

to the throne in 1907 he found a much-exhausted treasury.

Nasr-ed-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896 by a religious fanatic, said to be one of the remarkable sect of Babis who had attempted his life during the early part of his reign. The Shah was possessed of some literary talent, and the diary of his experiences in Europe was published on his return to Persia, and is interesting to read. He was also a keen sportsman and a good shot and rider, and, according to his lights, did his best for his country.

His son, Muzaffer-ed-Din Shah, amiable but much out of health, began his reign as an absolute monarch. Ideas of progress and liberty were, however, rife in Persia, the people having watched the birth of the Russian Duma with interest; and the sovereign, yielding to the national desire, granted a Constitution to his subjects in 1906.

Upon his death in February, 1907, his son, Mohammed Ali Shah, ascended the throne of Persia, and at his accession swore to uphold the Constitution. He did not, however, appreciate the curtailing of his powers by the National Assembly, or Majlis, and friction soon arose. In the December of 1907 he made an unsuccessful attempt to suppress it by force, and early in the next year his life was threatened with a bomb. Surrounded as he was by the Court camarilla, he could not realise that the country had awakened to Western ideas of progress, and in June, 1908, he took the extreme step of bombarding the Persian Parliament out of existence.

Upon this the important commercial city of Tabriz flung off its allegiance to the Shah, turned out the

[page 37]

Royalist troops, and, under the leadership of the bandit Sattar Khan, sustained a long siege.

Mohammed Ali's soldiers, sent to take the city, deserted to the Nationalist party, and the monarch was obliged to have recourse to the wild Kurdish tribes. Tabriz, however, held out until the April of 1909, when the Russian troops raised the siege in order to protect the lives of the Europeans in the town.

Throughout the struggle between the Shah and his subjects it was noticeable that the Persians proper did little material service to the Nationalist cause, which was largely supported by revolutionaries from the Caucasus and by the fighting hill-tribes. Chief among these latter were the Bakhtiari, who first took possession of the city of Isfahan and at last marched on Tehran.

The Shah, who was strongly urged by both the British and Russian representatives to restore the Constitution, broke his solemn promises again and again; and apparently entirely failed to grasp the situation until it was too late.

The Sipahdar (Commander-in-Chief), who belongs to the Royal Family, cast in his lot with the Nationalist party, and threatened Tehran from the north; while the Sardar-i-Assad (brother of the chief of the Bakhtiaris) led his warlike

tribesmen up from the south to invest the capital. Mohammed Ali, perhaps warned by the fate of the ex-Sultan of Turkey, did not await the result. He took refuge in the summer quarters of the Russian Legation outside the city, and by this step virtually abdicated.

On July 16, 1909, he was formally deposed by the

[page 38]

National Council, and his son, a boy of eleven, elected Shah in his stead. The supreme power rested in the hands of the Sipahdar and the Sardar-i-Assad, both men being imbued with Western ideas. After considerable haggling as to the allowance to be made to the ex-Shah, and after much discussion on the question of the Crown jewels, his Majesty finally left the capital on September 10th, and made his way by leisurely stages to the Caspian. In future he is to be the guest of the Russian Government, either at Odessa or in the Crimea.

It is too soon to judge how the change from an autocratic rule to that of a Constitutional Government will work; but owing to the agreement of 1907 between England and Russia, Persia has every chance of working out her own salvation. Whatever may be our opinion of the decadence of Persia at the present day, surely an empire which took its rise some five centuries before Christ, and is an independent kingdom in the twentieth century after Christ, must hold within it the elements of renewal? That Persia may succeed in her arduous task of regeneration is the earnest wish of all Englishmen who take any interest in the country.

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[page 140]

bodies as they burst through the gates, the adherents of the False Prophet having taken poison, and he himself having died on a funeral pyre in order that the people might believe that he had left them but for a season, and would reappear as he had foretold. Every legend about Al Mukanna speaks of the mask, or veil, which he habitually wore to conceal a countenance of surpassing ugliness; but the reason he himself gave was that he covered his face in order not to dazzle his disciples with its effulgence.

There is also the tradition that he caused a "false moon" to rise from a certain well, which was visited night after night by crowds of people anxious to see this remarkable phenomenon. It gained for him hundreds of converts, and the "Moon of Al Mukanna" is mentioned in two Persian poems, such an impression did the Veiled Prophet and his dramatic death make on his own and succeeding generations.

Sufism and Babism are the two heresies about which Europeans in Persia hear most.

The Sufis, or Mystics, are those who do not take the words of Mohammed literally, but give them a so-called spiritual interpretation; and they came into prominence in the time of Ismail Shah, the founder of the Sefavean

dynasty. Sufism is more a philosophy than a religion, and several of the most celebrated poets of Iran, such as Hafiz, are supposed to be singing of divine mysteries in their songs of love and wine. Though there are seekers after truth in their ranks, yet many writers affirm that the Sufis use their mystical creed as a veil for excess.

Professor E. G. Browne, [A Year among the Persians] however, speaks of them as

[page 141]

akin to the Quietists and Quakers, and says: "It is indeed the eternal cry of the human soul for rest; the insatiable longing of a being wherein infinite ideals are fettered and cramped by a miserable actuality. It is in essence an enunciation more or less clear, more or less eloquent of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and to be at one with God."

The sect of the Babis is so remarkable that many hoped that it might vivify the dry bones of Islam.

From the works of Lord Curzon [Persia] and Professor E. G. Browne, [A Year among the Persians, etc.] the latter of whom has made a special study of this subject, we learn that the founder of Babism, Mirza Ali Mohammed, a native of Shiraz, was given to religious meditation and went on pilgrimages from an early age. At the age of twenty-four he proclaimed himself to be the Bab, or "Gate," by which his followers might attain salvation; and throughout Persia he was hailed as the Mahdi, the long-expected Twelfth Imam.

His doctrines spread so rapidly that the Government and priesthood became alarmed, and imprisoned him at Shiraz. From that city he escaped to Isfahan, where the governor protected him; but on the death of his patron he was again consigned to a captivity which only ended with his death. On his way to the fortress where he was to be immured, village after village on the route poured forth its inhabitants to greet him with the wildest enthusiasm; his adherents rose at Yezd and in the province of Mazanderan; and the inhabitants of Zanzan defended their town against a Persian army with marvellous bravery. The beautiful poetess Kurratu'l-'Ayn spread his doctrines far and

[page 142]

wide, until her tragic death at Tehran; and it seemed as if the status of women would be raised, for they were to be considered equal with men, were to throw off their veils, and polygamy and divorce were to be abolished.

The Bab, however, was shot at Tabriz in 1850. Strangely enough, he actually escaped unhurt after the soldiers had fired at him, the bullets having merely cut the cords that bound him; and the cloud of smoke concealed his flight. His hiding-place was soon discovered, and he was dragged forth and done to death. His adherents were suppressed with terrible cruelty, and their attempt to assassinate the Shah resulted in sanguinary massacres in which, almost without exception, they met death and torture with unflinching heroism.

If the Bab had escaped, in all probability Persia would have been converted to

his doctrines en bloc, and would have emerged from the petrifying influence of Islam into a liberal atmosphere where progress was possible. At his death his followers split up into two factions, one following Mirza Yahya, whom the Bab had designated as his successor, and the other Beha Ullah the half-brother of the new Gate. Beha soon asserted his claim to be “He whom God shall manifest,” and gave out that his revelations were superior to those in the Bayan, or Bible, composed by the Bab during his imprisonment; and at the present day his successor is regarded as the head of the Babi faith, and his adherents visit him in his retirement at Acre.

Almost up to now the Babis have been persecuted at intervals, the last popular outburst against them,

[page 143]

engineered as usual by the priesthood, occurring at Yezd in 1903, when many were slain.

It is difficult to know whether the movement is gaining ground or not, as its followers naturally keep their faith a secret; but the standard it sets up is so high that it is to be hoped that in time it may become a power in the land. Many look upon the latest development of Babism, Behaism as it is called from its founder, as one of the great religions of the world, and they affirm that it numbers its adherents by millions.

Beha Ullah asserted that he was the last Manifestation of the Deity, and, as such, included in his own person the teachings and powers of Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed. There is no ceremonial or priesthood in his religion, which inculcates love toward all men, equality of the sexes, a universal language, and peace throughout the world.

Beha Ullah himself died in 1892, but his son carries on his work, and at the present day European and Oriental men of every nation and belief meet at Acre to sit at the feet of Abbas Effendi, the Master, as they call him, and imbibe his teachings.

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