

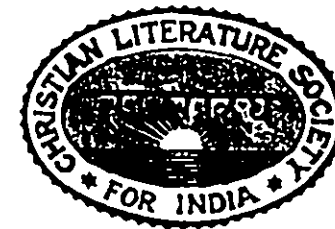
THE CULT OF 'ALÍ

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'THE RECENSIONS OF THE QUR'ÁN'



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THE CULT OF 'ALĪ

'Alī, the cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, was one of the earliest converts to Islām. Amongst the band of remarkable men who attached themselves to the Prophet's cause 'Alī stands prominently forth, distinguished by his earnest personal devotion to his master and his lion-hearted courage in the warlike contests of the Prophet's career at Madīna. At the battle of Badr he engaged in single combats and slew his foes; at Uhud, he received no less than sixteen wounds. He was the standard bearer in many fights. He was, however, more successful as a follower than as a leader. He lacked the qualities requisite for a ruler in tumultuous times. His Khalifate was not a success, but I have dealt with that subject elsewhere.¹

The affection of Muḥammad for his faithful follower was great. He used to say 'I and 'Alī are of one stock; 'Alī is a part of me and I of

¹ See *al-Khulafā ar-Rāshidin*, pp. 41-59, in which I have given a full account of 'Alī's political career.

'Alí.' 'He whose friend I have been, 'Alí is also his friend.' 'Thou art my brother in this world and the next.' To look upon 'Alí is devotion.' 'He who reviles 'Alí reviles me.' I am the city of wisdom and 'Alí is its gate.' The Prophet's appreciation of 'Alí gave him a position of great influence. The Khalífa 'Umar highly respected the judicial opinions which 'Alí enunciated from time to time, and 'Áyesha declared that he excelled all others in his knowledge of the Sunnat, that is the rule of faith and practice, founded on Muḥammad's words and deeds.

But the high opinion of Muḥammad for 'Alí, recorded in the traditions, leads to a further development, that of the doctrine of the divine right of 'Alí and his descendants to the spiritual leadership in Islám. This idea grew slowly at first, but it took deeper root in the minds of many Muslims after the tragic end of 'Alí and his two sons. 'Alí was assassinated in the year A.D. 661. His son Ḥasan, according to the Shí'ah historians, was poisoned and Ḥusain, another son, was treacherously put to death at Karbala. The circumstances were tragic in the extreme. The plain of Karbala is now a sacred place of pilgrimage to Shí'ahs and the sad event which took place there is kept alive in their memories by the annual celebration of the Muḥarram. Traditions say that Muḥammad foretold the death of Ḥusain thus:

¹ As-Syúfi, *History of the Khalífas*, (ed. Calcutta, 1881) pp. 173-4.

'He will die for the sake of my people,' and that Ḥusain before setting out on his fatal journey stood by the Prophet's grave and said: 'How can I forget thy people, since I am going to offer myself for their sakes.' The historical value of these traditions is probably very slight. The assassinations were the natural result of a tribal feud amongst a people still uncivilized and semi-savage, but the whole history has been idealized, and this seems to show that the hard and cold system of orthodox Islám failed to find a warm response in the Shí'ah mind. The Christian idea of self-denial, of self-renunciation, of self-sacrifice for others was needed; and this representation of Ḥusain as a voluntary sacrifice for the people was the example the Shí'ahs found. It has been well said that 'the death of Ḥusain, as idealized in after ages, fills up this want in Islám; it is the womanly as against the masculine, the Christian as opposed to the Jewish element, that this story supplies to the work of Muḥammad.' The more intelligent Shí'ahs study the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the more will they see how completely it fulfils the highest aspirations of the human heart, and how superior even as an ideal it is to deaths which came as a result of a political feud.

Still the tragic end of 'Alí and his two sons invested them with peculiar interest, and the Shí'ahs found consolation in the reported sayings

of the Prophet, already alluded to, and drew from them the conclusion that the Imámat, or religious leadership in Islám, should remain in the family of 'Alí. This idea has played such an important part in the cult of 'Alí that I must now explain it somewhat fully. It is essentially a doctrine of the Shi'ahs, as the followers of 'Alí are now called. It is based largely on tradition.¹ Thus, 'Alí existed before the creation of the heaven and the earth; he is a shadow at the right hand of the throne, and men and angels make *tasbīḥ* (i.e. celebrate his praise) to him. Some say that 'Alí is alive and that 'a part of God is in him'.² One section of Shi'ahs, the 'Albáyyiyyah, say that 'Alí 'is superior to the prophet'.³ 'Alí himself records some sayings of the Prophet which may perhaps be regarded with some suspicion. However, whether genuine or not, they serve to show the form which Shi'ah thought has taken. He reports Muḥammad as saying: 'Thou ('Alí) art the elect the chosen; I will make the members of thy family the guides to salvation.' I place in thee my light and the treasures of

¹ Tradition, in the Muslim sense, bears a different meaning to tradition in the Christian one. It is not the opinion of an early Muslim divine, but an actual inspired saying of the Prophet handed down from his companions (*Ashāb*), and so is authoritative in law, religion, and morals. For a full statement of the nature and authority of traditions (*ḥawāḍith*) see my *Faith of Islám* (3rd ed.) pp. 93-101.

² *رويه الجزء الإلهي*—Shahrastāni, *al-Milal wa'n-Nihāl*, p. 132.

³ *كان يفضل علياً على النبي*—Ibid. p. 134.

my grace: for thy sake I make the waters to flow, exalt the heavens, distribute rewards and punishments, and create heaven and hell. I reveal to thy family the secrets of knowledge and to them shall be no subtlety nor mystery. They will be the apostles of my (i.e. God's) power, and unity.' The use of the word 'my' is an illustration of the belief that a tradition is a saying inspired by God.

What is known as the *nūr-i-Muḥammad*, or light of Muḥammad, played an important part in the formulation of the dogma of the Imámat. It is said that that a ray of light from the splendour of the glory of God was set apart long before the creation of the world; but did not appear on earth until the birth of Muḥammad into whose body it then entered. This light in due course passed on to 'Alí as the lawful successor of the Prophet. The only difference between the light of Muḥammad and that of 'Alí is that the one was prior to the other in point of time.² Some commentators say that this light is referred to in the verse,

Now hath a light (*nūr*) and a clear book come to you from God.—*Sūratu'l-Mā'ida* (v) 18.

But the verse more probably refers to the teaching given in the Qur'án. The origin of the idea of this light is to be found in Zoroastrian

¹ Mas'ūdi, *Murūju'dh-Dhahab*, vol. i, p. 56.

² Shahrastāni, *al-Milal wa'n-Nihāl*, p. 145.

books, from whence it has evidently passed into Islám.¹ The light passed on from 'Alí to the true Imáms and is considered a clear proof of their fitness for office and of the high dignity which attaches to it.

The term Imám means, literally, a leader and is so used of the person who leads the prayers (*namáz*) in a Mosque. The leaders in religion and law are also known as Imáms, such as Imám Ghazáli, Imám Abú Hanífa, and many others. These are called the lesser Imáms. In its highest sense it is only applied to the successors of the Prophet, and by the Shí'ahs to those alone who are also successors of 'Alí. These are the greater Imáms. It is only in the latter sense that the term Imám will now be used. The Imám, according to the Shí'ahs, is the greatest man in Islám, more learned, more holy than any other man of his age. He is considered to be free from all sin, original or actual, and so is called *ma'súm* (innocent) and is possessed of faculties which enable him to know things which are hidden from the knowledge or observation of other men.² The Imám is equal to a prophet, and like him his body is so pure and delicate that it casts no shadow. In one respect he is even greater than a prophet, for he is a medium between God and

¹ Tisdall, *Sources of the Qur'an*, pp. 246-51, or *al-Qur'an* (of this series) p. 17.

² Jalálu'd-dín as-Syútí, *History of the Khalifas* (ed. Calcutta, 1881) p. 473.

man, and only through his intervention can the grace of God come to any human being. To know the Imám is then the very essence of the knowledge which men can gain of God. It is not easy to understand the Shí'ah system and the curious beliefs which have been evolved from it unless the nature of this dogma of the Imámnat is clearly understood and its importance realized, for 'The Imám of the Shí'ahs is the divinely appointed successor of the Prophet, endowed with all perfections and spiritual gifts, one whom the faithful must obey, whose decision is final and absolute, whose wisdom is superhuman and whose words are authoritative.'¹ The Imám is, then, the supreme Pontiff, the Vicar of God upon earth. The possession of an infallible book is not enough. The Shí'ahs need an infallible guide. Naturally they expect that such a guide can only be found amongst the descendants of the Prophet. This fact is quite sufficient to account for the almost divine honour paid to 'Alí and his descendants. I may remark in passing that the Sunnis duly respect the Imáms as Ahlu'l-Bait, or 'Men of the house' (of the Prophet), but do not, as the Shí'ahs do, give them precedence over the duly appointed Khalifas.

One principal article of the Shí'ah creed is to consider 'Alí to be the Khalifa next in order

¹ Browne, *Episode of the Báb*, p. 296. The qualities possessed by an Imám are set forth in the *Journal Asiatique*, Quatrième Série, tome iii, p. 398; and his connexion with a prophet is described in the *R. A. S. Journal*, July 1899, p. 632.

after Muhammad,¹ to believe 'Alí's descendants from Ḥasan to al-Mahdī, the twelfth Imām, to be his true successors and to consider all of them, in character, position and dignity, as raised far above all other Muslims. This is the doctrine of the Imāmat.

The Shī'ah sect, however, soon became divided into two parties—the Imāmites and the Ismā'īlians. The former believe in twelve Imāms, of whom 'Alí is the first.¹ The last of the twelve, Abū'l-Qásim, is supposed to be still alive, though hidden from human eyes in some secret place. He is called al-Mahdī, or the 'guided one,' who is therefore, able to be a guide to others. It is said that the verse,

Say 'truth is come and falsehood is vanished: verily falsehood is a thing that vanished.' Sūratu Bani Isrā'il (xvii.) 83, was found written on the right arm of Abū'l-Qásim when he was born. The Sunni commentators make no mention of this curious belief, but say that the words were spoken at the capture of Mecca.² It is also related that a person one day visited the Imām Ḥasan 'Askarī (the eleventh Imām) and said, 'O son of the Prophet, who will be the Khalīfa and the Imām after thee.' Bringing out a child, he said: 'If thou hadst not found favour in the sight of God,

¹ The names of the twelve are: 'Alí, Ḥasan, Husain, Zaynū'l-'Abidīn, Muḥammad Baqir, Ja'far as-Sādiq, Mūsá Kāzim, 'Alí ibn Mūsá ar-Razá, Muḥammad Taqī, Muḥammad Naqī, Ḥasan 'Askarī, Abū'l-Qásim (or Imām Mahdī).

² *Khalāsatu'l-Tafsir*, vol. iii, p. 55.

He would not have shown thee this child: his name is that of the Prophet and so also is his patronymic' (Abū'l-Qásim). A tradition, recorded on the authority of ibn 'Abbās says: 'There will be twelve Khalīfas after me: The first is my brother and the last my son.' 'O messenger of God,' said the people, 'and who is thy brother and thy son?' The Prophet then replied that 'Alí was his brother and al-Mahdī his son, who would put away tyranny, fill the earth with justice, whom Jesus Christ would assist and follow and whose empire would extend far and wide.

This high claim of the Imāmites is totally rejected by orthodox Sunnis, whose view of the case is well put by their great historian ibn Khaldūn. He says: 'The error of the Imāmites arises from a principle which they have adopted as true and which is not so. They pretend that the Imāmat is one of the pillars of religion, whereas, in reality, it is an office instituted for the general advantage and placed under the surveillance of the people. If it had been one of the pillars of religion the Prophet would have taken care to bequeath the functions of it to some one; and he would name his intended successor to be published, as he had already in the case of the leader of prayer (namāz). The Companions (Aṣḥāb) recognized Abū Bakr as Khalīfa, because of the analogy which existed between the functions of the Khalīfa and those

of the leader of prayer. "The Prophet" they said, "chose him to watch over our spiritual interests; why should we not choose him to watch over our earthly interests?" This shows that the Prophet had not bequeathed the Imámát to any one, and that the Companions attached much less importance to that and its transmission than is now done.¹

The Shí'ah doctrine of the Imámát seems to show that there is in the human heart a natural desire for a mediator—some Word of the Father—who shall reveal Him to His children. At first sight it would seem as if this dogma might to some extent reconcile the thoughtful Shí'ah to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and mediation of Jesus Christ, to His office as the perfect revealer of God's will and as the guide in life; but it is not so. The mystic lore connected with Shí'ah doctrine has sapped the foundation of moral life and vigour. A system of religious reservation is also a fundamental part of the system in its mystical developments, whilst all Shí'ahs may lawfully practise 'taqlíya', or religious compromise in their daily lives.² This and the legality

¹ *Les Prolegomenes d'Ibn Khaldún*, vol. i, p. 431.

² This is based on the verse,

Let not believers take infidels for their friends rather than believers: whose shall do this shall have nothing to hope for from God—unless, indeed, ye fear a fear from them. —Súratu 'Alí 'Imrán (iii) 27.

For a critical comment on this verse see, *Faith of Islám* (3rd ed.) p. 117.

of mut'a, or temporary marriage, have done much to demoralize the Shí'ah community.

The other large section of the Shí'ahs, the Ismá'lians, agree with the Imánites in all particulars save one. They hold that after Ja'far as-Sádiq, the sixth Imám, and not after the twelfth Imám, the succession of the 'concealed Imáms' commenced. It was, however, from the Ismá'lian sect that many strange systems arose, in all of which the cult of 'Alí played a considerable part. It is necessary, therefore, to deal with this branch of the Shí'ahs in some detail. Ja'far as-Sádiq died at Madína in the year A.D. 148. He had nominated his son Ismá'il as his successor, but as he was found drunk on one occasion, the father transferred the office of Imám to another son, Músá Kázim. This led to a great dispute. Some supported the last appointment, others maintained that the son of Ismá'il, who had predeceased his father, was the legitimate Imám, and so appointed Ismá'il's son, Muḥammadu'l-Habíb, whilst the Imánites stood by Músá. Muḥammadu'l-Habíb was called the Mukhtúm, or concealed Imám, a title borne by his successors, which seems to show that they hardly dared to assert their claim openly.

The Ismá'lians are famous for the esoteric views they held and their activity in propagating them. One extreme section was called the Báṭinis, from a word meaning inner. They said there

was an inner meaning of the Qur'án known only to the initiated, and that the true meaning of revelation could only be learnt from the Imáms, or from their emissaries. The men who had been instructed in this secret were called Dá'is. They led their disciples through nine stages of enquiry, the more promising ones being finally turned out as unbelievers in God and man. These men were furnished with an 'armoury of proselytism' as perfect, perhaps, as any known to history: they had appeals to enthusiasm and arguments for the reason and 'fuel for the fiercest passions of the people and times in which they lived.'¹ They were bound by solemn oaths to yield implicit obedience to the will of their superiors. Of the Dá'is it is said that 'they used the claim of the family of 'Alí, not because they believed in any divine right, or any Caliphate, but because some flag had to be flourished in order to rouse the people.'²

As a preparation for the first degree of initiation, the Dai, having excited the desire of the neophyte, went on to say that the secret of mysterious matters about which he had spoken were revealed only to those who entered upon a severe course of training. He quoted the verse: 'Remember that we have entered into a covenant with prophets and with thee and with Noah and Abraham and Moses, and

¹ Lane, *A History of Egypt*, p. 94.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

Jesus, son of Mary, and we formed with them a strict covenant,'¹ to show that unless a covenant were made and a promise of devotion and loyalty were given no further steps could be taken.

When the oath of obedience had been taken the pupil entered upon the course of study for the second degree, in which he learnt that true knowledge could come only through the Imám.

The object of the third degree was to teach him why there were only seven Imáms, that those who recognized twelve, as the Imámities did, had departed from the true religion; that only those who recognized Muḥammadu'l-Ḥabīb as the seventh and last Imám could learn the esoteric meaning of religious dogmas.

In the fourth degree he was taught that the prophets entrusted with the promulgation of new religions were seven in number: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad and Muḥammadu'l-l-Ḥabīb, the son of Ismá'íl, in whose person was gathered up and terminated all previous knowledge ('ulūmu'l-awwalin). Each such leader was called a Nátig, and each had a special companion called Sús. The Sús of Muḥammad was 'Alí. The proselyte had now to accept Muḥammadu'l-Ḥabīb as a later prophet than Muḥammad, and so ceased to be an orthodox Muslim but a devoted Ismá'lián. The great majority of men stopped here, but a few

¹ *Súratu'l-Ahzáb* (xxxiii); see also *Súratu'l-Baqara* (ii) 77; *Súratu'l-Má'ida* (v) 1; *Súratu'n-Nahl* (xvi) 93.

selected individuals passed on to the five higher degrees.

In the fifth degree the pupil learnt that each Imám had twelve ministers, called the Hujjat, or proof, whose special mission it was to make known the teaching of their respective Imáms. He further learnt that religious orders and ceremonies were to be explained allegorically.

In the sixth degree he was taught that one religion superseded another, yet all came originally from God. He also learned that the opinions of philosophers were superior to those of prophets, that religious creeds were clever artifices to fetter reason. The arkán-i-dín, the obligatory practices of Islám, were all explained away allegorically, and so it was no longer necessary to observe them.

In the seventh degree the principle of dualism was taught. Thus, of creation it is said: 'When God createth a thing, He only saith: "Be."' This is the first of two powers; the second is found in the words: 'All things have we created after a fixed decree.' The object of this teaching was to destroy belief in the Tauhíd or Unity.

In the eighth degree this subject was further dwelt on to the mental bewilderment of the pupil.

In the ninth degree the pupil was led on to nihilism. He was now taught that there was no God, no law, no religion.

Thus the Ismá'ilians, emancipated from the control of a moral law, were formed into a fanatical sect, spreading destruction all around.

In the year A.H. 288 the Dá'í, Abú 'Abdi'lláh, proceeded to Africa and soon attained considerable power and influence. He then proclaimed 'Ubaidu'lláh as the true Khalífa and Imám of Islám. Some say that 'Ubaidu'lláh was the brother of the twelfth Imám (p. 8); others that he was the son of one of the Mukhtúm, or the hidden Imáms (p. 11); others that he was an impostor. However that may be, 'Ubaidu'lláh had been taught his part. After passing through many dangers he arrived in Egypt; but was cast into prison by the ruler of Sigilmása. He was released through the influence of Abú 'Abdi'lláh, who forthwith proclaimed him as al-Mahdi, the Imám whom all expected. 'Ubaidu'lláh behaved badly to his friend whom he soon got rid of on a charge of treason. He was the first of the Fátimide Khalífas of Africa, so called from their descent from 'Alí and Fátima, the daughter of the Prophet. The fourth Khalífa al-Mui'zz (A.D. 953-75) founded Cairo and firmly established the Fátimide rule. It is, however, the Khalífa Hákim bi Amri'llah (A.D. 996-1021) who is chiefly connected with our subject. The record of his mad actions as a ruler is a very long one and is well told by Stanley Lane-Poole.

¹ *Egypt*, pp. 124-34. See also Osborn's *Islam under the Arabs*, part ii, chapter iv; and S. de Sacy's *Exposé de la Religion des Druses*, vol. i, pp. 330-7.

He persecuted the Sunnis and all who were suspected of enmity to the descendants of 'Alí. His anger was often roused against the Jews and the Christians, whilst he continually interfered with the customs of the Muslims and with the observance of their religious laws and ritual. The only explanation of the forbearance shown by the people to this tyrant is to be found in the Ismá'lián view of the Imámate. Their idea was 'that all the phenomena of this sensible and material world were types or symbols of the corresponding realities in the spiritual and unseen world. Every positive precept of the law was an allegorical statement of some unseen verity; and as one pure and universal Reason presided over the spiritual world above, so it was necessary that in this lower world also the pure Reason should be incarnate in a visible person. That Reason was so incarnate in the Imám Ismá'il and in his descendants: so also it was in the Fátimide Khalífas of Egypt'.¹ The idea that this knowledge could only be obtained through a descendant of 'Alí, that is, the Imám and that the true Imáms were the Fátimide Khalífas was accepted by the Ismá'lians as a certain fact, and this explains their submission to such a mad monster as Hákím. One of his many wild ideas was that he was an incarnation of Deity and that divine worship must be paid to him. It was not an unnatural development of the Ismá'lián idea of

¹ Osborn, *Islam under the Khalifs*, p. 247.

the Imámate and it gained support. A leading Dá'i of the Bāṭini sect named Darázi encouraged the Khalífa in his pretensions. He wrote a book to show that the soul of Adam passed into that of 'Alí and that the soul of 'Alí passed into that of Hákím. Hákím now openly joined the sect of the Darázis which grew in influence and power. One of their number went to Mecca, struck the black stone of the Ka'ba and said to the astonished pilgrims: 'Why do you adore and kiss this which is useless and hurtful and all the while neglect him (Hákím) who in Egypt gives life and death?'

One day when the courtiers were assembled before Hákím, one of them read the verse:—

We have not sent any apostle but to be obeyed, if God so will, but if they, after they have sinned to their own hurt come to thee and ask pardon of God and the apostle ask pardon for them, they shall surely find that God is He who turneth, the Merciful. *Súratu'n-Nisá'* (iv) 68.

The speaker meant this to refer to Hákím, but a learned Muslim who was present at once read the verse:—

Verily, they on whom ye call beside God cannot create a fly. *Súratu'l-Hajj* (xxii) 72.

Hákím was much annoyed at this and changed countenance; but he dissembled before the audience and gave the Muslim a present. His friends, however, advised him to leave Cairo, which he wisely did. Hákím ceased to attend the Friday prayers, abrogated the rule about alms, discouraged the pilgrimage to Mecca and

allowed the fast of Ramaḍán to be broken before mid-day on the last day.

Another man, Hamza, now appears upon the scene. He called himself the 'Hádi, or guide and the life of those who submit.' He earnestly supported Hákím's claim to divinity and quoted as referring to his marvellous works the following verse:—

If all the trees on the earth were to become pens and if
God should after that swell the sea into seven seas of ink, his
words would not be exhausted. Súratu Luqmán (xxxi) 27.

As Hamza applied the term Alláh to Hákím this verse is said to refer to the Khalífa's multitude of marvels.

The end of Hákím, however, soon came. At last the Muslims were exasperated at the cruelties he practised. The Turkish troops and the Kitána Berbers raised a revolt. His own sister, in reply to an odious accusation, turned against him. On February 13, 1021, Hákím went forth for a ride, but never entered his palace again. The ass on which he rode was found some days later bearing the marks of wounds. Hákím's coat, with dagger marks on it, was recovered, but he himself was seen no more. His followers refused to believe that he was dead and awaited his return, and still the Druses in the Lebanon believe that the divine Reason was and is incarnate in Hákím and that the day will come when he will return in glory and reveal great truths to men.

Hákím before his death allowed the Ismá'ílian Dá'is to hold meetings in which their peculiar tenets were expounded. He built a large college in Cairo called the Dáru'l-Hikmat, or Hall of the Sciences, for the education of these Ismá'ílian missionaries. It was almost entirely devoted to studies of the Shí'ah mysticism and the discussion of speculative philosophy. Twice a week the grand Prior of the Order convened a Lodge meeting for those who were to be initiated into the various degrees and for the exposition of the dogmas of the sect. Hasan ibn Šabāh, afterwards the Grand Master of the Assassins, came to one of these meetings. In his early youth he had been a friend of the well-known 'Umar Khayyám. He came to Egypt during the reign of the Khalífa Mustansír, who received him with marks of favour. This led to jealousy on the part of other officials, and at last Hasan found himself in prison. Having gained his freedom he spent three years in Syria, preaching the Ismá'ílian doctrines, and made many converts, until, at last, partly by force, partly by stratagem, in A.D. 1090, he obtained possession of a fortress called Alamút, the 'Vulture's nest'. He carefully instructed his followers in the most extreme form of the Ismá'ílian cult, and pointed out to them that sufficient care had not been taken to conceal from the general public the blank atheism to which the system ultimately led. So, whilst appearing as a follower of 'Alí,

he enjoined an outward observance of all the orthodox usages; but he ever kept before the minds of his adherents the coming of the Mahdi, now present in the Fátimide Khalífa of Egypt and soon to appear as the conqueror of the world. The age was one of war and strife, and this longing for the 'expected one' who was to bring peace and quietness was, to men weary of life, a constant and reviving hope which lightened the burden of existence.

To carry out his plans, Hasan instituted a hierarchy of seven grades, he himself being the Shaikh or the head of all. In addition to the Dá'is he had one order, called the Fidá'is (the devoted ones). These were the Assassins. They were carefully selected for their strength, and courage and absolute submission to his will. They were taught that as the Prophet had slain Jews in Madína, so they were aiding true religion by putting away its enemies.

So completely were they under Hasan Ṣabah's influence, and so obedient were they to his will, that at his command one stabbed himself and another cast himself over the battlements of the fortress to convince a visitor of the power of their leader. When the Shaikh required the service of any of them, the Fidá'is selected for the special service were stupefied with opium and carried into a splendid garden, where they awoke amidst all that could appeal to the sensual appetites—perfume of flowers, cool fountains of waters, companies of beautiful damsels. A few days were thus passed

when they were again drugged and brought back to ordinary life, ready to obey any order given to them. The memory of those days of delight was looked upon as a taste of Paradise, from the continual enjoyment of which only life hindered them and to which death was the door of admission. The Grand Master had shown them what it was, and obedience to his will and death in his cause would lead to a more enduring state of such joy. No wonder that the Fidá'is were devoted to Hasan.

Next to these came two Orders, consisting of the novices and the common people. As regards these latter, the usual religious duties of Islám were not relaxed, for Hasan knew that in their case the binding force of law and of custom was necessary. It was only the initiated who possessed the greater freedom or license and who inwardly rejected all positive dogma. The summary of their teaching has been described as 'to believe nothing and to dare everything'.

Hasan was called the Shaikh 'l-Jubál, chief of the mountains, hence the name by which he is commonly known, 'Old man of the mountains'. He died in the year A.H. 508, but his family continued in power until destroyed by the Mongol Hulágú Khán in A.D. 1256. The Khója community in Bombay is said to trace its origin to the mission of the Assassin named Ṣadru'd-Dín.¹

¹ For a fuller account of Hasan Ṣabah and his sect, see *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii, pp.138-41.

Hamza is regarded as the real founder of the Druses. He opposed Darázi, and so we have the curious fact of a sect's being called by the name of a man whom its founder repudiated. It is through Hákím and Hamza, whose teaching was a curious development of the dogma of the Imámát, that the connexion between the Druses and 'Alí is established. The basis of the Druse religion is that God is one, that He has often manifested Himself under human forms and that His final manifestation is in Hákím. By a true confession of the Unity, rightly believed, men gain eternal life. They hold that two dangers were to be avoided in the idea formed of the unity of God. They are expressed by the words *tashbíh* and *ta'tíl*. In theological language the former means comparison with something created; the second means a stripping off, and in its application to God the denial of any attributes in Him as being incompatible with His unity. As the Druses finally came to look upon Muḥammad and the four *Khalifas* who succeeded him, including 'Alí, as ministers of error, we need not proceed further with any account of them.¹

The case, however, is different with the Nosairis, or, as they are sometimes called, the Ansariyeh, a small sect dwelling in the Lebanon range of Syria. They have adopted the cult of 'Alí in an

¹ A full account of the religion of the Druses will be found in Sell's *Essays on Islam* (S.P.C.K. Madras) pp. 165-84.

extreme form. As very little information is available in English literature about the curious sect, I deal fully and in considerable detail with the subject.

The Nosairis are described as a manly race, browner than the Turk, but fairer than the Arab. The women when young are handsome. They live chiefly in villages and produce various articles of commerce, amongst which wine and tobacco are the most important. The Latakia tobacco is well known in the East. They are said to be now about 130,000 in number. They are ill-educated, but honest and industrious peasants. The chief interest connected with them is that they form a remnant of the many sects into which the Shí'ah section of the Muslim world was soon divided. Many of these sects followed the cult of 'Alí to such an extent that their religion assumed a grotesque and strange form.

Various accounts are given of their origin. As a tribe they seem to have existed from ancient times. Their modern name is said to be derived from a Muslim who, about the year A.H., 270 came from a town called Nasaria;¹ but a more probable explanation is that their present name comes from Muḥammad ibn Nosair, a disciple of the eleventh Shí'ah Imám, Hasan al-'Askari. If so, it gives the reason why, though they hold so much

¹ Silvestre de Sacy's *Religion des Druses*, vol. ii, p. 562.

in common with the Ismá'ilians, they yet differ from them.

In the early part of the twelfth century the Ismá'ilians tried to establish themselves in Syria, but were compelled to retire to the mountains. The Nosairis had to submit to this invasion and it did not draw them nearer to the invaders, for there has always been enmity between the two sects.¹

The power of the Ismá'ilians was broken up in the thirteenth century in Persia by the Mongols, and in Syria by Baibars, who also tried to convert the Nosairis to orthodox Islám. He forced them to build a mosque in each village, but the Nosairis would not at his bidding change their opinions. It was about this time that a learned Muḥammadan divine, ibn Taimiyyah, gave a fatvá, or judicial decision, against them, which shows that the Muslims were then paying some attention to this curious sect. The fatvá, to which we shall refer later on, though the work of an adversary, is useful as a description of Nosairi faith and practice.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nosairis were brought into conflict with the Turkish Governor of Damascus. On the arrival of Ibráhm Pasha in Syria in 1832 the mountainous region occupied by the Nosairis was governed by their local chief who paid tribute to the Pasha of

¹ Burckhardt's *Travels in Syria* (ed. 1822) p. 152.

Tripoli. In 1847 there was an insurrection and the Turks intervened. In 1854 troubles again arose, and so the Turkish Government appointed one of the Nosairi chiefs, named Ismá'il, Governor and received him with much pomp and ceremony at Beirut and at Tripoli. He, however, assumed the airs of a monarch, oppressed the people and enriched his friends. Still, so long as he paid the tribute regularly, the Turks did not interfere. He employed an agent, both at Tripoli and at Constantinople, and thus kept himself in favour at head-quarters. Tumults then arose and Ismá'il Beg was slain. Since then the Turks have administered the country by their own officials. The country is ill governed and the condition of the people is bad. In 1870 a Russian Agent at Latakia wrote to his Consul-General at Beirut about them. He reported the condition of the Nosairis to be miserable and sad. Their villages were devastated by pillage and fire. The tax gatherers and officials were unjust, and took away even the means of existence from the people, who complained in vain to the Governor.¹ For many long ages, against Greeks, Arabs, Franks, the Nosairis preserved their independence, and still, though in an abject condition and not politically free, they retain their religion.

Of that religion we must now give some account, though, as in the case with so many of the sub-

¹ René Dussard's *Histoire et Religion des Nosairis*, p. 38.

divisions of the Shí'ahs, it is extremely difficult to get any clear view of their religious system. It is mixed up with old pagan notions, Gnostic ideas, and all manner of heresies; but there are a few distinctive doctrines which can be defined and which differentiate the Nosairis from the rest. They divide time into seven cycles, each corresponding to a manifestation on earth of the deity. The Ismá'ilians also hold this view, but whereas they make this, the last age, that of the manifestation of the Mahdi, the Nosairis say it is that of 'Alí whom they exalt to divine honour. He is the Ma'ni, a peculiar term expressing the 'sense' or 'meaning' of the thing revealed. It practically is the divinity hidden under a human form. This term constantly occurs in all their writings. Hamza, the apostle of the Druses, speaking against the Nosairis, says: 'He who places the Ma'ni in 'Alí and adores him will be deprived of all good in this world and in the next.¹ The Nosairis eagerly received some of the new teaching of the Ismá'ilians and worked it into a system of their own. Little is known about it, but it seems clear that the Ismá'lian propaganda really affected them. Then, unable to raise themselves to philosophic speculations, they conceived of God, not as an abstract divinity, but as 'Alí, the incarnation of the Universal Soul, the emanation from God, as God himself.

¹ Sell's *Essays on Islam*, p. 159.

With the Persians the idea of the divinity of 'Alí has gathered round him as the legitimate Khalifa and so has a political as well as a religious import. The Nosairis had no interest in a Khalifa. To them 'Alí was simply a divine being, and the belief is confined thus to the sphere of religion. They say he is unique and immortal, that his essence is light. Though without attributes, he controls creation and destroys empires. Outwardly he is recognized as Imám: in reality he is God. This extreme view leads the Nosairis to treat as polytheists those who make no distinction between the Khalifas Abú Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmán, and 'Alí. They look upon the first three as incarnations of Satan. The distinctive feature of the Nosairi religion is, then, the prominent position given to the divinity of 'Alí. Their creed may be summed up in the words, 'There is no other god but 'Alí.' The Imáms are his representatives on earth. The Nosairis look upon their own Shaikhs as Imáms whose will is law, and whose knowledge extends to events of the future. The faithful must consult them in all affairs of life, follow their advice in the arrangement of new houses, accept their decisions as to the auspicious day for a marriage, or removal to another place of residence.

Shahrástání says that the Nosairis are those who have carried to exaggeration the veneration of 'Alí and that they consider him to be a por-

tion of God (*fehu juzwan Ilian*).¹ It is said that 'Alí from his own light created Muḥammad, thus reversing the Muḥammadan theory of the nūr-i-Muḥammadi. The Nosairis believe also in a Trinity, consisting of 'Alí who is the Ma'ni, Muḥammad who is the Hījāb or veil, and Salmán al-Fārisi who is the Bāb or door. The two latter are sometimes said to be emanations from God. This idea of a Trinity does not seem to have been borrowed from Christianity, but to be the development of some local cult.

This Trinity is represented by a symbol which is highly venerated, and which is used in meetings for the initiation of disciples. It is called the 'Sirr-i-'ain mīn sīn,' that is, 'the secret of the letters 'ain, mīm, sīn'. 'Ain is the first letter of the name 'Alí; mīm of Muḥammad; sīn of Salmán. In this Trinity 'Alí occupies the highest place. The Nosairi says: 'I turn towards the Door (Salmán); I bow before the Name (Muḥammad); I adore the Ma'ni ('Alí)'. One writer says: 'He who adores the Name to the exclusion of the Meaning (i.e., Ma'ni) is an infidel; he who adores both is a polytheist; but he who adores the Ma'ni to the exclusion of the Name, that is, adores 'Alí alone, is the true believer.

The Nosairis believe that before the world was created they were bright shining stars. They were 777 years in that state. Then 'Alí appeared in

¹ Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa'n-Nihāl*, p. 143-4.

all the splendour of a sapphire. They sinned by saying, 'Alí has not been created over us,' and so for 7077 years they were covered with a veil. Then 'Alí said: 'Am I not your God?' to which they replied, 'Yes'; but again sinned and for another long period were put into darkness. Again 'Alí appeared in the form of a Shaikh with a long white beard and said: 'Who am I?' They replied, 'We do not know'. Then he appeared as a young man mounted on a lion; then as a little child. At each appearance he said: 'Am I not your God?' He added: 'I have created for you an inferior world into which I shall send you. I have created human forms for you. Those amongst you who come to know me and the veil and the door (i.e., the Trinity), I will bring back here. He who denies me will be transformed with a transformation debased.' Then they said:—'O Master, exalt us to thy glory and we will adore thee. Do not cast us down to the lower world.' To this, 'Alí replied, 'Say, "we only know what thou hast taught us. Thou art the most wise", then I will pardon you still'. On account of their disobedience, 'Alí created Iblis (Satan) and the devils, and, on account of the sin of Iblis, he created women. It is for this reason that the Nosairis deny the immortality of the souls of women; nor do they teach them the prayers, or any portion of their religion, a position which the women seem to have accepted with equanimity.

The Nosairi belief, then, may be thus summed up. They look on 'Alí as God, believe in metempsychosis and the eternity of matter. Wine is allowed. The resurrection of the body, the existence of paradise and hell are denied. Ceremonial ablutions are not required before the five prayers, and, instead of them, it is enough to repeat the five names of 'Alí, Ḥasan, Ḥusain, Muḥsin and Fátima. 'Alí is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He is the Lord; Muḥammad is the Veil; Salmán is the Door.¹

It may be well at this stage of our consideration of the subject to notice briefly a very important fatvá delivered against the Nosairis by Taqí'u'd-dín ibn Taimiyyah, who died A.H. 728,—A.D. 1327.² The statement of their views and practice is by an opponent, but it may be taken as fairly correct; at all events it represents the then views of Muslims concerning them. The judgment is that of an orthodox Muslim. The following epitome of the case as stated, and of the judgment given, brings out the chief points.

QUESTION

What do the Saiyids, the learned Imáms of religion, say about the Nosairis, who say that wine is lawful, who believe in metempsychosis and in

¹ René Dussard, *Histoire et Religion des Nosairis*, p. 76.

² The original Arabic of this fatvá will be found in the *Journal Asiatique* for Août-Septembre 1871, pp. 162-178.

the eternity of matter, and who deny the bodily resurrection of the dead, and heaven and hell, who declare that the recitation of the names of 'Alí, Ḥasan, Ḥusain, Muḥsin¹ and Fátima takes the place of the five stated prayers, who say that 'Alí created the heavens and the earth, that he is their God in heaven above and their Imám on earth below, who say that unless initiated no one becomes a true Nosairi and that then it is a sin to reveal the secrets thus learnt. They believe in the transmission from age to age of the Name (Ism) and of the Meaning (Ma'ni). Thus Adam was the Ism, and Seth the Ma'ni: Jacob the Ism and Joseph the Ma'ni. They quote the verse, 'I will ask pardon of my Lord, for He is gracious and merciful,'² to show that Jacob, the Ism, could not forgive his sons; but would intercede with Joseph, the Ma'ni, for them, and then quoting the words of Joseph, 'No blame shall be on you this day',³ affirm that this shows he had greater power than Jacob. This exalts the Ma'ni. In the same relation were Moses and Joshua: Solomon and Asaf: Muḥammad and 'Alí. In each case the second name, being the Ma'ni, is superior. What is the decision as to eating cheese made by them? Is it lawful to allow them to remain on the frontiers of Islám? Ought the ruler to send

¹ A son of 'Alí who died in infancy.

² Súratu'l-Yúsu'f (xii) 99.

³ Súratu'l-Yúsu'f (xii) 92.

them away and put Muslims in their place? Is it not a duty to denounce them and to extirpate such absurd beliefs? What will be the reward of him who applies his zeal to this object?

REPLY.

The Nosairis are a branch of the Karimathians, more infidel than Jews or Christians and even than the pagans. They have done more harm to Islám than all the unbelievers have done. In the presence of ignorant Muslims they pretended to be Shi'ahs;¹ but they believe neither in God, nor in His Prophet, nor in His book, nor in heaven and hell, nor in any prophet or religion before Muḥammad. Their object is the absolute negation of the faith and practice of Islám. They teach that the five stated prayers (namáz) symbolize the knowledge of their mysteries, the fast their secret obligation, the Ḥajj the visits to their

¹ Henry Maundrell, who travelled in Syria in the year 1697, says of the Nosairis who dwell in the mountains: 'It is their principle to adhere to no religion; but camelion-like, they put on a colour of religion, whatever it be, which is reflected upon them from the persons with whom they happen to converse; with Christians they profess themselves Christians; with Turks they are good Muslims; with Jews they pass for Jews. All that is certain concerning them is that they make much and good wine and are great drinkers.' *Travels in Syria in 1697* by Maundrell. (London edition 1810), p. 16.

Burckhardt, who, in the year 1810 travelled over the same region, says that the Nosairis 'whenever they visit any part of the country under Turkish rule assume the character of Muslims, being well aware that, if they should be detected in the practice of any custom contrary to the Turkish religion, their hypocrisy in affecting to follow the latter would no longer be tolerated.' Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria* (ed. 1822), p. 152.

Shaikh². Whenever possible they shed Muslim blood and slaughter pilgrims. They are our enemies and have joined the Christians against us. They have no faith in the revealed books, Pentateuch, Gospels and Qur'án. So according to the doctrines of Islám it is wrong to intermarry with them, or for a Muslim to cohabit with a Nosairi slave woman. Animals slaughtered by them are unlawful as food, and cheese made by them may not be eaten. Their vessels and clothes are impure. They must not be buried in Muslim cemeteries, nor may prayers be said at their graves. 'Never pray thou over any one of them who dieth, or stand at his grave, because they believed not in God and His Apostle and died in their wickedness.'¹ They must not be employed on the frontiers, nor in fortresses, nor in the army. The sacred war (jihád) and severe measures against them are agreeable to God and are a religious duty. It is not lawful for any one to conceal what he may know of their affairs; on the contrary, he must make it clearly known. No one should aid them, nor oppose those who attack them, for the divine command is, 'O Prophet! contend against the infidels and the hypocrites, and be vigorous with them; hell shall be their dwelling place! wretched the journey thither!'² An authentic tradition states that 'a day and a night spent in combat in

¹ Súratur-Tauba (ix) 85.

² Súratur-Tauba (ix) 74.

the way of the Lord is better than a month's fasting. Jihád is better than the greater or the lesser pilgrimage'. The Qur'án says: 'Do ye place the giving of drink to the pilgrims, and the visitation of the sacred temple on the same level with him who believeth in God, and in the last day and fighteth on the way of God? They shall not be held equal by God.'¹

This fatvá thus utterly condemns the Nosairis and sanctions severe measures being taken against them. It has not had, however, any great influence; for the Turks, though they despise the Nosairis over whom they now rule, do not carry out the severe measures which Taqí'u'd-dín ibn Taimiyyah, in centuries long gone by, pronounced against them.

The Nosairis, themselves a sub-division of a sect of Islám, are again split up into a number of parties. Some of these represent a compromise between what they learnt from the Ismá'lians and their own ancient beliefs; but the points on which they differ amongst themselves are exceedingly abtruse and of little general interest.² They are divided into two classes; the Shaikhs and the ordinary people. A Shaikh must be of the family of a Shaikh. These men are held in the highest honour by the people.

¹ Suratu't-Tauba (ix) 19.

² A full account is given by René Dussard in his *Histoire et Religion des Nosairis*, pp. 77-103.

The Nosairis, in common with the Ismá'lians and the Darwísh Orders, admit members into their religious system by an initiation ceremony. They have reduced the nine degrees of the Ismá'lians to three. A neophyte must be born of Nosairi parents and cannot be initiated by his own father. He must be, at least, fifteen years old. The father, in the presence of a Shaikh, testifies to the good character and the education of his son, and produces witnesses who say that the lad will be faithful and true, and will not reveal any of the secrets of the Nosairi religion. The Shaikh then undertakes the preparatory instruction of the lad. When that is done the initiation takes place. In the first one, the neophyte, in order to show his humility, puts the slippers of all the assistants there assembled on his head and says: 'I implore you to beg my Shaikh to receive me as a slave, to purify me from polytheism, to draw me out of the darkness of error and to lead me in the right way.' The Shaikh addresses the lad somewhat as follows: 'I invite thee by the order of God and by His will, according to the noble word of His servant, with whom God has placed thee. Be confident in the order of God. There is no doubt in what He has established for thee—it is the light of the knowledge of the Faith. To its defence apply thyself.' Words are then used which describe the gradual formation of the body in the womb, words based

on such a description as is given in the Qur'án.¹ These have some mystical application to his spiritual growth. He is then told, under the seal of secrecy, further points, and is made to repeat a great number of times the formula 'By the secret of 'Ain mim sin.' He is then given wine, a symbol of divinity, to drink. After this, the Shaikh pronounces over him a benediction and says: 'Truly of the faithful hath God bought their persons and their substance, on condition of Paradise for them: on the path of God shall they fight.'² The neophyte then embraces the Shaikh, and kisses the ground in front of him. The Shaikh says: 'Rise, God guard thee.'

After forty days the parents of the newly initiated person give a great entertainment at which the second initiation takes place. About eight months after this the final stage is passed. Thus his full entrance into the religion answers to the period of his natural physical formation already referred to. The ritual of the last initiation is very complex and forms a grand ceremony. The initiated then resides for some time with a Shaikh who perfects his education.

The belief in transmigration is complete; a virtuous Nosairi will after death rank among the stars; an evil one will pass through many transmutations. If he disobeys a command given by

¹ Súratu'l-Má'mínám (xxiii) 13-14.

² Súratu't-Tauba (ix) 112.

'Alí, he will become a Jew, a Christian or a Sunni Muslim. Infidels, who do not worship 'Alí at all, will become camels, asses, dogs and so on. The Nosairi, however, looks forward to a final release and prays: 'Deliver us from human forms, and make us return to the luminous bodies amongst the stars of heaven.'

Amongst the ordinary people, the worship of al-Khidr, whom they associate with St. George, is common, and the story of the victory over the dragon and other marvels are fully believed. In fact, the distinction between the initiated and the non-initiated has considerable effect on the religious beliefs of the people. The initiated follow the teaching laid down in their religious books, the rest satisfy their religious sentiment by the observance of ancient customs. They make their offerings to al-Khidr. He is to the ignorant masses, what 'Alí is to the more instructed of the people.

The Nosairis observe many religious festivals. The chief fête day is the Yaumu'l-Ghadír, which is observed on the eighteenth day of Dhú'l-Hijjáh. It was appointed as a Shí'ah festival in Egypt so long ago as A.H. 362 (A.D. 972). It is said that Muḥammad, after making the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, encamped at a place called Ghadír, and there appointed 'Alí as his successor. The Nosairis have adopted this view, and so lay much stress on the observance of the festival. They say that

the following words of the Qur'án refer to the event commemorated: 'O apostle! proclaim all that hath been sent down to thee from thy Lord, for, if thou dost not, thou hast not proclaimed His message at all.'¹

They say that this was a command to reveal the doctrine that 'Alí was the Ma'ni, and that if Muḥammad had not made such a proclamation, he would not have been a true prophet, nor have 'proclaimed God's message at all'. This day is called a glorious day, a day of joy, a day which bears witness to the high dignity of 'Alí.

The feast of al-Fiṭr is in honour of Muḥammad and a prayer used on it says: 'O my God, I attest that Muḥammad is Thy praised Name, Thy deserved Place, Thy venerated Veil: that he it is concerning whom Thou hast proclaimed the outward and the inward meaning. This is the festival of the believers and the salvation of the wise.'

The 'Ashúra, kept on the tenth day of Muḥarram, is in memory of Ḥusain,² but the Nosairis say that he is not dead. He has simply disappeared and will some day return. They say: 'I attest that thou, O Ḥusain, hast not been slain, nor conquered; that thou hast not died nor wilt die; but that thou art now concealed from the eyes of men.'

¹ Sūratu'l-Mā'ida (v) 71.

² *The Faith of Islām*, (3rd ed.), pp. 352-9.

Many other fête days are kept, in the ceremonies of which there are traces of the old pagan superstitions. Pilgrimages to the tombs of venerated Shaikhs are common. Groves of trees are planted near the tombs of saints, a practice which is probably a relic of the old pagan custom.

The Nosairis practise the rite of circumcision, but no fixed age is required. At death the body is washed, wrapped up in white cloths and laid in the tomb. Each person present places some earth on the corpse. Three upright stones mark the place of the grave. If a man of one tribe kills a member of another, his tribe has to pay blood money, often as much as the equivalent of £15. The bridegroom has to pay a sum of money for his bride. One part of the marriage ceremony consists in the beating of the bride by the bridegroom. A man may have four wives, but is not allowed to divorce any one of them. He can only get another wife when one of the four dies. Some of the sects do not allow smoking; others permit it. The Nosairis have a number of secret signs by which they know each other when they meet in distant places.¹

The Druses have always been enemies of the Nosairis. Al Ḥamza, the minister of the Khaliḥ al-Ḥakim, whom the Druses worship, wrote a book

¹ A fairly good account of the social habits of the Nosairis is given by the Hon. F. Walpole in *The Ansāyri*, vol. iii, pp. 342-68; but he has confused them with the Ismā'īlians from whom they are distinct.

called the *Refutation of the Nosairis*, in which they are accused of all manner of evils;¹ but Hamza was actuated by jealousy, and much reliance cannot be placed on his statements. As regards his grosser accusation it may be noted that a Nosairi catechism concludes with these words: 'adultery is a black robe which the faithful do not wear, and with which they do not cover themselves.'

This somewhat meagre account of this little known but peculiar tribe reveals the extraordinary influence the history of 'Alí has upon the eastern imagination. In some form or other of it many millions of the human race have adopted this curious cult, though none have carried it so far as the Nosairis have done. They hold to their extreme view of it with great tenacity and, apparently, no political or social changes can shake their belief in the divinity of 'Alí, or the ardour with which they pay divine honours to him. To the colder and more practical Western mind it all seems very strange, even if not very foolish; but a belief which influences so many races, is so widespread, and which finds such a curious outcome in the Nosairi religion is, at all events, worthy of close study and observation as one of the many forms into which the religious faculty in man develops itself.

¹ A full account of Hamza's charges against them will be found in Silvestre de Sacy's *Religion des Druses*, vol. ii, pp. 568-75.

We now pass on to consider the connection of 'Alí with the Bábí movement.

We have seen that Abú'l-Qásim¹ (al-Mahdí) succeeded his father as Imám in the year A.H. 260 (A.D. 873) just one thousand years before the manifestation (Zuhúr) of the Báb. He is said to have disappeared in the year A.H. 329 (A.D. 940) and to be now living in the mysterious city of Jáb-ulqá or Jábulsá. It is believed that in due time he will reappear, that Jesus Christ will herald his approach, that then injustice and misery will be put away, that the true (Shí'ah) faith will prevail, and that a millennium of happiness will be ushered in. Meanwhile, he is invisible and inaccessible to the great mass of his followers. At first, however, he held direct intercourse in some way with a select few who were the channels of communication between himself and the larger body. These intermediaries were called 'Gates' (Abwáb). Their names are Abú 'Umar 'Uthmán ibn Sa'id 'Umarí, Abú Ja'far Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmán, Ḥusain ibn Rúh Nawbakhtí, and Abú'l-Ḥasan 'Alí ibn Muḥammad Símarí. For a period of sixty-nine years these 'Gates', one after the other, were the medium of communication with the Imám. This period is called that of the 'minor concealment' (ghaibat-i-sughra). The day came at length when the last 'Gate', Abú'l-Ḥasan, reached the end of life

¹ *Ante*, p. 8.

and the people begged him to nominate a successor, as his predecessors had done; but he absolutely refused to do so, alleging as his reason that 'God hath a purpose which He will accomplish'. That which the faithful had looked forward to with despair had now come to pass, and all intercourse with the Imám was at an end. This period is called the 'major concealment' (*ghaibat-i-kubra*). The importance attached to these men and to their position is seen from the following extract from the *Beyán*, a Bábí book to be explained later on, in which we read: 'For God hath associated refuge in Himself with refuge in His Apostle, and refuge in His Apostle with refuge in His Imáms, and refuge in the Imáms with refuge in the Gates of the Imáms. For refuge in the Apostle is the same as refuge with God, and refuge in the Imáms the same as refuge in the Apostle and refuge in the Gates is identical with refuge in the Imáms.'

We next come to the time of Shaikh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (A.D. 1733-1826), who was the founder of the Shaikhí sect. He had a profound belief in 'Alí, and was devoted to the memory of the Imáms, whom he looked upon as creative forces, arguing from the text, 'God the best of creators' [*Súratu'l-Mú'mimún* (xxiii) 14], that, if He be the best, He cannot be the only one. The special point of his teaching was that 'God is immanent in the Universe which proceeds from Him, and that all the

elect of God, all the Imáms, and all just persons are personifications of the divine attributes.' According to this belief, he held that the twelve Imáms from 'Alí to al-Mahdí were personifications of twelve chief attributes of God, and that, consequently, they were eternal. 'Amongst these Imáms 'Alí holds the highest rank, being superior to angels, to prophets and to Muḥammad.'¹

The successor of Shaikh Ahmad was Hájí Sayyid Kázim. The Shaikhí doctrine now spread all through Persia. In 'Irāq alone there were more than a hundred thousand disciples. Sayyid Kázim died in the year A.D. 1843, and left no successor. According to the Bábí writers he appointed no one, because he looked upon Shaikh Ahmad and himself as forerunners of one who should shortly appear and be far more glorious than they had been. To Mullá Husain, one of his most distinguished followers, he said: 'From whatever quarter the sun of truth shall arise, it will irradiate all horizons and render the mirrors of believers' hearts capable of receiving the effulgence of the lights of wisdom.'

After fastings, vigils, and prayers for guidance, the Shaikhís began to consider what was to be done in the matter of a successor, a spiritual director. They then went in different directions. Mullá Husain proceeded to Shíráz and there met with

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, Sixième Série, tome vii, p. 458.

Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad who produced before him the signs of his call to his divine mission. Amongst these was his commentary on the *Súratu Yúsuf* (xii). For several days Mullá Ḥusain pondered over these matters, and, after a long and severe struggle, became convinced that he had found in the young and ardent enthusiast before him, the 'Proof', the 'True One', the 'Sun of Truth', to whose advent Hájí Sáyid Kázim had pointed. 'He wrote to his friends at Kerbelá that neither he himself nor any other of them was worthy of the high dignity of Murshid (or leader) and that that "Illuminated One", to whom their late master had referred, was alone worthy. I have found him at Shíráz and he is worthy to be the Murshid.'¹ It is for this reason, and because he so heartily espoused the cause of his new master, that Mullá Ḥusain is named the 'Gate of the Gate' (*Bābu'l-báb*); the 'First Letter' (*Ḥarf-i-awwal*); and the 'First to believe'. But this decision was not acceptable to all the Shaikhís. A party headed by Hájí Muḥammad Karím Khán of Kirmán utterly refused to receive the Báb and became his bitterest persecutors. However the great majority followed Mullá Ḥusain, and Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad became their recognized leader.

The Shaikhís rejected certain articles of the Shí'ah creed and added one, which they called the fourth support or pillar (*rukṇ-i-rábf*). The meaning of

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, Sixième Série, tome vii, p. 465.

this is that there must always be amongst believers one perfect man (*shakhs-i-kámil*) who can be the channel of grace (*wásiṭa-i-faíd*) between the absent Imám and his people. The term 'fourth support' is primarily applied to the dogma that the concealed Imám must always have on earth some one who possesses his entire confidence, to whom he gives special spiritual instruction, and who is thus qualified to convey to the believers the wishes and wisdom of their invisible head. The term has, however, come to be applied to the person who fulfils this office. It is said that Hájí Muḥammad Karím Khán, the Shaikhí who refused to accept Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad as a leader, considered himself to be the fourth support. This, too, was the position of the Báb, at all events at first, for he claimed to be this 'fourth support', and thus to occupy the place held by the 'Gates', who were the intermediaries between the Imám and his followers during the minor occultation. Thus it is that Báblism is connected with the very central doctrine of the Shí'ahs, though in many other ways it has so far departed from accepted Muḥammadan ideas as to form a new sect altogether.

Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad was born at Shíráz, on October 9, 1820. As a young man he proceeded on business to Kerbelá, where he was brought into contact with Hájí Sáyid Kázim, the Shaikhí leader, whose lectures he occasionally attended.

Visitors to Kerbelá, especially those from Shíráz, showed him much consideration, and so his fame was spread abroad. He now began to commit his thoughts to writing, and composed a commentary on one of the chapters of the Qur'án, the Súratu Yúsuf (xii).

He was a very earnest student, and now began to attract general attention. Thus it came to pass that on May 23, 1844, when he was about twenty-four years of age, Mirzá 'Alí Muḥammad more definitely formulated his views and announced himself as a duly authorized teacher and guide. He then assumed the name of the Báb. He said: 'Whosoever wishes to approach the Lord his God and to know the true way that leads to Him ought to do it through me.' Of this period of his career Mirzá Kázim Beg says: 'The number of his adherents increased, day by day, and when they demanded that he, like the ancient prophets, should give them a sign, in proof of his mission, he relied on this that he could write a thousand inspired lines in one day. By his peculiarities and by his austere life, even when still at Kerbelá, he was called the Illuminated. When the inhabitants of Shíráz returned from Kerbelá, they used to say: "Have you heard of our Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad? He is no longer as we are, he has become famous and has merited the name of the Chosen of God. All people, small and great, flock around him.'" He also adds

that dreamers and mystics, and evil disposed persons from self-interest joined him. No doubt some did so from mixed motives; but Mr. E. G. Browne seems to me to give the fairest account. He divides the Báb's first adherents into several classes. Firstly, rigorous and pious Muḥammadans who really believed that the signs of the twelfth Imám were fulfilled in him; secondly, all those who desired reform in Persia and thought that Bábism would conduce to that end; thirdly, the mystics who considered Bábism to be similar to their own pantheistic system; fourthly, those who were drawn by the personal influence and character of the Báb.'

The next step seems to have been the pilgrimage to Mecca in November 1844. After completing all the rites incumbent on pilgrims, he returned early in the following year to Bushire. He soon became the centre of attraction, and the Mullás and others became excited about him. They induced Husain Khán, the Governor of Fárs, to give orders that some of his followers should be beaten. A little later on in the year the Báb was brought as a prisoner to Shíráz. Mirzá Kázim Beg thus describes a famous disputation held there: 'The 'Ulamá then assembled. The Báb appeared in the midst of them and spoke with courage and enthusiasm. The Governor, who had assumed the character and position of a

¹ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1889, p. 504.

learner, humbly suggested that the Báb should demonstrate that his doctrines were superior to those of Muhammad. The Báb answered boldly, "Take my Qur'án, compare it with that of your prophet, and you will be convinced that my religion is the preferable one." On hearing these words, the Governor changed his attitude and called for the executioner to whom he pointed out the prisoner. The Báb was then bound and beaten.'

The orthodox Mullás soon perceived that they must attack the Báb direct, and so they urged the Governor of Fárs, Husain Khán, to take more decisive action, saying: 'If thou desirest the extinction of this fire, or seekest a firm stopper for this rent and disruption, an immediate cure and decisive remedy is to kill the Báb.'

An attack was made on the house in which the Báb lived, but, apparently with the connivance of those who had charge of him, he was allowed to make his escape and to proceed to Isfahán. This event took place about March 1846. Before his arrival at Isfahán he wrote a letter to the Mu'tamadu'd-Dawla, the Governor of the Province, asking for a suitable lodging. The Governor, Minuchíhr Khán, afforded him protection and showed him hospitality. At first the 'Ulamá paid the Báb much respect, but soon began to be alarmed at his growing influence with the Governor, and signed a declaration to the effect that they

were quite convinced of the heretical character of his doctrines. After the death of the Governor in 1847, the Báb was removed to the castle of Máku, a fortress on the north-west frontier, though his confinement was not at first a rigorous one. His followers were allowed free intercourse with him, and continual correspondence went on between the Báb and his principal agents. The Báb at this time wrote many religious books, and his influence seemed to be on the increase. It was, therefore, determined to place him in stricter confinement, and so he was removed to the citadel of Chiríq, near Urumíyyé. Soon after his arrival there he was brought to Tabriz to undergo his first examination. A full account of this is given by the Muhammadan historians, but as they represent him as utterly foolish and ignorant,¹ it is more than probable that it did not take place as narrated. Mírzá Kázim Beg says that the accounts given of the interview were most contradictory, and he does not give credence to the more absurd ones. The Bábí account of it is that the Báb advanced the claim of Mahdí-hood, on which a great tumult arose, and that, in general, his defence was a success. This much is certain that he was severely beaten and sent back to confinement in Chiríq. Then we are told that 'learned divines and esteemed lawyers who were possessed of power and influence, girt up the loins of endeavour for the

¹ A full account is given in the *Episode of the Báb*, pp. 277-60.

eradication and suppression of this sect.' They maintained that the Báb and his followers were not only in error, but were also hurtful to Church and State. The King, Muḥammad Sháh, however, declined to interfere, and declared that so long as the public peace was not disturbed the Government would not further interfere with him.

It was now that his most famous convert was made. This was a woman called Qurratu'l-'Ayn (lustre of the eye). She was the daughter of the very learned Hájí Mullá Muḥammad Šálih. She was acquainted with Hájí Sayyid Kázim, the Shaikhí leader, and his famous disciple Mullá Husain. She became a devoted follower of the Báb and went everywhere preaching and making converts to the Bábí faith. The Báb applauded her zeal, and bestowed on her the title of Janáb-i-Ṭáhirá (Her Excellency the Pure). From that time all acknowledged her position. Her uncle, who showed much hatred of the Bábis, was now assassinated, and Qurratu'l-'Ayn was unjustly charged with being privy to the deed. This rendered her further stay in Kazvín impossible, and she left for a place called Núr, where she remained until the suppression by the Government of the Mázarandán insurrection. She was then made a prisoner and sent to Teherán. On her arrival she was taken before the Sháh who said: 'I like her looks, leave her, and let her be.' She was then kept in prison, though her confinement does not

appear to have been very rigorous, for she had occasional intercourse with different Bábis. She was put to death in the massacre at Teherán which followed on the attempt to kill the Sháh in 1852. Qurratu'l-'Ayn was the most remarkable of the Báb's disciples. She was a person of marvellous beauty, possessed of high intellectual gifts, eloquent, devoted and fearless. She threw her whole soul into the cause she advocated, and her martyrdom sheds a halo of glory round her short and active career.

Her romantic career, her marvellous power, and her tragic end will continue to give for a long while to come strength to the Bábí cause and the spirit of endurance to its followers.

The Mullás now determined to get the Báb executed and the Báb and a young man named Aká Muḥammad 'Alí, a youthful Bábí, who belonged to a noble family of Tabriz, were delivered up to the military authorities for execution. For the following account of what really transpired I am indebted to Mírzá Kázim Beg.¹ The roads which led to the court of the barracks were crowded with people. At a military execution in Persia, the condemned are tied together with their backs turned towards the firing party. Aká Muḥammad 'Alí begged to be allowed to turn his face towards the people, and then, in a loud, but calm voice, he began to say some

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, Sixième Série, tome vii, p. 377.

prayers which had been composed by the master. The Báb kept perfectly silent. His pale and beautiful face, surrounded by a black beard, his white and delicate hands, his figure and distinguished manner, everything in his person and in his dress aroused the sympathy and compassion of the spectators. The Governor and the Mullás tried to keep this in check by preaching loudly against the Bábí doctrines, exaggerating the evils of the system. They recounted in a pathetic manner the end of those who had met their death at the hands of the Bábís; still, so strong was the feeling aroused by the self-sacrifice of Aká Muḥammad 'Alí and the dignity of the Báb that it required the utmost effort of the Mullás to suppress it. The first volley fired simply severed the cords by which the prisoners were fastened to the post. A second volley proved effectual. The bodies were finally cast out of the city, near the moat, to be devoured by dogs and jackals; but on the second night were conveyed away by the Bábís, who by bribes, or by the influence of powerful friends, obtained possession of them. They were wrapped in white silk, placed in one coffin, and sent to Teherán, where by order of Mírzá Yahyá (Ṣubḥ-i-Ezel), who, though but twenty years old, had been chosen to succeed the Báb, they were deposited in a small shrine. Here they remained for seventeen or eighteen years, till the schism originated by Bahá deprived his

half-brother Ezel of the supremacy in the Bábí church which he had hitherto enjoyed, when they were removed by the Bahá'ís, to whom alone is now known the last resting place of the Martyrs of Tabriz'.¹

Mírzá Kázim Beg, who though eminently fair, did not believe in the claims of the Báb thus describes him:—

'He had some characteristics truly great and noble, and was a man of firm and settled convictions. His moral character was high, and he aimed in his preaching to bring all his countrymen into a community, united by intellectual and moral ties. He spoke with much earnestness on the necessity for a religious and social reform in Persia, the cessation of religious persecution, and the amelioration of the lot of women. It is said that much of what he preached on these points had an esoteric meaning, known only to his disciples; but whether that is the case or not, the veneration they felt for him was profound, and there can be no doubt that the teaching of the Báb was in the direction of freedom and that he personally was in favour of reform'.

Mírzá Kázim Beg sums up his reflections thus: 'We neither consider him an adventurer nor a fanatic, but an eminently moral man, a dreamer brought up in the school of the Shaikhís and possessing some touch of Christianity. We regard

¹ Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 64.

him also as a man troubled by the direct influence of some of his devoted and ambitious disciples. In any case, we believe that the appearance of the Báb will be more or less of use in time to the cause of civilization in Persia.¹

The next historical event of some importance is the attempt on August 15, 1852, to assassinate Násiru'd-din Sháh. It does not appear to have been an act determined on by a large number of the Bábí leaders, but to have arisen from a spirit of revenge in a few devoted followers of the Báb. If such be the case, the frightful persecutions which followed are utterly unjustifiable, even from an oriental stand-point.

The strongest measures were immediately taken against the Bábís. The police at Teherán searched everywhere for them and succeeded in arresting, according to one account, forty, and, according to Mirzá Kázim Beg, seventy persons. Most of these who were arrested were condemned to death, whether any proof could be given of their complicity in the plot or not. It was quite enough to be known as a Bábí. A great fear fell upon those in authority, and it was determined to make a terrible example. The principal malefactors, says Mirzá Kázim Beg, 'were tortured in the most odious manner, with an unheard of refinement of cruelty'. An English traveller says²—

¹ *Journal Asiatique*, Sixième Série tome vi, p. 384.

² John Usher, *Diary of a Journey from London to Persepolis*, p. 628.

'Tow steeped in oil was inserted between their fingers and behind their shoulder blades, leaving portions hanging down which were lighted, and in this condition the unhappy wretches were led, as long as they could walk, through the principal streets of the capital. A furious proscription followed. No time was lost between apprehension and execution, death was the only punishment known, the headless bodies lay in the streets for days, the terrified relatives fearing to give them burial, and the dogs fought and growled over the corpses in the deserted thoroughfares'.

Renan speaks of the massacre thus: 'The day of the great slaughter of the Bábís in Teherán was, perhaps, a day unparalleled in the history of the world.'¹ He quotes from M. le comte de Gobineau's work² to the following effect. 'Children and women with lighted candles stuck into the wounds were driven along by whips, and as they went along they sang, "We came from God, to Him we return". When the children expired, as many did, the executioners threw the corpses beneath the feet of their fathers. Life was offered if they would recant. An executioner told one father that if he did not recant, his two sons, the elder of whom was fourteen years old, should be slain on his breast. The father, lying down said that he was ready, and the elder boy claimed by

¹ *Les Apôtres*, p. 378.

² *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale*.

right of birth to be the first to have his throat cut. At last, night fell on a mass of shapeless flesh, and the dogs of the suburbs came in troops to the place.' So ended one important period in the history of the Bábís.

There has been since this time no formal outbreak of Bábí revenge, nor has there been any persecution like it. Even this altogether failed of its purpose, for it gave to the movement a vigour and vitality which otherwise it might have lacked. It is said that half a million Persians are Bábís, but Lord Curzon of Kedleston considers the total to be nearer one million. He says: 'They are to be found in every walk of life, from the ministers and nobles of the Court to the scavenger or the groom, not the least arena of their activity being the Musalmán priesthood itself. It will have been noticed that the movement was initiated by Sayyids, Hájís and Mullás.'

After the death of the Báb, the chief interest in the movement circles round Mírzá Yahyá and his half-brother Bahá'u'lláh, who became the respective leaders of the two sects, into which the Bábís are now divided—the Ezellís and the Bahá'ís.

In 1852, when the attempt on the life of the Sháh was made, the Bábís were bitterly persecuted, and Subh-i-Ezel retired to Baghdad, which then became the head-quarters of the sect, and was for many years recognized, at least nominally, as its

¹ *Persia*, vol. i, p. 499.

head. Mírzá Husain 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh, who was Subh-i-Ezel's senior by thirteen years, and had just been released from imprisonment, joined him in 1853. The Persian Government, at length, objected to his residence there and prevailed on the Turkish authorities in 1863-4 to deport him and his followers to Constantinople, from whence a few months later on they were sent to Adrianople. Subh-i-Ezel led a very secluded life, and the correspondence and other matters were carried on by Bahá'u'lláh who acted for him. The influence of Bahá'u'lláh then grew, and at last he began to advance claims which afterwards culminated in the assertion that he was the person to whom the Báb referred as 'Him whom God shall manifest'.¹ To this claim the Ezellís replied that before the person of whose advent the Báb had spoken could come, Bábism must obtain general currency, and the laws laid down by the Báb in his books must be accepted by most of the nations of the world. They further added to their reply that it was not to be supposed that two manifestations (zahúr)—that of the Báb and that of 'Him whom God shall manifest'—could take place with so short an interval of time between them. The Bahá'ís, who admitted that Subh-i-Ezel was the first vice-regent of the Báb, to all the objections alleged replied that Mírzá Yahyá's rule was

¹ He declared openly his divine mission in 1866-7 at Adrianople, from which date the schism commences.

only to last until the manifestation of the new leader, who was to come suddenly, and the time of whose advent was known only to God; that the Báb had stated that he, the new prophet, would come suddenly, and that it could not come to pass that anyone should falsely claim the honour. They also used an argument well known amongst Muḥammadans, an argument based on the literary style of the books given by means of a divinely appointed messenger, and urged that the 'Lauḥ-i-Naṣr', in which Bahá'u'lláh announced his mission, fulfilled this condition of a divine revelation by its eloquence of diction and the wonderful knowledge, unacquired by study, displayed by the writer. Anyhow, the conflicting claims to the leadership led to quarrels and blows. The Turkish Government then determined to separate the disputants. Bahá'u'lláh and his followers were sent to Akká (Acre),¹ and Mirzá Yahyá and his people were exiled to Famagusta, in Cyprus. A few Ezelis were sent with Bahá, and a few Bahá'is were sent with Mirzá Yahyá. It was hoped that by this arrangement the minority, in each case, would act as spies and prevent any communication between Bábis in Persia and either of the leaders. Since then the followers of Bahá have increased very much, whilst those of Subḥ-i-Ezel, or Yahyá, have decreased. This is an

¹ This is still the head-quarters of the Bahá'is to which sect most of the Bábis now belong.

unlooked for development of the work of the Báb, for Bahá claims to be the messenger of a new dispensation altogether.¹

The question at issue now became something more than a mere struggle for leadership, for Bahá's claim virtually deposed the Báb from his position as the 'Point of Revelation' and made him the mere forerunner of 'Him whom God shall manifest'. The Ezelis are, however, nearly extinct, and it is not likely that they will ever attain to power again. Assuming that Bahá had right on his side, it is stated that the changes he made were in a practical direction and beneficial.

Mr. E. G. Browne says: 'It cannot be doubted that the survival and extension of the religion formed by the Báb were secured by the modifications effected in it by Bahá'u'lláh, for in its original form it could never have been intelligible, much less attractive, outside Persia; and even

¹ Mr. Browne put the following question to a Bahá'í: 'Why do you speak of Mirzá Yahyá as though he were of no account? In the books about your religion, which I read in Europe, he is described as the Báb's chosen successor and, after him, as the chief of your sect?'

'Yes,' replied Mirzá Hasan, 'it is true that he was one of the early believers, and that at first he was accounted the successor and vico-regent of the Báb, but he was repeatedly warned not to withhold his allegiance from "Him whom God shall manifest", and threatened that if he did so he would fall from the faith and become as one rejected. In spite of these clear warnings of his master, he refused to acknowledge the new manifestation when it came; wherefore he is now regarded by us as of no account.'—*A Year amongst the Persians*, p. 935.

there, when once the ferment attending its introduction had subsided, it would probably have sunk into the insignificance shared by so many Muslim sects which once played an important rôle in history'.¹

The Bábi doctrines are to be found in the writings of the Báb called the *Bayán*, a name sometimes apparently applied to them collectively, but more generally to a particular book. Many of the dogmas are very mystical; but the following is a brief summary.

God is eternal and unapproachable. All things come from Him and exist by Him. Man cannot approach Him except through some appointed medium. So, distinct from God, there is a Primal Will² who becomes incarnate in the prophets. This Primal Will spoke in the Báb and will speak in 'Him whom God shall manifest'.

Each dispensation of the Primal Will thus become incarnate supersedes a preceding one, and so Islám has ceased to be the true religion for to-day. It has already been shown (p. 42) that devotion to the Imám was a very prominent point in the teaching of the Báb. In one of the earliest of his writings, we read, 'When thou wishest to visit the Friend of God, or one of the Imáms of the Faith, first purify thy body from

¹ *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii, p. 307.

² For the connexion of this idea with Sufism, see *The Faith of Islám* (3rd ed.), p. 163.

everything which thy heart dislikes; then wash thyself with seven handfuls of water upon thy head'. Then follow directions how to approach the Imám with humility, and the prayer to be said. He addresses the Imáms as 'Effulgences of the Divine Glory', 'Manifestations of God', 'Intercessors with Him' for sinful men. He longs for communion with them. Thus, 'Where are the days of your manifestation that I may be independent of all except you? and where are the days of the appearance of the signs of your lordship, that by your permission, I may say to whatsoever I will, "Be", and it shall become existent before you'. These are the enthusiastic utterances of a devout Shí'ah, and represent the feelings of the Báb before he felt conscious of any special mission. But this constant dwelling on the glory of the Imáms, the dispensers of God's will and favour, gradually led to the formation of the idea that he had special communication with them and was, in fact, the Báb.

At this stage the usual Muhammadan customs were not set aside. The month of Ramadán was observed as a fast; but the 'Ulamá were bitterly reproached for opposing this new revelation. Thus the Báb says: 'O people of the earth! give thanks to God, for verily we have delivered you from the doctors of doubt'.

For a more complete exposition of the Bábi dogmas, Mr. Browne, to whose valuable researches

we are chiefly indebted for the best information on the subject, refers to the Persian *Bayán*, from which quotations have already been made. This work brings out more fully the theory of a Primal Will. 'Since it is impossible for created beings to know the divine essence, the Primal Will has, for their guidance and instruction, incarnated itself from time to time in a human form. These incarnations are known as prophets. That which spoke in all the prophets of the past now speaks in the Báb and will speak through "Him whom God shall manifest", and after him through others, for there is no cessation in these manifestations. That which spoke in Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad¹ was the one and the same Primal Will. In each manifestation news has been given of the following one. Thus the Jews were told to expect a Messiah, but they rejected him; the Christians to expect Muhammad but, as a rule, they did not accept him; so the Muhammadans are taught to look out for Imám Mahdí. Yet now he has come (i.e., in the Báb) they persecute him.'

Another point on which the *Bayán* lays much stress is that no revelation is final. This is entirely opposed to the ordinary Muhammadan view, which is that, as Muhammad was the Seal of the

¹ These are the Anbiyá' ulú'l-'Azim. See, *The Faith of Islám*, (3rd ed.), p. 239.

² *Journal of the R. A. Society*, vol. xxi, p. 914.

Prophets', his revelation closed the series. The Báb taught that, as the human race progresses, the Primal Will, the teacher of men, speaks in each new revelation more fully and more clearly. All these successive and progressive revelations and dispensations are simply to prepare the world for the fuller teaching of 'Him whom God shall manifest'.

'A new prophet is not sent until the development of the human race renders this necessary. A revelation is not abrogated till it no longer suffices for the needs of mankind. There is no disagreement between the prophets: all teach the same truth, but in such measure as men can receive it. As mankind advance and progress they need fuller instruction. The instruction given by Abraham was suitable and sufficient for the people of his day, but not for those to whom Moses was sent, while this in turn had ceased to meet the needs of those to whom Christ was sent. Yet we must not say that their religions were opposed to one another, but rather that each manifestation is more complete and more perfect than the last.'

The Muhammadan doctrines of the examination of the dead in the graves, the resurrection, sirát, heaven, hell, are all treated allegorically. The first is really a summons to the people to believe

¹ *Khatamu'l-Anbiyá'*.

² Brown, *A Year amongst the Persians*, p. 303.

in the next manifestation of the Primal Will, the resurrection is the appearance of this manifestation. *Širát*, or the Bridge, is the belief in the prophet of the age, a matter difficult to the self-willed, but easy to the seeker after God. Hell is ignorance and denial of the last manifestation of God, through the Primal Will incarnated in the Prophet, whilst Heaven is joy in it.

To a very large number of Bábís, Bahá'u'lláh was during the latter part of his life looked up to as a divinely appointed guide. Before he assumed that position he wrote a book called the *Iqán*, which is held in great esteem. In this book he seems to acknowledge the then superior position of Šubḥ-i-Ezel, but writes bitterly of some who were hostile to himself. Two years after the Turks had banished him to Adrianople, he boldly asserted his claim and called on all the Ezels to submit to his direction. He then wrote other treatises in which his position is dogmatically set forth. 'If any one understood the love of Bahá'u'lláh in the world of creation, and were to fight on his side against all who are in the earth and the heavens, God would verily make him victorious over them, as a showing forth of his power, a setting forth of his Majesty'.

A few extracts¹ from some of Bahá'u'lláh's writings will show to some extent what he taught

¹ *A Traveller's Narrative*, pp. 70, 114.

his followers: 'As for those who commit sin and cling to the world they assuredly are not of the people of Bahá'u'lláh. O worshippers of the Unity, make firm the girdle of endeavour, that perchance religious strife and conflict may be removed from amongst the people of the world and be annulled.' 'For love of God and His servants engage in this great and mighty matter. Religious hatred and rancour is a world-consuming fire.' 'With perfect compassion and mercy have we guided and directed the people of the world to that whereby their souls shall be profited. I swear by the sun of truth that the people of Bahá'u'lláh have not any aim save the prosperity and reformation of the world and the purifying of the nations.' 'The heart must be sanctified from every form of selfishness and lust, for the weapons of the worshippers of the Unity and the saints were, and are, the fear of God.' 'No stranger must find his way into the city of the heart, so that the Incomparable Friend (i.e. God) may come unto His own place, that is, the effulgence of His names and attributes, not His essence, for that Peerless King hath been, and will be holy for everlasting above ascent or descent.'

Prayer is to be said three times a day, and the number of prostrations are much fewer than those

¹ This is to guard against the idea held by some that God comes down into man or man rises up unto God, and that thus both are identified. The mystical view is that man is annihilated in God.

held necessary amongst Muhammadans. The worshipper no longer turns to Mecca, but towards 'the Most Holy Region, the Holy Place, whence issueth the command to whomsoever is in the earth and the heavens'. That Acre is here meant is clear because it is said that when Bahá dies, or, as it is put in hyperbolic language, 'when the sun of truth and exhortation sets', the Qibla is to be changed to 'that place which we have appointed you'.

The great festival is that of the Persian Naurúz (New Year's day). Instead of the Muhammadan fast of Ramadán of thirty days, a month of nineteen days, the last month of the Bábi year, is appointed. Images and pictures are not allowed in places of worship.

Some of the precepts to guide the conduct of Bábis are on the following subjects¹ :—

1. Abolition of religious warfare.
2. Friendly intercourse with all sects and people.
3. Obedience to the ruler who protects them.
4. Submission to the laws of the country in which they live.
5. Confession of sin to fellow-men prohibited. Confession must be to, and pardon sought, from, God only.

¹ For a fuller account, see *Journal of the R.A. Society*, October 1892, pp. 678-9.

6. The study of such sciences as tend to the welfare of mankind is encouraged.
7. All must learn some trade or practise some profession.
8. Visits to tombs and shrines are not obligatory.

The personal influence of Bahá'u'lláh over his followers, is not to be wondered at, when an English visitor can thus describe an interview with him. 'The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines of the forehead and face implied an age which the jet black hair and beard flowing down in undistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain.'

Bahá'u'lláh died in the year 1892. Disputes arose between his sons regarding the succession. His eldest son, 'Abbás Effendi gained the day and is known as the 'Man uráda'lláhu', or 'He whom God hath desired'. 'Some Bahá'is consider that he, like Bahá'u'lláh, is a divine manifestation and not a mere man; others deny this and say that he is nothing more than a servant of Bahá, for they hold that no further manifestation will take

¹ Browne, *The Episode of the Báb*, p. xl.

place until a thousand years have passed away.' 'Abbás Effendi lives at Acre and rules his followers from there. His claim to the leadership was disputed by his brother Mírzá Muḥammad 'Alí, who soon gained a considerable following, and a schism similar to the older one between Bahá'u'lláh and Subḥ-i-Ezel seems likely to occur again.'¹

The person and appearance of Subḥ-i-Ezel are thus described by Mr. Browne.² 'A venerable and benevolent-looking old man of about sixty years of age, somewhat below the middle height, with ample forehead on which the traces of care and anxiety were apparent, clear searching blue eyes and long grey beard, rose and advanced to meet us. Before that mild and dignified countenance I involuntarily bowed myself with unfeigned respect; for at length my long-cherished desire was fulfilled and I stood face to face with Mírzá Yahyá, Subḥ-i-Ezel (Morning of Eternity), the appointed successor of the Báb, fourth "Letter of the First Unity." When Cyprus was handed over to the English Government, Mírzá Yahyá, with other political exiles, was transferred, and remained there as a political pensioner. Subḥ-i-Ezel, in his island seclusion, may be compared to Napoleon in St. Helena—a man who has played a great rôle in

¹ *The Faith of Islam* (3rd ed.) p. 167.

² The points of disagreement are set forth in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii, p. 304.

³ *Episode of the Báb*, p. xxiv.

stirring events and times, but whose active life and power to mould men's thoughts and deeds have passed away.'

The most curious development of Bahá'ism, as it is now called, has been in America. A Syrian convert, Ibráhím George Khayru'lláh, who is married to an English wife, about the year 1892, lectured on the subject in Chicago. He espoused the cause of Mírzá Muḥammad 'Alí, and so in 1902 'Abbás Effendi sent missionaries to America to defend his claims before the converts to Bahá'ism. There are said to be in Chicago, Washington and New York communities of several thousands followers of 'Abbás Effendi, with whom at 'Akká some intercourse is maintained. As regards the influence of the Bábís (or Bahá'ís) in Persia, it is difficult to say much about it. Mr. Browne says it is not certain to him 'that their triumph over Islám in Persia would ultimately conduce to the welfare of that distracted land, or that the tolerance they now advocate would stand the test of success and supremacy.'

We have now traced the influence of 'Alí and the teaching connected with him through long ages and amongst many peoples. Although the Nosairís and the Bábís have formed themselves into distinct religious organizations, and cannot be classed amongst the Shí'ahs, or the more direct

¹ Browne, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii, p. 303.

² *Ibid.* vol. ii, p. 307.

followers of 'Alí, yet at the basis of the dogmatic teaching of both sects is the necessity for an intermediary between God and man, a constant revealer of God's will, who corresponds to the Imám of the Shí'ahs; so it is clear that the influence of the cult of 'Alí has been a very real one in the inception and the growth of religious ideas amongst both Nosairís and Bábís. The Nosairís even go so far as to worship 'Alí as divine.

The influence of the devotion to 'Alí is still more clearly seen in the earlier Shí'ah movement and in all the strange developments which have proceeded from it. All the world over, wherever Shí'ah Muslims are to be found, 'Alí, to this day, is venerated as a true leader and teacher, with a devotion which sometimes places him even higher in the scale of regard than Muḥammad himself.

But it is rather through the doctrine of the Imámát, so closely connected with the cult of 'Alí, that his influence has been most widely extended. In the idea underlying that great dogma there is some truth.¹ We all see the need of a divine intermediary, a mediator between God and man, a revealer of His mind and will; but 'Alí and all his Imáms were fallible men and have passed away. One, the eternal Word of God,² remains,

¹ *Ante*, p. 10.

² In *Súratu'n-Nisá'* (iv) 147, Jesus Christ is called, 'Apostle of God and His word.' رسول الله و كلمته

as the loving intercessor and the perfect revealer of things divine.

We admire the devotion of Shí'ahs to 'Alí; we regret that they put him into a position he was never meant to occupy, and we believe that the fulness of the truth they hold can only be realized by a transfer of their allegiance to an ever-living mediator, Jesus Christ, who is the true Imám and the true Báb (door) of entrance to the knowledge of the divine will and to the realization of the divine grace and favour. He has said of himself:—'I am the door (báb): by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.'¹

¹ John x. 9.

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