Mary Bird in Persia

Source: Bahá'í Library Online (bahai-library.com), curated by Jonah Winters.
Used by permission of the curator. Original citation: Clara C. Rice, Mary Bird
in Persia, bahai-library.com.
â”€â
”€â”

Mary Bird in Persia

Clara C. Rice
pp. 37-40

London: Church Missionary Society, 1916

[page 37]

The trend of Mohammedanism in Persia is towards Sufism
and consequently mystic pantheism. At the present time many followers
of the prophet are in revolt, some giving up all faith and becoming
materialists; others secretly accepting Christianity, being intellectually
convinced of its truth.

But the greatest leakage from Islam is caused by Bahâism,
whose attraction for Moslems consists in the fact that it is
promulgated by their own people, that it can be believed secretly,
and that its professors may openly appear as good Mohammedans
still. The Babis or Bahais were originally the followers of Mirza
Ali Muhammad, who called himself the Bab, or gate, a holy man
of Shiraz who lived during the first half of last century. The
followers of his successor Baha'ullah, who claimed to be a manifestation
of God the Father, increased in numbers and suffered much persecution.
The present leader of the sect, Abdul Baha or Abbas

[page 38]

Effendi,
figures as the divinely appointed "messenger" for this
present age to all who are ready-to accord this character to
him. In 1912 Abbas Effendi visited London, and in a West End
flat men and women of note gathered to listen to this Eastern
sage with his dignified personality. He spoke of the oneness
of the human family, God being the Shepherd; and of international
peace among nations and religions, the reality of religion being
the cause of unity and love. Science, education, and civilization
he regarded as necessary for full religion. Professor Browne
speaks of "the supernatural claim — whatever its exact nature — which
Abbas Effendi did and does advance," and elsewhere he says,

"The only essential in Bahai eyes are the love of Baha'ullah and his accredited successor, Abdul Baha, the belief in their divine character, and the eager desire to listen to the reading of their words . . . which are for the most part rhapsodies interspersed with ethical maxims." It follows from these extravagant claims that the religion of which these men are the founders challenges the acceptance of all the world, or at least of all those who believe in God at all. For if God's essence has been mirrored in a perfect human being, no believer in God can afford to neglect these manifestations except at his peril. But it is scarcely wise to say this before its Western friends, and Bahaism in the West is careful not to make inconvenient demands which it shrewdly perceives will not be granted. Its teaching is essentially pantheistic and Sufiistic.

[page 39]

Bahâism assumes the main tenets of the religion of each man whom it hopes to gain. Thus, in the West it often uses Christian technical terms, such as "Logos," in quite a different sense. For instance, Bahâ'ullah is often meant when the Logos is spoken of; and "resurrection" means becoming changed in soul, or converted to this faith.

A characteristic of Bahâism is wilful misrepresentation, e.g., in regard to the number of its converts — millions is the word commonly used, even to "fifty million souls." Present authorities suggest one hundred thousand in Persia, and possibly fifteen thousand outside, of whom two-thirds are Shiah Mohammedans. Believers may be found among Buddhists, Taoists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews. A more intellectual form of the teaching has been adopted in America, Russia, France, and Germany, and even in England one hundred converts may be found.

There is to most Western minds a charm about anything which comes from the East. And, when the Orient claims once again to have given birth to a new religion — a great world-wide movement — the attraction seems to a few to be irresistible. Some Westerners are drawn to Bahaism by its supposed freedom from dogma; others through its teaching of unity, brotherhood, and tolerance; while to others its appeal comes through its claim to be a world-wide religion, capable of embracing and unifying all other great faiths. But while it is possible to be in sympathy with its social and

[page 40]

philanthropic propaganda, yet the philosophic basis and religious tenets of this new religion are subversive of the Christianity of the Gospel.

At one time this movement seemed likely in Persia to prove a half-way house towards Christianity, but now it has so developed as to be rather a barrier. Men are content to come into the twilight of this faith, and there to entrench themselves, and are less easy to move than if they had remained Mohammedans. Bahais have set themselves the task of believing all religions and uniting all men in a common brotherhood. They would do away with war and educate and elevate their womanhood. They are devoted to the person of their present leader; their periodicals are becoming numerous, and are printed in Persian and several European languages. They are a courteous people, free from contempt of others, and personally attractive. They often listen respectfully to the claims of the Gospel, yet the opposition of Bahai influence in Persia is considerable, and is increasing daily. In Teheran they have three women missionaries — a doctor, a nurse, and an educationist. It is an easy faith — easier to accept than Christianity, as a public profession is not needed, and its followers can still be loyal to Islam, while a deep self-satisfaction lulls the conscience. Like other human cults it values what is good and beautiful, and calls upon men to live noble lives, but it tells little of the power with which to carry out what it inculcates.

METADATA

Views5593 views since posted 2013-03-10; last edit 2022-02-08 19:29 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../rice_mary_bird_persia
Language
English
Permission
public domain
Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/2563
Citation: ris/2563

Documents
East-asia
Encyclopedia
Essays
Etc
Excerpts
Fiction
Glossaries
Guardian
Histories
Introductory
Letters
Maps
Music
Newspapers
NSA-documents
NSA-letters
Personal
Pilgrims
Poetry
Presentations
Resources
Reviews
Scripts
Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings

home

sitemap

series

chronology

search:
author

title

— Mary Bird in Persia (Used by permission of the curator)