptism by water was for repentance and remission of sins, but that is no longer necessary, for in this the age of Baha’u’llah baptism by the Spirit and Love of God, which is the real baptism, is established and understood.¹ In the East, in both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, infants are baptized by immersion in water mixed with olive oil, and many of them fall ill from shock. In other places the priest sprinkles water on the forehead of the child. Other nations are amazed that they should treat children in this way, for no possible benefit is derived from the rite. It does not bring about a spiritual awakening in the child, nor does it inspire faith in it, nor does it work the conversion of the child. It is just an empty custom. In the time of John the Baptist there was some meaning in it, for those who were baptised unto repentance spent their time in

earnest expectation of the coming of Christ and of the Kingdom of God. Times have changed, and baptism is no longer necessary, for the needs of modern times are not those of the time of Christ.²

It is surely significant that in showing the uselessness of baptism he confines his remarks to infant baptism, and not a word is said about the possible significance

Mof., pp. 70 f.

ibid., pp. 71 ff.

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of baptism to an adult. Life as a missionary in Persia has shown the present author what baptism can mean, and should mean. To men who have found in Christ their Saviour it is no empty rite, but a sacrament in the true sense of the word.

The question "Can a Christian be a Baha'í?" has but one answer—an emphatic "No!" for Baha'ism is a denial of all that is fundamental in the Christian religion. The Apostles' Creed is almost wholly denied, and the two chief sacraments of the Christian Church are declared to be meaningless rites, mere customs.

The teachings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Part III: The Prophets, miracles,

Scriptures, sin and evil, salvation and love

a) The Prophets

The progress of humanity depends on education. Without education man sinks to a lower level of life than that of the animals. The wonders of the civilised world show to what heights man can rise when education plays its part in life, whilst the condition of cannibal tribes shows to what degrees of degradation he can fall when education is lacking. There can be no education without an educator. Education is three-fold: physical, human, and spiritual. Physical education is concerned with the development and care of the body, and is common to animals and man. Human education is concerned with civilisation and progress, which include the art of government, trades and crafts, sciences, and charitable works. In short, it is concerned with all the various activities of man which distinguish him from the animal. Spiritual education is concerned with the acquirement of the divine perfections, and this is the true education. Mankind, therefore, needs an educator whose authority and teachings will be equally effective in all three branches, from which it follows that he must be distinguished above all the rest of mankind.

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He must be a Perfect Man. The Perfect Man has appeared at different times in the persons of the Prophets, and through them the world has been led along the path of progress. Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, the Bab, and Baha'u'llah were all such

educators.¹

Man can only know God through the Prophets. They are true mirrors of the Being of God, and in them are all His perfections revealed. We cannot know the Ultimate Reality of God, but we see Him reflected in the Prophets in the way in which the sun is reflected in a mirror.² The Prophets are distinguished above other men by the manifestation of the divine in them. In them is the Word of God, the Eternal Grace, the Holy Spirit, which is eternal, and has neither beginning nor end.³ So the title “Word of God” which we are wont to give to Jesus, and which even Mohammad gives to none but Him, can, according to this teaching of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, be equally applied to any one of the Prophets. There are two classes of Prophets—those who bring a new code of law and new Books, and inaugurate a new age, and those who follow the first and are dependent on them, and promote their teachings. The former, who receive the bounty of the divine grace direct and without mediation, are the mediators through which it is conveyed to the latter. Whereas the former are like the sun, which is in its very essence light, the latter are like the moon, which derives its light from the sun. Among the former are the educators mentioned above, whilst among the latter are Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁴ There are cycles in history. Each of the divine Manifestations

Mof., pp. 5 ff.

ibid., pp. 110 ff.; Khat., Vol. I, p. 28.

Mof., pp. 114 f.

ibid., pp. 123 f.

12. The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha : Part III 155

has a cycle, and during that cycle his teachings are in force, but when a new Manifestation appears, a new cycle begins. In addition to these cycles, there are universal cycles. An universal cycle covers innumerable epochs, and includes the other cycles. In such a cycle a number of Manifestations appear with great splendour, and finally the great universal Manifestation appears. We are in the universal cycle which began with Adam, and its universal Manifestation is Baha’u’llah. Other Manifestations will appear after him, and will renew certain commandments from time to time according to the needs of those times, but they will all be under his shadow.¹ The Prophets have no thought for themselves—their one concern is the welfare of mankind. The reproaches and rebukes for sin found in Holy Scriptures, which, apparently, are directed to the Prophets, are in reality intended for the people. In the same way, when the Prophets make confession of sin, their words must not be interpreted literally, for all of them were sinless. Their purpose was to encourage their followers to humility and meekness, and to confession of sins.² All the Prophets are sinless, but only those of

the first class mentioned above are sinless by nature. The others are protected by God from sin, so their sinlessness is acquired. This acquired sinlessness is granted to every holy soul. It will also be granted to the Universal House of Justice when that is established under the necessary conditions. All that the Prophets say is the word of God, and all the things which they command are righteous. Obedience to them is incumbent upon all believers, and none has the right to criticise them. The attitude of the

Mof., pp. 120 ff.

ibid., pp. 126 ff.

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believer must be one of absolute submission.¹ Every Prophet knows the contents of the Books brought by other Prophets. He may not have seen those Books, he may not have seen those Prophets in the flesh, but he knows all their secrets.² The knowledge of the Prophets is not acquired knowledge, it is divine knowledge—that is to say, it is a divine revelation. They are aware of “the reality of the mysteries of beings” and so they establish laws which are suitable and adapted to the conditions of human life.³ The influence of Islam is clearly seen in his teaching of the sinlessness of the Prophets, and in the doctrine of the prophetic cycles, which is merely the Islamic teaching that each Prophet abrogates the laws of his predecessor expressed in a different way. His teaching of the universal cycle and of the universal Manifestation is a development of the “Beyan” teaching about “Him whom God shall make manifest,” and of Baha’u’llah’s own teaching. Baha’u’llah taught that after a thousand years another Manifestation can be expected, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha makes the Coming One subservient to Baha’u’llah. His teaching about the two classes of Prophets is a development of the ordinary Moslem teaching, and it is chiefly interesting because it allows a place for him among the Prophets. He can be numbered with the Prophets of the second class, and though he is thus dependent upon Baha’u’llah, and draws his light from him, yet he is the possessor of no mean station, and can claim acquired sinlessness.

b) Miracles

All the Manifestations could work miracles. Nothing was too difficult or impossible for them, for they were

Mof., pp. 129 ff.

Mok., Vol. II, p. 80.

Mof., pp. 118 ff.

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endowed with exceptional powers, and all of them did work miracles.¹ Though Baha’u’llah did work miracles, he does not wish to mention them, for the listener may not accept them as true.

Those miracles were, however, numerous, and acknowledged even by outsiders.² Thus, though he denies the absurd story current in Islam that Mohammad split the moon into two parts, ³ he does ascribe miracles to Mohammad. This is contrary to the teaching of the Qor'an, which declares that Mohammad was not given power to work miracles. When the Jews and Christians demanded miracles from him as a proof of his mission, Mohammad answered that the Qor'an was his miracle, and that he was not sent with miracles, as the infidels of old had despised them.⁴ With this the teaching of the Traditions also agrees. In the Shi'ah book of Traditions called "Hayatu'l-Qulub" an interesting explanation is given as to why Mohammad had no miracle other than the Qor'an. In the time of Moses magic was the chief accomplishment of the age; in the time of Christ healing was the great art; in the time of Mohammad literature was considered the greatest of all arts. Thus it was that Moses, Christ, and Mohammad each came endowed with the power that best befitted the need of his own age. 'Abdu'l-Baha's teaching is, therefore, a departure from that current in Islam. But though he teaches that all the Prophets worked miracles, he only discusses the miracles of Christ, and, strange to say, his discussion is a virtual denial of the truth of those miracles! Miracles are of no importance; they are signs and proofs only for those who see them. They cannot be quoted

Mof., pp. 77 f.

ibid., pp. 28 f.

ibid., p. 18.

Surah Ankabut, vv. 48 ff.; Surah Asra, v. 61.

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as proofs to-day, for men can always argue that the stories are fabrications. The real miracle performed by Christ was the work He did for the world, and the way in which He influenced the whole of the subsequent history of the world. Were a blind man to receive his sight it would make no difference in the end, for when death came blindness would once more be his lot. Were a dead body raised to life, what would be gained by it? Death would come to it eventually. Such miracles are useless and of no importance, for eternal life is all that matters, and the gift of that is the true gift of life. That is what Christ Himself meant when He said to one of His disciples, "Let the dead bury the dead, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." Those who apparently were alive were in reality dead, for life really means eternal life. Accordingly, when the Scriptures speak of raising the dead to life, the meaning is that souls spiritually dead received the gift of eternal life. When the blind receive their sight, it is spiritual sight; when the deaf have their hearing restored, it means that they acquire spiritual hearing. That this is so is proved

by the Gospel itself, for Christ said that these are like those of whom Isaiah said, "They have eyes but they see not, ears have they and hear not, and I heal them." The Manifestations could work miracles, but spiritual sight, spiritual understanding, and eternal life were the things that mattered to them, and the Scriptures must be interpreted accordingly. 1

'Abdu'l-Baha has utterly failed to see the teaching value of the miracles of Christ, and has not understood

Mof., pp. 77 f.

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that Christ neither regarded them as signs and proofs, nor used them as such. Christ did not work miracles and then demand faith. He demanded faith and then worked miracles. The real interest of this teaching lies in the use that 'Abdu'l-Baha makes of the Gospels, because it serves as an example of the method commonly followed by all Baha'ís when interpreting other Scriptures. In the first case he takes two sayings of Christ on totally different occasions, and combines them to suit his own argument. In the second he manages by slightly altering the words of Christ to convey the meaning he wants.

c) The Scriptures

He has very little to tell us about the Scriptures, but that little is important. The later the Book, the greater its value,¹ so the Qor'an and the Babí-Baha'í books are all of more value than the Bible. The "Aqdas", though totally unsuited to the needs of to-day, abrogates all previous Scriptures,² and yet, though Baha'ism has spread West, no English translation is in use among Western Baha'ís! They have accepted the prophet, but are ignorant of his teaching!

d) Sin and evil

In view of his pantheistic theology it is only to be expected that 'Abdu'l-Baha should deny the reality of free-will. Man has the choice of doing good or evil, but that choice is only psychological. All effective causality is referred to the will of God.³ The only way in which it is possible to escape from making God

Mok., Vol. II, p. 70.

ibid., Vol. I, p. 343.

Mof., pp. 187 ff.

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the direct author of evil, which is the logical outcome of this teaching, is to deny the origin of evil, and this he unhesitatingly does. Evil is the absence of good; poverty is the absence of wealth; imperfection is the absence of perfection; ignorance is the absence of knowledge. All that is in existence is good, and these opposites are referred to absence or nothingness. But if it be objected that serpents and scorpions exist and are evil, the answer is obvious: they are evil only in relation to man. In relation to themselves they

are not evil, but their poison is their weapon of defence. Thus evil does not exist, and all that God created is good.¹

Since evil is relative, a similar doctrine of sin is to be expected.

According to 'Abdu'l-Baha, the teaching that death entered the world as a consequence of the sin of Adam, and that Adam's guilt became the heritage of the human race, is entirely wrong, and arose from a misunderstanding of the teachings of St. Paul. St. Paul, he tells us, was referring to the physical imperfections when he spoke of death. Adam was the cause of physical life, and the physical world of man is a world of imperfections. These imperfections are shared by the animals, but only in the case of man can they be regarded as sin. They are strongest in man when he has not received spiritual education, as is clear from the condition of the cannibals of Africa. Sin is therefore the lack of perfections, which again is due to lack of training. It is attachment to the world, which in relation to the spiritual world is considered as sin. The sin in man is relative to his position. His imperfections are shared by the animals, but are not

“S. of W.”, Vol. XIX, No. 12, p. 379; Mof., pp. 198 f.

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sin in them, whilst his good deeds are the sins of the Cherubim (lit., Near Ones). Bodily power is weakness in relation to spiritual power, and physical life is death in relation to eternal life.¹

e) Salvation

Attachment to the world is the cause of the bondage of spirits, and this bondage is identical with sin. Salvation, therefore, means freedom from this bondage, which is eternal life.² But eternal life is impossible without the knowledge of God, and as God can only be known in His Manifestations, submission to them is a necessary condition of salvation.³ Here we are forcibly reminded of the Sufi teaching and practice. The first step taken by the Sufi is the putting of himself under the guidance of a “Pír”, or spiritual director, whose voice is to him the voice of God. The Perfect Educator of 'Abdu'l-Baha's teaching would seem to fulfil the same functions as the Sufi “Pír”. Apart from the Manifestation, the believer cannot attain to eternal life. Good works alone are useless, unless they are sustained by the knowledge of God. Good works become perfect when to the knowledge of God are joined the love of God, attraction, ecstasy, and good-will.⁴ By placing himself under the guidance of the Manifestation the believer is enabled to detach himself from the world, and to attain to ecstatic union with the Deity.

f) Love

The first principle of God, Love, is the creative principle. It is an outpouring from God, and is pure

Mof., pp. 89 ff., 92 ff., and 5 f.

ibid., pp. 92 ff.

ibid., pp. 110 f., 221 ff.

Mok., Vol. II, p. 305; Khat., Vol. I, p. 105; Mof., pp. 221 ff.

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spirit. It is one aspect of the Logos, the Holy Spirit. It is the immediate cause of the laws which govern Nature, and it reflects the positive aspect of God. It is active, creative, spiritual.¹ If the love of God did not exist, the contingent world would be in darkness, and the hearts of men would be dead, and deprived of the sensations of existence. It is this power that unifies mankind and removes all differences from among men. The Love of God is the spirit of life, and it gives to man the life of the Kingdom. ² Love is therefore the power which keeps the world together; it is the Holy Spirit, it is the Logos. This conception of God as Love in a cosmic sense is also found in Sufism, the influence of which is to be seen in almost all his teachings. To be filled with the love of God, to lose self in the ocean of the Deity, is the highest aim of the Baha'í. When the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles, they gained new life through the spirit of the Love of God. They detached themselves from the things of the world, they sacrificed their body and soul to the Beloved, and even forgot their own existence.³ In short, they attained to ecstatic union with the Deity. This, as we saw, is the meaning of salvation, but behind it lies the Sufi conception of God as Love in a cosmic sense. This is a very different thing from the Christian conception of the love of God. When we can feel that God loves us as a father loves his children, when we can feel that He cares for us as individuals, personality has a new value, and finite individuality comes into its own. We become in reality sons of God. The aim of the Baha'í is to lose himself in God, but the Christian finds himself in God. The consciousness of the Father-

“Scrip.”, pp. 300 f.

Mof., pp. 221 f.

ibid., pp. 81 f.

12. The teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha : Part III 163

hood of God arouses in him the consciousness of his sonship, and instead of forgetting his existence, he realises it in its fullness. The difference between the Christian conception of the love of God and the Baha'í conception can be illustrated by two quotations. St. John said, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”¹ Baha'u'llah said, “O Son of existence! Love Me that I may love thee. If thou lovest not Me, My love can never reach thee. Know this, O servant.”² Finally, there remains to be considered his teaching about love as a principle of conduct. Baha'ism, as we have already seen, claims to unite all men in love, and to remove all causes of difference,³ but every step in the growth of the movement was marked by

bitterness and strife, which even found expression in bloodshed. 'Abdu'l-Baha himself felt nothing but hatred for his opponents, and he declared that Baha'u'llah constantly prayed that the Covenant-breakers be wiped out,⁴ and constantly expressed his hatred for them.⁵ Yet, in spite of this, he bids us love our enemies, and tells us were it not for the law of God Baha'u'llah would have been ready to kiss the hands of those who wished to kill him. ⁶ We must love others, even if they slay us, even though they are doing us harm.⁷ Yet he himself has no faith in the power of love to change the human heart. "You cannot love a tyrant, a traitor, or a thief, for kindness will only make him worse, it will not arouse his better nature.

I John 4:10.

Kalimat, p. 3; "Scrip.," p. 172.

Mok., Vol. I, pp. 363 f.

Mof., Vol. III, p. 86.

ibid., pp. 414 f.

Khat., Vol. I, p. 107.

"Scrip.," p. 450.

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The kinder you are to a liar, the more will he lie."¹ This was 'Abdu'l-Baha's own experience; having failed to love his own enemies he knew not the power of love. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."² The Gospel of Jesus is a gospel of redeeming love, love that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things." 'Abdu'l-Baha knew nothing of that love, it passed his comprehension. Jesus knew what was in man, knew to what depths of infamy he could fall, but he believed in man. 'Abdu'l-Baha despairs of one liar, Jesus believes in man in spite of his failures and sins. He died for man because He believed in man. "To make us believe this (that reality is what God sees and not what we see) is the greatest service the divine can do for the human. It was the service Christ was always doing, and nothing showed His divinity more. He took us men and He called us, unworthy as we were, His brethren, the sons of God. He took such a one as Simon, shifting and unstable, a quicksand of a man, and He said, 'On this rock I will build My Church.' A man's reality is not what he is in his own feelings, or what he is to the world's eyes; but what he is to God's love, to God's yearning, and in God's plan. If he believes that, so in the end shall he feel it, so in the end shall he show it to the eyes of the world."³ Jesus alone can save the world, because Jesus alone believes in man.

Mok., Vol. III, p. 211.

I John 4:8.

George Adam Smith, "Isaiah," Vol. II, pp. 385 f.

The doctrine of the
person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

We have already seen that ‘Abdu’l-Baha denied that he desired any position for himself save that which his title implied—the Slave of Baha. The purpose of this short chapter is to show the position accorded to ‘Abdu’l-Baha by his followers. It cannot be said that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was directly responsible for the growth of a doctrine as to his person, for when questioned he invariably denied the statements that were being made about his rank. Yet he cannot be exonerated from all blame, for he was fully aware of the teachings of Dr Kheiru’llah, and consented to them in so far as he approved of him as a missionary. Furthermore, it was Mírza Abu’l-Fazl of Gulpaygan who undertook the task of proving from Holy Scripture that the coming of ‘Abdu’l-Baha had been foretold, and he was the leading Baha’í propagandist, and high in the favour of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. His “Rasaleh-i Istidlalíyeh” was written when the dispute between ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Mohammad ‘Alí was at its height, and was a reply to a book written and issued under the name of Hají Seyyid Taqí with the purpose of winning the Baha’ís over to the side of Mohammad ‘Alí. It is hardly probable, therefore, that it was issued without the knowledge of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, so we are forced to the conclusion

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that, in spite of his many denials when questioned, he did approve of this teaching. That this doctrine did not originate with him, we know, but his later writings would seem to show that he approved of it sufficiently to allow room for it in his teachings. We saw, for instance, that he teaches that there are two classes of Prophets, independent and dependent, and two kinds of infallibility, essential and acquired. Acquired infallibility is a quality of the dependent Prophets, and inasmuch as he did claim such infallibility as the sole interpreter of Baha’í doctrine, we can reasonably assume that he claimed to be a Prophet of the second class. This becomes more probable still when we remember that the duty of Prophets of this class is to promote the teachings of the independent Prophet under whose shadow they appear, and this was exactly what he claimed to do. Thus he did allow room in his teachings for a doctrine of his person such as that which Mírza Abu’l-Fazl set out to teach.

The teaching given in Mírza Abu’l-Fazl’s book is based, for the most part, on Bible passages, and will best be understood if these passages are quoted.

“Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are they that put their trust in him.”¹ It is not necessary to suppose that Mírza Abu’l-Fazl

regarded Baha'u'llah as God, but the use of Holy Scripture by him is best interpreted by assuming that he regarded all references to God as applicable to the Manifestations, so that here 'Abdu'l-Baha is not

Ps. 2:10–12.

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the Son of God, but the son of His Manifestation. But the station thus given to 'Abdu'l-Baha is an exceedingly high one. Implicit obedience to him is incumbent upon all, for salvation depends on his good-will.¹

The next two passages are interesting because they throw light on the Baha'i method of interpreting Holy Scripture. When a passage contains a clause, or clauses, which would render it unsuited to the commentator's purpose, the offending words are omitted, and the rest of the passage is used.

“In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped.”² The verse is cut short, and the words “of Israel” are omitted.³

“And speak unto him saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the Branch, and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory and sit upon his throne.”⁴ Here again the passage is cut short, and the words “and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” are omitted. Mirza Abu'l-Fazl's explanation of these words is as follows: “And these gracious verses and great tidings are exceedingly clear. After the occultation of the Blessed Lord, the Branch of His Excellency shall sit on the throne of praise. The Branch that springeth forth from the Ancient Stock shall take his place upon the throne of glory, and shall build the temple of the Lord, in other

Rasaleh, pp. 13 f.

Isaiah 4:2.

Rasaleh, p. 14.

Zech. 6:12 f.

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words, he shall build the place around which the arch-angels circle, and shall make the word of God powerful and victorious in East and West.”¹ The verses refer to the appointment of Zerubbabel as king, and Joshua the High Priest as co-ruler with him, but 'Abdu'l-Baha rules alone, so the final words of the passage had to be omitted! We have already seen in a previous chapter that 'Abdu'l-Baha is called the Most Mighty Branch, so no further comment is necessary.

“Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people,

and healeth the stroke of their wound.”² Here the sun is said to be Baha’u’llah, and the moon ‘Abdu’l-Baha. “In the day of the Lord the abundant lights of the Moon of the Covenant and Centre of the Covenant shall be as the abundant lights of the Sun of the Horizons, and the lights of the rays of the Sun of the Horizons shall shine seven times more bright and more glorious than did the previous Manifestations.”³

From these passages it is evident that ‘Abdu’l-Baha, seated on the throne of glory, was God’s vice-regent on earth, and was clothed with a light like unto that of Baha’u’llah, which was seven times more glorious than that of any previous Prophet.

“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee, for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone there shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the

Rasaleh, p. 16.

Isaiah 30:26.

Rasaleh, pp. 14 f.

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Lord of Hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”¹ We once more recognise ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the Branch, but the passage tells us nothing else, for, to quote Mírza Abu’l-Fazl, “In these verses there are subtle references, but this is not an opportune moment to enter into details”!²

“For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”³ “This is a clear gospel that the coming of the Spirit will be under the shadow of the coming of the Lord, and the glory of the Son shall appear on the day when splendour of the Father dawns.”⁴

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”⁵ This is said to refer to the coming of Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha, when the cycle of Islam is finished.⁶

“And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”⁷

There is nothing in the teaching of Baha’u’llah to justify this method of interpretation, for, though he teaches that all references to God in Scripture are to be read as referring to the Manifestation, he definitely claims to possess an unique station which is shared by none.⁸ Throughout Mírza Abu’l-Fazl’s teaching we see the tendency to associate ‘Abdu’l-Baha with his father as possessing equal glory. He sits on the throne of glory, and the kingdom is equally his.

Salvation

Zech. 3:8 f.

Rasaleh, pp. 15 f.

St. Matt. 14:27.

Rasaleh, p. 17.

Rev. 11:15.

Rasaleh, p. 17.

Rev.21:22.

“Aqdas”, p. 18.

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depends not on acceptance of Baha'u'llah, but on obedience to his son. It is 'Abdu'l-Baha who judges men, and rewards them according to their deeds. He is no longer the interpreter of Baha'i teaching and the slave of Baha'u'llah, he is the co-ruler, showing forth in himself all the glory that belonged to Baha'u'llah as the perfect Manifestation. True, Mirza Abu'l-Fazl does distinguish between them, for he tells us that the son came in the shadow of the father, but he gives to the son a station which, from the point of view of the “Aqdas”, belonged to Baha'u'llah alone.

In view of the immense changes that he intended to bring about in the movement, it was necessary for 'Abdu'l-Baha that he should have the support of the main body of Baha'is. The position accorded him by Baha'u'llah was not such as he could be content to accept, for it set definite limits to his authority, and hampered his plans. The schism that took place soon after his accession to power warned him of the strength of the opposition. He was careful enough not to make any excessive claims for himself, but he made full use of the opportunity given him by others. Wherever the teachings of Mirza Abu'l-Fazl spread, 'Abdu'l-Baha was hailed as a prophet, and his writings found a place along with those of Baha'u'llah as inspired Scripture.

There is a definite tendency in modern Baha'ism to deify Baha'u'llah, and 'Abdu'l-Baha is exalted along with him. So we find him hailed by the title of “He whom God wills”, and by the still more splendid title of “The Most Mighty Branch of God”.¹ So, too, it is suggested that he was endowed with the power of working miracles. “With regard to what is commonly

urus, p. 30.

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called ‘miracle-working’. ‘Abdu'l-Baha taught that this may be incidental to, but not alone a proof of prophethood, being but the outworking of laws as yet little known or understood by man. But, naturally, around His household wonderful and inexplicable things constantly occurred. And in lives that are purified and dedicated to His service, a divine power manifests itself in many mysterious ways.”¹ How important a place 'Abdu'l-Baha holds in present-day Baha'ism is clearly seen from this passage. It is not only implied that he was a prophet, but Baha'ism is regarded as his religion, for

service is his service, and from him comes divine power to strengthen the believer.

The position given him in Persia is clearly indicated by Sheikh Muhammadu'n-Nateq, who declares that 'Abdu'l-Baha was chosen to succeed his father solely on account of his character. The successor of Baha'u'llah needed to be distinguished above all men, and to possess in himself the divine attributes and perfections, His position in Baha'ism is that of 'Alí in Shí'ah Islam. 'Alí was the first

Imam, and the Imams as the successors of the Prophet are regarded as sinless. Their word is the word of God, their authority is the authority of God. They are wiser than the most learned men of their age, and holier than the most pious. They are adorned with all the qualities possessed by the Prophet (Mohammad), and obedience to them is incumbent upon all.² 'Abdu'l-Baha, therefore, whilst dependent upon Baha'u'llah in the sense that the Imams were dependent upon Mohammad, is yet endowed with all the qualities possessed by Baha'u'llah. He is the bearer of the divine mysteries, the possessor

Florence Pincheon in "S. of W.", Vol. XVIII, No. 12, p. 363. Sell, p. 97.

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of the Holy Spirit, and the centre of knowledge and divine inspiration.¹ This teaching thus agrees with that of Mírza Abu'l-Fazl.

The place 'Abdu'l-Baha has come to occupy in modern Baha'ism is still more clearly seen from the official Tablets of Shouqí Effendí, the present Guardian of the Cause, and the successor of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The present author has in his possession a number of these Tablets issued during the years 1924–1926, all of which bear the signature of the copyist, who invariably describes himself as "The sacrifice of the gate, and the servant of the threshold of His Excellency 'Abdu'l-Baha, may His glory be great, 'Alí Akbar Rohaní." The Bab is all but forgotten; his successor Mírza Yahya, "The Morning of Eternity", is remembered only as Satan;² the service of Baha'u'llah has become the service of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and the light of the "Moon" has eclipsed that of the "Sun".

Mun., pp. 226 ff.

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 411 ff.

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The Bab taught that all the Scriptures were sent down to prepare the world for the coming of "Him whom God shall manifest". It was only natural, therefore, that he should declare the Gospel to be the Book of God, He brings Islam into line with the Gospel as part of one great Revelation. The Gospel was a gift from God to Mohammad, and the latter perfected it. It is essentially

identical with the Qor'an and the Beyan. It is obvious that he was acquainted with the Gospel, for its influence upon his teaching is very marked,¹ but nowhere does he adduce proofs from it. His teaching that Mohammad fulfilled and perfected the Gospel was carried to its logical conclusion by Baha'u'llah, who devoted a considerable portion of the book "Iqan" to the interpretation of the Gospel.

There is a very general belief among Moslems that the Scriptures now in the possession of Jews and Christians are corrupt. The Traditions say that Jesus took the genuine Gospel with Him when He returned to heaven. The impossibility of the teaching that the Bible has been corrupted has long ago been shown, and need not be discussed here, whilst the growth of education makes it impossible for men to believe that our Lord took the genuine Gospel with Him at His ascension, so

Noq., Index lxviii.

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that thinking Moslems are prepared to admit the authenticity of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. In view of the great importance attached to the Bible by Baha'ís, they are compelled to accept the Christian Scriptures as genuine, even though individual Baha'ís are wont, when defeated in argument, to resort to the old accusation that the Christians have corrupted the Gospel. Baha'u'llah's teaching on the point is very definite. He declares that the accusation has neither meaning nor foundation,¹ but is an invention of the Moslem mullas, who, failing to prove the prophethood of Mohammad from the Bible, were compelled to compose a falsehood.² As for the teaching that Jesus took the Gospel with Him to heaven, it is foolish, and the people who hold it are fools.³ But there is a sense in which the Scriptures have been changed. Though the text of the Scriptures is undoubtedly genuine, the meaning has been changed and corrupted by the clergy, who have consistently misinterpreted it. The failure of the Christians to accept Mohammad when he came was entirely due to the fact that they had lost sight of the true meaning of their Scriptures. That, in short, is the teaching of the "Iqan". That being so, the next thing, obviously, was to show the true purpose and meaning of the Bible, and that he proceeds to do, choosing as his main subject the eschatological teaching of the First Gospel.

Baha'u'llah must be given the credit for inventing the method of Bible interpretation which became a distinguishing feature of Baha'ism, and which was of great value when the movement spread to the West. In the course of this chapter it will not be possible to

"Iqan", p. 73. See *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 83–4 & 86. *ibid.*, pp. 70 f.

ibid., p. 75.

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discuss the use made of the Bible by more recent Baha'í writers, but an attempt will be made to show the method adopted, and a detailed criticism will be given of the interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Baha of certain portions of the Apocalypse.

It must be borne in mind that Baha'u'llah regards the Traditions of Islam as of equal value with the Bible, and passages from them are quoted along with Gospel verses, or ideas directly derived from them are introduced into the interpretation of Gospel verses.

Although, strictly speaking, we are not concerned with his use of Islamic Traditions, yet it is important that we should realise that behind his interpretation of the Gospel lies a Moslem conception of Christ. To him Christ is but one of the Prophets, who is in no sense the Saviour of the World. He accepts the Qor'an teaching that Christ did not die on the Cross (though the Qor'an teaching is not consistent on this point), and thus denies the truth of the Atonement. "What else shall I tell you? Shall I tell you what happened to that Exalted One (Jesus) after he had said these words, and how they behaved towards him? In the end so set were they on killing him that he fled to the fourth heaven."¹ The influence of the Moslem Traditions is very clear here, and need not be discussed, but it is necessary to point out that it is this view of Christ which makes his interpretation of Gospel passages possible. Some of the methods of interpretation used by Baha'í writers are already familiar to the reader. We saw in the last chapter how Mírza Abu'l-Fazl quoted portions of Bible passages, omitting any clauses that

"Iqan", p. 111.

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were unsuitable to his argument, and we further saw how 'Abdu'l-Baha combined totally unrelated passages, and slightly modified others so as to obtain the necessary meaning,¹ but a fuller discussion is now necessary. It will be more convenient to divide our study into three parts: (a) the use and interpretation of corrupted texts; (b) the use and interpretation of genuine Gospel verses; (c) the use and interpretation of lengthy passages from the book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. As this book is intended chiefly for missionaries who come into daily contact with Baha'ís, and since great prominence is given by all Baha'ís to the interpretation of certain portions of the Apocalypse by 'Abdu'l-Baha, the author feels justified in devoting the greater part of this chapter to a detailed discussion of the interpretation in question.

(a) One of the doctrines that Baha'u'llah took over from Babism was the doctrine of "Rij'at", which implies that all the Prophets are "returns" of one and the same Spirit, which thus appears in the

world in different ages, to different peoples, and under a different name. So Jesus is Moses returned, and Mohammad is Jesus returned. This doctrine is definitely and clearly expressed in the words, "In the same way he (Mohammad) said, 'I am the first Adam, and Noah, and Moses, and Jesus.'"² Baha'u'llah uses corrupted Gospel verses to support this teaching. "He (Jesus) said, 'I go and I come again', and in another place he said, 'Another will come who shall say that which I have not said, and fulfil that which I have said', and these two sayings are in reality one."³ These words which he attributes to Jesus are corruptions of St. John 14:25,

Chapter XII above.

"Iqan", p. 128.

ibid., p. 17.

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26, "These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (R. V. translation). The first saying is also found in a different form from that given by Baha'u'llah in the third and eighteenth verses of the same chapter. Baha'u'llah by corrupting these verses interprets them to mean that Jesus foretold the coming of another Prophet, who would bring a higher revelation than that contained in the Gospel, in that it would add to and fulfil the latter, and the bearer of this new revelation would be a "return" of Jesus.

In the "Baha'i Scriptures" we read: "For this reason Jesus said, 'I will go and come again.' Even as the sun:"¹ but the Persian original would allow of another reading, which considerably changes the meaning of the passage, namely: "For this reason Jesus Himself said, 'I go and come again like the sun.'"² The present author has consulted several Persians as to the true meaning of this passage, and both explanations have been given. We must therefore regard the words as ambiguous, and no importance can be given to the passage, but a suspicion remains that words are attributed to Jesus which are foreign to His thought. We can agree with Him when He teaches that true wealth is spiritual, and worldly poverty is not the true poverty; we can regard our Lord, who had nowhere to rest His head, as wealthy in His poverty, having nothing and possessing all things; but we cannot condone Baha'u'llah's action in corrupting Gospel texts in order

"Scrip.", p. 8.

"Iqan", p. 18.

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to support such a teaching. He declares that Christ at His trial said, "Do not you see that the Son of Man is sitting on the right hand of authority and divine power?" whilst He was apparently devoid of

all power.¹ The words used by Christ to refer to the future² are changed so as to refer to the present. The whole meaning of the passage is thus changed, and Christ is reduced to the level of a Prophet.

'Abdu'l-Baha makes a similar use of corrupted verses. He declares that in the days of previous Manifestations men were not capable of receiving the highest teaching (lit., exceedingly strong medicine), and so Christ said, "There are many things that must be told, but you are not able to hear them, but when that comforting Spirit comes, whom the Father will send, he will set forth the truth for you."³ The only change in the words that concerns us is the substitution of the words "that comforting Spirit" for "he, the Spirit of Truth".⁴ The words are then made to refer to Baha'u'llah. In another connection he makes these words apply to Mohammad, once more using the phrase "that comforting Spirit," but more interesting still is his use of the phrase "that holy Spirit" for "the Holy Spirit", where the substitution of the demonstrative for the definite article completely changes the meaning of the term.⁵ It will be seen from the above examples that very little change is necessary in order to make the Gospel words applicable to another Prophet, and this is constantly done by 'Abdu'l-Baha. For this part of our study these examples must suffice.

"Iqan", p. 111.

St. Matt. 26:64.

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 251 f.

cf. St. John 16:13.

Mok., Vol. II, pp. 59 ff.

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(b) We now come to the interpretation of genuine Gospel verses. The only Gospel verses discussed at any length by Baha'u'llah are eschatological in character, and a considerable part of the book "Iqan" is devoted to their interpretation. In the Gospel we read: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet."¹ The interpretation of these verses by Baha'u'llah became the model for all later Baha'í attempts to interpret the Scriptures, and it is therefore given in full. A procedure which is also made necessary by the statement that the Christians rejected Mohammad because they had failed to understand the meaning of this passage.

In the "Iqan" the passage is interpreted clause by clause, and the

same method will therefore be followed here.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days”—the “tribulation” precedes the coming of every Manifestation. It is a period of spiritual darkness when the warmth of the rays of the Sun of Truth is no longer felt and the fruits of the tree of wisdom have vanished from among men. It is a time when men are in the thralldom of ignorance, and the gates of the Unity (God) and of knowledge are closed to them. At such a time men do as they like, and God is but a name to them,

St. Matt. 24:29–31a; 31b is omitted.

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whilst desire for God never goes beyond words. In short, it is a time when men are spiritually dead. Such a period precedes the coming of every Manifestation, indeed it is an essential prelude to it.¹

“Shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven”—the sun and the moon have a figurative meaning here. This meaning is twofold. In the first place, these words refer to the clergy of the religions founded by previous Manifestations. In the day of their own Manifestation they were bright lights to guide people, but when new Manifestations came and they failed to recognise them, their light became darkness.² Secondly, sun, moon and stars are figurative expressions for the laws of previous Manifestations which are abrogated at the coming of a new Manifestation. In their day these gave light to men, but their light now becomes darkness. Both these meanings are implied in this verse.³

“And the powers of heaven shall be shaken”:⁴—the word “heaven” is here figuratively used for the religion of a former Manifestation, which was in its day great and powerful, but is abrogated at the coming of a new Manifestation.⁴

“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man”—which sign is the glory of the Promised One.⁵ This sign is to appear in heaven, and this again has two meanings. The appearance of every Prophet has been marked by the appearance of some sign in the heavens. A star marked the place where Jesus was born, and similar portents marked the coming of Moses, Mohammad and the Bab, and this is the first meaning of the verse.

“Iqan”, p. 25.

ibid., pp. 28 ff.

ibid., pp. 32 ff.

ibid., p. 34.

ibid., p. 22.

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The second meaning is spiritual. John the Baptist was like a star in the spiritual heaven, and he was the herald of Jesus. The coming of every one of the Prophets was announced by a herald, and this is

the second meaning of the verse.¹

“And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn”—for in those days the saints shall mourn the disappearance of the Sun of the divine grace, of the Moon of knowledge, and of the Stars of wisdom.² “And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”—they shall all realise the great and lofty station of the Manifestation, for that is the meaning of the word heaven in this sentence.³ The clouds, too, have a figurative meaning, and represent all the various things that cause people to doubt, and prevent them from accepting the Manifestation. Among these may be mentioned the poverty of the Prophets, and their oppressed state, together with the fact that they were innovators, and offended people by the changes they introduced. Their power and glory are clearly seen from the fact that they all exerted a tremendous influence on the course of the world’s history.⁴

“And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet”—and these angels are undoubtedly those who, burning with zeal, serve the cause of the Manifestation.⁵

Far-fetched as this interpretation is (four meanings were necessary for the one word “heaven”), it is yet superior to those which we shall consider next, for it is free of the inconsistencies which are such a

Iqan”, pp. 52 ff.

ibid., pp. 55 f.

ibid., p. 56.

ibid., pp. 59 ff.

ibid., p. 66.

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marked feature of the interpretations given by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. The interpretation, clever though it may be, cannot be taken seriously, for it ignores the background of the passage, and substitutes a background of Islamic legend and tradition. For instance, he tells us that before Abraham (who is one of the great Prophets according to Moslem teaching) was born, Nimrod had a dream and summoned the soothsayers, who warned him that a new star had appeared in the sky. The coming of Moses was similarly marked, and a wise man appeared among the children of Israel, who consoled and assured them of the coming fulfilment of that recorded in their books.¹ This interpretation, therefore, presupposes a belief in both the Qor’an and the Traditions of Islam, according to which Abraham was granted “books” whilst Nimrod was the tyrant who oppressed Abraham and desired to make war on Abraham’s God. ² It is noteworthy that the only reference to Nimrod contained in the Old Testament implies that he was a worshipper of Yahweh.³

It is important to notice that according to the interpretation here given the Bab was no mere herald of Baha'u'llah, but a Prophet of equal importance with Jesus and Mohammad, whose coming was heralded by the appearance of a new star in the phenomenal heaven, and by two bright lights, Ahmad and Kazem (the Sheikhí leaders), in the spiritual heaven.⁴ The Christian missionary is therefore never called upon to refute this interpretation; all he need do is show that, if this teaching is true, the Bab was in no sense the herald of

“Iqan”, pp. 52 f.

cf. Sale, “The Koran”, p. 246, footnotes.

Gen. 10:3 ff.

“Iqan”, p. 55.

14. The Bible in Baha'ism 183

Baha'u'llah, and the claims made for the latter are devoid of any justification.

(c) We now come to the interpretation of certain passages from the Apocalypse. This interpretation is found in the book “Mofavezat”, which consists of table-talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. As the purpose of this discussion is the refutation of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s interpretation, only those verses are quoted which are necessary to the fulfilment of that purpose. The Revised Version of the Bible is used throughout, because it corresponds with the version used by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. Two chapters of the Apocalypse are interpreted by him, and these will be considered separately.

a) Interpretation of Rev. of St. John chap. 11

“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. And the court which is without the temple leave without, and measure it not; for it hath been given unto the nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”¹ The reed mentioned in this verse signifies a perfect man. When a reed is empty and hollow, it produces perfect melodies, but those melodies come from the musician and not from the reed. In the same way, when the sanctified heart is emptied of all but God, it becomes the channel of divine inspiration. So the perfect man is a reed, and as such he can also be likened to a rod, for as the rod of the Divine Shepherd he guards the latter’s flock, and leads them about the

St. John 11:1–2.

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pastures of the Kingdom. This interpretation is undoubtedly ingenious, but it hardly explains the verse. If the reed is a person, then who is the person addressed, and what is meant by the giving of the reed to him? By measuring the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein is meant the discovering of the true

condition of the worshippers, and the acquirement of the knowledge of the mysteries of those holy souls who dwell in the Holy of Holies in purity and sanctity. It is obvious that the Holy of Holies is here interpreted in a figurative sense. Two interpretations are given by him, but we are concerned with one of them only—namely, what he calls the outward meaning of the verses. It is somewhat strange to find that in his interpretation of the next verse he accepts the literal meaning of the words. He tells us that when the Holy City was conquered at the beginning of the seventh century after Christ, the Holy of Holies, “that is to say, the house which Solomon built”, was outwardly preserved, whilst the outer court was taken and given to the Gentiles. Obviously, ‘Abdu’l-Baha knew nothing of the history of the Temple, for the building erected by Solomon was destroyed in the year 586 BC, whilst the later Temple was finally destroyed by the Emperor Titus in AD 70, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s interpretation is therefore historically impossible. The forty and two months in which the nations tread Jerusalem underfoot is, he tells us, the cycle of Islam. Forty and two months is equivalent to 1,260 days, and as each day stands for a year, this makes 1,260 years. This calculation is based upon the verse, “I have appointed thee each day for a year,”¹ which is regarded

Ezek. 4:6. A.V.

14. The Bible in Baha’ism 185

as the key to the chronology of the Bible! The Bab appeared in AH 1260, so the forty-two months are thus made to refer to the period from the Hegira to the coming of the Bab, which is the cycle of the Qor’an. This interpretation is in itself inconsistent, for if we accept his statement that the handing over of the outer court to the Gentiles, and the conquest of Jerusalem by them, refers to the seizing of the city by the Moslems, then we cannot count the 1,260 years from the Hegira, for the conquest of Jerusalem took place in the year AH 15, and the period of forty-two weeks would therefore end in AH 1275, nine years after the death of the Bab.

“And I will give (power) unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three-score days clothed in sackcloth. ... And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that cometh out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them. And their bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”¹ According to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, the two witnesses are Mohammad and ‘Alí, whilst the beast is the Omeyyad tribe which deprived ‘Alí of the Khalifate. The dead bodies are figurative for the Law of Islam, which during this period was scorned and neglected by men, and resembled a body without spirit. In making this interpretation he has ignored the fact that the two witnesses are to prophesy for a thousand two hundred and

three-score days, and that the beast will appear when the period of their testimony is finished. This had to be ignored in order to identify the beast with the

St. John 11:3, 7, 8.

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Omeyad tribe. If we accept the statement that the 1,260 years began with the Hegira, and that they are the cycle of Islam, then we have to place the appearance of the beast at the end of that period, so it coincides with the appearance of the Bab, who certainly did try to abrogate the laws of Islam!

Furthermore, the dead bodies of the two witnesses are to lie in the street of the city "where also their Lord was crucified." If the two witnesses are Mohammad and 'Alí, Jesus must be their Lord, and no Baha'í can accept this without denying the doctrine of "rij'at", according to which Mohammad is Jesus returned.

Further comment is really unnecessary, for all that he has succeeded in doing is to testify to the Lordship of Jesus, and to point to the Bab as the beast out of the abyss, which appeared at the end of the 1,260 years in order to kill the two witnesses.

Before we leave the interpretation of this chapter, we must pause to consider one more verse, which offers an excellent example of the method adopted by 'Abdu'l-Baha.

"And after three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon them which beheld them."1 We saw above that he interpreted the dead bodies to mean the Law of Islam, or the religion of God, which during the 1,260 years was as a dead body, so now the three and a half days are said to refer to the same period. The implication is that at the end of that period the Bab appeared and renewed religion. But how can three days and a half be made into 1,260 years? If one day stands for one year, then three and a half days

St. John 11:11.

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will be three and a half years. He gets over this difficulty by reducing the three and a half years to months, and the forty-two months thus obtained are reduced to days, and so we get 1,260 days, each of which then becomes a year. Thus one day comes to represent three hundred and sixty years! Unfortunately, even this will not avail to prove his case, for the three and a half days begin with the death of the two witnesses at the end of the forty and two months, and cannot possibly refer to the coming of the Bab, even if we accept his chronological scheme, for the resultant date will be AH 2520!1

b) Interpretation of Rev. of St. John chap. 12

"And a great sign was seen in heaven; a woman arrayed with

the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars”² The woman is said to be the Law of God that descended upon Mohammad, so the sun and moon represent Persia and Turkey respectively, both of which countries are Moslem. The twelve stars are the Twelve Imams, who promoted the Law of Islam. This interpretation is interesting because it would seem that ‘Abdu’l-Baha now accepts the Twelve Imams. We saw in Chapter 1 that there is considerable historical doubt as to whether there ever was such a person as the Twelfth Imam, and it would seem that neither ‘Abdu’l-Baha nor the Baha’ís in general accept him as a historical personage. Ja‘far, the brother of Imam Hasan ‘Askari, declared that his brother had died heirless, and the Shi‘ahs have consequently bestowed upon him the opprobrious sobriquet of Ja‘far the Liar (Kazzab),

Mof., pp. 35 ff.

St. John 12:1.

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but ‘Abdu’l-Baha declares that “Ja‘far out of truthfulness and sincerity spoke one word, and hitherto they have called him a liar.” (This is taken from a Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, a copy of which is in the author’s possession, and which is No. 15 in the MS. book entitled “Kitab men al-Ba qabl-i Ha”.) Mírza Abu’l-Fazl likewise declares that the Shi‘ahs are content to accept the testimony of “one woman and an ignorant servant” on such an important question as the existence of the Twelfth Imam,¹ whilst in a Baha’í teachers’ handbook it is definitely stated that the Immaculate Imams were eleven in number.² So it would seem that they only accept the Twelfth Imam when they find him indispensable.

“And there was seen another sign in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems.”³ The dragon is said to be the Omeyad tribe, and the seven heads and seven crowns are the seven countries over which they ruled. In order to get the seven, he is compelled to group some countries together and to leave others out altogether. But it is his interpretation of the ten horns that is interesting.

These are said to be the ten Omeyad Khalifs. But these Khalifs were fourteen in number—namely Muavia, Yezíd, Muavia, Mervan, ‘Abdu’l-Melek, Welíd, Suleiman, Omar, Yezíd, Hisham, Welíd, Yezíd, Ibrahím, and Mervan. It will be seen that in this succession the names Muavia, Welíd and Mervan occur twice, whilst Yezíd is found three times, so ‘Abdu’l-Baha declares that for the purpose of this interpretation these names must only be counted once, and the number is thus reduced to nine. In

Fara’ed, p. 156.

“Durus”, p. 9.

St. John 12:3.

order to bring them up to ten, he adds the name of Abí Sofian, the father of the first Muavia, whom he declares to have been the first of the Omeyad line, but this is incorrect, for the Omeyads are the descendants of Umaiya, the son of 'Abdu'l-Shams, and the grandfather of Abí Sofian. The division of Mecca into Hashimites and Omeyads goes back to the time of Umaiya, so it was necessity, and not history, that accounted for the inclusion of Abí Sofian's name in this list.

“And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”¹ The child is said to be the Bab, who was caught up to heaven at his death. The 1,260 days again represent the cycle of Islam from the Hegira to the coming of the Bab. The impossibility of this interpretation is evident from the fact that the period of 1,260 days begins with the translation of the child and the flight of the woman. As the Bab was killed in AH 1266, this period would come to an end in AH 2526!²

It is of interest to note that this chapter had been previously interpreted by the unknown author of the book “Dala'il-i 'Erfan” (the author's signature is in the unreadable Khatt-i Badí', and the book bears the date AH 1313), with which 'Abdu'l-Baha was undoubtedly acquainted. Here we find the statement made that each day must be counted a year when interpreting this passage, but the rest of the inter-

St. John 12:5–6.

Mof., pp. 52 ff.

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pretation differs somewhat in that the woman is said to be Fatimeh, the sun Mohammad, and the twelve stars the 'Imams, the last of whom is the Mahdí (Sahibu'l-'Asr ve al-Zaman). The child is the Bab, and the dragon represents the Omeyad and Abbasid Khalifs together with the Kings of the powerful nations.¹ The interpretation given is a bare outline, but it may well have influenced 'Abdu'l-Baha.

These are but a few of the many passages of the Bible which are used by Baha'í writers, but they are sufficient for our purpose, and the reader must be referred to the various books mentioned and quoted for further examples. The writings of Mírza Abu'l-Fazl of Gulpaygan, and in particular his book “Fara'ed”, should be read by all who desire to acquaint themselves with Baha'í thought.

“Dala'il”, pp. 111 f.

Worship in Baha'ism

The conception of worship varies greatly in the different religions, and no study of Baha'ism would be complete without some consideration of the place given to worship in that religion. Our conception of worship must depend on our conception of God and of the relationship in which man stands to God. Judaism, in spite of its legalism, provided the background for the Psalms, because the God of the Jew was essentially a personal God. Even the Priestly narrative shows us an intensely personal God. Neither the elaborate ritual of the Temple worship nor the numerous regulations governing that worship could conceal the wonder of the God of Israel. The description of the Tabernacle and of its furniture may be tiresome to read, but even there the character of the God of Israel shines out in a glorious flood of light. He is a personal God taking a personal interest in the worship offered Him, He is even interested in the pattern of the candlesticks used! Thus it was that in Judaism worship at times degenerated to mere formalism, whilst at other times it was the expression of real personal devotion to an intensely personal God. Islam, like Judaism, is legalistic, but it lacks the

Exod. 25.

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conception of God that made Judaism great. In Islam, too, we see men revolting against the formalism that so easily creeps into legalistic worship, but that revolt generally finds expression in a pantheistic mysticism like the Sufi philosophy. Nowhere do we see the intensely personal God of the Old Testament looking down upon us.

True prayer is only possible when God is conceived of as personal. The poor publican could stand in the Temple and pray because God was to him a personal God, and sin was a reality to him. The Pharisee had no such sense of sin, and could have no such conception of God.

We saw that behind Baha'i teaching about God there lies a background of Moslem legalism and Sufi pantheism, and that, therefore, there is no true belief in a personal God in Baha'ism. The result will be seen in the Baha'i conception of worship.

The student of Baha'i literature is at once struck by the great difference in the tone of the teaching of Baha'u'llah about worship compared with that of Baha'i books that have their origin in the West. We have already seen that Western Baha'ism is totally distinct from that of the East, and we can expect to find a distinct Christian influence helping to mould the thought of the former. An American Baha'i writes as follows: "Conscious prayer may be of two general kinds: first, the wordy, automatic, formalistic prayer that results from habit, and fails to touch the core of the heart; and, second, the sincere, heartfelt aspiration of the soul

expressed in thought, attitude or word, or in both attitude and word” and he then quotes some words attributed to

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‘Abdu’l-Baha. “God knows the wishes of all hearts, and answers them according to the individual need. But the impulse to pray is a natural one springing from man’s love to his Creator. If there be no love, if there be no pleasure or spiritual enjoyment in prayer, do not pray. Prayer should spring from love; from the desire of the person to commune with God.”¹ If God is not a personal God, then communion with Him is impossible, and this quotation in no way represents the Baha’í teaching about prayer. The real Baha’í aims not at communion with, but at union with God. But alongside this Sufí tendency in Baha’ism there runs another which finds its chief expression in the book “Aqdas”—the legalistic conception of worship derived from Islam through Babism. But it must not be thought that these two elements are contradictory, for even the Sufis accept the discipline of the “Sharí‘at” or Law,² and Baha’u’llah

himself, in the book “Haft Vadi’”, which is purely Sufí in character, declares that “On all these journeys (through the Seven Valleys) the pilgrim must not deviate one hair’s breadth from the Sharí‘at which is in truth the secret of the way (taríqal), and the fruit of the tree of Reality.”³

We are therefore justified in regarding the laws of the “Aqdas” as a discipline to be undergone by all who would attain to union with the Deity.

a) Congregational prayer

“Worship unites us in a fellowship of adoration; and, when it is worthily offered, can become for us all a joy as well as a duty, and brings us that refreshment and encouragement for which thousands are really

Dr Orrol L. Harper, “Why Pray?” “S. of W.”, Vol. XIX, No. 5, p. 146. Hughes “Dictionary”, article “Sufism”.

“Haft Vadi’”, p. 37.

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hungry, though they know not for what they hunger.”¹ Jesus always attended the synagogue services, and congregational worship became an essential part of the life of the Christian Church. From the very beginning Christians found joy and strength by uniting in a fellowship of adoration. In Islam congregational prayer is recognised as of great importance, particularly among the Sunnis. Baha’u’llah, however, declares that congregational prayer is unnecessary except in the case of the burial of the dead,² a law which he took over directly from the Bab.³ In view of what was said above, it was not to be expected that congregational worship should be enjoined, for that is foreign to the spirit of Sufism. That

an exception should be made in the case of the burial of the dead is only natural and needs no explanation.

The burial service resembles that of the Mohammedans in many ways, and the influence of Islam is clear throughout. At the graveside the "Takbír" is to be said six times. In Islam only the Imam (or among the Shi'ahs the Mujtahed) is allowed to recite the "Takbír", but Baha'u'llah declares that any person can recite it as long as he is able to do so in the correct way, but should no one be present who is able to intone it correctly, it may be omitted.⁴ The full form of the service is not given in the "Aqdas", but is found in the book of prayers called the "Ad'iyat-i Hazrat-i Mahbub",⁵ and should be compared with the Moslem service as given by Hughes.⁶ Baha'í meetings are generally opened and closed

Lambeth Conference Report, 1930.

"Aqdas", p. 6.

Noq., Index lxxxv.

"Aqdas", p. 5.

p. 105 ff.

Hughes "Dictionary", article "Burial of the Dead".

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with a prayer (salwat), which is formally intoned by a chosen leader. The prayers thus used are usually from among those composed by 'Abdu'l-Baha, and are generally in the Arabic language.

b) Private prayer

Prayer is ordained for all believers, and must be made morning, noon and night. In towns and places where it is difficult to ascertain the times of prayer watches or sun-dials may be used. The daily prayer consists of nine rak'ats (prostrations), not seventeen as in Islam, and the believer is bidden to turn towards the place where Baha'u'llah is when saying the prayers. After Baha'u'llah's death his grave became the qibleh. Fur is no longer ceremonially unclean, and the believer may wear the skins of the marten, the beaver or the squirrel when performing the prayers. In the same way nothing that is "soul-less", such as bone, etc., can render prayer null and void, and when prostrating in prayer the believer may rest his head on anything that is clean. These regulations are obvious modifications of those current in Islam, with which they should be compared.

Special prayer in times of distress (Salvatu'l-Ayat) is forbidden, but when the believer is frightened he may mention the name of God, and recall His greatness and power, by saying, "Greatness belongs to God, the God who sees, but is never seen, the Lord of the Worlds (or Creatures)." Shortened prayers are incumbent upon every traveller. When he reaches a place of safety he must say his prayers, but only one sajdah (prostration in which the forehead

touches the ground) is necessary, during which he must repeat the

Salah, pl. salawat.—M.W.T.

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words “Praise be to God, the Possessor of Greatness and Glory, Bounties and Graces” or the shorter form, “Praise be to God”, may be said instead. After the sajdah he must sit back upon his knees and say, “Praise be to God the Possessor of Dominion and Glory” eighteen times.

Menstruating women are exempted from these prayers, but they must perform the ceremonial ablutions (see below) and repeat ninety-five times during the twenty-four hours from noon to noon the following words, “Praise be to God the Possessor of Beauty and Grace.” The physically weak and the diseased are unconditionally exempted from prayer.¹

It will be seen that the numbers nine and nineteen or their multiples are continually introduced; the reader is therefore referred to Appendix I at the end of this book.

The shortened forms of prayer given above have very much in common with the Sufi zekr, though the latter is much more elaborate, and the purpose of the repetition of these prayers is to draw the mind of the believer away from the world, so that he may attain to ecstatic union with God. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the directions given to the believer who is in a frightened condition. By dwelling upon the name of God and meditating on His greatness and power, the believer becomes unconscious of the world around and attains to inward peace in an ecstatic union with God.

The fuller forms of prayer show a similar Sufi tendency of thought. The form of morning prayer is rich in Sufi ideas. The worshipper is unconscious of all but God, and sees God in everything. He dwells

“Aqdas”, pp. 5 ff.

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on the riches of God which he sees through his own poverty. Separation from God turns his heart into water, but the love of God sets his whole being aflame. He passionately desires to attain to the things of God, who is the only God. The numerous repetitions of the “Takbír” and of such phrases as “God is greater than all the great” are also in harmony with this tendency.¹

In short, these prayers show Baha'ism to be a type of Sufi mysticism set in a frame of Moslem legalism.

c) Ceremonial ablutions and fasting

As in Islam, so also in Baha'ism, ablutions are a necessary preliminary to prayer, but whereas in the former the believer is bidden to wipe the face and hands with sand when water is not available, in the latter it is only necessary for him to repeat five

times “In the name of God the Most Pure of the Most Pure.” Both prayer and fasting are incumbent upon all who have attained to the age of maturity. The fast lasts nineteen days, and is preceded by five intercalary days during which the believer is bidden to give gifts to relatives and to the needy poor, and to praise and exalt the name of God. The fast month is the last of the Baha’í year (March 2 to March 20, inclusive), and during these days all believers are to abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. Every day the face and hands must be washed, and the believer, facing Acre, must repeat ninety-five times “God is Most Glorious”. The physically weak, the diseased, all travellers, pregnant women and nursing mothers are

“Ad’iyat”, pp. 70 ff.

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exempted. These regulations need not be discussed; it is sufficient to point out that they are modifications of those current in Islam.

d) Prayers composed by Bahá’u’lláh

Both Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha wrote numerous prayers, the majority of which are in the Arabic language. These are interesting because they show a conception of prayer that is utterly foreign to Christian thought. A large number of the so-called prayers of Baha’u’llah are not prayers at all, but consist of brief accounts of all his troubles and expressions of disappointment that men did not accept him at once. Some of them are mere recitals of his claim, and we are reminded of the prayer of the Pharisee in the Temple. They were composed to be read by others, as is obvious from their contents, and are not prayers in the true sense of the word.²

But most important of all for our theme is his prayer for healing. This prayer consists for the most part of a monotonous recital of the attributes of God, and it concludes with the words: “I abjure Thee that Thou protect the bearer of this blessed (prayer) sheet, and him who reads it, and him upon whom it is placed, and him who passeth by a house in which this sheet is found. Grant healing by this prayer to every sick person, every weak person, every poor person, and (protect them) from every calamity, every adversity, every evil and every grief. And by this prayer do Thou guide every person who would enter the way of Thy guidance, and the channel of Thy grace and Thy forgiveness. Thou art the Glorious, the Sufficient, the

“Aqdas”, pp. 5 f.

Vide “Ad’iyat”, pp. 221–252.

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Healer, the Protector, the Bountiful, the Forgiving, the Merciful.”¹ This prayer is an interesting commentary on the claim of Baha’u’llah to free men from the chains of superstition, for it bears

out our contention that the word superstition as used by him is simply a term for those ideas and beliefs which find no place in his teachings, and must not be interpreted to mean more than that.²

This prayer is obviously meant to be used as a charm. When carried in the pocket it protects the bearer; when kept in the house it protects both inmates and passers-by; when laid upon the sick it brings them healing; in short, it possesses magic properties. The use of prayer sheets as charms is common throughout the East, and this prayer serves to show that Baha'u'llah was a true Oriental.

e) The marriage service

Baha'u'llah himself provided no form of marriage service, though he did write certain Tablets which were to be read as “sermons” on such occasions.³ The form of service regularly used by Persian Baha'is was drawn up by 'Abdu'l-Baha. This service is important on account of its implied teaching. We saw that the “Aqdas” allows a man to have two wives, but this service would imply that monogamy was the law—“O peerless Lord, who by Thy great wisdom hast ordained companionship for pairs”⁴ Furthermore, the contract is referred to as “a contract of permanent marriage”, which would imply that it cannot be broken. In Shi'ah Islam permanent marriage does not mean

“Ad'iyat”, pp. 183 ff.

Chapter 7 above.

“Ad'iyat”, pp. 286 ff.

“Qabaleh”, pp. 2 f.

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this, but is a term used to distinguish between marriage as such and temporary marriage. In Baha'ism this is not the case, and the term must therefore be interpreted to mean that death alone ends the contract—“till death us do part” is the Christian equivalent. The Christian Church lays great stress on the sanctity of marriage, but the same cannot be said of Baha'ism, for divorce is not only possible, but easy. A court decree is not necessary. All the husband needs do is desert his wife; should he fail to return at the promised time or to inform her of his failure, she must wait nine months, when, if she is still without news of him, she may remarry. If a man and his wife fail to agree, the man is bidden to wait one year to see what happens, but if at the end of a year matters have not changed he must divorce her.¹ Thus though God is bidden to make the marriage in heaven,² it is very easily dissolved upon earth!

f) Hymns

Music is generally held by Moslems to be contrary to the teachings of Mohammad, but the Sufis believe that “the beauties of nature, music and art revive in men the divine idea, and recall their affections from wandering from Him to other objects.”³ Poetry became a natural medium for expressing Sufi ideas, and the works

of the mystic poets are very popular in Persia. As the Baha'í movement grew it was natural that some of its teachings should be expressed in verse, and some of these have now been published in book form. The best known of these is the collection of the poems of Aqa Mírza Na'ím Isfahaní, many of which have been set

“Aqdas”, pp. 24 f.

“Qabaleh”, p. 3.

Sell, p. 107.

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to music, and are sung at Baha'í meetings. They deal with a variety of subjects, among which the doctrine of “rij‘at” is very prominent. 1 The eschatological sayings of Jesus² appear once more in verse form, and some of His other sayings are put into couplets. “Should the heavens and the earth both pass away, my word and my faith shall remain always” is an almost literal translation of one of these couplets.³ The old Moslem argument that by the Paraclete is meant Mohammad once more appears,⁴ and a new argument in support of Mohammad is brought forward, based on the parable of the grain of mustard seed.⁵ This book, called “Kulliyat-i Na'ím”, is of real interest to every student of Baha'ism, but for our present purpose the above remarks must suffice.

These hymns are sung by choirs of children (boys generally) at all Baha'í festivals, but as there is no such thing as congregational worship, these festivals are more in the nature of sacred concerts.

The purpose of the poems is obviously didactic rather than devotional, and the spirit of worship is consequently lacking. Some of these verses are, however, tinged with Sufism, and do to a certain extent create a devotional atmosphere, but the number of them is comparatively small.

In conclusion it must be pointed out that in the West it is the custom of Baha'ís to retain membership of Christian Churches and to join in the worship of those Churches, whilst the “Aqdas” is not available in English, and consequently private prayer as commanded by Baha'u'llah is not observed by them.

e.g., “Kulliyat”, p. 224, where Baha'u'llah is said to be Jesus returned.

St. Matt. 24.

“Kulliyat”, p. 23.

ibid., p. 234.

ibid., p. 235.

Shouqí Effendí and the Bahá'í constitution

According to the Will of Baha'u'llah, the succession should have fallen to Mohammad 'Alí when 'Abdu'l-Baha died, but, in view of the schism that took place after Baha'u'llah's death, it was not to be expected that this should come to pass.

'Abdu'l-Baha in his Will nominated Shouqí Rabbaní as his

successor. Shouqí Effendí, as he is commonly called, is the son of a daughter of ‘Abdu’l-Baha and is descended on his father’s side from the family of the Bab. He will be succeeded by the first-born of his lineal descendants,¹ and so the leadership of the Baha’í movement is made hereditary. Such an arrangement could very well lead to abuses, and ‘Abdu’l-Baha has tried to guard against that danger by stipulating that should the first-born not possess the spiritual qualities necessary to such an office, it is incumbent upon Shouqí Effendí to choose another of his sons to succeed him.²

The succession of Shouqí Effendí was not accepted by all the Baha’ís, but, strangely enough, Mohammad ‘Alí seems to have accepted the Will without much hesitation, contenting himself with a somewhat mild protest.³ But opposition came from unexpected

“Organisation”, p. 178.

ibid., p. 180.

cf. the deductions made from this by Ruth White, “Organisation”, p. 126.

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quarters. In Cairo a book was published which caused a schism among the Baha’ís of Egypt, many of them breaking away from and opposing the Spiritual Assembly. The author of the book seems to have visited Syria and to have carried on active propaganda amongst the Syrian Baha’ís. The extent of the trouble thus caused can be gauged by the fact that the Spiritual Assembly of Haifa was eventually compelled to issue a circular letter setting forth the claims of Shouqí Effendí and warning all Baha’ís against the author of the said book. A copy of this circular dated May 1924, and signed by the secretary, Nuru’-d-Dín, is in the possession of the present author.

In America, too, the Baha’ís became divided. A strong section led by Mrs Mary Hanford Ford refused to accept Shouqí Effendí as anything more than “business manager or errand boy”,¹ but this attitude is totally unjustifiable. Acceptance of Shouqí Effendí presupposes acceptance of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Will, and there can be no question as to the position accorded therein to Shouqí Effendí.

Whatsoever he decides is of God, and disobedience to him is disobedience to God. Denial of him is denial of God, and deviation from him is deviation from God. ² The only consistent attitude, therefore, is that of Mrs Ruth White, who not only refuses to accept Shouqí Effendí, but goes so far as to declare the alleged Will of ‘Abdu’l-Baha to be fraudulent.³ It is interesting to notice that Mrs White, who refuses to accept Shouqí Effendí because she believes that the office of “Guardian of the Cause” is

“Organisation”, p. 74.

ibid., pp. 178 f.

See further the Appendix to “Organisation”.

16. Shouqí Effendí and the Baha’í constitution 205

foreign to the true teachings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, yet knows so very little about those teachings that she believes that Baha'u'llah himself regarded 'Abdu'l-Baha as the possessor of a loftier station than that possessed by him!¹

Mrs White has published a translation of the Will of 'Abdu'l-Baha together with a facsimile of the original,² but her obvious ignorance of Persian has led her to make several serious mistakes. The English translation of the Will is divided into three parts, and this gave rise to some very rash statements on the part of Mrs Ruth White. She declares that "in the original document there is no indication which is Part I, II or III. This arrangement was made by the beneficiary and alleged successor Shoqhi [sic] Effendi himself, as was also the above translation,"³ from which it would seem that she accuses Shouqi of dividing the Will into sections to suit his own purpose. But there is not the slightest justification for this charge, for the sections in the Will are clearly marked. Each section opens with an Arabic ascription meaning "He is God" (in the case of the third section the words "the Witness, the All-Sufficing" are added), and closes with the seal and signature of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Mrs White then draws the attention of the reader to a supposed contradiction in the Will itself. "There is no mention made in Part II that there is to be a successor and a continual line of successors. On the contrary it confirms what both Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Baha said during their lifetimes, that the power of the Baha'i Religion was to vest in the Houses of

"Organisation", p. 119.

ibid., pp. 165 ff.

ibid., p. 198.

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Justice whenever they would be established." ¹ The clause in the Will which Mrs White refers to is as follows: "Unto the Most Holy Book (i.e. the "Aqdas") everyone must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice."² But the contradiction is only apparent, for in the first section of the Will we read: "Unto this body (the Universal House of Justice) all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be solved, and the guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head, and the distinguished member for life of that body."³ The functions of the Universal House of Justice as set forth in the first two sections of the Will are therefore identical, the only difference being the omission of all mention of the Guardian in the second section, but this can hardly be said to be a contradiction. In connection with this it is of interest to note that the handwriting expert engaged by Mrs White to report on the writing in the Will declares that pages 4-8 were all written by one

and the same person, and both the passages quoted above are found in those pages. It is somewhat doubtful how much value can be set on the report in question, for the author of it himself declares that “any conclusions to be drawn from an examination of the photographic enlargements must necessarily be of a provisional character contingent upon the accuracy of the photographic records.”⁴ The present author is of the opinion that the evidence produced by Mrs White in support of her contention

“Organisation”, p. 198.

ibid., p. 189.

ibid., p. 183.

Appendix to “Organisation”, p. 14.

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that the Will is fraudulent is not sufficiently strong to merit acceptance, and the question must remain unsettled until such a time as Shouqí Effendí sees fit to allow the original copy of the Will to be examined by an expert versed in the various types of Persian script. For our present purpose it is best to regard the Will as the authentic work of ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

But another question now arises: Did ‘Abdu’l-Baha possess the right to nominate his successor? It does not seem that he did, so his action, in nominating Shouqí Effendí and his heirs as Guardians of the Cause, and the creation thereby of a hereditary office, was totally unexpected and unjustifiable. It was not the intention of Baha’u’llah that the leadership should be vested in his descendants, but he definitely directed that after Mohammad ‘Alí the House of Justice should assume control of the affairs of the Cause. That ‘Abdu’l-Baha ignored the directions of Baha’u’llah in making this Will is shown by the fact that whereas in the “Aqdas” it is definitely laid down that after ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Mohammad ‘Alí the House of Justice will assume the control of all vaqf property (i.e. pious endowments), ‘Abdu’l-Baha declares that Shouqí Effendí and his successors are the trustees for all monetary gifts.¹ The fact that ‘Abdu’l-Baha calls this money offering “Huquq” does not materially affect the argument. The present Baha’í Organisation is therefore foreign to the thought and intention of Baha’u’llah.

At the head of the Organisation (which as yet exists only in part) is Shouqí Effendí, the virtual dictator of

Compare “Aqdas”, p. 16, and “Organisation”, p. 122, with “Organisation”, p. 184.

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the movement, whose every word is of God. He is supported by a body of nine men elected from among themselves by the “Hands of the Cause” who in their turn are nominated and appointed by Shouqí Effendí himself, and who are in duty bound to obey his

every command. This body would seem to form the Executive of the Movement. Then comes the International House of Justice, which is the legislative body, the members of which are elected by the various National Assemblies. Implicit obedience to the Guardian of the Cause is incumbent upon all the members of the Universal Court of Justice also. The members of the National Assemblies are elected by the representatives of the general body of the believers in each country, so that the movement has a semblance of representative government. Last of all come the local assemblies which can be formed wherever the number of believers is nine or over. The position of Shouqí Effendí according to this arrangement is that of dictator, for obedience to him is incumbent upon all.¹ The functions of the House of Justice are clearly set forth in the Will. Under the direction of the Guardian it is to deal with all matters which cannot be settled by reference to the Holy Books, and whatsoever they decide has equal authority with the Holy Books. It has also the power to alter and change laws according to the exigencies of the time, but this only refers to laws enacted by the House of Justice itself.² The Government (Hukumat) referred to in Part I of the Will³ is probably the Executive Authority composed

“Organisation”, pp. 178 ff.; “S. of W.”, Vol. XIX, No. 1, p. 6.

“Organisation”, pp. 183 and 189 f.

ibid., p. 184.

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of the Guardian and the Hands of the Cause, which is to work in harmony with the Universal Court of Justice, and to enforce the enactments of the latter.

It must be borne in mind that the House of Justice as conceived by Baha’u’llah was a very different thing from that found in present-day Baha’ism, for Baha’u’llah looked forward to a time when the laws of the “Aqdas” would be adopted generally and a House of Justice would be formed in every town. These Houses of Justice would have the right of imposing fines and penalties, and would also be the educational authorities in each town.¹ The changed outlook in Baha’ism is responsible for the fact that the House of Justice has given place to the Spiritual Assembly (Mahfel-i Rohaní),² which has very little in common with it.

Mrs White will have nothing to do with these Assemblies, but declares that they are foreign to the spirit of Baha’ism, and were first started by Dr Kheiru’llah.³ Furthermore, she quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha as saying that there are no officers in the Baha’í cause,⁴ and that the organisation the Baha’ís have among themselves has nothing to do with the teachings of Baha’u’llah.⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Baha may have said this, indeed it is more than probable that he did, but he often said things that he did not really mean! That he did not mean what he told Mrs White is clear from the fact that he himself wrote

to the Baha'ís of Bombay giving them instructions as to how to start an Assembly (Mahfel), and bidding them elect a president and obey the person elected and submit to his ruling.⁶ It is clear therefore that 'Abdu'l-Baha not only approved

“Aqdas”, pp. 19 f.

Mahfil-i-Rawhaní.—M.W.T.

“Organisation”, pp. 35 ff.

ibid., pp. 11 f.

ibid., p. 18.

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 505 f.

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of the formation of the Assemblies, but also gave instructions that officers be elected.

Mrs White objects also to the rule that “the individual conscience must be subordinated to the decisions of the Spiritual Assembly”,¹ and declares it to be a complete inversion of the teachings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. But here again Mrs White is mistaken, for in the Tablet to the Baha'ís of Bombay quoted above 'Abdu'l-Baha himself declares that the individual must accept the majority decision of the Assembly at all times, and once that is given no member has the right to oppose it either in or outside the Assembly.²

There is no such thing as freedom of conscience or of opinion in Baha'ism. The decisions of the Spiritual Assembly are binding upon all believers; these in their turn are bound to submit to the decisions of the National Assemblies, which are again bound by all the decisions of the International Court of Justice, which is but a tool in the hands of Shouqí Effendí, the infallible and absolute Guardian of the Cause. This system is justly condemned by Mrs White, but she is at fault when she declares it to be foreign to the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Finally, a few words must be said about the Guardian of the Cause, Shouqí Effendí, and the policy adopted by him.

Shouqí Rabbani was twenty-five years of age when, in the year 1921, 'Abdu'l-Baha passed away. He was at the time a student at Balliol College, Oxford, which he entered in 1919, after having pursued a course of study in the American University of Beirut. He was young to undertake the duties of his new office, but

“Organisation”, p. 34.

Mok., Vol. III, p. 507.

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he had the benefit of the experience of men who had been long in the movement. There was no House of Justice to act as legislative body, so the movement was controlled by Shouqí aided by his secretaries and the Spiritual Assembly of Haifa. He devoted his attention to the consolidation of the Baha'í organisation, and the

rapid political changes in the Near East helped him greatly. The Baha'ís began to enjoy greater freedom than had hitherto been their lot, and, urged by Shouqí Effendí, they began to form Assemblies. In 1925 the number of Spiritual Assemblies in the Near East was very small, and Persia could boast of one only. In a Tablet to the East written in that year Shouqí Effendí gives a list of these Assemblies, and urges the Baha'ís to pay more attention to organisation, pointing out that the House of Justice cannot be formed until the local Spiritual Assemblies are properly organised. Since then the local organisations in Persia have grown considerably, though the numbers of the adherents of the movement in the different towns show no corresponding increase. In the same Tablet he points out that it is necessary to try to secure possession of all places which are of historic interest to Baha'ís through their association with the Bab or Baha'u'llah,¹ and urges them to make every effort to bring this to pass. In another Tablet, written two years later, he gives more detailed instructions as to how to set about the task. The Assemblies should appoint committees consisting of old and experienced Baha'ís, and these committees should undertake to make inquiries concerning all those places which are of peculiar interest

Tablet dated Mehr 12th, 1304 [5 October 1925.] (AD 1932 corresponds to the year 1310–11, Persian solar reckoning).

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to believers, such as the graves of martyrs and the scenes of their martyrdom, and report to the Assemblies concerned. Copies of these reports, together with photographs of the places mentioned in the reports, should be sent to Haifa, where Shouqí Effendí has made arrangements to have them preserved. It is incumbent upon the Assemblies to see that all such places are kept immune from damage until such time as it shall be possible to acquire possession of them for the Baha'í organisation. Shouqí Effendí hopes that in the course of time it will be possible to erect a Baha'í temple (Mashrequ'l-Azkar) near every such place.¹ Both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha were prolific writers, and in addition to their books and Tablets to Baha'í groups scattered throughout different lands, they both wrote a large number of Tablets to individuals. Shouqí Effendí urges upon the Assemblies that every effort should be made to collect these, that none be lost. Many of them are now in the possession of non-Baha'ís, and every effort should be made to obtain copies of these. There can be no doubt as to the wisdom of this policy. The possession of a number of shrines in Persia would be a great asset to the movement. Nothing would promote the Cause in Persia better than a constant stream of Western Baha'ís coming on a pilgrimage to such shrines. The house occupied by the Bab in Shíraz has been secured, and is visited by many pilgrims.

The author knows of Baha'ís from America, and of one from Australia, coming to visit the "Beit", as the house in question is called by the Baha'ís. The coming of all such pilgrims is given every publicity, and as a result the

Tablet dated Mehr 3rd, 1306 [26 September 1927].

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impression is created that Baha'ism has become a real force in the West. The importance given to the collection of scattered Tablets¹ is readily understood in view of the fact that they are all "scripture", and should be revered as such. Scattered all over Persia are Moslem shrines, many of them in a state of dilapidation and ruin, but they play a great part in the religious life of the common people. Reverence for the Qor'an and for their shrines is characteristic of all Moslems, and the possession of shrines and of a recognised canon of Scripture would be of undoubted value to the Baha'í movement. Such an ambitious policy—for such it is—calls for self-sacrifice on the part of all Baha'ís, for it cannot be carried out without money, and so Shouqí Effendí urges the Spiritual Assemblies to start a Benevolent Fund (Sanduq-i Kheirieh) in order to acquire these shrines and to promote other good works.²

In his general policy he follows 'Abdu'l-Baha, and forbids the Baha'ís to interfere in political affairs. They must belong to no political party and be obedient to the Government and civil authorities.³ They must be concerned only with the things that belong to their religion, such as the promotion of education and the raising of the position of women. Above all, they must be missionaries. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with that side of their work, for the Baha'í religion is essentially missionary.⁴ Consolidation of the Faith and propagation of its doctrines are thus seen to be the guiding principles of Shouqí Effendí's policy.³

Tablet dated Aban 4th, 1305 [27 October 1926].

Tablets dated Isfand 15th, 1304 [6 March 1926], and Mehr 3rd, 1306 [26 September 1927]. Arabic al-Sanduq al-Khayr.

Tablets dated Isfand 15th, 1304 [6 March 1926], and Aban 4th, 1305 [27 October 1926].

Tablet dated Mehr 3rd, 1306 [26 September 1927].

Bahá'í missionary methods

The main purpose of this chapter is to show some of the methods adopted by Baha'ís in their missionary efforts, and particularly those methods which were adopted by 'Abdu'l-Baha. Much has been written by others about the methods adopted by Persian Baha'ís, so only the briefest mention of them is necessary here.

Prof. Browne has pointed out that as early as 1887–88, when he himself was in Persia, the Baha'ís were well represented in the postal and telegraph services,¹ and these two departments have

continued to be almost entirely staffed by Baha'ís. Needless to say, the postal service offers unique opportunities for missionary work, and a journey by post-lorry gives a splendid insight into the activities of these "missionaries". It can be truly said that membership of the Baha'í organization is almost a sine qua non for admission into the service of the postal department. Baha'í influence has spread into other departments of the Persian Civil Service, and many young men join the movement simply and solely because they hope thereby to obtain good positions. Where they hold positions of authority, Baha'ís not only use that authority to spread Baha'í influence, but also take advantage of their position to do all in

"Materials", Introd., p. xvi.

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their power to hinder the work of Christian missionaries. The Baha'í Assemblies are first and foremost missionary institutions, and exist in order to propagate Baha'í doctrines. Everything is done to attract the young, and organised classes for children are a great feature. Graded lessons have been drawn up, and the children are awarded certificates and prizes for lessons well learnt. In Shíraz many young men were attracted to the movement by the prospect of learning to play the "tor"¹ (a string instrument) free of charge. An orchestra was formed, and became a great attraction, and is even to-day the chief "draw" for young men. But these manifold activities are but helps or aids in the work, and the true secret of Baha'í missionary success (though that success is somewhat superficial, as will be seen) is the amount of personal work done. Every Baha'í becomes a missionary, and it is the influence of friend upon friend that accounts for a large number of young men joining the movement. The remarkable thing is that whilst every effort is made to induce young men to join the movement, almost nothing is done to keep them in it afterwards. The majority fall away, others remain in the movement because their work depends on it, others again are afraid to break with the organisation lest influence should be brought to bear upon their employers to discharge them. This fear is very real, and the author has in his possession a letter from the Shíraz Spiritual Assembly to a young man suspected of associating with the "enemies of the Cause"; though the young man in question is secretly an enemy of the Baha'í cause, he does not dare leave it and show his true colours. Religious dissimulation (taqíeh)² is practised by all

Persian tar, a long-necked, waisted lute family instrument.

Taqíya. "In Persia, ... when life was in danger, and complete freedom offered to those who indicated they were Muslims and not Baha'ís, the Guardian [Shoghi Effendi] not only deprived anyone who did not openly declare his Faith of his voting rights, but even indicated they

were Covenant breakers. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers, 30 April 30 1957) (Lights of Guidance,#215, p. 61)

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Baha'ís; amongst the Moslems they pose as Moslems, and amongst the Christians they pose as inquirers. Some have even become baptised members of the Christian Church in order to be able to carry out their purpose of trying to win over the Christians. Nearly every Christian hospital in Persia can tell of a Baha'í becoming Christian in order to be able to carry on propaganda within the hospital. The spirit of Baha'ism is the spirit of lying, and herein lies its power. It is an enemy that must be fought in the dark. Finally, it need only be said that paid missionaries are found in nearly all the big towns of Persia, whilst others are engaged in itinerating work in the villages. These missionaries function as clergy, and officiate at marriages and other ceremonies, so the Baha'í boast that the movement knows nothing of a clerical caste has no foundation in fact.

But far more interesting is a study of the missionary methods of 'Abdu'l-Baha, for these not only throw a light on his character, but also show clearly the true nature of the movement which owes so much to him. We have seen in a previous chapter how he himself undertook two great missionary journeys to the West, and appealed to Western Baha'ís to undertake similar journeys to further the Cause, and the response made to his appeals will be considered later on in this chapter. More important even than his journeys are the innumerable Tablets he wrote, and a study of these will serve to show perfectly clearly the method he adopted in order to quicken interest in the movement in both the East and the West. His policy can best be summed up by saying that he incited the West to greater efforts by telling them remarkable stories of the growth of the

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movement in the East, whilst in his Tablets to the East he pointed to the West as offering an example of what missionary zeal can do. In other words, he resorted to a campaign of lies (for such, indeed, it was, as this chapter will show) in order to spread his doctrines. The failure of the movement in Persia was a source of great disappointment to him, as his Tablets show. The Persians are deep in a nightmare sleep;1 overcome by the sleep of negligence, they are completely ignorant of the fact that the intelligentsia of the West are being drawn into the movement. Those who are far away in distant lands are being drawn close, but those who are near are as yet cut off from him.2 His real feelings towards them are seen from a Tablet he wrote to Mrs Dreyfus, who herself was acquainted with the conditions in Persia. After declaring what Mohammad had done for Mecca, he says: "If only they (the Persians) consider they

will understand that the Cause of Baha'u'llah will make Persia prosperous and the Persians great. But what is the use?—they lack intelligence! They think they can revive Persia by their 'bon jour' and 'good morning'—in other words, by learning French and English. Lack of intelligence is the worst thing in the world. These Persians not only lack intelligence but are self-satisfied as well! They think that they are each one the Plato of this age, whereas in reality they know nothing at all.”³ These statements show perfectly clearly that he thought the prospects of the movement in Persia to be anything but promising. But how differently he speaks when addressing the West! He then sees wonderful visions of a Baha'i Persia. The Persians will come into the

Mok., Vol. III, p. 348.

bid., pp. 215 f.

ibid., p. 315.

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movement in troops, and all the Shi'ahs will become Baha'is. So great has been the effect of these teachings on the Jews that the day is not far off when there will not be a Jew in Persia who has not become a Baha'i! As for the Parsees, who were always so bigoted and exclusive, the majority of them have already become Baha'is.¹ That 'Abdu'l-Baha knew these statements to be devoid of truth is obvious from his own words quoted above, but it is not unfitting to point out that, except for a large number of Jews from the Hamadan and Kashan districts who have become Baha'is, the movement has had very little success among the Jews and Parsees of Persia, the percentage of converts being almost negligible.

He encourages the Baha'is of the Persian town of Najafabad by telling them the story of a poor Manchester woman, who, having nothing else to give, sacrificed her wealth of hair in order to contribute something towards the erection of a "Mashrequ'l-Azkar" (Baha'i Temple) in America,² and urges the American Baha'is to hurry on with the building of it, telling them that in most of the cities of Persia, and even in some villages, a "Mashrequ'l-Azkar" has been founded.³ This statement again was entirely devoid of truth. There neither was nor is a "Mashrequ'l-Azkar" in Persia, and, as we saw in the last chapter, Shouqi Effendi looks forward to the time when it will be possible to erect such buildings near the Babí-Baha'i shrines. That he does not believe it will be possible to erect such temples in the near future is obvious from the fact that he urges the Persian Baha'is to found a "Hazíratu'l-

Mok., Vol. III, Pp. 124 f.

ibid., p. 292.

"S. of W.", Vol. II, No. 5, p. 13.

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Quds" (Enclosed Sanctuary) wherever possible as a centre for their

meetings.¹ It only remains to point out that 'Abdu'l-Baha was also very disappointed with the slow growth of the movement in the West, and knew full well that there was no ground for the statements he constantly made in order to encourage the Persian Baha'ís. In 1917 he wrote to the Baha'ís of America urging them to greater efforts, and complaining that although twenty-three years have gone by since the movement was first introduced into that country, the progress made is far below what was expected, and the movement has not yet become alive.² Nor was he satisfied with the condition of things within the movement in America, for, when invited to revisit that country, he declared that he would only come when harmony and unity were established among the American believers.³

He also knew the importance of emotion as a religious factor, and in his Tablets to the West he gave great prominence to the sufferings of Baha'u'llah, and the stories he told should be compared with the true story as found in this book, for they serve to explain why so many good and sincere Christians could be attracted to the Baha'í movement.⁴ Sometimes this habit of exaggeration and misrepresentation of facts led to his making the most impossible statements, but none in the West would know that. He tells us, for instance, that in the town of Yezd in Persia the persecution was so fierce that five thousand Baha'í households went in daily fear of their lives, expecting every

Tablet of Shouqí dated Mehr 12th, 1304 [4 October 1925].

Mok., Vol. III, p. 42.

ibid., pp. 78 and 90.

cf. Appendix II.

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minute to be attacked and killed by the fanatic Moslems. They feared for their homes, and feared for their women-folk and children.¹ Assuming that each household consists of six persons (a very conservative estimate for a Persian household), the Baha'í community of Yezd would thus number some 30,000 souls. According to the Persian Official Calendar for the year 1930–31, the total population of Yezd is forty thousand to fifty thousand, and of these some ten thousand are Parsees, so that if we accept the story told by 'Abdu'l-Baha, we must picture a community of thirty thousand Baha'ís living in daily dread of a small Moslem community which would consist of ten thousand people at the most! None will deny that the Baha'ís in Yezd were persecuted, but the truth is that they were only a small portion of the community, as is proved by reference to a history of the martyrs of Yezd written by a Baha'í who was acquainted with most of them, and witnessed some of the events of that period. He tells us that when Prince Jalalu'd-Dawleh was Governor of Yezd for the last time, there was a

lull in the persecutions, and the Baha'ís were able to indulge in mission work. Ibn-i Abhar, a well-known Baha'í from Teheran, visited Yezd, and as a result a large number of people became Baha'ís. Indeed, so popular did his meetings become that the number of Baha'ís increased, till there were from four to five hundred present at each meeting.² It is obvious, therefore, that 'Abdu'l-Baha had little or no regard for the truth, and it is not surprising that Shouqí Effendí should adopt a similar policy. The Tablets of Shouqí Effendí to the Baha'ís of the

Mok., Vol. III, pp. 136 f.

Shuhada'-i Yezd, pp. 80 f.

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East make very dull reading, but they show clearly that he is a true disciple of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He keeps the believers informed of the triumphs of the movement in the West, and prophesies a brilliant future for the Cause. Over and over again he refers to the fact that Queen Marie of Rumania and the Princess Ileana have become Baha'ís as significant of the new outlook in the West.¹ He is overjoyed at the coming of Australian pilgrims to Haifa, and sees in their coming the fulfilment of a saying of Baha'u'llah that "if they conceal the light on the land, it will appear in the middle of the sea." All this signifies the dawn of a new day for Persia, for the believers from the West shall come to that land and shall establish factories and promote agriculture.² The West has come to realise the value of the Baha'í teachings, and all men now confess that the solution of the world's problems is in the hands of the Baha'ís.³ But still more interesting are some of the statements to the West. A good example is furnished by a letter he wrote to the Esperantists in conference at Danzig in 1927, in the course of which he said: "It will interest you, I am sure, to learn, that as a result of the repeated and emphatic admonitions of 'Abdu'l-Baha, His many followers even in the distant villages and hamlets of Persia, where the light of Western civilisation has hardly penetrated as yet, as well as in other lands throughout the East, are strenuously and enthusiastically engaged in the study and teaching of Esperanto, for whose future they cherish the highest hopes."⁴ Shouqí Effendí was too well informed of the

cf. Appendix III.

Tablet dated March 6th, 1925.

Tablet dated Isfand 15th, 1304 [6 March 1926].

"S. of W.", Vol. XVIII, No. 7, pp. 209 f.

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conditions prevailing in Persia not to have known that the statement he was making was utterly and wholly devoid of truth. A more detailed study of the Tablets is impossible here, but it may be pointed out that they should be read by all who desire to

get a real insight into the nature and methods of Baha'ism. The Tablets to individuals, and particularly those written to various Baha'í missionaries, are of peculiar interest for the light they throw on the method of carrying on "personal" work.¹ Of peculiar interest to English people is his advice to a missionary as to how to deal with the then Prince of Wales, now His Majesty King George,² and his plan to win the interest of Lord Curzon,³ which show 'Abdu'l-Baha in the character of a spider quietly spreading his net.

We have now seen some of the methods employed in Persia, and we have had a glimpse at the leaders of the movement at work, but this chapter would not be complete without some account of methods employed by the Western organisation. There is no international House of Justice as yet, so the movement is controlled by Shouqí Effendí aided by the Hands of the Cause. The real missionary organisation, however, is the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'ís of the United States of America and Canada, and it is with the activities of that body that we are now concerned. It will be remembered that 'Abdu'l-Baha appealed to the American believers to undertake missionary journeys to spread the new teachings, and his appeal did not fall on deaf ears. The spread of Baha'ism owes

cf. Mok., Vol. III, pp. 250 f., 444, and 448.

ibid., p. 455.

ibid., pp. 446 and 455.

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much to the labours of those people who responded to this appeal. We read of some of these missionaries visiting Honolulu, Japan, India, Burma, Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, and almost all the countries of Europe. At first these missionaries were voluntary workers, but later some of them became paid teachers. Mrs Ruth White records an offer made to her in 1914 to travel as a paid teacher, but she refused it on principle.¹ In addition to these travelling missionaries, there are some who undertake institutional work, and medical and educational missionaries have been at work in Teheran, the Persian capital, for many years.

"The Baha'í movement works through existing institutions for their betterment and final perfection," says Mr Horace Holley, the paid secretary of the American organisation, but this statement does not give a true idea of the extent to which this is done. There is hardly a movement having for its purpose the promotion of peace or of the rights of women which is not used by Baha'ís to promote their own teaching. Geneva, the home of the League of Nations, offered unique opportunities, and a Baha'í bureau has been established there. The Esperanto Congresses, the meetings of the Church Peace Union, and various conferences held under the auspices of the League of Nations are all attended by Baha'í

delegates and opportunities are invariably found for bringing the movement to the notice of the delegates.² But not content with making use of existing organisations, they have also started other movements such as the “World

“Organisation”, p. 17.

e.g., vide “S. of W.”, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, pp. 75 f.; No. 6, pp. 191 f.; No. 21, pp.

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Unity Conferences”, which are run simply and solely for the purpose of spreading Baha’í doctrines by “follow-up work” amongst those who attend.¹

A study of the statement of accounts issued by the American National Spiritual Assembly for the year 1926–27 will serve as a guide to the activities of that body. Although Mr. Holley tells us that the Baha’ís hold that spiritual instruction should not be sold² we find that during that year 5,064.98 dollars were spent on teaching, and another sum of 10,062.41 dollars was spent on the administration. During that year alone 5,816.85 dollars were spent on World Unity Conferences, and a further 3,000 dollars were devoted to general publicity work. The expenses in connection with the Star of the West magazine amounted to 3,621.91 dollars, and another sum of 1,975.32 dollars was spent on publication. The total expenses incurred by the American organisation during that one year amounted to the huge sum of 47,288.83 dollars.

Finally, a word must be said about the publications of the movement. The list found at the beginning of this book will give some idea of the amount of literature published by the movement, but in addition to these books a large number of periodicals are published. A complete list of these is impossible, but the following will serve to show the importance given to this kind of publication.

The Star of the West, a magazine entitled Reality and the Bahá’í News-letter are published in America. The German publications include Baha’i Nachrichten (the newsletter of the German organisation), Sonne der Wahrheit, Baha’i Weltgemeinschaft, Rosengartlein (a paper for children), and La Nova Tago

“Organisation”, pp. 79 ff.

“Census”, p. 11.

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(an Esperanto paper). ‘Asr-i Pahlaví is published in Egypt in the Persian language, and has a wide circulation, whilst India produces the paper called Kokab-i Hind. Freedom of the Press is as yet unknown to Persia, but a small paper called Akhbár-i Amrí (a newsletter) is printed for private circulation amongst the believers. In 1926 the number of Baha’ís in the United States was 1,247, an almost insignificant number, yet the cash receipts during that year

amounted to the immense sum of 51,039.28 dollars.¹ Christians have much to learn from the Baha'ís in the matter of giving, and whatever may be our opinion of the movement, we are bound to admire the zeal and enterprise shown by its adherents in the West.

“Census”, p. 6; “Organisation”, pp. 64 f.

Baha'ism and the future

It is always difficult to estimate the survival value of any new religion. In 1903 the late Prof. E. G. Browne wrote as follows: “Everyone who is in the slightest degree conversant with the actual state of things in Persia now recognises that the number and the influence of the Babís in that country are immensely greater than they were fifteen years ago, and the conviction which I heard continually expressed this year in Babí circles at Cairo, that in the course of a very short time their religion would reign paramount in their own country, and break down once and for all the power of the Shí'ite Muhammadan mujtahids and mullas, is seriously discussed as a possibility by European diplomatists and consular officers.”¹ With the passing of years he was compelled to modify his opinion, and in 1917 he wrote: “Of the future of Baha'ism it is difficult to hazard a conjecture.”² It is important, too, to note that whereas Prof. Browne in 1903 still referred to the Baha'ís as Babís, in 1917 he definitely speaks of the movement as Baha'ism, thereby showing that he had come to realise that Babism and Baha'ism are by no means synonymous terms.

There can be no doubt but that Prof. Browne was very

Phelps, Introduction, p. xiv.

“Materials”, Introduction, p. xxiv.

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much misled as to the number of Baha'ís in Persia in 1903. Cairo talk is no index of the true condition of things in Persia, as Prof. Browne ought to have known. He was undoubtedly influenced, too, by the reports brought back to Europe by Western visitors to Persia. Lord Curzon, writing in 1892, estimated the number of Babís in Persia at something between half a million and a million, a somewhat amazingly false estimate from so acute an observer. This estimate carrying the authority of so famous a man greatly influenced most Western accounts of the movement, indeed it continues to influence some Western writers, as is seen from a brief account of the movement written by Dr Percy Dearmer during March, 1931.² It is somewhat remarkable that a scholar of such eminence as Dr Dearmer should regard a book published in 1892 as an authoritative account of the state of affairs in Persia in 1931! The last few years have seen many changes in Persia, and rapid progress has been made in many directions. The power of the Mohammadan clergy has been broken, and the great nomad tribes have been brought into subjection. It is not the purpose of this

chapter to discuss the various causes that led to the making of Persia a united country under a strong central Government, but as Baha'ís are fond of pointing to the teachings and influence of Baha'u'llah as responsible for these changes, it is just as well for us to point out that Persia owes very little indeed to its small Baha'í population, who are forbidden by their prophets to

“Persia”, Vol. I, p. 499.

Article, “Persia and Christianity”, Church of England Newspaper, March 6th, 1931.

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take any part in political affairs. They took no part in the revolution, indeed 'Abdu'l-Baha's attitude at the time was unsympathetic, and some of the Baha'ís in Persia were accused of reactionary sympathies.¹ The forces that went to make the revolution in Persia eventually led to the founding of the new dynasty under Reza Shah Pahlaví. Nor must we forget the part played by the Great War in the moulding of modern Persia. There can be no doubt but that the coming of foreign troops to fight each other on Persian soil helped to create a spirit of nationalism which had already been stirred by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which divided Persia into two zones of interest. The triumph of Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the formation of the new republic with its capital at Angora did much to spread the new national spirit which was already manifest in the Near East, and certainly had a great influence on Persia. Fortunately for the latter country, a real leader was found in Reza Khan, who was successively War Minister and Prime Minister before he ascended the throne in December 1925 with the title of Reza Shah Pahlaví. To him, more than to any other, is Persia indebted for her rapid progress during the last few years.

It behoves us now to consider the effect that all the remarkable changes brought about by the new regime have had on the Baha'í movement in Persia. Reza Shah Pahlaví is a Persian above everything else, and it has been, and is, the essential part of his policy to create in his subjects a real patriotic spirit. The introduction of European dress and the Pahlaví hat caused much amusement to some European visitors to

“Materials”, Introduction, p. xviii.

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Persia—it would seem to be the general custom of a certain type of traveller to laugh at everything which he does not understand. But the change of dress is significant of the Shah's whole policy. Miss Rosita Forbes writes: “The introduction of European dress has established a standard of neatness hitherto unknown, and by abolishing the differences which used to exist between the costumes of the various districts has enabled a man to think of

himself as a Persian rather than as a Shirazi, Isfahani, or a Kermani.”¹ “To enable a man to think of himself as a Persian”—Miss Rosita Forbes is right when she declares that to be the purpose of this change of dress, but it meant more than the abolition of local peculiarities of dress. In the past there was no such thing as a national consciousness in Persia, and a man was a Shírazí or Isfahaní rather than a Persian, but there was another division which went much deeper than this—a religious division. The introduction of the new dress removed the unenviable distinction made between Jew and Moslem, or Parsee and Moslem. Under the old regime both Jews and Parsees were liable to every form of persecution, and were compelled to wear distinctive dress to distinguish them from their Moslem neighbours. The introduction of the new dress meant a new liberty for the Jew and Parsee. No longer are they members of despised sects—they are the Persian subjects of a Persian monarch, and as such are free to trade as Persians.

This change is not without its effect upon Baha’ism. The main attraction of Baha’ism to the Jew and Parsee is now gone. The indignities heaped upon these two

“Conflict”, p. 170.

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peoples under the old regime served to help Baha’í propaganda among them. It was not difficult for a Jew or Parsee to become a Baha’í. The Jewish convert was not asked to renounce anything. He maintained his allegiance to the Law, and the practice of taqieh allowed him to be a Jew among Jews. He was not called upon to make any public profession of his new faith, but continued to worship as a Jew. Outside the circle of his Jewish friends he was received as a brother and treated as an equal by Moslem Baha’ís who previous to their conversion had regarded him as unclean. He had everything to gain and nothing to lose by becoming a Baha’í. The same was true of the Parsee, and the remarkable thing is that so few converts were made from among these two peoples. The introduction of the new dress has therefore deprived Baha’ism of its chief attraction for the Jew and Parsee, and materially affected the prospects of the movement.

In spite of the fact that the power of the Mujtaheds and Mullas has been broken, Islam is officially stronger than it was before, for the Government continues to be, and must continue to be, Moslem in name if not in anything else. The proximity of Russia and the spread of Bolshevik teachings in the north of Persia are a real menace to the new dynasty, and the Government has been compelled to take action to prevent the spread of all such teachings. It can truly be said that Reza Shah owes his throne to the Mujtaheds of the Shí’ah religion. In 1924 there was a strong

feeling in favour of a republic, with Reza Khan as its first President. It was just at this time that the Turkish Grand National Assembly abolished the Khalifate and disestablished the Moslem religion.

This event

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gave the Mujtaheds their opportunity, and they declared that a republic would be contrary to the principles of the Shí'ah faith. Supported in their views by Reza Khan himself, they won the day, and this eventually resulted in the founding of the new dynasty. It is to the mutual advantage of the King and the clergy that they should support each other, A republic, bringing with it the possible disestablishment of the Shí'ah faith, endangers the position of the clergy, and a continuance of the monarchy is essential to them, whilst it is equally essential to the throne that the Shí'ah faith should be strong enough to counteract any republican tendencies among the people. Thus it is that only Moslems can be employed in Government offices, and all anti-Islam propaganda is forbidden. The institution of an examination for clergy, and the making of the turban a privileged head-dress for those qualified by examination, have removed many of the old abuses current in the religion, and this, in time, must win a new respect for the religious teachers. This, again, must affect Baha'ism. Those Baha'ís who work in Government offices are compelled to practice taqieh if they are to retain their posts. Their propaganda is hindered by the new regulations, and the removal of many of the abuses which were current in Islam makes that religion a far more formidable opponent than it previously could have been.

It has been a common custom amongst Baha'ís to refer to the Shah as if he were of their faith, and the fact that they hid the true nature of their celebration of the "Aid-i Rezvan"¹ by holding it on the day of the Shah's coronation, a public holiday, seemed to add colour to this; but in 1931 the holiday was cancelled

'Id ar-Ridvan.

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at the last moment by Government proclamation, and thus the Baha'ís were prevented from taking advantage of the public holiday to celebrate their festival. There can be little doubt but that this incident was meant to show the attitude of the ruler towards the Baha'ís.

Bolstered up by the State, Shí'ah Islam can yet live a long time, but with the coming in the future of religious freedom its day will draw to a close. Old institutions, like old customs, die slowly, and a religion which has held its own for centuries will not pass away in a night. Islam will outlive Baha'ism in Persia, for the latter is definitely on the wane. Miss Rosita Forbes, an acute observer of events, who can hardly be said to be prejudiced on the question,

writes: "Babism in Persia is not increasing and though their numbers are always exaggerated, I doubt if there are more than twenty thousand of this enlightened sect throughout the country."1 It is almost impossible to discover what the number of Baha'ís actually is, but the author, after collecting statistics from most of the provinces of Persia, is convinced that they cannot number more than thirty thousand, but are probably far less.

Baha'ism in Persia to-day is but a stepping-stone from Islam to materialism. Strangely enough, the Baha'ís are wont to argue that the superiority of their creed to all others is proved by the fact that most of those who leave Baha'ism become materialists. They fail to realise that many have entered Baha'ism because Islam could not satisfy their need for God. Finding that Baha'ism has nothing to give them, they lose all the faith they had in God and lapse into unbelief.

"Conflict", p. 168.

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In 1903 the late Prof. E. G. Browne wrote: "Without doubt the most remarkable triumph of the Beha'i religion (for the older Babí doctrine out of which this has grown, now preserved in its primitive form only amongst the followers of Subh-i Ezel, has been little studied or appreciated across the Atlantic) is the marvellous success achieved in recent years by its missionaries in the United States of America, where, as I understand, the numbers of believers may now be counted by thousands, not confined to one State or city, but represented in almost all the important towns. Once again in the world's history has the East vindicated her claim to teach religion to the West, and to hold in the Spiritual World that pre-eminence which Western nations hold in the Material." 1 It would seem that Prof. Browne did distinguish between the Babí and Baha'í movements when referring to the West, whilst persisting in calling the Eastern Baha'ís Babís.2 It is obvious, too, that Prof. Browne had again been led astray as to the numbers of converts in America. Baha'ism never did win a real footing in the West, and it is not surprising to find that it is now rapidly losing ground. A study of the United States Government Census report for 1926 will serve as an index to the true condition of the movement in America. America, the home of all kinds of strange movements, became the centre of Western Baha'ism, and still remains the home of Baha'í missionary effort. In 1906 there were 1,280 members, an average of fifty-three per Assembly, in America. In 1916 the numbers had reached 2,884, an average of fifty-one members per Assembly, but by 1926 the numbers had dwindled

Phelps, pp. xiv f.

See above.

to 1,247, an average of twenty-eight per Assembly. Thus in ten years the number of Baha'ís in America had decreased by over 56 per cent.¹ The movement in England has practically ceased to exist, and its leaders have come to the conclusion that the Baha'í movement cannot be organised,² whilst in Germany the excessive claims made by the National Spiritual Assembly have alienated many from the cause.³

But whilst the movement is undoubtedly losing ground, its missionaries continue to be active, and their insidious propaganda must be fought down. Persia is slowly coming to the cross-roads where she must face the inevitable choice, Christ or Materialism. God grant that the Church in Persia may so reveal Christ that, when the choice has to be faced, Persia may yield herself to Him, and find in Him the fulfilment of her aspirations.

“Census”, p. 6.

“Organisation”, p. 99.

ibid., p. 100.

Appendices

I

The numbers 19 and 9 in
the Bábí-Bahá'í Religion

Behind the use of the number 19 in Babí-Baha'ism is the belief in a mystic correspondence between letters and numerals and the transcendent Reality. In the “Abjad” arrangement of the Arabic alphabet letters and numerals are brought into correspondence, giving words a numerical value and emphasising the mystic relationship between letters and numerals. According to Roemer, letters and numerals are regarded as the “????????” [data] of the spiritual and material world.

The Babí system centres round the number 19, which is derived from the number of letters in the formula “Bismi'llahu'r-Rahmani'r-Rahím” (In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful). These letters are counted as 18, and 1 is added for God (the Abjad value of the letter A which stands for God being 1).¹ The Babí hierarchy is composed of eighteen “Letters of the Living” one for each letter in the above formula, together with the Bab who is the “Point”, and represents the “Alif” or “1” which indicates, in the phraseology of the mystics, the unmanifested essence of God. This number has also a theological significance, for the “Abjad” value of the word “vahed” (Unity) is also 19, so that the number is significant of the fundamental belief in the essential Oneness of God.

There are 19 consonants in the Islamic expression ????? ??

??

??? ??? ??? ? ??

???? ??,

and it has an abjad value of 786. As regards the Bahá'í Faith, the number is

based on wahid, which has an abjad value of 19.

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The Calendar is divided up into nineteen months of nineteen days, thus giving a total of 361 days, and this number then represents the "Number of All Things" ('Adad-i Kull).¹ God is said to have ordered the world according to this number, and the chapters of the "Beyan" are arranged according to it. The "Beyan" when completed was to consist of 19 "Vaheds" of 19 chapters each.² The number 9 is called in the "Aqdas" the number of Baha, so its significance is obvious. The "Abjad" value of the word Baha is 8, and here again 1 is added for the "Alif".³ We have already seen the frequency with which this number appears in Baha'ism, but it did not altogether oust the far more significant number 19, which remains in the Calendar and in many of the "Aqdas" laws; but it should be noticed that the majority of such laws were taken over from the "Beyan" by Baha'u'llah. Roemer points out that the number 9 appears as a holy number in the Avesta as well as among the Germans and Greeks. He also points out that the numbers 9 and 5 appear as divisors in the "Beyan" Inheritance laws. Both these numbers play a part in the Baha'í system, for 5 is the "Abjad" value of the word Bab, and the multiple of 9 (Baha) and 5 (Bab) gives 45, which is the perfect number, being the number obtained when all the numbers from 1 to 9 are added together.⁴

Kullu-Shay' ("all things") has an abjad value of 361 (19×19).

See further Roemer, pp. 24 ff.; "Trav.", Vol. II, Notes U and Z; footnotes, pp. 60 and 95; Noq., Index, lxxv, lxxxi ff.

"Baha" in Arabic is really Baha' (?????), which has an abjad value of 9.

Roemer, p. 111 f., footnote. Baha'ís consider 9 to be the perfect number, since the higher numbers are the mere repetition of the numbers 1 to 9.

II

'Abdu'l-Bahá's contradictory

accounts of the life of Bahá'u'lláh

The reader will remember that when the "Taríkh-i Jadíd", written to displace the "Noqtatu'l-Kaf", failed to win the approval of the Baha'í leaders at Acre, 'Abdu'l-Baha himself undertook the task of writing a suitable history, and produced the "Traveller's Narrative", which became the first "official" history of the Baha'í movement. The purpose of this note is to show how, as the movement spread to the West, 'Abdu'l-Baha in later years produced a new story of the life of Baha'u'llah, in which the stress is laid on the latter's sufferings on behalf of humanity. All the so-

called histories produced in the West (an example of which is offered by the story entitled “The Coming of the Glory”, quoted in the earlier chapters of this book) are based on the story of Baha’u’llah as found in ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s writings to the West and addresses given in the West. The new story is as follows.

Baha’u’llah was four times banished.¹ He was banished from Persia² to Baghdad. After much suffering in Baghdad he was taken to Europe,³ and became an exile in Constantinople.⁴ It should be

Mof., p. 21; “Questions”, p. 33.

“S. of W.”, Vol. III, No. 9, pp. 3 f.

Mok., Vol. I, p. 371.

Mof., p. 23; “Questions”, pp. 36 f.

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noticed that the Persian Government is here said to have exiled him to Constantinople. In Constantinople (Europe in text) he was subjected to all kinds of troubles and annoyances,¹ until the Persians decided to remove him to Roumelia (Adrianople) because Constantinople was a place of sojourn for various nationals including Persians.² Even then the Persians were not content, but decided to send him somewhere where he would be reduced to powerlessness, and where his family and followers would have to submit to the direst afflictions, so they chose the prison of Acre, which was reserved especially for murderers, thieves and highway-robbers.³ Baha’u’llah remained for twenty-four years in the “Most Great Prison”⁴ being put in chains, and being made subject to all kinds of indignities and revilements.⁵

This story is absolutely devoid of truth, as will be evident to all who have read this book, but it is interesting to see how it is contradicted by ‘Abdu’l-Baha himself in his other writings.

According to the “Traveller’s Narrative” Baha’u’llah was not exiled from Persia, but left at his own desire, his purpose being to save his own skin. ⁶ In Baghdad he lived in ease and affluence.⁷ Whilst there he became a Turkish subject; thus it was that he was removed to Constantinople, being treated with every possible courtesy on the journey, and becoming the guest of the “glorious Ottoman monarchy in Constantinople until

Mok., Vol. I, p. 371.

Mof., p. 23; “Questions”, pp. 36 f.

Mof., p. 24; “Questions”, p. 37; “S. of W.”, Vol. III, No. 9, pp. 3 f.

Mok., Vol. I, p. 371.

“S. of W.”, Vol. III, No. 9, pp. 3 f.

“Trav.”, Vol. II, pp. 62 f. A misreading. “No sooner had Baha’u’llah recovered His freedom [from the Síyah Chal] than the decision of the government was handed to Him, informing Him that ... He, with His family, was expected to leave Tihiran for a place beyond the confines of Persia.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 650)

“S. of W.”, Vol. III, No. 9, pp. 3 f.

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a place of residence was appointed for him.” Eventually Adrianople was decided upon, and thither he went. In Adrianople “the materials of comfort were gathered together, neither fear nor dread remained, they reposed on the couch of ease, and passed their time in quietude.”¹ According to the “Traveller’s Narrative” Mírza Yahya now began to consider making a claim, and the trouble that resulted was the immediate cause of the removal to Acre,² but this we know to be untrue.³ This story shows, however, that the Persians were in no way concerned with the removal of Baha'u'llah to Adrianople, and thence to Acre. It is significant, too, that the “Traveller’s Narrative” contains no mention of the hardships endured at Acre.⁴

Thus we see that ‘Abdu'l-Baha had no regard whatsoever for truth. Did he really think a religion built on falsehood would stand the assaults of time?

“Trav.”, Vol. II, pp. 88–93.

ibid, Vol. II, pp. 93 ff.

See Chapter V above.

ibid.

III

Queen Marie of Rumania

and the Princess Ileana

In January 1926 Queen Marie of Rumania granted an audience to Miss Martha Root, one of the most active of Baha'í missionaries. As a result of that visit Queen Marie has become known to Baha'ís throughout the world as the first royal convert to the new religion. Miss Root published an account of her visit in the Baha'í Magazine, Star of the West (dated June 1926), and sent a report to Shouqí Effendí, who immediately wrote Tablets to the Baha'ís informing them of the Queen’s conversion. In a Tablet to the East dated Aban 4th, 1305 (27 October 1926) he gives an account of Miss Root’s audience with the Queen, and quotes Her Majesty’s words: “It is the solution of the difficulties of humanity. It removes the differences between and harmonises the divergent views of the various religions. Its foundation is the Spirit of God, and its motive power is the love of God.” He then quotes Miss Root’s own remarks: “So greatly has the Queen been attracted by these teachings, and so joyful and confident has she become, that she has directed that a copy of every Baha'í book published should be sent to the Royal Palace, that she may teach her new daughter the laws of Baha'u'llah from her youth up.”

In a Tablet to the East written in the following year (dated 3 Mehrmah, 1306)¹ Shouqí announces the receipt of a letter from Queen Marie herself. In this letter

26 September 1927.

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Queen Marie confesses her faith in Mohammad as a Prophet of the first rank, and declares that both she and the Princess Ileana are busily engaged in preaching the new doctrine.

In another audience granted to Miss Martha Root on Oct. 9th, 1927, Queen Marie made the following statements: "Tell them (Shouqí Effendí and the family of 'Abdu'l-Baha) I hope some time to go to Jerusalem and 'Akka and Haifa. I should like to pray at both graves and to meet the family of 'Abdu'l-Baha." "I am so happy to think I have been able in any way to further a Cause which, I am sure, is destined to bring happiness, if not to the world, to all those who really have understanding of what is the real meaning of God." "I have been a groper¹ and life has taught me many things. It is logical that this message of Baha'u'llah should come to me. Ever since I received these books they have been my dearest spiritual reading next to the Bible. I am sure they will bring the same blessing to all those to whom they come."

Queen Marie, who is rather a novelty as a Queen, in the course of a series of daily articles written for an American syndicate, wrote four on the teachings of Baha'u'llah, but it is obvious that Her Majesty has no real understanding of those teachings, or she would not rate them as "next to the Bible" for according to Baha'í teaching the Bible ranks after the Qor'an, which again ranks after the Babí-Baha'í books.²

It should also be noted that the Princess Ileana is "devoted to the work of the Rumanian Church", which again shows that these Royal ladies have no understanding of the true nature of the Baha'í movement.

Someone who searches blindly or uncertainly.

See Chapter XII above.

IV

The problem of the Bahá'í "inquirer"

The author has often been asked by missionaries to suggest some method whereby Baha'ís who pose as inquirers can be brought out into the open and made to show their true colours. As has been pointed out,¹ it is not unusual for Baha'ís to gain admittance into Christian institutions by pretending to be inquirers. In many cases they have even come forward for Baptism and Confirmation and been regular in their attendance at Holy Communion. It is hard to see how any man can deliberately, in the presence of God, promise to fight manfully under Christ's banner until his life's end, with no other purpose than to deceive people. Thus it is that Baha'ís are often regarded by Christian missionaries as incurable liars. But if we look at the matter from a Baha'í point of view, we see that the man who can come forward for Baptism,

and does so with a view to enlarging his field of operations as a Baha'í missionary, is perfectly unconscious of having done any wrong. The difference between the Shí'ah Moslem who practises taqieh in order to hide his religion and the Baha'í who practises taqieh must not be overlooked. The former is allowed by his religion to deny his faith if necessary, the latter may deny that he is a Baha'í, but he is not denying his faith when he does so! To

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the Baha'í Baha'u'llah is Christ, he is Mohammad, he is Moses, he is Zoroaster—for he accepts the doctrine of rij'at. He can, therefore, swear the most solemn oath of allegiance to Christ, for to him Baha'u'llah is Christ. He can deny that he is a Baha'í, and confess Baha'u'llah by calling himself a Christian, and this it is that creates a problem for the Christian missionary. The missionary who has made a thorough study of Baha'í literature finds no real difficulty in dealing with Baha'ís, for sooner or later they are sure to give themselves away by their use of corrupted Bible texts, or of well-known Baha'í expressions, but unfortunately Baha'í books are not easily obtained, so some other method must be found. It is obviously useless to accept a mere denial of Baha'ism, for any Baha'í is ready to give that, so some other formula must be sought. In the Baha'í book “Shuhada-i Yezd” we read of Baha'ís denying that they were Baha'ís. That answer having been given they were invariably bidden by their inquisitors to curse Baha'u'llah, and invariably they refused. Thus we are indebted to a Baha'í writer for suggesting a method of dealing with Baha'ís. The writer would suggest that all seekers after Baptism should be asked to declare publicly before the whole Church that they consider Baha'u'llah a false prophet. Some such formula as the following would probably meet the case; “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that He really died on the Cross for our salvation; that He really and truly rose from the dead, leaving behind Him an empty tomb; that He was really and truly seen by the disciples as the Gospels bear witness. I believe that He alone is the Saviour of the World. I deny the doctrine of rij'at, by which I am to believe that

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Jesus was Moses returned, and that Mohammad, the Bab and Baha'u'llah were ‘returns’ of Jesus, and I declare it to be false teaching. Accepting Jesus as my Lord and Saviour I declare Mohammad, the Bab, and Baha'u'llah to have been false prophets and false guides, leading men away from the truth.”

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