Modern Iran

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Chapter 4
Nasiru'd-Din Shah's Heritage

As one historian of the Qajar period remarked, the conduct of Muhammad Shah's vazir, Hajji Mirza Aghasi, a person generally held in slight esteem by Iranians, while not deserving 'the high opinion which he entertained of his own performances'1 was nevertheless sufficiently effective to prevent Iran disintegrating either into autonomous principalities or appanages of Russia in Asia and Britain in India. In spite of his 'dervishism', the vazir was not slow to realise that an influential Iranian nobleman in the eighteen-forties could personally profit from the new contacts with neighbouring powers. The Russian and British policies included commercial considerations as well as strategic aims. Mirza Aghasi perceived, as many of his class were to do, that in the new age then dawning landed estates were no longer useful merely as the source of food supplies for the absentee-landlord's palace and numerous dependants in the city; and no longer of the significance as reservoirs of manpower in times of civil war that they had been in less settled epochs. The settlement imposed on Iran by Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar had not been completely abrogated and Russian and British efforts to prevent any major internal explosion had been effective; also the nobility's new preoccupations, the product of contacts with foreign powers, further inhibited serious outbreaks of internal conflict.

One of the consequences of the Russian interest in buying exports from northern Iran, and British trading activities in the south, was that during Nasiru'd-Din Shah's reign the Iranian landed proprietor gradually ceased to be

an influential and patriarchal protector or arbiter in a domestic, independent, locally balanced and locally sufficing agrarian system, and became instead a large-scale profiteer able to dispose of cash-crops, such as cotton, opium, silk, dried fruits and nuts, in foreign markets.

This change is exemplified in Mirza Aghasi's schemes for developing certain aspects of Iran's internal resources. He revived the cultivation of the mulberry-tree in the Kirman region, to feed silkworms; and he envisaged the diversion of the waters of the River Karaj for

1 R. G. Watson, A History of Persia, London, 1866, p. 354.

Tehran's water-supply, which the Karaj waters do furnish today. His measures were in accord with an Iranian aristocrat's shrewd perception that the time had come for turning to personal enrichment the openings provided through new foreign contacts. The failure of Hajji Mirza Aghasi's countrymen to praise him for his enterprise was partly no doubt due to an equally shrewd appreciation on their part that new economic alignments emerging during his period as Prime Minister were not destined to enrich the people, but only to make a rapacious aristocracy more powerful, while the situation of the cultivator became little better than slavery.

Muhammad Shah died in the late summer of 1848, Once again the British and Russian representatives, at this time Colonel Farrant and Prince Dolgorouky respectively, were on the alert to prevent any major outbreak. The heir-apparent was in Tabriz, but the new Queen Mother showed firmness and promptitude in the palace at Tehran, while a group of notables, having first chosen to seek security for their deliberations in the British Legation, formed an interim council of regency. Nevertheless there were disturbances, both in the capital and at provincial centres. In the latter the local populations

sought to take advantage of the situation to rid themselves of unwanted Provincial Governors.
In the capital the riots were against the unpopular Mirza Aghasi. Two court factions, the so-called Azerbaijan Party and the adherents of the Asafu'd-Daulah, Allah Yar Khan, now in exile, united against Mirza Aghasi, joining in the general demand for his dismissal as the necessary prelude to a new reign. Mirza Aghasi barricaded himself with a private army in the Arg or citadel of Tehran but was soon forced to flee and during several difficult days the British and Russian Missions acted in concert to ensure the sixteen-year-old Shah's safe arrival on the throne. The young Shah finally reached Tehran under the capable aegis of Mirza Taqi Khan.

Mirza Taqi Khan, who on his master's arrival in Tehran received the title of Amir-i-Nizam, Commander-in-Chief, a title he preferred to that of Sadr-i-'Azam, was the son of a cook who had later become steward to the Qa'im Maqam.
Contemporary foreign observers made much of this, referring to his 'plebeian' origins and so transferring western European social conceptions to Qajar Iran—a transference not confined to westerners' observations on that country but also influencing the minds of some of the Iranian elite, by this time open to foreign concepts by the journeys to Iran of foreigners and the journeys abroad of Iranians. But the contrast between classes is none the less basically alien to the Muslim-Persian social structure.

One of the characteristics of Muslim society was mobility. Particularly in the Shi'ite social ideal, it was not a man's birth that counted so much as his ability. A clever man could ascend to the highest degrees of the religious hierarchy, which were in fact generally filled by men of the people. A great measure of the influence of the clerics arose from this, for they could claim, and still do, close contact with the common people and that they were thus better able than others to gauge popular

reactions.

Mirza Taqi Khan was not, however, a cleric; but in becoming the chief officer of the state from the kitchen he was not without exalted precedents in Persian dynastic and political history. If, as R. G. Watson suggests,1 Persians like the Queen Mother were opposed to him because of his 'humble extraction', already by 1848 European ideas had penetrated certain Iranian minds to a surprising extent. What is more likely is that opposition to the Amir-i-Kabir, the Great Amir as Mirza Taqi Khan came to be called, was excited by his stern integrity and zeal for reform.

His political lineage is much more significant than his descent, although it might be expected that the son of a steward in a household run to the satisfaction of a man like the Qa'im Maqam would possess a shrewd sense of affairs. Mirza Taqi Khan had been the protégé of the Qa'im Maqam, whose work he attempted to continue. To do this he had to try to mould the mind of the autocrat who was his employer, so that he at least would support the minister's efforts. In the same way the Qa'im Maqam had shaped the mind of 'Abbas Mirza and tried to influence Muhammad Shah on 'Abbas Mirza's untimely death, though then he had made little headway. The fate of both these ministers demonstrates how difficult and dangerous striving to influence a Shah could be: neither did the Qa'im Maqam long outlive Muhammad Shah's accession, nor Mirza Taqi Khan that of Muhammad Shah's successor. Portentous was his initial incapacity to win the confidence of the Queen Mother and, as he was by no means the first vazir to suffer dismissal and death, so he was not the first to suffer through failure to obtain support of the harem. At the end of this book we shall see Iranian women permitted to sit in Parliament. Now they are allowed openly to play their part in politics, but they always wielded considerable power, even when strictly confined.

On Nasiru'd-Din Shah's accession, Mirza Aghasi was supplanted by Mirza Taqi Khan the Amir-i-Kabir, whereupon the Queen Mother became the

rallying point for those members of the elite who, not wanting Mirza Aghasi at the head of affairs, desired the Amir-i

1 Op. cit., p. 370.

Kabir even less. The disturbed state of the country, however, at first allowed no one scope for action: everyone was too busy securing his own personal safety, and waiting on the outcome of events, for conspiracy to advance from whispers to action. It was convenient to leave the Amir-i-Kabir to re-establish a measure of stability before his downfall was contrived; let him first replenish the coffers of state. There would be time later to bring him down.

Mirza Taqi Khan found a serious deficit due to the Mirza Aghasi's irresponsible dispensations of grants to undeserving hangers-on—his distribution of baráts, demands for the payment of pensions and rewards to various people, addressed to provincial tax authorities and chargeable on local revenues. Many of these drafts had not been honoured. In some instances the Mirza Aghasi probably never intended that they should be; issuing them was a way of silencing the importunate. Thus, in addition to an empty treasury, the new minister found the throne encumbered with debts. As one of his main objectives was the preservation and enhancement of the Shah's prestige, he strove to satisfy all the creditors. Somehow at the same time he had to finance the suppression of rebellion in the province of Khurasan. There the son of Allah Yar Khan was conducting a full-scale war against the central Government. Allah Yar Khan, the Asafu'd-Daulah and he whom we have met in connection with the Griboedov scandal, had been made Governor of that rich province. He had sought to have his partner in the affairs of Khurasan removed because in effect in the governorship of Khurasan the system provided for the provincial governor to be watched by another great official, the Nayibu't-Tauliyyah, a layman entrusted by the Shah with the

guardianship and the administration of the large revenues of the shrine at Meshed, the provincial capital. This office is still highly prized and still in the Shah's personal gift. Allah Yar Khan tried to acquire it for a member of his own family, thus to gain virtually sole charge of the province and become independent of the capital. His attempt resulted in Muhammad Shah sending him into exile, but his son rebelled against Muhammad Shah's successor and presented Mirza Taqi Khan with one of his most difficult and expensive initial tasks.

Khurasan was ultimately brought back into the fold, but it continued to be extremely distracted, chiefly because of the boldness of Turkoman raiders across the northern borders. Rebellion in Khurasan had given them an opportunity, not only for taking sides with the rebels, but also for raiding, sometimes as far south as the neighbourhood of Isfahan. The raiders carried off cattle and kidnapped men and women, who were sold into slavery in the market of Khiva.

When Nasiru'd-Din Shah sent an embassy to protest against this traffic to the Khan of Khiva, the Khan said that as they were Sunnites his people and those of the other Central Asian Khanates considered it legal to possess Persian Shi'ites as slaves, whom they employed as cultivators. It was only the Russian pacification of the border between Turkistan and Persia in the 1880's that put an end to this scourge. In the preceding years it had reached such a pitch that Nasiru'd-Din Shah himself had been unable safely to make the journey from Tehran to Meshed.

The Amir-i-Kabir continued the Qa'im Maqam's efforts to clarify the official language. Among other things he reduced the number of honorifics with which it was customary to address people in the beautifully, and artfully, worded and inscribed communications of those days. Thus the Minister's work forms part of the history

of the development of modern Persian literature as well as of modern Iran. Had he survived to carry his reforms further, a measure of modernisation would almost certainly have been achieved earlier, and on firmer foundations, than it was. He had been at the meetings of the mixed frontier commission convened in 1842 to study Irano-Turkish border problems and had been for some time in the Turkish city of Erzerum, where he had heard of the reforms of the tanzimat in Turkey, among the very first attempts at systematic modernisation of a Muslim state. Also Mirza Taqi Khan had travelled to St. Petersburg with Prince Khusrau, in the special embassy sent from Iran to express regret for the murder of Griboedov. This visit had early impressed upon his mind Iran's need for reform; while the movement in Turkey had shown him that reform of an Oriental and Islamic government was within the bounds of possibility.

We have noticed some of the less attractive consequences of increased contact with foreign nations. The results of new relations with the outside world, however, were not entirely unbeneficial A very important result of these new relationships was the mental awakening which they engendered. For example the Government of India began recruiting Iranians to teach its British officers a pronunciation of Persian which would be less offensive to Iranian ears than the one they learnt from Indian teachers. The Indian munshi, as local teachers of the Indian and Persian languages were called, taught a pronunciation of Persian somewhat analogous to the English spoken in Boston as compared with the standard English of England. The trade between southern Iran and India was increasing and young Iranians, mostly the sons of merchants or of noblemen in the southern provinces of the country, were being sent to India for advanced education. Thus an intellectual and commercial relation-

ship between one great oriental territory under western rule and Iran, which had for many years been almost completely sealed off from the rest of the world, was now flourishing. It was relationships of this kind which were to hasten Iran's 'Awakening'. In the course of the nineteenth century Iranian merchants began to move all over the Near East as well as visiting India, and they were men of quick discernment and men of culture and patriotism. The lessons they gained from familiarity with cities like Istanboul, Tiflis, Baku, Batum, Odessa, Cairo, Bombay and Calcutta were to have a profound effect on events in their homeland.

Mirza Taqi Khan was the merchants' friend. He built the great bazaar at Tehran and encouraged a rising mercantile class which differed from the elite in that its influence rested on individual honesty, a correct appraisal of world events and well-filled cash-boxes; not on inherited privileges and the fruits of extortion; intriguing round a small and ignorant court; dissimulation and treachery. By the time Mirza Taqi Khan relinquished office, there were three potentially active political and social classes in Iran: an aristocracy of ignorant but tenacious nobles; the merchants with international contacts and increased wealth due to revived foreign trade; and the clergy. Above all these was the throne, and the court which revolved round it. Mirza Taqi Khan had succeeded in forming some semblance of an army and, which is more important, making sure that the soldiers were paid. He had reduced rebellion and strengthened the Crown. The tribes were, therefore, reasonably quiescent; they only became restless in times of trouble.

The chief source of restlessness that manifested itself at the time of Mirza Taqi Khan's fall from power was the religious classes. Mirza Taqi Khan first and foremost showed himself opposed to any circumstance that might damage the prestige of the throne. In accordance with this policy he had brooked no interference in political affairs from the clergy. Not only had he regarded clerical interference with suspicion, but he had

also striven to diminish the influence of the foreign legations, particularly the Russian and the British These legations had come to be regarded by some Persian dignitaries as legitimate places of refuge and while some people preferred the Russian others preferred the British, depending upon which way their sympathies lay or which of the two powers they thought would best serve their interests. The Amir-i-Kabir was careful to make it clear that this kind of reliance on foreigners was unpatriotic and that encouragement of it by foreigners constituted an insult to his country's sovereignty and would not be tolerated. He attempted to make resorting to foreigners an unfashionable practice

and, so far as he was able, withstood the demands of the two great powers. Admittedly he gave way to the Russians on the question of their having a naval base on the island of Ashurada in the southeastern corner of the Caspian Sea and very close to Iranian territory, but in this prudence was certainly uppermost: the minister's motive was not so much a desire to avoid exciting Russian anger as the desire to free the Caspian coast of Turkoman pirates. This Russian ships could achieve to the benefit of merchant shipping generally and the trade of Iran's northern provinces.

Before returning to his policy towards the religious classes, it is necessary to note that he was not only faced with potential interference from the orthodox religious, but also found himself confronted by heresy in the form of the religious movement known as Babism. Babism may be taken as a sign that the mercantile class and some of the religious classes associated with merchants were aware of the necessity for taking the matter of reform and modernisation into their own hands. The Persian religious classes, as might be expected, included a number of men of great intelligence. Not surprisingly, these men were sensitively attuned to the desire for change and to the

preparations for meeting the modern world on its own terms which were very much in the minds of some of their compatriots, especially those who travelled abroad. The capacity to sense a situation quickly, assessing shifts in outlook and trimming sails accordingly, is not less a feature of Iranian clerics than it is of the nation as a whole. After the deaths of Nadir Shah and Karim Khan the Zand, the situation had become extremely confused and in many parts of the country the people were subjected to great hardship and privation. As William Francklin[1] and George Foster[2] both demonstrate, the Iranian people in those troubled times turned to religion, with the sad result that the mullas were able to use their influence to produce a fanatical attitude among the masses: an attitude basically alien to the Persian character, although less so to the Turkish.

Mirza Taqi Khan's secularism reduced the scope of the religious classes' influence but left them in search of some diversion whereby they could again make their presence felt. Babism was just such a diversion. Babism began in Fars, the southern province with its capital at Shiraz, in the year 1844. The new religion's founder was Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, who was born in 1819 in Shiraz of a merchant family. For our purposes, the following elements may

1 William Francklin, Observations made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia in the Years 1784-7, London, 1790.

2 George Foster, A Journey from Bengal to England (in 1783), London, 1798.

be noted among those which formed the basis of the Babi movement.

First, there was an element, in the movement's origin, of the protest of the south against the north: a protest articulated by merchants who were prospering from trade through Shiraz and its port of Bushire, and through the cities of Yazd and Kirman with their port of Bandar 'Abbas, with both the Indian sub-continent

and
Mesopotamia; the latter being served by the port of Basra, for southern Persian merchants
the key to the Levant.

Second, there was the protest of an awakened and intelligent community against an apparently inert, excessively conservative orthodox religious class which accepted subordination to the dictates of the central government situated at a sufficiently remote distance in Tehran, and which thus represented a power the south felt no particular sympathy for, but rather, with those memories in Shiraz and Kirman of Agha Muhammad Khan's atrocities still fresh, the contrary. As an example of the recent alignment of the religious classes, when in Isfahan on Muhammad Shah's death the people had rebelled against the governor, the Imam Jum'a of the city—the most important religious dignitary—had sided with the government against the people.

Third, the Babi movement reflected a response to the advancing and menacing outside world, against which Iran could not contend on the material plane, but against which a spiritual regeneration and some new religious assertion might prevail. In other words, Iran lacked guns and ships such as the powers of the West possessed so formidably, but religious genius and theological subtlety were certainly part of Iran's inheritance. Instead of being completely overawed by the foreigners, here to hand were peculiarly Iranian advantages, ready for use in the resuscitation of the nation and as a means of quelling defeatism and despair. Despair in the people might in the early days of the movement be expressed and to some extent assuaged by the dismissal of this world and its institutions as no longer valid once the new dispensation had been revealed; but ultimately this new dispensation was to conquer the world. This was a form of spiritual conquest Iran could still arrogate to itself while materially her people were already confronted by defeat and ignominy at the hands of materially more advanced nations.

However, before Babism began to embark on its mission as a

world faith, its chief preoccupation was at home. As just suggested the south of Iran had never been entirely in accord with the north, and the Qajars had not imitated the example of Shah 'Abbas the Safavid in making Isfahan, the half-way point between north and south,

their capital. By the middle of the nineteenth century Tehran was in some respects less close to Shiraz and Yazd and Kirman than were Bombay and Basrah. Yet Tehran controlled cities like Shiraz and Yazd through the governors and tax-gatherers which Tehran appointed and whose presence in the south could not be expected to endear the distant capital to the hearts of the Yazdis or Shirazis. Shiraz was a natural centre for the emergence of a new movement and it was there that Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad declared himself as the Bab or Gate of the Shi'ite tradition, the man who could announce the Coming of the Mehdi. He went further than this, passing beyond established tradition, for he claimed that he had come to inaugurate a new tradition which made all earlier teachings noxious and nugatory.

Yazd soon also became the scene of a serious and Babi-inspired revolt; next, Kirman was chosen as a centre for the new propaganda. The Shah possessed that knack which certainly rulers of Iran need, for scenting danger from quasi-esoteric movements. The Babi movement was outlawed and fulminated against from the pulpits of the mosques, but only to flourish under persecution and to become a vendetta against the Shah. Its aims were to effect the spiritual and moral regeneration of mankind and to achieve, in world political unity, the halting of world conflicts. Aims of this kind assured the movement considerable appeal to a growing number of adherents among enlightened people. The masses of the people were not much affected. It was the middle and educated classes, merchants and the younger generation who were the most attracted; but those who joined the movement included intellectuals whose intellectual awakening had not

yet
displaced a traditional concern for the state of the soul. Equality of the sexes, world political
and legal organisation, encouragement of education regardless of class, were the kind of
objectives the new movement later established for itself, but, though in the course of its
development Babism, and its offshoot Bahá'ísm, became a world faith, which attempted a
synthesis of the best elements in other great religions and adopted a stand against the
exclusiveness and negative pride of Muslim clericalism, in its origins and initial appeal it
was a Messianic cult with roots deep in the whole complex of Iranian spirituality.

The roots of this millennialist anticipation and aspiration may be considered implicit in the dualist religious and originally entirely Iranian resolution
of the problem of evil, in which Ahriman, the evil force, is ultimately defeated and destroyed
by the power of goodness. Without himself going into details, Ahmad Kasravi, in

his pamphlet on Bahá'ísm1 asserts that anciently 'Iranians believed in Ahriman and ascribed to him the world's evils, believing that a day would come
when someone of the race of Zoroaster named Sayushiyant [sic] would appear and, having
slain Ahriman, empty the world of all evil.' He links the Iranians and the Jews as having
belief in a Messiah in common and ascribes this belief's strength to the sufferings and
oppressions endured by these two peoples at various times in their respective histories. He
then discusses the injection of the Messiah belief into Islam, a religion within which it
initially had no place. The belief in a saviour was, he explains, added to Islamic theory by
Iranians; certainly by non-Arab converts to Islam in the eighth century, most of whom were
Iranian, the movement taking its rise round the personality of a man named al-Mukhtar at
Kufa in the southern Euphrates region of Mesopotamia where a number of Iranians were
active. It was there that the doctrine was promulgated of the 'Concealment' of

Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya, one of 'Ali's sons, and of his not having died, only disappeared someday to return.

Expectations of the concealed Mehdi's manifestation, to lead forth armies of the righteous and put right the affairs of the world, is one of the principal tenets of even the moderate Shi'itism recognised officially in Iran; but during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah a dissenting Shi'ite theologian of Persia named Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'i carried the theory of the Mahdi and of the Emamate, that is to say, of the system of divinely inspired leadership by Emams descended from 'Ali, a stage further. He preached that the Emams are collectively the sole surrogate upon earth for God on high and that it is through them that the world is sustained, as it was created through their having been created first before all else.

A great deal of Shaikh Ahsa'i's teachings represented an attempt to bring into a philosophical system the popular belief in and craving for the appearance of the 'Hidden Emam'. Shi'ism had become the established religion of Iran, as we have seen, under the Safavids, but since their fall the country had been subjected to a variety of stresses and was, by the time of Shaikh Ahsa'i, also already beginning to feel the effects of foreign pressures and influences. The restlessness and dissatisfaction of the people, to which allusion has already been made, had for a considerable period been evinced to an increasing degree by public and private prayers for the Hidden Emam's return. In the history of what may be called Emamism in the Near East this was not new; there had centuries before been times when parties of

1 Bahá'ígari, in Persian, Tehran undated but probably written in the early 1940's.

people went daily to the spot whence the Emam was expected to reappear and where they beat drums and cried out for him. But when Shaikh Ahsa'i began his new teaching, the

act of
praying for the Mehdi and bewailing his non-appearance was claiming a startling proportion
of the people's attention. Kasravi describes how, 'Up to the Constitutional Movement, the
people of Iran's sole source of hope was the Hidden Emam: only through his Appearance did
they expect future happiness, the country's salvation from misfortune and so on. Everyday
they cried . . . 'Peace be upon Thee, O Lord of the Age', and with wailing and lamentation was
his early coming sought.' These are things, Kasravi adds, 'that went on until our own time
and we remember them well.'1

Shaikh Ahsa'i called himself the Gate, Bab, for the
Hidden Emam and in his vigorous revival of this aspect of Shi'ite Islam, his revival of
Emamism, he seems at times to have gone even further. His and his disciples' voluminous
writings gave a fillip to religious thought in general. New theories were widely discussed,
while the disputations between the Shaikh's followers and those opposed to him conferred on
religious controversy and speculation a fresh vitality; albeit what chiefly emerged was a
plethora of fine-spun theorising in the worst kind of scholastic tradition and of a nature that
makes one question the sanity and seek some social and historical explanation for the
fantasies of its exponents.

When Shaikh Ahmad of Ahsa died in 1826, his cause was
carried on by two leaders of whom the most influential was Sayyid Kazim of Rasht. On this
Sayyid's death in 1843 he left no clear indication about who should be regarded as his
successor; instead he hinted that the time of the Emam's Appearance was not far distant. After
Sayyid Kazim's death three separate calls developed out of the original Shaikhi movement.
One was that of Hajji (the title Hajji means that its holder had performed the
Pilgrimage to Mecca) Karim Khan at Kerman and Hajji Karim Khan's descendants still enjoy
rank, wealth and veneration as religious notabilities in the city of Kirman, where they have
the title, Sirkar Agha. Another was the movement of Hajji Mirza Shafi' of Tabriz, whose

followers were termed 'Shaikhi' to distinguish them from their rivals in Kirman, the 'Karim Khanis', who also had agents in Tabriz. Thirdly there was the Babi movement itself, which was initially promoted by one Mulla Husain of Bushruyah round the saintly young Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali of Shiraz, and the prime motivation of which may be attributed to Sayyid Kazim's prognostication about the early manifestation of the Hidden Emam. For though Sayyid Muhammad

1 Ahmad Kasravi, op cit., p. 16.

'Ali only declared himself the Gate or Bab for the Appearance, it seems evident that when he found the youthful Sayyid in Shiraz Mulla Husain was on a quest to discover the man who might be the vehicle for the Emam's return among men.

In addition to these three groups, Tabriz saw the rise of a counter movement in the Mutasharri'yun, those who saw the Shaikhis etc. as deviators from orthodox Shi'ite theology. Tabriz became a centre of vigorous religious arguments and sporadic outbursts of religious factionalism. It was there that the then Crown Prince, who was Governor of Azerbaijan and later, as Nasiru'd-Din, the Shah of Persia, had the Bab, Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali, fetched from a fortress on the Turkish border where he was being kept prisoner and, in September 1848, subjected to the ordeal of a religious debate with prominent divines. Nasiru'd-Din's report of these proceedings to his father, Muhammad Shah, still exists and from it we learn that the Sayyid's theology was extremely faulty, that all he would say was 'I do not know' or 'I cannot say', and that when he ventured to utter a string of pious clichés and spiritual ejaculations, his incorrect Arabic grammar—for he said these things in the language of theology, Arabic brought scorn and laughter from his interlocutors. In the end they had him beaten and he wrote, in, it must be confessed, the most exquisite handwriting, whatever the state of his Arabic grammar might have

been, a kind of,
but by no means complete recantation. He said that he was only the humblest of God's
servants and that he had never claimed supernatural powers.

Nevertheless it was not long before the poor Sayyid, still not
thirty years of age, suffered death for his mission in the manner shortly to be described; but
the point needs emphasising that the mission had probably been chiefly foisted upon him by
men who believed it their mission to find either the Emam in human guise or the Bab
who should herald his coming. Thus a man of the calibre of Mulla Husain of Bushruyah, who
made the Babi movement a militant and politically dangerous one extending all over Iran,
lighted upon the Sayyid in Shiraz and, after being closeted alone with him for three days,
apparently convinced him that he was somebody special. By the time the Bab was executed in
1850 the movement had attained such dimensions that the emissary sent from Tehran to
supervise his execution was careful to have the captive sent round to the chief divines of
Tabriz for fatwas, decrees, to be obtained sanctioning his death; and, incidentally, it
seems that only three such sanctioning decrees were in the end issued. But before describing
the Bab's death a reference will have to be made to what had been happening between 1845
and 1850, during the last two

years of which period the Bab himself had been in prison and not active.

Babism announced its secession from Islam at the convention
of Behdasht in 1848. Thereafter the movement assumed a distinctly militant policy, which
resulted in increased persecution. The Bab had been imprisoned in the north, near Tabriz, as
a result of Mirza Aghasi's letter to the religious dignitaries of Isfahan, on 1st January
1847, charging the Bab with laying claim to prophethood and, interestingly enough
commenting that most of 'these Shaikhis' were addicted to the use of Indian hemp or
Bang, and that their acts and pretensions were the product of intoxication from

these
drugs. Then, in the spring of 1850, a renegade Muslim cleric who had turned Babi led a band
of his brethren in rebellion in the city of Zanjan. Zanjan is not a very large city, but it is
situated in a rich agricultural region and on the main road from Tabriz to Tehran, nearer the
former. With extraordinary courage and resource the insurgents for nearly a year withstood
attempts by the Shah's army to reduce them. Eventually their leader was killed and they lost
heart and surrendered. It was during the insurrection that the Bab was brought from his
prison to Tabriz and placed before a firing squad. A party of Christians was engaged to shoot
him and any claims to supernatural powers that he may have made seemed to have been
vindicated when, after the firing squad's first volley, he was found, not dead but to have
vanished. The bullets had severed the cords by which he was suspended from a wall and had
left him unscathed. He ran away under cover of the smoke from the volley. Unfortunately he
ran into the Guard Room and was immediately recaptured and dispatched.

The Amir-i-Kabir might feel gratified that one piece of Babi perfidy had been, not without difficulty, eradicated at Zanjan, but then he was faced with
troubles from orthodox religious quarters. Not wishing the Babis to have the monopoly in
miracles, the orthodox clerics of Tabriz concocted miraculous-seeming events in one of the
city's mosques. A cow that was being led to slaughter twice ran into the mosque. Its drover on
trying to prevent it doing this a third time dropped down dead. This was ascribed to divine
intervention on behalf of the cow and the mosque soon acquired a reputation for other virtues
such as healing. The city was illuminated and there was great excitement. Few things are
more effective in boosting religion among the simple than a miracle or two: the mullas gained
great prestige among the people of Tabriz as a result of these stories, but Mirza Taqi Khan
was not the man quietly to watch one of the most important and prosperous cities in the
empire fall entirely under

religious influence. He ordered an Afsharid tribal chief to enter Tabriz with an army and forcibly kidnap the Shaikh al-Islam, the leading religious personality.

Thus we see Mirza Taqi Khan on the one hand ridding himself of the leader of a heterodox religious movement, and on the other dealing a blow to orthodox religious influence in one of the country's principal proclamation centres.

Mirza Taqi Khan the Amir-i-Kabir was dismissed in November 1851; his death followed a year later. Then he was dragged from the side of his wife, the Shah's only sister, who remained devoted to him to the very end, and taken into a bath in the Palace of Fin at Kashan, where the pair had been kept as prisoners. In the bath the great Minister's veins were opened so that he bled to death before his wife could realise what had happened to him. Ironically, the attempts made by the Russian minister to save the Amir probably precipitated his execution. The Shah and his councillors were alarmed by the Russian protests for they thought that an order to spare the great Amir's life might ultimately come from the Tsar himself. They therefore decided to make away with Mirza Taqi Khan before such an embarrassing diplomatic situation arose. The British did not repeat the rather clumsy efforts of Prince Dolgorouky to save the Minister. It is perhaps on account of this tactful behaviour that the British have, for some otherwise inexplicable reason, often been charged by Iranians with having had a hand in the Amir's fall and subsequent death. Yet contemporary English observers expressed the greatest admiration for the Amir-i-Kabir and regarded him as one of the greatest statesmen Iran had ever had or was ever likely to have. These observers were prone, correctly as events showed, to see in his death the suspension of any improvement in the conditions of the country.

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Chapter 5
Nasiru'd-Din Shah on his Own

In 1852 the King was slightly wounded by a bullet fired at him while out hunting in the neighbourhood of Tehran. Three men were arrested and tortured in an effort to establish who directed this attack on the Shah's life. All that could be discovered was that they belonged to the Babi sect and consequently the signal was given for the interrogation and ultimately execution of those Babi leaders who were at the time in prison in the capital. These leaders were eventually brought into the bazaar of the city and slowly done to death in the manner described by an Austrian officer in the Shah's service who was so disgusted by what he saw that he resigned; his own words, from a letter written at Tehran in August 1852, give the story of an extraordinary outburst of cruelty and hysteria only paralleled in the nineteenth century history of Persia by the episode of Griboedov's murder and the massacre of the Russian mission twenty-three years before. Captain von Goumoens wrote that the first leader of the Babis, the Bab himself, had 'pointed out to the disciples of his teaching that the way to Paradise lay through the torture-chamber. If he spoke truly, then the present Shah has deserved great merit, for he strenuously endeavours to people all the realms of the Saints with Babis! His last edict still further enjoins on the royal servants the annihilation of the sect. If these simply followed the Royal command and rendered harmless such of the fanatics as are arrested, by inflicting on them a swift and lawful death, one must needs, from the Oriental standpoint, approve of this; but the manner of inflicting the sentence, the circumstances which precede the end, the agonies which consume the bodies of the victims until their life is extinguished in the last convulsion are so horrible that the blood curdles in my veins if I now endeavour to depict the scene for you, even in outline. Innumerable blows with sticks which fall heavily on the back and soles of the feet, brandings of different parts of the body with red-hot irons, are such usual inflictions that the victim who undergoes only such caresses is to be accounted fortunate. But follow me

my friend, you who lay claim to a heart and European ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones
who, with gouged-out eyes, must eat,

on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own amputated ears; or whose teeth are
torn out with inhuman violence by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are
simply crushed by blows from a hammer; or where the bazar is illuminated with
unhappy victims, because on right and left the people dig deep holes in their breasts and
shoulders and insert burning wicks in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the
bazar, preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so deep that now
the fat flickered convulsively in the wound like a newly extinguished lamp.

'Not seldom it happens that the unwearying ingenuity of the
Orientals leads to fresh tortures. They will skin the soles of the Babi's feet, soak the wounds
in boiling oil, shoe the foot like the hoof of a horse, and compel the victim to run. No cry
escaped from the victim's breast; the torment is endured in dark silence by the numbed
sensation of the fanatic; now he must run; the body cannot endure what the soul has endured;
he falls! Give him the coup de grace! Put him out of his pain! No! The executioner
swings the whip, and—I myself have had to witness it—the unhappy victim of hundred-fold
tortures runs! This is the beginning of the end. As for the end itself, they hang the scorched
and perforated bodies by their hands and feet to a tree head-downwards, and now every
Persian may try his marksmanship to his heart's content.... I saw corpses torn by nearly
150 bullets.... Not only the executioner and the common people took part in this massacre:
sometimes Justice would present some of the unhappy Babis to various dignitaries, and the
Persian (recipient) would be well content, deeming it an honour to imbrue his own hands in
the blood of the pinioned and defenceless victim. Infantry, cavalry, artillery, the ghulams or
guards of the King, and the guilds of butchers, bakers etc., all took their

fair share in these
bloody deeds.1

There we can leave the Austrian officer's letter, recalling ruefully that in 1952 it would have been less easy to draw an odious comparison between 'European ethics' and 'the unwearying ingenuity of the Oriental' in devising fresh tortures.
One of the most interesting points which emerges from his narrative is how people of all ranks dipped their hands in the blood of the martyrs, a fact attested from other sources.
Although the Austrian's account must be recognised as that of a man brought up in a very different tradition to the one then prevailing in Nasiru'd-Din Shah's Persia, and the document of a person obviously not anxious to admit any extenuating circumstances in the case he was describing, there is no reason to doubt its accuracy,

1 Cited from Edward G. Browne, Materials for the Study of the Bab Religion, Cambridge, 1918, pp. 268-270.

however emotive its tone. Indeed Iranians commenting on this singular episode in the recent history of their country have generally remarked on the wide-scale audience-participation, as it were, which was a feature of that frightful day in 1852. It is said that, not to be thought dilatory in demonstrating loyalty to their injured sovereign, Ministers and their minions rushed to the scene of execution in order to stain their hands with the victims' blood. The Austrian reports that one Babi actually fell 'to the share of the Imam-jumia, who put him to death'.

This kind of action can be accounted for in two ways: the division of responsibility for the holocaust entailed by the participation in it of numerous people, so that it could never be laid at the door of one man; and the fact already alluded to, of wishing to prove devotion to the man whose attempted assassination afforded the pretext for it; there would also be the factor of nobody's daring not to conform to the dictates of mass

hysteria—the Imam Jum'a may not have liked doing what the pressure of the moment
forced upon him. But there must have been more to it than this: Iranian commentators, their
comment coloured by an instinctual understanding of their country's history through ages
before 1852 and by pessimism about its state in subsequent times, draw attention, perhaps
superfluously, to the fact that such cruelties were symptoms of a terrible degree of national
frustration and desperation.

An outlet for the nation's sorrows has, until very recent
years, been provided by the annual mourning ceremonies commemorating the death of Husain
and his family, massacred on the 1oth of the Arabic month of Muharram in the 61St year of
the Muslim era, the 10th October A.D. 680. Husain was the son of 'Ali by the Prophet
Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. He is reputed to have been the object of his maternal
grandfather's special affection. On his father's death and after Hasan, his brother's, he
became head of the Shi'a. Shortly afterwards he was surrounded by the soldiers of the rival,
Umayyad Caliph, Yazid I, and slain with all his people. Subsequently the spot where this
event took place, on the site of Kerbela in Iraq a few miles to the west of the River
Euphrates, became a centre of pilgrimage for Shi'ite Muslims, by whom the first ten days of
the month of Muharram are observed as a period of yearly mourning.

Although discouraged under the secularising policy of the late
Reza Shah, and again today under his son, these mourning rituals were for a long time a
prominent feature of the Persian religious calendar. Each evening preachers used to fill
black-draped tented arenas with audiences from whose eyes they wrung tears with

sermons, chanted in accordance with established formulae, describing the massacre. These
sermons were a kind of verbal preview of the mystery plays performed on the tenth day.
Then the massacre was re-enacted with such passionate realism that sometimes counterfeit

death became that which could not be undone, while the unfortunates cast in the roles of the murdering Umayyad general, Shimr, his immediate commander, 'Umar ibn Sa'd, and the rival Caliph, Yazid, not rarely courted disaster at the hands of the crowd. The participation of the audience in the grief engendered by these sermons and performances was intense, the emotion aroused infectious. Another form of demonstration which marked these days were processions of flagellants through the streets, drawing blood from their own breasts and chests with many-thonged, spiked whips of chain and thumping the skin off their flesh with pummelling fists as they walked, repeating the names of the Shi'ite martyrs in unison, marching and beating themselves in unbroken rhythm.

The passion-plays, called ta'ziyas, present several features of interest to the mythologist. One such item is the appearance of the Christian Prior, who pronounces the Muslim confession of faith before the head of the martyred Husain when it is being carried in dolorous procession to the wicked Yazid in Damascus. There a Frankish Ambassador, likewise representing a different faith and dressed in an alien garb, intercedes with the Caliph to ensure the head's proper burial, and a lion pays homage to it. In the roles of the Ambassador and the Prior, the mythologist may wish to see parallels to the role of the 'Doctor' in certain European re-enactments of the death and resurrection of the Vegetation Deity; or the Spirit of the Year of old Russia. The analogy may seem far-fetched, but it is worth bearing in mind; it conveys some sense of how, like old European folk rituals, these ta'ziyas answered a popular emotional need. They were in some sort an annual festival of sorrow, with the difference that in Iran a kind of deep, ineradicable pessimism overclouded them, prohibiting the sudden transition from grief to the joy of rebirth and resurrection characteristic of their European counterparts. It is in their function of affording an annual release of universal grief, a flowing of tears, a passionate tearing of the

flesh and buffeting of the body to express contempt for the vileness of our depraved human state, that these maudlin incidents are being looked at here. Here, too, they are to be seen in the context of that extra though much more sinister 'Muharram' outburst of 1852, when a whole city participated in the mutilation of the living flesh of the silent or simply hymn-singing Babis. For the slaying of the Babis gives evidence, additional to the regular Muharram ceremonies, of how a nation's

accumulated sense of grievance can suddenly manifest itself in an orgy of blood. Contrary to the general temper of the time, the Amir-i-Kabir had discouraged such scenes. Had he been alive it is probable that he would have been equally averse to the scenes which occurred after the attempt on Nasiru'd-Din-Shah's life. As it was, the Tehran tumult of 1852 provided dismal proof of how wretched the nation was becoming at the time of the great reformer's death.

Western observers, kept informed through the publication in Europe of letters like the Austrian's, were deeply shocked by the victimisation of the Babis, both at the time and later, when Iran was exciting greater interest in the West than in 1852. Already, in the middle of the century, the incident in Tehran soon became news, to be a topic of conversation in Vienna and London. Already to this extent contact with the outside world had destroyed the nation's privacy. It was not long before the expansion of Europe brought to Iran the pressure of Europe's assumed right to judge and criticise the acts, the follies, the angers, the inadequacies, the humiliations, the cruelties of 'the Oriental'.

The unflinching courage of the Babis, those sacrificial victims in a moment of Persian despair, and the fact that among them was a woman, a poetess moreover, called Qur'atu'l-'Ain, gave their tragedy an appeal the more stirring to liberal sympathisers in Europe. This was especially so because Babism and later its offshoot,

Bahá'ísm, presented the novelty of a new religion, complete with a Prophet and a Prophecy, from a land traditionally the home of spiritual force and religious innovation, at a time when many in Europe were suffering disenchantment with their own established faith and becoming increasingly imbued with ideas of social progress and enlightenment. Not having yet, however, accepted the view that societies might be reformed without the adjunct of religious reform, the idea of a religious movement against conservative orthodoxy and coupled with a programme of social reform was extremely attractive; few things can be more seductive in the transmission of influence and ideas than the feeling that the conduct of others is due to dissatisfaction similar to one's own and therefore, though at a dangerously superficial level, seemingly more easily understandable and deserving of sympathy. The Babi movement was seen as an attempt to break out of the backwoods of rigid Muslim orthodoxy and ensure a new enlightenment, rather on modern European lines, under the aegis of a new religious teaching. An advance was made from the original Babi position when the first Bab, who merely claimed to be the Gate for the coming of one greater than he, was succeeded by Bahá'ullah, who declared himself the one 'whom God

shall manifest'. This declaration was not made in Iran but in exile in 1863. It meant that in effect Bahá'ullah was the expected incarnation of divine power; Bahá'ísm was entering on its mission as a world faith. Bahá'ullah died in Palestine in 1892 and during practically thirty years of separation from Iran, the country of the Babis' and Bahá'ís' origin, the sect had had plenty of time, and plenty of compulsion, to develop a world mission.

The course of Babism became difficult after the death of the Bab because of a split among his followers. Some supported Bahá'ullah, the chosen successor; others preferred his brother, Mirza Yahya Nuri, designated the Subh-i-Azal, Morning of

Eternity. The Subh-i-Azal's adherents were in the minority and it is as Bahá'ísm that the Babi teachings have become most widely known internationally. So far as Iranian history of the mid-nineteenth century is concerned, mention of the two brothers who followed the first leader, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad the Bab, has significance apart from their religious enterprise. These two men were from the North of Iran, from the province of Mazandaran, whereas it will be recalled that the original Babi movement had begun in the South. They were of courtier, land-owning stock, whereas it will be remembered that the founders of the faith had generally speaking been of the merchant and mulla classes. Thus they show the introduction of a fresh element into the movement. Few of their own class followed their example. Nevertheless the fact that they set it at all shows how the Babi propaganda had spread over the whole country and indicates the possibility that it could attract a wide variety of social types to its teaching and ultimately against the established order. Nasiru'd-Din Shah's stern commands after the attempt on his life were clearly neither entirely accidental nor lacking in foresight. Drastic action was considered necessary.

Among the Europeans who became interested in the movement notable were the French Comte de Gobineau and the British Professor E. G. Browne.1 E. G. Browne, who became a Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, was keenly interested in the Persian language and literature and, though his initial enthusiasm for the Babi-Bahá'í movement appears later to have somewhat cooled, in it he was doubtless as much motivated by personal liberal sympathies as by his excitement on discovering that an ancient seat of religious speculation like Iran could in modern times give proof of continuing religious genius.

1 See particularly, de Gobineau, Les Religions et Les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale, Paris, 1865, E. G. Brown, op. cit., and A Year Amongst the Persians, Cambridge, 197.

Such men were moved by the courage of the Babis under persecution. For their part the Babis must have been profoundly interested in the amount of foreign sympathy they so soon began to attract to themselves, if not to their tenets. After all, they were Persians: no Iranian would forget that men like de Gobineau or a professor in a famous British University belonged to nations capable of influencing Iranian Shahs and governments. In these religious ferments' political aspects, in so far as they were in conflict with the Iranian Government, expressions of liberal and spiritual sympathy from eminent Europeans were useful. Whether, as in the case of Browne, the views of those foreigners were often at variance with the official policies of their own governments made no difference: Iranians when impelled to seek strength through the approbation or merely the benign interest of influential foreigners do not draw too fine a distinction between what the individual says and what his government's policy is. It is enough to have discovered a point of reference abroad; a source of strength to allude to and with which to impress people.

Browne's later change of heart towards Bahá'ísm might be ascribed to the rise after 905 of the Iranian Constitutional Movement, one of his major preoccupations. Then the social and political reform of Iran had passed into hands which, where they were religious were orthodox, and where they were secular, bordered on the anti-religious and agnostic. In other words, by 905 it had become obvious that Iran's regeneration was not to be the task and the glory of heterodox religious sectarianism, but rather, of politicians in conjunction with divines who played, not at presenting the world with a new kind of religion, but at being politicians. The Babis in Iran in the eighteen fifties had, as events later showed, acted too precipitately. They had arisen, with the support of sundry people of greater enlightenment than their compatriots and more experience of countries better organised than Iran, to express dissatisfaction with the established

religious and political institutions; but they had been premature. So had the Amir-i-Kabir:
1852 saw the end of his attempts to regenerate Iran and also saw the end of the Babis as a
body that might ultimately have undertaken Iran's reform. In effect all that the Babis
achieved was the awakening of certain elements of the orthodox religious classes, for whom,
no less than the Amir-i-Kabir himself had, Babism acted as a warning.

This is to anticipate developments which were not to take place for another three decades after 1852. On the dismissal of the Amir-i-Kabir, affairs
deteriorated until early within the next century revolution came to arrest and temporarily
reverse the down-hill trend. In studying the build-up to revolution, the situation in 1852 is
inter-

esting because then both a significant rift and a significant challenge became manifest. The
rift was in the breakdown of sympathy between the throne and influential sections of the
community such as the Babis, or those who were secretly attracted towards them. The
challenge was that which confronted the clergy, first in the Amir-i-Kabir's erastianism,
second, in the Babi movement. The latter had threatened to cut Iranian society into opposing
ideological groups. Its rigorous suppression prevented any such plain and dramatic
development; but nonetheless the throne had been overtly threatened, for the first time in
many years, and a strong leavening of progressively minded people had already made up their
minds about the Shah. His prestige was damaged: the potency of the Crown's charismatic
essence reduced. Meanwhile Nasiru'd-Din Shah had dismissed and connived in the execution
of the wisest man in his Empire, who had been his Chief Minister. Thus early in his reign the
young King set in train the process of his own increasing isolation and ineffectiveness. His
rule was no longer based upon consent but upon there being no obvious alternative to him

immediately available and on fear. Certainly fear must be regarded as the converse of the hysteria against the Babis and would be the natural consequence of the stern orders from the injured Shah for their extermination. In a country like Iran, however much one group may seem to revel in the discomfiture of another, nobody is unwise enough to forget that, in the caprice of events, their own turn to suffer a similar fate may quickly follow.

The Shah began increasingly to seek an escape from loneliness in the harem. Favourites whose demands on his time and his purse were only equalled by their ignorance and levity became an obsession. Their company was tantamount to a drug with which to assuage his fits of disillusionment between bouts of his own efforts to renew attempts to reform and regenerate the country. The clergy were, of course, not on the side of Babis. Nor were they invariably in unison with the sedimentarily ignorant but ebulliently, or cunningly, self-seeking elite. At the same time, it is not to be expected that shrewd mullas, anxiety for their own potentially threatened position growing, would gladly commit themselves to the cause of an embarrassed monarch. There was little trust between them and a ruling prince whose obsessive passions ranged from a gardener's daughter to an ugly small boy, and whose conduct generally increasingly gave rise to scandal. The gravity of the Cloth could not but seek dissociation from the follies of the Throne, while in its wiser moments the Throne felt little sympathy for the Cloth, regarding it as representative of backwardness....

... Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar was destined to be the last medieval type of Persian ruler. Even had Nasiru'd-Din Shah had the force of character of his ancestor, it was no longer possible for him to indulge in the military exploits whereby the rule of an autocrat could be sustained, while liberal ideas from abroad and increasing royal ineffectiveness at home were in any case shaking the whole basis of his

position to a profound
extent. The holocaust of 1852 may have been an attempt to impose the rule of fear. It had had
the strange result of a mass sharing in the letting of blood ordered by the monarch, as if to
show him that execution was no longer the royal prerogative only, but could be turned into a
disquieting demonstration of the subjects' discontent.

The Babi movement had itself sprung from among the
mercantile classes, a fact which recalls us to the realisation that, as political strains can be
symptoms of economic ills, so in a country like Iran can religious movements reflect the
anxieties of classes engaged in commerce. In terms of a new religious hope, the Babi
movement was part of a syndrome indicating the stress of mounting economic and social
tension. Ironically the fostering by the early Qajar kings of the merchants had done a great
deal to bring about this tension. European observers early in the nineteenth century had
noted the Qajars' policy of exempting merchants from all exactions other than Customs
duties. Agha Muhammad Khan had been swift to punish anyone guilty of molesting wealthy
burghers. This was a change from conditions under the last Zand rulers, when the merchants
of Shiraz had at times been compelled to disgorge large sums to the government and its
military adjuncts. Fath-'Ali Shah had apparently carried royal support of commerce to the
lengths of discouraging imports in order to protect home industries.2 Thus between 1800
and 1857 the merchants had in effect become a rather pampered class. The forceful
redefinition of the frontiers and the care exercised by Agha Muhammad over the border
entrepot cities had given the Iranian merchant greater scope than he had enjoyed since the
middle of the Safavid period....

2 In a very interesting article, where new ground in the study of the
Qajars is broken, An Introduction to the Economic Organisation of Early Qajar Iran, in the
Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies, Vol. II, 1964, Dr. Hambly cites a

reference to Fath-'Ali Shah's discouragement of the import of Kashmir shawls to protect the
home production of, presumably, Kirman shawls.

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... The King was fond of outings. It was springtime when the air and flowers in the most beautiful season of the Persian year attract people out of doors for picnics and visits to favourite gardens and shrines. It is said that the Shah had originally thought of going to Shah Abdul-Azim the day before, but the trip had been postponed to the morrow because his astrologers had warned him that the day was inauspicious. It is related that the King was so delighted by the fine weather and prospect of a holiday that on leaving the palace he threw his hat in the air. This stuck in people's memories because the Shah very rarely took his hat off in public. From childhood he had suffered from a disease of the scalp; he was, as the Persians say, kachal, scaldheaded.

When the Shah reached the shrine of Shah Abdul-Azim, Mirza Muhammad Kirmani was waiting. He approached him with a petition and shot the King at point-blank range. The Aminu's-Sultan acted with great promptitude and had the Shah's uniformed body sent back in the carriage to Tehran, propped up in a sitting position so that nobody would know he was dead. The clerics passed the blame on to the Babis as far as they could and by inaccurate reporting the European press helped in this. Not that the Iranian clerics would have gone to the extent of murdering the Shah themselves. Mirza Muhammad Kirmani, with his recent association with Sayyid Jamalu'd-Din Afghani, was not representative of them; and they had found in 1892 over the Tobacco Concession that the Shah could be brought to heel in other ways—by a decree from a great mujtahid for example. But his murder provided the clerics with an opportunity too good to be missed of denigrating the Babis; and for various subtle reasons of their own it would have been inconvenient for Sayyid Jamalu'd-Din Afghani himself to be openly implicated.

It was naturally not difficult to inculpate the Babis: ever since 1852 they had been regarded as the arch plotters against the Shah; but it is interesting that the mullas should have been at such pains to ensure for themselves freedom from blame or suspicion, because their sensitivity on this point indicates the extent to which they too had come to be considered opponents of the Shah. It also indicates a desire to keep their cloth free from any stain of ignominy at a time when they knew that events were moving towards a showdown in which it would be essential for the religious classes to embark upon a major role with a clear record; a record that did not include connivance at political assassination.
The coming revolution was one in which the religious classes would have to act in the interests of rectifying the evils to which the state had fallen a prey....

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... Reference was made earlier to the diffusion of power in the immediate post-Musaddiq period, and while any coalition of forces which could threaten the Throne was prevented, efforts were made to win over certain extremists. One particular effort, designed to win over the 'ulama, deserves a passing reference. In 1955 observers were surprised when the Government suddenly instituted moves against the religious minority of the Bahá'ís; although there is religious toleration in Iran, action against the Bahá'ís was condoned on the grounds that their faith is not recognised as a separate religion. No less a person than the Army Chief of Staff took charge of the sequestration of the Bahá'ís' main centre in Tehran. The dome of this building was destroyed and the building itself made the headquarters of the city's military government. The true motives for this persecution are still not clear, but it seems likely that there was some desire to placate Muslim religious zealots: the persecution might also have been prompted by less extreme members of the religious hierarchy, who wanted to make a horse-deal between themselves and the Shah. The move may also have been intended to placate

extreme
nationalists in so far as charges had been levelled against the Bahá'ís of being pro-foreign—
their chief centre is outside the country, on Mount Carmel, and they have a number of
adherents and important centres in the United States. Criticism of their persecution in the
United States was strong and the Government very soon abandoned it. Some restrictions on
the employment of Bahá'ís were promulgated but, since Bahá'ís tend to be among the most
conscientious and best educated people in the realm, not employing them was an
inconvenience from which their persecutors suffered as much as the victims. It was not long
before those who molested them were arrested and this short but ugly recrudescence of
religious intolerance was at an end.

In 1956 the Iranian Government announced that it was no longer prohibited for foreigners to call the country Persia; either Iran or Persia was
equally permitted, although of course Iranians themselves never call their country by any
other name than Iran.

When Dr. Iqbal became Prime Minister, on 3rd April 1957—as has already been noticed in connection with the withdrawal of military governments—a
new phase was inaugurated. Dr. Iqbal showed himself the man to do the Shah's bidding, the
completely docile Prime Minister. His energy was a commendation in his favour and his
impressive mien also an asset. He had succeeded Dr. Siasi as Chancellor of the University of
Tehran in 1954 and had later been made Minister of Court, when Mr. 'Ala became Prime
Minister. While Chancellor of the University, Dr. Iqbal had proved himself vigilant, and
thoughtful for others....

— Modern Iran (Used by permission of the curator)