

THE CRISIS



A RECORD OF THE DARKER RACES

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ABDUL BAHÁ, THE PERSIAN TEACHER OF BROTHERHOOD

A PERSIAN TEACHER.

ON April 12 Abdul Baha, the head of the religious movement known as Bahaism, arrived in America to visit his rapidly increasing band of followers. His coming is of particular interest to those of us who believe in the brotherhood of man, for that is the doctrine the Bahais emphasize above all other things. Because they have taught it, their first leader was put to death, their second died in prison, while Abdul Baha, their third head, has spent all his life, until a few years ago, in the Turkish prison at Acca, in Syria, the "new holy city" of the Bahais.

It is only seventy years since the movement of which he is the leader originated in Persia; to-day it numbers 10,000 disciples and is growing at an amazing rate. It is not, properly speaking, a "new religion." It does not ask a Christian to cease professing Christianity or a Mohammedan to give up his Mohammedanism. It does, however, demand that each person shall follow the spiritual truths of his religion, and it pays little attention to dogma.

The movement presents in many respects a striking parallel with the early growth of Christianity. Like Christianity, it began as a protest against the corruption of established, intolerant, unspiritual religion, and also like Christianity it drew on itself the most inhuman persecutions. The number of martyrs is estimated at about 50,000. They have been burned alive, beheaded, torn in pieces, hanged and tortured in all the ways official cruelty could devise. There has not been an instance of recantation. The records of the Bahais speak of the victims as "athirst for the draught of martyrdom," and it is indeed true that they died with songs on their lips.

There were persecutions and martyrdoms so recently as nine years ago, but the great time of trial was in the years 1848 to 1852, when the movement was beginning and the Persian government saw, in the growth of this enthusiasm for brotherhood, a menace to its arbitrary power. Perhaps twenty thousand men, women, and even children, died during these years of persecution.

It was in 1844 that a young Persian named Mohammed Ali began to preach a doctrine of simplicity and spirituality. He called himself "the Bab," which in Persian means "the gate." It was not uncommon for teachers to adopt this title, signifying that wisdom did not originate with them,

but came from heaven, using them as the gate by which to approach humanity. The Bab was only 25 years old, but he soon won a large number of followers, so soon that the great persecution began when he had preached but four years.

The accusations brought against the followers of the Bab were very similar to those brought against the early Christians. They were charged with being "bad citizens," because they taught love to all men of all races, and of immorality, because they practised a kind of community of goods, like that of the early Christians.

The Bab found martyrdom in the course of time, being hanged from the wall of a prison and shot; so, in the words of the chronicle, did "that holy spirit escape from its gentle frame and ascend to the supreme horizon." But, like John the Baptist, he had continually spoken of someone to follow him and perfect his work, and soon after his death a man arose who was generally received as the head of the movement. This was Baha Ulla, the father of Abdul Baha.

Baha Ulla was a man of great wealth and high rank. He did not long keep either, for the Persian government, afraid perhaps to kill him, confiscated his goods and exiled him. "Thank God, I am now free," cried Baha Ulla when he heard that all his wealth was lost. With the greatest suffering he and his family, with a band of followers, made their way from Persia toward the coast. No sooner had they arrived than the Turkish government arrested them and threw them in prison at Acca. Baha Ulla never left the prison again, and Abdul Baha grew up and spent all his life there, until the "Young Turks" seized the government a few years ago and gave him his freedom.

At first the family suffered greatly, but by degrees, as the jailers saw that they were kindly and gentle people, they were given some privileges, so that friends could see them and the work could be carried on from the prison. Baha Ulla did a great deal to simplify the somewhat complicated and Oriental teachings of the movement. His son was accepted by all as his successor, although there is no theory of a priestly family which is to rule the Bahais.

At Abdul Baha's house in Acca all men are welcomed. Persian, African, Frenchman, American—they all meet as brothers before the master. He is the most generous



THE LATE DAVID H. FERRIS

and hospitable of men, and all are welcome to his table. He follows literally the Scriptural injunction to give his goods to the poor; the coat he wears is usually all he has.

Naturally, he is interested in the question of race prejudice in this country, where he has so many disciples. Recently he sent this message to one of them, Mrs. M. L. Botay, who has sent it to *THE CRISIS*:

"Give Mrs. Botay my greetings and love and tell her she must greatly endeavor through the assistance of heaven to cast light among the colored people, so that they may become as our brothers, no blacks, no whites, both as one. By this means you shall free America from all prejudice. Because in the Kingdom of God all are the same, whether black or white. The greater the faith of either, the more acceptable is he in the Kingdom. A faithful colored believer is a child of the Kingdom, while a white unbeliever is deprived. God looks upon hearts, not upon colors. He looks upon qualities, not upon bodies."



THE LATE DAVID H. FERRIS.

ON March 9 Mr. David H. Ferris, one of the well-known colored men of New Haven and a veteran of the Civil War, died of heart failure. For many years he had interested himself in the welfare of his people, and the tributes paid to his memory came from all classes of society. He was

born in New York City sixty-seven years ago, and was the son of a Methodist preacher. His grandfather had escaped from slavery. David Ferris was only a boy when the war broke out, but he enlisted as soon as he could be received, and went South with a New York regiment. He was a man of great strength, as well as courage, and distinguished himself on several occasions. He served for some time in the far South, and after the close of the war did duty in suppressing the guerrillas. His son, William H. Ferris, is a graduate of Yale and Harvard Universities.



THE MILITARY ATTACHÉS TO LIBERIA.

THE military attachés of the United States legation who are to reorganize the Liberian constabulary have just sailed. They are headed by Captain Young, of the United States army, and with him go Dr. Wilson Ballard, who will rank in the Liberian army as major, and Mr. Richard H. Newton and Mr. Arthur A. Browne, who will rank as captains.

CAPT. A. A. BROWNE CAPT. R. H. NEWTON
MAJOR W. BALLARD