

A Year among the Persians. By EDWARD G. BROWNE, M. A. M. B., Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. London: Adam and Charles Black. New York: Macmillan & Co. 8vo, pp. 594.

This book might be entitled a literary journey in the land of primitive faiths. It is rarely that we have so charming a narrative of a student of theology seeking books, men and thoughts in Oriental lands. The accomplished Lecturer in Persian to the University of Cambridge has already given us "A Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Bab." He has also written a new history of Mīrzā Alī Muhammad, the Báb. In the "Journal of the Oriental Society" he has exploited the literary treasures which he brought home with him. While the present portly octavo does not lack details of travel and personal adventure, it is mainly devoted to his interviews with followers of the Bab, with the orthodox of Islam, with Zoroastrians and others. His pages sparkle with the gems of Oriental wisdom, for he gives in choicest language the convictions of these Aryans nominally subjugated but intellectually free. After Count Gobineau's "Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale," there is probably no book, certainly none in English, which presents so clear a picture of Persian religion. The last important work, before the very recent book by the correspondent of the London "Times" on religious Persia, was that of Mr. R. G. Watson, whose generalizations and hostile criticism of the Babis were founded on the immoralities of certain particular members. From a much wider induction of facts, and much closer observation, Mr. Browne presents not only a more accurate, but a more vivid and thorough presentation of that most remarkable phase of Muhammadanism (if indeed it can be called such) known as Babism.

The most striking feature of the Persians as a nation is their passion for metaphysical speculation. Far from being confined to the learned classes, this passion permeates all ranks, manifesting itself in the shop-keeper and the muleteer as well as in the scholar and the man of letters. While few theological systems are more dogmatic and uncompromising than that of Islam, Persia, though considered one of the strongholds of the Muhammadan faith, is a very hot-bed of systems. One of the latest and most remarkable of these is that founded by Muhammad Ali, born at Shiraz, in 1824 or 1834. Babism is one of the innumerable schools of Sufism, but directed into a more practical channel by its founder's keen perception of the evils of his time. In reality, the conquest of Persia in the seventh century by the followers of the Arabian prophet, which destroyed Zoroastrianism, made a change that was but skin-deep. A host of heterodox sects soon sprang up, and the religion forced on the nation by Arab steel was transformed into something which, though still wearing a semblance of Islam, became intrinsically something quite different. Indeed, Persia seems to illustrate the contention that an Aryan

race does not naturally receive Muhammadanism. Instead of the rigid monotheism inculcated by the prophet, the most vital part of Persian religion is Pantheism. In Babism there are additions from Gnostic, Cabbalistic and even Buddhist sources. The whole universe is considered the unfolding manifestation or projection of God; it is coeternal with God but not coequal, because it is merely an emanation dependent upon Him while He has no need of it. Just as the light proceeding from a luminous body becomes weaker as it recedes from its source, so the emanations of being become less real, or in other words more gross and material, as they are further removed from their focus and origin. In this recession from the Primal Being there are infinite grades, though much stress is laid upon the number seven as the standard of definitiveness. Man finds himself in the lowest of these grades, the material world, of which he is the highest development, for he contains in himself the potentiality of re-ascent to God, his Origin and his Home. To discover how this return may be effected is the object of religious philosophy.

One of the most interesting practical manifestations of Babism is its morality. This is lofty, optimistic and cheerful. In its treatment of women it closely approaches Christianity. It forbids plurality of wives and the employment of concubines. Its women discard the veil. In its list of sovereigns or prophets, we might say incarnations, of the divine nature, nineteen in number, one must always be a woman. Hospitality, charity, liberal diet, with abstinence from intoxicating liquors, are commanded, while every form of mendicancy is sternly repressed. In setting forth the doctrines as obtained from the deliverance of living followers of the Bab, or the standard works of the sect, great beauty of language and thought is often found, and one is thrilled and delighted with the grandeur of the diction found upon almost every page here. The author's previous preparation for his travels, including ability to recognize hashish when put in his pipe, and to use several languages and dialects, prepared him to profit by his interviews, often furtively obtained, with prophets of both sexes, and to discern between the intellectual chaff and grain which was set before him. We regret to find that the orthodox Mussulman's idea of anti-Christ is that of a rider upon an ass, the distance between the ears of which shall be a mile, and that this ass is concealed in America. They expect this creature to arise out of a well near Isfahan, which is supposed to be "opposite" to America. It is because this American ass has not yet arisen, that they justify their disbelief in the Bab, and refuse to see in him the promised deliverer!

To the student of Oriental religions in the far East, especially in Japan, this volume on central Asiatic faith and philosophy has unusual interest, because of the many points of likeness to the pantheism which, under the name of Confucianism, and in the manifold sects of Buddhism, comprises the greater part of religion in Japan. Some of the teachings of the later

Japanese sects seem practically identical with those of Bab philosophers. In the ritual observances of modern Zoroastrianism, also, it is interesting to note the close resemblances to the cultus of Japanese Shintō ; while in the unchanging dynasty of the Mikados of Japan, there is a magnificent contrast to the frivolous instability of the dynasties of Persia, the kings of which seem to care nothing at all about their predecessors. Travel in central Asia may be " travail," as the Persians say, " a portion of hell-fire " as the Arabs affirm, but, surviving scorpions, tarantulas, spies and fanatics, the author has contributed a work of prime value on Persian religion. In conjunction with the movements of the Higher Criticism of the Koran in India, by Mussulmans, the Babis of Persia are yet to be further heard from in that Parliament of Religions which is to be spoken of less in the aorist than in the historical present and the continuing future.

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