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This book is the history of a proscribed and persecuted sect written by one of themselves. After suffering in silence for nigh upon half a century, they at length find voice to tell their tale and offer their apology. Of this voice I am the interpreter.[11]

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Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk's, and strongly-marked but pleasing features--such was my first impression of 'Abbas Efendi, 'the master' (Aka)[22] as he par excellence is called by the Babis. Subsequent conversation with him served only to heighten the respect with which his appearance had from the first inspired me. One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I should think, scarcely be found even amongst the eloquent, ready, and subtle race to which he belongs. These qualities, combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at the influence and esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father's followers. About the greatness of this man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt.[13]

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During the morning of the day after my installation at Behje[24] a one of Beha's[35] younger sons entered the room where I was sitting and beckoned to me to follow him. I did so, and was conducted through passages and rooms at which I scarcely had time to glance to a spacious hall, paved, so far as I remember (for my mind was occupied with other thoughts) with a mosaic of marble. Before a curtain suspended from the wall of this great ante-chamber my conductor paused for a moment while I removed my shoes. Then, with a quick movement of the hand, he withdrew, and, as I passed, replaced the curtain; and I found myself in a large apartment, along the upper end of which ran a low divan, while on the side opposite to the door were placed two or three chairs. Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called taj [46] by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

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A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued:

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--'Praise be to God that thou hast attained! . . . Thou hast come to see a
prisoner and an exile. . . We desire but the good of the world and the
happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition
worthy of bondage and banishment. . . That all nations should become one in
faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between
the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should
cease, and differences of race be annulled--what harm is there in this? . . .
Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass
away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come. . . Do not you in Europe need this
also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? . . . Yet do we see your kings
and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction
of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind.
. . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as
one kindred and one family. . . Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his
country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind. . .'

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- 1 1. Browne (ed.), A Traveller's Narrative, vol. II, vii.
- 2 2. Aqa.
- 3 1. Browne (ed.), A Traveller's Narrative, vol. II, xxxix-xl.
- 4 2. Bahji.
- 5 3. Baha'u'llah.
- 6 4. ????? (???? ? ??????)
- 7 1. Browne (ed.), A Traveller's Narrative, vol. II, xxxvi.
- 8 ??. Traveller's Narrative II, 70 ? 71.

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