

States, chiefly residents of New York, Washington, and Chicago.

In the brief personal acquaintance with the head of the new faith, with which I have been honored, Abbas has impressed me as a man of great mental ability, tact, and persuasive power; friendly in disposition, affable in his manners, and amiable and progressive in his spirit. He is wisely putting the emphasis in the Behai community more and more on those great principles of international fellowship and friendly relations between diverse faiths and races that best realize the essence of the Christian spirit. Moreover, he has practically exemplified these principles in his own pacific conduct and charitable activities. The descriptions that visitors to Akka have given of his daily personal benefactions is, indeed, beautiful and impressive. The warm welcome and cordial greetings which he has received here have been most creditable to the breadth and kindness of American Christianity.

The growing interest in this new religion, the very name of which a few years ago was quite unfamiliar to American ears, makes it interesting to turn back and review its origin and course of development.

Some recent writers and adherents have denied that this new Persian revelation is either a sect, a religion, or has had either ecclesiastical or political entanglements. But in its early stage, when it was known as Babiism, it bred alarming insurrections that were not subdued by the Persian Government for months. Beha'u'llah, after whom Behaism takes its name, was claimed by his followers and by himself to be the Lord of the Visible and the Invisible World and the highest Manifestation of God yet given to the world. The holy scriptures of this faith equal in their bulk and claims to sanctity the Quran, the Bible, and the Zand-Avesta. If any one, in the light of such facts, still doubts that the new Persian faith is properly called a religion and not a mere "movement" let him read that popular Behai hymn the "Tarkib-Band." In the adoring strains of this Persian psalm, Beha is called "The Lord without Compare," "The Creator of Creation and Distributor of Provisions," "The Object of Man's Creation," "Free from Time and Eternity." No Christian bard has ever used more glowing and unqualified epithets in glorifying the Christ than the Behai worshipers have lavished on the Divine Manifestation who dwelt at Akka. Behaism is, therefore, rightly called a religion. Now to understand the source and nature of our own Christian religion there is no light so priceless as that which is supplied by studying at close range the rise and development of a new faith in our own age and among those Oriental peoples, where the Gospel of Christ originated.

Behaism, in its origin, was an outgrowth of Babiism. This preceding faith was a reformed Muhammadanism of a pronounced adventist and theophanic type. It developed from what has been called the Shaykhi School of Shiite Muhammadanism. Seventy years ago a specially intense spiritual unrest pervaded Persia. This was due to the expected return to the earth of the Imam-Mahdi, who a thousand years before had mysteriously disappeared and was now expected to come back and inaugurate a reign of universal blessedness.

It was in this atmosphere of religious expectation that the youth, afterward called the Bab, grew up. His proper name was Mirza Ali Muhammad. He was born in 1820 at Shiraz. He was a self-made business man, but was very devout and upright and found time to attend the lectures of the leader of the Shaykhi School, Seyyid Kazim. When this leader died, Mirza Ali Muhammad assumed the headship.

Although he had not long before been considered illiterate, he now astonished his fellow-members by improvising Arabic poems, which were regarded by them as so eloquent, subtle, and profound that they were regarded as inspired, and he was proclaimed to be the long-expected Bab, or Gateway of Revelation.

A crowd of ardent disciples gathered about him; and in the next year, 1844, the exact completion of the sacred cycle of a thousand years, Mirza Ali Muhammad went to Mecca and proclaimed himself to the throng of pilgrims there as the Forerunner of the Imam-Mahdi.

On returning to Persia the new Gospel was vigorously pushed. The vices, ignorance, and bigotry of the Moslem clergy were unsparingly denounced. A multitude of astonishing miracles were related to the people as having been performed by the Bab or as having attended his steps — healings, prophecies, transfigurations in celestial glory, and exhibitions of marvelous knowledge. The commotion led to his imprisonment by the authorities. But he was allowed to write and communicate with his disciples, and during his imprisonment he elaborated an entirely new system of theology, morals, sociology, politics, and chronology.

The ardor and credulity of his disciples grew fast. Soon he was proclaimed as much more than the mere Gate of Revelation. Mirza Ali Muhammad was himself the long-expected Imam-Mahdi, “the Center of the Covenant” or “Goal of Revelation,” the full manifestation of Allah. It was only from humility and prudence that at first his Divinity had been veiled and he had been content to call himself merely the Bab, or Gateway to the complete Divine Manifestation.

The Babis now began to explain away all the outward forms of Moslem religion — prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and alms-giving — as mere symbols, not things to be carried out practically. The Babis began to put many of these reforms in practice. The tax-collectors were forcibly resisted; the Moslem clergy and officials began to repress the Babis with cruelty and force; the Babis retorted by assassinating the persecutors. Great insurrections broke out. The Babis resisted the Government troops with amazing heroism; and when arrested, tortured, and executed they endured martyrdom with the most pathetic fortitude. The heresy spread more and more. So the stupid Prime Minister thought to stamp it out for good and all by putting the Bab himself to death. Then a most dramatic thing happened, almost one of the great miracles of history. The Bab, after having endured the worst indignities and cruelties with Christ-like patience and fidelity, was at length hung up by ropes against the brick wall of the military barracks to be shot to death.

The second volley was fired at the Bab. When the smoke rolled away, wonder of

wonders! The Bab had disappeared. The people cried, "He has gone up to heaven." The officers were beside themselves. Was it a trick or a miracle? At length they found him alive and calm in the guard-room, serenely writing on the wall a stanza breathing a spirit of dauntless courage. The soldiers ran a sword into him and then hung him up again on the wall, and by another volley ended his mortal life.

In 1852 three Babis tried to assassinate the Shah. Because of this, hundreds of innocent fellow-believers were condemned to death, which they met most nobly. The cruelties and tortures which the Babis suffered at this time are only paralleled by those inflicted on the early Christians in Nero's time; and the heroism and martyr faith and fortitude of the Babis were as lustrous as those of any Christian martyr.

Of course, none of these persecutions put an end to Babiism. It only grew more rapidly in secret. Long before the death of the Bab he had appointed his successor. This was Mirza Yahya, a young Persian noble — a man of great piety, courtesy, and scholarship, a fine poet and devout mystic. Under the title of Subh-i-Ezel — i.e., "the Morning of Eternity," he was for some fourteen years the undisputed head of the Babi church. But Subh-i-Ezel was unequal to the situation. More a scholar and a devotee than a man of affairs as Subh-i-Ezel was, the interests of the Babi church suffered.

Now there was a half-brother of Subh-i-Ezel, whose name was Mirza Huseyn Ali. He was thirteen years older than his brother and was just the man for administering the affairs of the new church. Huseyn Ali was, indeed, not one of the "Letters of the Living"; but as the Primate's brother he might be the power behind the throne. A man of resolute spirit and great executive ability, he took up the administrative reins which the dreamy Subh-i-Ezel did not care to guide. But after having managed affairs for some fourteen years in Subh-i-Ezel's name, Huseyn Ali concluded that he might as well have the official position also.

The Bab himself originally had only claimed to be the "Gate," or Forerunner of the full Divine Manifestation. Now all the Babis agreed that the providential sign of "Him whom God should manifest" to complete the Babi religion and reveal the Perfect Divinity was "the improvisation of Arabic poetry." This was no difficult miracle; and so in 1866 or 1867, at Adrianople, whither the Babi leaders had removed, Mirza Huseyn Ali, the half-brother, improvised a quantity of religious verse and revealed sundry signs in fervid Arabic and Persian rhapsodies whereby he claimed to be himself the full "Point of Revelation" or "Center of the Covenant" to whom all the verses and prophecies of the Bab pointed. He took the name henceforth of Beha'u'llah — i.e., "The Glory of God," and at other times called himself "The Supreme Perfection." The Bab was no longer to be looked upon as a veritable impersonation of the Divine, but as a mere precursor of "the Manifestation of God" which appeared in the person of Beha. Subh-i-Ezel, who for fourteen years at least had been regarded as the authoritative head of the Babi church, was branded as the "First Letter of Denial" unless he yielded

to his elder brother. It was true that in 1861 or 1862 Beha had in his own writings (the *Ikan*) admitted the spiritual headship of Subh-i-Ezel and declared that “he [Beha] never sought supremacy over any one.” Now Beha proclaimed himself “The Lord of the Divine Attributes,” “The Point,” or “Providential Goal of Revelation.”

In the *Sura-i-Heykel*, or Discourse of the Divine Temple, Beha’u’llah relates how “an angel appeared and, addressing the heavenly hosts,” declared Beha to be “the Beauty of God in their midst” and “God’s authority among them”; “the mystery of God and His command”; “one hair of whom is more precious in God’s sight than all things in heaven and earth”; that he has been appointed “a temple” to be “the source of life amid the new Creation.”

This proclamation rent the Babi church asunder by the most bitter of schisms. The majority of the Babis, especially the younger, accepted Beha’u’llah as their master. The older leaders, who had been personal friends of the Bab and had exposed their lives in his behalf, stood staunchly by his nominee, the gentle visionary Subh-i-Ezel. But one by one they dropped away, not a few of them becoming victims of the unscrupulous violence of their rivals. The author of the *Hasht-Bihisht* alleges that sixteen of the followers of Ezel were thus removed; and Subh-i-Ezel, in his statement to Captain Young, charges that altogether about twenty of his party were killed by the partisans of Beha. It is even charged in the *Hasht-Bihisht* that Beha’u’llah was personally concerned in an attempt to poison his half-brother with a dish of poisoned rice. Beha and his daughter, Behaiah Khanum, in published accounts, agree that there was such an attempt at poisoning, but charge that it was Subh-i-Ezel who tried to poison Beha.

The lamentable thing in Beha’s conduct at this time is, as his own writings show, that Beha regarded the assassinations of Subh-i-Ezel’s followers, two of whom were among the original Apostles, not with abhorrence, but as Divine judgments upon his foes. There is, however, no evidence that the assassins acted under orders from Beha.

At any rate, if the end justifies the means, the means were approved by the victory achieved. The assassinations were a success. The weak Subh-i-Ezel was deserted. The great majority joined Beha’s party. The Turkish Government, to put a stop to the wrangling and disorders, exiled Subh-i-Ezel to Famagusta in Cyprus, where he lived many years in obscurity; and Beha was sent to Akka in Syria, where he peacefully passed away in 1892. Before his death he had worked a momentous revolution in Babiism. As soon as he was established in his authority he began to exercise the privilege which all the Babis recognized as belonging to the final “Point of Revelation” — viz., to abrogate, change, develop, and supersede the earlier revelations. He discouraged the visionary speculations of his followers, made the religion more moral and less metaphysical, and abolished many useless and impractical regulations; especially he did everything he could to conciliate the temporal authorities, even the Shah of Persia, whom the older Babis were accustomed to curse as the

Nero of their faith. Believing that the new faith could grow better by assimilating the elements already estranged from the orthodox Mussulman Church, he strove steadily to diminish the ratio of Muhammadan thought in it and to seek a better understanding with the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. In short, he tried to make Behaism henceforth a universal system suitable to all mankind. The older Babi scriptures and epistles, with their magniloquent rhapsodies, foggy mysticism, and wild visions of the return of the Imam-Mahdi and the millennial marvels of the new age, he allowed to fall into innocuous desuetude. The earlier history of the origin and rise of the Bab and his church was written over by Beha's adherents, in the book, *A Traveler's Narrative*, in an entirely new vein. The Bab was represented as a mere forerunner of Beha; Subh-i-Ezel was described as a coward and fugitive who went about in disguises; his earlier friends, Hazrat-i-Kuddus and the famous woman Apostle "Consolation of Eyes," were depreciated; and Beha'u'llah and his Neo-Babi doctrines were glorified, and every expression of detestation of the Shah which might interfere with Beha's new policy of conciliating the Persian Government was eliminated.

The effort thus radically to metamorphose the whole record of Babist history fortunately failed through the fact that many of the early documents had previously passed into European hands; but the effort to establish pacific relations with the Persian Government proved successful, and for forty years the Babis have been free from public persecution. By a secret propaganda they have greatly diffused their doctrines. Some writers even claim that there are now several millions of followers of the new religion.

Of Beha's life at Akka, where he remained over twenty years, there is little to relate. He remained most of the time in deep seclusion in a villa outside the city, supported by the Turkish Government and his presence carefully guarded from the approach of irreverent or curious people by his devoted followers.

Most of his time was spent in composing the sacred writings which now form the authoritative scriptures of the Behai faith. These comprise codes of laws, hygienic, ceremonial, and moral regulations, formulas for prayers to be said three times a day, explanations of prophecy and theological problems, and multitudes of tablets or religious epistles to believers. The best known, perhaps, are the famous epistles to the leading European monarchs containing his noted prophecies of the downfall of Abdul-Asiz and Napoleon III. Finding the Christians quite sympathetic, Beha now gave special attention to securing converts among them. In the year 1892, at the age of seventy-five, however, his supreme divinity failed any longer to protect Beha against the attacks of fleshly maladies, and, like any other mortal, he paid the usual debt to Nature.

Beha was succeeded in the office of authoritative head of the Behai church by his oldest son, Abbas, the "Greatest Branch." In this difficult position he has conducted himself with dignity, discretion, and breadth of mind. Soon after Beha's death a bitter quarrel broke out. Two half-brothers of Abbas and the aged secretary of Beha made serious charges against Abdul-Beha, and the

adherents of AbdulBeha made equally bitter charges in rebuttal. In the end Abbas and his party had a majority of the believers, and Abbas remains the acknowledged head of the church. The rebellious brothers have submitted to the authority of Abbas.

Just what is the spiritual rank or claim of Abbas is somewhat doubtful. Many of the faithful call him a “return” or reincarnation of Christ, and apply to Abbas the Old Testament prophecies as to the Messiah and claim that they are fulfilled in him. The eminent Behai writer, Abul Fazl, whose book on the Behai proofs has been approved by Abbas, states that Beha conferred upon Abbas the titles of “The Mystery of God,” “The Greatest Branch of God,” and “The Center of the Covenant” (or cause of God). He is recognized by all Behais as the authoritative expounder of the Divine Book, the Kitab-i-Akdas, and the source and origin of the commands and prohibitions of the Heavenly Religion — i.e., The Behai Faith. Abbas, however, prefers to call himself simply Abdul-Beha — i.e., the servant of Beha. When, in 1900, the envoy from Akka sought to procure the submission of Dr. Kheiralla, who for many years had been the leading promoter of Behaism in America, Dr. Kheiralla was ordered to assent to a certain confession if he would be taken back into the Behai church. In brief, it was this:

“There is no God but Beha; and Kitab-i-Akdas is a book revealed by God: Abbas is my Lord and Master. He who turneth away from him hath turned away from God; and I beseech God not to associate us with him either in this world or the next.”

What are the chief doctrines of Behaism? First, that of the Divine Unity, the Self-Existent One; from him both the worlds and humanity emanate. A favorite name by which the Behais call themselves is “The Unitarians.” As men cannot know the Eternal Invisible Essence, there occur from time to time manifestations or mirrors of the Primal Will. All the great prophets and sages and their revelations were words of God. Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were each successively more full of grace, and truth than his predecessor. But each was an incomplete Manifestation. Beha fulfilled them with a higher and fuller Revelation of the Divine Unity not to be improved upon for thousands of years.

In Beha’s own religious writings he speaks of himself in the most exalted terms. Beha entitles himself now as “The existent Root of things” — “The Lord of the Beginning and the End.” Now as “The Beloved One who quickened the World and the Nations by the Waves of Revelation”; “The Divine Father whereof Israel gave you tidings and the Comforter whom the Spirit promised should come after him”; “Whosoever faces unto him hath faced unto God.” “All preceding manifestations were ended in this manifestation” — i.e., Beha’s: “This is a Divine Manifestation the like unto which shall manifest himself but once in five hundred thousand years.”

Closely connected with the doctrine of Divine Manifestation is the doctrine of “The Return.” The common people understand it as a doctrine of

reincarnation of the soul in a second earthly life. But the Behai scholars and teachers say that this is an error.

The more subtle thinkers refine it into a mere identity in the archetypal idea of God or the Divine purpose. John the Baptist played the same role in the Divine purpose and thought as Elijah, and the Bab played the same role as Elijah.

As to the survival of the spirit Beha seems to have believed in a universal resurrection; but Abbas, according to the testimony brought back from Akka by Myron H. Phelps, teaches that for the great masses of humanity there is no hereafter: human consciousness does not survive the dissolution of the body. But where the mind is so developed that the Divine soul ray can form a complete union with it, then, that soul becomes a part of the Eternal Essence, man and God in one.

As to the Atonement, Abbas teaches that there is no Vicarious Atonement as held and taught by Christian theologians and churches. "Christ offered Himself as an example."

As to the relation of the other faiths to Behaism, it is claimed that all other manifestations culminate in this Greatest Manifestation of Beha as the Glory of God, and "all preceding lights are merged in this horizon in which the sun of might and Glory hath dawned."

Why should one accept Behaism? Chief among the reasons that the Behais give is that it is more universal and full of divine truth and power than either Christianity or Muhammadanism. It is the promised light that should fulfil them. The popular proofs given for this are Apocalyptic — i.e., drawn from the fulfilment of the prophecies in the Bible and the Quran by Beha, Abbas, and the Bab. Behaism claims to be a cosmopolitan faith in which all others shall be absorbed. It varies its proofs, therefore, with the nations to whom it presents itself. To the Jews it claims to fulfil the prophecies in the Old Testament and the Talmud; to the Christians it claims to accomplish the expectations of a Second Advent and realize the visions of the Apocalypse; to the Muhammadans the Bab is declared to be the Imam-Mahdi and Beha fulfils the longing of the faithful throughout Islam. The Behais constantly resort, therefore, to allegorical interpretation. All the ancient revelations are interpreted as pointing to the Persian masters. They quote with approbation the saying of one of the Imams: "We speak a word and we mean seventy meanings from it." In another place seven hundred meanings are affirmed.

Accordingly, the Behaists go through the Bible and the Quran and the Talmud, transforming days into years and names into numbers and numbers into types and symbols; and if they cannot succeed in hitting some date or other in the Bab's career or Beha's life or Abbas Effendi's existence that shows them to fulfil precisely the prophetic signs in one of the three great religions and disclose thus some mystical coincidence and deep celestial import, it is, indeed, lamentable. To find cogency in such proofs you must accept the equal inspiration of Bible, Quran, and Talmud, and be willing to interpret them

neither literally nor critically nor historically, but allegorically.

Besides these popular proofs the Behai scholars appeal to the inspired writings of Beha, so manifold, excellent, and spontaneously produced; to the rapid diffusion of their religion, obtaining converts in so many different faiths and races; to the self-sacrificing devotion and fidelity of the Behais and to the fact that none of the religious Founders before Beha even claimed to be the Supreme Manifestation of the Self-Existent God. The Behais also adduce the practical good results of their faith in elevating the morals and purifying the character of their own disciples and also that of their neighbors. They declare that wherever it spreads it works wonders in assuaging religious feuds and racial and personal animosities, inspires ardent spiritual enthusiasm, and promotes knowledge, industry, and fraternity. As a general thing, I believe this is true. But Behaism does not have a monopoly to-day of such elevating influence.

Now as to laws and morals, what did Beha inculcate? In the main, he confirmed the precepts given by the Bab in the Beyan, but with many changes. The authoritative Book of Laws for Behais is the Kitab-i-Akdas, written by Beha himself. By his command it was lithographed in Bombay; copies are in European libraries and translations of its substance have been published by European scholars.

In prayer the Behai believer is ordered to prostrate himself nine times daily with face turned toward the sacred city where Beha lived — i.e., Akka (American believers, however, do not prostrate themselves, but only kneel). There is no congregational prayer. There are nineteen months of nineteen days each and five extra days kept as a holy festival. The last nineteen days before this festival are days of fasting which last from sunset to sunset. But American Behais have not yet attained to this height of self-restraint over their Occidental appetites. All self-mortifications, except the nineteen days' fast, are forbidden. Monkhood, beggary, and Sufiism are strongly prohibited.

A man caught a third time thieving is to be branded on the forehead. A husband cannot divorce a wife at once (as Muhammadan law allows), but must wait for a year for the chance of reconciliation. A second wife, while the first lives, is permitted, but not encouraged. Beha himself had two wives. All the wealthy must pay the head of the church nineteen per cent of their income. Wine, opium, and praying in the streets and the carrying of arms except in time of war are prohibited, as also is slavery.

Criticisms and over-subtle explanations of the sacred code are banned, and any one who claims to have a new Mission or Divine Manifestation before the accomplishment of a thousand years is declared to be "a lying impostor."

The chief reforms of Beha were codified by him under fifteen heads called Good Tidings, which he promulgated in February, 1891. The first seven and the most important ones are in substance as follows:

Abolition of religious warfare. (No propagation of the faith by the sword.)
Permission of all sects and peoples to unite in friendly intercourse.
Permission to study foreign languages (which the Bab had prohibited), coupled with a recommendation that one language and one writing should be selected as a medium of international communication.
All the followers of El-Hak — i.e., Beha — are bound loyally to serve and support any king who extends his protection to their faith.
All Beha's followers, in whatever land they dwell, must cheerfully and ungrudgingly submit to the laws and conform to the customs of that country.
Promise of the "Most Great Peace" — i.e., that all nations shall become one in faith and harmony, and wars cease.
All are permitted (subject to the dictates of decency and good taste) to follow their own inclinations as to dress and the wearing of the hair.

As to the future of this religion, it is difficult to say. The superseding of the Bab and Babiism by Beha and his reformed system, and especially the ambition of Abbas to seek his converts rather from the Christian world than from the Moslem, introduce very uncertain elements. The dissensions that have arisen obstruct the growth of the religion. The personality of neither Beha nor Abbas seems so well adapted to quicken religious enthusiasm or bind men in personal loyalty as that of the Bab did.

For any man to subordinate Jesus Christ in the reverence and affections of the world to any modern man who is to be regarded as a higher manifestation of the Divine is something that grows every day increasingly difficult. The reporters and the biographers are too numerous and too inquisitive to allow that idealistic magnifying and embellishment, which transforms a mere man into a divinity, to work sufficiently undisturbed nowadays. Moreover, that which should be the seal of a prophetic mission and divine revealer and the guarantee of the prophet's sincerity — an heroic death — becomes daily more difficult of attainment. It is by no means easy for the most ambitious leader to get himself crucified, or even shot, nowadays. The Bab had the rare good fortune to have not only an obscure youth and an unquestioned simplicity and devotion, but also a series of romantic adventures and a martyr death, and his life was crowned at its close by a most dramatic incident which came near contributing to history one of the most astounding and best-accredited miracles in the annals of religion.

Beha lacked noticeably all those important elements of life and character requisite for the man who would center about himself, as a Divine Being, the veneration of any large portion of the human race. It was, therefore, a strategic error of the first magnitude when the Bab was subordinated as the Supreme Manifestation in this faith to the far less inspiring personality and much more vulnerable character of Beha'u'llah. It is easy to see many things that naturally would lead a progressive Moslem to abandon Muhammad and the Quran for the Bab and the Beyan. But why should any Christian renounce the gospels and Jesus Christ for Beha and the turgid rhetoric of the Surat-ul-Heykel?

However, in expediency and administrative efficiency, for the time being, it was advantageous for the Babis to be turned by Beha's authority from their irreconcilable attitude against the State. They were led to abandon the open conflict with the Persian Government. It is pretty sure that the religion has grown faster thereby.

But is it not possible that the glowing faith which, in the devoted lives of the early Babis, courageously confronted the most frightful tortures and filled princes and prime ministers with dread of dire convulsions may, like the flame of Anabaptist zeal in Germany, cool down to tepid respectability, accommodate itself to the world, and simply add one more to the many obscure sects of the Orient?

On the other hand, we must remember the weakness of the Persian power and the activity of these dreamers of a new kingdom of heaven on earth.

The unhesitating faith, the heroic martyrdoms, and burning enthusiasm of the Babis were shared by all classes and common to young and old. Their fearless devotion inspired respect in the indifferent and struck terror even among their persecutors. If the Behais of to-day can maintain this fervid zeal and combine with it a practical prudence and wisdom that the Bab knew not, they may go far. It is possible even that some day there may be a manifestation and revolution, both religious and political, in that ancient land of Persia which will work as great a change as Muhammad in the seventh century wrought in Arabia and Syria.

But for Europe and America, it is difficult to see how the Behais can look forward to any great future. Surely they cannot expect to subordinate Christianity to Behaism as that higher faith in which the imperfect truth and grace of the Gospel is to be fulfilled. In European and American civilization, if religion survive at all, it will continue to reign under that sign of the cross above which Constantine read the inspiring motto, "In this symbol conquer."

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