

THE CHURCH MISSIONARY REVIEW

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BAHAISM IN ITS RELATION TO THE STATE

[The writer of the following article, the Rev. S. G. Wilson, D.D., has laboured in contact with Bahaism, at Tabriz in Persia, upwards of thirty years as missionary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. We are indebted to the Secretary of the Mission, Dr. Robert E. Speer, for suggesting to him that it would be welcomed for our pages.—ED.]

BAHAISM is being heralded as a new religion, bidding for popular favour. As such it should be considered in its relation to the State, for this is an important factor in forming our judgment of it. As it historically sprang from Bâbism, it is well to review, first of all, the political relations of Bâbism.

I.—Bâbism in Persia was a form of Mahdiism. Mirza Mohammed Ali, the Bâb, claimed to be the Mahdi, the Qaim, the twelfth Imam returned. According to Shiah doctrine, the rulership of the State by divine law belongs to the Imam. The Kajar Shahs had the right to kingship only in the absence of the Imam. Their authority would cease with his appearance. This is so universally recognized that the constitution of Persia drawn up by the Parliament in 1906-7 contains in the preamble the provision that it shall continue only till the manifestation of the Imam.

In accordance with this principle the Bâbis looked upon Mohammed Shah and Nasr-ud-Din Shah as no longer the rightful rulers. They were, *ipso facto*, supplanted by the Bâb, the Sahib-i-Zaman or Lord of the Age. The Kajars were called by them "unlawful kings." Hazrat-Quddus says,¹ "We are the rightful rulers; know that Nasr-ud-Din is no true king and that such as support him shall be tormented in hell-fire." Disloyalty was an essential corollary of Bâbism and not a consequence of the repression and persecution which it met. The measures of the Persian Government were caused by this knowledge. The rebellions of the Bâbis were justified in their eyes by self-preservation as well as by the desire to remove, if possible, the Shah and make way for the reign of the Bâb. Professor Browne's opinion on these points is conclusive. He says² :—

The Babis looked for their immediate triumph over all existing powers, culminating in the universal establishment of the true faith and the reign of God's saints on earth. . . . They intended to inherit the earth; they held those who rejected the Bâb as unclean and worthy of death, and they held the Kajar Shahs in a detestation which they were at no pains to hide. . . . They did not

¹ "New History of the Bâb," translated by Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge University, p. 362.

² *Ib.* p. xvi.

make any profession of loyalty to or love for the reigning dynasty. . . . Unbelievers were flouted with scorn because they supposed that the Promised Deliverer would confirm the authority of the Shahs.

The Bayan, the chief book of the Báb, anticipates the time when the Shah's government shall be superseded by a Bâbi state, which shall prevail in Persia. It gives the laws for this Bâbi state as well as regulations for the distribution of the spoils of war and for the Jihad,¹ showing that the Báb anticipated religious wars. The kings of the Bayanic dispensation are directed what they should do. In the five chief provinces of Persia, no unbelievers are to be allowed to live, except some foreign Christian merchants. They are not to be killed, but to be driven out and their property confiscated.² Directions are given as to the use of their property. The strongly intolerant doctrine is set forth³ that "unbelievers have no right to anything, not even to a believing wife. All that thou seest in the hands of unbelievers is not theirs by right. If the manifestation has power, he would even forbid their breathing."

Bâbism, therefore, was a political as well as a religious movement. As such it fought and with some prospect of success, for, as Browne says, "it seemed at one time to menace the supremacy alike of the Kajar dynasty and of the Mohammedan faith in Persia."⁴

The Báb was executed in 1850. The Bâbi insurrections were suppressed. Terrible reprisals followed the attempt on the life of Nasrud-Din Shah. The leaders fled into exile to Turkey. Bâbism, repressed and forced into concealment, entered upon a new phase. It emerged somewhat changed as Bahaism (1867).

II.—Bahaism should be considered in its political aspects in relation to the Government of Persia.

(a) In Persia, the issue of the sword had declared against the Bâbis. Baha Ullah adopted a policy aptly called "political opportunism."⁵ He proclaimed the loyalty of himself and his followers to the Shah, denounced the attempted assassinations, wrote prayers to be said for the Shah,⁶ and pleaded for the toleration of the sect as one without political aspirations. Bahai apologists condemned the Báb and the conduct of the Bâbis, declaring it contrary to the principles of the Báb.⁷ Mirza Abul Fazl, on trial before the Persian Government, repudiated the Bâbis, denounced their actions as unseemly and bad,⁸ and declared with emphasis that Bahaism was an entirely different religion. He pronounced the Shah free from blame regarding the death of the Báb⁹ and the persecutions of the Bâbis, casting the responsibility and reproach on the mullahs and the Ministers of State.¹⁰

¹ "Traveller's Narrative," p. 287.

² Bayan VI, 4.

³ *Beyan Persan*, vol. IV, p. 118.

⁴ Browne, *New Hist.* VII.

⁵ *Id.*, *ib.*

⁶ *Ib.* p. 316.

⁷ "Traveller's Narrative," p. 65.

⁸ "Bahai Proofs," pp. 51, 63, 77.

⁹ *Ib.* p. 38.

¹⁰ *New Hist.* pp. 172, 180.

He even made a show of blaming the attendants for the death of Badi, the messenger who bore Baha's epistle to the Shah, and made as though the Shah regretted it. The "New History" and the "Traveller's Narrative" are both tendency writings, following out the same purpose, glossing over the facts as given in the contemporary narrative of Mirza Jani, putting the odium on the mullahs and asserting "that no particular blame attaches to His Most Sacred Majesty the Shah;¹ though other writings of Baha show a spirit of hostility to the Shah.² Following the policy of conciliation the Bahais made petition to the Shah stating that³ "this sect has no worldly object nor any concern with political matters, it has nothing to do with affairs of Government neither has it any concern with the powers of the throne." They stated that⁴ "they have made no disturbance, or rebellions, or any sign of sedition." So Baha⁵ enjoined that "in every country they must behave towards the Government with faithfulness, trustfulness, and truthfulness." The Persian Government responded to this policy and ceased to persecute as before. During the past fifty years the Bahais have not been much molested. Their persecutions have been few and generally due to local causes. The number of Bahais who have lost their lives in the course of their history (after they cease to be Bâbis) is probably not more than 300, more than half of whom were killed in riots at Ispahan and Yezd in 1903. The Bahai historian⁶ states that "on rare occasions certain Ulama, for their own personal and private advantage, molest one or two individuals of the sect." But the Shah's Government has tolerated them.⁷ More Nestorian or Armenian Christians have lost their lives in Persia from violence, in the half century, than Bahais. The Government has shown liberality towards Bahais by allowing them to occupy positions in the civil service, as clerks in the post, telegraph, customs, courts, and consulates, and has not discriminated against them.

(b) Coming to the period of the agitation for a constitution and the revolution, it is plain that the Bahais had little to do with the struggle. Neither they nor their teachings were the cause of it. The causes were the same, in general, as those which influenced Turkey and China towards constitutional reform. The occasions in local circumstances and politics had nothing to do with Baháism. The leaders were enlightened Moslems, and even mullahs of the Shiáhs. They were not Bahais. These held aloof from the propaganda and the struggle for popular liberties, took little part in the elections or in parliament, and

¹ "Traveller's Narrative," p. 189.

² See Surat-ul-Mullah and "Star of the West," 27 September, 1913, pp. 9, 10.

³ "Traveller's Narrative," p. 156.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 160.

⁵ "Words of Paradise."

⁶ "Traveller's Narrative," p. 166.

⁷ Browne, "A Year among the Persians," p. 101.

joined neither the army of the constitutionalists nor that of the reactionaries. They displayed no love of country by striving for the cause of the people, nor any real love or loyalty to the autocratic Shah. Yet the influence of Abdul-Baha Abbas was thrown in favour of Mohammed Ali Shah, and after he had scattered parliament at the cannon's mouth and annulled the constitution, Baháis were granted appointments in the civil service and rejoiced in the reactionary regime. A tablet of Abdul Baha was circulated prophesying a long and prosperous reign for Mohammed Ali Shah, who before many months was driven from his throne into exile.

My personal knowledge of these circumstances is supported by abundant printed evidence. First of all there is Abdul Baha's own statement. He said in America,¹ "In Persia the Baháis have no part in the movements which have terminated in corruption. They must have nothing to do with seditious movements." Excerpts from his letters² show that they were constantly enjoined "from the very beginning of the revolution to stand aside from the struggle and war." To the same effect are the words of the Bahai Remey,³ "The Baháis had remained neutral in the struggle for constitutional liberty and the renewal of Persia." So Dreyfus, another Bahai,⁴ "He (Abdul Baha) dissuaded them from mixing themselves up in the political struggle. This explains the apparently passive rôle played by the Baháis in contemporary events in Persia." Because of this attitude, Professor Browne accuses them of lack of patriotism and laments their inaction. But this attitude of neutrality was only maintained by them as far as taking up arms and public action were concerned. Their secret influence was on the side of the reactionary party. It is plain that the constitutionalists regarded the Baháis as their opponents, and Mohammed Ali Shah counted them as his supporters. Abdul Baha said in New York,⁵ "The Baháis have taken no part whatever in political questions and disturbances. Their clamorous persecutors were the revolutionists. These discontents wanted constitutional rights and privileges. They were politicians, not religionists." Certainly the hostile animus of these words is unmistakable. There is indubitable proof, too, that Abdul Baha carried on correspondence with Mohammed Ali Shah. M. H. Ford, a Bahai writer,⁶ states the fact in detail. Its purport was such that, when the Constitutionalists knew it, Abdul Baha feared violence. This was commonly reported in Persia. In Chicago the first Bahai missionary to America confirmed this fact which he had heard from Acca. He said, "The authorities intercepted Abbas's

¹ "Star of the West," 13 July, 1913.

² Browne's "Persian Revolution," pp. 424-9.

³ "Observations of a Bahai Traveller," p. 53.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 172.

⁵ "Star of the West," 1 August, 1912.

⁶ "The Oriental Rose," pp. 185-6, 197.

letter intriguing with Mohammed Ali Shah, and therefore the revolutionists threatened him." Remy shows the affiliation of the Bahais with the Shah, and his satisfaction with them. He arrived at Teheran just when the Shah had scattered the parliament and hanged the editors. He says, "We found the Bahais in the utmost peace and happiness. They were in good esteem and respect of the (reactionary) Government, and were now enjoying *unusual* privileges. . . . Several of the Bahais had been appointed to high governmental positions." In accord with all these facts is the statement of J. D. Frame, M.D., of Resht¹ :—

The political influence of the Bahais has been grossly exaggerated. They were forbidden to accept seats in the first parliament and professed to maintain strict neutrality, but in the spring of 1908 a "tablet" was circulated among them, promising that Mohammed Ali Shah would rule for the remainder of his life; and the writer possesses a copy of another "tablet" promising him speedy peace and prosperity. The subsequent forced abdication of the king cost the Bahais considerable prestige and some followers.

We thus see a double failure on the part of this movement. As Bábism it failed in 1848-52 in its rebellion and wars against the Kajars; as Bahaism it failed to enter into and assist the modern movement, which, aiming at reform and progress, inaugurated a constitution. The cause is not far to seek, Bahaism has a political scheme of its own. We will now consider it.

III.—Bahaism has set forth a system of civil government. Claiming to be a revelation from God, it has enunciated the laws and regulations of the future State. It approves of constitutional monarchy as the best form of government, and permits republics.² But this monarchy will be limited not so much by its constitution as by the law of Bahaism and its hierarchy. Baha, in the *Kitab-ul-Aqdas*, the Book of Laws, directs that *Bet-Adl*, houses of justice, be established in every place, with nine or more members, all Bahai men, who shall be Trustees of the Merciful, Administrators for God. In the thirteenth of the "Glad Tidings"³ he says :—

The affairs of the people are placed in charge of the men of the House of Justice. They are daysprings of command (divine agents, representatives of God). They may execute what they deem advisable. It is incumbent upon all to obey them. Their souls will be inspired with divine aspiration. God will inspire them with what He willeth.

With them will lie the interpretation of points of doctrine. They must decree and judge according to Bahai revelation. "They must gaze day and night towards that which hath been revealed from the horizon of the Supreme Pen." They shall rule by divine right. Their authority shall be absolute. Abdul Baha restates the words of Baha :⁴

¹ "The Moslem World," 1912, p. 238.

² "Glad Tidings," p. 91.

³ Chicago edition, p. 89.

⁴ Grundy's "Ten Days in Acca."

"The House of Justice must be obeyed in all things." "It is the centre of true government." "The Law of God will be invested in them, and they will render decisions." "All judgment will be from the standpoint of God's laws." "Its decisions and commands will be guarded from mistake. It will have conferred upon it infallibility." The House of Justice will have local councils, national ones, and an international one.¹ Of the latter, Abdul Baha said in an address in New York:—

A universal or world House of Justice shall be organized. That which it orders shall be the Truth in explaining the commands of Baha Ullah and shall be obeyed by all. *All men shall be under its supervision.*²

Its functions are not confined to matters of faith, for Abdul Baha continues: "The House of Justice is endowed with a political as well as a religious aspect. It embodies both aspects, and is protected by the preserving power of Baha Ullah himself." *In the political aspect it will be supreme.* "The separation of the Religion and the State can only be temporary," says Dreyfus,³ "a momentary stage. For the present the two spheres are separate. When Bahatism triumphs they will be united." "The House of Justice⁴ will have under its control almost the whole administration, and naturally will take the place of our municipal councils. Such has been Baha Ullah's intention. Further he clearly aims not only at a municipal House of Justice, but also at a legislative one, sitting as a national parliament and as an international tribunal." Remember that all the members are to be Bahais. So Remy says, "There will be a union of Religion and the State—the governments of the nations. The material laws of men will be founded and enforced according to" Bahatism.⁵ In this politico-religious regime, the political will be subject to the religious. "The kings and rulers of the world," says Abdul Baha,⁶ "will find their true authority under the rulings of the House of Justice. It will decide between kings and kings." Baha addressed letters⁷ to kings with arrogant assumption of authority to control the civil powers.

The Houses of Justice will have *large financial powers*. They shall inherit all property of those dying without heirs, and one-third of that of those dying childless. One-third of all fines for crimes shall go to them. For example, in case of murder, two-thirds of the blood money shall go to the family of the murdered and one-third to the House of Justice. A tithe of nineteen-hundredths shall be given into their

¹ "Answered Questions," by Abdul Baha, Barney, pp. 198-9.

² "Star of the West," 12 December, 1913; 9 April, 1914, p. 21.

³ "The Bahai Revelation," p. 123.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 144.

⁵ "Bahai Movement," p. 69.

⁶ Grundy, *ib.*

⁷ Mohammed wrote to the rulers of Constantinople, Persia, Egypt, and Syria. That which was a bold and striking act on the part of the Arabian enthusiast is a weak imitation on the part of Baha.

hands. They shall act as trustees for minors and incapables, and as a Poor Board.

They shall have *civil* jurisdiction, "to settle material difficulties between believers,"¹ for the protection of men, for the preservation of human honour.² "If any man refuses to educate his children, the House of Justice shall do it at his expense," and "shall order all the negligent to pay" and use police powers to enforce it.

They must also interpret and administer *criminal* law, for Baha has "revealed" a code of laws and regulations concerning material as well as spiritual things.³ Abdul Baha says, "The revelations of Baha Ullah contain all the great laws of social government." "The laws cover all points and questions of national administration."⁴ For example, in the *Kitab-ul-Aqdas*, the punishment for theft is prescribed: for the first offence, exile; for the second, imprisonment; for the third, branding "thief" on the forehead, "lest other countries accept him." For adultery a fine is to be paid to the House of Justice, and for the second offence, double of the fine. Arson is made punishable by burning, etc. This fiat legislation of Baha Ullah is to be imposed upon the parliaments of all nations. "All legislative and administrative functions," says Dreyfus,⁵ "shall assume a sacred character" under the control of the Bahai House of Justice.

In brief, Bahatism would set up in each town, in every country, ruling councils, and a central one universal in its sway, composed entirely of Bahais, clothed with supreme authority, because God-given, over kings, parliaments, and peoples; councils infallible and absolute, superior to appeal or protest; deciding and exacting obedience in every department of the life of humanity—religious, domestic, social, educational, financial, judicial, and political. It would be not an *imperium in imperio*, but an Empire over all. It would be a priestcraft⁶ such as the world has not yet seen—a religious-political regime in which kings and presidents will go not to Canossa but to Acca, and alike hold the stirrups of Bahai justices, and laws of parliaments will be subject to revision and veto by the Bahai House. In it is the certainty of priestly oppression when fallible men set up their judgment as God's. The Bahais claim to have no priests and no *hierarchy*. It is a question of names. Their system and laws contain the real thing, full-fledged, men mediating God's will. We may call it a *bahaiarchy*, if they prefer.

Abdul Baha, recognizing the objections that will be made to the political functions of the Bahai justices, and foreseeing difficulty with

¹ Dreyfus, p. 131.

² Remy, p. 61.

³ "The Bahai Revelation," p. 32.

⁴ The word "priest" is used loosely for an officer of religion. Bahai use no special term.

⁵ Ishraqat, p. 33.

⁶ Kheiralla, p. 433.

Governments, has, for the time being, directed that in America and Europe the name "House of Spirituality" or "House of Consultation" be used.¹ But change of name does not alter the reality or change the "revelation" of Baha. The House of Justice (central) is to be set up when Abdul Baha dies, and it will assume its functions gradually as opportunity and expediency demand. Already orders have gone forth prohibiting the interpretation of the words of Baha or personal expositions of them.² Already the fiat has interdicted the publication, by a Bahai, of a tract, book, or translation on the Bahai religion without submitting it to the censor at Acca.

The effect of the working of the Bahai system may be realized by imagining it as set up in Persia. Suppose, for example, that the small minority of Bahais now in Persia should become a majority, with a Bahai Shah, Bahatism would become the established religion. "Houses of Justice" would come into operation. What of those who remain Moslems and Christians? Fortunately Baha has abolished the law of the Bâb that required their expulsion from the chief provinces of Persia and the confiscation of their property. But either the other religions must be judged by Bahai courts, or separate courts must be set up for them. This would perpetuate the double system of courts, the *wrfi* or civil and the *shari* or religio-civil courts. The latter would be entirely Bahai and either lording it over or in conflict with the civil administration. This would be a continuation of the present confusion of Persian conditions, only with the Bahais in control. What might the minority expect? The oppressions and anathemas received by the old Bahais from the followers of Abdul Baha Abbas give the answer. Fortunately for the world, the universal reign of Bahatism is not to be realized, neither is the prophecy of Abdul Baha to be fulfilled which says³ "that the flag of Baha Ullah will overcome every other flag and all rulers will do homage to it."

SAMUEL G. WILSON.

¹ "Tablets," vol. I, pp. 1 and 6.

² "Brilliant Proof," p. 26.

³ "Daily Lessons at Acca" (Goodall and Cooper), p. 72.