

write such perfect Arabic.

After he went into business his family noticed what seemed to them certain unusual traits in the young man; he would depart at midday, retire to a secluded spot and meditate, chant and read prayers, spending hours in deep spiritual communion. Observing this the Báb's family endeavored to awaken in him a greater interest in acquiring wealth and fame, but they soon found that these things did not interest him.

In the Báb physical beauty was joined to that of the spirit. His hair was black and his dark brown eyes shone like stars. His features were symmetrical and his face most luminous. His carriage was majestic, yet simple and humble. The purity of his character was such that even his enemies could find no fault with him. It would be hard to imagine a life more spotless, more devoted to love for humanity. He reflected the light of the spirit and radiated to those around him such wonderful spiritual life that his superiority was generally recognized, and he was shown utmost honor and respect. When he entered a room he was given the seat of honor and others, involuntarily, waited for him to speak first. He was full of happiness, contentment and resignation; so it seemed as if the Spirit of God were shining from that young body.

A few years before his declaration, in 1844, he left his uncle's office and journeyed to Karbala, Mesopotamia, the center of the Shi'ite Muslim world. The tomb of Husayn, the martyred grandson of Muhammed is in Karbala, and every year thousands of people made a pilgrimage to this shrine, where long prayers were read. When the Báb repeated his own prayers before the assemblage the people turned from the usual prayers and gave all their attention to him. The Muslims had, in Arabic and Persian, many prayers which seemed to them beautiful beyond description. Therefore they were prepared to recognize the sublime beauty and the inspiration of the Báb's prayers. He remained in Karbala several months and many people were drawn to him because of his inspired utterance and the holiness of his life.

At the age of twenty-three the Báb married a young girl, a relative of his family. A little son was born to them who lived but a few months. And shortly after, the Báb was apprehended and thrown into prison.

1844 Call of the Báb

The religious outlook of the Islamic world had become very dark; the people had lost their spiritual vision and held to dogma as spiritual truth. About this time God inspired the hearts of a number of men to look deeper into their religion and study its true meaning. This school of men in their teachings made frequent mention of a Star of Guidance which was about to dawn. In 1843 they set out on a journey to the distant parts of Persia to try and discover this Master of the New Age. Before starting they gathered together in a mosque and for forty days fasted that they might be prepared for the momentous journey. They had been taught that there were nineteen proofs by which they might recognize the Great Master, the coming One, one of which was his spiritual power which, even if he spoke not a word, would draw the people to him. This

power they were to find in the person of a handsome youth. They made a compact that he who discovered the Truth should at once communicate it to the others. Then they started off, in different directions.

Mulla Husayn, a very celebrated and learned man was one of this group. He remembered having met at Karbala a singularly spiritual youth, who came from Shíráz, and he decided to journey to Shíráz and try to find him. Arriving in that city he made inquiries which led him to the young man's home. To his great joy the door was opened by the Báb, himself, who welcomed him as a guest and bade him enter. Then the Báb told him how, when about to leave home early that morning for his office, there had come to him the foreknowledge that great and glorious news was about to be made known. He knew that the coming of this guest was a part of the good news. So, here in the rose garden of the Báb's home, was laid the foundation of the Great Cause.

The Báb inquired of Mulla Husayn by what sign would he recognize the Great Star. And Mulla Husayn gave the nineteen proofs.

Suddenly the Báb said: "Do you see these signs in me?"

Mulla Husayn was made almost breathless by the question. However, after a moment's consideration he said:

"Yes, I see all the signs but one in you. That one sign is this: the Great One should have extraordinary knowledge. This important sign of wisdom and knowledge I do not see in you." He said this, thinking that great knowledge must be acquired in colleges and universities.

The Báb talked of other matters, tea was served, and the hours passed.

Later, while conversing upon very spiritual subjects, the Báb again said: "Do you see these signs in me?"

Mulla Husayn did not make immediate reply but led the conversation into channels which it seemed to him must make apparent this knowledge.

The Báb then left the room, and Mulla Husayn, seeing some books upon the table, took one up and began reading. He was astonished to find that both the ideas and phraseology were entirely new and unfolded the divine mysteries. He read page after page and when the Báb returned inquired the name of the author of the book.

The Báb replied: "A young man."

Mulla Husayn exclaimed: "Read some of these words yourself! Who has written them?"

The Báb said: "You see. You see."

Then he placed the book beside him, and began to speak eloquently, in a higher language. The words flowed from him like a river. Mulla Husayn listened spellbound, for these were the erudite phrases of the book. He became so intoxicated with divine joy that he was like a man beside himself; so the Báb

again spoke in his ordinary manner, and gave him tea. Mulla Husayn threw himself at the feet of the Báb and cried: "I must go and proclaim the truth!" But the Báb said: "No, this is not the time."

When Mulla Husayn, the first disciple, was completely converted he longed to bring his associates to the Báb but the Báb told him that, for the present, he must just tell them that the Star of Hope had arisen, but not of his whereabouts.

Mulla Husayn returned to his friends who found him so transformed that they besought him to tell them if he had found the Truth. So, one by one, he took them to the Báb, and the first class, numbering seventeen, was formed. Kurratu'l-Ayn also became one of these disciples. With the Báb himself they were called the Nineteen Letters of the Living.

The Báb called himself "Báb" because he was the "gate" of the New Age. The first disciple was given the name "Bab el Bab", for through him the people came to know the truth. Another spiritual person among the eighteen "Letters" who recognized the Báb from afar and instantly believed in him, was Quddus. When the eighteen Letters of the Living were complete the Báb became the Point of Knowledge around which they gathered; eighteen apostles and one Point, making the first circle, the first unity.

The Báb gave his disciples certain wonderful epistles bidding them travel throughout Persia and, especially, to Karbala that they might teach the religious leaders of the Islamic world. These early apostles were fearless and full of enthusiasm. Whenever they entered a city they at once gathered the people about them and proclaimed aloud the good tidings of the New Day and the coming of a new spiritual dispensation. As their students were of the Islamic world they referred to the Qur'an and its prophecies concerning this day and the coming of the Point of Knowledge, explaining that they were fulfilled in the Báb.

In the Qur'an it is said that no one could give to the world a book to compare with the Qur'an. And from the time of Muhammed until the year 1260 of the Hegira this was true. Then the Báb, through divine power, wrote with the same brilliant and profound knowledge. In order to prove this power to the people he called to them in his epistles, saying that he would answer abstruse questions without recourse to any book. So he was asked many difficult questions. And he wrote the answers with the rapidity of lightning, each page a masterpiece in thought, in style and beauty of penmanship. Again and again it was proved that his writings were not of the intellect, but were pure inspiration.

The Báb now went to the holy city, Mecca, the center of Islam, to which thousands of people journey every year. The journey was made by sea, and one day a terrible storm arose. It seemed as though the ship would sink any moment and the passengers were in a state of great excitement, when some of them noticed the Báb, sitting quietly, apart from the others, in deep meditation. He seemed so undisturbed by the impending peril that they exclaimed: "Do you not realize that we shall all be drowned? But, with perfect serenity, he

continued his meditations, and soon the storm passed and the sea became calm.

Among the passengers on this ship was a man of spiritual insight. He recognized the quality of the courage and serenity in the Báb and later became one of the Letters of the Living.

While the Báb was at Mecca the three disciples who first accepted him started out from Shíráz and began fearlessly proclaiming the message. Mulla Sadiq, an eminent and very popular Muslim, head of a mosque and with a following of hundreds of people, was one of their converts. It was the custom to proclaim, four times a day, from the turret of the mosque: "God is great and Muhammed is His Prophet !" Mulla Sadiq told the mohazin to call out also that a great Gate of Knowledge had appeared. He, himself, mounted his pulpit and read from the writings of the Báb profound interpretations of the Qur'an. This sufficed to arouse in opposition some of the people of the community; others recognized the mercy and justice of this message to establish the Kingdom of God. The mullahs of the city became so disturbed at these happenings that they appealed to the Governor, as fanatical as they, who gathered the people together in a large hall and demanded the presence of Mulla Sadiq.

When Mulla Sadiq entered the audience hall his presence bespoke such majesty that the people were impelled to rise and show him deference. The Governor inquired concerning the new teachings. Mulla Sadiq replied: "You are asleep! You must rouse yourselves and listen to this call for the One whom you are awaiting has appeared, to fulfill the prophecies. This is his Book and he, himself, is at Mecca!"

But this great message was rejected, and the three disciples of the Báb were taken into custody. Their beards were burned, holes were pierced in their noses, they were bastinadoed, and made to ride through the city seated backwards on donkeys. They accepted this treatment with such resignation that the people began to open their eyes. They were banished from that city, and went to other places to teach the Cause.

By this time word had come, from Bushire on the Persian Gulf, that the Báb was returning from his pilgrimage to Mecca. The Governor then sent guards to bring him back to Shíráz. When he arrived in the city the state authorities and the clergy met in a great conclave and flung at him numberless questions. These he answered with such wisdom that his friends were all confirmed in the teachings and his enemies could find no fault with him. Nevertheless it was decided that he must abide in the home of his relatives, that no one could visit him, and that his teachings must not be spread among the people.

But the idols of imagination were now broken. The people were ready to investigate, and many eminent men, seeking information, made their way to the Báb.

Then a terrible epidemic appeared in Shíráz, hundreds of people were stricken, and fear and consternation fell upon all. The Governor, when his son fell ill, felt that this had come upon them because of their persecution of the

Báb. So he went to the Báb and fervently besought him to help his son. When the son was healed the Governor was so overjoyed that he permitted the Báb to leave the city that he might bring happiness to others.

Quietly the Báb left Shíráz and traveled to the city of Isfahan, in the center of Persia. The rumor of his coming having reached those regions the people ran out to meet him, and the Governor, Manoucher Khan, a deeply religious man, welcomed him, and became a believer. The radiant, spiritual happiness of the Báb, the glowing beauty of the love of God which he manifested, drew hundreds of people to him. The doors were thrown open, that all might enter, might meet the Báb, listen to his words and be quickened. Among those who visited him during these first days of his stay in Isfahan were many important personages, whose presence inspired the people with confidence. Then some of the clergy, seeing the Báb's large following, feared for their own popularity. The Governor told them that, since this was a theological matter, a meeting would be called, and all their questions could be put to the Báb. Reports were taken of this meeting. These reports exist now, and the questions asked were most childish. The Báb in replying threw such wonderful new light upon these questions that they were utterly unable to comprehend his words.

1847 Banishments, Imprisonments and Sieges

The Governor was much disturbed. Although he favored the Báb, yet he could not risk his position. So he said, to the mullahs: "I will exile him for your sake." He ordered a cavalcade to accompany the Báb on his departure, and instructed the guards to bring him back. So the cavalcade left the city through one gate, and brought the Báb back through another. He stayed with the Governor for forty days, and many people visited him and received the message. He wrote many volumes upon his teachings during this period of his stay in Isfahan. The Governor became so enkindled that he wished to take radical steps to spread the Cause. But the Báb said: "This is a day of faith and persuasion. Force cannot accomplish your purpose. We must teach the people through self-sacrifice and non-resistance." He also told the Governor that his (the Governor's) days were numbered, and that ere long he would enter the Kingdom of God. On the fortieth day of the Báb's concealment in the palace of the Governor the Governor passed away.

The new Governor was neither just nor good. Finding the Báb in the palace he told the populace. They raised a great hue and cry and demanded that he be banished from Isfahan. Therefore, by special permission of the Shah, the Báb was sent to Tihran.

While these events were taking place the eighteen Letters of the Living were traveling north, south, east and west proclaiming the teachings with such spiritual fervor that their number had increased to a host of believers. It was like a great conflagration. When the Báb's teaching had spread throughout Persia the Shah wished to know of its message. On his staff there was a mulla in whom he had great confidence. This mulla he sent to Shíráz to visit the

Báb that he might ascertain the nature of his teachings and report to the Shah. This mulla became one of the Báb's greatest apostles and finally gave his life for the Cause.

The Báb wished to meet the Shah, personally, also the Grand Vizier and the Cabinet. He hoped that they might be persuaded to give heed to the revelation; then the people of Persia might also become enlightened and enter into a new, spiritual life. Therefore, when he arrived, in his journey to Tihiran, at a village nine miles distant from the capital, he sent a letter to the Shah. But the Grand Vizier prevented the Shah from meeting the Báb. He influenced the Shah to write him that it was impossible to grant an interview, giving as excuse that the frontier was being attacked by an enemy. The Shah then had the Báb taken to northern Persia, there to await a change in conditions, saying he would send for him later. On this journey from Tihiran the Báb's bodyguard, rough, uncouth tribesmen, became so transformed through his spiritual power that before the journey's end they were ardent followers, ready to do anything whatsoever that he desired.

In banishing the Báb, at this time, from place to place, the guards made it a custom to stop outside the towns and villages that no one might know of his presence. But despite this precaution the news of his approach would spread and when they drew near the towns the people would meet him and, often, bribe the guards for permission to talk with him and receive his spiritual instructions. Thus this plan of banishment which, it was believed, would exterminate the teachings, proved a failure, for all those who came in touch with the Báb were irresistibly drawn to him. Even the Governor of this province was attracted, and allowed the people free access to his presence.

Then the enemies of the movement again became active and influenced the Shah to command that the Báb be sent to a very remote castle, near the extreme northern boundary of Persia. The Governor, here, was an exceedingly harsh man, and he kept the Báb's presence absolutely secret. His followers traveled and searched, in every direction, but no one could discover where he was hidden.

In this castle the Báb's imprisonment was extremely severe. He was allowed no light, and completely isolated from the outside world. However, he now had the time to write many divine teachings, which gradually spread throughout Persia. During these days a fire was lighted in the hearts of his followers, which flamed forth and enkindled others and many awoke from the deep sleep of centuries and started out to travel and teach. Then the enemies became more active than ever and determined utterly to extinguish the Cause. The followers of the Báb were obliged at times to band together and defend themselves, bodily, behind trenches, in order to resist the violent attacks made upon them, in different parts of the country. A new Shah, seventeen years of age, now reigned and the country passed through a period of confusion. More than ever were efforts made to extinguish the flame of the movement, because of a prevailing idea that, in this way, peace could be established in the land.

The siege of Mázindarán, which occurred about this time, has no parallel in

religious history. About four hundred of the followers of the Báb were gathered together in a jungle. Here they were surrounded by several thousand guards, armed with guns and cannon, and reinforced by a populace numbering many, many thousands. In the center of the jungle there was an ancient shrine and here the believers entrenched themselves, and a siege began which lasted for nine months. During the last three months of the siege the little party were almost starving. They ate their horses, and then boiled the leather of the harness, and ate grass and herbs to sustain life. Yet they spent the time in prayer and spiritual communion, and the forces of the government were utterly unable to overcome them.

Then the general decided upon other tactics. He sent to the besieged the Book of the Qu'ran upon which he had written a covenant or agreement to the effect that if they would come out, and go their way, their lives would be spared. Believing in the sincerity of this document they filed out into the open. They were asked to lay down their arms, and when this was done a feast was spread before them. While partaking of this feast the soldiers charged upon them and massacred them all, to a man.

Two other events, of a like nature, occurred in southern and central Persia.

The movement seemed threatened with complete destruction. Although the followers of the Báb made heroic defense, the government authorities slaughtered them right and left. Yet, strange to say, their numbers steadily increased, and the longing for truth flamed brighter and brighter.

1850 Martyrdom of the Báb

At last, in desperation, the Shah and his prime minister determined to do away with the Báb himself. Word was sent to the Governor of Tabriz to bring him out from his prison. An important meeting was then held at which many dignitaries were present. The Báb was questioned, declared a heretic, and sentenced to death. An order was issued that he be bastinadoed. But, at the risk of their lives, the servants of the court refused to carry out these instructions, They were filled with respect and admiration for the noble prisoner. This so angered the enemies that one of them rose in his wrath and himself perpetrated the deed.

The proclamation went forth that the Báb was condemned to death, and great excitement prevailed in the city. On July ninth, 1850, he was brought out, with bare head and feet, and compelled to walk through the streets to his execution while thousands followed him,

One of the most devoted disciples of the Báb, who had been with him in prison, requested that he be martyred with his master. So these two were fastened with ropes to the wall of the citadel, in the open square, and a regiment of Armenian soldiers were commanded to fire upon them. They all fired, at the same moment. When the smoke cleared away the body of the disciple was discovered riddled with bullets. But the Báb was nowhere to be seen. At first it was thought that a miracle had been wrought. But, upon investigation, the Báb was

found in a room in the citadel. The bullets had merely severed the ropes binding him to the wall, and he had fallen to the ground, unharmed. He was brought back and the regiment commanded to fire again. But they refused to do so, saying, among themselves, that the Báb must be a great saint. Another regiment, of Muslim soldiers, was brought, and this time their bullets pierced his body, leaving his face quite free of disfigurement. Thus the soul of the Báb ascended to heaven,

His body was carried and dropped outside the city, before the eyes of the populace, as a sign of disgrace. A small number of guards were set to watch the place. While most of them were asleep some of the disciples of the Báb came and bribed the two who remained awake, and obtained possession of the body. They carried it to a silk factory and it was carefully wrapped in silks, and taken secretly to Tihran, where it remained for many years. After the departure of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had the body brought to Mount Carmel where it was placed in a tomb and now all pilgrims who journey to this region visit this shrine.

1852 Eradication and Bahá'u'lláh in the Black Pit

Two years after the martyrdom of the Báb great trouble came upon his followers through a few fanatical disciples who in their ignorance made an attempt upon the life of the Shah which resulted in a violent persecution of the whole movement. The Shah, very despotic and powerful, was at his summer palace. These misguided disciples secreted themselves in the garden, and, as he came forth from the palace they rushed forward, with pistols. The Shah was slightly wounded and several of the conspirators were killed. Believing this to mean that the movement was opposed to the government the Shah gave orders that all the believers in Persia be searched out. In Tihran many were found; among these were about forty eminent men who were placed in an underground prison where they were heavily chained and given little food. Each day one or two of this number were taken out, by order of the Shah, and executed, after being subjected to every kind of torture. The Shah divided the believers among groups representing the various professions and trades, to be killed by each group according to their particular method. The spiritual fortitude of these martyrs was so wonderful that some of their enemies even were converted. While undergoing utmost torture they chanted the glorious verses of the Báb, and one of them danced during his execution. Permission was given by the court to kill all believers and confiscate their possessions. It was believed that anyone who killed a follower of the Báb would ascend to heaven.

A regiment of soldiers was sent to destroy the home of Bahá'u'lláh, and men, women and children, nineteen in all, were captured. They were stoned and thrown into prison. This, it was thought, would completely eradicate the movement.

Ministry, Writings and Teachings of the Báb

Although the six years of the Báb's ministry were spent, largely, in prison and in exile, and he was constantly surrounded by guards and enemies, he was at all times peaceful and happy, always radiating heavenly joy. He was so

surrounded by enemies that his friends and followers had the greatest difficulty in obtaining a meeting with him, and yet, thousands and thousands of the people of Persia, of high and of low degree, partook of his teachings, became their embodiment, and spread them to all parts of the country.

During this long persecution the Báb found time not only to dictate many teachings but, with his own pen, to write volumes of exquisite calligraphy. In Persia, to this day, beautiful penmanship is regarded as an art. Those who are fortunate enough to possess some of the delicate writings of the Báb consider them a most valuable heritage. Many of the Báb's writings were, unfortunately, destroyed. Often, when his followers were being persecuted and driven from their homes they buried in the ground, before fleeing, his writings which they prized so highly. Returning at some later time they would find that moisture had almost effaced them.

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BAB

The teaching of the Bab to which his persecutors objected most was that man should be delivered from superstition and dogma. Living in Persia, it was necessary to consider the Islamic world; therefore a large part of his teaching referred to questions asked him regarding the Qur'an. He called to the people of Islam to consider the inner and important meaning therein. He taught that he himself was but the "gate" or door to the "City of Revelation", that divine City which would be revealed. He taught that a Great Personage, then living, but hidden behind the veils, would come to them and teach them a divine revelation and would usher in the new era of universal brotherhood. He often addresses this invisible Being in his writings, saying: "O, my Master! O, my Lord! I have accepted every persecution in order to prepare the people for Thy coming so that when Thou shouldst unveil Thyself they might be ready to meet Thee!"

A great question of the Islamic religious world was that of the "return", the belief being that when the new Gate of Knowledge appeared many holy souls would return and be present with him in flesh and blood. This question was given utmost importance, and it is for this reason that the Báb said the qualities and attributes of these holy souls had appeared, through his apostles.

Another question which the Islamic world addressed to the Báb was that of the "Resurrection", which was understood, literally, as it is by the Christians who have the same teaching. The Báb explained that the resurrection is the coming of the Manifestation of God, when religion is renewed. He said that his own coming was the Lesser Resurrection; but the Great Manifestation, of whom he so frequently spoke, would usher in the Great Resurrection. God sitting upon the throne, he explained, meant that the body of the Manifestation would be the throne of the Holy Spirit. Paradise, meant the recognition of the Lord in the Manifestation and living in accordance with His teachings. Hell was selfishness, fanaticism and doubt. He said that resurrection, therefore, did not mean the resurrection of flesh and blood from the tomb, but a spiritual resurrection, an awakening of inner potentialities and spiritual faculties,

brought about by the recognition of the Manifestation of God.

The Báb divided the revelation of the Manifestations of God into five parts. The first part deals with those writings which explain the mystery of divinity. The second part includes the prayers, communes, supplications revealed by the prophets and addressed to God. These, when recited, draw man unto the spirit of divine harmony and a higher state of spirituality. The third part is concerned with the interpretations of the heavenly books, explaining the symbolism and hidden meanings from which man has been veiled for past centuries. The prophets and Manifestations from time immemorial have spoken in metaphor and symbol and their meaning it has not always been easy for people to understand. But the Great Teachers themselves have been able to throw a flood of light upon the esoteric teachings of the former Great Teachers; they alone can fully grasp and explain the significance of the sacred words. The fourth applies to the metaphysical, scientific and theological questions asked by the scholars and thinkers of the age. The fifth part is the essence of the Teachings.

The writings of the Báb may be similarly divided. First, his explanations of divinity, so subtle, so transcendental, so divine in quality that a mind and soul especially equipped are required, to understand them. Second, the prayers which are filled with ecstasy and rapture. Third, answers to questions regarding interpretations of the Islamic writings, as the teachings of the Báb have largely to do with the Islamic world. Fourth, treatises on scientific and philosophical questions. Fifth, the verses of the Báb stating that when the Great Manifestation appears He will cancel or repeal as many of these teachings as are not fitted to the exigencies of the time.

The Báb declared that he had brought in but the Lesser Resurrection because his message was circumscribed, limited to the Islamic people and to one part of the world. But there would arise a new consciousness, a universal resurrection, and this new spiritual consciousness would sweep over the entire world.

Normalisations

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