

the next generation of missionaries to reap with joy, that at last he that soweth and he that reapeth may *forever* rejoice together.

"Brother Perkins, there is no friendship on earth quite up to the friendship of old missionaries; but how that will be on the other side of this Jordan here at our feet, we shall soon see and realize. The Lord prepare us fully for it by that same free and all-sufficient grace that first brought us out of nature's darkness into the glorious light and liberty of his children!"

The last days of Dr. Perkins were eminently peaceful. His bodily sufferings were great; but his spiritual joys were greater. Nearly a month before his death, he remarked, "The prospect of soon being with Christ has been very sweet to me, during the past week". "I do not wonder that the believer prays, 'Take me not back to convalescence'". Subsequently he exclaimed in ecstasy, "Precious Jesus! thy blood cleanseth from all sin". A little later he said, "There is no obstacle between me and the cross". "If such bliss can be here, what must heaven be!"

An intimate friend asked him what were his views of the missionary work, as he looked back upon it. "The most

glorious", he replied, "that can engage heart or hand of man; but I would have it kept on the high plane of laboring to lead souls to Christ". "My missionary life has been a refuge to my soul. My domestic life has been one of intense contrasts, the highest enjoyment and the deepest anguish". "Our children, beautiful treasures, were olive plants of joy; but, nipped in the bud, left an aching void that nothing earthly could fill or solace, except the same blessed missionary work". "As I have often retired to pray for God's interference and help, in circumstances of trial, my petitions have wandered from the particular object before my mind when I began, to the glorious work in which I was engaged. I have been borne upward and onward, beyond all my trials; and I have found infinitely more joy than sorrow in all my missionary experience".

The pastor of the Congregational church at Chicopee wrote, immediately after the death of Dr. Perkins, "For four days his utterances have been fragmentary and inarticulate; but, to us who have seen his patience and resignation to the divine will, there is abundant evidence that he sleeps in Jesus".

THE ALI ILLAHEES (OR NUSAIRYS) AND BABEES OF PERSIA

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In our special efforts to extend the knowledge of the gospel to the Mohammedans of Persia, our attention has been drawn, with particular interest, to some of the heterodox sects which exist among them, and which furnish peculiar opportunities for the labors of the

Christian missionary. Some account of two of these sects may be interesting to the readers of the Herald, who look with eager desire and fervent prayer for the decay of the power of Islam in Persia, preparatory to its redemption to Christ. Those of which I would give a brief notice

are the so-called *Ali Illahees* and the *Bâbees*.

The *Ali Illahees* are so designated by the orthodox Mohammedans, who suppose them to assert the divinity of Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed. Though they do not reject this name, nor the specific doctrine it imports, they commonly call themselves *Ahl-e-Hakk*, i.e., "The people of the True"; also, "The people of the truth"; in distinction from "The people of the law", as they denominate the followers of Mohammed's legal religion. They also recognize the name *Nusairy*, by which, and by many of their doctrines, they seem closely related to the Nusairys of Syria.

This sect is found in nearly every part of Persia; scantily in the northern provinces, and very numerous in the southern and eastern. In some cities and districts, it is said, on good authority, that one half the population belong to this religion. In Oroomiah there are from fifteen to twenty villages of them only.

As an open profession of their faith would subject them to the rigors of Moslem law, they are obliged to practice it in secret. Outwardly they profess to be true Mussulmans, and before the orthodox, practice all the rites of Islamism. Among themselves, and to Christians, they denounce Mohammed and disregard nearly all the prescriptions of Mohammedan law. It is, moreover, a part of their faith that the inner doctrines of their religious belief are mysteries which it is forbidden them to reveal to outsiders. Hence a knowledge of their real faith and practices has been sought for with difficulty. In Syria, neither torture nor death has been able to extort from them these sacred mysteries. Their religious books are so rigidly concealed that it is commonly supposed they have none. M.

Gobineau, formerly French Ambassador at Tehran, securing the confidence of some of the sect, elicited from them the main secrets of this singular religion, which he has published. In my interviews with the *Ali Illahees* of Oroomiah, I have satisfied myself of the correctness of most of his statements. It has been amusing to witness their astonishment as they have discovered my acquaintance with one and another of their secret doctrines and customs. The great amount of mysticism in which their tenets are enshrouded, renders it difficult to state their whole creed with positiveness; but a few of the principal points are definitely known and may be read with interest.

The Nusairys, or *Ali Illahees*, claim that their religion was promulgated a few hundred years after the establishment of Islamism. A special prophet came from God with the new revelation. They hold to four principal emanations of the Deity. These were associated in the creation of the universe, and through them God and his will are manifested to man. They designate these as the four chief "Pyr" (spiritual guides). The most eminent of these is Pyr Benjamin, who is the embodiment of the divine law, and the mediator between man and God at the final judgment. He is, it would seem, the central object of their faith and worship. As a memorial of him, they observe an annual fast of three days, at the autumnal equinox.

Besides the four primary divine intelligences, or emanations, numbers of secondary ones have appeared on the earth at various times, as incarnations of the Deity, sent for the purpose of restoring man to the true knowledge of God. Among these they reckon Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus Christ, Ali, and numerous others. To Jesus they assign

peculiar honor, as they admit that the miracles he wrought were of a superior order. This feature of their belief disposes them to be more in sympathy with Christians than with Mohammedans. Believing all Nusairys to be descended from some of the early Pyrs, they seem to regard themselves as fractions of the Divine Being. By resisting the degrading influences of the flesh and becoming genuine "People of the True", they have now eternal life. The "True" (God) is in them, and they cannot sin; and at death they are reabsorbed into God, while the souls of unrepentant sinners, and of all Mussulmans, after death undergo a series of transmigrations in the bodies of brutes, until purified from sin.

The lineal descendants of the early Pyrs are highly revered by the masses. I have seen them, on entering the presence of one of these persons, approach, kneel down, and kiss his hand, and then remain standing until he gave them permission to sit.

Their rites of worship are as sacredly concealed as their doctrines. The principal of these is a great feast which occurs at the beginning of the year, and lasts for several days. The mystic ceremonies of this occasion are observed at night. They assemble together and spend the time in feasting and in religious exercises, consisting of music, prayers, and fervid repetitions, by which they work themselves into a religious ecstasy, and, as they suppose, receive the Divine Spirit into their souls. They have also, at this time, a sort of communion called "the office of bread". In connection with this they receive any proselytes, and their own infants, into the fellowship of the sect.

Few readers are found in the sect, and they seem to place little value upon education. They are annually visited by

agents of the Pyrs, who keep alive the zeal and devotion of the faithful, and receive from them contributions for the support of their spiritual guides. These religionists are subdivided into numerous minor sects, one of which, the *Dawoodees*, hold David and the Psalms in peculiar reverence. Their number is large.

These features of this wide-spread secret religion suffice to show how radically it differs from genuine Mohammedanism. It seems to have had its root in Buddhism, and to have grafted upon itself teachings of Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. The existence of such a large and heterodox sect in the bosom of Mohammedanism reveals one of the weaknesses of Islamism in Persia.

The secret hatred of the Ali Illahees for the prevailing religion of the land, their friendliness to Christians and their high esteem for Christ, render them particularly easy of approach by the preacher of the truth as it is in Christ. My visits to them have been received with marked cordiality, and have been returned by them with evident good-will. Though as yet they have no particular interest in Christianity, the way is open to preach the gospel to them. One of our Nestorian helpers is disposed to improve the opportunity, and visits one of their villages occasionally for the purpose of talking with them on the true way of salvation.

It must be said, on the other hand, that their mysticism, their many senseless superstitions and traditions, and their servility to the opinions of others in order to conceal their own, are serious discouragements to the most hopeful preaching of the gospel to them. It would seem that they must have an important place in the future religious history of

Persia. M. Gobineau is of the opinion that when a less favorable day to Islamism shall come, the influence of a religion so hostile to the laws of the prophet will lead to astonishing results. It is important that we take advantage of the access to them Providence has given us, to leaven them with the doctrines of the gospel.

The other sect of which I proposed to speak, "*Bâbees*", was noticed in the *Herald* for May of last year. Occurrences of the past six months have added somewhat of interest to the position of this new religion, and justify further observations upon it, from a Persian point of view.

It is doubtless true that "the rise of a new scheme of religion, originating with some man of subtle and mystic mind, is not a remarkable phenomenon in the East". Such schemes do certainly abound; but as a rule they make no attempt at radical changes in the existing religion. They aim rather to graft upon it some new mystical interpretation of the Koran, or some addition to its ritual.

Bâbism, on the contrary, while it acknowledges the Koran as of divine origin and authority, proclaims the abrogation of some of its fundamental doctrines. It claims to be as distinct from and superior to Mohammedanism, as Christianity is distinct from and superior to Judaism. And it is a fact, that no such scheme of religion has, in many generations, produced such a sensation in Persia as this of the so-called Bâb. The dread of the Mollahs caused it to be suppressed. Its history is one of exile and blood, but still it lives. It glories in its martyrs, and the martyr spirit that still animates its disciples. They cherish the strongest faith in the destiny of their religion to secure for itself recognition and power. This

faith prompts them to perilous undertakings for the furtherance of their divine mission, as they believe it to be.

The aims and the zeal of these sectaries is forcibly illustrated by an event which occurred last fall at Tehran. As the Shah was riding out one day, he observed a man at a little distance watching him. It was remembered that he had been seen there on previous occasions, and the king sent and had him brought. Upon inquiry, he acknowledged being a Bâbee, and stated that he was the bearer of a petition to the Shah from the chief of the Bâbees at Acre, who had 70,000 men under his orders. The document was presented, and proved to be a petition in behalf of the sect for liberty to reside, unmolested, in the Shah's dominions, in the free exercise of their religion. The petition was not granted, of course, and the man was arrested and put to the torture to make him reveal his associates. He died under the great sufferings inflicted, revealing nothing, and meeting his end with the utmost calmness. He told his torturers that his death was of small consequence, as every one of the 70,000 Bâbees was ready to die in the same cause; that others would be sent on a like errand; and that in the end, unless their prayer was granted, the King would doubtless be assassinated. This is the occurrence upon which was founded the telegram in the European and American papers last fall, of a conspiracy to assassinate the Shah of Persia having been discovered.

The same spirit of steadfastness in the face of danger we have witnessed in the few Bâbees here in Oroomiah, this winter. They are quiet in the profession and practice of their religion, but it is generally known who they are. Some of the more fanatical Molahs endeavored recently to incite the governor to arrest,

and either banish or execute the leader. Neither he nor his adherents evinced the least fear as to the issue; and, I presume, had the plot succeeded, they would have met the worst unflinchingly, rather than, even for a single moment, deny their faith. It is this zeal and fearless devotion that gives them consequence in the country, more than their numbers.

It is intimated that the Shah and his principal advisers are disposed to grant them religious toleration. Fear of the Mollahs is the chief obstacle to their doing so. And here is the importance and hope that, from a Christian point of view, attaches to Bâbism— not in its near approach to Christianity, nor in any superiority of its teachings to Mohammedanism (though in both these respects it is worthy of attention), but in its apparent promise of hastening the era of religious liberty in Persia. In the unusual vitality of this now small sect, and its radical pretensions and resolute measures, seem to lie the germs of great events to be witnessed at some future day in this bigoted country. When we consider the popularity of this movement before it was put down, we may infer what might be its fruits should the point of toleration be carried. Says Mr. Watson, the recent English historian of Persia, who resided some years at Tehran, "Bâbism, though at present a proscribed religion in Persia, is far from being extinct or even declining, and the Bâb may yet contest with Mohammed the privilege of being regarded as the real prophet of the faithful".

From our missionary point of view it seems to be one of the providences of God, preparing the way for the evangelization of Persia. From the ranks of the

Bâbee enthusiasts we are not sanguine of many converts to Christianity; but from the spirit of dissent which Bâbism seems destined to awaken, the cause of Christ has much to hope.

Our intercourse with the few adherents of this new faith in Oroomiah has been of the most friendly kind, and has led to many deeply interesting conversations, of which Christ has been the prominent theme. Scarcely a day passes that some of them are not found in the book-shop we have recently opened in the market. They have brought with them their skeptical Mussulman acquaintances, and many long discussions and expositions of the doctrines of the gospel have taken place there, day after day. They have found out our place for Turkish preaching, and are occasional attendants on that service.

A Mohammedan, for years a secret professor of his faith in Christ, regularly comes to an evening bible-class conducted by Dr. Van Norden. Last week it was the pleasure of many to hear the voice of this Mussulman in prayer for the first time in a public way.

We cannot tell what will be the issue of our new labors so auspiciously begun. The cause must go forward. It may be that the blood of Christian martyrs must mingle with that of the disciples of Bâb before Islamism shall sheath its sword, and liberty to confess Christ openly be won in Persia. Be it so. The followers of Christ can ill afford to yield to the adherents of Bâb the honor of superior devotion, or of greater readiness to suffer for the extension of their faith. We most earnestly ask the prayers of all God's people in connection with this deeply interesting and important subject.