



PERSIA

THE LAND OF THE IMAMS

A NARRATIVE OF TRAVEL AND RESIDENCE

1871-1885

BY

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MISSIONARY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN BOARD

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1886

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I LEFT Oroomiah on the twenty-eighth day of May, 1872, intending to go to Tabriz, Tehran and Hamadan, and thence to return to Oroomiah by way of the province of Ardalan. The total distance of the journey is about one thousand and sixty-four miles. I had been in Oroomiah about six months, and had acquired some knowledge of the Persian-Turkish language. I took with me two Nestorians; one to serve as cook, and the other as interpreter.

tents inhabited by Elyots, and midway of the stage were the only human habitations.

Late in the afternoon we rode about two farasangs to the village of Zanje where we remained for the night. In the morning early we started for Zengan, said to be four farasangs distant. On approaching the outskirts of the city we passed an extensive graveyard. Near by was a hut through which a rill of water flowed. This is the house for the baptism of the dead. A number of naked corpses were lying on the ground without the house. I know not how many may have been within the wash-room. As we rode through the city gate we met two men bearing on their shoulders a very rude bier in which was the blackened corpse of one who had died of famine.

While in this city I learned that the reports of the prevalence of the famine and typhus fever here were, in the main, true. At this time the number of deaths daily was sixty. The population of the city was said to be about forty thousand, an estimate which I judge to be very large. The famine had been very severe during the winter. At first only refugees from other places died from this cause, but later many of the citizens died. In the nine months preceding, five thousand six hundred and thirty dead bodies were carried out of one gate for burial, and one thousand one hundred in the last forty-six days. In the same period of nine months there had been borne through another city gate five thousand dead bodies. It was thought that

the water had become polluted, since some of the water courses passed near or under the cemeteries.

The city of Zengan is an old town, and was once more prosperous and important than now. It has not regained the position of power which it possessed before it was taken and destroyed by the Moguls. The celebrated sheik, Abal Abas, who died A. H. 557 was buried here. Zengan is one of the most important cities of the second class. It is near midway between Tabriz and Tehran. In late years it has been noted for the power acquired here by the Babees. In 1850 the chief mullah of Zengan, Mohammed Ale, having embraced the tenets of the Bâb, drew to himself a large number of adherents and took possession of the city. Troops were sent from Tehran, and in time the Babees were driven to the southeastern quarter of the town. Here they constructed defences and held the position during a year.

It is related of the Babees that they were fanatical and cruel, and that they tortured all prisoners taken by them. A Persian writer says that some of their captives were shod as horses; others were suspended from beams by one arm, and others were burned to death. The Babees women engaged in the defence, sharing the danger with their husbands and brothers. When their leader Ale was slain, his followers became discouraged; their defences were taken, and all the surviving Babees, men, women and children, were massacred.

CHAPTER V.

Zengan to Sultaneah—Palace of Fattah Ale Shah—Founding of Sultaneah—Principal Structures—Mausoleum of Mullah Hassan Kashe—Altitude and Position of Sultaneah—Route to Casveen—Horumdarah—Famine—Abhar, its Location and History—Unreasonable Identification with Habor—Valley and Villages of the Kemah Rud—Seadum—Tat—Road to Casveen—Wells and Connaughts—Perils of Travel—Situation of Casveen—Gardens and Productions—History—Population—Routes to Tehran—Departure from Casveen—Night Marches—Anxiety of the Persians and Imaginary Dangers—Haunts of the Assassins—The Story of Hassan—The Name Assassin—The Kurdish Warrior—An Episode—Kishlak to Tehran—Coal Mines—Karaj—The River and Village—Water Course to Tehran—Road from Karaj to Tehran—Approach to Tehran—Position of the City—Position of Raghes and Ra—Entrance to Tehran—Situation—Rise to Importance—Changes in the City and its Improvement—Gates—Desert and Aspect of the Environs—Heat and Reptiles.

SULTANEAH is six farasangs eastward of Zengan. The road follows the valley of the Zengan Tchai. The valley is here much narrower, and decreases in width to the summit. It is, however, very spacious, and the ascent is very gradual. It is formed by two ranges of the Elburz, though the southern range at its eastern extremity, seems to be a continuation of the system of mountains in Northern Azarbijan, and to be connected with the Sahund.

questions put by him was this: "Do you believe in jins? Have you any in your country?" This word jin is used in Persia to denote a certain class of demons. In reply I did not stop to explain the terms, but took his question in the evident intent of it, and replied that I did not believe in them. He then said, with great sincerity, "We have jins here." He then gave a particular description of them in answer to my question what they might be. "They are," he said, "little fellows, about so high,"—putting his hand about three feet above the floor,—“and they have tails." I asked: "Have you seen these creatures?" He replied: "No; I have not seen their bodies, but I have heard their voices. The mullahs of Reza have power," he continued, "to bring them up, and the jins are under the control of the mullahs. They sometimes enter rooms in a mysterious way, and strangle people. *Look out for jins.*" I told him that the priests seemed to be familiar with spirits, and that there are people in America who professed to be able to bring up the dead and to talk with them. He immediately replied: "The mullahs of Reza do that." He also said: "I would like to get a talisman that would repel the jins."

Demoniacal arts and sham miracles have been practised here to such extent that the inhabitants of the city have come to realize the desperate character of the persons connected with the shrine. Quite every person with whom I conversed on the subject, voluntarily and in strong terms condemned the frauds practised,

and seemed to believe the mullahs capable of doing any amount of evil. The secular power is wholly subservient to the religious. A few weeks before our arrival the mullahs had caused a Bab to be killed. At another time they incited a mob to destroy the house of a prince who had the temerity to say that he would drink wine in spite of the prohibition of the mullahs.

The asylum afforded by this shrine is intended to be commensurate with the greatness of the Imam. It is said that the Shah himself would not dare to take from the sanctuary a criminal who may have taken refuge there. It is a striking feature of the Persian custom of asylum that even Christians, Jews, and Guebers are allowed asylums where, under ordinary circumstances, no non-Mussulman is permitted to enter. The practice is intended to denote the sacredness of the shrines and is not an expedient for showing mercy to the infidels. The pilgrims to Reza in the course of the year are very many. But there is no means by which the exact number can be known. The greater part of these are fanatics. Many are pleasure seekers and religious tramps. The dervishes are numerous, and many of them seek to excite religious fervour and fanaticism.

The shrine of Imam Reza is the most sacred and celebrated in Persia. The regions to be travelled over to reach it are among the most dangerous for the stranger and the traveller. Yet the highways are filled with pilgrims, many of whom are women who have

CHAPTER XIV.

Religion of the King and Ruling Races—The Athna Asherain—Review of the Rise of the Sect—Abu Bekr and the three first Khalafahs—Ale and his Assassination—Moaveyah—The Dynasty of the Amme-yah—Rise of the Abasidees—Condition of the House of Ale during the Reigns of the Khalafahs—Princes of the House of Buyah—Suljuks—Hassan Saba and the Assassins—Division of the Country—With the Ata Begs—Mogul Princes and their Toleration—The Twelve Imams proclaimed by Khodaband—Tamouridees—Rise of the House of Ismael or the Sufees—The King of the Sheahs—Supremacy of the Sect of the Athna Asherain—Distinguishing Tenet of the Sect—Doctrine as to the Mahde or the Riser—The Babees—Attempt to Assassinate the Shah—Death of the Conspirators—Ale Allahees—Curious Rites of—Sheikees and Mutasharahees—Sufecs—Their Philosophical System—Relation of the Founder of the Sufec Dynasty to the Imams—Doctrinal Development of the Sect of the Twelve—Religious Literature of the Twelve—The Sheah call to Prayer—Divine Nature of Ale Claimed—Vicarious Death—The Sayeds—Superstitions of the People—The Most Holy Shrines—Celebrated Schools of the Sect of the Twelve—Principal Ceremonies—The Takeahs and the Tazeahs—Public Assemblies—Religious Orders—Mullahs—Imam Juma—Peesh Namaz—Wais—Mujtaheed—Revenues—Dervishes—Privileges of the Sayeds—Honorary Titles Conferred on Mullahs—Theological Schools—Their Support.

THE religion of the king and ruling races of Persia is that of the Mohammedan sect called Athna Asherain,¹ or the Twelve. It is a subdivision of the Sheah sect.

¹ Pronounced by Persians Asna, also written Athna Ashera and Oshera.

The essential doctrines and ceremonies of the Athna Asherain cannot be understood without a knowledge of the rise and fortunes of the Sheahs. Immediately after the death of Mohammed there arose a dissension among his four most intimate friends, as to who should succeed him as ruler of the Moslems, and as to the principles and code of laws by which they should be governed. Ale, the son-in-law and cousin of Mohammed, declared for the hereditary right, and claimed the succession on the ground that Fatimah was the only surviving child of the prophet, and he himself the first spiritual child of Mohammed, since he had been first in Mekkah to embrace the new religion. He contended that the Koran should be the code of laws, which, however, was not then compiled. Abu Beker, Omar and Othman claimed that the succession should be *elective*, and the Khalafah should rule in accordance with the Koran and the traditional sayings of Mohammed. Later it was claimed that the rulings of the first Khalafahs should be followed as precedents, or a code of laws. The controversy was summarily decided by Omar, who declared for Abu Beker, and caused the election by the congregation.

From this time onward the ranks of Islam were divided, but the government remained in the possession of the advocates of the elective right. When the three adherents of this principle had each served as Khalafah, and had been removed by poison or assassination, Ale was chosen. His election was the signal

for rebellion by the military ruler of Syria, Moaveyah¹ of the house of Ammeyah. The assassination of Ale and the dissensions of the Moslems left Moaveyah master of the field, and the succession remained in the house of Ammeyah for a period of about a hundred years, and until this dynasty was overthrown by the successful conspiracy in favour of the house of Abas. The Abasidees ruled over all the Moslems of Asia until the reign of the Suljuk Turks, A. H. 418.

During all this period the heirs and descendants of the house of Ale were distinguished in all countries as Sayeds. Numerous aspirants for the khalafate sprang up among them, but they were invariably defeated by the forces of the reigning Khalafahs, and the representatives of this house, who became conspicuous for sanctity, learning, and popular esteem, were uniformly put out of the way by poison. The house of Ale, however, steadily gained adherents among the Persians, and opponents of the Arab control, and some of the rulers of the provinces openly favoured the pretensions of the Sayeds. The princes of the line of Buyah, who began to rule in Fars and Irak, A. H. 392, though tributary to the Abasidees, favoured the Sheahs, and Asad al Doulat restored the buildings at Najaf over the grave of Ale. The last of this dynasty died A. H. 448. The princes of Ghaznah were Sunees. They ceased to rule A. H. 583. The Suljuk Turks began to

¹ This name,—as quite every other proper name,—is written in different ways by Persian writers, and in several ways by the *same* author.

reign in Persia A. H. 416. About this time Togrul Beg and his army embraced the religion of the Koran. He overthrew the dynasty of Buyah, conquered Persia, and took the capital of the Abasidees, Bagdad. He practised the religion of the Sunee Mohammedans. In the reign of his grand-son Malek Shah, A. H. 485, the famous assassin Hassan, Sabâ, A. H. 483, established the sect of the Ismaelites. They were so named from Ismael the son of Imam Jafir. The so-called "Old Man of the Mountain," Hassan, was the first of the Sheahs to head a successful revolt, and to establish a dynasty of the Aleites in Persia.

The Suljuk dynasty ceased in A. H. 636, and Persia was divided between the sway of the Assassins and the Ata Beg princes until the fall of the several branches of the latter. The Assassins ruled, especially in Northern Persia, for a period of a hundred and sixty years, and until they were exterminated by Huluku Khan, A. D. 1253. The Mogul princes were Theists, and tolerated both Islam and Christianity. Of this line, Abaka and Argun were Christians, but Khodaband, the son of the latter, caused the oration of Friday, delivered in the mosques, to be proclaimed in the name of the twelve Imams, throughout the kingdom. The Mogul dynasty was succeeded by that of Tamour, which continued from A. D. 1387 to 1447, and was followed by a reign of anarchy while the princes of the various Turkish tribes contended for supremacy. In A. D. 1468, Sultan Hassan Beg, after subduing a rival clan,

became ruler. He married Despina, a daughter of Kalo-Johannes, emperor of Trebizond. A daughter by this marriage named Martha became the wife of Sultan Haidar, a descendant of the seventh Imam. A son of Haidar and Martha named Ismael established an independent government at Ardabil during the years of anarchy. His arms were successful, and in A. D. 1499 he was proclaimed Shahe Sheahan, or king of the Sheahs. He obtained possession of all Persia, and founded the house of the Sufee¹ dynasty and with it the sect of the Sheahs, called the sect of the Twelve Imams, which has remained until the present time the prevalent religion of the princes and people of Persia. The essential and distinguishing tenet of this sect is that by the command of Mohammed, the right to supreme spiritual and secular rule was possessed by the eldest living representative of Ale, until and including the twelfth generation. These representatives are believed to have been Ale, Hassan, Hosein, Ale called Zain al Abādeen, Bakir, Jafir, Mosa, Reza, Takke, Ale, Hassan [Askare] and Mohammed, called al Mahde. The last when a child, and while pursued by the executioners of the Abasidee Khalafah, disappeared in a well in the court of his paternal home. He did not die, but remains concealed. He is to make two revelations of himself. He is the true Mahde, who, when he shall appear, will be entitled to absolute rule over the

¹ Written also Sufevee, Sufeveah and Sefavee by Persian writers.

world. He is therefore called *kaim* or the riser, and Lord of the Time.

The doctrine of the Mahde has given abundant occasion for the pretensions of impostors. Many have appeared claiming to be the Mahde. The most conspicuous of these in modern times is one known as the Bab, and who has given rise to the sect known as the Babees in Persia. This sect originated with one called Mirza Ale Mohammed, the son of a merchant of Shiraz, where he was born in 1819. He manifested strong religious proclivities in early manhood ; studied at the schools of Najaff for a time, and followed the life of a dervish. The Arabic word *bab* means a door, gate and way. He first professed to be the door to the Mahde, in the sense of a forerunner, to prepare the way for the coming of that Imam. It is asserted by Persian writers that he gradually abandoned this assumption, and professed to be the Mahde himself, and after a time, he set up the bold claim of being an incarnation of the Supreme God. Whatever in fact his own doctrines as to his own nature may have been, the last claim is that which is now adopted by the Babees of Persia. His adherents were flushed with the success of the new pretension, and asserted the right of the Bab to temporal rule. If this were denied, yet it must be a natural result of their tenets. Judging by an examination of their books and by conversations had with teachers of this sect, I understand that their chief tenet relates to the doctrine of

the Divine manifestations. They hold the *unity* of these in all ages. The Divine person was in Moses, Christ and Mohammed and is now in the Bab. Birth and death is the law of human life, therefore, every incarnation of Deity is in accord with this law. Hence the Bab is born and must die to human appearance. They hold that God must at all times be in the world. He has always been present in a bodily form. The natural death of the body is only the step or means to another manifestation by means of another body. In all that these religionists set up there is apparently an absurd collection of contradictory tenets, and the real claims for the Bab are obscured by high-sounding words and unintelligible sentences.

The doctrine which appealed to the people and made adherents was simply this one of the Mahde, and the investment of the Mahde with Divine prerogatives. In the imagination of all who accepted him, the visible kingdom of God had come, and brought with it the right of all Babees to inherit the world. The doctrine of the Babees is adapted to the doctrine of Divine manifestation as held by all religions. The books of this sect are made up of quotations from the New Testament and from the Koran. Yet there is great diversity of doctrine among the Babees themselves. They are one of the most numerous sects in Persia, and their tenets have found many advocates in quite all the countries of Asia. The assumption of the Babees alarmed the mullahs and the government.

Active measures were devised to suppress the sect. The Babees took up arms in defense, and assumed the aggressive. Ale Mohammed was, after long imprisonment, given the form of trial in Tabriz, and being condemned, was publicly shot in that city. The public executioners and Persian soldiers objected to taking any part in the execution owing to the assumed sacred character of the Bab, but the order was executed by a number of soldiers, in the public square of Tabriz. The Babees were engaged in many places with the government troops. I have related their conduct in Zengan. In the province of Mazandaran they made a fierce resistance for some months. The affair at Zengan occurred in 1851. In the following year a conspiracy was formed for the assassination of the Shah. It is the custom of the Persian king to permit the presentation of petitions to himself in the street. As the Shah was riding near the summer palace Neavaran, he was met by four men, one of whom was permitted to approach the Shah. The assassin attempted to seize the king, for the purpose, doubtless, of dragging him from his horse; but failing in this, he fired a pistol, the shot of which inflicted a slight wound in the thigh of the king. The conspirators were seized and put to death. There followed a general persecution of the sect, and until the present time the profession or proof of the Babees' faith has been considered cause sufficient for the infliction of the penalty of death.

Mirza Hosein Ale, of the province of Mazandaran, and for a time a resident of Tehran, was an agent or vakiel of the Bab at the time of the death of that man in Tabriz. He escaped from Tehran, but was arrested in Constantinople, and during several years has been confined at Akka, in Syria. He professed to be the Bab, and is very generally recognized by all who now hold to the tenets of that sect in Persia. In this fortress he receives the contributions of the faithful, professes to work a miracle in proof of his divinity by writing a thousand letters in an incredible short space of time, and sends his decrees to kings and people in many places.

One of the most prominent sects of the Persian Sheahs is the Ale Allahees. They contend that as the name denotes, Ale, the husband of Fatimah, is God. The more moderate of them claim, however, no more than the possession by Ale of the Divine nature. The Ale Allahees are believed, however, not to be a sect of purely Mohammedan origin, but they appear to hold mysterious rites and tenets, which seem to refer their origin to a heathen source. It is not apparent that they have any clearly defined system of religious faith. The only tenet which appears to be held with distinctness is that of the divine nature and right of Ale. Their curious dance around the fire would seem to indicate some connection with fire worship, but it may be accounted for as being no more than a social custom.

Two prominent sects are the Sheikees and the Mutasharahees. The former name is derived from a celebrated Sheik who taught in Kerman. He represents the authority of reason in addition to, or in opposition to, revelation. His principles are believed to be atheistic in their tendency. The Mutasharahees represent the adherents to the law or letter of the Koran, as the perfect and absolute rule of faith and conduct.

The Sheah sect, which has been most widely influential in Persia, is that of the Sufees. It gained ascendancy with Ismael, the founder of the Sufevcan dynasty. The sect is known by its religious alliance and religious tenets, but rests in fact upon a philosophical system, and yet retains enough of the ancient philosophy to indicate its origin in the sect of the Sophists. The system begins with an acknowledgment of religions and manifestation of God, but ends with a denial of his personality. It is quite impossible to find any clearly defined system of philosophy or theology, which all the so-called Sufees will accept; but it is conceded that the essential doctrine as known at the present day is the supremacy of reason. The sect is known more by the absence of any clear system of doctrine than by the possession of one, and has found favour with the public chiefly through the political acts and power of its principal adherents.

The sect of the Twelve Imams was brought to supreme power in Persia by virtue of the blood relationship of the founder of the Sufee dynasty to the Imams,