

ISLAM

A CHALLENGE TO FAITH

STUDIES ON THE MOHAMMEDAN RELIGION
AND THE NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF
THE MOHAMMEDAN WORLD FROM THE
STANDPOINT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

BY

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but this does not signify that he is poor. I remember one who came to me in Arabia in tattered garments and asked me to keep a bag of silver money for him! He had made large sums writing talismans and amulets for women and children. They wander from country to country, and it is not at all uncommon to meet derwishes from Tunis, Calcutta or Java on the streets of Bagdad and Constantinople.

There are two classes of derwishes—those who govern their conduct according to the law of Islam and those who profess to be free from the yoke of any creed, altho calling themselves Moslems.

There are thirty-two orders of derwishes founded by various leaders between A. D. 766 and A. D. 1750.¹ Their influence is widespread and everywhere opposed to Christianity and Christian governments. *The derwish orders are the tentacles of the Pan-Islamic movement*, and the Sultan of Turkey uses their leaders as spies and to work out his own ambitions.²

The Babis and the Beha'is.—Altho these are not Moslem sects, but arose rather in protest against some of the teaching of Islam, they yet sprang up on Moslem soil, and their opinions are closely connected with the Shiah doctrine of the Imamate. They share their mystical mode of thought and thousands of Shiahs in Persia were the first to hail the Bab as the great Deliverer.

When Abd ul Kasim, the last of the twelve Imams, disappeared in 329 A. H. he is supposed to have held intercourse through a successive number of men who were called "*Doors*" (singular=Bab). Abu el Hassan, the last of these "*Doors*," refused to appoint a successor.

¹For a full account of their worship, shrines, doctrines and aim, the student is referred to the bibliography on this chapter.

²See R. P. Louis Petit, "*Les Confréries Musulmanes.*"

Many centuries passed by and then, in 1826-1843, the Shaiki sect revived this belief and sought for a new Bab. He was found in the person of Mirza Ali Mohammed, who was born at Shiraz in 1820. After having studied, meditated and led an austere life until he was about twenty-four years of age, he announced himself as a duly authorized teacher and guide, and assumed the title of the Bab, declaring that whosoever wished to approach God must do it through him. Notwithstanding the opposition of a number of Mullahs (priests), crowds of people, among whom there were learned men also, followed him and became his disciples. In 1848 the Shah of Persia severely persecuted the Babis and put the Bab himself to death. In 1852 an attempt was made to assassinate the Shah and a new persecution of the sect followed. But they continued to increase and spread their teachings.

After the death of the Bab, Mirza Yahya and his half-brother, Beha Ullah, became the leaders of two rival sects of Babis, viz., the Ezelis and the Beha'is. Both leaders were deported, Beha and his followers to Akka and Mirza to Famgusta, in Cyprus.

Babism and its derived sects are all a protest and a revolt against orthodox Islam, whether the "orthodoxy" of the Shiah or the Sunnis. The whole movement in its origin, extent and present decline is indicative of the disintegration of Moslem philosophy and religion. It is the beginning of the end. Islam as an intellectual system can no longer appeal to the thoughtful. They are groping elsewhere for a Deliverer, and seeking an ideal of character higher than Mohammed. The Babis forbid the traffic in slaves, and deprecate violence in religion; they do not observe Ramazan and do not pray toward Mecca.

Concerning the Beha'is an American missionary in Persia writes: "They are not more open to the gospel than the Moslems. In fact, many consider them less so, for although they profess to accept the whole Bible, yet by their allegorical interpretation and denial of all miracles they effectually change its meaning. Having incorporated into their books some of the moral precepts of Christ and having adopted a semi-Christian vocabulary, they delight to discourse at length on love, on a tree being known by its fruits, and on kindred themes; but having left out Christ, the centre, they have missed the essential thing, and now in Persia are notorious as being religious in word rather than in deed. In fact, many of them are simply irreligious rationalists. By neither Moslem, Jew nor Christian are they considered morally superior to the Moslems, while in some respects they are rightly judged less so. They have grossly exaggerated the number of their converts, so that Moslems now say of them that the Bahai claims for a convert every man who speaks to him on the street. The outside figure for all Persia is 200,000, with all probability that half that number is nearer the truth. The one promising aspect of the movement is that it is an opening wedge making for religious liberty."¹

The Wahabis.—The rise of this remarkable movement in Islam cannot be called the birth of a new sect. They themselves do not consider it so. It was an honest attempt to reform or renew Islam on radical lines; an endeavor to return to the golden days by setting back the hands of the clock. But, like every other attempt to reform Islam, it failed signally and piteously.

Mohammed bin Abd ul Wahab was born at Ayinah, in

¹S. M. Jordan, in "The Mohammedan World of To-day," 129.

Nejd, in 1691. Carefully instructed by his father in the tenets of Islam according to the school of Hanbali, the strictest of the four great sects, Abd ul Wahab visited the schools of Mecca, Busrah and Bagdad, to increase his learning. At Medina, too, he absorbed the learning of the Moslem divines and soaked himself in the "six correct books" of Traditions. In his travels he had observed the laxity of faith and practice which had crept in, especially among the Turks and the Arabs of the large cities. He tried to distinguish between the essential elements of Islam and its later additions, some of which seemed to him to savor of gross idolatry and worldliness. What most offended the rigid monotheism of his philosophy was the almost universal visitation of shrines, invocation of saints, and the honor paid at the tomb of Mohammed. The use of the rosary, of jewels, silk, gold, silver, wine and tobacco, were all abominations to be eschewed. These were indications of the great need for reform. The earlier teaching of the companions of the Prophet had been set aside or overlaid by later teaching. Even the four orthodox schools had departed from the pure faith by allowing pilgrimage to Medina, by multiplying festivals and philosophizing about the nature of Allah. Therefore it was that Abd ul Wahab not only preached reform, but proclaimed himself the leader of a new *jihad*. His teaching was based on the Koran and the early traditions; his sword was found in the desert of Arabia and his followers fought, as did the companions of the Prophet, to destroy all infidels.

The movement is chiefly distinguished from the orthodox system in the following particulars :

1. The Wahabis reject *Ijma*, or the agreement of later interpreters.

The disintegration of Islam and the present crisis emphasize these unprecedented opportunities. From every quarter comes the testimony that the attitude of Moslems generally toward Christianity has changed for the better in the past decade, in spite of the frantic efforts of their political and religious leaders to bring about a reaction.¹

In India Islam has abandoned, as untenable, controversial positions which were once thought impregnable. Instead of denying the integrity of the Bible and forbidding its use, they now read it and write commentaries on it. Mighty and irresistible forces are at work in Islam itself to prepare the way for the Gospel. Thousands of Moslems have grown dissatisfied with their old faith, and of tens of thousands it is true that they are hungering for a living Mediator. The Babis, the Beha'is, the Shathalis, the Sufis, are all examples of this unconscious search for our Redeemer, whom Mohammed and the Koran have so long eclipsed.

"Far and wide, though all unknowing,
Pants for Thee each human breast;
Human tears for Thee are flowing,
Human hearts in Thee would rest."

The Cairo Conference.—The thought of a world's conference to discuss the problems of Moslem evangelization had, no doubt, often occurred to more than one missionary at the front; especially ever since Dr. H. H. Jessup gave the Church an outline of the problem in 1879.² Yet missionaries felt that at none of the great general missionary conferences since that time had Islam received such breadth of treatment and careful attention

¹See "The Mohammedan World of To-day"; also Tables on 284 and 294, column 5.

²"The Mohammedan Missionary Problem." (Philadelphia, 1879.)

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