Comte de Gobineau and Orientalism

Selected eastern writings

Translated by
Daniel O'Donoghue

Edited by
Geoffrey Nash

Culture and Civilization in the Middle East

COMTE DE GOBINEAU AND ORIENTALISM
A SOURCEBOOK

Though known to specialists, Comte de Gobineau's vital if idiosyncratic contribution to Orientalism has only been accessible to the English reader through secondary sources. Especially important for its portrayal of an esoteric Sufi sect like the Ahl-i Haqq, and its vivid narrative of the Babi episode in Persia, Gobineau's work impacted significantly on European intelligentsia, including Ernest Renan, Matthew Arnold, Lord Curzon, and the Orientalist Edward Granville Browne.

Daniel O'Donoghue's brilliant translation now makes available sizeable extracts from Gobineau's two most important writings on the East: *Three Years in Asia* and *Religions and Philosophies of Central Asia*. Geoffrey Nash's comprehensive introduction and notes contextualise Gobineau's work in the light of contemporary scholarship, as well as assessing its impact on nineteenth-century Orientalists and modern Iranians, and its relevance to debates around Islam and modernity that are still alive today.

Gobineau and Orientalism will be attractive to scholars, students and general readers who are interested in the debate on Orientalism opened by Edward Said. For those who are aware of Gobineau's reputation as "father of racist ideology" these writings present a different, more sympathetic side to the Frenchman. The general reader will find their knowledge of nineteenth-century Persia, its religious history and its contacts with Europe, greatly expanded.

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NOTES ON THE TEXT, TRANSLITERATIONS AND ANNOTATIONS

Trois ans en Asie (de 1855 à 1858) was first published in Paris in 1859 by Librairie de L. Hachette & C^{ie}; and the first edition of *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* appeared in Paris in 1865 from Didier & C^{ie}. The French texts used for this translation are to be found in volume two of Gobineau's three-volume *Œuvres*, general editor Jean Gaulmier, published by Gallimard in 1983.

Almost the entire second part of *Trois ans en Asie* is translated here; the exceptions being the final chapter, "Return", and a section from Chapter 3, "The Sufis", *Œuvres*, ed. Jean Gaulmier, vol. II, pp. 257–64, which is a narrative in the style of Gobineau's *Oriental Tales*. From *Religions et Philosophies*, the entire section on Babism has been translated, with the exception of Chapter 12, "Books and Doctrines of the Babis", excerpts of which can be found in English translation in Moojan Momen, ed., *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844–1944, Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, pp. 20–2. Two further chapters, 1 "The Religious and Moral Character of Asiatics", and 3 "The Faith of the Arabs: Origin and Development of Shi'ism" are fully translated. Unfortunately there was no space to include Gobineau's groundbreaking chapters on Persian religious theatre, the *taziya* (Chapters 13–16). Matthew Arnold includes some extracts in English from these in his essay, "A Persian Passion Play". Daniel O'Donoghue has translated both books in their entirety.

The two original mid-nineteenth century French works incorporate Gobineau's own transcription of Persian and Arabic words. Not only were they written before more standardised forms were introduced in the later nineteenth century, they are, naturally enough, inflected by the French phonetic system. Some modifications were therefore necessary in an English edition. To have sought, in the cause of authenticity, to remove the French inflection but retain as far as possible Gobineau's own transliterations would have amounted to an artificial tampering with the original which would not have aided clarity. Alternatively, to swap Gobineau's transliteration for a near contemporary English author's, such as for example Lady Sheil's, whose *Glimpses of Life and Manners In Persia* was published around the same time as *Three Years in Asia,* would have been a self-defeating exercise as her transliterations are far from satisfactory. A translation can never hope to achieve complete equivalence with its original. We therefore decided to

transliterate Arabic and Persian words broadly according to the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* but (with the exception of *Shi'ism*) without diacritical marks or representation of the letter *ayn* or *hamza*. Well known place names (e.g. Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, Kerman) are written in their common form, but less familiar ones are transliterated.

Given our desire to print as much of Gobineau's works as space permitted, notes and annotations have been kept to moderate length, enough (we hope) to explain essential points of fact, contextualise Gobineau's remarks, and give the reader a general insight into the issues and scholarship surrounding the works today. All notes are the editor's unless followed by the abbreviation (tr.) in which case they are the translator's. However, we also acknowledge our debt to Jean Gaulmier, whose notes we frequently made use of, by the abbreviation (Fr. ed.).

Translator's note

I have endeavoured to translate Gobineau as accurately as possible with regard to style and word choice. This has led to a certain amount of obscure vocabulary and idiosyncratic syntax, e.g. suppression of "and" in lists, and some very long sentences containing many subordinate clauses. All European words and their sometimes manifold definitions, as well as many of the Middle Eastern words, may be found in the 1971 edition of the Oxford English dictionary.

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INTRODUCTION

Available in translation as a seminal figure in the formation of European racist ideology, or as a minor French author of eastern tales, Comte de Gobineau's vital if idiosyncratic contribution to European Orientalism, though well known to experts in the field, could up till now only be accessed by an English reader through secondary sources. The present translation of sizeable extracts from Gobineau's two most important oriental writings, *Trois ans en Asie*, and *Les Religions et Philosophies dans L'Asie centrale*, should partially rectify this situation. The aim of the introduction is to treat Gobineau's ideas and observations on the East – which in practice largely concern Persia – both within the context of their own time, and in the light of contemporary perspectives. As a literary figure his abiding impact has been as a writer of historical narratives, fictional and non-fictional. In spite of the fact that his racial theories were largely ignored in his lifetime, and his Orientalist pretensions dismissed as amateur and unscientific, he passed on to his contemporaries several key narratives encoding highly personal readings of Persia's distant and more recent past. French and German Orientalists regarded Gobineau's pronouncements, drawn from his deciphering of the cuneiform script of ancient Mesopotamia according to the occult interpretations of native informants, with disdainful silence. Nevertheless, according to Curzon, himself a redoubtable traveller and connoisseur of travel writing, the best works on the East were those written by Gobineau.[1] To be more specific, his writings on oriental topics proved very influential in two areas: first, as an interpretative narrative of the history and beliefs of the Shi'ih sect of Islam influenced by national/racial ideas; second, his articulation of the history, beliefs and practices of Iranian religious sects and movements which he considered antithetical to Shi'ism. Particular attention will be paid to the impact these narratives had on British and French Orientalists and the way they helped shape their views on the East, as well as their continuing relevance to debates centered on Islam and modernity which are still very much with us today.

Gobineau and the Orient

Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, the French littérateur with a predilection for historical and oriental studies, whose family supported the Bourbons, and whose racial

theorisations were purloined by the twentieth-century European Right, is a figure whose reputation, such as it is, has cohered more around the sobriquet "father of racism" rather than that of an expert on eastern culture and religious belief. In his time Gobineau's eastern writings either provoked apathy or were contemptuously dismissed by professional Orientalists. In the long term it has been Gobineau's pessimistic views about the degeneration of civilisation caused by miscegenation between races – barely considered worth challenging during his lifetime – that kept his name alive outside the confines of academic specialists and enthusiasts.

With Alexis de Tocqueville as his patron, Gobineau in 1849 embarked on a diplomatic career, holding positions in Switzerland and Germany before joining a mission to Persia that resulted in a French legation being established there. He became successively secretary and chargé d'affaires in Tehran from 1855–8, to where after a brief spell in Newfoundland he returned as minister in January 1862, finally leaving in September of the following year. His later postings took him to Athens, Rio de Janeiro and Stockholm. But it was his two periods in Persia that stimulated a lust for the Orient present in Gobineau from childhood: a family friend said of the boy: "His aspirations were directed towards the East. He dreamt only of mosques and minarets; he called himself a Muslim, ready to make his pilgrimage to Mecca."[2]

The scope of Gobineau's oriental writings ranges from his *Memoir on the Present Social State of Persia* (Mémoire sur l'état social de la Perse actuelle, 1856), his pseudo-historical *Treatise on Cuneiform Writings*, (Traité des écritures cunéiformes, 1864) and *History of the Persians*, (Histoire des Perses, 1869) to his travel memoir and description of contemporary Persia, *Three Years in Asia* (Trois ans en Asie, 1859), an exposition of his idiosyncratic views on Persian race and religious culture, *Religions and Philosophies of Central Asia* (Les Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie centrale, 1865), and the late collection of fiction, *Oriental Tales* (Nouvelles asiatiques, 1874). In addition, posthumous publications of Gobineau's correspondence and diplomatic dispatches containing his observations primarily on Persian affairs include, Lettres persanes (1958), *Correspondance entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten* (1933), and *Les dépêches diplomatiques du Comte de Gobineau en Perse* (1959).

For most of the twentieth century Gobineau's reputation was overshadowed by misappropriation of his racial theories as laid down in the *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines, 1853–5). These theories, which also strongly inform his eastern writings, are however to be distinguished from twentieth-century systematisations of racism as a political creed. Gobineau's pithy warning about the dangers of western imperialists' urge to conquer the East encapsulates his generally pessimistic theory of the effects of racial intermixture and its responsibility for the decline of modern Europe, a process he believed might be observed in its latter stages in the East. The anti-rationalist basis of his rejection of the scientific claims of professional Orientalists, led both to his proposal of untenable theories on the structure of the ancient history of the Near East, as well as

to his more influential speculations on such matters as the distinctive qualities of Aryan Persia vis-à-vis Semitic Arabia, his exposition of the hidden practices of modern Near Eastern sects of significant longevity such as the Ahl-i Haqq, and his sensitivity to and recreation of the dramatic events surrounding the growth and suppression of the Babis.

In my discussion of Gobineau the Orientalist, I intend to trace his writings on the East from exaltation of the "Aryan Zoroastrians" in the *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, through "Chaldaism", a term he used to encode the ancient religious wisdom of the Near East, and which he applied to Arabian Islam, and the influential theory that Persian Shi'ism was a national riposte to the Arab conquest, along with his demonstration of the continuation under the cover of Sufism of ancient doctrines and customs as enshrined by a sect like the Ahl-i Haqq, and finally to *Religions and Philosophies of Central Asia*, of Gobineau's writings the work that had the largest impact on contemporaries by its dramatic representation of Babism which he inscribed in terms attractive to a European Christian audience.

Gobineau's general attitude to the East

It should be noted at the outset that, in spite of his racial theories, Gobineau's eastern writings are built upon a sympathy with and sensitivity towards the peoples of the East, especially those of what he calls Central Asia, by which he means the cultural area inhabited by Persians and Persianised Afghans, Kurds and Turks. Given that his motivation for writing the *Inequality of Human Races* had been a disdain for nineteenth-century Europe, it is not surprising that alongside his respect for Persia he displays great contempt for would-be European conquerors and adventurers in that land, as well as in the East in general. The British repression of the Sepoy rebellion in India (1857–8), to which Gobineau refers several times, typified for him the hypocrisy of Europe's claims of cultural superiority and its fitness to promote civilisation among the races of the East. He specially reproves Europeans' poor knowledge of the local history and languages of oriental peoples, and the type whose presence in Persia was motivated solely by the aim of expropriation. His arguments concerning European conquest of the East are encapsulated by a remark made towards the end of *Three Years in Asia* to the effect that such imperialist expansion was an attractive but "poisonous dish". This statement is clarified in a letter he wrote to Toqueville in March 1856:

> Establish kingdoms, great dynasties, republics, whatever you wish. To this I have no objection . . . Go and torment the Chinese in their homeland, finish off Turkey, bring Persia within your sphere; all that is possible, perhaps even inevitable . . . but, in the final account, the causes of your enervation are accumulating and will accumulate by these very actions and there is no longer anyone in the world to replace you when your degeneration is completed.[3]

Gobineau witnessed European encroachment at close hand, noting the deepening Anglo-Russian rivalry during his periods in the French Legation in Tehran as well as European dictation to a weaker eastern nation leading to the Anglo-Persian War of 1856–7 when he took charge of British interests in the country. Fiercely anti-Russian on account of his views on the Slavonic races, he wrote to his friend Prokesch-Osten in September 1855: "If the Persians . . . unite with the western powers, they will march against the Russians in the morning, be defeated by them at noon and become their allies by evening. All courses seem to me to have the same upshot."[4]

The *Treatise on Cuneiforms* and *History of the Persians* are works that would be considered, in a modern sense, hardly based on historical study but mostly mythical construction. A major constitutive factor in the production of these works was Gobineau's preference for native oral sources. Concerning oriental ways of thinking on religious and philosophical matters Gobineau wrote (in a letter to Mme de Circourt of May 1862) he considered himself "the first Occidental who has penetrated these arcane matters". He also declared himself "astonished and shocked sometimes by the profundity of the life of these oriental nations, above all when I compare it with the stupid moral day to day ruin of European thought."[5] Such attachment to non-rational methods of thought and writing makes Gobineau's work what it is – a mix of inaccuracy sometimes descending into nonsense perhaps, and also an expression of inspired intuition.

The value he placed on indigenous Persian ways of thinking is expressed sententiously in the opening sentence of *Religions and Philosophies*: "All that we think and all the ways in which we think have their origins in Asia".[6] The first chapter proceeds to articulate the dichotomy between European and Eastern minds, epitomising the difference in the phrase: "the rationalism of Europe and the logic of the East".[7] By this the Frenchman understood an opposition between on the one hand the utilitarian bent of western thought, and on the other the mystic speculation of the Orient. Where European thought favoured narrow fixity – "a well delimited, defined state of truth, bounded by walls and ditches, impervious to error" – the Persian mind set no limits on metaphysical speculation, even as it was imbued with an unconscious scepticism:

> They are full of fire and have the most alert and skilful ease of intuition in the world; they excel . . . at splitting hairs, and from strands they will form a bridge capable of bearing a carriage. They will see unlimited food for thought, not without value, in the tiniest of notions.[8]

When Gobineau declares such minds incapable of thinking within the bands of common sense, he means to insult the materialist practicality of the westerner, not the poor grasp of workaday reality of the oriental. Overall, he is disinclined to wield the label fanatic in his description of any of the various expressions of Persian religiosity he is concerned with, unless it be that of the Babis. On the contrary, one outcome of Gobineau's eclectic interest in religious expression is his evocation of the

variety, flexibility and protean character of Persian religious practice, arguing that whatever the differences which separated Shi'a, Sufis, members of the Ahl-i Haqq and so on, any individual Persian remained capable of imaginatively entertaining or at least being intrigued by beliefs that were not his own.

All this, as Gobineau's French editors argue, is but the epitome of the notions governing his derided *Treatise on Cuneiform Writings*, a work produced in collaboration with two "spiritual confidants", Lalizar Hamadani and Abul Hasan Ardastani: the former, a Jewish savant learned in esoteric thought, the latter an orthodox Shi'ih mullah with whom he read the Koran.[9] To these names should be added that of Gobineau's personal servant, Mirza Gaffar, a votary of the Ahl-i Haqq creed. Gobineau's French editors propose that these influences and his long meditation on the cuneiform inscriptions led him to believe he had found a key for which he had long searched. His letters are evidence of the hermetic existence he adopted on his second tour in Persia, when he lived alone without his wife and daughters, with the result that he had become "a believer . . . sure of his fate".[10] Besides the *Treatise on Cuneiforms*, the fruit of his esoteric interests is to be found in Gobineau's collection of manuscripts housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in the section marked "occult sciences".[11]

On the Aryan Persians

It might be observed that Gobineau took Persians at face value. He noted a strong attachment to the pre-Islamic past, observable in the everyday speech even of illiterate peasants who invoked the names of ancient heroes such as Jamshid and Cyrus. "A nation that attaches such value to its antecedents evidently possesses a great vitality."[12] His writings on Persia can be considered as born out of his identification with the Iranian people: "I wanted, as far as was possible, to put myself in their place before pronouncing any judgement on their ways of feeling or being". Persians, after all, were "a most ancient nation (une nation très ancienne) . . . perhaps the most ancient in the world to have had regular government and have functioned on the earth as a great people."[13]

In terms of his own predilections, this attachment to the Persians was underwritten by what he understood to be their place in the racial history of mankind. *The Inequality of Human Races* is built upon the premise that every civilisation of note was created by the white Aryan race which was in energy and ingenuity superior to the two other root races – the Black and Yellow – with whom however it invariably mixed as conqueror. This was the case with those Aryans who leaving their ancestral homes among the other Aryans of High Asia, divided into Greek, Hindu and Zoroastrian branches, the latter – distinguished as Bactrians, Medes and Persians – moving across vast but indeterminate areas of Asia until they ventured as far south as the Tigris. [14] Here some were absorbed into the Semitic Assyrians, while encountering populations of Blacks or Hamites, they mixed intimately ("se mêlèrent intimement") with them. The "Zoroastrian nations of the south" who played the primary role in the glory of Persia were therefore something of a mélange racially.[15]

The one fixed point of reference in this vague discourse on origins was that of language. In his rough delineation of the racial make-up of ancient Persia, Gobineau was dependent on the contemporary image "linguists and historians had made of the primitive Aryans . . . [and] the nomads of Asia".[16] In particular he cites the work of the early nineteenth-century scholar of Zoroastrian texts, Eugène Burnouf. Yet he felt able to single out Zoroastrianism, the ancient faith that was established as the national religion of the mythical Kiyanian dynasty of Persian kings, as "incomparably more dignified, more moral, more elevated than that of the Semites".[17] It was henceforth the Zoroastrians' destiny to clash with and to attempt to civilise that inferior but (according to Herodotus, another source on which Gobineau heavily relies) greatly more numerous Semitic race, the Assyrians. In due course both the Aryan Iranians and Aryan Greeks would be sucked into the orbit of inferior African and Semitic cultures becoming in the process like barbarians, negligent and forgetful of their (Aryan) community of origin. This putative Aryan superiority over Semites would feature again prominently in a later work, the *History of the Persians*.

Here it need only be observed that Gobineau saw the process of racial adulteration of a great people continuing into modern times. Arab and Turkish invasions of the Islamic Age exercised his interest in the works he wrote specifically on the Near East, especially *Three Years in Asia* and *Religions and Philosophies*. In the former he claims history had created a Turkish/Iranian split:

> Looking closely, one can see that the Turkish tribes as well as the Farsi populations have inhabited the land for centuries, and from time immemorial; that both origins are foreign, both are conquerors, and have an equal right of possession. So neither can really treat the other as an intruder, and yet they hate each other because they are unalike, speak different tongues and have likewise had very different destinies.[18]

Gobineau's preference for martial tribes like Bakhtiaris, Lurs and Kurds, can be compared to the similar sentiments of an imperially-minded English traveller like Curzon. But this can be offset by his appreciation of the racial character of the town-dwelling Persians whom he calls Tajiks and Farsis and who, in contrast to the dense, ponderous, but solid northern Turks, are characterised as quick, lively and possessive of a superior intelligence.[19] We find precisely the same attribution of racial characteristics made by Browne in *A Year Amongst the Persians*. [20]

On Islam, Persian Shi'ism and heterodoxy

In Book I of the *Inequality of Human Races* Gobineau had assigned the Arabs and Islam a role in what he termed Greco-Asiatic civilisation. In *Three Years* he writes of the Arabs:

> All their statesmen and administrators, like their scholars and their philosophers, were converts of foreign blood, and almost from the start governed without them as well as to their detriment. Individually taken they are a noble race, but incapable of understanding the idea of the nation

> state, the idea of the system. Attachment to the tribe represents the extent of their capabilities. They know nothing of that which bonds societies together, not even religious faith, which they gladly confine to the realm of sentiment. [21]

The Arabs therefore did not create anything new, but incorporated remnants of conquered races – the Muslims consisting of mixed populations who formed a hybrid culture. As Hourani put it: "The so-called 'Islamic' civilisation therefore did not exist: it was a mixture of the civilisations of different races – its religion Arab, its laws Persian and Roman, its sciences Greco-Syrian and Egyptian."[22] Hourani's discussion clearly points out how Gobineau shared with Renan (and other nineteenth-century western "philosophers of history") an approach to Islam that demeaned its originality and categorised it as a product of "the Semitic mentality". Gobineau, it should be emphasised, was in no way as anti-Semitic as Renan (let alone the Nazis to whom he was supposedly a precursor).

If Gobineau can be said to have had a vaguely systematic view of the origins of the Near East's religious history this can be found set out in his *Treatise on Cuneiforms*. Into the cuneiform inscriptions he read the ancient beliefs of Western Asia and comprehended these in the term "Chaldaism". Gaulmier points out that for Gobineau Chaldaism signified "sémitisme" whereas for the philologically trained German Orientalists the Chaldeans were Aryans. He also argues that the talismanic meanings the Frenchman went on to discern in Islam in fact featured in both the ancient and medieval worlds rather than deriving from the specific category he termed "sémitisme".[23] For Gobineau Chaldaism was also the essence of Islam. Muhammad had been a reformer who had attempted to recover and purify the faith of the ancient Arabs, for which purpose he had borrowed from the two preceding Aramaic faiths, Judaism and Christianity; however, these had broken off from Aramaism. Therefore from the standpoint of the Prophet, Islam was "the true faith, [hitherto] soiled by the accumulation of successive idolatrous errors".[24] Be that as it may, as a conquering faith Islam only required outward adherence – the formula "there is no God but God" allowed space for an individual to entertain whatever speculative/mystical ideas he wished.

> However, as Islam, with its vague, inconsistent precepts, seemed to invite everybody to recognise it, without forcing anybody to abandon any of their ways of thinking, it became what we see today, the comfortable blanket under which shelter, barely concealed, the entire past and the hybrid ideas that bud every day in a soil which contains so many things in a state of putrefaction.

In practice Islam's tolerance ensured "the old opinions, doctrines and theories had little trouble surviving".[25] Persians were thus afforded the licence both to go on practising their ancient gnosis, as well as to incorporate indigenous elements into a specifically Persian brand of Islam.

However Gobineau exaggerates his case by stating of Persia: "the masses are in reality not Muslim".[26] He goes on to inquire into the causes behind Persians' continual use of empty religious phrases, posing the question: "How has an entire nation been led into the curious spectacle of a universal hypocrisy, which deceives nobody?"[27] He answers by linking this with dissimulation, a practice that went back to the Sassanian period when Mazdaeism, a repressive form of Zoroastrianism, had been the state religion. The Zoroastrian clergy who had before exercised suffocating power renewed themselves with the tacit agreement of the Arab conquerors: "They reconstituted themselves as an inquisitorial, dominating clergy, merely exchanging the name of mobeds for that of mullahs." [28] Persians thus continued their unbelief beneath a surface conformity; they were adept in employing dissimulation in order to cover "the fashion for secret religions".[29]

After the Arab conquest, Persia pursued the quest for its own distinctive religion out of racial pride and animosity against the inferior Arabs.[30] "Everyone felt free to curse the Arabs . . . even the grandchildren of those who had welcomed them with open arms."[31] A salient feature of the Persian revolt against the religion of the Arabs was that the status of the Prophet and even God himself was diminished in favour of Ali and the Imams. Persian Shi'ism changed Islam out of all recognition as seen for example in its rejection of the legitimacy of the Caliphate and ordinary Persians' profound attachment to Ali and Husayn in what we might today call a process of writing them into the nation's history. Shi'ism was therefore inscribed as a new form of an older Persian patriotism. In due course the Safavids made Persia the only country where Shi'ism was the state religion. "In reality many customs absolutely opposed to Muhammad's doctrine reappeared and gradually established themselves." A clergy arose that continued the old ways but under an Islamic guise:

> It could not justify its existence by the Koran, nor even by the authentic traditions of the Prophet, who, on the contrary, had wanted each believer to remain a free master of his own faith. It gathered therefore ancient maxims and, transmuting them into the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, established dogmatically that the Koran, on pain of death, could be read or interpreted only by the mullahs. [32]

But with loss of respect for mullahs the ancient religions/sects re-asserted themselves in Persia, though there could be no question of Persia ceding from Islam, because this was now the recognised power structure of the world.

One of the first Europeans to look closely at Shi'ism, Gobineau articulated it as a distinctively Persian encoding of Islam, and so helped shape Europeans' image of Islam in the nineteenth century. However, his statements on the subject frequently demonstrate the same disregard for accurate historical detail that characterises his writings on the history and ancient religious ideas of Persians. His emphasis on the continuity of Zoroastrian/Sassanian beliefs and practices and their incorporation within what he termed "Persian Islamism" is backed up by an extremely vague

chronology and precious few dates. An example can be seen in the third chapter of *Religions and Philosophies* ("The Faith of the Arabs: Origin and development of Shi'ism") when he comments: "and so, gradually, a day arrived when the Sassanid religion more or less found itself resuscitated in Shi'ism. That day followed shortly on the advent of the Safavids, who thus in turn found themselves Sassanid Muslims of a sort."[33] A modern commentator can only marvel at the aplomb with which the Frenchman elides the eight and a half centuries between the fall of the Sassanian dynasty (651) and the establishment of Safavid power in Persia (1502). While it is correct that the Safavids oversaw the creation of the first Twelver (*ithna-ashari*) Shi'ih state and that many traces of Persia's Sunni and Sufi past were erased during their rule, Gobineau makes no mention of Persia's Sunni past and – equally as important – the substantial Arab Shi'ih contribution that made the Safavids' project possible. In what sense then was the Safavid conversion of Persia to Shi'ism the working out of a uniquely Persian national genius? In the fourth chapter of *Religions and Philosophies* Gobineau writes that during the period from the thirteenth to the end of the sixteenth century

> local Shi'ism developed [in Persia], left its old forms behind, revived and restored almost the entire stock of Guebre ideas and customs, and put them in place of Muhammad's prescriptions . . . With the return to those fundamental ideas and the almost unlimited fabrication of hadiths or traditions, which brought ancient theology back to the domain Arab faith believed itself to have conquered, Shi'ism developed daily and admired in itself the true expression of Persian nationality.[34]

In key respects Gobineau's method here is an expression of the kind of Orientalism exposed by Edward Said. This can be seen in the way he elides the various stages in the developments of Shi'ih theology and practice in favour of a static – or near static – formulation that derived Shi'ih behaviour from pre-Islamic conditions and essentialised notions of Persian racial consciousness. Shi'ism becomes a trans-historical category, its existence in other territories besides Iran largely ignored, its place in Islam distorted (especially by implying that Shi'ih *hadith* was entirely different to the Sunni), and the sect's extremer offshoots (such as the Ali Illahis) given undue prominence. Unsurprisingly, given this essentialist, a priori approach, Gobineau pays little regard to the developments in Shi'ism of his own time other than to opine that the sway of the ulama had entered into terminal decline. He gets the Akhbari-Usuli dispute wrong, overemphasising the significance of the former and failing to note it was the latter (for whom he reserves the term "mujtahids") who wielded the clerical power he expatiates upon elsewhere. It would be harsh to censure him for misunderstanding the doctrines of Shaykhism, about which until recently little was known in the West. However, at the end of his chapter on the religion of Persia in *Three Years* (Book 2 Chapter 2) he implies the Shaykhis are "dissidents" before in the next chapter turning his attention to other sects of longer standing that qualified for this term.

We might well consider Gobineau's articulation of the religious and philosophical scene in nineteenth-century Persia as an exercise in seeking out and projecting the occult and the heterodox. He felt that Shi'ism had outrun its course and that the vitality of Persian religious expression lay beneath the clerical blanket of suppression:

> Without the mullahs there would be no Islam in Persia. From the day the people had no more faith in them they no longer believed what the mullahs alone had advocated, and that is how Islamism comes to be lost to the Persian masses, and one can state that today the ancient secret religions of the Sassanid era have not only recovered all the ground lost during the first centuries of Muslim domination, but have propagated themselves far more than they succeeded in doing under the mobed inquisition. The only way, therefore, of understanding Persian ideas in matters of faith is to consider these suppressed cults or beliefs.[35]

In the chapter devoted to it in *Three Years in Asia*, Gobineau begins by emphasising the role of Sufism as a Persian riposte to Islam rather than as a vehicle for mystical expression within that religion. What he looks for and finds is ancient beliefs and practices under the skein of Sufism. The chapter is mainly devoted to discussion of a sect Gobineau mistakenly termed Nusayri, but which was in reality the Ahl-i Haqq. Gobineau pioneered scholarly interest in this occult sect, although some of his judgements – such as claiming Buddhist origins for it and converts from Persia's previously Christian population – are now no longer accepted. Minorsky, who considered him the first to see the importance of the Ahl-i Haqq, also lamented that the Frenchman's sources were entirely oral.[36] (One of Gobineau's valets was a "saint" or leader in the cult.) However, oral evidence was what most suited Gobineau's grand, intuitive approach to the explication of religious doctrine. In his articulation of the doctrines of the Ahl-i Haqq he emphasises the sect's hatred and disdain for orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, even if this was hidden beneath an outward loose conformity and dissimulation or *kitman*. In *Religions and Philosophies*, Gobineau wrote a further chapter on Sufism. This time it is represented as an extravagant cult which "thanks to its kitman, its tact" had "seduced all classes of oriental society". Gobineau's summing up of Sufism as the bringer of "Quietism, beng and opium" greatly disillusioned the young E.G. Browne.[37] But the young Englishman took the trouble to read on and in so doing underwent a life-changing experience. Also in *Religions and Philosophies* Gobineau focuses on a movement whose "dissident" credentials could hardly be contested for it had very recently been locked in open opposition to the religious and political status quo in Persia. In Babism he had found the heterodox sect that raised the greatest challenge to Shi'ism, representing, he felt, the spiritual response to the new socio-political phase into which Persia was now moving. But he largely failed to notice how deeply it was steeped in a Shi'ih religious world-view. His reading of Babism as the latest manifestation of an ancient, essentialised Persian spirit raised in opposition to

Islam, framed in his account by a western–Christian terms of reference, was a distortion of what began as a manifestation of Shi'ih millennial expectancy joined to an agenda for radical political change.

On politics, society and religion in nineteenth-century Persia

> All in all however it is only a very minor exaggeration to say of the government of Persia that it is non-existent.[38]

As descendents of the great Aryan kings, for Gobineau the modern Persians are not the braggadocios and cowards we find in English writers on Persia such as Morier and Curzon. Gobineau is disinclined to condemn the people of Persia for not wishing to fight for government or nation. Persians were not without courage; they just needed a reason to fight. The problem was that they entertained no personal loyalty for their rulers, perceiving them as foreigners, or for the Islam promoted by the mullahs, in which as we have just seen, he considered they had little faith. The root of this disaffection went back to the Arab conquest and beyond. The

> fundamental law of the land declares [the king] illegitimate and sees in him a mere usurper, demanding obedience to him as the de facto but by no means rightful governor. Here again we see the great antiquity of all things in Persia and how their origins are to be found in the very earliest institutions.[39]

The Shi'ih beliefs of Persia decreed that Ali's family should have ruled after the overthrow of the Sassanians (his son Husayn having supposedly married a Sassanian princess, Bibi Shahrbanu, daughter of the last Sassanian king, Yazdijird III). But the Umayyad caliphs had usurped the rights of Ali's house, and "the result was that all those sovereigns, one after the other, from the Sassanids up to the present ruler, Nasir al-Din Shah, had to accustom themselves, nolens volens, to being de facto but not rightful masters."[40] Gobineau's emphasis on the precariousness of the authority of Persia's rulers is, however, too rooted in the theory that it was Shi'ih law that withheld this legitimacy in the name of the Imams. He fails to affirm the popular basis enjoyed by the Safavids. More importantly, he misconstrues the reasons behind the chronic instability of Persian society.

An aristocrat with legitimist inclinations fallen on hard times, Gobineau had preconceived ideas about the most desirable form of government, and his early writings demonstrate a nostalgia for the Middle Ages.[41] In accordance with his views concerning the continuity of ancient habits of social behaviour and religious belief, Gobineau emphasises a primordial dimension to political life in Persia. Alongside his assertion that the majority of Persians bore no allegiance to a central government upheld by arbitrary rule, he sets up a balancing order of tribal affiliation, what in his *History of the Persians* he termed "monarchie féodale limitée", considering it a permanent feature of Persian civilisation. However, when it came to writing the recent history of Qajar Iran, he found the material evidence for this feudal order lacking. His description of customary fears of collapse into disorder in the

interregnum between the death of Muhammad Shah and accession of Nasir al-Din in 1848 shows his awareness of the centrality of personal rule in Persian society. He accepts on the one hand that when the king is not present "the notion of law as sovereign as such does not exist in Asia" but argues that this "is bizarre; for there more than in any other land the law is immutable", by which he means the feudal structure dominated by tribal custom.[42] But his analysis fails to explain the succession of order and anarchy that, given the absence of an effective, established law, forms according to Homa Katouzian (2007) the perennial pattern of Iranian socio-political history in which the cycle of personal arbitrary rule is followed by lapse into chaos with the death or overthrow of the ruler. On the other hand, as a diplomat Gobineau was in a position to observe the day-to-day workings of the Persian state, and no one was more aware of the control exerted over the government by the two great powers, Russia and Britain. However, he does not notice in the events of 1848 the beneficial effects of the establishment of the principle of primogeniture by the second Qajar monarch, Fath Ali Shah, which Abbas Amanat (1997) sees as a move to create a more stable monarchy in tune with the practice of European states, endorsed by the two powers.

Persia in fact faced even graver crises once the accession of Nasir al-Din Shah had been established. Amanat writes of two challenges threatening the survival of the Qajar throne in 1848: the open insurrections being staged by the Babis, and the Khurasan tribal revolt of the Davalu chief Hasan Khan Salar and his Turcoman and Kurdish allies.[43] Gobineau incorporates the revolt of Hasan Khan Salar within his larger narrative of the Babi movement in *Religions and Philosophies*. He demonstrates the wide appeal Babism held for different social classes, and the weakness of the townsfolk in the face of the religious sectaries. Though he gives prominence to the decisive actions of the premier, Mirza Taqi Khan, Amir Kabir, his presentation of these tumultuous events is largely driven by his close adherence to the chronicle structure adopted by the court historians, Sipihr, Lisan al-Mulk, and Riza Quli Khan (see below). The campaigns against the Babis – who resisted and periodically routed the government forces – are represented as fiascos prompted by the ineptitude of an army led by royal princes who were heavily dependent on Turk, Kurd and Afghan tribal leaders. It is significant here that in spite of his obvious regard for the Babis' heroism, rather than condemning the treachery whereby the Shaykh Tabarsi and Zanjan revolts were concluded, and the terrible vengeance wreaked on the Babis after the attempt on the Shah's life, Gobineau represents these events as medieval tableaux in which all the actors play their parts in accordance with prescribed patterns of social and political behaviour. The Babis' readiness to embrace martyrdom supports this standpoint: it both demonstrated a quintessential Persian mentality that was uncommitted to Islam and confirmed the diametrically opposite character of Persians to Europeans. In these instances Gobineau comes closest to projecting a perennial Persian character that is not far short of that essentialist discourse on the East that Edward Said argued as typical of western Orientalism. As we shall see below, this trans-historical encapsulation proved very influential in the case of at least one later Orientalist, Edward Granville Browne.

According to Gaulmier and his collaborating editors, Gobineau followed Sipihr too closely in representing Babism as "a political rebellion". [44] Indeed Gobineau's explanation of the motivation and significance of the Babi uprisings can take on Marxist overtones, as when he implies that only religious motivation could move Persians to revolt – "to move souls nothing less than religious speculation will suffice". Politics on its own was not sufficient to enlist Persians: they had to be "enrolled under God's banner". [45] Religion was thus a cover for profound social and political dissatisfaction with both the Qajar state and the Shi'ih religious establishment.[46] On the other hand, Gobineau's account of the religious ideas to which Babism responded is certainly faulty. His imperfect understanding of Shi'ih millenarianism causes him to dissociate the figure of the Bab (who he rightly points out had played no direct part in the insurrections) from those raised in his name. Of the twin ingredients the Qaim would have been expected to address – jihad and exposition of occult doctrine – only the latter exercised Gobineau. One of his master narratives was that Persians were only Muslims in veneer. This caused him to radically underplay Shi'ih motifs such as the Karbila paradigm, which contributed greatly to the ideas and behaviour of the Babis. In spite of all this, however, when he brings into play his personal experience of meetings and discussions with Persians and observations on the material scars left over from the conflict, he seems to understand intuitively the impact Babism had had on Persian society. Even when it comes to representing the suppression of the Babis (with whom he clearly sympathised) Gobineau refuses to take sides, distributing qualifications such as fanatic, brave, cowardly and cruel, where the case warranted. "Muslims", he writes of the phenomenal Babi general Mullah Husayn Bushrui, "naturally have a deep horror for the memory of this leader; the Babis a corresponding veneration. They are both right."[47] Defeated and oppressed though the sect might have appeared, Gobineau could see lodged in the Persian psyche beneath outwardly expressed formulae of contempt for Babism, the legacy of an almost superstitious fear and admiration.

Gobineau's influence on later Orientalists and beyond

Promotion of the myth of Aryan Persia.

In spite of the apparent failure of the *Essay on the Inequality of Races* in his own lifetime, Gobineau's "constant need to verify his racial theories"[48] led him to apply these to his writings on the East and in this form their impact was diffused into later nineteenth-century Orientalism. Renan was careful not to commit himself one way or the other over the *Essay*; but his strictures against Semitic rigidity vis-à-vis Aryan inventiveness may have been influenced by Gobineau, though Renan's statements go well beyond the latter in their negative categorisations of Judaism and Islam.[49] The young E.G. Browne, writing in the 1890s, adopts a Gobineau-esque essentialism when he envisages the sweep of Iranian history in terms of competing racial entities/principles.[50] But it was Gobineau's application of Aryanism to medieval rather than ancient history that proved influential on subsequent writers. Although in his chapter

"Sufism" in *Three Years in Asia* Gobineau writes: "Persian Islam is half Hindu, half Guebre", he certainly was not the originator of the notion that Persian Sufism finds its source in Indian mysticism.[51] Even so, his explanation of Persian Shi'ism and Sufism according to racial categories, as Aryan ripostes to Semitic Arabian Islam, chimed with Renan's categorical statement that Sufism was:

> "in Persia at least, [a reaction against] the hypocrisy imposed by Muslim fanaticism . . . a revolt of the Aryan spirit against the dreadful simplicity of the Semitic spirit, excluding by the rigour of its theology all individual devotion, every secret doctrine, every religious connection living and varied."[52]

This formula proved useful to those who might wish to exaggerate the divisions in Islam for imperial or missionary purposes. Lewis Pelly (1879), for example, stated:

> Though the personal history of Ali and his sons was the existing cause of the Shiah schism, its predisposing cause lies far deeper in the impassable ethnological gulf which separates the Aryan and Semitic races.[53]

Browne phrases the same idea (though without Renan's racist emphasis) when he writes after the Arab conquest of Iran:

> "soon a host of heterodox sects born on Persian soil – Shi'ites, Sufis, Isma'ilis, philosophers – arose to vindicate the claim of Aryan thought to be free, and to transform the religion forced on the nation by Arab steel into something which, though still wearing a semblance of Islam, had a significance widely different from that which one may fairly suppose was intended by the Arabian prophet."[54]

Gobineau's ideas on Persian race/history might also be said to have filtered directly or indirectly via other western Orientalists through to Iranian secularists and nationalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century such as Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, Ahmad Kasravi and those who today glorify Iran's ancient but condemn its more recent Islamic past. Nikki Keddie has noted the fashion among certain Iranians for "glorification of ancient Iran and its religion, the hatred of the Arabs and their identification with Islam and of both with Iran's downfall".[55] In his study, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: the Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, Mehrzad Boroujerdi singles out Hamid Enayat's criticism of sympathetic western Orientalists who "used the most colorful language in praise of Iranian culture" and whose ideas were taken up by Iranian scholars, victims to a "perverted Eastern attraction to itself through the West's condescending love for the exotic".[56]

The episode of the Bab

In discussing Babi history and its sources, E.G. Browne wrote enthusiastically in 1891 of Gobineau's *Religions and Philosophies*:

> This most brilliant, most graphic, and most charming work is too well known to need any detailed description. Though largely based on the

> *Lisanu'l-Mulk's* account of the Babi movement, it embodies also many statements derived from Babi sources; and not only are the facts thus obtained sifted with rare judgement and arranged with consummate skill, but the characters and scenes of this stirring drama are depicted in a manner so fresh, so vivid, and so lifelike that the work in question must ever remain a classic unsurpassed and indeed unapproached in the subject whereof it treats.[57]

A century later a more detached Denis MacEoin summed up thus the impact of the Bab's story as disseminated by the Frenchman: "During the nineteenth century, something of a myth of the Bab was perpetuated in some intellectual and literary circles in Europe, largely owing to the widespread influence of the Comte de Gobineau's *Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, which presented an extended and somewhat inaccurate picture of the Bab."[58] Gobineau's presentation of the Babi movement had an influence in Europe for several generations at least after its appearance in 1865. Renan included a lengthy quote about Babi martyrs from *Religions and Philosophies* at the end of *The Apostles* (Les Apôtres) published the following year, and later referred to the subject a number of times.[59] The immediate impact of Gobineau's writings on Babism is demonstrated in the list given by Moojan Momen of periodicals in France, Germany Britain and North America, each of which published either reviews of *Religions and Philosophies*, or longer feature articles on Babism stimulated by the book.[60]

The impact of Gobineau's narrative rested on a number of linked factors: first of all its capacity to exemplify the events surrounding the appearance of Babism as generic to the formation of the great religions of the past. Near the start of his chapter, "Beginnings of Babism", Gobineau speaks of:

> a truly remarkable movement worthy of study on all counts. It permits us to witness developments, manifestations, catastrophes of an order one customarily imagines only in distant epochs at the time of the formation of the great religions.[61]

In the course of his narrative of these phenomena Gobineau places particular emphasis on the significance of Babism for a modern understanding of the origins of religion by drawing parallels with the birth of Christianity. In the process he very much dissociates Babism from the Shi'ih milieu in which it arose. His portrayal of the Bab can be linked to his general tendency to demote Islam and to exalt the genius of the occult "Aryan" Iranian mind with its essentialist predilection for esoteric and mystical doctrines. It was precisely this inflection that Renan picked up on when he wrote: "the amazing religious attempt of the Babis showed the force of the ancient mystical and pantheist leaven which the Arab conquest was not able to snuff out."[62] Furthermore, the explicit and implicit Christian parallels Gobineau incorporated into his analysis played a vital role in shaping the impact Babism had in Europe. Renan used Gobineau's account to compare Babism with Christianity in such matters as the last words attributed to the founders of each religion, their

torture and deaths, the type of disciples who recanted, and the manner in which their followers were martyred. Another of Gobineau's perspectives which may have resonated with Europeans was to project the movement as an eastern response to the new nineteenth-century conditions, emphasising the volatile nature of society under the Qajars and the popular challenge the Babis represented to a corrupt clergy and a weak and indecisive government. His narrative has Mulla Husayn Bushrui tell Muhammad Shah

> that Persia seemed to be embarking on a new path, that relations with Europe were multiplying daily . . . that it was not without importance to favour doctrines, like those of the Bab, which were closer to those generally accepted around the world, like . . . the abolition of legal impurity . . . and, more or less, of polygamy.[63]

The vivid and evocative picture of Babism presented in *Religions and Philosophies* was no mean achievement given the nature of Gobineau's sources. That his view of Babism was inflected by oral testimony (most significantly, as Browne suggests, that of Babis) should not come as a surprise; neither should inclusion of the author's own experiences and observations, given the part these play in his other compositions. Further research needs to be done into Gobineau's oral sources, though it may not be possible to identify these beyond the names Momen gives.[64] Equally intriguing is his use of the court histories, the most important being the *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* by Mirza Taqi Mustaufi, also known as Sipihr, whose official title was Lisan al-Mulk ('the tongue of the kingdom'), the use of which Gobineau specifically acknowledges. Another is the *Rawzat al-Safa* by Riza Quli Khan Hidiyat. Gobineau's account follows Sipihr so closely in structure and detail as to be virtually a free translation. Browne decided not to fully index those parts of the *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* that dealt with events surrounding Babism because Gobineau's work had already incorporated "almost everything relating to the subject". Court chronicles by Muslim historians might be expected to be hostile to Babism, but according to Browne, though Sipihr "brings against the Babis many unfounded and absurd accusations", for example "accusations against the chastity and temperance of [the Bab's] followers" which Gobineau does not reproduce, his account records

> with a fidelity scarcely surpassed by the witty and sarcastic Comte de Gobineau the cowardice, incapacity, and treachery of Mahdi-Kuli Mirza, the courage of Mullah Huseyn of Bushrewyh, the constancy of Aka Muhammad Ali of Tabriz, and the heroism of the Babi women of Zanjan.[65]

Somewhat ironically, therefore, mainly through the conduit of Gobineau, the *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* became the main source of European knowledge about the Babi movement, prompting in the process no little sympathy for it.

Gobineau felt able to fit the information provided by Sipihr (and Hidayat) into the frames outlined above without the need to censor or recast his Persian sources. To these he added his own commentary together with artistic touches. An example

of the latter is the close of the chapter, "Beginnings of Babism", when Mullah Husayn is rescued from a confrontational situation in the house of the Mujtahid of Shahrud by the arrival of news of the death of Muhammad Shah. The French editors state that Gobineau derived this type of cliffhanging ending from a literary genre in vogue in his youth.[66] And as the Browne quote indicates, while Gobineau sticks to the details supplied by the court histories, his interpolations inject an accent that is very different to them, and which is obviously intended to provoke a sympathetic response in a French reader. For instance, a description of Mullah Husayn's attack on Prince Mahdi Quli Mirza ends: "Within the space of a few moments his army, already something of a rabble, was scattered by Mullah Husayn's three hundred men. Was it not the sword of the Lord and of Gideon?"[67] And a little further on, building on Sipihr's honest portrayal of another débâcle for the royalist troops, Gobineau adds: "the truth is that those Muslims were not at all far removed from considering Mullah Husayn a prophet."[68] Gobineau's ironic sense of humour is adept at rendering the impotence of the army to press home its advantage against the energetic Babi assailants:

> Thus several days passed in discussions [between the army leaders] . . . It goes without saying that surveillance had gone from mediocre to being non-existent, and the troops were spread out before the castle [Shaykh Tabarsi] as trustingly as if they had been at home.[69]

As for Gobineau's "Christianising" of the Bab's story, this needless to say is a further addition to Sipihr. For instance, the Frenchman writes:

> It is established that he [the Bab] read the Gospels in the translations brought by the Protestant missionaries, he often conferred with the Jews of Shiraz, [and] he sought out knowledge of Guebre doctrine.[70]

Stephen Lambden argues there is no evidence for such assertions.[71] Elsewhere Gobineau claims Manuchihr Khan believed "such an extraordinary character as Mullah Husayn should be a saint", then proceeds to call him a "missionary" who sought his listener's sympathy "in absolutely the same way" as Saint Paul preached to the Athenians. In the next sentence Gobineau adds "there is no relationship between the Babi idea of the *Point* and what Muslims think about the Imam Mahdi."[72] Such examples serve to underline how the Frenchman set out to detach the Bab from his Shi'ih background, turned him into a seeker and would-be exponent of comparative religion, but above all a Persian messiah. Gobineau also planted the gist of an idea for others bent on drawing Christian parallels with the "Persian" Shi'ih version of Islam. He is an important early source for European knowledge of Persian religious theatre, the *taziya*, to which *Religions and Philosophies* devotes several chapters. Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan use Gobineau's material to stretch out the supposed commonalities between Christianity and Shi'ih Islam with respect to their treatment of the themes of

suffering and self-sacrifice.[73] A deep intersection of the two faiths is drawn from an implied comparison between the story of the martyrdom of Husayn and the crucifixion of Christ. Significantly, both Arnold and Renan introduce the Bab into their comparison of Jesus and Husayn: he functions as a sort of intermediary, or latter-day exemplar of the principle of religious sacrifice.

Significance of Gobineau's work in the writing of modern Iranian history

Besides his influence on nineteenth-century western Orientalists and some Iranian nationalists, a case might be made for the significance of Gobineau's writings within the broader scope of Iranian history. This would require looking back to the vantage point of the mid-nineteenth century when he composed his works on Persia, and then tracing the trajectory Iranian society has followed down to the present day. Such a perspective might help us to recover the pioneering status of Gobineau's writings – idiosyncratic as they seemed in their own time and perhaps continue to do today. Gobineau's scrutiny of the Iranian scene encompassed many aspects; it is however specifically on the part religious ideas have played in Iranian history then and since that we might focus. Shi'ism was little studied in the nineteenth century and well into the second half of the twentieth western scholars of Islam paid most of their attention to the Sunni world. This state of affairs changed when the Iranian revolution of 1978–9 drew the world's attention to Iran, producing many analytic interpretations of recent Iranian history, and causing earlier work on Shi'ism and radical protest, such as Nikki Keddie's studies of Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani" and his Azali collaborators, to be republished and updated to fit the new conditions.[74] At around the same time, Jean Gaulmier et al. edited a selection of Gobineau's works. To contextualise his ideas on Shi'ism they drew upon French scholars such as Louis Massignon and Henri Corbin, the former decidedly an authority in Sunni Islam, the latter a specialist in mystical rather than mainstream Shi'ih teaching. To elucidate Gobineau's commentary on Babism the French editors relied on a limited number of E.G. Browne's writings and the work of another French diplomatist and Orientalist of the early twentieth century, very sympathetic to the Bab, A-L-M. Nicolas. Coincidentally, there also arose in the early 1980s a new academic interest in Babism. This was mostly the result of the emergence of a group of young scholars who began studying Babi history, which also involved their scrutinising the Shi'ih and Shaykhi milieu surrounding its inception.[75] As Denis MacEoin wrote in 1992:

> Now, it seems to me that the study of Babism, particularly that of Babi history, has entered a critical phase, and one in which questions of analysis must play a vital role. After a lengthy period of neglect, Babism has reemerged as a subject increasingly interesting in its own right and as an important aspect of the study of modern Iran and nineteenth-century Iranian history. Its significance can, of course, be exaggerated, especially by those working in the field: Babism was, after all, little more than a brief

> series of incidents overshadowed by events of much greater moment in the wider world. But it is equally true that the Babi movement can be – and has been – much underestimated by historians. If we consider its original political potential, its radical departure from Islamic norms, and the intrinsic interest of the religious doctrines preached by its leaders, it should be clear that it merits much deeper study than has so far been accorded it.[76]

Gobineau's role in foregrounding the importance of Babism within the history and society of nineteenth-century Persia remains not only foundational but of continuing critical significance. His narrative of Babism resonates, as we have seen, through Browne's work on the same topic, as does his insistence on the value of Babism as a talisman of the Persian spirit and as a tragically foreclosed avenue of national renewal. Of the recent academics to address Babism disinterestedly, arguably Nikki Keddie and Mangol Bayat have carried forward one notable perspective implicit in Gobineau's work, that is, that Babism played a highly significant role in transmitting in religious form social and political protest against state and clergy in nineteenth-century Persia. Gobineau's inscription of Babism must be seen as erroneous in its attempt to detach the Bab's and his followers' religious ideas and behaviour from their Shi'ih context. However, he appears to have understood intuitively the dynamic moving through that movement which later scholars – most notably E.G. Browne and Abbas Amanat – have seen at work subsequently in the *mashrutih* or Iranian constitutional revolution of 1905–11.[77] Arguably, the transformational urge that Babism represented has yet to work its way through Iranian society. Iran's engagement with modernity will remain imperfect until – as Gobineau urged – it adopts some of the more forward looking reforms muted by the Babis – most notably the enfranchisement of women and updating of the social code.[78]

Though suspect for the sort of reasons a nineteenth-century western Orientalist would be in the Islamic world (and from a Saidean perspective not entirely unjustly so) Gobineau's work is both fiercely protective and appreciative of Persians and other oriental peoples, and cynically aware of the intriguing interference and potential for aggressive intervention represented by western "influence" in the East. The reader of Gobineau's eastern writings cannot fail to notice how they challenge Orientalist notions that are arguably still current today in the West.[79] Disinclined to wield the labels "fanatic", "backward", "barbarian", and so forth, the Frenchman, on the contrary, evokes the variety, flexibility and protean character of nineteenth-century Persian religiosity in such a way as to throw into doubt this rhetoric of the West, widespread in Gobineau's time as well as ours. His narratives might inspire the reader to re-think Orientalist notions of the monolith that is supposed to be Islam, and to appreciate instead that cultures are rarely produced by one all embracing belief system, but are more frequently founded on older customs and practices, especially in the East where things are not always as they outwardly appear, and where diversity and eclecticism and religious innovation have, time out of mind, been the order of the day.[80] On the other hand, it is missing the point to argue that

since he was an idiosyncratic amateur Gobineau's contribution to Orientalism (along with Renan's) has been exaggerated by Edward Said; Said's mistake was to conflate Gobineau with Renan (probably because he read very little of Gobineau's work). Although he was right to point out the racist conclusions that were drawn from both Frenchmen, Said did not appreciate Gobineau's split-Orientalism – his sympathetic and creative understanding of the East alongside his responsibility for siring ideas that became entrenched in later western writing about it. This, as I have argued elsewhere, was a phenomenon by no means restricted to Gobineau, but can also be observed in other nineteenth-century travellers, political agitators and even academics, for whom Muslim nations became simultaneously objects of desire and subjects to be theorised and narrativised from positions of individual eccentricity.[81]

Geoffrey Nash, January 2008

Part I

THREE YEARS IN ASIA

1

THE NATION

So here we are finally settled in our new lodgings; the days pass in quick succession. For the next three years or so each one of them will add to our experience and help us penetrate the great secret of the life of a people so different from our own, and made up of so many races whose ideas and interests intertwine in such a way as to form a tight network whose strands sprout and grow without ever joining, intermarry but never merge. Moralists have come up with the axiom that man, taken in isolation, is difficult to know. By that they mean men like themselves, of the same blood, the same customs, living in the same environment. The farther their studies, however well considered, have led them, the more the learned men who have set themselves the task of analysing their own people have become afraid of their task and the less they are willing to guarantee the ensuing results. As for those who have wanted to understand neighbouring nations, foreign, but living nonetheless within the orb of light of the same civilization, they have rightfully been considered bold spirits, and when by chance they succeed, great spirits. We must therefore assume that philosophizing on Asiatic populations, so unlike our own in every way, is a difficult task, and that many precautions, much attention is necessary in order not to fall into error at every step.

I believe that was, and still is, the opinion of the men who have best known that large fraction of humankind, the Elphinstons, the Burnes, the Campbells, the Kayes[1]; but the common run of observers are less scrupulous. Some of them consider the peoples of the Morningland[2] rare peculiarities lost in forgotten recesses of the globe and see in them only savages, debased if they submit to European rapacity, bloodthirsty if they do not. For that sort of mind, which forms the majority of the judges, Europe represents the navel of the world, and all that is not Europe exists without right and steals its share of air and sunlight; in their arrogant ignorance, it is those people who applaud all the abuses of force without understanding their hatefulness, and crown victories of which they do not perceive the inanity. Cruel as imbecilic children, to their eyes every ruined, shot or hanged Asiatic is a host legitimately placed on the altar of progress. When they hear of some disaster affecting those distant lands they tirelessly prophetize the certain and imminent triumph of Christianity and civilization.[3]

Others, no less frivolous, feel they have more right to decide on the question.

They have visited the lands they speak of. They have assured themselves of the fact that Asiatics are men, and very numerous men to boot. They recognize that in a census of humanity, to the eyes of a judge who had to decide on the value and importance of the races according to their fecundity, they would far outstrip us. They have also observed, (and who could fail to see it?) that the Europeans who inhabit those climes more often than not do little honour to Christianity, and are not the most apt to give the natives a high opinion of our civilization. But for some strange reason they identify the effects of these truths only in the relations between the Europeans themselves. They complain of the vices from which they suffer but make no attempt to discover whether those vices, besides the bad impression they create, cause direct suffering to the natives and bring results it would be useful to be aware of, even if only to find ways of putting a stop to or attenuating them. This species of observer, even if they have lived in Asia for twenty years, see little, see badly or see nothing at all. They do not know the local languages, and do not judge it useful to learn them. They have no notion of local history, and in the mass that swirls around them they perceive and recognize few individuals, usually their servants: and despise even them because they dress differently, eat differently, speak differently. It is possible that these reasons for disdain emerge in their accounts less crudely than I have indicated, but emerge they do; and beings who wear long robes, eat with their fingers, sit on the ground, and speak Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Hindustani or Chinese, are not men. I recall one traveller, a man of a certain intelligence, who, never having been able to dispense with the services of a dragoman for all communication, even the most basic, nevertheless asserted that that which he found most shocking in the Asiatic character and which confirmed the sad opinion he had of it was the profound dissimulation and absolute lack of frankness he had always observed in the people he came into contact with.

In order to escape from all these ways of seeing and forming opinions I have tried to completely repudiate any true or false idea of superiority over the peoples I was studying. I wanted, as far as possible, to put myself in their place, before pronouncing any judgement on their ways of being or feeling; and above all I have forbidden myself, as far as possible, any of those brilliantly hollow conclusions, which are today appreciated above all others: for accepting the validity of spouted phrases whilst knowing their falsehood is the principal characteristic of our time.

The Persians, of whom I can speak in more detail because I have seen more of them, are a most ancient nation, and, as they themselves say, perhaps the most ancient in the world to have had regular government and have functioned on the earth as a great people. That truth is present in the minds of the whole Iranian family. It is not only the lettered classes who know and express it; people of the lowest classes revel in it, speak gladly of it and make it a subject of everyday conversation. It is the basis of the firm sense of superiority that constitutes one of their collective notions and an important part of their cultural patrimony. I have often received the compliment, that the French, (as far as they could know) are the ancient monarchy of Europe *par excellence,* and that in this they resemble the Persians. To the minds of the speakers this represented a courtesy towards me, and at the same time a great

glory for them: for by showing me how far my people are above all others in Europe, they at the same time make it clear how great a distance remains between us.

From such a universally widespread and favoured opinion one must draw the conclusion that tradition exercises a great authority over the minds of the population. It is absolutely not the sole domain of the literate, it is the common wealth, and everyone wishes to possess the largest possible share of it and takes an extreme pleasure in its continual growth. By tradition I mean the annals of the country, theological matters, literature, a certain number of scientific notions, in short, everything that constitutes the cultural heritage of their ancestors.

The history of the Persians is certainly far from exact.[4] There are a thousand reasons why it should be thus – the great distances involved, the innumerable invasions, the interminable revolutions. It is also permissible for a people who still possess fragments relating to facts preceding recorded history, which have survived the great wars of Phraortes with the Scyths and the Assyrians, Cyrus' warring period, the time of the usurpation of the first Darius, the Macedonian conquest, the Parthian domination, to have gaps in its annals, and to fill them with contradictory fables, especially when one considers that with the Sassanids, that is, dating from the third century after Jesus Christ, everything is archived and reaches us in far more complete and satisfying condition than the annals of the Occident before the thirteenth century.

In Persia people adore stories. It would be an understatement to say that in all periods the most exclusively warlike kings and princes have dispatched ambassadors and declared and sustained wars in order to carry off or keep a precious volume. This could be the result of individual caprice; but more indicative is the great sorrow with which Fath Ali Shah handed over the history books and literature that the 1828 treaty forced him to cede to Russia,[5] and even more so the difficulty one encounters in trying to separate someone of the lowest classes from a manuscript. In order for them to consent to sell it they must be in the direst need; and the less they are educated and capable of appreciating the value of the work so dear to their hearts the harder it is to reach a bargain with them, for in that case they never fail to imagine some important secret virtues in the jumble of mysterious characters whose sense they cannot explain. The manuscript or printed book one is haggling over is always the most precious work ever produced by the hand of man; it unfailingly contains all the wisdom of the genii. A suitcase was stolen from an English traveller, and the thieves sold the content bit by bit. After a year or two somebody brought to one of my friends a book that was said to contain all the knowledge of the Europeans. By that pompous expression the orator meant the art of balloon building, railway construction, steamboat propulsion, all things which have greatly impressed the Asiatics and upon which they reason interminably. That rare work was an incomplete edition of Lord Byron. But how often have I been offered manuscripts allegedly containing the history of the most ancient Persian dynasties! For the most endearing point is that a true Persian is infinitely more curious to learn about the deeds of Jamshid or Cyrus than in the edification to be got from reading of the life of the Prophet himself.

However, not everybody has the wherewithal to study a great deal. A great distance therefore separates the scholar from a man of the lower classes, that goes without saying, and with many intermediary degrees, but that distance is by no means what we might imagine judging by the state of affairs in Europe. There, illiterate people know absolutely nothing of history and in no way concern themselves with it. It would be hard to find a peasant whose memory had retained the names of Louis XIV, of Charlemagne or of Cæsar. The idea of Napoleon the First himself, who lived only yesterday, is already scarcely historic for those crude and obtuse intellects, and nobody is unaware that what is told of him in the countryside has already become the stuff of legend. But in Persia I have never met a man of even the humblest condition who did not know at least the principal traits of those interminable annals, which begin with the world and lead to the present sovereign. Without doubt they confuse many facts; without doubt, they honour such and such a figure with many actions that do not belong to him; Jamshid is too brilliant for them, Rustam too heroic, and Shah Abbas the Great, if one believes the muledrivers, built almost all the caravanserais in Persia. I do not approach the question from the point of view of knowing whether it would be a good idea to address oneself to the Persian populace to obtain an exact account of its dynasties; I merely note that the nation's past is a favourite theme of conversation for that populace, and that to its mind listening to a reading of a book or, even better, to some learned person who wishes to teach his listeners something they do not yet know is time both pleasantly and constructively spent. I have often witnessed gatherings of this type where both the speaker and the audience were of the lowest condition. Those academic sessions were held at the foot of a ruin or in a ravine, with everyone squatting on the ground; but the assembly was as attentive as if they had been settled in armchairs around a green carpet in some official hall. I camped in the desert for four months, twenty leagues from Tehran and my men gathered every evening in the tent of one of the pishkhidmats, or house stewards. There were readings and then discussions about some ancient historical event. The native inhabitants of those camps were always present at those meetings; the more able spoke, the more ignorant listened and tried to retain what they heard. Not even the soldiers wanted to miss that serious pastime. I was often asked to arbitrate on discussions. A nation that attaches such value to its antecedents evidently possesses great vitality.

Persian nationality also manifests itself by another symptom – a fondness for the memory of the Imams. The Imams are the sons and grandsons of Ali. Ali himself is included in that veneration, which borders on worship. There is no Persian who does not feel a profound attachment to those holy figures, and whatever the inner beliefs of the person one is speaking to, no matter how far they stray from the Muslim faith, he will never take kindly to anyone speaking lightly of the Imams. The reason is obvious. It is that Ali, although an Arab by birth, found many followers in Persia, and was persecuted by the Arabs; it is that his eldest son, Husayn, married a princess of Sassanid blood who converted to Islam and became a saint[6]; it is that the children of this holy couple and all the survivors of Ali's family found refuge in Persia and became Persians, and that the Arabs, by persecuting the nation,

also persecuted them. So the cause of the descendants of Ali became that of a conquered Persia, and in the trials and tribulations of that family Iranians see those of their ancestors. This love for the Imams is therefore a form of national feeling, and one must be careful to show the utmost respect for it if one does not wish to shock the natives. A friend once said to me that in his country one can curse everyone and everything except the Imams and the wife of the person one is speaking to. On those points alone one could make mortal enemies.

In fact, apart from the question of the Imams and the supremacy of their national history over the history of the rest of the world, the Persians have, strictly speaking, nothing that constitutes patriotism. They dearly love their country and consider it by far the most pleasant, the most fertile, the healthiest. *Iran khub mamlakat ast*, Iran is a good country, is a maxim that is repeated constantly and in a most touching and winning fashion, for it contains much truth; but it must be admitted that they are little concerned with national independence; that since the advent of Islam they are in no way attached to their dynasties, which they see rise and fall with the most complete indifference; that they care little whether the government that dominates them be composed of their countrymen or foreigners. This point, so revolting according to the European way of thinking, in no way touches them, and one cannot but see that they would adopt the domination not only of another Asiatic people like themselves, Muslim like themselves, but Christian, European, and perhaps even with a preference for the latter. There are not merely reasons for supposing it, but decisive causes for believing it. When the Russians campaigned against Persia in 1827 they were dreaded and hated. The rumour had gone around that after demolishing the mosques the Russians, fanatical Christians, massacred the mullahs, killed the children and outraged the women. The initial successes of this reputedly savage army brought great terror.

However, despite such fear, which could easily have gone to their heads, nearly everybody reflected in the way that ancient nations do in such cases: "That concerns the government, perhaps my neighbour, but not me personally". So when a high ranking and even greatly venerated clergyman in Tabriz preached holy war and set off with a number of men of the people at first all went well. Many of the volunteers deserted however. During the night the faithful troupe lost more of its valiant champions, and when the leader reviewed the troops in the morning he found them so reduced in number that he too was obliged to abandon the enterprise and return to Tabriz by forced march. But one would be quite wrong to suppose this people lacking in military courage, it has a great deal but needs a reason to fight and repel a foreign invasion; so little is it accustomed to liking what it has that whatever fear one manages to inspire fails to make the expenditure of its strength seem appropriate.

After the Russians had successfully taken and passed Tabriz, even reaching Turkmanchay and Miyanih, at the foot of the mountains of Kaflan-Kuh, the country began to know them better and, thanks to the severe discipline established by Prince Paskievich,[7] those men, of whom such a terrible portrait had been drawn, showed themselves to be quite different from what had been imagined. The wise

men congratulated themselves on not having gotten themselves killed for a danger that was clearly imaginary, and when the Russians withdrew, taking with them the four provinces that had to be ceded to them, they left behind the impression that the Europeans were in no way either fanatics or devils, or as evil as they had been portrayed; that perhaps they were wrong to be Christians, but that was really only their own business, and the good thing about them was that they paid for what they bought regularly and with good money. From then on a considerable annual emigration was organized between the Transcaucasian borderlands and the Russian States. Every year it has gotten bigger. Some of those who go end up never returning and settle on the far side of the river Arax; the others, more numerous, do not renounce their country, but more and more they spread the idea that when, for one reason or another, one is not happy with one's master, there is nothing simpler than looking for a new one. This viewpoint has made such progress that the two Caspian Sea provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran have requested to be occupied and annexed to the imperial throne; and even at the gates of Tehran, a few hours from that capital, some peasants expressed to me a strong desire that all of northern Persia, and their village, become a Russian possession. It goes without saying that the formerly Persian provinces, now governed from St. Petersburg, are generally agitated by opposing sympathies; they would like to go back to being Iranian. The Persians can put up with a government, but they are no longer inclined to love or interest themselves in one. That is a subject that merits analysis, but first I am going to tell of another event I witnessed.

During the last war the London cabinet waged on Persia,[8] in order to swell the ranks of its forces, the Tehran government gave the order to preach jihad in all the mosques of the empire. The peculiarity of the resolution was that it was first suggested by an Armenian Catholic. Before it was adopted the most curious discussions took place. Many statesmen rejected it vehemently. They deemed it a seriously bad idea to mobilize the lower echelons of the town, not knowing, if they once banded together, what else it might occur to them to do, and if royal authority could be maintained. Others found such recourse barbarous and, lukewarm Muslims as they were, had no taste for fomenting the development of a zeal, which at the very least seemed to them ridiculous. Finally, the canniest condemned the measure as useless, not believing that the slightest disposition to get over-excited in the interests of the faith existed amongst the masses.

But if the hesitations and discussions of the politicians were interesting to follow, the attitude of the bazaar was infinitely amusing. The stallholders ran around in extreme agitation. "They are going to preach jihad", they said. "Why, to stop the English from coming here? Why shouldn't they come? What good does that do us? They have money, they will spend, they pay cash; where's the harm? Let those who don't want them go and fight. Why don't they go? What's stopping them? Do they need to preach jihad to go off to war? Let them preach in their own houses and leave us in peace".

The great concern was to see the rabble arm itself and roam the streets, as they do in Europe when the homeland is declared to be in danger, with all the

inconveniences entailed by that kind of defender. They could already see shops pillaged, houses broken into, murder and mayhem everywhere; as for religion, amidst all the tales of woe nobody even gave it a thought. The unhappily small group of honourable mullahs disapproved and gave the idea a wide berth, making no attempt to hide the fact that the faith was at no risk in the present war. The wealthiest merchants were unhappy; military leaders found the idea despicable.

As for the populace, the main target of the sermon and object of the government's measure, the announcement of what was to come left them completely indifferent. With an intelligence that does them honour they well grasped the probable outcome; that is, that if they demonstrated enthusiasm they would immediately be marched off to the theatre of war but that in no case would they be permitted to plunder. They therefore decided to maintain a strict neutrality.

It was amidst these rather unwarlike deliberations that the fateful day arrived. I do not know how things transpired in other towns, but in Tehran the bazaar was closed all day by supreme order and the entire Muslim population summoned to the royal mosque. Merchants, scribes, servants, public officials, soldiers, ordinary people, everybody squeezed and crowded in. Once in there was no way out. The king's farrashes, armed with long sticks, kept order, while many others, directed by the kadkhudas, or local mayors, and the kalantar, or prefect of police, made sure that nobody remained in the streets or was taking care of his own business.

The imprisoned multitudes accepted their lot patiently, in Persian fashion, that is, with a lot of joking. With no respect for the sanctity of the surroundings, people called out loudly, sitting on their heels, holding the least canonical discussions and allowing themselves the most irreverent observations on the object of the meeting. As the prime minister and the great men of the empire were supposed to attend the sermon on the holy war and had not yet turned up, a mullah took the pulpit and began an introductory preamble with the sole aim of occupying the assembly. He chose for his subject the usefulness of prayer, and endeavoured to demonstrate that the best way to get rich was to practise it assiduously. Intentionally or unintentionally this was precisely what was on the minds of the congregation, who were burning to return to their trafficking, and who were being held against their will in the holy place. "Muslims", cried the mullah, "Do you want to become great merchants, acquire fertile lands, have many sons and an opulent existence? Multiply ceaselessly the number of your prayers; on that path everything will come to you". Thereupon he recounted endless tales of the lives of saints, supporting his text and proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that the way to succeed in this world was to think only of the next.

But the inhabitants of Tehran were not in a very devout mood that day. One mocking voice after another interrupted the preacher, and he could not quieten the tumult, the laughter, the ever more frequent catcalls. One said: "Since you know the secret of getting rich without doing anything, why are you always crying poverty?" From the far side a voice answered: "It's because he's as bad a Muslim as he is lazy. He's not stupid enough to waste his time praying when there are wine merchants in town". Cries followed, quips, puns, a terrible din, the desperate efforts of the

mullah to win over his public, the final rout. He descended from the pulpit announcing the arrival of the prime minister and that the sermon of the day would soon begin.

In effect, Mirza Aqa Khan made his entry with the whole court and took his place on a dais that had been reserved for him. Silence fell, or rather, a seeming silence. The leader of the government said a few words to supplement the rather obvious shortfall in pious sentiment of those present, then the holy proclamation was read. It called upon all Muslims to gird their loins and rush to defend the faith against the threat of the infidel. Another mullah rather coolly attempted to comment on the text, then the meeting was dissolved, and the delighted population, anxious to get out, pushing and shoving, climbing on shoulders and uttering deafening cries, poured out into the streets like a swarm of schoolboys. For several days the holy war was the talk of the bazaars and the baths, it was an inexhaustible source of clowning and parody. Then it slipped out of mind, and I have never heard that a single volunteer set out from a single town or hamlet. In Shiraz it looked for a moment as if the populace might be moved to set off, but to help the English rather than attack them. And in fact the idea of the jihad was not a good one, because everybody knew that not one important or respected man would take part in it and that they counted on the dregs of society to get worked up. This was all such a foregone conclusion that the idea did not even stem from Muslim politicians, and the Armenian priest who supplied it took his inspiration from the foreign examples of Shamil and Abd al-Qadir.[9] The root of this indifference is once again that it matters little to the Persians who governs them and they have neither a preference nor a disliking for anybody; with the sole reservation that they never like the existent power. This is an age-old mental predisposition.

Now, why is this so? Why has time instilled this cold scepticism in the entire nation? This is what the examination of the ethnic composition of the blood of this people will show.

In Europe we have the habit of calling Persian an amalgam of races which the people of that country call Iranian and which they divide into two distinct but intimately linked groups. To one of them they give indiscriminately the name of Farsi, Lur, or Kurd; the other they call Turkish. It is the joining of the two halves of this one whole which, in official and historical language, is designated by the term of millat-i irani, the Iranian nation, just as we call the group of neo-Latin and Gallo-Germanic-populations living between the Pyrenees and the Belgian border the French nation.

And just as these constituent parts of the French people can in turn be divided up into numerous varieties, on one side the people of Auvergne, Provence, Poitou, on the other the Picardians, Flemish and Lorrainese; so the Farsis have many sub-divisions, and the Turks also have a few. But they derive considerable advantage and an incontestable superiority from their greater homogeneity.

As far back as chronicles go the Farsis arise from a mixture of Arabic speaking and consequently Semitic multitudes with peoples who in ancient times came from the Far East to the Iranian plateaux in successive migratory waves. In the first

period the main theatre of this intermixture was the present-day province of Shustar, the former Susiana, and Persis or province of Fars, as far as and including Kerman and Yazd. The centuries of Assyrian domination, which ended long before Cyrus, increased the Semitic influence in this mingling of bloods and carried it further towards Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar. The result was that, from approximately the ninth century before our era, the southern Iranians, the Farsis, were on the whole perceived as little different from the Assyrians of Mesopotamia.

But when that domination ended the northern element reasserted itself. It had always retained its dominance in the long chain of mountains that stretches from the Hindu Kush to the Caucasus and in the provinces that border that chain to the north and south. It had maintained close ties with the innumerable white tribes from which it originated and which our history books call the Scythian nations. They strengthened their bonds more than ever before. Many Scyth families settled in the empire, even reaching the south. They came to combat the influence of Semitic blood by the different qualities intermarriage introduced into the veins of those ancient populations, and more than ever Persia found itself torn in different directions by the double ethnic action it sustained. Under the successors of Darius, Mesopotamian influence was considerable and its great capitals filled with Assyrians. After Alexander, under the Arsacid regime, the Scythian element triumphed, regained the upper hand and kept that pre-eminence for about five hundred years. With the Sassanids the sceptre once again fell into the hands of Semitic populations, and during the entire period of domination of those kings, with the capitals decidedly established in the south and with relations between Arabs and Persians closer and more frequent than ever before, the empire became more semitized than ever. Then suddenly Islam irrupted and covered the empire as far as the Indus with a ravaging cloud of adventurers from Yemen, Oman, Hijaz, Syria and Asia Minor who, seeing themselves transported into a living paradise and masters of a flourishing region where generations of their ancestors had been slaves, spread out in great number, determined nevermore to depart. They intermarried, founded families, and like a second flood covered the east of Iran in fresh Semitic blood in a way that had not been seen since the origins. But then the violence of the western race ceased and the northern invasions, the Scythian invasions, now known as Turkish, recommenced. They ended barely two or three hundred years ago, and have still not absolutely ceased. After they had ceased crossing the Oxus, a remarkable peculiarity turned the avant-garde of those invasions back across the territories they had already left, that is that the Turks, having reached Anatolia and Syria, where the Crusaders encountered them, mostly entered Persia, where the house of Uthman began laying the foundations of its greatness.[10] Almost unanimously the other Turkish nations placed that house, which stemmed from a minor branch of the Saljuqs of Iconium, on the index.[11] The tribes wanted neither to obey nor recognize it, and obliged it, like Romulus, to form a nation of vagabonds and freed slaves, who returned en masse to Iran, submitted to the laws of the Pasha, and lived in the areas assigned to them. So, looking closely, one can see that the Turkish tribes as well as the Farsi populations have inhabited the land for centuries, and from time

immemorial; that both origins are foreign, both are conquerors, and have an equal right of possession. So neither can really treat the other as an intruder, and yet they hate each other because they are unalike, speak different tongues and have likewise had very different destinies.

The Farsi population is itself composed of two categories. One inhabits the mountains of the west and south: these are the Bakhtiaris, Lurs, Kurds, and a certain number of tribes dismembered by royal decree and scattered indiscriminately as far as Mazandaran, the borders of Turkmenistan, the outskirts of Kandahar. They are people of great physical beauty, remarkable strength, fearless, very active, very intelligent; they provide admirable leaders and have given much to the Asiatic world. I will cite only Saladin and Nadir;[12] but they are absolutely indisciplinable. To get the better of them one needs a rod of iron. They have fiery imaginations, are excitable in the highest degree, have as exalted a sense of honour as the mediæval Spaniards, and very little sense. It therefore ensues that they can be put to no useful purpose and do only what pleases them individually. Those gentlemen rarely leave their mountains.

The other category could not be more different. It is composed of the populations of Persian towns, except those of Azarbaijan and Khamsa, a small province touching on that great north-western region. It speaks Farsi or related dialects. It comes from all over Iran and claims descent indifferently from Farsis, Arabs, Indians, Turks and foreigners. It lives from domestic employ, minor administrative positions, commerce, and especially from usury and second-hand trade; it supplies statesmen, scholars, painters, poets, musicians, dancers, adventurers, many idlers, and is composed almost entirely of people with their wits about them. But it has neither tribal nor, really, strong family ties, for in Asia the two necessarily go together. It feels neither strong friendships nor hatreds; is devoted to nobody, counts on nobody, takes things as they come, lives day-by-day and very little can surprise it. In addition it professes principles on the instability of worldly matters that would be the delight of the Hebrew prophets, but are little apt to creating anything lasting. As the urban population represents a great number of the inhabitants of Persia it is naturally very important. It is swelled by peasants from many villages of the Farsi race, but who, settled in the south as they are, are more semitized than the Farsis of the cities, like Tehran, Damghan and Qazvin, where there is a greater proportion of the Turkish element in the blood, although the majority of these people remain Tajik, that is, Farsi.

The Turks are a whole other matter, and observing them one would think oneself a thousand leagues from what one sees in the Tajiks. The core of the race has remained nomadic. But this term is understood in the Occident in such an inexact sense that I cannot desist from explaining it. Nomads are not people who live in tents and wander at will over a vast expanse of territory according to their caprice. They are farmers or shepherds, especially the Turkish nomads. In winter they live in one place, always the same, where the wealthiest usually have their houses. In summer they seek out cooler climes in the mountains, in some spot that is permanently attributed to them; there they wend their way, generation after generation,

along the same paths, stopping at the same watering holes and remaining the same number of months, or even days. So they often have rural property in several locations, and their pilgrimages rarely exceed fifteen leagues and often far less. It takes a revolution, persecution, the will of a prince to trouble this state of affairs. If we look closely we can see that there are nomads of this type in Europe, particularly in Switzerland, but the climate does not allow them to use tents.

The chief characteristic then of these nomads is not wandering, but their great attachment to the tribe; to be as unified, as homogenous as the urban Farsis, or Tajiks, are disunited and heterogeneous. They are, besides, generally more resistant and hard-working, and, as for morality, incomparably superior. Last but not least, they are endowed with considerable military spirit. All these qualities in some respects make up for what the Tajiks possess in greater quantity, that is, quick and lively intelligence. The Turks are unquestionably inferior in this respect. They are ponderous, dense; and when one sees them arguing with a Tajik one can be almost certain they will get the worst of it. However, the proof that what they lack in pleasantness they make up for in solidity is that all the successive dynasties have been of northern origin; to limit ourselves to the post-Alexandrian period, the Arsacids were Scyths; the Sassanids came from the ruling family of Aran, a small Caspian province; as soon as the Caliphate lost its vigour it was the Ghaznavids, the Saljuqs, two Turkish races, who reunited the empire. After the Mongols came the Tartars, after the Tartars, the Turkmen; after them the Safavids, descendants of Ardabil, a Turk; after the Safavids and the long interregnum, the present dynasts, all Turks like their forerunners.

But if it is easy to understand how the shortcomings and even the qualities of the Tajiks have never allowed them to take the reins of government, one should also understand that no interest binds them to royal houses of different blood, which seek their support elsewhere and treat them with no consideration. Since deepest Antiquity the fall of the monarchy has been of complete indifference to the Tajiks, because they are not the monarchy; and, as they are an agglomeration but not a political body, it is a matter of no less indifference to them if the head of State is a Tajik like them, a Turk or anything else. Perhaps, the human heart being what it is, they would feel even less love and respect for one of their own than for a stranger. Envy would enter the equation.

From the Turkish viewpoint things are quite different, but the result is the same. The triumphant tribe is satisfied if the advantage it possesses of counting the sovereign amongst its ranks brings it wealth and favour, always a difficult problem to resolve. Given the same conditions their allies and relatives would think like them; but the other tribes? The other tribes remain in a permanent state of irritation because they believe themselves to have imprescriptible rights to be royal stock in their turn, and await the day impatiently. I speak of the Turkish tribes of course. The Farsi and Kurdish tribes give such matters no thought, and are busy enough making year-round war on each other.

To sum up, I would therefore say that, in my opinion, the Persians have a sort of immortal patriotism; they love themselves in their country and their country in

themselves. They would see the most diverse governments pass over their heads without ever becoming enamoured of any of them; and, by that fact, show themselves to be devoid of political patriotism; but the successive dominations, conquests, annexations, will exhaust themselves and fall without denting Iranian individuality. Persia will be mutilated in vain, divided, its name could be taken away, it would remain Persia, and, consequently, undying. I seem to see a granite rock cast into the depths of a sea dried by the revolving globe, borne onward by a river and, worn, rounded at the corners, frayed in many places but still granite, resting for the moment in an arid vale. It will continue its pilgrimage when it sees fit. It matters little which element will sweep it along or what adventures it might have. As long as it does not vanish it will always be granite; and it will wear out a thousand forces that in a hundred years will barely leave a mark on it.

2

RELIGION

After national sentiment, which according to its nature gives a people its place in creation, the most interesting point to observe is the study of religious beliefs.

Judging by appearances, Persia is a country of Muhammadans. Only the Muslim faith is recognized, and the inhabitants, who always have some pious phrase drawn from the Koran on their lips, seem to be the world's most zealous believers. It is impossible to converse for a quarter of an hour with any native whomsoever, on any subject, without hearing expressions such as: *inshallah*! (please God!), *mashallah*! (God save us!), *khudavand-i alam* (Lord of the world), *hazrat-i payghambar* (His Highness the Prophet), *salavat allah ali hu ala*! (may God save and exalt him!) and other pious expressions of the same kind. If he speaks of the Koran he devoutly calls it the *Book of God.* If he wishes to quote a few verses he will call them *precious verses*; and, no matter how small his public, will never fail to utter those terms of studied piety without a sanctimonious, nasal accent, inflating his voice, raising his eyes to heaven and looking for all the world like a little saint. Yet for all that it can be taken as an irrefutable fact that scarcely one out of twenty Persians corresponding to this portrait believes what he is saying. How has an entire nation been led into the curious spectacle of a universal hypocrisy that deceives nobody? This curious moral and political philosophical question is undoubtedly most worthy of examination.

I would tend to believe that the origin of this phenomenon pre-dates Islam. Under the Sassanids, the priesthood of fire, the mobeds, had acquired an enormous influence in the State. They were well-nigh all-powerful in royal councils, had taken over a large part of the civil administration and, mixing the domains of faith and politics, refused to accept that any part of the latter remain closed to them. For this claim to meet neither protest nor resistance the whole country would have had to share the ideas of Magism, and that was far from being the case. To begin with, amongst the Magi themselves there were many dissidents, sects that rejected the new authority granted to the mobeds; then there were a large number of Buddhists, as well as Christians, Catholics and others; Gnostics who remained distinct from the latter despite their similarities, Sabians and vestiges of ancient religions of which specimens such as the Yazidi and other analogous sects still exist. The mobeds, a powerful body, well organized and led by fervid leaders, did not hesitate

to enter into a sustained system of persecution, which far outstripped all that has been told or invented about the Spanish Inquisition, and they struck their antagonists indiscriminately with equal severity.

The perseverance with which they applied this system would without doubt have led them to triumph if they had not with one hand rejected the neophytes brought to them by the other. According to their dogma all craftsmen who hewed stone or worked with fire were declared violators of the purity of the elements and considered eternally impure. They were expected to hold no other religion than that of State, and yet that religion treated them as pariahs, refused them entry to the temples, forbade the faithful to intermarry with them, covered them with insult and inconvenient restrictions, without even being able, like Brahmanism, to promise those poor unfortunates compensation in a second incarnation if they submitted patiently to their present condition.

The logical result of this state of affairs would have been the extinction of such generally vilified and reproved guilds. The nation would have returned to being an exclusively pastoral, agricultural and warring people, as in ancient times; it would have renounced the arts and the pleasures of luxury, or would have known them only through foreign trade and importation. But that could not be, nor did the mobeds themselves wish it so. The habit of luxury was too well ingrained for its disappearance to be contemplated. Kings loved their golden thrones, their splendid finery; their women the precious jewels and richly embroidered clothing of varied hues. The priests wished to don superbly ornamented tiaras, and would preach nowhere but in temples built with all the refinement whose production they cursed. In that violent situation there were terrible explosions. The industrial classes, who, like everywhere, formed the majority of urban populations, answered persecution with hatred and erupted with fury on several occasions, especially during the reign of Kobad, when the heresiarch Mazdak put himself at their head, preached the destruction of the mobeds, communal possession of women and wealth and other such shameful follies, which unvaryingly and invariably appear in decrepit societies without conscience. On that occasion the united civil and religious authorities were able to ward off the threat; they suppressed the disorder, but did not eradicate it; so in the tenth century of our era, four centuries after the advent of Islam, there were still many followers of the ancient religion of Mazdak in Persia.[1]

As I said however, the disorder was suppressed, and forced consequently to go into hiding. Thus began the more or less well-concealed dissimulation that brought peace to everybody. The dissidents remained silent to avoid persecution. The masters pretended to see nothing in order not to have to fight continuously. Provided that nobody protested outwardly against the established religion, Christians, Buddhists, Gnostics, Sabians, idolaters, Mazdakites and others all lived in peace. The fashion for secret religions was established.

If material order remained relatively untroubled, moral order suffered profoundly. Religions became occult, lost their dignity and their dogma; in the depths of the murky minds that enclosed them they deemed a few points essential and clung to those, neglecting the rest. What seemed to them important above all was to

maintain an irreconcilable hatred against the dominant religion in the hope of finding revenge. It was at this juncture that Islam was born.

The prodigious rapidity with which it spread in Persia, where in the space of a few short years it came to dominate from the Euphrates to the Indus, would be inexplicable if one did not take into account the situation I have just outlined. The day of rancour had dawned. In the cities the oppressed dissidents raised their heads. The hordes of workmen who had been mistreated by the mobeds, the artists, rebellious or congenital disbelievers, all threw themselves into the arms of the conquering Arabs. Love of revolutions and pillaging did the rest. While the people of the cities immediately adopted the new faith, the rural population, led by the feudal nobility, resisted for several centuries. That faith was, however, most accommodating. As long as one said out loud the phrase: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the prophet of God!" [2] it found it had no business scrutinizing man's conscience; ergo, it put secret religions at their ease. Everything seemed to presage that the mobeds would fall victim to the furious reaction and disappear.

But that confrairy showed little ambition for the honours of martyrdom. It had meddled in worldly matters too much not to have acquired the taste, to the detriment of its faith, and instead of squarely resisting the Arabs and the national insurgents as it should have done for its greater glory, it negotiated with the former.

As one caliph admitted, the Arabs might possess military genius, but they completely lacked that of government and administration. The mobeds offered to put their experience at the service of the conqueror, if the conqueror so wished. He accepted, on this point of his conquests, as he accepted similar explicit or tacit agreements on all the others, reserving for himself war, invasion, pillage, the bulk of the booty; they took the mobeds on as intendants, on condition that they recognize Islam; to this they consented, and immediately set about making themselves an Islam that would have been unrecognizable to Muhammad, and which resembles nothing to be found in the rest of the Muslim world.

They reconstituted themselves as an inquisitorial, dominating clergy, merely exchanging the name of mobeds for that of mullahs. That alone was a great novelty, for other than in Persia Islam has no priests and no provision for them. They established the principle that reading the Koran without the participation of a mullah in itself constituted a grave heresy, and that only the mullah could and should give the faithful the true sense of the holy text. As an innovation this truly represented an enormity. In order to support such doctrines they went a step further: they based them on the authority of a multitude of hadiths, or holy traditions of the Prophet and the Imams, of which no one but themselves in the entire Muslim world has ever heard, and multiplying those traditions according to their needs, have formed such voluminous collections as to defy the imagination. At first they had little taste for the overly dry simplicity of their new faith, which might suit coarse Arabs, but did not match the needs of refined sensibilities like their own. One of their first good offices therefore was to complicate it, and taking advantage of the attraction the nation felt for the descendants of Ali and which was a sort of disguised protest against the Arabs and therefore against Islam itself, they invented the cult of the

Imams and attributed to it such a scope that not only did the majesty of the Prophet pale in the effulgence of his grandsons, but even God himself was diminished.[3]

Under the Sassanids they had as mobeds had an important rôle in civil justice. Under the new regime they placed its entirety under the jurisdiction of the Koran; but acting like Arab qadis was not enough for them. The latter write their judgements and base them on holy texts or on accepted interpretations of respected jurisconsults; as they had arrogated to themselves the exclusive interpretation of the Koran in terms of dogma, they did the same in terms of law, spurned legislation by precedent and decided each case on the design, the caprice, the interest or the passion of the moment. In this way they acquired enormous importance in Persian society.[4] The merchants, who continually had need of them as civil judges, eagerly courted them, the poorest levels of society, who lived on their charity, bowed to them, and they soon found themselves in a position to defy kings. Those kings became afraid.[5]

The first sovereign of the Safavid dynasty, who ascended to the throne in the sixteenth century, was not a Muslim. He was a Sufi; there is good reason to believe that he was at first offended by that great rival power and would have eliminated it if he could have. But the task seemed too taxing, and, instead of starting a war whose outcome was far from certain, he preferred to cast himself into their open arms. The new era that had seemed to threaten the power of the mullahs became instead one of aggrandizement.[6]

The Persian partiality for the descendants of Ali had from the beginning given birth to several sects stretching as far as Syria, of which the most important was the Shi'ite.[7] The mullahs had always leaned towards that persuasion. In agreement with them the new dynasty made it the State religion, profoundly modified oral doctrine and broke off from the rest of Islam. From that moment on the incongruities in the Persian fashion of understanding Muhammad's law were consecrated; they were legitimized. The existence of a priesthood, the exaggerated cult of the Imams, a theology as refined and exuberant in developments as the Koran is simple, and finally the veneration of the saints to a degree that turns them into half-gods, all of that became written doctrine and not merely tolerated or favoured but obligatory. In practice the mullahs found themselves absolute masters of the empire.

Just as for so many other authorities for whom reaching the height of their influence proved to be dangerous, omnipotence soon began to show its disadvantages. To be fair, up till then the mullahs had for better or for worse shown themselves the equals of their ancestors, the mobeds. They were as ambitious and greedy, but also as knowledgeable and energetic, skilled in the art of knowing and leading men. They had not left Islam lacking in greater minds. Quite the contrary, if one examines the list of great thinkers, great historians, great scholars, great Arabic grammarians, one finds that most of them were Persian mullahs. But having reached the pinnacle they went no further on that magnificent path. From the time of the Safavids onwards no more great men appeared in any field. When the Afghan invasion began at the beginning of the eighteenth century their nullity was deplorable, and despite the goodwill of the people, who were anxious to defend themselves

against the pillagers, the appalling advice they gave the unfortunate king Shah Sultan Husayn was decisive in the fall of the empire.[8] During the half century of disorder that followed they completed their degeneration and were no longer the brightest minds of the land. Many intelligent laymen came to prominence whom the public regarded as more eminent, more productive and therefore more respectable. They gradually fell to the level of leaders of the rabble. Entirely concerned with keeping a grip on that resource, they ingratiated themselves with the plebe, showed untoward zeal for the collection of charitable offerings, of which a great part remained in their hands, and in their quality as administrators of justice applied themselves diligently to making decisions favourable to wretches whose support they one day might need to count upon. But even if they were still feared during riots and the government itself sometimes trembled before them, the upper classes distanced themselves from them and learned to despise them, and then began that system of denigration and mockery that fills Persian literature and where the clergy and their behaviour are the butt of all sorts of scandalous stories. In songs and satirical pamphlets they were portrayed as thieves, drunkards, murderers; there was no vice that was not attributed to them; they became the perennial subjects of licentious paintings sold everywhere with naive freedom, and although prudent men were careful not to offend them they nevertheless avoided their company. Then the government realized that the mullahs were no longer a truly formidable adversary and that to hold them in check they no longer had to contend with the susceptibilities of public conscience but only with the paid vociferation of the dregs of society. One of the first attempts to put the knowledge of this truth into practice was made at the succession to the throne of Muhammad Shah, father and predecessor of the present sovereign. The city of Tabriz was troubled by a riot led by a mullah and the palace was threatened. The king had the troublemaker seized and strangled in full view of the people. The mob immediately dispersed and the inhabitants of Tabriz praised the king's justice. Later, in Isfahan, after atrocities had been committed against the peaceful population by bands of ne'er-do-wells spurred on by the mujtahid or chief of the clergy, Muhammad Shah entered the town with cannons, arrested the principal mutineers, had them put to death, the mullahs killed and the mujtahid banished. All of Persia heard the news and met with cold irony the laments of the class that had been dispossessed of its prestige. From that moment on royal authority strode resolutely into action against a force that had often obstructed it and which it had always greatly feared. The prince began to nominate the mujtahids, a previously unknown occurrence. He no longer recognized their unimpeachability; he no longer permitted that their crimes remain unknown to him. He ordered their destitution and exile at will, imprisoned them, made them pay fines; in a word, he made them into humble, defenceless civil servants like any others, and the mullahs are so aware of their weakness that they no longer dare do anything other than what the governments permits and instructs them to do. In the last seven or eight years they have returned to a sort of favour, and by a natural turn of events it would sometimes appear that the sovereign and his counsellors fear they have gone too far in the abasement inflicted on the priestly caste and would like to restore

a little of its lost prestige. But that will not be easy. The king himself deigns in vain to honour the principal ecclesiastical figures of the capital with a ceremonious yearly visit, in the course of which he attests to official respect by the pompous titles he bestows upon them in his rescripts. The public is neither moved nor impressed. It has acquired the habit of not respecting the mullahs and so they are not respected. Besides, the government cannot avoid undoing with one hand what it seems to wish to re-establish with the other, and is so quick, when displeased, to mistreat the clergy that their radical impotence is all too plainly visible. Their obedience is also far too readily obtained. Of this we have seen the proof above in the matter of preaching holy war in the scuffle with England. It is conceivable that the clergy collaborate in such a matter without betraying their conscience, but I shall now tell another story that cannot be interpreted in that light.

King Nasir al-Din Shah is young and endowed with a lively imagination. His piety is manifest, but is no more contained within the strict limits of Islam than was his father's; and it could not be otherwise, for Nasir al-Din Shah is essentially a Persian and must have the feelings, the instincts, the enthusiasms which have always existed in his people. Amongst his other devotionary practices he therefore dedicates a special cult to the saints; he shows his piety by filling his apartments with portraits and holy effigies to which he addresses his prayers.

About a year ago he announced that an authentic image of Ali was in his possession; that that image, brought from India, had an origin that put its perfect resemblance beyond all doubt, and that it consequently represented the most precious palladium for the nation; that inspired by his respect for the Prophet's son-in-law and the source of the Imamate, he had decided to officially decorate himself with that holy portrait; that the solemn event would take place in a manner worthy of the religion and the throne. And so the great and mighty of the State were called upon a given day to the palace in Tehran, the troops paraded and the mullahs, with their leaders at the forefront, came to present their compliments to the king, praise his piety and hang the holy effigy around his neck. The like had not been seen in Persia since the Arab invasion, and everyone commented on this. Everybody observed that the king was right to have his own form of religion, and that observation is essentially Persian; but they added that the mullahs were constrained to be strict Muslims, for otherwise their existence had no justification, and that if one point was clear in the Koran, it was the injunction against depicting the human form, and even more so that of the Imams. The conclusion drawn was that the mullahs were as powerless as they were without honour, since they had not refused to accomplish an act of which they could not approve, and their disrepute would have increased had such a thing been possible.

From what I have seen that disrepute could not be more deserved. One of the main leaders of the Tehran clergy is a kind of clown renowned for his youthful escapades; another, of no lower rank, became the depository of the money one of my servants stole from me, and refused to return the sum to him when I dismissed the fellow. Shortly afterwards the governor had him arrested for a prank that went too far. In brief, the Muslim clergy of Persia largely merits the disdain and hatred it

inspires; I do not doubt however that it includes exceptions worthy of respect. To tell the truth, I have not seen any, but I am assured that they exist, and that may well be the case. Only Sodom and Gomorra were so perverted that even God could not find ten honest men there. Be that as it may, those exceptions cannot redeem an entire corps.

It has happened in other spheres, and why should I fear to say that even in Catholicism the corruption of the clergy has endangered the religion? From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century the dissolution of the clerics doubtless did much harm and brought about the affliction of Protestantism; but all in all the Catholic faith has emerged triumphant from the trial and has never been more vigorous than in the eighteenth and present centuries. The same cannot be said for Persian Islamism. Putting aside all discussion on the respective merits of the Catholic faith and the work of Muhammad, I have explained how and why the latter succeeded in Persia. Imported into the dissolution of a decaying empire by a vigorous troupe of bandits of little faith but relentless in their desire to win as many provinces as possible so as to avoid returning to the sands from whence they came, the lowest castes welcomed it as revenge for their oppression. It asked little from them in the way of conviction and received none. The wealthy, educated, thoughtful who submitted, accepted the new faith with no liability, and only the mullahs, in the interest of their domination, could have conceived the idea of erecting a dogmatic monument on the sterile and narrow strip of land brought to them from Arabia. Without the mullahs there would be no Islam in Persia. From the day the people had no more faith in them they no longer believed what the mullahs alone had advocated, and that is how Islamism comes to be lost to the Persian masses, and one can state that today the ancient secret religions of the Sassanid era have not only recovered all the ground lost during the first centuries of Muslim domination but have propagated themselves far more than they succeeded in doing under the mobed inquisition. The only way, therefore, of understanding Persian ideas in matters of faith is to consider these suppressed cults or beliefs. To the extent that I have been able to understand such a necessarily difficult subject I shall now do so. For it cannot be forgotten that it will often require a great deal of time and that one must always inspire a great deal of confidence in any Persian one talks to before he will stop affirming that Muhammad is the prophet of God. Consequently to broach such a subject one must penetrate a triple veil.

As a branch of orthodoxy Shi‘ite views have naturally given rise to a large number of dissident offshoots. But they cannot penetrate very far into the masses because the masses are in reality not Muslim, and so these heresies survive for a time in closed circles of theologians and adepts and finally disappear to make way for others, which are continually being renewed. The most fashionable doctrine of the moment seems to be that of the Shaykhis, invented by a scholar from the south about sixty or eighty years ago.[9] Its dogmatic content largely deals with the nature of the last Imam, the Imam Mahdi, who according to the beliefs of all Muslim people will reappear at the end of the ages. But Shi‘ite scholars affirm that by that is not meant a return to the material and visible world but only the manifestation of a fact

that is always present but hidden. In a word, they teach that the Imam Mahdi has never left the earth and will do so only on Judgement Day, for the world subsists and can only exist through the merits of the Imams, concentrated in some way in the last of them, and if he were to disappear the world would no longer have any cause to exist. This idea is one of the foundation blocks of the faith and one of the great stumbling blocks to the Sunnis, who, not without some appearance of reason, complain that all this enthusiasm for the Imams belittles the Prophet himself.

But the question raised by the Shaykhis is this: In what way is the Imam Mahdi present on this earth but unrecognized? Official theologians answer that he exists with full conscience of his identity, hidden under some appearance or other and crossing the centuries without dying. Knowing that his identity must not be divulged until the end of time he is careful to avoid recognition and not to stay too long in one place, where different clues might lead to his discovery. The Shaykhis see this as a crude explanation and affirm that the Imam has no consciousness of himself and that his nature is the slave of divine will just as much as the humblest amongst us; that he passes successively through the bodies of a series of ordinary men who have no special prerogatives and die in the normal way. The only difference is that their souls do not return through death to the immaterial world but immediately take up a new carnal residence. As for morals, the Shaykhis maintain that polygamy is a bad thing, that the Prophet was wrong to tolerate it, and that it would be better to abstain from it. They doubt that feminine nature is inferior to masculine nature. Finally, more than all other Shi'ites, who let it be said are not lacking in this respect, they are of the opinion that however sacred the Koran might be, it contains things Muhammad would have done just as well not to include and which were certainly not dictated to him by the archangel Gabriel.

The Shaykhis, who have a certain number of supporters amongst the mullahs, have been persecuted on different occasions; but persecuted in the Persian manner, that is, that those who did not speak too loudly were left alone and only the overly belligerent were taken to task. The clerical leaders in Tehran recently wanted to renew these severities against one of their number who had attacked them vigorously in a public discussion and found them lacking in arguments for the defence of their orthodoxy. They therefore demanded that the heretic be put to death; but the government urged them to calm down and the matter went no further.

I only cite the Shaykhis to give an example of the disorder that exists in Persian Islamism, and I shall now go on to the views of earlier dissidents.

3

THE SUFIS

Amongst the populations of the towns any man belonging to what we might call "the middle class", that is, government employees, merchants, leading craftsmen, may be considered a Sufi. By that expression should be understood what we ourselves mean when we say that a man is philosophically minded. We mean that the person in question accepts no positive religion. This is essentially what a Persian Sufi is.[1]

A certain number of them, to whose ranks a large number of dervishes must be reckoned, reject Islam not as intrinsically evil, but rather as unworthy of a soul even moderately illuminated by the celestial light. It is a sop for children, when what they want is the good strong bread that rejects all dogmatic belief and all moral obligation beyond the joining of the human soul in God by ecstasy. When that union is complete the transformed soul becomes participant in the nature of the uncreated one, and man is God. In the past enthusiasts have been put to death for shouting out in the streets the high opinion they held of themselves.[2] Alongside this small group of immoderate spirits a large number of people accept from this doctrine only the freedom to deride both the Prophet and all moral precepts. As for their union with God and their apotheosis, they postpone it. Their active beliefs stem from a collection of superstitions whose origins are very difficult to untangle, probably impossible, but which are certainly very ancient. Similar ones are found all over Europe. It is a vague terror or an equally vague faith in good or bad genies or in such and such an action, deeds or writings, in forebodings, in chiromancy, in sorcery, in certain bizarre practices of which one must suppose that many belong to completely primitive rites whose true meaning is lost. In any case, these philosophers believe in the supernatural, for that is a necessary principle for all Persians: one will not meet a single dogmatic materialist, and I tend to believe that such a doctrine is not possible in Asia. I have met men who were extremely opposed to all positive religions and yet were covered in amulets. They lived in complete disregard of any moral law, except their personal instinct of what was good; but they in no way doubted the presence of the supernatural in the material world.

There are Sufis who accept parts of Islam. To them Muhammad is a very eminent figure who may even have really had some communication with the archangel Gabriel; but in that case he often misunderstood him, and his book is in need of

many corrections. In a kind of made to measure deism, whose limits they redefine at will, they find the Sunnis closer to the truth than their own scholars and the Wahhabis even closer than the Sunnis. Nonetheless they find fault with both of them and are impeded by the cult of the Imams from ever considering joining them.

There are also Sufis who have heard of Voltaire and regard him unreservedly as a great man. The Russians can be considered the source of this doctrine, which makes all the more proselytes because it sees in Voltaire only the enemy of the clergy and the priests. Thinking like Voltaire means hating the mullahs, and that goes without saying, nobody objects; one also finds a great satisfaction in having a European sage on their side. However, despite this favour, no work of Voltaire has been translated except, and even then I am not quite sure, the History of Charles the twelfth, which in no way deals with philosophical ideas.

Finally, to complete this summary of the Sufis, a considerable number of them only recognize the existence of a God who does not concern himself with the world and of good and evil genies, with the whole ensuing train of thaumaturgic ideas, magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and above them all the philosopher's stone, the transmutation of base metals. Many great figures limit themselves to ideas they share with a host of dervishes.[3]

The nation has a penchant for wonder. The late king Muhammad Shah did not doubt that his prime minister, Hajji Mirza Aqasi, an old mullah who had been his tutor, had direct and frequent communications with the divinity and was himself a far from ordinary being. Whatever the case, he was certainly one of the most original characters conceivable to the mind of man. Alchemists abound; lastly, of those who ridicule the aforementioned a large number have ideas which while they have the undeniable advantage of being less ruinous are no less bizarre. All these people come under the clearly very vague heading of Sufis. Mystics as such, very numerous in Turkey, are rarely found amongst the Persians, and it is remarkable that the main books of their classical literature, although composed in the Iranian tongue, are read more in Constantinople than elsewhere.

I can offer no greater contrast to these philosophical groups than the following two very different sets of believers. The first of them live in certain villages in Khurasan. They profess a profound respect for cows and consider the killing of a calf a practically irremissible sin. One would be tempted to consider them the remains of an Indian colony from an unknown era; but in the ideas of the ancient Guebres many traces of a similar veneration for animals are found, and it would by no means be extraordinary if they turned out to be the descendants of an aboriginal sect and not foreign immigrants. I have in any case only seen them in small numbers, and they all belonged to the humblest of classes. They were naturally reluctant to offer details about their beliefs, and I know no more than what I have written above. It would however certainly be a subject worthy of investigation.

The second category of devotees came into being no more than a hundred years ago in eastern Persia; their prophet is a sayyid named Khayrullah, who claims to be a divine incarnation.[4] When he reached old age and wearied of his infirmities he called his disciples together and announced that he was going to rejuvenate and that

they should not be surprised to see him appear in an unaccustomed form. Having thus warned his people against any surprises he entered a burial vault where he had had a nitric acid bath prepared for him. He plunged into the vat, and a few moments later the faithful, who had remained outside praying, saw a young man come out who was none other than the sayyid Khayrullah transformed. Since the first incarnation of this divine figure he has twice changed bodies. This sect has made great headway in Sistan and Khurasan and has reached as far as India. I have heard that the sayyid was presently in Bombay or thereabouts. It is likely that this religion, of which I know neither the dogma nor the moral teachings, is nothing other than a more or less disfigured Indian doctrine. Besides these two sects there are many more, each stranger than the last; then there are the remains of the Sabians, who will disappear leaving their ideas scattered to the four winds; there are too the multiple varieties of Yazidis in Kurdistan; but none of these cults really has many followers. I shall therefore now speak of the truly important religion of Persia, both by its teachings and by the number and quality of its adherents. It is the religion of Ahl-i Haqq, or people of the truth, called Nusayris by the Arabs and the Turks, and Ali Ilahis by the Persians.[5]

Both of these denominations indicate an erroneous understanding of the cult in question. The first, Nusayris, seems to assimilate them to the Christians, to whom they do in fact bear some curious likeness.[6] The other supposes that they regard Ali as God and worship only him. In fact a sect of that kind does exist in Persia; it has partisans in all of Anatolia, and the strangest thing is that Muslim history tells that it arose during Ali's lifetime, and that Ali, a zealous and convinced Muslim if ever there was one, was once so outraged by the adoration proffered to him that he drew his sword to smite whom he regarded as an idolater of the worst kind.[7] Despite the god's resistance the religion of which he was an object survived and even flourished, and I repeat, it has representatives in Persia, or rather, it is difficult to distinguish them from slightly exalted Shi'ite Muslims. One easily imagines what the exaggerated cult of the Imams can become in those fiery imaginations. A religion taking a man for its god, despite that man, and surviving him for long centuries is a far from mediocre singularity of human moral history. The Ali Ilahis regard Muhammad's son-in-law as a divine incarnation; it is probable that the Muslims judge them on this doctrine alone and have for that reason assimilated them to the Christians.

The Ahl-i Haqq have a far more complex doctrine than the Ali Ilahis and also far more deserving of study. Like all other dissidents ostensibly Muslim, they profess above all others a great hatred and scorn for Islam, as great as that of the Christians and Jews. They consider the Qurayshite Prophet a pure and simple impostor; they do not attend the mosque, and pray only when it is absolutely unavoidable. They are well disposed towards Christians, who have never caused them any harm. In many ways, and in this they are in agreement with Muslim perception of the two cults, they consider them half-brothers in the faith. One point in particular that prevents them from feeling as far from those of different faiths as the Muslims is that they do not recognize legal impurity.[8] If they reject Islam then, it is as a

dominant, oppressive, restrictive doctrine before which they are obliged to conceal themselves.

Such tolerance is completely opposed to the principles of ancient religions. All of them were based on the separation of nature into pure and impure things and beings. The Iranian Aryans strictly maintained that distinction, as did the Hindus. The Greek mystic cults in Eleusis and elsewhere recognized only initiates as pure amongst human beings. The Italiots also consigned the profane to a separate category. All the Semitic religions, Judaism as well as the cults of Anaitis, Militta and of Melkart of Tyre taught corresponding doctrines. Finally, Egypt is no less strict than India on this separation of animate and inanimate nature into two hostile and irreconcilable categories. Sunni Islamism has adopted this principle in a qualified form, but the Shi'ites have retained all its inflexibility, its primordial severity. Only two religions in the world have completely eliminated it, and both of them, Christianity and Buddhism, are theories of reform. The Nusayris, like them, with them, through them, recognize no other impurity, even in non-believers, than the moral impurity stemming from man's faults, and not from his opinions. They see none in nature, and to their eyes neither the dog nor the pig are unclean. In the same way they drink wine and condemn its abuse but not its use.

They do not authorize polygamy. It is a Muslim practice that several great Nusayri lords have adopted, true, for political reasons and not through laxity, but the religion condemns it, public opinion amongst the sect's members looks down on it, and exceptions to the rule are rare. In principle women are not forced into reclusion and can show themselves to strangers without violating any precepts; in practice the Nusayris must pass for Muslims, and as such are compelled to observe those rules of social behaviour to which Muslims attach the greatest importance, so, apart from relatives, they limit themselves to receiving those members of their faith who habitually visit them. They go even further during nuptial festivities: they perform round dances that last all night and during which the women, unveiled, take the men by the hand. But great care is taken to post a look-out at the door so no Muslim can come in. This is commonplace and just as innocent as in Europe.

Nusayris gladly marry Muslim girls, who in fact almost immediately adopt their spouse's religion. This renders such marriages desirable. The Nusayris on the other hand claim never to give their daughters to Muslims. This may be true in theory; but many instances of the contrary can be cited, especially amongst the wealthier classes. The common people, having less temptation to violate the precept, are probably more rigid. One positive aspect is that divorce is not allowed, and if by chance someone takes advantage of Koranic law to obtain it he immediately falls into disgrace and is considered an apostate.

The Nusayris class their own faithful and the members of the religions with which they are in contact in the following manner: the Ahl-i Shariat, people of the legal religion; the Ahl-i Marifat, people of the considered religion; the Ahl-i Tariqat, people of progress; and finally the Ahl-i Haqiqat, people of the true religion, or Ahl-i Haqq.[9]

They recognize the Ahl-i Shariat by the fact that they do not perform Nusayri

prayers, or even know them, and observe none of the obligations prescribed by them. Although, as I have just said, they in no way consider these people impure, they always refrain from discussing matters of faith with them, and maintain purely social relations. This refers especially to the Shi'ites, but theoretically speaking Jews, Guebres and even Christians come under that denomination, although only the first mentioned inspire real revulsion.

The Ahl-i Marifat, whose name evokes the idea of people who are beginning to think, who are nearer the truth than others, are represented by several classes of Sufis. Although they are not regarded as Nusayris the fact that they have renounced other cults leads to the supposition that they are on the right path. By the pantheistic doctrines that have led many of them to consider themselves more or less direct divine emanations and which have led to serious persecution and even martyrdom, they almost become assimilated to the Nusayris, particularly the lower classes. A certain number of Sufi saints are wrongly held in as high esteem as some truly holy figures of the faith. This is a perfectly natural result of the immemorial moral position of Persian religious sects. None have remained pure; all have made borrowings from other doctrines, even from those they most abhor; Persian Islam is half Hindu, half Guebre; Parseeism is in decline; so there is nothing more natural than seeing some of the innumerable Sufi branches lean decidedly towards Nusayrism. The result is that authentic members of that religion use Sufism to evade Muslim inquisitions. If their disdain for the faith, their neglect of the mosque, or some of the rude remarks they let slip draw attention and awkward questions upon them they hurriedly declare themselves Sufis, and of what at first might have seemed suspect produce a figurative interpretation, which always tends towards orthodoxy. And, in terms of interpretation and reconciliation, nothing in this world is more indulgent than a Persian mind.

To further promote this useful confusion, at which the cleverest Nusayris are the first to laugh when they are amongst themselves, the habit has been formed of citing and heaping praise on the names of the illustrious Sufis to whom the Muslims themselves, showing great inconsistency, pay the most fervent homage. To offer some examples: Jalal al-Din Rumi, author of the *Masnawi*; Farid al-Din Attar who wrote the *Pand Nama*; and above all Baba Tahir, whose poetry in Lur dialect is extremely appreciated, his sister, Bibi Fatma and Shaykh Hamir; but this last, whom the Muslims take for a Sufi, was in fact a true Nusayri, and recognized as such by those competent in such matters.

Despite the relations existing between the Ahl-i Marifat and the Nusayris the conscience and intimacy of the latter remain closed to the former. They are regarded favourably and with benevolence but are never allowed to participate in the mysteries, are not taught the prayers, are not told when to fast; the principles of the faith are not made known to them.

The Ahl-i Tariqat, or people who have already made progress towards the true faith, are one degree closer. The Ahl-i Haqq look upon them favourably, but disapprove of and even scorn what they see as the narrowness and incompleteness of their doctrine. They reproach them with stopping at the threshold of truth and,

therefore, judge them incapable of knowing and understanding Nusayri dogma. The rights and prerogatives of the true belief belong therefore solely to the Ahl-i Haqiqat, or people of the certain religion, otherwise known as the Ahl-i Haqq, people of the truth.

They are divided into eight different sects, which are: the Ibrahimis, the Daudis, the Miris, the Sultan Baburis, the Khamushis, the Yadiqaris, the Shah-i Ayazis, the Khanatashis.[10] Other sub-divisions probably exist, and we shall soon see how the fundamental principle of the religion itself makes it unlikely that they do not; but I have only heard of the above named. It even seems likely to me that the name Khamushi is an insulting generic expression attributed by Muslims to the Yazidis and passed on by them to the Nusayris, with whom they have nothing in common. It is the abbreviation of *chiragh khamushi*, put out the lights, and they have been given this name because zealous mullahs have spread the story amongst their flocks that the Nusayris have the habit, during their nocturnal assemblies, when all the men and women are gathered, of turning out the lights and coupling at random, father with daughter, mother with son. This calumny, which is directed at many sects everywhere, is too violent not to be absurd and clashes besides with all Nusayri teachings. It adds not little to the Ahl-i Haqqs' aversion for the mullahs. One day one of their leaders gave a visiting Christian a quite strange demonstration of the falsity of the accusation. Not everybody would be in a position to use his argumentation. This holy figure has seven sons who without exception strikingly resemble him. Pointing to them he said: "I less than anybody can be suspected of not fulfilling my obligations to our belief. If the infamy with which our detractors seek to besmirch us were our common practice, how could all my children be so like me?"

Striking therefore the name of the Khamushis, seven sects remain. But in support of what I have said about the existence of even more sects I could add that the person just quoted is well on the way to forming a new one. His birth suffices to make him venerable in the eyes of his brothers; and he has besides attained such a degree of authority over his sect and inspired them with such a lofty idea of his virtues and his mystic power that many people consider him a new starting point for a reform of the ancient religion. He is not the only one in this situation; and in all eras every great division of Persia has seen such men appear, whose memory usually sooner or later fades away but sometimes subsists. The seven recognized sects owe their existence to such individuals.

Nusayris unanimously profess that God existed alone before the beginning of time, in a state of immobility that was neither death nor movement. That situation, called *sirr*, mystery, formed the normal condition of the divinity and is the state to which it will return after the interruption of the world's existence. That existence is purely accidental and transitory. Animate and inanimate nature are different forms of divine emanation which will one day vanish, leaving in all its true nakedness the life-giving irradiation that is the sole positive existence within them and which will return to its source, that is, to the immobile God. In other words, under different guises and in different states and with different degrees of freedom beneath the

envelope and the constraints of those forms, there is nothing other than God in the universe and the universe itself is God. And this point is so clear to the minds of Nusayris of all classes that one of them, of no great education, whom I was chiding one day for having used the expression *khudavand-i alam*, the lord of the world, waited until there were no more Muslims in the room to say, shrugging his shoulders: "I speak in that way for those asses. Everybody knows there is no God and that Allah is nonsense".

God, and we see what they mean by that word, that is, the primordial energy, which the Sufis customarily express by comparisons[11] like *durr*, the pearl; *padshaham*, my king; *khavandagar*, the lord; *Sultan Ishaq or Shah Khushin*, and many more; God, having turned towards the work of creation, consumed part of His essence; this matter formed the seven climates that divide the earth, the globe rested on the back of the mystical ox, who stood on the back of the fish. All of these so Indian ideas were adopted by Islamism. Then another fraction of the divine nature was transformed by another influence, giving birth to animated beings.

To begin with figures appeared whose human character is so vague that one easily recognizes the first Bodhisattvas or followers of Shakymuni.[12] They are placed close to God, and the theological formula defines those five individualities thus: pir Padsham, or pir Benyamin is the *law,* the pure divinity and the *mystery*; pir Daud is the *believer*; pir Razbar is the *communicant;* pir Musi is the *registrar*. The absence of any one of these creatures or creations,[13] or to put it better, these emanations, would have made the formation of the universe impossible.

Having assumed their rôles the five forces immediately set about fulfilling them. Pir Padsham, or the Divine Essence, decreed the rule of the world; and to get things started[14] began by following it himself. Everybody inhabiting the earthly sphere was placed in religious dependence to a holy figure, image of the law and source of the rule for each individual. The Divine Essence, first to bow to this precept, chose for its pir, or spiritual guide, Benyamin. He became what the Nusayris call his mentor, *darsipurdah*, and was in certain respects dependent upon him.[15]

Pir Benyamin, the spiritual guide of the Divine Essence, his *rahbir*,[16] and incarnation of the law, of the condition under which the existence of the world is possible, was the sum total of every kind of religious prescription. The symbol and consecration of those rules is a three-day annual fast. But not all Nusayris accept the canonic necessity of that penitence. Only four sects submit to it, the Ibrahimis, the Daudis, the Miris, and the Sultan-Baburis; the Daudis distinguish themselves by beginning and ending the fast one day earlier. This expiatory period coincides with the autumn equinox; it differs from the Muslim fast not by its infinitely shorter length but in particular by its severity. It is not permitted to eat more than what is strictly essential for retaining one's physical strength either before sunrise or after sunset.

Pir Daud, incarnation of the faith, gave the other four divine manifestations the energy necessary for accomplishing their tasks. Without him neither action nor movement, nor progress nor salvation were possible. So if the pure Divine Essence turned submissively towards pir Benyamin it was under the influence of pir Daud.

But faith in the law necessarily entails a mode of conduct consistent with the law. If faith be the motive for movement, it cannot itself be movement. It was pir Razbar who supplied the wanting motive by indicating the road at the end of which the believer would find salvation.

In fact, for the Nusayris there is no end without the means; and its character is closely tied to a severe and rigorous moral teaching based on the notion that all men, all beings, all things being in reality and under all guises nothing other than divine emanations, to act badly towards them, to mistreat animals, to abuse objects, is to directly offend the divinity, not, as in Christian teachings, because it means disobeying its orders, but because it means actually attacking it in hand to hand combat and waging war. Pir Razbar then, established the duties of the narrow path of a rigid morality as absolutely inseparable from the faith. Neither he nor the Nusayris accept that one can fail to keep any one of these moral obligations and remain a believer. Theft, adultery, lying, are not faults, not sins, not even crimes, but true sacrilege, and therefore, so to speak, deicide. The result is that for the Nusayris morality is by far the most important part of the religion; in actual fact it is very nearly the entire religion, for in the eyes of the Ahl-i Haqq prayer is scarcely deemed necessary and the office is quite secondary. If one looks back to the early stages of development of Indian Buddhist doctrines one almost universally finds the same dogmatic conditions.

Having established that point, charity is assuredly its most direct expression. To love and serve others always is to love oneself; and the Nusayris, who call members of other religions *aqyar,* strangers, call themselves *yar*, friends. Peace and harmony must reign amongst them. Pir Razbar also commonly bears the title of officiant of the bread service, and it was he who instituted the communion. Like the sacrifice of the mass, this ceremony, the high point of the cult, is called *khidmat*. There is no fixed time for its celebration, it can be invoked for any important event or simply to make an act of faith. The first ever service in the world was held by the first five Divine Manifestations immediately after creation. They assembled, sacrificed an ox and prepared the meal. When they had gathered before the mystical feast pir Daud said grace. Afterwards he invited pir Razbar to divide the dish in as many portions as there were participants; he obeyed. On receiving a further injunction he gave to each his part. And so, after having paid homage to the divine power from which they had emanated and inspired by the same sentiment of brotherhood and union, they all ate. The reciprocal love that inspired them, the desire to please and the fear of offending manifested themselves and constituted the first praiseworthy act of creation. It was immediately recorded in writing by pir Musi, assigned to that function.

Compared to the other four divine powers pir Musi's function may seem of little importance. It is scarcely essential to record the memory of the good actions of beings who could only inadvertently commit bad ones. But with regards to the other emanations that constitute the common run of beings and things that record was an absolute necessity.

For in fact, after the five great celestial personalities in question, of which one,

pir Padsham or Divine Essence, remained immaterial and soon returned to his organic repose, the multitude of emanations that constitute the universe appeared, and amongst them men. They came to the world equipped with two opposing moral leanings; one is *aql*, reason, discernment, which can only inspire them to do good; the other is *nafis*, concupiscence, which constantly draws them towards evil. They must listen to the former and resist the latter, so despite the fundamental divinity of their nature they are vulnerable to many pitfalls. This is where pir Musi's intervention becomes necessary. He weighs the actions of men and keeps an account of one and all according to his quality and his value.

Left to their own devices men would have been unable to maintain a balance between their opposing leanings, for the power of concupiscence is notably superior to that of discernment. But the order that presided over the organization of the world came to their help. The four celestial emanations who had first appeared in the world, together with pir Padsham, decided upon its laws, observed them from all points, as pir Padsham himself had done, and died. But after them a series of superior incarnations showed themselves on the earth and came in successive epochs to renew the notions of truth and justice and to shepherd darkened minds back to that of duty. The Nusayris declare that an infinite number of these reformatory existences have appeared in the most varied countries and, in fact, in all the lands of the earth. But they also recognize that they have forgotten or even been unaware of the existence of the majority of these manifestations, of which many did not in fact concern them. Those they do mention are indicative of where they live. They recognize as divine incarnations Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus Christ, Ali and many more; and if they were habitually in contact with the Chinese, the Hindus, with European Protestants, it is likely that they would have no difficulty in accepting Confucius, Brahma, Luther and Calvin as incarnations. However, they feel no more than an obligation of respect for the memory of those passing gods, firstly because they did not come specifically for them, and also because others have since revealed themselves who truly lived for the inhabitants of Persia. These are the patron pirs of the seven Nusayri sects.

The existence of those incarnations is generally situated around the time of the first Abbassid Caliphs. Several appeared at the same time. So pir Daud, god of the Daudis, was a contemporary of pir Ibrahim, the god of the Ibrahimis.

This then is the heart of Nusayri doctrine. They recognize unequivocally the existence of a god of whom they themselves form part and to whom they declare themselves inferior, as the part always is with respect to the whole, but they never address themselves to him. That god, from whom the whole of nature emanated, things, beings, is too absorbed by the sum total of all the conceptions he represents. He is, he exists; he is the source of supreme reason, far more, as we shall see, he is the end, the goal of all creation; but during earthly existence only his apparent manifestations can be of any interest to man, because by enlightenment, by directing all efforts more assuredly towards good, those apparent manifestations alone exercise a salutary influence on mankind. The Nusayris therefore concern themselves only with the pirs, as the Gnostics concern themselves only with the æons. The prayers

they address to those gods are highly marked by their dominating moral concerns. They are, by this fact, advice the believers give themselves or their listeners in the form of homage to he who came to direct them on the path of good. Articles of worship are few and brief; and in fact as man himself is nothing but a part of the fallen God, a god himself like his pir, like the pure divine essence itself, multiplying effusions of respect is wasting words for no valid reason and to no profit. What is useful is to encourage oneself and others to constantly be on guard against concupiscence in order to prevent an even deeper fall from grace, and to stimulate one's understanding in order to give pir Musi the possibility of recording a quantity of praiseworthy actions which might raise the degraded condition of the fallen god. The important thing is achieving these results; this kind of cult is entirely constituted by the goal of bringing about the restoration of man to his pure divine condition, and this is why the cult is nothing but the perpetual reproduction of the order established between the five primordial divine emanations since the beginning of the world.

Each Nusayri has from birth or, in the case of a convert, chooses a pir as his *mentor*, as the pure divine essence was pir Benjamin's darsipurdah. As all pirs are celestial incarnations they are all equally good, and the rules they established must equally be followed; consequently all their darsipurdahs walk equally the true path. Naturally however each sect prefers its god and declares its doctrine higher and more suited to the true needs of the regeneration of man, and when that doctrine is manifestly quite down to earth, like that of the Khanatashis for example, those who profess it find it the best because it is simple and sufficient. Similar differences exist in Buddhism, divided into greater and lesser vehicles. Grave conflicts have often broken out amongst these different observances. If a Nusayri finds that the prescriptions of his sect do not suffice him he can adopt those of a higher or more severe doctrine without being considered an apostate.

Besides the pir or patriarch, who was the visible rule during his lifetime and whose teachings he follows, every Nusayri must also fortify himself with the advice of a contemporary called the *dalil*, the motive, the determining cause, because that figure is charged with directing the conduct of his disciple on the straight and narrow path and with illuminating the manner in which he might not stray therefrom. In this way he assumes the rôle of the pir. But it would seem that in modern times these delicate functions have lost most of their importance and are now more or less confined to ceremonial practices. When a child is born or when a stranger converts a number of the faithful gather. The guardian of the child or the neophyte in question stands before the dalil in the midst of the assembly. The latter wears a silk kerchief around his neck for which the newcomer must pay. He pronounces a few sacramental words which admit the neophyte to the fold, and the aforementioned must then kiss the hands of all present, beginning with those of more eminent religious dignity and finishing with those of less. Then a prayer is said, which as usual is a summary of pieces of moral advice. After the prayer everyone is seated for the communion.

As every reception produces a silk kerchief those offerings soon accumulate.

The dalil is then entitled to sell them and the revenue legitimately belongs to him. But as all dalils must descend from a common origin, Junayd,[17] a contemporary of the presently worshipped pirs, it often happens that there is no dalil in the area where the presentation is to take place. This inconvenience is obviated by choosing a substitute who performs the consecrated rite and receives the kerchief in the name of a true dalil. When too many kerchiefs have accumulated in the hands of this replacement he must dispose of them and send the money to the legitimate possessor, the dalil whose vicar he is. If for one reason or another this condition is not fulfilled the proceeds are applied to a communion. It is remarkable that the gift of kerchiefs also plays a great rôle in Tibet, an essentially Buddhist country.

The communion is the same ceremony performed immediately after creation by the five assembled divine intelligences. All foodstuffs are suitable, but the general custom is to buy a sheep for important occasions and sugar candy for lesser ones. Sometimes the dish presented for the office, khidmat, is donated by one of the participants; but it is usually paid for by a collection. The dish destined for the communion is called *niyaz*, offering, as is the sum of money used to procure it. The action of killing the sheep is called *qurban,* the sacrifice, and on those rare and solemn occasions when they kill an ox, *qavburan,* the rection[18] of the ox. The pir, or in his absence on of his descendants, stands in the middle of the congregation for the communion. Beside him is the dalil. The Ibrahimis and the Khanatashis as well, perhaps, as other sects, have a special hereditary dignitary for the regular performance of this ceremony: he is called the khalifa and is responsible for carving and distributing the portions under the direction of the pir or dalil. If no pir, no dalil, no khalifa is present, elected representatives of those celestial emanations will do as they would have done, and the communion is considered none the less sanctifying and meritorious. But if any descendants of those hereditary priest-gods are present it goes without saying that they occupy the place and the functions assigned to their ancestors, and even if they are very young they receive exactly the same honours. That rule is so strict and so completely disregards any concomitant circumstances that might seem diriment,[19] that an impoverished Nusayri man in lowly domestic employ whom I once knew[20] occupied a prominent position in religious assemblies because he was descended from a pir; and respected worldly figures to whom he is often called to perform the services proper to his rank not only treat him with marked deference in all their encounters, as much as the rule of secrecy allows, but in religious meetings do not approach him without kissing his hand. So the transmission of the individual divine particle occurs firstly from the pir, secondly from the dalil, and thirdly from the khalifa, to the descendants of those three incarnations, whilst in no way bearing the same character of saintliness or purity, but nevertheless in a higher degree than the state in which it is found in ordinary men.

When the communion is about to take place the president indicates to each man his portion, which is given to him by the designated officiant. Nobody may touch his portion however until the leader has given another signal and himself begun to eat.

Besides the portions of those present a certain number are usually kept for absentees. If the pieces are too substantial to be consumed at once three days are then allotted for their return or consumption. If the three days are nearly up without the legal result having been attained the remainder must immediately be given to the local members of the sect who performed the khidmat, the service. If there are none it must be given to members of other Nusayri sects; failing that to the Ali Ilahis; but if there are no Ali Ilahis it must unfailingly be given to the dogs or other animals, never to Muslims, because, the Nusayris say, although the divine essence of animals is further removed from organic purity than that of any man, even a Muslim, at least they are not inhabited by any ill will against the faithful.

After the necessary preparations for the consumption of the consecrated victuals have been made the leader of the assembly makes an address whose length depends on the gravity of the occasion or the fervour of the communicants. Then either he or somebody else sings, interpreting in his own way religious poetry almost always borrowed from Sufi poets and accompanying himself on a kind of mandolin called a *tar*. It is noteworthy that none of these compositions exist in the Persian language; they are all in Chaghatay Turkish or Azarbaijani, in Lurish or in Kurdish. Many are quite ancient, but of those I have seen none dated back more than four centuries.

Then there is the question of whether the Nusayris have books. Muslims assert that they do not; the Nusayris themselves say that the only writings they possess are those I have just mentioned. I have reasons however for not believing this to be true. Real libraries containing a good score of volumes must exist in at least two or three locations. As for the content of those works, of whose existence I have many reasons to believe but can only attest to with great reservations, I know nothing. It would be of great interest decisively to ascertain their existence; I am most inclined to believe that whether they deal with material facts or pure philosophy their historical value must be considerable. The most important of these books is said to bear the title of *Kitab-i Sanjanar*, the *Book of Sanjanar*, or *Kitab-i Chahar-Malak*, *Book of the Four Kings*. [21] What I have been told places the doctrine of the Ahl-i Haqq so close to the fundamental ideas of Indian Buddhism that I dare not reproduce those details, fearing that my manner of asking may have dictated the responses, as often happens in Persia. For example, the names of the first four active manifestations, pir Benyamin, pir Razbar, pir Daud and pir Musi are supposedly false names, which in itself I find quite likely, and their real names are those of Buddhas known to Indian texts. I do not dare accept this as completely authentic, but it is nevertheless possible. Another detail worth mentioning is that these books are supposedly written in Kurdish, that tongue being regarded as the sacred language. However, as the Kurdish of the Kermanshah region (the dialect in question) has many connections with an ancient form of Persian called Lakhi, which the Guebres still use amongst themselves, it is probable that that sacred tongue is Lakhi, a fact well worth studying and which, if confirmed, would give the exact time of the introduction of Nusayrism to Persia.

The silk kerchiefs given to the dalils or their representatives for the khidmat are

not the only contributions exacted upon the faithful by their religious superiors. It is also set out that each believer must annually give his pir seven and a half shahis, about a penny. That money, called *niyaz,* is given to the descendants of those figures, called pirzadas, of the pir, or, after the Muslim fashion, sayyids. The sayyids partially live on these offerings, which allow them to devote a part of their time to pious functions.

Armed with all these means of sanctification and surrounded by spiritual guides who are obliged to succour his weakness and prevent him from straying, the Nusayri is supposedly still not in possession of all he needs to battle the temptations of concupiscence. His religion obliges him to choose a brother, *baradar*, or in the case of a woman a sister, *khahar*, who shares the merit of all his or her actions, or the lack thereof. The worst of men, if he has the good fortune to associate him himself with a truly holy person, can arrange things so that he makes greater progress towards salvation than one who fulfils all his duties. One brother must always be able to count on the support of the other. They are on intimate terms and have the right to reprimand each other, including their wives and children, whenever they feel it necessary, even if there is a gulf between them in terms of social standing. Generally speaking these adoptions exert considerable influence on the lives of the Nusayris. They are deeply respected, and this tie, created by the religion, is considered at least as sacred as that created by nature. It is told that such fraternal bonds also exist between men and women. These are the most sacred adoptions of all. In the interests of the adoptive sister or brother one must be prepared to leave one's wife or husband, children or parents. If overly intimate relations arise from such a bond they are considered even more criminal than incest. This kind of union is not usually contracted without mature reflection and the advice of the specific sayyid under whose spiritual guidance one is placed. As they are consulted on all serious matters, particularly those that concern morality, a man who wishes to choose a sister or a woman who wants to acquire a brother has great need of their advice. Before giving an opinion the sayyid always enquires as to the respective ages of the two people involved. A young man must choose an elderly lady; if possible, a young girl is best suited to an old man. The experience and cool-headedness of one must compensate for the shortcomings of the other. It is also useful for the sayyid to know something of the personalities of the candidates. He will not recommend a woman of the same ilk to an overly easy-going man. Finally, when he has given his consent, the two parties take communion together and are thenceforth brother and sister. The Nusayris claim that this relationship has in most cases a very salutary effect on the morals of those who contract it. However, no matter what precautions one takes to maintain a state of purity it occasionally transpires that excessive intimacy and tenderness overstep the prescribed bounds. Not long ago a young man from near Tehran had chosen for his sister a woman of some forty years of age, which in Asia is considered quite old. As a result of the time they spent together in intimate conversation he conceived a violent passion for her. He sought to make her share it, but seeing that his efforts led only to remonstrations, he used force. She denounced him. The culprit fled, but his description was passed to all the members of the

religion; he was apprehended in southern Persia and put to death. The Nusayris claim that if the most extreme methods were not used to maintain inviolate the purity of voluntary fraternal unions between men and women the religion would lose one of its most powerful means of achieving perfection. The existence of such an institution in Asia will doubtless seem remarkable. These are the safeguarding principles that surround every Nusayri.

Nevertheless, despite so many precautions, such great pains, so much surveillance, the Nusayri is a man; it happens that he succumbs, just as do the members of all other religions, no matter how perfect they may be. And just like all other religions the faith of the Ahl-i Haqq announces the inevitable punishment to the guilty party. If his faults were paltry he will be reborn as a human being but to a more or less wretched existence. All the afflictions he bears are the consequence of his previous life or new errors he engages upon. If he has committed horrendous crimes he returns to expiate them in hateful conditions, as a reptile, an insect or a beast of prey condemned to an unquiet, tormented existence. But strictly speaking that punishment is not revenge: it is an indispensable purification. The harder the life, the more vigorous the correction, the surer and more complete the purification. The most rebellious nature therefore, that most prone to *nafis*, concupiscence, will traverse a circle of a thousand and one existences, at the end of which it will inevitably be cleansed of all its blemishes. Given the worst possible conditions, this is the longest expiation the man-god may have to endure. But he does not necessarily have to undergo such a long series of trials and tribulations: that is where observance of the rule, furnishing pir Musi's registers with the maximum number of good actions, contributes effectively towards the deliverance of the divine spark. The creature who, in any form whatsoever, observes the laws fixed by pir Padsham, arrives far quicker at the top of the ascending ladder of existences. It regresses less. Degree by degree, existence by existence, it soon attains the rank of the pirs, of the mortal gods, and having reached that point, when the soul abandons its corporeal form, it returns to the celestial hearth whence it emanated on the day of creation and is nevermore separated therefrom. It is God, as before beginning the series and chain of incarnations. It is not God individually, because the idea of God rejects any idea of fragmentation and of finitude. It is God in His incalculable immensity. When the last, the most recalcitrant existences have achieved purification, all that is but form will disappear, and eternity, according to all its conditions of amplitude, will reign alone. That is the day the Nusayris, borrowing an inexact meaning of the Muslim expression Ruz-i Jaza, the Day of Judgement, the day of the winnowing of the righteous from the unrighteous, consider the end of time.

Many Nusayri holy figures have testified to the reality of successive existences. Shaykh Hamir claimed to have retained the memory of some of his previous incarnations. Amongst other things, he recalled having been a maker of straw mats.

As all men together are merely a fraction of divine nature they must live together in solidarity. This is why Nusayrism has invented so many means of directing the lives of individuals. But the entire edifice of adoptive brothers and sisters who influence their intimacy and take credit for part of their good actions, of

communion gatherings that maintain fervour, of sayyids, khalifas and their representatives who watch over the purity of their faith, would be incomplete and lack an indispensable regulator if there were no supreme oversight, and this is what the religious organization has provided. A figure who holds the highest spiritual authority, who knows and tells what is to be believed, what is to be done, is at this moment living in a southern Persian town. His action is exerted through intermediaries, missionaries he sends once a year to all places where the faithful are to be found. Those delegates carry a kind of pastoral letter containing instructions and encouragement to the sayyids of each locality. It seems that the dignity of supreme leader of the religion is not the exclusive domain of the descendants of the pirs but is accessible to all believers. But how did the election take place? This is what I cannot say; nor do I know who the electors were. What I can affirm is that I have seen the orders of a spiritual leader carried out by his flock at approximately one month's walk form his residence, and that that man, venerated as a saint by his fellow believers, was one of the finest, most honourable, most modest and gentlest beings I have ever encountered.

With their profound scorn for the matter of which they consist, their conviction that that matter is nothing other than impurity, that it alone hinders the instant apotheosis of the complete God, the extremes to which the Nusayris push the cult of relics is not completely rational. It is however the case. Objects having belonged to the pirs are preserved in different places, and those testimonials to the existence of such venerated figures inspire great respect. Amongst other things, I know of a carpet and a hat honoured with extreme fervour. People visit them with extreme devotion and each of them has its legend. Several miracles have been obtained from them. But as far as I have been able to ascertain the faithful do not regard those objects as capable of alone producing effects contrary to the ordinary order of nature; their latent power must be put into motion by the holiness of he who invokes them. Thus it is told that a few years ago a saint venerated in all Persia was able to contain a flood and return the river to its bed by extending the above named carpet upon the surging tide and seating himself upon it. He was carried for a while on the surface of the waves then the swell abated and calm was restored. The hat performed no less astounding prodigies. Placed on the head of a man who had just expired it immediately recalled him to life. I have never heard of the mortal spoils of pirs or other revered figures being preserved in the same way. I find it hard to believe however that amongst the immense quantity of saintly tombs that cover Persia and constantly attract pilgrimages some sanctuaries visited by Shi'ites on pure hearsay do not in reality owe their origins to Nusayrism. The doubts attached to a great number of burial places of which no living being can say which saint is buried there, whence he came, what he did, nor even very assuredly what name he bore, represent a difficult question and are the butt of constant jokes. This seemingly important objection in no way however deters the devotees, who have a thousand reasons for loving pilgrimages. I have no doubt that the Nusayris are able to use the cover of this widespread popular penchant to have their own places of devotion.

From miracles operated by saintly relics to thaumaturgy there is only one step, and the Nusayris take it. Everyone in Persia, Muslims included, tells and believes

in the facts I shall now recount. In Kermanshah, especially in Sana, there are sayyids or descendants of pirs over whom fire has no dominion. A brazier of live coals is lit in the middle of the room and while a musician plays the tar or the little drum called a dombeck the Nusayri approaches the flaming hearth. He begins to work himself up into an exalted state, raising his eyes and arms towards heaven amidst violent contortions; then when he is in a state of complete over-excitement and sweat is running down his face and over his whole body he takes a piece of burning coal and puts it in his mouth, blowing in such a way that flames come out through his nose; he feels no pain. Then he sits in the centre of the fire; the flames rise to caress his beard without singeing it. He is in the middle of the blaze and his robe does not burn; finally he lies down on the coals, and this causes him no discomfort. Others enter a lighted baker's oven, stay for what seems to them a suitable length of time and then come out unharmed.

The power these sayyids have over fire others have with regards to air. They can hurl themselves and their wives and children from the highest rocks without their fall causing them any pain. Not only, I repeat, have Nusayris repeated all of these facts to me in profound good faith, but Muslims also claim to have witnessed and be unable to explain them. One finds many disbelievers even amongst the faithful however, and I have heard devout Ahl-i Haqq brand miracles of this nature as charlatanism.

Here is how one pirzada, or descendant of a pir, explained these extraordinary occurrences to me: "As", he said, "in nature everything is God, everything also conceals, latently it is true, but certainly, the plenitude of omnipotence. To make it appear and put it to work faith alone is required; and the more intense and complete that faith, the more wondrous the achieved effects. It is not only from fire or air that one can draw prodigies but also from the apparently lowliest of objects. If one wishes to compel anything to put its internal virtue into action it is necessary only to apply the irresistible instrument of faith, and then nothing is impossible". These then are by and large the ideas of the Nusayris.

I, for my part, do not hesitate to believe that this doctrine shares much common ground with Buddhism. Everything seems to indicate that it has existed in Persia since the time of the Arsacid kings and that it was introduced by Indian missionaries. It must have been firmly established at the advent of the Sassanids in the third century of the Christian era. It had a marked and direct influence on the Alexandrian school and subsequently on the formation of the first Oriental Christian sects. It gave to and borrowed from Gnosticism and Manichæism. Although the mobeds were powerless to destroy it they at least succeeded in forcing it into hiding, and it grew accustomed to that state of affairs. Islam found it thus and has been able to lay no hand on it.

According to the interested parties their number is incalculable. In their discussions they begin by stating the principle that their religion, being by nature universal, has always existed, and that it is currently practised under different names by thousands of believers in all the lands of the earth. From there they gladly go on to state that despite some appearances to the contrary Christians are basically

Nusayris, since they accept the doctrine of divine incarnation, the rigorous necessity of morality, and the legal purity of all beings, independently of sin.

They then go on to calculate that the princes of the house of Uthman and the majority of their subjects are Sunnis in name only but in reality belong to their faith; for they came from Persia and in Persia their ancestors were Nusayris. Although many inhabitants of Asia Minor do in fact merit that title the assertion appears no less bold when it is presented in such a general manner.

But even limiting oneself to the incontestable Nusayris, those of Persia, there is no doubt that amongst the sedentary and nomadic populations of the towns, the villages, the desert, at least two fifths of the total population of the empire are Nusayris,[22] and it is precisely the most warlike tribes, the men of Kurdistan and the nomadic Turks of the north who are the most deeply attached to those doctrines. They therefore inspire great fear in the political power structure, and in the same way as they traditionally refrain from declaring their beliefs, the government and the mullahs likewise do their best to avoid all conflict with them. This is why during Ramadan in Tehran, when a Muslim could not try to break the fast without incurring serious penalties, a blind eye is turned to the continuous and often public Nusayri infractions of this rule. If Persia were ever placed under an administration unfavourable to Islam the most unexpected results would ensue from this deep-seated preponderance of a religion so hostile to the laws of the Prophet.

The remarkable phenomenon that there are no Christian Persians can probably also be attributed to the presence of this doctrine. It is not improbable that most of the Christians, who seem to have been numerous in the country during the first centuries of the church, belonged to Gnostic sects; they would quite easily have merged with the Nusayris. Only foreign Christians remain; Armenians in Julfa, Tehran and Tabriz; Chaldeans on the shores of Lake Urumiya, Nestorians around Sana and along the Turkish border.[23]

I complete this review of the religions of Persia with the Guebres.

All-powerful under the Sassanids, under the Arabs and the first Turkish dynasties they became feared and formidable subordinates. It was difficult to wipe them out. The rural populations long remained Guebre. They founded their authority on the ancient territorial nobility, called dekhans,[24] a people both proud of their genealogy, schooled in the annals of the past and accustomed to war. They also had some quite strong allies in the large feudalities of the northern mountains, which kept their cult until the eleventh century of our era. What helped them above all were the policies of the first dynasties, rivals of the Caliphate. Formed as a reaction against the Arab conquest, they drew on nationalistic sentiment whilst remaining Muslim. They tried to revive any vestiges of the old religion; they paid historians and poets to tell the people of their own history. While still claiming an active faith in the religion of Muhammad they indirectly turned their sights backwards towards Magism. So it was not strictly speaking religious persecution that damaged this faith but rather political circumstances.

The Mongol and subsequently Tartar invasions profoundly affected landownership in Persia. Muslim landowners were ruined and replaced by other

Muslims, but the Guebre dekhans, bereft by the unfortunate times, were replaced by adherents of other religions. Once reduced to poverty they fell into the class of lowliest peasants and ceased to form the educated, scholarly layer of society. The poets of the eleventh and twelfth centuries had spoken of them with admiration and respect. Henceforth only their puerile superstitions were alluded to. A special disposition of the Koran caused them great damage. In that law it is stated that any member of an infidel family who becomes a Muslim inherits goods to the detriment of other beneficiaries. In the general intellectual decline many apostatized, and as most Guebre property was territorial the quasi-totality of those who remained true to their religion found themselves irredeemably ruined by their nearest and dearest. They were then oppressed, not as infidels, but as paupers.

However, in the last century that religion could still count three hundred thousand heads of family. The long anarchy and the interminable wars of the period greatly harmed them. Abandoned by all, without priests to lead them, without books to enlighten them, offering the sad spectacle of men who are ignorant of their most essential doctrines, most of them apostatized in order to escape such profound abjection. Only the most stubborn persisted. Under Fath Ali Shah there were still sixty thousand. Today, although they have not had to endure new attacks but are merely undermined by the force of events, this number has fallen to eight thousand, distributed as follows in the provinces:

	Men	*Boys*	*Women*	*Girls*
Yazd	289	373	412	305
Muryabad	115	155	142	109
Navimabad	18	17	23	24
On the lands of Hajji Abul Qasim Rashti	33	64	37	38
Khuramshah	144	234	335	154
Kuchak Biyuk	92	103	118	104
Nasirabad &surroundings	90	130	117	102
Aharastan	87	112	103	79
Khayrabad	40	65	55	49
Rahmatabad	8	6	8	1
On the lands of Hajji Sayyid Mirza	2	8	3	1
Wahnu	4	5	6	4
Zaynabad	49	70	57	53
Chasim	32	52	47	32
Muhammadabad	14	23	15	12
Husaynabad	46	62	53	54
Jafarabad	47	69	59	54
Taffat	90	131	121	110
Rafiqabad	5	10	4	6
On the lands of the Kalantar	28	39	33	28
Sharifabad, Ahmadabad (together)	69	68	87	48
Kerman	178	189	239	219

This table seemed to me worth saving and quoting, firstly because seeing the exact details of the last remnants of an ancient religion which formerly inspired such great deeds cannot leave us totally indifferent; and secondly because the document I transcribe is Asiatic and arises from considerable devotion. It is the work of a Parsee sage from Bombay who came to Iran for reasons of research, to meet and console his fellow believers and if possible to improve their lot. Manakji Limji Sahab[25] accomplished this charitable work with a zeal and an intelligence that honour him to the highest degree, and with him his race. He combed Persia, went to the smallest villages, the remotest hamlets. He met everybody. He counted them, encouraged them, he tried and is still trying to pull them out of their degradation. I confess that I ponder with pleasure the table of that charitable and noteworthy work, and the Parsee missionary does not bear its merit alone. He acted as a representative and emissary of all those tradesmen I spoke of at the beginning of the book who give freely all the money necessary for such a task. And those people pay no heed to whether the newspapers speak of them.

Manakji Limji Sahab undertook a superhuman task. Only a miracle could save the Guebres. I have said that they do not know their religion and it is almost unbelievable to what extent that is true. The few individuals they call their mobeds read the sacred scriptures of the *Avesta*, but none of them understand the language in which it is written so they do not know the precepts and are consequently unable to teach them to their followers. All they have retained of the traditions are a few mediocre theories about purification, and the fundaments of their faith have become so alien to them that they do not hesitate to leave their dead overground, an intolerable sacrilege to the feelings of their ancestors. They are also very curious to establish whether one may eat flesh. Some sustain it, others deny it; others claim that it is licit if one does not oneself kill the animal. Apostasies take place daily amongst the sparse ranks of those poor wretches. In this deplorable state the unfortunate descendants of the contemporaries of Darius and Artaxerxes can only boost their morale by indulging in the most extravagant daydreams. Imitating the general taste of the country for secret religions and wishing to give the appearance of being Muslims they have claimed that Zoroaster was none other than Abraham, and that thus the *Avesta* was a sacred book revealed by the angel Gabriel, like the other holy books recognized by the Muslims. They have also sought protection beneath the cover of a so-called letter of protection emanating from Ali; but the document in question is of such poor fabrication that this clumsy fraud could not establish itself even for a single day.

Despite everything this religion is actually quite noble, elevated, very pure, and still exhibits certain worthy traits. I shall not repeat what I have just said about the great charitable work of Manakji Limji Sahab and the generous participation therein of the merchants of Bombay. But I can recall to mind that the Parsees of India were originally Guebres who emigrated from Persia; that they arrived in their adopted land as fugitives and today claim to count two million followers. The vanished habit of study amongst their Persian brethren has also suffered long eclipses amongst them, and just as at the present time books are so rare in Yazd or Kerman

that one would seek in vain for a complete copy of the *Avesta*, so have the Guebres of Gujurat had times when the most rudimentary knowledge, when the most indispensable books were lacking. Today they have them, and study is beginning to flourish once more in a manner not to be scoffed at. The first result is the refutation of two hitherto most respected things: the influence of the mobeds, exclusively concerned with the Judaic observance of the ceremonial aspects of the cult, and the book entitled *Bundahish*,[26] a pile of absurd daydreams completely contrary to the true spirit of Magism. Enlightened Parsees go so far in their hatred of this inept composition that they declare it invented by their enemies to discredit them, or otherwise composed by the Mazdakites for the use of that abominable sect. What one must acknowledge however, is that the modern tendencies of the Parsees of Bombay are somewhat too rationalist for such an ancient religion.

The praise given to Parseeism in Persia does not address the intelligence but the heart. It is an article of faith that a prophet named Pashutan will soon come to restore, alongside its religion, the ancient glory of Persia. I have heard endless conversations on this topic. All the Guebres are awaiting Pashutan. The question is to know when he will make his appearance; as for the point on the horizon from which he will penetrate Iran with a manstrong army, it is known to be India. At the moment most Guebres tend to believe the army will be composed of Europeans, but which Europeans? There's the mystery. Some say the English; others on the contrary are betting on the Russians. Uncertainty is great. Meanwhile, some time ago, a Guebre of Yazd claimed to know and to be able to positively demonstrate that Pashutan and his army were already en route and about to cross over into Afghanistan. As one might imagine, he was in a great state of agitation and expectancy, and then it occurred to him that the chosen warriors, coming from abroad, had probably not been able to equip themselves with kostis; that is the name of the sacred belt that all men of the pure faith must wear. Seeing them show up without that essential emblem would spoil everything. To forestall any such imminent misfortune the poor man sold all he possessed, had twelve thousand kostis made, hired camels, loaded them with his offerings and set out alone for Afghanistan, judging the matter too urgent to wait for a caravan. No more was ever heard of him. In all likelihood some horde of bandits arriving ahead of Pashuten and his army made off with the camels and their load.

One of my friends, a known Guebre, was one day crossing a small, winding street in Isfahan. The street was deserted, and he was strolling peacefully amongst the ruins when he heard someone call him. He turned around and saw an old woman who, with a mysterious and imploring gaze, gestured to him to come in. He approached and asked her what she wanted. She begged him to be seated for a moment in her house; when he consented she hurried to offer him tea and fruit. As he ate he watched her sighing; soon her eyes filled with tears and she began to sob. Quite taken aback, my friend asked what was the matter with her: "Alas" she said, "I wanted to detain you for a moment in my home because I know you profess an excellent religion, that of my forefathers. A long time ago my father also used to weep for the memory of that purest of laws, which he knew only by

name. And, like him, I do not know what you believe, but I am quite sure it is better than Islam".

In certain Persian towns there are families who, when a man dies, close all doors and make sure that no passer-by can approach by chance. Then they light a chafing dish beside the bier and douse it with perfumes. When the smoke rises a precious book, hidden to all eyes except on these occasions, is passed around several times. That book, which sometimes consists of no more than a few scant pages, is the *Avesta* or some remnants thereof. None of those present are able to read it or even know what it is. The mysterious relic is nonetheless regarded as the most sacred object in all creation. When the ceremony is over the rest is done after the Muslim fashion.

This is all that survives of Magism in Persia. Traces of it might also be conjectured from the respect in which astrology is held. What am I saying? Shi'ism itself is full of sentiments, ideas, prescriptions borrowed from Magism. From Magism also comes the doctrine of the legal impurity of infidels and certain animals, far more widely and systematically applied than by the Sunnis. It can therefore truthfully be said that when the doctrine of Zoroaster is dead for Iranians, its essential points will survive at the heart of the rival doctrines. But as a dogmatic body it is most assuredly ailing.

I have outlined as quickly and broadly as possible the tableau of disorder of beliefs, their bizarre amalgams, their decay, their failings, as it exists in Persia. Some might draw from it the conclusion that Christianity, taking advantage of the chaos and weariness, could triumphantly seize the dominating throne that none of the indigenous cults will henceforth occupy. Putting aside what one can suppose about divine will and reasoning solely by human probability, the spectacle I have seen and tried to render has a thousand times inspired me with the opposite reflection. I do not see how all those jaded imaginations can ever be salvaged for a healthy, positive, defined religion. I believe that if Christianity had depended for its survival on the peoples of the Roman Empire it would have been in a woeful state and come too late. It was the active, juvenile conscience of the barbarians who sustained Catholicism and killed in the Occident the heresy that first and forevermore festered in that Oriental world. Minds accustomed to continual variations, tempered to doubt and who continuously see spread out before them the mass of all the beliefs held in the world since remotest Antiquity can and must be exhausted by this panorama and, once accustomed to doubt, will never again be able to free themselves from it.

They resemble those men who are disgusted and wearied of their dissipation but do not have the strength to renounce it. The practice of secret religions also renders the soul inapt to grasp truths in an absolute manner. Can we ever know what objections to expect from one who is accustomed to believing something completely different from what he professes? Does he not at the same time adopt some of the most discordant ideas? Is he not long immured to sophism, and has he not raised inconsistency to the status of dogma? It is precisely because it is inconsistency that it is elusive, and I believe that Christianity, transported to Persia, could at best substitute

Islam in the post of ostensible religion, which seems to me a rôle neither worthy of it nor particularly fruitful. Besides, there have already been three failed attempts that rather seem to support my opinion.

Shah Akbar in India and Nadir Shah in Persia,[27] on greatly differing religious terrain, were both very struck by the political drawbacks of this dispersion of consciences amongst their subjects. They wanted to inaugurate a new belief which, constructed in an eclectic manner, would have contained a little of everything: a little Christianity, a little Islamism, a little Nusayrism, rationalism and thaumaturgy; to satisfy one and all. The people watched, and they acquired not one neophyte. Shah Akbar failed absolutely. Nadir Shah was more obstinate, thought he understood that his undertaking was all too patently human and condemned itself for that reason. He decreed that everybody simply had to rally to Sunnism in order that his country be well and truly Muslim. People seemed to obey, but he soon perceived that he had changed not one iota of the status quo. As he was by nature incredulous and saw the matter only from the political viewpoint he gave up in resignation.

But Aurangzeb[28] was a man unlike those two sovereigns. In all things he had absolute ideas. He did not look for complicated plans to implement his thoughts. He quite simply wanted an irresistible despotism exerted on a people with no other faith than Islam; what he wanted at the beginning of his interminable reign he still obstinately desired at the end of it. He did a lot of harm, his memory is abhorred by all non-Muslims and he left no lasting achievement. After his death things returned exactly to where they were at his coming. Any analogous attempt in Persia would have the same result.

From this I conclude that just as Persian patriotism is by its nature above, or if one wishes, below all political transformations, but can in any case suffer them and bear all trials without losing anything of its virtuality and its effects, in the same way the religious disposition of Iranians, their astounding consumption of dogmatic ideas, the amorphous but gigantic mass of them that they possess, constitutes a rubbish dump that nothing could ever sweep away and will forever prevent a unique and complete doctrine from establishing itself on that terrain. It is a sort of marsh where it is impossible to solidly drive in pilings but which on the other hand is capable of engulfing any building one might try to erect upon it.

I shall now go on to the condition of individuals.

4

THE CONDITION OF INDIVIDUALS

Let us give honour where it is due, and start with the king.

The sovereign of Persia is not that absolute monarch we in the Occident imagine him to be. I have even read in certain writings that whilst limits could be imagined to the authority of other Asian sovereigns, including the Emperor of China, the Shah was a kind of terrestrial god and the puckering of his brow made whole provinces quake irremissibly. Those authors have taken the protocols of royal decrees a bit too literally. Without wishing to oppose a paradox to an error, I would tend rather to believe that no dynasty in the world is in such an equivocal position as that of the king of Persia.

To begin with, the fundamental law of the land declares him illegitimate and sees in him a mere usurper,[1] demanding obedience to him as the de facto but by no means rightful governor. Here again we see the great antiquity of all things in Persia and how their origins are to be found in the very earliest institutions. Plenipotentiary legal sovereignty was in the hands of the Sassanids. And why were the Sassanids legitimate? Because they had overthrown the Arsacids, a dynasty harking back to Alexander, a foreigner, and re-established the home-bred succession. They were the true kings of Persia and the ideal upon which the sovereigns of later centuries were obliged to model themselves.

When they fell before the Arab invaders Ali succeeded to all their rights, firstly because as a religious conqueror the sole fact of having brought the faith to the country justified his elevation; then as Imam. In this last quality he was sovereign of Persia for all eternity; all other rights naturally conjoined with his. Then, because his son, Husayn, married Bibi Shahrbanu, daughter of the last Sassanid king, and produced posterity, it is clear that any claims that might have been laid by other members of that ancient family were completely effaced. So the Alids should have ruled after the Sassanids; but the persecuted descendants of Ali did not rule, and their place was usurped by the Abu Bakr caliphs Umar and Uthman. Their domination was therefore seen as illegitimate by the Shi'ites. For the Sunnis however it was legitimate, as was the entire line of the Abbassids. Muslims disagreed, some said yes, some said no, but they were soon of one mind. The Abbasid domination of Persia very quickly became purely nominal. The al-Umaras Emirs assumed full royal authority and began the long series of local dynasties. They were not

descendants of the Imams, and remained therefore usurpers in the eyes of the law. Aware of the tenuity of their position, those princes, of Turkish origin as I have already said, tried in vain to extend their genealogy back beyond Yazdijird, the last Sassanid ruler. In vain they produced genealogies linking them directly to the king who preceded him. Beside the fact that those documents were highly suspect they did not resolve the central problem, for the prerogatives of the Imamate remained and could in no way be usurped. The result was that all those sovereigns, one after the other, from the Sassanids up to the present ruler**,** Nasir al-Din, had to accustom themselves, nolens volens, to being de facto but not rightful masters.[2]

The law as such does not recognize the legitimacy of their ownership of any property. In their imperial palaces they are obliged to pay rent to the mosque for certain designated rooms, otherwise they could not perform their prayers in them. Prayers performed in unduly possessed and unjustly held places are not deemed valid and turn to the shame of the despoiler. But they can overcome that difficulty by paying rent and becoming tenants. They have no more right to their furniture or even to the clothes they wear than to their royal residences. This is why a religious figure aspiring to any degree of holiness never accepts donations from a king of Persia; as the money he would receive would not be the legitimate property of the donator it would sully him. Likewise he may not sit on the king's carpet; it is a carpet that should not be in the hands of he who possesses it. No more than seven or eight years ago a mujtahid who had been summoned before Muhammad Shah lifted up the carpet that covered the ground with his cane and sat down on the bare floor. All those present, including the king himself, understood the action of the holy man, found it lawful, normal, natural and were not offended by it.

However, there would be considerable drawbacks to leaving the royal situation unpalliated in some way or other. The means of achieving this was found in the fact that the greatest dynasties, like the Ghaznavids, the sons of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, were foreign conquerors who dominated Iran by means of nations or tribes previously subject to their direct rule, and in the other fact that most home-bred dynasties were the creation of devil-may-care adventurers and their loyal supporters. Since those times the king has appeared as a protector, placed in a dominating position because of his strength but foreign to the regular hierarchy of State power. According to the theory he remains a permanent and omnipotent benefactor who casts his shadow over the empire and consents to do all in his power for its welfare. This fiction is revealed on solemn occasions such as the salam, or great reception of nawruz, the New Year. The people, the troops, the government employees all assemble in one of the imperial gardens. The talar[3] is opened and the platform is bedecked with enamelled gold and silver trays, precious vases of all periods, shapes and sizes, all filled with sherbets and confectionery. When the crowd has gathered the king appears, surrounded by relatives and courtiers, and takes the throne. He is in full ceremonial attire, sword at side, and next to him stand the bearers of the official arms, the ceremonial mace and shield, insignia of conquest and domination. All bow in respect; then, amidst the silence of the crowd,

the prime minister, interpreter of the feelings of the assembly, approaches to within thirty feet of the talar and greets the sovereign in a loud voice, wishing him prosperity. After having enquired about the state of his health the king asks whether the people have cause to be satisfied. To which the prime minister replies that public contentment has never been so complete, that Iran owes an incomparable felicity to the virtues and genius of the monarch and demonstrates its gratitude to him on that day. Then his Majesty goes into detail. He enquires whether there are hopes of a rich harvest? – Excellent hopes. – If peace reigns in all provinces? – Profound peace. – If the administrators are devoted to the public and of satisfactory integrity? – Nowhere were zeal and integrity ever worthier of praise. Seeing this the king thanks God for such a state of affairs and makes the observation that in order for it to continue the people must maintain their obeisance to the religion; to which the minister replies: "Verily! Verily!" – Morality must also remain pure! –"Verily! Verily!" – Avarice must also be banished from the hearts of public servants; for nothing is as harmful to a nation as dishonest judges. – "Verily! Verily!" After having pronounced a few more such salutary recommendations the king remains silent and his kalyan is passed to him. While he smokes servants distribute refreshments. Then bags filled with small gold and silver coins struck especially for the occasion are brought in and the king gives gifts to everybody. During this time he continues to make official observations to the prime minister, but in a very informal tone.

A poet steps forward from the bottom of the garden and declaims some verses in praise of the monarch. When he has finished a mullah in turn recites a prayer to the same effect, after which his Majesty rises, the prime minister bids him farewell, and when everybody bows the king leaves and the ceremony is over.

In the intermixture of this kind of royal discourse and national artfulness it clearly stands out that the king is not the State but is placed above it in the independent, in some ways exterior and above all protective situation I indicated above.

The true representative of the State is the minister, and although the latter is always chosen by the prince and in fact more the crown's man than the country's the existence of that high authority easily explains itself from the point of view I have described. If, on the contrary, one imagines the prince has a right to limitless despotism it becomes difficult to understand the perpetual presence of a delegate who on many occasions must thwart royal authority and on others eclipse it. The functions of prime minister did not exist under the Sassanids. The sovereign's inner circle consisted of three great dignitaries, the head Mage, the imperial chancellor and the commander-in-chief of the army. Under the caliphs the grand vizier did not have the immediate authority of a Persian prime minister of later times. Although he is endowed with a somewhat tottering authority and his dignity as well as his person are completely at the mercy of the prince that dignitary, whose title has often varied, is nonetheless the true and immediate head of the Persian administration. He holds in his hands domestic policy, the Exchequer, public works, the army. He represents the State. The prince chooses him at will, dismisses him, has him put to death; but he can hardly do without him and achieves nothing except by his

intermediation.[4] This troublesome position is sometimes suppressed for a time and replaced by a collective authority. But it is so much in the nature of things that it always ends up reappearing. This goes to show that true ability to act lies with the prime minister.

He presents officials of all ranks and natures for royal nomination. They are accountable to him. Under him are, firstly, his colleagues, of whom none has regular or fixed functions, for he does as suits him without asking their opinion; then come the mustaufis, state councillors of a sort, who take care of accounts. They examine expenditure and keep the books. Each minister has a limited number of employees under him. However, if one calculates that more are needed for customs and excise, for the army, for the arsenals, for the post, for finances and for all provincial administrations, one soon sees that their number nevertheless becomes quite considerable, especially taking into account that the population hardly appears to exceed ten to twelve million souls. The smelted hope and desire of entering public service that produces that large and ubiquitous class of men known as mirzas then becomes comprehensible.

A mirza is more or less what the English call a "gentleman". The prime minister is entitled mirza; but the hierarchy descends considerably and many servants are also mirzas. Generally speaking one adopts that title if one possesses a certain literary knowledge and both considers oneself and wishes to be considered somewhat above the common run of men. Most mirzas aspire to civil service, but they can also be found amongst the military ranks. If they come from very humble origins it is clear that their career will not follow the same path as those whose first steps were favoured by fortune. So one sees them as carpet rollers or kalyan bearers until some fortunate circumstance contributes to their elevation. There is no reason why they should not obtain the most eminent posts: officially only merit is required of them; in reality influential patronage. This class, which I cannot call a middle class, for it is unproductive, practises no trade, renders no positive service to the country and limits itself to the condition of lifelong seekers of favour, is the most visible and active part of Persian society. Even if many of its members amass extraordinary fortunes nowhere does it establish anything lasting; a family of mirzas rarely lives in opulence for two generations. Just as their employment exalts them, so the lack thereof brings about their fall.[5]

The kind of existence they lead is not conducive to maintaining high moral standards. They have the virtues and the vices common to seekers of favour in all countries. A great deal of patience, flexibility, endless amiability, a tendency to take things as they come, a great practical scepticism, gaiety, finesse, serendipity; they are so many Gil Blas. They are mad for pleasure and have the morals to match, would think themselves fools were they not a little treacherous, a little knavish. These then are the instruments of Persian administration.

In Tehran the prime minister manages within the realms of feasibility to keep his eyes on this motley crew; but as soon as one leaves the capital and lands in some provincial town one enters a tiny world where in many ways self-serving interest dominates the scene. It is true that the governor holds his post at the

pleasure of the king in agreement with the prime minister; but for as long as he holds it he does whatever he wishes. He is accountable to the central government for three things: property taxes, regular army recruitment, excise duties where applicable. Beyond these three points the governor enjoys complete freedom of action. He is a little king; he has his vizier just as the king has his, and he governs as he sees fit. He can be recalled, but is not watched, unless a spy has been assigned to him. But even in those cases the least wily amongst them corrupts his surveillant and shares the profits with him. If his actions displease the court the prime minister sends orders. But he has no means of assuring that they will be obeyed, and generally speaking they are not. One can therefore say that in truth royal power exists in Tehran only in the form of a perpetual delegation in the hands of its principal agent, and that in the provinces it has only one way of intervening, that is by the appointment and destitution of governors. But the daily practice of administration escapes it almost completely. Therefore, as I described above, in every town the mirzas' games begin.

After the mirzas come the merchants. I have spoken elsewhere of the behaviour and the customs of traders and have nothing more to add. They are the same in Egypt, in Arabia and in India. But in Persia merchants are perhaps the most respectable section of society. They are known for their great probity. As they do not live at fortune's whim and as a merchant is usually the son of a merchant from whom he has inherited a substantial fortune which he will in turn pass on to his sons he lives without worldly ambition and remains aloof from many intrigues. He needs public esteem and cultivates it carefully. The result is that this sharp-witted, sceptical, mocking and distrustful people has no qualms about investing its money with them, and in this way they correspond to European credit establishments. In reality they control most of the capital in Persia, a fact that renders them very important to the government, which is always beset by financial necessity and would not know where to turn if the merchants did not exist to help. It borrows from them; but, as the merchants necessarily lend capital that does not belong to them and for which they are accountable, they cannot do so without solid guarantees, and so they often hold monopolies or delegations on the revenue of such and such a province, precious stones or other similar securities. It has occurred that the court, ruined and not knowing which way to turn, has found no better solution than to declare bankruptcy; but these coups d'état are extremely rare, occurring only in times of extreme crisis, for their almost certain result is to render any ulterior borrowing impossible. I do not believe therefore that there have been any recent examples. What does happen is that the gage remains in the hands of the lenders in perpetuity; but in that case the spoliation is entirely on the borrower's side. In the same way it is very difficult to inflict any serious affront upon a merchant, because a man from whom one has taken a hundred francs by force will later refuse to lend a thousand in a case of urgent need, and not only he will give nothing, his colleague will do the same by esprit de corps. The Persian trader pays not one farthing in taxes. He sells everything, silk, cotton, porcelain, crystal, spices, goods from Europe and Asia; he is both banker and broker and pays no form of duty. He is considered a capitalist. All he pays is his shop rent to the owner of the bazaar. Nothing else.

Commercial practice is strongly marked by the horror in which Oriental nations hold precision. I have said that the Persian merchant is almost always of strict probity. This may be true, but he does not consider himself obliged to pay letters of credit when they fall due. If it does occasionally happen some question of pride is usually involved. In reality it is not considered obligatory, and even the most respectable people do not feel bound to do so unless their conscience is constrained by some verbal or written promise. The creditor gladly accords a postponement; he confines himself to raising the interest rate. As that rate is nearly always twenty four per cent, he raises it to thirty. I have seen credits reach sixty per cent in this manner. Then it often happens that the debtor declares himself unable to continue paying such high interest. While it is true that the law permits expropriation it does so only with repugnance and many restrictions, so it is an extreme measure that cannot be applied without damaging one's reputation; it is therefore only used with reluctance and then usually only as an act of revenge when one has personal reasons for being displeased with the debtor's behaviour. But ordinarily the period of the loan is extended without increasing the interest rate or the creditor makes do with a lump sum, which together with what had already been paid represents his capital augmented by a reasonable profit. This sort of agreement leaves no blemish on anyone's reputation and honours the creditor. From a moral point of view it would perhaps be wrong to judge this manner of proceeding with the rigour of our commercial principles. Such lackadaisicalness in no way impedes the Persian merchants' good faith in business matters. As proof of this I offer the confidence with which they act. I have seen one of them, on verbal request, send seven hundred and twenty gold pounds in a sealed silk bag and tear up as an offence the receipt he was offered. When I was in Tehran a mule-driver brought me a package containing a hundred and twenty pounds worth of ancient medallions from Hamadan, seven days march away. I had never heard of the man who sent me that parcel. He was suspicious neither of his mule-driver nor of an unknown European, which seems to me the most convincing proof of his personal probity.

The merchants then, live at the heart of Persian society with more or less no obligations towards it and in fairly considerable freedom. In many ways the same applies to the principal trades. They form guilds, *asnaf*, which have their officials, just as the merchants have theirs. These officials are elected by them and amongst them. They form assemblies to decide on their interest rates. They have a bank and a treasurer. Masters are named as a result of examinations. In a word, it is the organization of Saint Louis[6], or rather the organization that Saint Louis found and put in order, that our tradesmen owe to the Romans, who owed it to Asia, where it has remained, as everything remains. The traders pay nothing to the government, and the only tax exacted from craftsmen is the one they pay to their own bank. They do make a small contribution to the general running expenses of the bazaar. It immediately becomes clear that these regimented guilds are supported on one side by the merchants, for whom they work, and on the other by the mullahs who, needing massive popular support for their prestige, gladly support the cause of the apprentices, the craftsmen and even the masters. In untroubled times a Persian craftsman lives

in peace and tranquillity; the law protects him and demands nothing from him. The government and the administration could only act to his detriment by resorting to highly irregular procedures.

The Persian workman is skilful, ingenious, industrious, and even hardworking in his way. I say in his way because he does not understand how work should impose upon him the considerably more arduous labours of his European counterparts. He cannot conceive the idea of remaining twelve to fifteen hours a day at his task and neither would anyone dream of trying to impose such fatigue on him. Subdivision does not exist here as it does in Europe,[7] each craftsman completes alone and unaided both the constituent parts of his work and the work itself; the result is that he is subject to the capriciousness, pleasures, imagination and, it must also be said, the nonchalance of the artist. We achieve immense commercial results by dividing the production of a needle, or even more so, a watch, between a considerable number of workmen, each of whom has a speciality from which he never deviates. All acquire striking faculties of precision and rapidity; they produce in incomparable abundance and with incomparable mechanical precision; but they themselves become machines of a sort, and neither their intelligence nor their real and considered taste for the trade they exercise gain anything from this system. Speculation and production may profit greatly, but the man certainly loses. Nothing surprises and disconcerts a European more than being asked to do something even slightly outside of his usual routine. He becomes almost indignant, and his initial response is always to declare the thing impossible. I know I am going against a commonly held conception; but anybody not possessed by a systematic admiration for the working classes and who has tried to get Parisian workmen, who pass for paragons of dexterity, to do something unusual, will agree about their bad will and clumsiness, a double obstacle that can be overcome only by dint of patience, insistence and money. The Persian workman on the contrary is always charmed by the idea of work he has never done before. He eagerly sets to work, quickly grasps what is being asked of him and carries it out with surprising intelligence and dispatch. He particularly enjoys copying European artefacts. I have seen tables, chairs, armchairs, wardrobes, windows perfectly fabricated by men for whom they were more or less a trial run. Knives on an English model are commonly made in Shiraz and Isfahan at a very low price, and are so well counterfeited that even the word *London* is not missing from the blade. I have seen threaded spurs copied so well at sight by a locksmith that apart from the quality of the iron the Persian workmanship was at least as good as the English and moreover cost only about two thirds of the price. But for things to go satisfactorily it must be possible to do them by fits and starts or that they be quickly finished. Any object requiring methodic, patient work, persistence, lacking the excitement of novelty, is sure to be abandoned long before being finished. The Persian workman enjoys his work, as ours do not, but he is subject to boredom, and it then becomes very difficult to hold him to it until the end. It goes without saying that if one has been imprudent enough to pay in advance it is almost a foregone conclusion that that end will never be reached.

It would seem however that in former times, by that I mean from about a hundred

to a hundred and fifty years ago, a large part of the population was involved in the manufacturing industry. There was a great production of silk, velvet, taffetas, brocade, in Kashan, in Rasht, in Yazd; manufacture of arms in Kerman and Shiraz; woven calico in many different places; remarkably beautiful coppersmithery, renowned in all the Orient; lastly a quantity of different manufacturing branches, amongst which we cannot neglect to mention various types of carpet. The situation today is a far cry from all that; but a little of everything remains. That little feeds a certain number of craftsmen and could easily be increased without all the destructive effects of industrial activity that are presently at work in different Asian countries. But those effects, of which I shall speak later, are so pernicious that being a workman lacks desirable gainfulness and, consequently men of that class often prefer to embrace a profession that is ordinarily the refuge of penniless adventurers, unplaced servants and, to tell the truth, of just about everybody at one time or another: brokerage.

This trade seems admirably adapted to the Persian spirit. It demands finesse, guile, a kind of eloquence and genuine powers of persuasion, patience and some knowledge of the human heart. It is a school of experience and ergo of wisdom. All Persians, but particularly those of Isfahan and Shiraz, are born *dallals*, or brokers. Everybody sells or pawns what he possesses. When I say everybody I mean it literally. The king pawns his jewels, his women their finery; the scholar borrows on his books and the landowner on his fields. There are no men or women who are not indebted, and there is probably nobody so indebted as to not have his own debtors. Whenever one makes a purchase, a dress, jewellery, a cooking pot, one considers no doubt whether it is suitable for its intended purpose, but above all one makes sure it is suitable for pawning or resale, and there are certain moments in the calendar when half the town lends or gives money to the other half in this way. The principal moment is the feast of nawruz, New Year. The second is muharram, the time of theatrical representations; and all other occasions for rejoicing or mourning, public as well as private, and God knows they are not lacking, especially the former, in a people whose great and perpetual preoccupation is to enjoy themselves, are also circumstances where everybody frantically looks for money; wearing their trademark self-important look of complicity the brokers dash around carrying large packages and stopping people in the street or going to their houses and acting as if they were trafficking all the riches of the universe at low prices out of pure philanthropy. I have had dealings with the dallals, and not always exactly to the great benefit of my purse. But truth obliges me to admit that they are very useful for lovers of curios, and endlessly amusing. I desire that two members of that guild, who, of course, will never read these pages, find here the expression of my gratitude for the enjoyable moments we spent together. That Nasrullah may always find obliging buyers and Ustad Aqa, his colleague, undemanding sellers. The former is from Isfahan and the latter from Shiraz, and I am at a loss as to which of those two artful characters should receive the palm. I have had a few misunderstandings with Ustad Aqa, but no cloud ever cast its shadow over my relations with Nasrullah. One day when we were having difficulty reaching agreement and I, quite wrongly I am

sure, suspected him of taking excessive advantage of my credulity, I happened to call him by the common epithet *son of burnt father*. This expression, very much in vogue, means that the father of the person one is speaking to is burning in hell for his misdeeds. "Sir", Nasrullah said to me, "call me what you will, I shall feel honoured, but not that, because it makes me sad. If my father were living I would have no objection; but he is dead, and you understand . . ." I admired his delicacy, and, as a token of mutual esteem, asked him to lessen his demands somewhat, which I did not obtain.

One might say that the whole country has tried, is trying or will try its hand at the broker's trade and is comfortable with it; people are no less keen to lend money than to borrow it, as I have already said. The sovereign lends to the State, powerful figures lend to the people, servants to their masters, soldiers to their officers, officers to their men; the riff-raff of the bazaar borrow and lend amongst themselves: it is the panurgic[8] ideal. At first, when one sees that nobody in this pandemonium is in the slightest inclined to honour his engagements, this state of affairs seems almost incomprehensible. Signatures, as we say here, or stamps, as one uses over there, are liberally supplied to whoever is prepared to accept them, but scant concern is given to subsequently withdrawing those witnesses to indebtedness from circulation. From all this great disorder doubtless arises, but no poverty. A creditor who has his debtor's furniture sold is looked upon as a monster. The whole neighbourhood turns against him and he has no rest. So it is better to lose what one has lent than to retrieve it by violent means. From this one will understand that a man weighed down with debt in Tehran is far from finding himself in the difficult and wretched situation of his Parisian counterpart. His friends and neighbours commiserate with him; those he owes money to try to improve his position so that he can repay part of what he owes them; all in all he can quite cheerfully bear the weight of the day. I have been called upon to arbitrate in contentions between dependants or protégés of the legation and other natives; when I obliged a debtor to return the borrowed capital I performed an act of literal justice but by no means one of natural equity, and even the beneficiary of the repayment regarded the result as a piece of unexpected good fortune that represented a favour on my part and not the fulfilment of a normal and natural duty. And that is understandable. I made a man who seven or eight years previously had borrowed five hundred tumans (two hundred and forty pounds) return three hundred. Up until then the lender had periodically received an interest that had risen from forty per cent the first year to sixty per cent in the second year and had at that point reached eighty per cent. He had also already managed to recuperate two hundred tumans of the capital and would have long gone on to receive some amount or other at irregular intervals. As for the three hundred tumans, he had already written them off when he happened to come under my jurisdiction. After having examined his documents I ordered that he be paid, reducing the interest rate to what European usage allows of course, and he was so surprised and reacted so gratefully that I understood how great he deemed his good fortune. A Hindu merchant from Peshawar to whom I had returned what he had long despaired of ever seeing again reappeared before me the following day with his

clothes in tatters, his hat squashed and some of his beard pulled out. He had argued with a neighbour who didn't owe him a penny and from whom he had demanded some sum or other, based on the idea that what I had had paid to him yesterday I would certainly be in a position to have paid to him tomorrow. The difference between what was owed to him and what he wanted escaped him completely.

These habits of unbridled usury, of constant debts, of expedients, of lack of faith, of trickery, amuse Persians a great deal but do not contribute to elevating their level of morality. Life is a perpetual intrigue. All people think of is not doing what they are supposed to. The masters do not pay their servants, who in turn steal from them as best they can. The government does not pay its employees or pays them on paper, and the employees steal from the government. An immeasurable and limitless roguery exists from top to bottom of the social hierarchy. Everybody likes it, it profits each in turn, relieves much suffering, allows everyone a great deal of leisure and constitutes a game that keeps lively minds on the alert and accustoms them to an excitation that they would not gladly do without. As I have said elsewhere, the Amir Nizam paid his officials regularly but strictly forbade peculation: there was universal discontentment. How can being regularly paid a hundred tumans be compared with arduously acquiring sixty but with the prospect of picking up two hundred more here and there by a lot of wily cajoling and trickery? That is the hope at least; in reality, with ten times more effort than it would take to remain honest the sharp-witted employee barely accumulates his statutory hundred tumans by the end of the year; but do the hopes, the castles in the air, the thousand intrigues that have amused him throughout the year and the swindles that made his friends laugh so much count for nothing? As imagination makes up a large part of Orientals' happiness they see no comparison between two equal sums, one acquired legally and the other pilfered. Every schoolboy in the universe shares their opinion.

If there exists a class of Persian society that has a rather austere existence, at least intermittently, it is that of the infantry. I do not speak of the cavalry; it is entirely formed by nomadic tribes, composed of gentlemen who obey their respective chiefs and is only called up in time of war or to temporarily form the king's horse guard; but foot soldiers are recruited differently and do not serve in such a noble manner. District governors must supply so many men a year to the regular army. They divide up this contingent between all the villages of their territory. Local magistrates begin by exempting the mullahs, the merchants, the craftsmen, and naturally their friends and relatives. The servants of influential people are also given a dispensation, as is any man able to offer a sufficient gift to the higher authority or to the subordinate agents of that authority. When these non-combatants have been eliminated only the very poorest remain, people who have nothing to offer in order to escape serving king and country, and it is almost exclusively amongst these people that recruitment takes place. If the Persian administration shared the ideas concerning enrolment that existed in Europe before '89,[9] and which are still practised in England, it would find enough men to fill its regiments from amongst the lower urban classes instead of having to have recourse to agricultural populations. It would have at its disposal that crowd of worthless wastrels known as *lutis*,

pleasure-seeking gallows-birds who during the day fill the bazaars and during the night the houses of Armenian or Jewish wine merchants. They stroll about nonchalantly, insolent-eyed, bare-chested, with their hats tipped over their ears, hand on dagger, and would make lively troops for swashbuckling in the field. They are braggarts, but courageous too, and their braggadocio is not always confined to words, for in all Asia they are the only practitioners of the duel of whom I am aware. When they have been drinking they have the habit of challenging each other. Like here, the combat has rules, and serious injuries are often inflicted with the *gama,* a short, heavy, pointed, double-edged broadsword. At other times it is considered good taste to strike oneself heartily on the head with this weapon to celebrate the beauty and the harshness of a beloved object.[10] Neither is it rare to see a good luti, in order to cement his reputation, challenge the constables of the law and kill a few of them with his knife or pistol before meeting his own end.

But in the end it is a good thing that they are not made into soldiers because they would be a turbulent and formidable militia and almost impossible to control, especially given the complete absence of surveillance and discipline that reigns in Persian battalions. On the contrary, by the adopted method one obtains the gentlest, most patient, most submissive, most touching soldiers imaginable. When a family is definitively condemned to supply one or more soldiers and is unable to buy an exemption it designates from the cradle those of its members who will bear the musket, and from that moment onwards they are enrolled for the rest of their lives: not that they are constantly under the banner, far from it: the government sometimes sends them home for an indefinite period, during which time they receive no pay; or, for a small fee, the military leaders authorize hard working soldiers not to join their companies, and keep the absentees' pay for themselves; but legally every soldier is a soldier for life and can be obliged to serve even in his old age. One therefore sees old men over sixty years of age in the ranks alongside children of fifteen or sixteen.

Never, ever, except in extraordinary circumstances, does a Persian soldier receive the pay the State supposedly allots him. Leaving the Treasury it goes through the hands of the general in command of the division, the general in command of the brigade, the colonel, the captain, the lieutenant, the sergeant, and what arrives at destination is an infinitely small amount. But on the other hand no great efforts are required of him. He hardly ever goes on manœuvres, in the summer because it is too hot, in the winter because it is too cold. When he is on guard duty he is not relieved for the duration of the garrison's stay; so he sets up house in his guard post and is away most of the day. If he is assigned to sentry duty he has to stay all night, true, but nothing obliges him to plant himself alongside his rifle; he lies down on his greatcoat and sleeps peacefully until the following morning. If he knows a trade he practises it, and deducts from his gains enough to make presents to the officers who protect him in his banking operations with his comrades. He also serves as servant and porter; to cut a long story short, within the limits of his intelligence he organizes his existence as pleasantly as possible. Nothing in the existent legislation prevents him dreaming of the most glorious advancement. He is eligible

to become a colonel, a general, and even commander in chief. But as in practice all grades are conferred according to the presents offered to those who dispense them it is very unlikely that a soldier will rise very high. But in order to maintain their delusions Persian warriors can recount the story of the poor devil who was one day at the exterior gate of the palace of Hajji Mirza Aqasi, during his lifetime prime minister of the late King Muhammad Shah. Leaving home one day the great figure made the observation that he had often seen that soldier before and that he was obviously doing him great service by standing to attention like that whenever he passed. Upon that reflection he named him colonel; but such examples are rare.

All things considered life is quite tolerable for the soldiers as long as they are in garrison; but when they are out on campaign their fate becomes wretched indeed. They are paid even less often than before. As there is no Commissariat in Persia they have neither footwear, nor clothing, nor weapons, nor food. They are often reduced to eating grass from the roadside, where there is grass. No more than three years ago most of the troops deployed on the Turkmenistan frontier literally died of hunger. Even subjected to this terrible regime the Persian soldier rarely deviates from his inalterable patience. He is always gentle, timid and gay. Sometimes, when he suffers too much, he rebels; but if any of his mostly very justifiable demands are met he immediately returns to his duties. His intelligence and, I would say, his courage, are both admirable; for I find it moving that men treated in such a fashion, marching barefoot, using double action rifles, and led by the kind of officers they have nevertheless bayonet charged the English during the last war.[11]

I have not yet spoken of those who perform no public function, have no profession and live from private income. They do exist, but are very few in number; such figures are too isolated, too vulnerable to the greed of public servants, and more or less certain to be stripped clean one fine day without anybody coming to their aid. There are a few however in provincial towns. They offer frequent gifts, in proportion to their wealth, to the mullahs and local magistrates so as to have friends in time of need. They must display great wisdom, moderation and skill in all their dealings and appear as small as possible. In short, they have a number of difficulties to deal with. They also give up part of their independence in exchange for greater tranquillity. They enter the service of people who can protect them, and instead of receiving wages, pay them a contribution. In those cases their service is purely nominal and only obliges them to occasionally send greetings to their master or to join his entourage on gala occasions. In exchange for this they enjoy the advantages of patronage and are left in peace.

The income of a Persian individual, discounting any wages or salary he might receive and any irregular profit his position on occasion allows him to make, consists of the interest on the money he lends, and I have shown above how that traffic is conducted, of that on the money he invests in the merchant's commerce, and finally from his village property.

The dividend from money invested with merchants far from covers the exorbitant interest charged on the money lent; but the investment is generally secure. One can retrieve it at any time and nobody robs you of it.

Village property is still a good investment. It is a remnant of the ancient feudal constitution of the country; at the present time peasants are free and administer themselves through the kadkhuda or rishsifid, who is the mayor; but he pays two kinds of taxes, one to the State, the other, in the form of a perpetual rental fee, to the person nominated owner of the village, and whose only right consists in receiving this rent. He cannot increase it arbitrarily but he can lose it if the fortunes of the village decline. He is then, a born protector of the peasants against the Exchequer, and, as his revenues are proportionate to the abundance of produce he is keenly interested in the prosperity of the village and compelled to promote it. It is not a bad institution.

We see then, that Persian society presents a motley aggregate and a large amalgam of different situations. Its government contains remnants of feudality and institutions that might be called constitutional which, protected by their antiquity, often isolated, never abolished, guarantee the masses a certain degree of independence that the imperfection or rather absence of real authority and administrative power often exaggerates to the point of licence.[12] The strictly aristocratic organization of the tribes, based on birthrights and illustrous genealogies, creates a hierarchy of gentlemen who are extremely vainglorious of their origins but who hardly derive any serious benefit from them since they live in tents in the middle of the desert. As soon as they enter the gates of a town any prestige that might surround them evaporates, their family names count only if people wish to show courtesy, and no privilege is attached to them. On the contrary, the most absolute democracy expresses and applies itself. Just as in all other countries one hears Persian townsmen mock the hereditary nobility, tell stories about them and vaunt the rights of individual merit. In reality, also just as in many other countries, those rights of merit are reduced to the rights of favour acquired by rendering not always very laudable services, or else to strokes of good fortune that do not always elevate the most deserving. Whatever the case may be, the Persian townsman is just as in love with equality as anybody else in the universe, and nothing is said on this matter in the cafés of Europe that he has not thought of and expressed with great verve at all levels of the social hierarchy. But after having spoken of the king, powerful figureheads of the State, mullahs, merchants, workmen, landowners, soldiers, nomads, riff-raff, I would not give a sufficiently complete idea of all these people if I did not also show their perpetual mobility, their constant agitation. And to that end I must tell of the Persians' extreme taste for travel and of the manner in which they can indulge it, and above all the diverse reasons that cause the different categories of people to travel.

I have shown above that the action of authority is legally limited on all points. The privileges of the mullahs, those of the nomads, the merchants, the guilds, repeatedly block both the wishes of the king and those of the provincial governors. As besides taxes are only levied on the produce of the soil and according to very old and badly made land registers, often far below the true production levels, that tax amounts to a miserable sum and is neither onerous nor oppressive for the population, which pays neither for the right to exercise a profession, nor property taxes,

nor for livestock, nor for water catchment, and has never even heard of indirect taxation. The extraordinary cheapness of provisions can probably be attributed to this state of affairs, they are so cheap that the average price of wheat in Kermanshah is two shillings for six hundred pounds, and in Tehran, the most expensive spot in the empire, an ordinary family consisting of husband, wife and two children lives very well for sixpence a day. There is therefore no class hatred in Persia, nor exasperation of the poor against the rich. But to that favourable partial truth must be added another less favourable.

Public officials would die of hunger if they lived only on the generally very modest amount of their emoluments, and despite that they never actually receive them. They constantly have to exercise great ingenuity in order to render their situation more tolerable. They therefore try to extort gifts from the craftsmen and to take money from rural taxpayers. Governors of towns and provinces are the most advantageously placed to indulge in this kind of speculation, and here is how they operate.

According to the importance of the locality, they send a mirza, a servant or a soldier to the village that must pay its taxes; from this levy, besides the State, the actual creditor, the governor and his emissary must also get their share. As soon as the representative has arrived and explained his mission the village magistrate calls together the heads of families, and the local children and their mothers join those important men. Amidst this uproarious assembly the emissary puts forward his claims. The first meeting hardly ever passes without an exchange of blows, beard-pulling and swearing. The peasant women show no restraint in expressing the severest opinions about the governor, his wife, his daughters and his mother; they do not neglect to burn his ancestors and likewise for the messenger's family. Finally the session ends amidst a frightful tumult, with the men vowing they will give nothing and the tax collector attesting by all the prophets that the village will be razed to the ground and its inhabitants cudgelled till death doth ensue.

But when night has drawn on a little and passions have had time to cool the head of the village along with one or two prudent men go to the envoy with a tray of fruit and some tea or sometimes brandy. He expresses his regret at the deplorable scenes of the morning and his astonishment that such reprehensible disrespect could have been shown to the official of such standing and merit he now has the honour of addressing. These ragged individuals exchange compliments with the same earnest and abundance of florid expressions as if they were at the royal court.

The emissary shows unrelenting inflexibility, but he is given to understand that if he mitigates his claims with respect to his master and above all the State he himself will be reasonably compensated. The negotiations sometimes last a week or more. They squabble, are reconciled, curse and flatter, and finally things generally end more or less as follows. The envoy obtains for himself about two thirds of what he had originally demanded. Upon his return to town he will have to give up part of it to his superiors, and sometimes the intervention of a stick obliges him to give up everything. But this is rare. The governor has what he asked for minus a slight reduction. The State gets the smallest amount possible. The head of the village pays

nothing, families who have members in military service are exempt, the mullahs likewise, servants ditto; then whatever unforeseen expenses have been incurred during the year are deducted, and ordinarily that chapter is monstrously exaggerated. Conclusion: the village has paid far less than it should have. This is what an old peasant explained to me with a wily smile: "I have two hundred tumans (ninety six pounds) hidden somewhere, and I defy the king, the governor and all their people to snatch one *pul* (half a farthing) of it away from me".

Despite this noble assurance it can happen that an exceptionally rapacious administrator appears who will stop at nothing to get more than the villagers are willing to grant. In that case they set the mullahs into action, then the owner of the village may also turn up. These influences often manage to sort things out. But if they fail the villagers turn to their last resort: they abandon the village and flee. Then begin the voyages.

As there are no roads, as there are no police outside the towns, as the mountains are always quite close, no chance exists of preventing the recalcitrant ratepayers from putting their projects into action, and the inevitable result is to diminish the revenues of the province, so the State, firstly, the Governor, next, and finally the tax collectors, have no interest in pushing things to extremes. For the peasants however, this result is by no means as painful as one might imagine, judging by our customs. The land has no value in itself because it can be found anywhere and planting it suffices to assume ownership. In four years uncultivated soil becomes a garden in full yield. A house is built of clay and the roof is supported by eight to ten small poplar beams. It amounts to no more than a week's work. As for moving (in the case of a rich peasant) two or three carpets and four or five chests make up the furniture. The villager puts his money in his waistband, his wife on a donkey; the ox and the horse carry the rest. They set off in the evening and the following morning nobody would be able to say which direction they took. It is extremely rare that a village desert en masse; but individual desertions are frequent. Country people have no more sedentary souls than the rest of the nation, and when they are not subject to a tribe, and consequently restrained by ideas of class, they gladly change residence. For that reason or for others I did not see one agglomeration in Azarbaijan whose population was not new. Everywhere the peasants answered my questions by saying that they had only been living where I found them for twenty, thirty or forty years.[13]

One often comes across rustic families circulating around the empire, leaving one place to set up in another. They are welcomed by their new fellow citizens, who are always glad to see more arms ready to cultivate a land that is always too vast.

But these men in search of a residence are only temporary voyagers. There exists a class of beings who make their constant wandering to all intents and purposes their lives' goal. These are the dervishes, who usually having no other occupation, do not limit themselves to wandering the length and breadth of Persia, but set off without hesitation for Calcutta, Constantinople, Cairo, and all the more easily because their peregrinations cost them absolutely nothing. I have seen and dealt with many of them and hold them in general for interesting and well worth

knowing. There are doubtless amongst them a good number of vagabonds pure and simple, but here and there one comes across a pearl: and that is enough to give them value.

On foot or astride a donkey the nomadic philosopher sets off, stopping where he will for months, years, or crossing towns unimpeded, and nobody asks why; in the desert he joins caravans; in the lands where he feels no need of protection he goes alone. Bowed over a stream flowing between two rocks a willow tree seems to offer pleasant repose: he sits under it and stays as long it suits him. This was how I met a dervish from Lahore who was spending several days in a ruined hovel near Rayy, the former Rages. He had found the spot agreeable. One morning he disappeared and I never saw him again. The ultimate goal of his journey, he said, was Karbala. He was a man of at least sixty years of age who had experienced and had the good fortune to survive many catastrophes, and who used very refined and ornate language, possessed rare knowledge and knew many books. His elegance was entirely intellectual. He was dressed in a tattered white cotton robe, barefoot and bare-headed, hirsute, tangled grey beard, parched and deeply furrowed skin, but with a smiling face and an ardent gaze. Wherever these men stop people soon crowd around, and they tell of what they have seen in their peregrinations and of the conclusions they have drawn from all things. They often make a great impression on people's minds; and as religion is one of the favourite themes of their discussions and they are very audacious, it is to these roving monks that must be attributed the continual movement of heresies that torment the Muslim world, particularly in Persia, and which at every moment revives, reawakens, renews, or imports notions of Indian theology into Koranic law.

There are also other travellers who, according to European ideas, seem more deserving of interest; those who travel the Oriental world to seek knowledge. They are quite numerous. Outwardly nothing distinguishes them from the dervishes, except that they do not go bare-headed or have long hair. They have little curiosity about theological viewpoints or meditations on the supernatural, but concern themselves only with the customs of the countries they visit and whatever oddities of art or nature they can unearth. A certain Hajji Zayn al-Abidin, who was born in Shirvan and died at the most seven or eight years ago, was a sort of modern Asiatic Herodotus. After having studied under several masters, beginning with his father, the learned mullah Iskandar, he resolved to go and see the world with his own eyes and began by traversing Persia from west to east; he visited Baghdad, Mecca, and Arabia; crossed over then into Sindh[14] and on to India, went to Kashmir, crossed Afghanistan, Tukharistan, Badakhishan, the country of the Uzbeks, the lands of the Caspian sea, recrossed the north of his country, Armenia, the whole of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, wandered through European Turkey; after staying for a time in Constantinople he entered Greece, spent some time there before embarking for the African coast; and towards 1825 or 1826 arrived in Algiers, at that time independent. It is remarkable that all those great voyagers unanimously stopped at the edge of Europe, which they considered barbarous territory of which they feared the perils and which inspired neither their liking nor their curiosity.

After long years he returned to Tehran and began to write an account of his journeys. He wrote three versions, all of which are equally hard to find.

It would be a mistake to consider such men exceptions. It is certainly not common to see scholars like him leave the fruits of their discoveries to posterity. In most cases the laziness and nonchalance of Orientals prevent it; but many who keep their acquisitions to themselves want to see and do in fact go and see. Nothing could be more true to life than the beginnings of several tales from the *Thousand and One Nights*, which show the hero, attracted by a love of voyaging, leave a happy and peaceful existence to abandon himself entirely to that taste. Burnes met a local man in Kabul who had also written all his life and had travelled as far as Constantinople. His family had great difficulty in preventing him from setting off again, for that way of life holds unsurpassable charms.

But the most numerous ambulatory class is that of the pilgrims. I have seen and spoken with a great number of them, men and women, some arriving from Kabul, Kashmir, others from Delhi. Most of them were going to Karbala, to the tombs of the Imams; nearly all were poor, good-humoured peasants, who took the days as they came. As for the expense of their journeys, I have had occasion to judge it. An Arab ostler calculated that to go from Tehran to Baghdad, from Baghdad to Bombay and from there to return to Bushihr, sometimes on foot, sometimes riding on the backs of an obliging mule-driver's animals and then, on condition of lending a hand when called for, embarking on the bangalos of the Persian gulf, the all-inclusive cost would be about two and a half tumans, that is one pound or a little over. But the strangest pilgrims I ever met were the last ones I shall speak of here.

I was approached one day by two men. They were short and thin, of bluish-black complexion and with that smiling, gentle, submissive look that is characteristic of all peoples of southern Asia who do not belong to warlike races. At first I thought they were Baluchis. But I was wrong; for both of them claimed to be French. A little taken aback at first as the appearance of these self-proclaimed compatriots did not seem to support their claim, I was soon convinced of their sincerity. They wore long, pointed felt hats like those of the Uzbeks. Although it was July they were dressed in the tattered and greasy vestiges of those long, lined sheepskin robes produced in Bukhara, whose filth surpassed not only anything one can see but anything one can imagine. From their explanations I finally gathered that these two men, one named Kaksha and the other Mostansha, were Tamils from Pondicherry. They claimed to belong to the Brahmanic class and to be farmers. As, according to their beliefs, fire created all things and cannot be too highly worshipped, they wanted to make an act of devotion towards that element. It was a common belief amongst their compatriots in Pondicherry that an Atash-Kadih, or temple of fire, of extraordinary purity existed somewhere in Turkestan. From time immemorial the custom had been maintained of going there to pray, but as none of those who done the journey had bothered to write down the details of the countries they crossed in order to get there nobody knew anything other than that the Atash-Kadih was somewhere in the North. It seems that this information sufficed the faithful; for, like so many others, Kaksha and Mostansha had set off.

They began by going to Bombay by land, and from there crossed the Rann of Kutch[15] to reach the banks of the Indus. They ascended the river, sometimes walking along its banks, sometimes boarding whatever boats there were if there was nothing to pay. In this way they reached Peshawar, where they discovered that nobody knew of any Atash-Kadih in the region but that it was not impossible that one was to be found in Kashmir. They set off for Kashmir. In that town they were told that the cult of fire was unknown or that, at least, there was no sanctuary in the valley; but that as Balkh as known to be the mother of cities and had been founded by Zardusht or Zoroaster, if an Atash-Kadih existed anywhere at all it must indubitably be there. They found this reasonable and started off for Balkh. No Atash-Kadih; it was in Bukhara that the mystery must be solved. They went there and finally found, not what they were seeking, but positive indications. They were assured that the sanctuary of their faith existed in Baku on the western bank of the Caspian Sea, in the land of the Russians; and in fact the perpetual fires that nature maintains there are an object of constant worship to followers of a host of different sects.

Kaksha and Mostansha set off again without the slightest thought of losing patience and headed for Astarabad; but it was just at the moment that the present governor of that town, Jafar Quli Khan, was undertaking a long-postponed campaign against Turkmen marauders that had by that time become indispensable; fearing to become slaves on one side or to be decapitated on the other, the two Tamils headed for Mashad, and from there to Tehran, where I heard their story.

I shall not insist on the singularity of seeing the cult of fire and the Atash-Kadihs of Persia on the coast of Malabar and professed by men claiming to be of the Brahmanic caste; I merely note that it is one of the most striking indications I have ever come across of the diffusion and, I might add, the confusion of Persian and Hindu beliefs. To finish the story, the two pilgrims were travelling with a small white canvas tent where two people could sit but neither stand up nor lie down. They possessed two copper vases for cooking their food; for, a particularly awkward constriction in such an enterprise, they did not find it in accordance with their religious duties to eat anything prepared by any other hands than their own, which obviously deprived them of the benefits of common hospitality. Their furniture was completed by one of those games formerly in vogue in our salons called baguenaudier.[16] They seemed very skilled in it, and the Persians enjoyed watching them. It had taken them four years to reach Tehran and they foresaw undeterredly that upon their return from Baku they would have retraced their steps exactly and see the same amount of time pass before returning home. When they were told that by going to Isfahan and Shiraz and then taking the boat to Bushihr their journey would be much faster, they seemed completely unmoved by this advantage: an Asiatic finds it hard to understand the usefulness of hurrying. Finally, when they had spent a whole day answering the questions of the inhabitants of the house, seated joyously in a circle around them, and with whom they had from the very first established very friendly relations, they evinced a desire to continue their route. As they had refused all food, the kalyan and even a cup of water, they were asked what alms

would be agreeable and seem to them generous; they wanted nothing, but the people insisted, and finally they answered that if by means of a superhuman generosity, of which their hearts would eternally conserve the memory, the people would be so kind as to give them thirty shahis, they would consider themselves overjoyed. Thirty shahis is about one shilling and sixpence.

I could multiply stories of this kind endlessly; I shall tell only one more, told to me by Mr. Kanikoff,[17] then consul general of Russia in Tabriz, a man whose amiability matched his learning. One day he witnessed the arrival of a family composed of an old man, an old woman, a young man of twenty years, his wife, still almost a child, and a few months' old baby. They came to complain that the townspeople had stolen their donkey. During the conversation they told the story of their lives. They were from Marghalan, a small town in Khojand, close to the remote Chinese border. The young man had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. On his return, when the embracing was over, he recounted all the wonders of his journey, and his account so enflamed everybody's imagination, that father, mother and wife decided they would leave together that very evening in order not to die without having seen such extraordinary things; and off they went.

It is with this facility, but also this patience, this continuous gaiety, this gentle curiosity, always led to satisfy that of others by satisfying one's own, that Asiatics circulate in their respective countries, without really knowing where they are going, nor often even where they are. The long conversations of every hour, of every day where all ideas are expressed, where everything is said, where nothing is considered scandalous when the form does not shock, naturally exert an irresistible influence and give rise to those easy ways, that universal tolerance from which only the European, with his firm opinions, his peremptory and ironic decisions, is rigorously excluded, but which permit Muslims, Christians, Armenian Jews to live topsy-turvy without ever clashing, except in times of political crisis.

5

CHARACTERS, SOCIAL RELATIONS

I do not know whether the preceding details have sufficiently prepared the reader to understand that in reality the Persian State does not exist and the individual is everything. The State? How could it exist if nobody is in the least concerned with it? In this way, as in many others, the population resembles that of the Roman Empire in despising its rulers whoever they might be, good or bad, depredatory or well-intentioned. Incapable of political fidelity or self-sacrifice, full of adoration for the country itself, they are devoid of belief in any form of government. Everybody plunders shamelessly and without scruple, and vies to the best of their ability to misappropriate public funds, to the extent that little or no real administration can be said to exist. It must be acknowledged, if only for the singularity of the fact, that urban policing is fairly well managed. Since remotest Antiquity Asian towns have known and practised the excellent surveillance system of having night-watchmen in every street. There are no nocturnal disturbances; no public disorder. But beyond this single point nothing good remains to be said. A certain portion of the population never pays any taxes, either because unfair privileges justified only by long usage have legitimized an alleged right or royal authority has fraudulently consecrated it, or simply because the taxpayers do not feel inclined to pay, refuse to receive the collectors and chase them off. I have seen towns adopt this very expedient stance, and the governors were powerless to act against them, lacking either the necessary troops, resources or simply the will. But none of this causes undue concern.

The road network in Persia was of yore highly developed. Particularly in the southern provinces the Sassanid kings constructed magnificent roads, bridges, and numerous caravanserais. The various Muslim dynasties continued the system, and until the end of the Safavid era in the first third of the last century the existing structures were carefully maintained and here and there enlarged upon. But now everything has been destroyed and has vanished. There is not a single highway in the entire Empire, not even from Tehran to the sovereign's summer residence two leagues away. It is true that during the summer months the nature of the terrain and the sustained dryness of the climate make it possible to do without them in many places. Familiarity and skill do the rest.

Some bridges remain, mostly constructed by private individuals. As they are

never repaired it is customary to use them sparingly and only to cross them if absolutely necessary. One upstanding traveller told me it was a sin to use the bridges unnecessarily. A conscientious fellow wades across, and caravans unfailingly do so.

There are no fortresses; no arsenals of note; no public armouries; as regards its personnel the administration exists for the sole purpose of supplying a sizeable portion of the population with pretexts for living off the remainder; the services rendered by the army in no way compensate for the money it siphons off. It remains useful however because it can still maintain order in many situations and above all because it has contributed considerably to keeping in check and ultimately destroying the power of the nomadic tribes. All in all however it is only a very minor exaggeration to say of the government of Persia that it is non-existent.

It is nevertheless a general assumption in Europe that lacking any real power said government is at least able to proceed by violent and tyrannical measures that continuously disturb the tranquillity of its subjects and prevent anybody from enjoying the fruits of their labour.

Except on days when passions are aroused I have never observed that Asiatics are naturally cruel, except the Uthmanlis, the Uzbeks, the Turkmen and the Afghans.[1] They are in all things unscrupulous and their interests are not contained by their morality; but they are inconsequential and, not normally being partial to pushing things to extremes, gladly accept compromise. I have certainly seen crying injustices committed, but I have never seen them exceed certain limits. A destituted governor is rarely utterly despoiled. On the pretext of rectifying accounts a portion of what he himself has pillaged is taken from him; but he is left with enough to buy himself a new post and to be able to continue to cut a fairly fine figure in the world. That governor had likewise begun by trying to extort ten tumans from one of his subordinates and finally settled for four. Everything is done according to the all-adjusting spirit of *tawassut*.

Tawassut means the involvement of a third party in every transaction, of whatever nature. It is no more possible for the king to act to the advantage or detriment of one of his servants without a *wasta*,[2] the agent of tawassut, than it is for a merchant to buy a horse or conclude any analogous business without similar influence. This is universal practice. Everybody is at ease with it, desires it and submits to it. As soon as a notable figure, even the king, shows the intention of committing an act of oppression an intermediary appears. Sometimes it is a respected mullah, sometimes the entire body of mullahs, wealthy merchants, or the wife or son of the oppressor. The intermediary never acts out of pure altruism; in the event of success he deducts a right to the gratitude of his protégé. He therefore has every reason to intervene forcefully and in good earnest, wishing, besides, to create a good impression of his influence; and when dealing with the arcane mystery of the Asiatic character questions of pride and self-esteem must always be taken into consideration. As in my earlier description of revenue collection, and indeed in all other matters, a great deal is said, the two sides argue, threaten, insult, and, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, two thirds of the original claim is dropped; and the habit of never letting

things end as they began is so ingrained that when a man is condemned to death for murder usage calls for the king to pardon him if someone is prepared to offer a token sum of money, and the same usage establishes that intervening in such a case is considered a pious act, even when the condemned man is a notorious villain.

Three years ago there was a man named Rajab in Tehran, a native of Tabriz, a thoroughly bad specimen, a luti of the purest ilk, a boastful drunkard who had already killed one man in a quarrel. One evening he was crossing the bazaar in a state of complete inebriation. Showing oneself in such a state in public automatically incurs a flogging and a fine, so the police attempted to detain him. He ran from the sar-ghasmas, or sergeants, as we would say. As he was running down a dark alley an unfortunate mullah happened to be coming out of his house and to find himself face to face with Rajab who, believing that the poor man wanted to arrest him, drew his gama and struck him mortally. In the ensuing struggle another chance passer-by also received a blow. The murderer fled and sought refuge in the stable of a foreign legation under the consul's horse. This constitutes an inviolable sanctuary under any circumstances.

It was a commonplace crime however and his previous conduct had attracted little attention. He was ordered to leave the stable. He vowed he would do no such thing and, weapon in hand, threatened to kill anybody who laid a hand on him. The situation was becoming an embarrassment to the legation and seemed to be taking a turn for the worse when the chief of police managed to persuade the murderer that a brief whispered discussion could do him no harm, and he then did so well in persuading his client that his life would be spared if he gave himself up without too much ado that Rajab came out.

The trial was not long. He was sentenced to having his throat cut in the usual manner, i.e. the patient is placed on his back, bound hand and foot; the executioner lifts up his head, tenses his throat with the left hand and with the right slices vigorously with a knife. But Rajab was certain to be spared because several courtiers had clubbed together to pay his ransom to the king, who had graciously accepted. Everybody was making merry of the matter. The poor murdered mullah was an obscure sayyid who had only recently arrived from Isfahan; nobody knew him or cared about his fate.

But things did not turn out as expected. Seeing himself being led to the place of execution Rajab probably imagined he had been gulled with false promises. Naturally choleric and impatient, he went into a violent rage and began to curse and blaspheme, burning the fathers and grandfathers of the police magistrate and all his myrmidons. When his cortège arrived at the Green marketplace things got even worse. The king and the entire court were seated on the battlements to watch him pass, and it was there that the king was supposed, to the great edification of the crowd, to give the order to untie the condemned man. But it became impossible. As soon as Rajab saw Nasir al-Din Shah he began to vociferate in terms whose energy far exceeded simple respect. Not only did he commence burning the father, grandfather and ancestors of his sovereign, but allowed himself some allusions to very delicate matters that were so revolting and explicit that the order was given to the

executioners to continue their route and to carry out their duty. And thus they did, to accompanying unrest, the details of which I shall spare the reader.

On this occasion the intermediaries were unsuccessful; but it was clearly not their fault, and something completely unforeseeable was required to prevent their intervention from having its usual full success. I shall quote two more striking examples.

During the war with England the Persian government decided to meet expenses by trying to squeeze some funding out of the merchants. This in itself is not particularly tyrannical behaviour, especially if one bears in mind what I said above, that the mercantile class, certainly the richest in the State, makes absolutely no contribution to public expenditure and pays only customs and excise duty. The sum, moreover, intended to be spread out amongst all the merchants of the Empire, was far from exorbitant. But as in all Asiatic schemes reason is always lacking in some aspect, the project was only envisaged as the peace treaty was about to be signed and collection only begun when the troops were on their way home. None of this prevented the authorities in Tehran and other principal towns from trying to encourage the zeal and generosity of the merchants by painting a gloomy picture of the dangers the religion would run from the infidels, speaking of the need of Iran's invincible warriors for the money that would enable them to multiply their prodigies, and finally of the extraordinary merit the donators could not fail to acquire by their generous patriotism.

This last consideration produced no more effect than the first two; everywhere the traders declared, whilst protesting their devotion to the faith, that neither custom nor the law obliged them to make any sacrifices and that it was not their intention to do so; and a firm decision it was, for in the towns where the government agents seemed intent on their project they proved it by taking refuge in the mosques. To our eyes an entire class of people fleeing their homes to seek refuge from oppression in hallowed sanctuaries would assuredly be considered a pitiful sight. However, in order to judge things correctly and dispassionately we must leave aside some of our prejudices and see things as they truly are. What would we in Europe say of a man who ran to embrace the altar to avoid paying a pound on a capital of a thousand and filled the air with his desperate cries? This is exactly what took place, with the difference that this man, who to us would seem ridiculous to say the least, is a wise man in Asiatic eyes; he is claiming his rights, defending himself justly, and will thenceforth be even more respected for having shown infinite spirit and energy, particularly if he succeeds in making the government renounce its claims.

The prime minister and the king were not happy with how things were turning out. Some paltry sums, far less than what had been demanded, had nevertheless been gathered in several provincial towns when the order was rescinded and the money returned to its owners. The mullahs had intervened; even some members of the administration had criticized the measure and recommended that it be abandoned; in short it was made known that the merchants would be only too pleased to make suitable gifts to such and such a person if they were left in peace according to

age-old custom. Some intermediaries were paid, a few protectors, there were all sorts of comings and goings, cries, sighs, declarations and intrigues, and, to cut a long story short, the tax was not levied. In one town only, Qazvin, the vehemently decried governor, Hajji Khan, committed a few acts of violence; but even there the harm was limited to a few unduly administered strokes of the cane, which nevertheless provoked great outcry. In the end the government was as usual reduced to utter impotence by tawassut.

Here is one last example of tawassut standing between a poor unfortunate and the legal revenge of a family.

In Tehran there was a man named Kambir who was employed as a farrash or domestic servant of the lowest rank. He was a strapping, good-looking youth, elegant and polite but extremely poltroonish and always heavily armed. One summer's day he was wrestling playfully with his friends near his master's encampment. As they happened to be in a village square he laughingly grabbed a knife from a butcher's stall and threatened his adversary. The latter grabbed a beetle and the game continued; then suddenly, as they chased one another, Kambir accidentally stabbed his friend in the small of the back, causing blood to spurt out abundantly.

The youth, Ali by name, had long suffered from a weak chest. Be it that his death had in any case been imminent or that the accident precipitated it, he died a few days later. Then his father demanded either that Kambir be handed over to him so that he could kill him or that he pay the sum of two hundred tumans or one hundred pounds in blood-money. This is the letter of the law.

Having not the slightest desire to find himself in the hands of an avenger and being absolutely incapable of coming up with the sum of money demanded Kambir fled and sought refuge in the holy sanctuary of Shah Abd al-Azim.[3] The injured party set off in pursuit, and, unable to dislodge him, took up residence in the nearby village and swore never to budge until Kambir decided to leave his refuge, either from hunger, exhaustion or some other cause.

The matter was much talked about, and one day the king and the prime minister happened to come to perform their prayers at the mosque in question. His Majesty questioned poor Kambir, who thus had the good fortune to interest those powerful figures in his story. Everybody was agreed upon how sad it would be to put such a handsome young boy to death; that since Ali was no longer of this world it would render him but scant service to send his murderer to join him; but that it would nevertheless be annoying for the father to obtain no manner of satisfaction; but, as Kambir obviously possessed nothing, it was clear he could pay nothing; as a result of all these reflections the king assured him of his good-will and told him to come out and that nothing would happen to him.

Kambir got it into his head that all these fine promises were mere hollow words and that the king would think no more of him after leaving, and that if his enemy were to slit his throat in a corner none of these lofty figures with their reassurances would be there to intervene. In short, he obstinately refused to leave the mosque. He could be neither begged, cajoled nor threatened into coming out, and finally the

king became so incensed by such obstinacy that he told him that since he refused to be saved he was lost and that he himself would take revenge for Ali, and he ordered forthwith that Kambir be killed if he set foot outside the mosque. Guards were posted all around and the wretch found himself completely hemmed in by Ali's father's men and the royal police.

Then, no longer feeling that even the mosque offered him sufficient security, he tied himself to the Imam's tomb by means of a rope around his neck, and in order not to have to leave what seemed to him his only sure protection for even a second he limited himself to eating two dates a day, which soon reduced him to a state of weakness very close to the death he was going to so much trouble to avoid.

Twice it was said he was no more, and in fact he was close to expiration, for he had been following his diet for several days, when a highly respected and wealthy widow came to pray at Shah Abd al-Azim. She saw Kambir lying by the tomb and took a keen interest in him, paid his persecutor the twelve hundred tumans he was demanding, obtained the withdrawal of the king's pursuit and took the poor wretch home with her. His fortune was made. Shortly thereafter Kambir could be seen riding a fine horse through the city streets, dressed like a prince, fresh-faced and rosy-cheeked, pleasantly plump, strutting around in his capacity as private secretary of the khanum (lady) and thinking no more of his recent crisis than if it had happened to somebody else. The moral of this is that in Persia everybody is ready to involve themselves in matters that do not concern them and consequently no situation is ever truly hopeless; this amounts to saying that omnipotence is not to be found, and since everything is so fragile there can be neither immutable poverty nor solid prosperity. While the powerful may be subject to haughtiness and conceit, something the insubstantial national character easily permits, no despair exists amongst the lower echelons. Besides, poverty is not as abject there as elsewhere nor falls from grace so precipitous, by that I mean that nobody ever feels obliged to choose between working night and day and dying of hunger, or finds themselves in the even worse predicament of finding no work to do and being utterly bereft. Food is so cheap, accommodation so easy to come by, strangers so generous, public charity so wonderfully widespread and affectionate, for everybody is entitled to their portion of praise, that it gives without counting, always and to anybody, and would not dream, like elsewhere, of exacting payment in the form of the shame it imposes on its recipients. Those who ask for it are considered to have a right to it because they patently need it, and things are seen in that light. There are no false beggars. Nothing obliges a man to lie in order to obtain what everybody is glad to give him. A poor congenital cripple is installed in a street near the citadel of Tehran. He has no family and completely lacks resources. A carpenter has made him a very cosy little house on wheels free of charge. Local women supplied him with mattresses. Every day the neighbours carry him from the room he has been given to sleep in to his house, and they take it in turns to push his mobile establishment to its accustomed spot. There the passers-by give whatever alms they can. On public holidays children bring him plates of confectionery, and I have seen more presents of that kind pile up in his little cart than well-to-do Europeans get from their nearest and

dearest. This complete absence of worry about the bare necessities of life means that the Persian nation is very gay, light-hearted and pleasure-loving.

I do not believe there exists anywhere in the world a place where people enjoy themselves more continuously than in a Tehran, Isfahan or Shiraz marketplace. The day is one long conversation beneath the vaulted arches, where the most motley crowd imaginable throngs. The merchants sit by their shops where their wares are displayed according to an art that we have copied and perfected. Bare-chested lutis in their rakishly tipped hats elbow their way through the crowd, hand on gama. Blind musicians sing. A story-teller stands up and yells words of grief or emotion for all he is worth, or perhaps the edifying text of a novel. Some Kurds appear in their huge turbans, their faces sombre and serious. Inkpots on their waistbands, some mirzas slip between them like eels, gesticulating like madmen and guffawing; in their haste they come up against a line of mules loaded with goods, which are halted in turn by long-legged camels coming from the opposite direction. The question for the crowd is to get through this conflict, and get through it does. A dishevelled looking dervish is in friendly conversation with a mullah, a book-seller or a turner who makes him a pipe for his kalyan. He is half-naked, carries his axe on his back, rattles a long iron chain, and his red cap is embroidered in coloured silk with edifying sayings. An Afghan lord goes by on horseback with some of his hired ruffians. These scruffy lansquenets [4] have hard, savage, fearless faces, blue turbans plastered to their heads, tattered grey clothing, long swords, long knives, long rifles, and small shields on their shoulders, real pandours,[5] and amongst all this mob flocks of women. They wander in twos, fours, often alone, all uniformly covered from head to toe with a deep blue cotton veil, occasionally of silk. Tied behind the head above the blue veil a strip of white linen reaches down to the ground and makes it impossible even to guess at their features. A square of open-work embroidery above the eyes permits them to see well and to breathe through this *ruband* or face-tie. Underneath the blue veil, called a *chadur*, which is principally designed to wrap the person up completely from the head to the knees, they wear huge leggings that engulf their skirts, and which are only put on when going out. Thus wadded and constricted the women waddle around ungracefully in their high-heeled slippers, squat down at the back of the draper's shop, examine heaps of unrolled linen, silk, cottonades, discussing, comparing and finally, unable to make up their minds, get up and leave, often without having bought anything, as also occurs in other countries, and all this without ever having raised the tiniest corner of their veils.

And as the merchants vie with each other in eloquence and persuasion in order to win over the fickle tastes of their customers, all the gossip and tittle-tattle of the city washes from shop to shop. Politics are discussed, and some recent measure or reputedly imminent resolution is criticized. One person tells what happened the previous night or even the same day in the king's harem, another the exact point the argument has reached between such and such a khanum and her husband. The scandal sheet does the rounds largely unexpurgated and is steadily elaborated upon. Money is borrowed and lent. Somebody recuperates an item of clothing that had been in pawn for six months, and then goes off to pawn another. People argue,

threaten, but usually only come to blows in exceptional circumstances. Wailing, laughter, cries fill the air with an infernal din, the arches are sorely tested by the swell of the crowd and often succumb. Built of unfired bricks in many places and cemented with a very free hand they crumble noisily to the ground, especially as spring approaches, and it cannot be denied that they crush a few chatterers here and there. But this kind of accident is viewed very philosophically and nobody seems too put out or concerned.

This is how a typical Persian spends his day: a considerable portion is devoted to strolling around the bazaar, another to social calls. But before saying any more about this timetable I should say at least something about women, even if only to avoid leaving a gap in my account.

Whilst extremely reserved on the subject of the female portion of their own families, Persians could not be more ribald in regard to women to whom they are unrelated. They gleefully indulge in the most salacious banter, and listening to them one would be inclined to believe that if there are still any respectable ladies in Iran it is only because they still have a mother, a wife or sisters. Towards all others they display unbridled malevolence.

Without dwelling on these probably markedly exaggerated reports I must say that Persian women marry very young. In well-to-do families the father usually demands a bride-price of thirty tumans from the fiancé, that is about fourteen pounds, which is not exorbitant, and the parents usually use the money to the benefit of the young woman. There is therefore no cause for squandering eloquence on bemoaning the fate of poor victims sold off by barbarous fathers. Prior to the nuptial ceremony several months often pass during which the fiancé is not supposed to be allowed to see his future bride unveiled; but in order to reach a compromise between the attitude custom imposes on the head of the family and the legitimate impatience of the young man it is more or less taken for granted that the mother of the young girl, in her extreme fondness for her future son-in-law, furnish him by weakness with numerous pretexts for visiting the house. He naturally abuses this privilege and embarks upon what is known as the *namzad bazi*, engaged life, the betrothment game. That is, he enters the andarun,[6] leaps over balconies, comes and goes by the windows, and many a time spends the night tête-à-tête with the young person. Apparently no awkward problems arise from this because the fiancée, well-informed from the youngest age as all Oriental women are, has long been forewarned of the incontestable bad faith of the stronger sex and would not allow herself to be carried away by any transports of rapture before the nuptials.

The betrothed are usually very young; the man fifteen or sixteen; the girl ten or eleven. On that basis one would tend to imagine them lacking sufficient reason for leading a connubial existence; but as reason plays little part in all things Persian it would not be over-indulgent to say that they are already about as advanced as they will ever be in that respect, and there is no more to say about the matter. I have seen a household comprising father, mother, husband and wife crying in extreme anguish because the fourteen-year-old was about to give birth to her first child. The father railed against the mother for inducing him to expose his daughter to such a

danger. The mother was frantic with worry and running around, beside herself. As for the husband, he had fled to a dark corner to escape the reproaches that rained down on him from all sides and was weeping copiously. When the midwives had done their job he dared not show himself for a week, all the more ashamed because the new witness who would thenceforth attest to his infamy was alive and well.

In the upper classes that sort of childishness is in reality scarcer, but often feigned. For at seven or eight years of age a boy receives a woman to take care of him. She is supposed to be his wife, and does in fact legally belong to him. If later he does not like her he repudiates her. It is therefore in her interest from the outset to try quickly, usually too quickly, to form a bond of gratitude with him, which however is not very solid.

It is unusual for a woman to reach the age of twenty-three or four without having had at least two husbands, and often many more, for divorces are obtained with excessive facility; not as easily as marriages however, which are not only conducted very unceremoniously but are even contracted for a certain period, a year, six months, three months and far less.[7] But needless to say public opinion holds these unions in the same consideration as would be the case in Europe. The difference is that nothing shocks: Asiatic morality condemns only that which transpires in public and nothing of what goes on behind the walls of the andarun, where everything is licit.

The extreme ease with which alliances are made and unmade means there is little enthusiasm for having several wives simultaneously. Examples of polygamy may be said to be rare, and in practice constitute exceptions. There are towns like Damavand, for example, counting three or four thousand souls, where I found only two men who had two wives each, and I must add that they were not highly regarded. I speak of the Muslims, for the Nusayris are monogamous. Even if we accept that polygamy is detrimental to the population, which is rather difficult to believe when one sees the children of Fath Ali Shah form a tribe at least five thousand strong in the third generation, it must be admitted that polygamy cannot possibly be responsible for the depopulation of Persia as one can say almost categorically that it does not exist. Occasionally a Persian who periodically moves from town to town may have a wife in each of his residences, but this is also exceptional.

Women are rigorously cloistered in the andarun, in the sense that no outsider, no one who is not a member of the family is admitted. On the other hand they are perfectly at liberty to stay out from morning to evening and in many circumstances even from eve till morn. There are the baths; they go there with a servant who carries a small chest containing toiletry requisites and necessary garments, and return at the earliest four or five hours later. Next there are social visits amongst themselves that last at least as long. Then the constant round of invitations to births, marriages, birthday parties, public and private celebrations, not to speak of the even more frequent simple social gatherings. On top of all that there are pilgrimages, in which they are very assiduous and would not neglect for all the world. There is the pilgrimage to Shah Abd al-Azim, two leagues from Tehran, in a charming,

shadeful little village full of all kinds of shops, where fine folk go to be seen on Fridays. The population of this rustic spot is very hospitable and not only maintain at the disposition of the devout the tomb of the Imam, of sovereign virtue in a host of maladies, but also let rooms for two hours, for the day, for one or more nights as one so desires. There is also the pilgrimage of the Imamzada Qasim, in the hardly less attractive village of Tajrish. Above all there is the pilgrimage to Bibi Shahrbanu, Madam Patron Saint of the city, three hours from Tehran, and a hermitage containing the tomb of a great saint to which only women are admitted. If a man were daring enough to enter that sacred enclosure it is far from sure he would get off any more lightly than with instant death. Visitors usually stay a week in this revered retreat, and as it has a great reputation they come from far and wide. I have met caravans of penitents mounted on mules led by one or two servants arriving from Mazandaran, that is from forty leagues away. They suffered the exertions of the journey with great patience and seemed to be enjoying themselves enormously.

It must not be forgotten that all these women are so painstakingly veiled and so alike in their outer clothing that even the most practised eye would fail to recognize a single one of them. The custom still exists in Persia of taking a husband to make the pilgrimage to Karbala or Mecca when the real husband is unable to accompany his wife; but upon return the temporary husband ceases to be part of the family.

Finally, excluding invitations, the baths, pilgrimages, trips to the bazaar, the women go out whenever they want to, especially since the men are hardly ever at home, and it seems that they always want to go out, since the streets are crowded with them all year round. God forbid that all this should lead me to any unfavourable conclusions and that this perpetual hither and thither, the very liberal education they receive in certain matters, their conviction that they are mere imperfect creatures lacking in responsibility for their acts, and above all the impenetrable incognito that follows them everywhere should induce them to any unfortunate behaviour. Persian men claim it does, but they are slanderous scandalmongers and I do not believe a word of it! I limit myself to finding that all this licence without freedom and this complete absence of moral education have a deleterious effect on the husbands even more than on the wives and robs them from their earliest youth of a taste for family and home life.

Women have absolute authority in the homes where they spend so little time. They are waited on by servants of both sexes, and the andarun is freely accessible to visitors under the age of eighteen to twenty. This is a bizarre idea in a country where people marry at fifteen. But no inconsistency shocks in this country, and in particular, when one comments on this to Persians they laugh uproariously and tell you a thousand amusing tales; but they conclude seriously that it is the custom, and perhaps he who has just told you so many stories on the subject will upon leaving you go and hire some strapping lad as a ghulam bacha[8] whom he will earnestly take home to wait upon his daughters.

Not being responsible for anything, as I have said, the women are extremely choleric and violent. The Prophet discovered that their reason was lacking in some aspect, and hurriedly concluded, as they all too well recall, that their acts and

gestures were of no consequence. Full of this idea he even declared that the gravest lapse they could be accused of must be attested to by four eye-witnesses.[9] This more or less amounted to giving the weaker sex impunity and showed them great indulgence. Persian women have taken the Prophet's judgement literally: there are more husbands to be pitied than victimized wives. They have in particular a marked tendency to make use of their slippers, and those slippers, small as they might be, are made of very hard leather and armed at the heel with small horseshoe about half an inch thick. It is a terrible weapon whose deplorable effects I have seen on the furrowed face of a poor unfortunate who had drawn the wrath of a little lady of thirteen upon himself.

But to avoid giving the impression that I am calumniating the women of Persia I shall say no more, and I must above all positively state that in my quality as a European I have seen none of them and speak by mere hearsay; I add that the true or false inductions that might be drawn from the above in no way regard the women of the nomads and particularly the Nusayris. The former do not veil themselves, work hard, ride on horseback, take part in tribal business, and their existence is as useful and serious as the women of the towns is frivolous. It is no good asking them for information about the latter, for their remarks are very unflattering and they hold them in low esteem. As for the Nusayri women, they are not subject to divorce, which gives their unions an infinitely superior character to Muslim alliances. In addition they do not go on pilgrimages; they veil themselves in town, but only to avoid shocking and to comply with custom, and receive visits unveiled from any member of their religion as they see fit. As their religion in no way considers them inferior beings they do not have the benefits of irresponsibility and consequently behave better. A spirit of the family exists in the Nusayris that is lacking in the Muslims. The same observation applies to Guebre and Jewish women.

To return to urban populations, or as they say, the Tajiks, most of them are Muslims or Sufis, they and their wives spend most of their time away from home. The hours not given to the bazaar are absorbed by visits. Like everywhere these are of many sorts, ceremonious, utilitarian, business, pleasure.

When one wishes to go and see somebody it is customary to begin by sending a servant to enquire about his well-being and to ask if on such and such a day at such and at such an hour it would be convenient to come and visit him. In the event of a favourable response one sets out and arrives at the pre-established hour, which, given the manner in which Persians calculate time, is never nor could be too rigorously defined. One hour after sunrise is a good time to go and see somebody, because it is not yet too hot; or at *asr*, that is during the time of the third prayer, which, by the way, Persians often dispense with. When someone is supposed to come at asr, he may be expected from three in the afternoon until six o'clock without being considered to be late. As time is of no value being late is not considered a wrong, or is at least one that everybody shares.

So, one sets off with as many servants as possible, the jelodar walks in front of the horse with the embroidered blanket on his shoulder; behind the master comes the kalyanji with his instrument. One walks in step through the streets and bazaars,

greeted by acquaintances, giving to the poor. Sometimes there are singular cases amongst the latter. One of my friends was one day accosted by a woman whose new veil and clean ruband indicated that she was well-off. In a lamentable voice she asked for a *shahi*, a farthing. When he observed that she did not seem to be in need, she answered that she was indeed rich but that her child was sick and for that day she was reduced to living on charity in order to try to obtain celestial misericord by her humility. Other, more authentic beggars block your path crying loudly: "May the holy martyrs of Karbala and His Highness the Prophet and the prince of the believers (Ali) raise Your Excellency to the heights of prosperity and glory!" Sometimes His Excellency is a quite ordinary town-dweller who gives his alms nonetheless and is thanked by a prosopopœia worthy of the exordium. If the passer-by is a Christian the beggar makes not a mention of the Prophet or his people but invokes with great cries the blessings of His Highness Issa (Jesus) and Her Highness Maryam (Mary) upon the magnificent lord, the splendour of Christendom, which will no doubt come to the aid of the humblest of its servants.

Finally one arrives at the door of destination and dismounts. Preceded by the servants, one arrives at the house via several low, dark corridors. If you are of higher status the master of the house himself greets you at the first door. If you are of the same status he sends his son or a young relative. Then the first exchange of urbanities takes places: "How did Your Excellency or Your Lordship conceive the misericordious notion of visiting this humble abode?" One answers in turn, declaiming on the excessive honour being shown to you: "How is it that you deign to come thus before your slave? I am filled with inexpressible confusion; I am covered in shame by these excesses of bountiness".

Thus conversing one arrives at the door of the parlour one is to enter. Here you vie in civilities to establish who will enter first. The master insists that his home is your home, that all in this humble dwelling must obey you; you defend yourself modestly, swear the contrary, then take off your shoes, your host does likewise, and you enter.

You usually find all the men of the family assembled in your honour. They stand with their backs against the wall. They bow upon your arrival and you greet them. Then the master leads you to a corner of the room where he invites you to sit at the head of the table, you recommence your objections and multiply your protestations. Those present smile at this amiable combat, which shows the excellent breeding of the two actors. Finally both you and your host sit down. At your request the latter makes a gesture to his people and they too are seated. When everyone is settled you turn towards your host with an amiable expression and ask him if, thanks be to God, his nose is fat.[10] He answers: "Glory be to God, it is, by virtue of your bounty!" – "Glory be to God!" you reply.

Then you lean towards your nearest neighbour, whose positioning indicates particular rights to consideration, and inquire in the same manner if, thanks be to God, his health is good. Upon the always affirmative response, accompanied by a *glory be to God* and a *by virtue of your favour*, you go on to a third person and so on, until everyone has been greeted, taking care to subtly decrease the heartfeltness of your

questions as you descend towards those seated by the door. There you ask no more questions, a slight inclination of the head sufficing.

This ceremony goes on for a little while. When it is over you return to your host, and do no harm by repeating caressingly and as if you had not seen him for a fortnight: "Your nose is fat, please God?" To which he replies in similar tones: "It is, thanks be to God, by virtue of your misericord!" I have seen the same question repeated three or four times in succession by exceptionally polite people, and have heard high praise of the example of the late Imam Juma, or leader of the religion in Tehran, who, when visiting great lords never failed to inquire about the well-being of the noses not only of the masters of the house, but also of all the servants, and never got back on his horse without having assured himself in the most amiable possible manner that the condition of the nose of the sentry on guard duty at the door was such as he would wish it to be. For this reason this great ecclesiastical dignitary was so popular and beloved by all that his memory is still venerated.

Finally, after this question is exhausted there is a moment of silence to which the master of the house puts an end by observing off-handedly that yesterday's indifferent weather has suddenly become admirable, which fact can only be attributed to the astonishingly good fortune of Your Excellency. Those present unfailingly assent to the profound verity of this observation, and one amongst them will be found to say that all that is excellent renders that which approaches or surrounds it equally excellent; that a man eminent in perfection must be surrounded by equally eminent perfections, and that anywhere Your Excellency chose to appear nobody could be surprised to see the most perfect equilibrium of things and the highest degree of goodness immediately begin to reign. This proposition provokes even more assentment, and it would be a bad day were it not accompanied by a quotation from some poet.

One can of course fall over oneself in demonstrations of humility, and this is quite appropriate. But it is better to reply that the weather only truly took a turn for the better when your host agreed to your visit, that it is therefore not your good fortune but his showing its ascendance, and even better to say that upon mounting your horse you were feeling quite indisposed and only later became aware that you had begun to feel quite admirably well. Then, taking advantage of the hubbub of applause that greets the turn you have given to the conversation, you recount some anecdote that never fails to elevate the glad dispositions of the assembly to their zenith. Your host shakes your hand in gratitude, you press his hands tenderly, and then the kalyan, the tea, the coffee, the sherbets make their rounds.

I should not wish to praise this excessive understanding of politeness unduly; but I have the impression that the Persians, sharp-witted as they are, are quite capable of insinuating a touch of mockery into all these exuberant compliments; that step by step on the terrain of exaggeration sallies and comments not lacking in finesse and charm burgeon, that by dint of the ever-increasing refinement of these absurdities one sometimes comes across real flashes of wit, and finally, that on occasions and with people who make reasonable conversation impossible these conversations are decidedly less flat, livelier and gayer than what we call "talking of the weather",

even though the substance may be identical. Embroidery then, is their greatest merit, extravagant though it may be, and perhaps for that very reason.

I need not add that amongst people who have something to say to each other these formulas rapidly simplify; however, even between friends extreme courtesy persists, and in all classes of society. I have seen street-porters and peasants speak to each other with a consideration that to us would seem bizarre. Only the nomads differ. For that reason the Tajiks consider them vulgar and undeserving of existence. But I repeat, if these interminable compliments are dispensed with when a group of friends get together to celebrate the person talking to you is always *your slave;* if he is wearing fine clothes that day it is through the influence of your goodness, and if he says something that finds favour with the assembly it is due to your mercy.

At a dinner I saw Riza Quli Khan, former governor of the king's brother, ambassador to Bukhara, historiographer, grammarian, and an excellent poet in both literary Persian and dialect. He is one of the wittiest and most amiable men I have ever met anywhere in the world.[11]

With him was Mirza Taqi, who writes poetry under the pseudonym of *Sipihr* (the Sphere) and has received by royal decree the honorary title of *Lisan al-Mulk* [12] tongue of the Empire, a very learned and equally amiable character, but less the king's man than Riza Quli Khan. He is a mustaufi, or State counsellor, as well as imperial historiographer.

The Afghan prince Mir Muhammad Alam Khan, nephew of the late sovereign of Kandahar, was also there, a young man of twenty-four, of remarkable beauty, rare distinction of form and spirit, and also very knowledgeable.

Lastly, two of the prince's Afghan lieutenants, whose rough, barrack-room faces and somewhat savage smiles contrasted with the noble, distinguished manner of their leader, the learned, bureaucratic gravity of Lisan al-Mulk and the cheerful, light-hearted ways of Riza Quli Khan. We were the only two Europeans to adorn this eccentric company.[13]

Before beginning to eat we all agreed not to stand on ceremony and that anyone who so wished was free to eat with his hands. This was a precious concession to most of the guests, who had never seen instruments resembling our forks. The two Afghan naibs eyed them with the intrepidity befitting such gallant fellows, but seemed unable to grasp that one could stick four sharp points into one's mouth without incurring any peril. One of them even stated that, quite apart from that preoccupation, whatever was not eaten with the fingers was tasteless and could not cause any pleasure. Everyone began to treat his plate after his usual fashion, except Lisan al-Mulk, who adopted the European fashion and managed quite well, despite the jeering of his friends.

In order to deflect the exclusive attention he was attracting and put an end to the eulogy of European culinary practices he had embarked upon he stated that two things had always surprised him. Firstly, that such intelligent nations possessed no theology, surely the most beautiful and noble of sciences; secondly that our music, if the irrational racket of our instruments could thus be designated, should be so insignificant and limited in its effects.

The first reproach could only be met by assurances to the contrary, which found little assent because the Asiatics have mostly only seen Europeans of little learning in religious matters and are apt to believe that those specimens represent a common ignorance on the part of their compatriots. Besides, it was not the moment for speaking of such matters. As for music, we assured Mirza Taqi that he was mistaken and that our music was a cultivated and admired art form.

"But", he said, "does it produce a strong and powerful effect on the listeners? For the influence of an art form can only be judged by the effects it exerts on men".

"Certainly" we replied.

"But what do you mean by these effects?"

"A deep impression; sometimes an emotion capable of producing tears and at other times anguish and terror that a real event could hardly produce any better".

"We are familiar with all those things", replied Mirza Taqi, "and our music inspires them in us; but this is not enough to give you a true idea of its strength and power. For men are intelligent creatures and once their imaginations are excited they can contribute much to their own commotion. I shall give you an example of what our musicians are capable of. I had a friend who owned a troupe of strong, fine camels; he used to rent them to merchants for the journey to Yazd. He was also a skilful flute player. Whenever he wanted to demonstrate his skill he would shut his camels up in a stable for three days without water and on the fourth day he would open the door. The frenzied beasts would rush out and run towards a nearby stream. Then he would take out his flute and begin to play. The camels would immediately stop, turn their heads towards him and come back, surrounding him, with their necks strained and apparently feeling extreme pleasure. He would stop playing and they would rush off again towards the water. He would start again, they would forget to drink and return to where he was, and so on until he would take pity on them and let them go.

"Is that all?" the sardar cried out. "We have men far more skilful, and your tale reminds me of one of our musicians who was in the service of the Emperor of India, Shah Jahan. One day the prince was walking with his court near Malwa when he ordered the musician to play his tar. He took his instrument and plucked the strings with such delicacy that that not only did the courtiers begin to weep but a large rock, upon which Shah Jahan was sitting softened visibly before everyone's eyes and became covered in water. The Emperor then threw his pearl necklace at the sensitive rock and the pearls remained incrusted.

"What? Incrusted!" everybody cried out.

"They are still there", the prince said dispassionately.

"In that case", Riza Quli Khan observed, "we must admit that Your Highness' tale is the grandfather of Lisan al Mulk's. But since we are speaking of extraordinary matters, allow me to recount an adventure I to some extent witnessed personally and of which I can guarantee the authenticity. I spent the first part of my youth in Shiraz where there was, perhaps there still is, a man named Sulayman, renowned as a great eater of beng, which as you know is an intoxicating preparation of hemp. One day this character was in his bath when he heard a thunderous voice crying

'Jibrail! Jibrail!' He immediately recognized that it was God most high and most great calling the archangel Gabriel (may the blessing and the salvation be upon him!). Jibrail immediately answered: 'What's up?' 'Go and find me Sulayman', the voice answered.

"Sulayman immediately felt himself lifted up with extraordinary force. The arch of the bathroom was rent, in a second he was flying, and with the same velocity rent the first heaven, the second, the third, the fourth, and finally arrived before God's throne where the archangel, who was carrying him on his shoulders, stopped. You can imagine that Sulayman was shaking like a leaf.

"'What's that you've brought me?' cried the voice in terrible tones.

"'You asked me for Sulayman and I've brought him', countered the archangel.

"'Eh! Animal', the voice replied. 'I asked you for Sulayman, son of David the prophet, not that idiot. What use is he to me?'

"Unhappy at this reprimand, Jibrail twitched his shoulder and Sulayman, son of Aqa Jahan Khan, fell through the heavens and came to an abrupt halt by banging his nose on his bathroom floor.

"People hurriedly lifted him up and asked him what had caused him to hurl himself to the ground in such a manner, for his nose was bleeding profusely.

"'Ah, Muslims!' he cried out woefully, 'when Jibrail (may the blessing and the salvation be upon him!) comes for you, take good care to ask him if he has the right person; because otherwise, you see how he sends you back'."

When the stories of this nature were exhausted Mirza Taqi demonstrated the wonderful prodigies of his memory. To test him we asked him if he knew the weight of Goliath's armour, since we had just been discussing the Pentateuch, a book Muslims scarcely read. He did not raise an eyebrow and replied immediately with the fractions after Persian measure. We made the calculation and he was not a spot off. Justifiably proud of this success and the praise it brought him he told the two astounded Afghans that Pharmoun was the first Padishah of the French, that Dakouper, in whom we easily recognized Dagobert[14] had reigned for such and such a number of years, and that he had transcribed all the actions of these monarchs without missing a single one, which is strictly accurate.

At that point someone said to the naibs: "You Afghans are charming fellows; but don't you think you are a little too free with those long knives you wear in your belts?"

"Never without cause", the younger replied with conviction. Putting his hand on his colleague's shoulder he added: "He is my friend. But if I noticed that the sardar favoured him over me, he would not live long".

I carefully noted the moral of that phrase, because I had only invited one of the naibs to dinner, and the sardar, very wisely, had brought both of them, for which I had thanked him, as I could have absolutely unintentionally brought about a man's death. Those gentlemen's daggers were not for show. They looked like they had used them.

The young lieutenant's remark was well taken by his comrade, who laughed a great deal over it and then told us his own little Afghan story.

"Three or four years ago an English officer came to Kandahar in disguise with letters of recommendation for the prince. He was very well received. As is the custom of the Englishmen who visit us he passed himself of as an Arab, and he did in fact pronounce Persian a bit like the men of that nation. One evening after dinner in the house of a chief who had invited him he was sitting at the edge of the terrace drinking coffee. An Afghan comes in, walks up to him and strikes him on the head with his sword. The Englishmen falls into the street.

'What have you done?' the chief says; 'he was the prince's guest'.

'By my faith I knew nothing and I am sorry. Say I was drunk. No, wait. Tell the truth. There is less harm in killing an Englishman than in drinking wine'."

The story was judged very Afghan but somewhat brutal, and the two Persians in particular found it lacking in charm. The evening passed in this way and did not seem to us long. May the same be thought of my telling, by which I desired to give an idea of Persian conversation.

At this conjuncture I have named two men not only of great wit but learned and truly talented. I do not believe there are presently two more consummate and remarkable scholars in the whole of Persia in regard to their country's history. One of them, Riza Quli Khan, has completely re-edited the great chronicles of old and brought them up to date. It is highly unfortunate that such works are always composed on the orders and at the expense of a king who, in regard to himself, naturally demands that they somewhat take on the tone of a panegyric. This constraint spoils contemporary annals. Riza Quli Khan's work is however a remarkable and valuable production. The author has also published a great quantity of poetry, an account of his time as ambassador in Bukhara, and he has recently finished a complete anthology of the ancient and modern poets of Persia, a highly voluminous work containing the greatest accumulation of documents ever gathered on the subject.

Lisan al-Mulk is also an outstanding man. He has taken upon himself the task of co-ordinating a truly gigantic compilation of universal history according to the documents of all peoples. Only blissful ignorance of criticism renders such an undertaking possible. It nevertheless requires true intellectual fortitude to conceive and, above all, to persist in such a vast project; and given the way Asiatics write history, paying as much attention to trivial details as to major events, the writer must perforce have a memory similar to that which Lisan al Mulk has shown himself to possess to a remarkable degree. Two folio volumes have already been published. Lisan al-Mulk is a poet as much as a scholar and has acquired a solid reputation in both fields. He is besides an admirable writer of official edicts, a highly appreciated form of literature in Persia. A fine *firman,* conferring a royal appointment on some man in favour is a slice of elegance which will be read in public before a chosen circle. A good reader is essential to its true appreciation, and a good reader is one who makes the sentence boom, pauses in all the right places and excites endless Ahs! I imagine Montfleury's[15] declamation at Bourgogne County Hall must have approached this system of emphatic delivery. But although this is the fashionable style there are other tastes too, and I have heard, amongst others, an old dervish and

a messenger recite verses with the most authentic charm and the most harmonious and simple intonation. Coming back to the eulogies, it is not enough that they be well read, they must also be well composed, not in their foundation, which never varies, but in the choice of expressions. Comparing the sovereign to the sun, affirming that he is the guardian of the planet Saturn, that Alexander the Great is his bodyguard and Darius his chamberlain, all that is nothing. It would be disrespectful and almost indecent to say otherwise, but terms must be chosen whose rhymes echo richly from phrase to phrase; the most unusual words must be sought out, so that much remain incomprehensible to the majority of the readers and listeners. Naturally everybody who divines these enigmas, flattered by their own knowledge, applauds the erudition of the author. Finally, amidst all the conventions and official exaltations, a way must be found to slip in some unexpected praise where the subtle intelligence of the scribe shows itself in the relationships he has succeeded in establishing between apparently irreconcilable elements. A good example in the genre therefore is at the same time a logogriph, a linguistic tour de force and brilliant nonsense. Common sense is banished with the most inflexible rigour. People swoon, admire, compliment the creator of such beauty. For several days the text circulates all over town, inspiring the boundless admiration of the literati, and possessing copies of the masterpiece is a source of great vanity.

Mirza Said Khan, the minister for Foreign Affairs, has no less reputation as a writer than the two men I have just mentioned. He is also reputedly one of the best scholars of the Arab language in Tehran. This study is nowadays neglected and the Persians are far more attached to their mother tongue than was formerly the case.

Poets abound, and it would be difficult to name the most fashionable. Every town has its own, whom it values above all others. Lyric poetry is the most cultivated, but some imaginations aim higher. A small village in the South possesses a poor mullah who is composing an epic poem destined to carry on the *Book of the Kings,* by Firdausi[16] and to give the complete annals of national history since the eleventh century.

Amongst the scholars of theology Hajji Ali Kindi is noted as a dogmatist and Shaysan Abd al-Husayn as a jurisconsult. Every learned man is surrounded by disciples to whom he communicates his doctrine and who, accompanying him everywhere, even act as his servants.

Sayyid Abdullah Shustari is reputed a distinguished mathematician. He speaks the most elegant Persian I have ever heard. He also has a profound knowledge of literature and Arabic. He is high born. His father was vizier of the Nizam of Dekkan; the late Muhammad Shah wished to see him due to the elevated saintly reputation he had throughout the Muslim world, and kept him at his court by allotting him a sizeable pension; that is where he died.

Mullah Abd al-Jawad Khurasani is also quoted as an eminent mathematician. He lives in Isfahan and is surrounded by a considerable number of students. He also excels in the theory of music. He is even reputed to play the tar very well, a kind of mandolin; but as the religion forbids that exercise he is never heard in public.

Akhund Mullah Ali Muhammad is scarcely inferior in reputation to the above mentioned as a mathematician and music theorist. But he plays no instrument. To find performers one must leave the solemn classes, and then there is Ali Akbar, whom the Persians are fond of calling *the divine* and who does in fact play the tar marvellously. He has my most sincere respect. I have seen Europeans extremely averse to Persian music fall equally under his spell when listening to his arrangements of Russian music for his instrument. He plays with wonderful soul and feeling and would be considered a great artist in any country in the world. But he also has all the defects that often attach themselves to that glory. He is extremely capricious, vain and nervous; his outbursts are legendary and it is often an onerous undertaking to get him to play. Whilst giving him all the credit I feel he is due, I would scarcely consider Khushnavaz his inferior. He is an excellent player of the kamancha, a Persian violin played like ours with a bow but supported on the ground like a violoncello. Khushnavaz is a jovial fellow, lacking perhaps the desirable horror for alcoholic beverages; with his instrument in hand he is wonderful. On the santur, which can be compared to a virginal, Muhammad Hasan is unrivalled. He is as serious as Khushnavaz is boisterous, but sometimes makes fun of himself, and laughs wholeheartedly at his colleague's musical antics.

Besides these musicians, who are isolated artists, there are also the musicians of the tribal nomads, gentlemen who fulfil a function considered important in their world and whose practice is often hereditary. They are greatly respected, and sing a host of Persian and Turkish airs; amongst the latter two are of particular value: the song of Karim and the song of Karaglu.[17] They are two extended poems, and I have never met anybody who knew them in their entirety, particularly the first. Turkish music is far more energetic and moving than Persian, but the latter is more refined and subtle in its melodic effects. They both proceed from the same principles.

Painting is sorely neglected. Persians are aware of it and look especially for ancient works, for which they pay very high prices. King Muhammad Shah sent an artist to Rome to learn the secrets and the techniques of European art, which Persians have no qualms about recognizing as far superior to their own. Unfortunately the student does not seem to have been very well chosen. The painter was impressed by nothing and understood nothing. The only result of his journey was that he brought back a copy of *Seated Madonna*,[18] which obtained great success and is now reproduced everywhere. European engravings and lithographies have in any case long been copied. One sees them, particularly religious scenes, on kalyans, on inkpots, on mirrors. The prime minister recently had his palace in Nizamiya decorated with great frescos representing the king, his children and all the courtiers as well as the heads of European missions, but they are poorly executed.[19]

Persians still have one taste connected to the art of design in which they indulge frenetically. It is that of fine examples of calligraphy. People pay twenty pounds or more for a line written by the hand of an old master like Amiri the dervish or others. But Amiri is the most famous. Modern masters are cheaper but are nonetheless greatly admired. At the same time everybody is agreed that nobody now writes with

the same perfection, the same elegance as in ages past. Styles have changed. I have witnessed acts of pure folly to get hold of ancient works, which were in fact remarkably beautiful.

Songs are greatly favoured, but they must be new, and the latest arrivals are all the rage. Many are satirical and often political. Amongst those that deal with the charms of love and wine many are of the most august origin. The king, his mother and the ladies of the royal andarun produce them incessantly, and they are immediately repeated in the bazaar and the other andaruns. But although the words might be changed new melodies are rare and that is why knowledgeable people affirm that music is in a decadent phase. Few people know anything about theory, and are happy to learn a certain series of tunes by heart that enables them to keep abreast of the novelties.

In every street one comes across wandering story-tellers. Cafés used to be their theatre, as in Turkey. But the cafés, a new invention in Persia, have been suppressed by the Amir Nizam because politics were being discussed and too much opposition was arising. They have not been re-opened. But on a site near the Green market a sort of large wooden hangar has been built, open on all sides and replete with tiers that can accommodate two or three hundred people squatting on their heels. There is a stage at the back of the hangar. There, an ever-changing stream of story-tellers and listeners flows from morning till night. The *Thousand and One Nights* are considered a classic collection, beautiful but dated. *The Secrets of Hamza* are preferred, a vast compilation in seven folio volumes containing the motliest collection of tales imaginable, but all to the glory of the Imams.[20] This is the chief reference. But amusing anecdotes, clever ripostes, unflattering stories about mullahs or women, all mixed with poetry and sometimes song are also well appreciated. The population spends a good portion of their lives listening to these recitals, which cost the idle little, if anything at all.

But whatever charm all this might possess is completely eclipsed by theatrical productions, with which nothing can rival. The entire country is mad for them; men, women and children share the same enthusiasm, and a show gets the whole town scurrying. In every borough, in every square a sort of awning is suspended to that purpose. Some characters of the drama stand under it, but most of the action takes place down amongst the spectators. The women are crowded together on one side, men on the other, the two groups only loosely separated. The show is always a drama borrowed from the life of the Persians, the story of one of the persecutions of the Abbasid caliphs. The most famous of these compositions is presented in the month of Muharram and deals with the death of Ali's sons and their families on the plains of Karbala.[21] The declamation lasts three or four hours a day for ten days. It is composed of often very beautiful and moving lyrical verses, strung together and recited with great passion. Nobody worries about going on too long, and Persians can never get enough of the detailed depiction of the suffering, misfortunes, anguish, terrors of their favourite saints. The entire audience sobs uncontrolledly and utters cries of desolation. Most of these demonstrations are sincere, for it is in fact difficult not to be moved, and I have seen Europeans gripped by sadness; but

some of them indulge in obvious affectation and are by no means those who moan the quietest.

From time to time the mullah, seated on a chair placed opposite the stage, intervenes to make it clearer to the crowd how much the Imams suffered. He goes into detail about their torments, paraphrases the drama, curses the oppressive caliphs and intones some prayers. The crowd, chiefly the women, immediately begin to strike their breasts violently in cadence, chanting a sort of antiphon and repeating endlessly furious cries of: "Husayn! Hassan!" Then the entr'acte finishes and the drama recommences. Although basically unchanged for many years some small change is always introduced and the most moving scenes are usually developed. It is good going when the actors playing the despicable parts burst into tears like the spectators at the thought of their own villainy. I have seen one playing the abominable part of the Caliph Yazid who whilst proferring the most atrocious threats against the saints Hasan and Husayn was so incensed with himself that he wept to the point of being almost unable to speak, which brought the crowd to a frenzy. I do not know if these people treat a work of art according to the principles of Longin[22] and other critics, but it is impossible to deny that they produce an effect on the public which our greatest tragic masterpieces cannot approach. It is theatre somewhat in the manner of the Ancient Greeks.

We French have the honour of playing a noble part in the representation of the death of the Imams, the sons of Ali. An ambassador of King John (which King John? It is not easy to explain) happened to be at the court of the Caliph Yazid when the announcement was made of the capture of the holy family in Karbala. He tried to move the tyrant to pity in regard to the women and children. Failing to do so and in a transport of grief and indignation he declared himself a Muslim and a Shi'ite and was martyred. It can easily be imagined what light this puts us in.

I should not omit that despite the poignant emotion that seems to hover over the crowd gathered for these sacred dramas, rumour has it that these occasions are a wonderful aid to amorous intrigues. It is said that people who wish to meet do so at these solemnities and that those seeking adventure find it. But Persians are so ill-tongued it is unfair to take them at their word.

I have spoken elsewhere of their farces or sketches. I shall therefore not recapitulate.

6

PROBABLE RESULTS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA

I have not by far touched upon all that might be said, nor is it my ambition to do so. Other travellers have discussed in depth many points I pass over, and in tarrying over them I would only lay myself open to criticism. I prefer to cut right to the quick and study the outlook for the present rapprochement between Central Asia and the countries of Europe. At this point I shall fill in some of the scenarios I have previously tried to outline.

It is absolutely clear to me that in all the countries I have seen there exists no political nation as such in the sense that we nowadays attach to the word. The Arabs neither can nor ever have been able to lay claim to the designation. When they were abruptly wrenched from their deserts by Islamism and thrown in as conquerors amongst the Greek-speaking populations they acquired a taste for pillage but not for the art of governing peoples, nor have they learnt it since. All their statesmen and administrators, like their scholars and their philosophers, were converts of foreign blood and almost from the start governed without them as well as to their detriment. Individually taken they are a noble race, but incapable of understanding the idea of the nation state, the idea of the system. Attachment to the tribe represents the extent of their capabilities. They know nothing of that which bonds societies together, not even religious faith, which they gladly confine to the realm of sentiment.

The Persians understand everything that remains inaccessible to the Arabs and have an all-encompassing intelligence, but they lack constancy, reason and, especially, conscience.

The Afghans are brigands possessed of enormous energy and spiritual vigour as well as an extraordinary independence of spirit, but above all brigands, and the concept of the State, which the Arabs have never understood and which the Persians have exhausted for all eternity is for them forever tied to the form of the barracks, if the day should ever come that they might consent to enlist.

Therefore it does not seem to me that the peoples of Central Asia, unaided, are in a position to rejuvenate their society and rebuild it on its ancient foundations. Are they more open to accepting a new civilization?

I tend not to think so. For thirty years or so now one hears a lot of talk about civilizing the other peoples of the world, of bringing civilization to this or that country.

Look as I might, I find no evidence either in ancient or present times that any such result has ever been obtained. As far as the past goes, the Greeks and Romans never civilized anybody. The former, after the Alexandrian period, fused with the peoples of the Near East; but it would be very difficult to say that those peoples became more Hellenic than the Hellenes became Lydians or Phrygians. As for the Roman transformation of Gaul, it was only completely successful in the south, where they took the trouble to forcibly sell off a part of the indigenous population, replace them with italiot colonies and reduce the remainder to serfdom. In modern times I do not see that the French have civilized the Canadians or the Hindus of Pondicherry, nor the Moors of Algiers; neither that the English have done much towards changing the ways of their Indian subjects; nor the Dutch transformed the population of Java, and the Russians no more so that of the Caucasus. That does not necessarily mean that that which has not been seen since the beginning of the world, never may come to pass; but, however, in the face of such prolonged failure, it would seem prudent to remain doubtful. When a country is sparsely populated it can be civilized no doubt, but only by causing it either to disappear or to be absorbed.

There are therefore only two possibilities: either the people of Central Asia will continue to vegetate as they have done for centuries or they will be conquered and dominated by European nations.

Although their territories are vast and far from the coasts, which offer the most easily accessible points of attack, this hypothesis is not absolutely unlikely if one takes into account the extraordinary expansive thrust of our society and the need for invasion that propels it. There is therefore no definitive hindrance, all the more so because the material means at our disposal for executing our desires are of enormous power and our military organization assures us of an incontestable superiority anywhere we choose to present ourselves, even when numerically outnumbered a hundred to one. I concede therefore the possibility of any European country establishing itself in Central Asia. This could be done in two ways.

Let us first imagine that the English system be employed, of which the principal trait is the desire to dominate the conquered masses without mixing with them, ruling from above whilst maintaining a total separation and only according them an extremely limited say, always subordinate and provisional, in the governing of their own affairs, which may be withdrawn at any time.

This system is, I believe, very noble, and all well and good while it lasts. But it has the drawback, from the point of view of the subjugated peoples, of being a permanently provisional state whose yoke and insult they impatiently endure. Maintaining it requires skill and a constant show of force. The slightest weakness, the slightest neglect of a necessary measure can compromise everything because one is continuously faced with the enemy, who one does not allow to slumber; and as the masters are more likely to doze than the slaves everything rests upon a perpetual danger. The continual tension occasioned by this state of affairs has a high price, and if by mishap things start to go wrong in other areas related to the general affairs of the conquered peoples concerned terrible repercussions are to be feared. A general uprising may put an end to the domination. If one envisages such a

moment the fragility of such a form of government will become clear, for the day following its fall nothing will remain. The countries which have been subjected to it will fall into an abyss of total anarchy. Everything must be recommenced, and in all probability nothing more can be done.

The other method is that adopted by the Seleucids after Alexander, continued by the Romans and practised today by the Russians in their Asian territories. It is to consider the local people, as far as possible, equally as apt for governing as the conquerors, to offer them employment and rank, to bind them in all possible ways, by self-interest and prestige, to the enduring success of the conquest, in a word, to tend to assimilate them to the victorious nation so that they fuse with it completely and form with it one sole people and one sole territory.

I do not speak of the years of transition, which are rife with dangers. The natives are not yet tamed and yet they still have many means of causing damage at their disposal. They are at once dignitaries in the service of the conquerors and solicited by the call of local patriotism. The high status recognized or accorded them may singularly excite them to higher ambitions, and to such as only independence would satisfy. The more or less justifiable dissatisfaction of the lower classes which generally follows a conquest finds a foothold. On the other hand it cannot be denied that skilful surveillance can overcome these difficulties; that in these matters by gaining time one gains everything, and that past experience (I quoted the Seleucids and the Romans above) seems to suggest that this system has good chances of perpetuating itself.

The two nations are therefore brought together; they are welded together but still not in a state of fusion. Fusion begins, and in this operation what happens? Does the European nation give the Asian nation its qualities and solid merits or does it rather borrow precisely those of its associate's vices and shortcomings which brought about its inferiority and defeat?[1]

History passes its verdict, and it is the latter answer that prevails. By the time Alexander had conquered Asia Greece had lost all its moral stature and fell to the level of the ancient and bastardized peoples who had been its prey; and its intellectual level followed the moral in swift decadence so that when Rome in turn subjugated Greece she introduced the infection that ultimately would kill her. Rome also took Asia and began to fall from that day on; she became less and less herself, forgot the European genius and took pleasure in modelling herself on the decrepit ways which she had up till then so rightly despised.

But Greece and Rome did not merely fall morally and intellectually as a result of this marriage, what is not less remarkable is that they became impoverished in ever-increasing proportions. At first they both gained from pillaging and devastating the ancient regions where untold riches had accumulated for centuries. However pillaging has its limits, and as it regards a certain capital and accomplishes the transfer without care and concern for maintenance no matter how substantial that capital be it will one day necessarily be exhausted. It still wasn't when Roman patriotism flowed back into Asia. The reason for this was that Asia is a great productive region, and as Europe's wealth increased its need for luxury increased at

least as quickly, and the only place in the world capable of satisfying that need was Asia itself. Seleucie and Alexandria soon became far more opulent cities than Athens or Corinth, and Antioch and Constantinople equally soon brought about the ruin of great Rome herself. The rest of Europe never became rich; on the contrary it increasingly drained itself dry for similar reasons, and always to the profit of Asia.

Today I do not see that things present themselves in a different light. One has the opportunity of observing both Europeans accustomed to Asian life and Asians brought up in Europe. The former have, on the whole, acquired the vices, or at least the sluggishness, slovenliness, laziness and fickleness of the Asiatics; the latter have remained what they were with the acquisition of a few additional vices, whilst I have never come across a single one who had gained a European virtue. Life in hot countries as such does nothing for the descendants of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons; if it does not make them effeminate it causes them to develop an arrogance and a brutality which have an unfortunate effect on their intelligence, and as for the offspring of mixed marriages, all those who have seen and commented on them have rightly spoken in such unfavourable terms that I do not wish to return to the subject.

As for the loss of European capital, I consider it inevitable. I have already mentioned a few of the causes when I spoke of the mercantile classes. I am well aware that some great individual fortunes have been amassed in London and in Amsterdam from commerce with Asia; but I am also struck by the proportionately greater accumulation of riches arising from transactions with us which can be noted in the hands of the natives of Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Canton, and far more evenly distributed. In Europe only a handful of important traders have become rich, whilst in Asia, besides the large houses which enjoy immense prosperity, enormous sums are spread out amongst a whole class and a class of native agents of all kinds, brokers, retailers, producers and even amongst the peasants. Equal profits are incompatible with such inequality of results, and I see the proof in the large amount of currency that passes from Europe to Asia each year to pay the difference.

One should also note that, with the exception of China, the present situation is by no means normal. But even there tea and silk constitute two items of trade which will remain to our eternal detriment. Opium prevents the scale from swinging too far against us, but it is only a temporary remedy and sooner or later we will have to cease counting on such a regrettable resource, either because China will herself begin production, something she could easily do, or she will permit importation for a reasonable toll.

For eighty years now profits from India are not what they were. The metropolis found itself obliged to severely curtail industry there in order to assure the outlets of its own manufacturers and it closed, for example, all the chintz and muslin factories, not to speak of others, with which it would have been unable to compete. But these are violent and unsustainable measures.

When some day, for whatever unforeseeable reason, India recovers her freedom of action in this respect, as she possesses abundant raw materials and, more importantly, as her workers can work at rates we can never match, England itself will be unable to compete. One might object that machinery will give an edge, but what is

to stop the Indian manufacturer, of European blood or half-caste, from introducing the same machines for his own use?

Persia has found itself in most unfortunate but also completely exceptional circumstances for a century and a half now. The last princes of the Safavi dynasty were overthrown by an Afghan incursion which put the country to fire and the sword for fourteen years. As they knew that their reign would be short-lived because they lacked the resources to make it last they carried off all that could be carried off and knocked over, broke or burned all that remained. No town was spared. Nadir Shah came to eject them them; but Nadir Shah was a Kurdish adventurer, a soldier by trade and by character, who scarcely treated his homeland better than the brigands he had rid it of; and who in turn, in order to go off and devastate India, took the little money he could find and of every ploughman made a soldier.[2]

The yoke was intolerable. The warrior was assassinated; but thousands of minor oppressors appeared, the nomadic tribes began to live off the town dwellers; the town dwellers stole from each other. The fallow fields were no longer sown and those which had been cultivated ceased to be so. A part of the nation emigrated to the Pashadom of Baghdad. It was only around the turn of the century that some semblance of order began to reappear, first with the Zend prince, Karim Khan, and then with the kings of the present dynasty.[3] But as the administration is such as I have depicted it, it could not of itself be of any great use; the mere existence of peace brought, relatively, quite remarkable results. For some ten years now villages have been raised in the middle of the desert. Great works of irrigation have brought fertility to sterile wastelands. In some cases it was necessary to travel three or four leagues to bring water from the mountains. It was done. Fallen towns were resurrected. The surroundings of Tehran are no longer recognizable; gardens abound, and as a result the atmospheric conditions have been modified to such an extent that that city, once cited as the unhealthiest in all Persia, is today one of the healthiest. In just the last two years it has completely changed physiognomy. Beautiful bazaars have been erected; caravanserais of glorious architecture now adorn the capital; whole neighbourhoods are being built. Every year numerous and great private houses are added to the scene. Things progress slowly because the government promotes nothing; content at least that the rapaciousness of its officials does not impede activity; but in the end things work, because bad governments were not invented yesterday in Asia, and this evil has not prevented the states of this part of the world from prospering materially. The reason, in Persia as well as in China, lies in the abundance of raw materials and low living and production costs. Up till now there has been importation from Europe into Persia and not exportation; but if a European state had a hand in the affairs of the country, as has been discussed above, the situation would necessarily change and one would find oneself in the presence of a productive terrain, abundant with cotton, highest quality wool, silk, coal, copper, lead, tin, iron and a population only too willing to process this wealth. If to this one adds the great commercial astuteness of the Persians and the fact that Europe is tending towards the abandonment of protectionism I believe one cannot but not be convinced that there will remain no means of competing with Asian productivity,

in other words, that the harm done by Asia to Greeks and Romans alike menaces in equal measure modern Europe.[4]

I am therefore not inclined to consider favourably the extraordinary ardour that pushes Western nations towards Asia. Beside the foregone conclusions of military success I seem to glimpse, in other fields, failures no less bitter whose consequences will more than outweigh the advantages of glory. But I understand that there are irresistible tendencies and that Europe will not be able to reason against the force which pushes it beyond itself and to far reaching activity and, finally, that societies do what they must do, although their action often works in the opposite direction from where their true interests lie. I limit myself to noting the fact that Asia is a succulent dish which poisons those who eat it.

Part II

RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

1

THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CHARACTER OF ASIATICS

All that we think and all the ways in which we think have their origins in Asia. It is therefore of interest to know what, and how, Asia currently thinks.[1] For those of us who have no wish to lose sight of the course of history my opening statement amply justifies such curiosity. If besides one considers that our contacts of all natures with the occupants of the eastern regions of our globe multiply daily and become more fruitful, and that both our primary and secondary material and political interests are and will become increasingly more involved in such questions, one cannot but fully acknowledge, not only the interest, but also the direct, practical usefulness of gaining the greatest possible insight into the moral and intellectual conscience of those peoples we needs must make our associates.

Having dealings with other nations whilst neither knowing nor understanding them is fine for conquerors, less so for allies or protectors; but for those like us who claim to be the bearers of civilization nothing could be more detestable and senseless.

I do not feel therefore that I am departing from the general needs of our time nor that I am creating a book of pure speculation if I analyse as well and as thoroughly as I am able the religious, philosophical and moral notions, and even the literary habits of the present day inhabitants of Central Asia. Perhaps the results I shall present and the considerations to which those results give rise will be able to furnish the explanation for many facts that have hitherto been imperfectly understood, if indeed at all.

The principal aim of this study is to consider the true nature of the Asian genius. When a European embraces a doctrine his intelligence finds it natural to renounce all that is alien to it, or at least that which would produce too strong a contrast with it. Not that such an operation is a simple or easy matter. Whilst one manages quite easily to recognize that black and white are incompatible and that in order to preserve one or the other in a desirable state of purity it is necessary to isolate and suppress its rival, the spirit rarely possesses sufficient energy to make the separation as absolute as it should be and conserves a little of the opinion it no longer has, or even of the opinion it has never had. It is possible to refute in clear and precise declarations such and such a dogma, but only to a lesser extent to avoid the consequences of that same dogma and notions that without it would not exist: in a word, resolutely black or white consciences are rare everywhere; it is grey that predominates.

That being said, I repeat, that of all peoples who have ever existed, those from our part of the world, our contemporaries, are those who have best succeeded in creating an apparently homogenous set of beliefs. The same cannot be said of the Asiatic peoples. They are so far from such a result that they cannot even conceive the usefulness of it: they turn their back on it, and are concerned, unlike us, less with seeking a well delimited, defined state of truth, bounded by walls and ditches, impervious to error, than with not neglecting a single form, a single idea, a single atom of form or idea perceptible to the intelligence. This represents truth to them: antinomies do not deter them, the immensity of the landscape enthrals them, the vagueness, or rather absence of boundaries seems to them indispensable, to such an extent that whatever the thesis that be expounded before them it will seem to them important and worthy of their esteem not according to the measure of exactitude towards which it strives but according to the minuteness of the research applied to some thitherto neglected point whose subtlety might at the very least give rise to the glimpse of a dream.

It is the overuse of the inductive method that has led to this moral disposition. It has finely honed the intellect but at the same time imbued it with a sort of unconscious scepticism that arises from the very need not to set limits on metaphysical curiosity. It has shown things of such diversity, led the imagination through such varied landscapes, always eager to lead it to the bottom of the abyss after having let it glide at the most ethereal heights, that there remains neither the wish, the desire nor the time to forge a permanent attachment to any of the ensuing results. One allows oneself to be gently rocked in this atmosphere, or rather one continuously experiences the feeling of joy that certain mountainous landscapes inspire in travellers. The way is narrow, without horizon, the road invisible, rocks rise up to left and right threatening to cut off from view the last scraps of blue which crown their summits, one sees no way out, but goes on nevertheless until eventually the pass appears; then new doubts, a new exit, and soon one finds oneself walking, not in order to advance, but solely for the pleasure of unravelling the perpetual enigma of the path.

So goes it with the Orientals and their philosophical horizons. We might not unfairly say that the habit their judgement is in of incessantly giving itself to such gymnastics must have caused it to become dislocated. They are full of fire and are truly the most naturally and deeply intuitive people in the world; they excel, as the saying goes, in splitting hairs, and from the strands they will form a bridge capable of bearing a carriage; they will see unlimited food for thought, by no means lacking in value, in the tiniest of notions; but at the same time it is certain that the moral faculty we call *common sense* and which, let it be said in passing, depresses us at least as often as it guides us, is not in perfect equilibrium with the power of their imagination and the speed of their understanding. The truth is that they lack common sense, and in all their dealings, great and small one sees barely a trace of it.[2] All that either leads or pushes them is generally foreign to it. Their entire lives are spent in making almost no use of it. Things great, everywhere a scarcity, are nevertheless more accessible and familiar to them than things reasonable.

Certainly, nothing is as regrettable in the general conduct of affairs as this perpetual wavering in judgement. At the present time one sees the Oriental, who surely lacks courage and steadfastness no more than he does intelligence, become at all levels the victim of European adventurers, cast in markedly inferior metal but of greater rigidity. No less noteworthy is the fact that this so regrettable inferiority affects them far less than one would be prone to think. For the Asiatic the sovereign good does not lie in the advantages of material well-being or social and political life. Generally speaking, the greatest and most detailed knowledge possible of the supernatural is the foremost of all considerations. They value all that comes their way on this subject, regardless of its source. As soon as they have acquired a certain amount of trust in you they are prepared to confide what they know of the object of their concern in exchange for what you yourself know. They need the unseeable world; they feel it weigh upon them; they grapple with the perpetual impression of mystery; they seek something above and beyond daily life, and one sees them alert, waiting in a desire, in a never abating fever, trying to open their eyes beyond measure, gazing far and wide into the air, far more concerned with the life to come than with anything of this world. They are afraid of missing God or even that God will miss them.

If only certain social classes were so inclined it would be no great wonder. But, once again, the defining trait is that all classes are possessed by the same demon, and one feels it as strongly in the lowliest mule driver as in the most highly placed of mullahs. In truth, everyone in Asia has an ecclesiastical bent[3] and enjoys expounding, demonstrating, preaching and being preached to. Nobody, even the worst rascal, in whom the tattered shirt, the swaggering dagger and the cocked hat would never have led one to expect to find even the most superficial of such instincts, is incapable of at times adopting a sanctimonious tone and giving vent to dogmatic considerations, not in order to deceive others, but rather for self-edification. Neither should one imagine that this be confined to practitioners of any particular religion, but is common to all Asiatics; the preceding observations apply to all, regardless of sect. So these sects, without distinction, I repeat, are drawn together despite their divergences by these three primary common traits: use of the inductive method pushed to the extreme, an exaggerated curiosity for theological matters, the habit of rambling extemporization.

The only truly hateful opinion is that which, forever fixed in stone, does not speak. Cromwell's Independents, the Puritans of the Great Uprising, were extremely dangerous for the Catholics because no consideration would have brought them to reason with people condemned for all time without redress. But he who argues discusses, and he who discusses converses, and as Field Marshall de Monluc[4] has put it, the town that negotiates and the woman who listens are close to surrender. The Orientals' passion for philosophical and religious discussion has accustomed them to listening to everything, and when even the most intolerant of mullahs has twice met Jews, Christians or Guebres, or even Banian Hindus, he feels inclined to a certain calm, all the more so because his natural mental quickness has not failed to retain some part of the contradictory opinions he has heard, and he

keeps them not in order to reflect upon their perversity or weakness but in order to try to extract from them some quintessence that he may be able to add to the notions he already possesses. These sorts of combinations are a commonplace arrangement. The Albanian Muslims' cult includes the burning of candles to Saint Nicholas. The Mirdite Christians respectfully consult dervishes. The women of Khosrova in Chaldea make offerings to Our Lady in order to become with child, and if their wish is granted they do not fail to appear in church in order to give thanks, and they are careful to inform themselves about which rites they must perform in order to make their prayers in a Christian fashion, considering this a sign of their deference and good will. In the circumscribed territory of Pondicherry conciliation has gone even further; the Muslims have adopted from the Hindus and the Christians not only the custom of processions, essentially foreign to them, and have more or less succeeded in integrating it with the perfectly heterodox[5] adoration of their saints, but in addition the three faiths consider it a duty and a merit to observe their rites together and to participate with equal reverence at each other's divine services. The communities have not limited their integration and eclecticism to a taste for absolutely similar processions. The Catholics have added the performance of interminable religious dramas to their rites in which it is impossible not to recognize the imprint of the dramatic systems from which they were copied, Shi'ite taziyas and especially the Brahmanic. But as far as mixtures of faith goes the most complete example I have come across was at the temple of fire in Baku. Let it be said in passing that this sanctuary is by no means as ancient as is generally supposed. It dates back to no later than the seventeenth century, at which time many Indian merchants frequented the courts of the Tartar Khans at Derbend, Gunjeh, Shamakhi and Baku. It was those traders who took it into their heads to create a place of worship there for their own use. The penitents who inhabit the place today have no notion of positive religion. For them everything has been reduced to the practice of a complete ascetic insouciance arising from a syncretism founded more on scepticism than belief. I ran into an old friend there whom I had met several years earlier during his pilgrimages to distant parts. Mostansha took me to a kind of divine service held to the accompaniment of small Guebre cymbals in one of the temple cells; on the altar, beside the Shivaite divinities, there were vases belonging to the Parsee cult, Russian images of Saint Nicholas and the Virgin and Catholic crucifixes; these so diverse relics were all treated with equal respect. On account of the heat of the naphtha torches all the penitents who were in the temple went about almost naked, although it was the end of December. But their thin or rather emaciated bodies seemed no more susceptible to physical influences than the souls they housed to common sense. My friend did not hide from me that the designation corresponding to himself and his companions was *padri*, which he assured me was the English word for "Brahman". He regretted only the fact that for several years no expert in the practical science of austerity had come to Baku, which explained why I saw no voluntary martyrs. Everything else he had come to terms with, as with all things of the world. His language had become as motley as his faith. Since we had last met he was no longer content to speak Persian mixed with several Hindi

dialects, he had added a little English, a little French, a little Russian and a large amount of German, which a Livonian workman who rented half of his room in the temple had taught him, there being a candle factory opposite, which seems neither to scandalize nor to bother the ascetics in any way. One would swear that they remain oblivious of it.

Amongst the more lettered classes the mixture of ideas is doubtless of a less clear-cut nature, but it is carried to limitless levels of complication. Here one enters into a genuine pandemonium where everything penetrates, embraces, mixes, is accepted, and only philosophical doubt is expulsed; certain forms of scepticism make do without it. Certain transformations, far less important than one might suppose, have scarcely disguised the most ancient theories. Since history witnesses that from the most distant ages Asia has lent its ear to all the assertions of supernaturalism it will easily be grasped what a fearsome wealth of theories has arisen, how many have married, and how many generations of mixed systems such alliances have engendered; and nothing of all that has been forgotten, nothing lost. In this book we shall see the most manifest proof of what I have already demonstrated in another work; of how their children and their children's children have ceaselessly and continuously come to align themselves beside their ancestors.

If all these doctrines and shades of doctrines had remained isolated, confined to well-defined circles of believers, such an environment would have rendered impossible the existence of a dominant or State religion. Their multitude is so great that the resulting tableau would show a series of numerically insignificant groups. But this is not how one should conceive them, and it is an incontrovertible fact that the head of every man contains and nourishes, in sufficient harmony, a greater or lesser flock of contentious conceptions and that deep within every spirit those conceptions dominate and eliminate each other by turns, in such a way that during his lifetime their ingenious appreciator runs a well-extended gamut of barely compatible and often directly opposed beliefs in permanently mobile evolution.

That does not prevent each person from nominally belonging to a positive religion. From the cradle to the grave one remains Muslim, Jew, Christian, Guebre, Hindu. Genuine conversions from one faith to another are a rarity and so burdensome to the few who venture along that path that one generally sees their children or even the apostates themselves return to the religion of their forefathers. Here one could cite the example of the Islamic converts amongst the Jews of Persia, some of whom simply returned to the Mosaic tradition, whilst others raised their children in it but themselves remained true to their new faith.[6] What is noteworthy is that even though the Koran decrees the death penalty for such a crime there were no disputes between these apostates and local authorities. But the political reasons that led the Prophet, without much success, to want only Muslims in Arabia[7] and which likewise led the Turks to be pitiless towards those whom they regarded as civil deserters do not exist elsewhere. Tolerance of ideas is the general practice therefore, except in those cases where purely worldly considerations stand against it. In general therefore, one must consider the conscience

of an Asiatic as being composed of the following religious and philosophical ingredients:

1 a largely nominal adherence to a given religion;
2 a more or less intense faith in certain precepts of the professed cult;
3 a determined opposition to many, even some of the most essential of those precepts;
4 a greater or lesser stock of ideas espousing completely alien theories;
5 a steadfast predisposition towards favouring the peregrination of those ideas and theories and to replacing the old with the new.

The replacement is all the more assured if the theories and ideas savour of contrast. In that case the happy thinker supposes that he has just opened a doorway to infinity that had up until then gone unnoticed both by himself and others.

Such an intellectual organization or, if one prefers, disorganization would be impossible for us, and for several reasons. First of all because the experimental method in which Europeans place an absolute and routine confidence leaves such a feeble taste for the supernatural that most minds exclude it completely, or accept at most only the tiniest of doses. In addition, our discussions tend to be vigorous, slightly brutal and generally lacking in essential reticence, in such a way that unless he keeps it strictly to himself, a tête-à-tête of limited prospects, the advocate of an idea is obliged to risk it in open combat and consequently to assure that it is relatively unassailable. Far from allowing him too much licence this will often force him to treat it like a mongrel dog, cutting off its tail and ears in order to give the assailant less to grab on to. This is the state he presents it in, and the inevitable result of this kind of armament in war is that the promoter of a theory, obliged to subject his champion to a severe preliminary examination in order to prevent it from being strangled right off the bat, in as far as he is able, refuses categorically to treat it with indulgence. If the idea is not in sufficient harmony with the notions from which it springs it will be repudiated before ever being presented. This severity, these guarantees, these barriers do not exist for the Asiatic; on the contrary, one might say that he had ordered matters so that nothing might interfere with the flight of his fancy and, in fact, nothing does.

It is a rule of ancient wisdom as well as of the Greek philosophers that all opinions concerning the higher entities must be shrouded in mystery. In the first place the respect owed to holy matters demands it. It is not reasonable (here I speak the language of those whom I observe) to cast high truths before beings unworthy of conceiving them, and the unworthiness stems equally from unpreparedness and pure ignorance as from hostility and bad will. In order to merit participation in any doctrine whatsoever an initiation is called for whose nature and ordeals vary according to the good or bad dispositions, known or imagined, of the neophyte. As for indiscreet disclosure, Antiquity testifies to its revulsion by the so frequent accusations of profanation of mysteries with which it hounded a number of its great men. This form of thought, which originates in Asia, has remained perfectly intact

there. It is one of the latent but sure causes which justify the Muslims' repugnance for allowing Christians or Jews into their temples. The same goes for the latter, and for the Guebres with regard to their atashgahs.[8] We justify our interdiction with the same reasoning as the High Priest of Diana of the Ephesians.

Then again it is not a good idea to expose one's faith to the insult of disbelievers, given that one might come across a sophist who would take advantage of his eloquence in order to undermine in the faithful certain in of themselves indisputable ideas which their partisans would simply be incapable of defending. In such a way that the unfortunate soul, fallen victim to his imprudence, deprived of the noble prerogatives of his faith, would find himself in the same position as that of a traveller divested of his gold by bandits. Faith and gold would have lost none of their value but in both cases the victim would no longer be in a position to benefit from them. Not confronting particularly wily debaters is therefore a measure of elementary prudence; consequently it is necessary not to confess what one thinks and to hide carefully what one believes.

Yet another reason, albeit of a wholly different order, tends to the same end. The possessor of truth must not expose his person, his worldly goods or esteem to the aberration, to the folly, the perversity of those whom it has pleased God to lead into and to keep in error. As long as he is sensible and walks the right path he is precious to God; his health and prosperity are of consequence to the world. Never could speaking lightly bring advantage; for God knows what he wants, and if it suits him that the infidel or the wayward believer discover the true path, he needs help from no-one to bring about this miracle. Silence must therefore be considered useful, as well as knowing that speaking, and exposing the believer and perhaps even the religion, is ill-advised and at times may even amount to impiety.

However there are cases where silence is no longer sufficient, where it could pass for an admission. In that case there can be no hesitation. One should not only renounce one's real opinion but it is imperative that one mislead one's adversary by all manner of ruse. One makes all the professions of faith that may please him, performs all the most senseless of rites, distorts one's own books, exhausts all the possibilities of deception. In this way one acquires the multiple satisfaction and merit of having safeguarded oneself and one's loved ones, of not having exposed a venerable faith to horrid contact with the infidel, and finally of having imposed on the former the spiritual shame and wretchedness he deserves by tricking him and confirming him in his error.

This represents through the ages the generalized practice of all sects in Asia and is known as *kitman*.[9] The European would tend to see a humiliating situation in this system, which not only renders reticence indispensable but calls for the use of untruthfulness on a vast scale. The Asiatic on the contrary finds it glorious. Kitman ennobles him who practises it. The believer raises himself to a perpetual state of superiority over the person he deceives, be it a minister or a powerful king, no matter; for he who uses kitman against him he is above all a poor wretch to whom one closes the true path and who suspects nothing; ragged and starving you stand, outwardly quaking in your boots before deceived might, yet thine eyes are filled

with light; thou treadst in brightness before thy foes. You ridicule an unintelligent being; you disarm a dangerous beast. What multifarious delights!

This then is the system. But one should not be duped. The Asiatic possesses neither the active energy nor, especially, the imperturbable order in his ideas that would be required in order to apply kitman in a strictly rigorous manner. I have just outlined the theory; practice does not pride itself on following it step by step.

In the outlying areas of Trebizond and Erzurum there are some religious communities who profess the Sunni Islamic faith. In their villages they visit the mosques on Fridays; they support mullahs to read the Koran to them and to comment on the traditions of the Prophet. But, however, they whisper, we are not Muslims; we go to church, we hear mass, accept the divinity of Jesus Christ and venerate the images of the saints.

This is all strictly true, and by having said it in confidence to a few trusted persons nobody in Anatolia is unaware of it, and it is as public as the peal of the church bells. So it might seem that the pretence is of no use: not in the least. When it is called for, these men appear before the qadis, and no one questions their status as faithful Muslims. They make oaths on God's book; their oath is as valid as that of the Sharif of Mecca. Everybody knows their opinion; but everyone pretends to believe their lie. It has all the civil effects one might imagine, and in reality the injustice is not so great; for these peasants are far less cunning than they themselves believe. Even if they should want to dispose of their hypocrisy tomorrow they would no longer be able to get rid of beliefs which have become their own, simply by aping them and, at once Christians and Muslims, the mosque has become no less indispensable to them than the church.

In Persia, the Nusayris, who believe neither in an individual God nor in the fixed determination of existence, pass themselves off all the same as Muslims, are accorded without difficulties all the rights of believers, are allowed to enter the mosques and can at the same time use their right as non-believers to fairly publicly break the fast of Ramadan without incurring sanctions. These Nusayris, far more Muslim in appearance than the Christians I recently spoke of, are in fact much farther removed from Islam, for which they feel nothing but aversion. As a rule, besides being Nusayris they are also Sufis. One of their notable inconsistencies is their attachment to circumcision. In their stock of notions and ideas there is not a single one that would justify it, and they are all agreed upon its perfect uselessness. Nevertheless all are circumcised, and they do not omit to circumcise their black slaves, even when bought in early or late adulthood. The women in particular attach great importance to this ancient custom. An extremely intelligent Nusayri, when pressed on the subject confessed that it was conjugal influence that obliged him to circumcise his children. Ultimately it is habit that imposes this inconsistency; it is no less powerful in Asia than elsewhere, perhaps even more so.

The Guebres claim that the founder of their religion, Zardusht, was none other than the patriarch, Abraham; they want therefore that their sacred texts, coming from one of the prophets recognized by Islam, be accepted by Muslims as holy.[10] Through this interpretation they would be classed amongst the peoples of the book,

and would enjoy the advantages promised to the Jews and Christians by Muhammad. Nobody is unaware of the fact that their claim is false, not even themselves. However it is officially accepted, and I have heard Muslims feign with great pomposity highly flattering opinions about His Highness Zardusht, assuring me that it was one of the names of Abraham. The Guebres tend towards Islamic methods beyond all other consideration in fact, and by dint of seeking to obtain the regard of the doctors of unitarianism they have made so many concessions that they can today somewhat be regarded as superstitious deists. Their original faith as such languishes in their spirits. This is not in fact as new as one might believe. Since prior to the Sassanid reform at the time of Shapur, the unitarian spirit was breathed into the breasts of the Zoroastrian priests by Aramaism.[11]

There are endless examples of kitman in religious matters; there is not one communion, one sect which does not bask in its glory or its pleasure, now on one point, now on another, in its entirety or on points of detail. But precisely for that reason I shall be obliged to speak and to show the action and effects of kitman so often that it is pointless to speak at further length on it here. As for philosophical opinions, one can see that there are a thousand occasions for the application of this principle.

First of all everybody's tendency to change so frequently and to link such opposing opinions is particularly convenient for kitman. When one conceals what one thinks one is not faced with the problem of having to truly understand what one thinks, and when one only gradually, reticently and only under a different guise allows one's convictions to come forth it is considerably more difficult to be caught out in a contradiction. This then is how the Asiatics communicate their ideas amongst themselves. One can doubtless guess the general direction of the thought of someone one knows well; but one is never sure that that direction has not been modified by the action of some old or new belief which he has never confided to us, and if by chance some deviation appears and we make him aware of it the friend, through fear, hypocrisy, caprice, pride or something less than all that, through a feeling which even he does not fully understand, will hasten to prove to you that you are mistaken, by demonstrating to you that the idea you attribute to him is absurd, inadmissible, guilty in the highest degree, and to confess to you that his true vision is diametrically opposed to it. A month later he will have forgotten his fine defence and will of his own accord expound to you in full detail the sentiment against which he had so fiercely rebelled.

For with the Orientals no secret is kept for long. One of the most surprising things when one lives amongst them is to perceive how the great affectation of mystery that surrounds the life of each person is nothing but a veil, hanging from above but not attached below and blown aside by the slightest puff of wind, revealing even the most unnecessary of matters to the public gaze. In the days of Fath Ali Shah the details of the singular scenes enacted in his harem were the talk of the bazaars, and the names of, the manner in which the Georgian merchant, the magnificent nomadic horseman or the elegant Mirza who had entered there unhindered the evening before were freely bandied about. If these indiscretions may be so casually committed one can easily imagine that private scandals are equally grist to the mill

of the gossips. In fact indiscretion in this respect goes a long way, and one is rapidly obliged to conclude that the cloistering of houses and the veiling of women have exactly the opposite effect as far as keeping secrets from that which one might at first suppose. Since the Asiatics speak with such ingenuity of things that are so close to them it is not surprising that they show such intemperate imagination and parlance in the domain of ideas. Kitman serves as a kind of perpetual carnival that makes them unassailable by dint of disguise and elusiveness rather than as a means of truly disguising their thought. A Muslim Sufi confided in me that Persia, in his opinion, did not contain one single absolute Muslim. I am tempted to believe that the proposition must be extended and transformed thus: Central Asia does not contain a single person who recognizes only the precepts of his nominal faith and believes in them all.

Now one will grasp without difficulty why I affirmed in a previous work[12] that fanaticism, in such as representing the exclusive persuasion of any religion, was a disagreeable phenomenon to the Oriental spirit and is not found amongst them. As there exists no all-encompassing faith there is also no preoccupation of exclusivity. As no one group united by the bonds of a strictly accepted doctrine is large enough there is also no collective enthusiasm, nor well-defined common hatred. What does exist are individualities or small groups into which one enters or leaves noiselessly, without fuss, all of whom consider themselves possessors of the truth in all things whilst being reluctant to say so, but letting it slip in spite of themselves, scornful of all that is not in accordance with their ideas of the moment, contributing thus to the propagation of the *esprit de secte* and the egotistical personality, principal *raison d'être* of the Oriental's political weakness, and presenting to the eye of the observer nothing but a seething mass, an endless undulation of the most diverse doctrines tossed around, mixed up with local influences and, all in all, far too weak and too busy with defending themselves to have the leisure, the great designs, the temerity and implacable resolution which make up fanaticism.

2

THE FAITH OF THE ARABS: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SH'ISM

The faith of the Arabs is a decidedly meagre and very dry branch of Chaldaism.[1] It will easily be understood that in ages past the men of the desert had neither the leisure nor a taste for launching themselves into all the philosophical research of the Mesopotamian schools, but neither did they have the intellectual capacity to seek their religious opinions elsewhere. By commerce, by the caravans, by politics, even by their depredations, the Bedouins of those times, just like those of Late Antiquity, just like those of today, were in too constant a contact with the most cultivated peoples of their blood and their race to have been able to isolate themselves, and they neither did nor wanted to do so. Their ways were necessarily different from those of the Assyrian or Babylonian towns, different in the sense of an austerity that poverty and their war-like ways maintained; but, speaking a dialect of the same language, seeing many things through the same eyes, often paying tribute to the same kings, the Arab of the desert who wanted to believe in something had, from the most distant Antiquity, to turn to the priests and scholars of the large towns to inform himself.

And in him one can perceive their main doctrines. He does not know the philosophers in all their refinement, but he does know the first principles and is no less ignorant, perhaps far less so, of the superstitions of the lower or even the upper classes of the countries which have educated him.

He believes in divine unity, strict, rigorous, lacking in any defined morality, desiring evil as often as good, and considering the mere manifestation of its will as justice. This unity must be respected because it is all-powerful, certainly, but even more so because it is always active, can reach anywhere and is always ready to strike. Permeating the world in many guises, it exists majestically in the planets and can also be recognized in other cosmic manifestations. Some are strong, some weak. All should be venerated, no enemies should be made amongst the forces emanating from the One force. But unfortunately man's mind does not lend itself easily to following such a complex system in all its diversity; it likes fixed points of reference. So the Bedouin ends up venerating in theory the One force, that which has never ceased its becoming, and choosing in practice his protectors amongst the emanated forces, who are called upon far more frequently. This is how seekers of grace and favour always proceed in worldly matters. They find it more fruitful to

obtain the goodwill of a few subordinate authorities than to seek that of a supreme master. Thus the Arabs set about trying to establish which of the secondary divinities offered the most advantages and attached themselves almost exclusively to it whilst in no way denying the august character of the others. This gave rise to those discussions of which the Bible has conserved and transmitted more than one recollection, where the merits of one God are compared to those of another. This kind of cult was reinforced by all the practices of divination and magic learned in Syrian towns alongside the cult of the planets; that of Hobal, brought from Balqa, those of Asaf and Nayalah, that of Meni, the whole celestial army, in other words.[2] Naturally the long series of domestic superstitions attached themselves to these kinds of notions down to the minutest detail.

It is true that the desert Arabs are by nature less orientated towards this sort of tenebrous exploration than the Arabs of the towns, in many cases however they practised nonetheless the immolation of infants before the idols after the manner of the Cananeans. On the whole however, as with the other Semitic peoples, religious unitarianism has always been a marked tendency in them, of which they have never completely lost sight, even when they succumbed to different influences. The independence they cherish in worldly affairs inspires them with a certain propensity for negative or at least highly restrictive criticism in those of the other world. This is why they absolutely obstructed Muhammad's wish and his efforts to make Arabia into a land of irreproachable orthodoxy. Even during his lifetime and the period of his able first successors this proved to be an impossible task. Today there is no less Muslim country in all of Islam.[3] The same tendencies towards opposition to the existing religion doubtlessly existed before Muhammad, and he was not the first to rise up with passion against the idols and the superstitious practices involved in their cult. The general desire was to find a kind of doctrine that would lead to a return to unitarianism by paths that were agreeable to the national spirit. Judaism was a little too Arab; they did not wish to submit to theories that were too Israelite in nature, precisely because they themselves, of the same blood, wanted in the same way to see the Arab family as the centre of the world. Christianity was rejected as too complicated. The doctrine of the Trinity rang hollow to the ears of the logicians of the desert.

In reality, the past in question was still very much present in the minds of all, even if here and there, as seems probable, few tangible traces of it remained. It was the debris of the highest doctrines of the Mesopotamian schools, which could be perceived at the core of the philosophical, theological, astrological and medical literature of the Syrians, the Jews, the Persians. For centuries important universities had been in a position to propagate and magnify the renown of this literature and even more certainly to corrupt the enormous mass of notions concentrated in the different branches of science it encompassed. There were Nehardea, Pumbedita, Rishihr, and other towns besides. There, large troupes of students of all races and all persuasions, Christians no less than others, congregated. However famous the schools of Antioch and Edessa were for teaching the Catholic faith it should not be obscured that their lustre was far from effacing that of these scientific centres, and

at best they could barely match the rival glow without overly fading. The firmest proof thereof is that the Christian disciples who remained in the faith after having gone there to study the Semitic sciences, a rare triumph in fact, never failed to bring back with them a troublesomely heterodox booty whose end result was the extension, consolidation and injection of a new ardour into those innumerable Gnostic sects, almost twins of the Church, which the Western spirit has barely succeeded in stifling.

So, the many famous schools that I have just named exerted an enormous influence across the entire Orient. There and far beyond they represented science *par excellence*. They boasted, and not without cause, of having gathered the heritage of that erudition of Antiquity, nourishment of the first Greek philosophers, which after having furnished some primary notions to Thales, to Pythagoras and their like was no less generous to Plato. In short, it was the object of no doubt that the learned critics of Alexandria, that the Neoplatonists of all shades had found themselves in even closer communion with the Mesopotamian schools and were nothing other than disciples who had remained more or less faithful with regards to form, but in any case avowed disciples of Semitic doctrine. One must agree that a science able to adorn itself with such memories and invoke such testimonies was not only not to be despised but must also count on universal veneration. It would have been unlikely that its reputation did not penetrate the encampments of the Arab tribes whose contact with urban populations was most certainly very frequent; but it would be even more extraordinary if in Mecca, object of the comings and goings of so many travellers and curious, even educated people, that that which had been the object of enthusiastic veneration in the whole of Asia for centuries had remained unknown. Above all, it would be radically impossible that Muhammad, child of an important family, holder of the high post of Guardian of the temple of the Kaba, where religious debates must have raged so frequently, that Muhammad, merchant and traveller who had sojourned in the towns of Syria and conversed with so many people, that Muhammad, finally, full of curiosity for learning and zeal for understanding, and with a burning desire to combine ideas, would not have been, of all his compatriots, he who had the largest number of notions and the highest regard for Aramæan science.

All of this seemingly weighty evidence consists however of nothing but reasonable deductions devoid of material proof. They will only acquire their true value in the light of certain factual observations.

Like all the sciences of the world Aramæan science gave birth to a literary æsthetic. It deemed it indispensable to know, from its own standpoint, and to create fixed rules and conditions concerning beauty in literary composition. All civilized societies have witnessed an analogous phenomenon, and the result obtained has conformed to the existing conditions of the language and taste as well as to the acquired experience of the local intelligence. This no less so in countries where Semitic languages were spoken than in Greece or Italy. But there the linguistic conditions were such that literary beauty was produced in a very particular manner, and the taste as well as the nature of the knowledge rendered what passed for stylistic

perfection absolutely inseparable from the powerful secret virtues attributed to the writings. Thus, according to Semitic ideas, a well composed, well written document, one which followed all the rules, did not merely have the merit of being of being beautiful; for that very reason it also possessed a mysterious energy which, by being assimilated to the forces of nature transformed it into a formidable instrument of magic. This was how literary composition was seen in the famous universities I cited above. A doctor, a wise man, conceived and produced his work in such a way that in no matter what direction one read the lines a religious and theological meaning must appear; moreover, by changing the value of letters according to fixed rules new and equally well-ordered meanings appeared; on top of that all the letters must alliterate; finally, it was not sufficient that the text contain multiple meanings, some of those meanings had to be of a favourable, others of an unfavourable nature. Such tours de force were most assuredly not easy to bring off, and consequently their number was not infinite; but there is surely no doubt that nothing could be more glorious than finding a new combination in this genre; it must be the crowning glory in the life of a scholar and the most noteworthy work to which time could give birth. In fact, these texts, which when read seemed to present scarcely more than combinations of divine names, contain *ipso facto* all the energy of those names, inasmuch as they manifest the various attributes of divine power. They exert an irresistible influence on nature; they are medical formulæ of extreme power, and as for philosophy, what could it find more august than these recitations, which beneath the scant cover of a disyllabic word or even of one letter offer an infinity of the most varied secrets to the meditation of the scholar? In this way Semitic science arrived at the production of talismans. Talismans, lords of everyone's imagination, were in reality made in Asia but widespread across the entire Western world. The people of Mecca had talismans, like everybody else, and could not have been ignorant of their mode of production. Thus, Muhammad must have known, and he knew as well as anyone, that the Semitic unitarianism to which he wished to lead his people back could not come into existence without that certain science, of a certain nature, which had already arisen out of it and which was at that time the most famous in the world, to the Asians, the Greeks, the Romans, and that that science, in order to be truly august, could only express itself by means of a certain style that made the works of the entire school resemble the talismans people had been accustomed for centuries to fearing and venerating.

The Koran was written according to this system. The Prophet saw fit to portray himself as ignorant in order to establish well that he would have been incapable of inventing the sublime form and depth that one finds in his work. He attaches such value to the quality of poverty of spirit that he points out several times that only God would be capable of producing such a masterpiece and challenges those who contradict him to produce something even remotely similar. On this point I do not think he overstated his case; for in fact no composition in Arabic can compare with the superior merit of the writing and the thoughts of certain passages of the Koran; and, be it that the circumstances have never been as favourable as when that book was written or that another writer as skilled in manipulating the language has never

appeared, it is undeniable that the great profusion of efforts to produce something of beauty in Arabic have never resulted in anything other than copies and essays of inferior quality. So therefore the label of ignorance with which Muhammad defines himself and which Christian critics have quite naively picked up in order to use against him cannot be taken seriously; his claim must not be accepted because if it is we must enter with the Prophet into the hypothesis of the book having been dictated by the archangel Gabriel. For a scholar, from an Arab point of view, given the possibilities of the time and place, a scholar of the Christian Apocrypha, of Jewish traditions, of Aramaic philosophy, a scholar initiated in the difficult style of that philosophy, a scholar by an extraordinary knowledge of the true character of the Arabic language and the resources proper to it and of the kind of beauty that arises from its particular genius, the Prophet is to the highest degree and with a genius it would be puerile to ignore or underestimate. Particularly in the adoption of talismanic style he wielded alliteration and accumulated multiple meanings as no other has ever been able to do.[4] In the same way as, according to the Cabbalists, the Bible contains forty nine pure and forty nine impure meanings, so, according to the declaration of al- Jahiz, the Koran presents on one hand praise of God and on the other blasphemy,[5] an antinomy which according to Chaldean ideas is absolutely indispensable in a holy book. These are not results that are obtained by inspiration; producing them requires perfect models, study, meditation, work, patience and time.

Considered from this aspect Muhammad's great work, Islam, is a religion that has assigned itself the goal of going back through the ages in order to return to the absolute unitarianism of its Arab ancestors, that is, of its Assyrian ancestors. Cleansing the Arabism of his time is the goal Muhammad sets himself; as his instruments he uses Christian and Jewish notions, and he opts for them because they present a more exact form of unitarianism than contemporary versions of the same idea. But, for the reasons I have indicated, he accepts neither religion: they broke off from Aramaism. He also, and above all, uses that Aramaism, and with a marked predilection; it is there he goes to seek both form and even many of his ideas, discounting what that system already had in common with Judaism and Christian dogma. Aramaism is in more or less the same position as Arabism with regard to him, or rather, it is one and the same thing. He recognizes in it the true faith, soiled by the accumulation of successive idolatrous errors. That is the terrain that must be cleared and upon which the worst of his anger falls. But by the very fact that it is the beloved, favoured country, the fertile soil where that faith sprouted and thrived long ago and that must be brought back to the true faith, it is also quite natural that the Prophet grant the same prerogatives to the partisans of that ancient law, whom he calls Sabis.[6] As to the Christians and the Jews, in them he sees worshippers of the one God, who have however strayed from the path. In short, he makes it clear in a hundred ways that fundamentally he is their man. He accepts their magic, their astrology, their algebra, their talismanism, their doctrine on the active power of sounds, of letters, of words combined with the power of numbers; that is the realm of knowledge he accepts; and provided that he is able to destroy the idolatry that has insinuated itself into it he intends to change nothing, or very little.

His moral teaching is also very imperfect. It remains absolutely that of ancient Semitism, and in reality from the viewpoint where Muhammad places himself it could not be otherwise. Personally the Prophet, of all the Arabs and even of all his contemporaries, was a serious man of gentle ways, enormous goodwill and boundless selflessness who loved justice. But in his case this was a question of temperament and not of principles. He sought to change nothing of the traditional moral precepts practised around him and before him. He certainly did a lot of good, but with no spirit of continuity, no system, no notion of right, either implied or demonstrated. He opposed with confident generosity the continued inhumation of newborn babies with which the desert tribes, often threatened with famine, replaced the Greco-Roman custom of exposure; he extended the practice of monetary compensation for murder; by demanding the presence of four eye witnesses he made the regular condemnations for adultery practically impossible; whenever he had to confront the somewhat bloodthirsty prejudices of his people he never ceased pointing out that God loves those who forgive; finally, in order not to over-extend the list of his very real good deeds and to cite the most important of all, he created the legal position of women in marriage, and it is far from being as hard as we tend to believe. But again, however praiseworthy this legislation may be, especially compared with that which it replaced, it still shows serious gaps, numerous inconsistencies, a lack of seriousness, because it is a work of blood and nerves where logical principles, the essential element, are lacking, as they are in all conceptions of the Semitic spirit, and, in fact, the Semitic unitarianism to which the Prophet attaches himself as closely as possible and to which he wishes to return contains nothing of the sort. In his concept of the divine nature what dominates is, firstly, infinity, then omnipotence, and on these two attributes the other ideas that followers of such cults imagine concerning the perfections of the Sovereign Being spread out like branches from the trunk of a tree. Justice remains completely undefined. Certainly, it is counted amongst the qualities of omnipotence; but what is this justice? I have already said it: nothing other than will; and that will of the infinite essence, constantly appearing as a daunting, formidable presence, contains evil just as much as good, it is neither pure nor clear.[7]

This is certainly a considerable defect, and one that exerts the most deplorable influence on Asiatic minds. Justice is not one of those concepts that theologians, following on from the founders of religions, can leave with impunity for future ages to recognize and to determine. It is incompatible with the idea of mystery; cannot, like Isis, be venerated whilst hidden behind a veil; it must show itself completely, as naked as the truth, because the world thirsts for justice and the notion of it must be so complete that none might mistake its character without wishing to do so. On this capital point Catholicism has reached a degree of precision that leaves nothing to be desired; and has established, according to the exposition of Saint Thomas, that in defining this attribute the first requisite is the will to determine that a just act is necessarily free; then to accept its constancy and perpetuity, so that it be strong and firmly established. Having established these points, the following definition is reached: “Justice is a habit by which someone, by means of a constant and

perpetual wish to do so, gives to each person his right". It is hard to see that the successive philosophies of the modern age have added much to the expression of the Angel of the School.[8]

But Islamism has produced nothing similar on this capital point. Vagueness and uncertainty everywhere; boundless fear of God's unforeseeable judgements and the absolute deference with which one must declare one's submission to them, that is all it has had to say. Again, the Prophet in no way modified the old conception of morality and limited himself to softening the ways of his people as much as was in his power, by natural goodness and gentleness rather than by a thought out system. In the same way we have seen that in matters of dogma he merely wanted to return to the ancient foundations, the ancient beliefs of Aramaism. One can therefore state with assurance that originality is essentially lacking from his dogma and that if he brought about no moral progress amongst the populations that came under his influence he simply wished, from the point of view of their faith, to make them return along the path from whence they came.

Naturally the consequence of this lack of novelty was that which we have already observed; Islam succeeded only in casting a moment of uncertainty into the spirits of its followers, and it soon became clear that none of the intellectual abuses of the past had truly been destroyed. However, as Islam, with its vague, inconsistent precepts, seemed to invite everybody to recognize it, without forcing anybody to abandon any of their ways of thinking, it became what we see today, the comfortable blanket under which shelter, barely concealed, the entire past and the hybrid ideas that bud every day in a soil which contains so many things in a state of putrefaction.

The greatest proof that can be provided of this is the very existence of Persian Shi'ism.

After the Arabs had overthrown the Sassanid Empire at the battle of Qadasiya[9] their initial successes were rapid, and as surprising as those they had enjoyed in the Greek provinces. The reason for this was the exactly similar state of decrepitude of the two great states attacked by the fledgling Muhammadism. Without detracting in any way from their savage energy, the belligerent enthusiasm of the newcomers, without denying their conquerous virtues, devotion, sobriety, magnanimity, intrepidness, without underestimating the genius of their leaders, it is manifestly clear that if they had been confronted in the East, as they were in the West, by populations who were attached to their masters and by military leaders capable of using the immense resources of the invaded territories with discernment, the results would have been quite different from those we have seen, and the Amrus and Khalids[10] would have swiftly and brusquely been swept back into their deserts. But the Byzantine provinces were rotten with vice, disarmed and dismembered by heresies, as were the Persian territories for analogous reasons.

When the Magi, under the protection of the Sassanid government, founded a state religion that intended to tolerate no dissident faith at its side, a mistake the Arsacids had refused to commit, they did not realize that the ground under their edifice had been mined in advance. In the south and west of the kingdom the populations were dominated by Greek and Assyrian polytheisms, fused by Neoplatonism.

In the north the tribes wanted to practise Parseeism only in the free forms of the primitive cult, which admitted no clergy; they therefore rejected the numerous borrowings made by the new priesthood from Aramaism, insisted that the head of each family remain the sole priest of the domestic altar, and accepted no other altar. And above, below and around these resistances a notable group of Christian sects, a considerable number of Jewish communities powerful enough to have their own princes and governments, standard bearers, to bribe soldiers and conduct private wars, as well as other associations, more modest perhaps but no less stubborn in their faith, Buddhists, Manichæans, and Brahmanists too, in Kerman and the districts of Ormuz, slipped through a thousand cracks.

The energy with which the renewed Parseeism accepted and conducted the struggle was not unworthy of respect. It is clear from the great number of borrowings made from Judaism, Christianity, Chaldean philosophy, that it had set itself the task that has tempted many great statesmen but in which none have succeeded. By accepting something of everyone's ideas, by making everybody happy and by replacing the ancient cults with a clever syncretism it wanted an era of universal concord to succeed the generalized discord. It is curious that this so philanthropic desire has never failed to lead to violence whenever it has appeared in such clarity. Parseeism, in fact, when it was not an outright tyrant, became, essentially, a persecutor, and showed itself to be aggressive, taunting, oppressive and hateful to the populations. It was even more so because it never failed to share in all the hatred the political administration that supported it could inspire.

The battle of Qadasiya was a signal of deliverance for the dissidents, and we have just seen that they were legion. The Jews, who were periodically massacred, and the Christians, who were deported, breathed again under the authority of a Prophet who declared them true believers, albeit incomplete, demanded only a tax from them and excused them from military service. The countless tradesmen who were mistreated and legally disadvantaged because it was said that their professions soiled the earth, fire or water rushed to convert, and swelled the avid ranks of the victors. This is what explains the quick success, the rapid expansion of Islam in Central Asia.[11]

However, although they could not maintain their control the government had not remained in the firm hands of such learned clerics as the Parsees for over four centuries without their influence becoming widespread. Besides, if they had been vanquished it was alongside the national monarchy, the country itself. When, after a certain time, many grievances had been forgotten, they found themselves in the position of representing that oppressed country. As remnants of the powers that were they had kept wealth, honour, local influence far more than one might believe, for the oppressive and spoliatory instincts of Muslims have been greatly exaggerated. The feudal chiefs of the tribes and villages who had been Parsees of the old school under the Sassanids, and hateful to the triumphant clergy, became Parsees of the new school and dear to the oppressed clergy. When ambitious Turkish princes wanted to create realms for themselves in the domains of the Caliphs they did not fail to notice these tendencies and, even though they were

Muslims, often excessive Muslims like Mahmud Ghazni, they encouraged them.[12] Literature, with a few exceptions as regards to form, prided itself on being Guebre to the core because it was compelled to be Persian. Everyone felt free to curse the Arabs and did so gleefully, even the grandchildren of those who had welcomed them with open arms, and the faded memories of the former miscontent gave way to grandiose memories of the former priesthood, which in time became as many regrets. That vanished power became the object of all dreams. No descendants of the ancient dynasty remained; but nationality could be re-created if something approaching the mourned for clergy could somehow be re-created. From that moment on Persian patriotism expressed itself in the quest for its own distinctive religious formula, which was as near to the appearances of old as the times would permit.

For there was no question of an abrupt departure from Islam. For an Oriental at that time the whole world was Muslim. It was the political power, splendour, it was civilization. Many happily saw it as no more than a word; philosophers worked on it after their fashion, with no less ardour than Sassanid, Ghaznavid, Buyid and Daylamite princes in theirs;[13] but that word was absolutely indispensable; just as here unbelievers who brook no currency with the mass nevertheless make so much of these terms: “Christian civilization” and “Christian world”.

The unity of the Caliphate was resented. People were suffocating under a domination that stretched from Spain to India, and the Persians aspired to autonomy. So the Persians attacked the legitimacy of the Caliphs. They championed the unrecognized rights of the descendants of Ali and found themselves thus installed on a territory where, having become masters of a legal theory more demanding than that practised, more Arab than the Arabs, more Muslim than their rivals, they assailed them in the name of principles that were all opposed to them and which the latter had the bad grace to deny. That was the beginning of Shi‘ism, and from the first days that upheaval brought great troubles and caused a great deal of woe. But it served the national cause beyond all expectations and marvellously revived the morality and the beliefs of ancient Iran.

It was apparently no more than an opinion concerning the right of the Abbasids to occupy the throne. In reality many customs absolutely opposed to Muhammad’s doctrine reappeared and gradually established themselves. Each town formed a clergy from amongst its learned men; that clergy formed a hierarchy, applied itself to covering the country with its members, and in time succeeded. It could not justify its existence by the Koran, nor even by the authentic traditions of the Prophet, who, on the contrary, had wanted each believer to remain a free master of his own faith. It gathered therefore ancient maxims and transmuting them into sayings of the Prophet and the Imams established dogmatically that the Koran, on pain of excommunication, could be read or interpreted only by the mullahs. Those ancient maxims, which I have already alluded to above, were gathered here, there and everywhere, from the writings of the philosophers as much as from those of the Parsees, but preferentially from the latter, and so, gradually, a day arrived when the Sassanid religion more or less found itself resuscitated in Shi‘ism.That day

followed shortly on the advent of the Safavids, who thus in turn found themselves Sassanid Muslims of a sort.[14]

This is essentially what Shi'ism is today: God, infinite, eternal, unique does not exert any direct influence on the world. He has set out its laws, He has established the conditions of damnation and salvation; we shall all return to Him. The Prophet is invoked more for form than for substance. He is the most excellent of creatures. Is he a creature? He merges with God on so many points that one might well doubt it. In any case, the Koran is uncreated, it has existed in divine thought since all eternity. All in all God, the Prophet, the Koran correspond quite neatly to a sort of all-encompassing unity, which represents the notion of Zirwana-Aqarana, *limitless time*, from whence the Parseeism of previous ages drew all other existence and by which they intended to satisfy Aramæan unitarianism.

The truly active element is the corps of the Imams. The world is preserved, justified, directly led only by them and their actions. After them there is only darkness. Not to hold oneself to them is to rush headlong to Gehenna. In them is all salvation. There are twelve of them, but looking closely one observes two distinct facts: Ali has a completely divine and conservative rôle, saviour of Ormuzd, whilst his descendants are so like the Amchaspands that they could easily pass for them. If, on the contrary, one contemplates the Imamate, reduced to its concrete existence, one finds oneself back with Ormuzd. As for the world, for matter, for the Semitic Shaytan who presides there and who is in perpetual conflict with the Imams, it is easy to see Ahriman and his certain defeat.[15] It is not very extraordinary that the Sunnis find such a system hateful; despite its disguises and sophistries they have little trouble in recognizing it. If they call it by its own name and accuse it of Parseeism they are not wrong. But what they in turn do not recognize is that only a religion as vague, as inconsistent as theirs could permit such an intrusion. If there is an upheaval it is an upheaval that Islam made inevitable by taking so little care to avert it. In fact, Islam, less demanding than Sassanid Parseeism, seems to have wanted to found a terrestial empire rather than a religion as such. One might particularly accuse it of having wanted to enrol beneath its standards, under the easiest possible conditions, the greatest possible number of people, of minds. This faith is not really a faith in the sense of a well defined system; it is a compromise, a cockade, a rallying sign; it is hard to find anything obligatory in it, and that is why, favouring the mobility of the Asian mind, in no way disturbing it, it is agreeable to it in nearly every way and does not run the risk of falling into ruin in the way we understand it in Europe. But we will soon see that after all the transformations to which it has constantly lent itself another one is impossible.

3

BEGINNINGS OF BABISM

In all times, in all countries, it can be observed that any change in the socio-political situation of a people produces a parallel adjustment in its spiritual life. Modern Persia finds itself in completely new circumstances; one should therefore expect new doctrines to appear, and this is in fact what has happened.

Today one no longer sees great philosophers attached to tradition. Hajji Mullah Hadi[1] is a disciple of Avicenna no doubt, but it is also beyond dispute that he has sought and would like to find something newer than even the most advanced theories of the old master. Other scholars, who shall remain nameless because they are still living and are less powerful than the wise man of Sabzawar, hence more compelled to secrecy, would also like to stumble upon some hitherto unnoticed notion that might be applied to the current state of affairs. Sufism is beginning to be insufficient; and the proof of this is that detractors have appeared; many polemicists consider that it does not meet the needs of the day, in the sense that it is too enervating, precisely the quality that had been regarded up till now as its supreme merit. People are getting irritated with Islam, even against that strangely disfigured Islam presented by Shi'ism, finding it too narrowly restrictive, and from the pantheistic viewpoint God knows it deserves this reproach. People are looking for something else. What? There are no more Turkish, Mongol or even Arab warlords in Central Asia who retain ideas foreign to the soil; there are no more officials so rich and powerful that they can hope to play that rôle. All that remains is the local nobility, well nigh illiterate tribal horsemen concerned only with hunting, and the immense democracy of the towns that tends towards one thing alone: the same thing the coastal Greek and Syrian democracies invaded by the first Muslim armies in the middle of the seventh century aspired to and which their descendants wanted, the fathers of those now living, that is, the object of the ancient passion, the Semitic faith *par excellence.* It hastens in that direction, and that is how a very particular religious movement has mathematically arisen which today actively concerns Central Asia, that is Persia, a few places in India and part of Asiatic Turkey, around Baghdad, a truly remarkable movement worthy of study on all counts. It permits us to witness developments, manifestations, catastrophes of an order one customarily imagines only in distant epochs at the time of the formation of the great religions.[2]

There lived in Shiraz, around 1843, a young man named Mirza Ali Muhammad who was no more than nineteen years of age,[3] if that. Many have attached great importance to claiming that he was descended from the Prophet via the Imam Husayn, that is, to attributing to him the rank and the prerogatives of a sayyid; others have attached equal importance to denying him this quality. What is undeniable is that if he was a sayyid it was in that same rather obscure manner that casts more than a shadow of doubt over the pretensions of many a Persian family that flatters itself with the same honour. Serious people note that during the lengthy persecutions suffered by the descendants of Ali under the dynasty of the Umayyads and above all that of the Abbasids all genealogical documents capable of proving such holy lineage were either lost or destroyed; the outlaws fell beneath the sabres of their enemies in great number, the remainder hid as best they could, and, accepting that the line of the Imams survived, it is in nobody's power to prove that the precious blood flows in their veins. Four families and no more are considered to have greater justification than most for claiming to be sayyids, and even then the reasons they put forward would not be taken seriously by any European genealogist. They are very old, wealthy families and have enjoyed public respect for centuries; but to attain the status of Imams there remains a gap of at least two centuries that they are unable to fill, and the revered monuments they present as being handed down from their glorious ancestors, seals, prayers written by the hand of the saintly figure in question or other similar objects, would find little credence in our eyes.

Whatever the case may be, Mirza Ali Muhammad belonged to none of these families, and, whatever malicious tongues might say, if his predecessors bore or laid claim to the title of sayyid it was on the basis of very scant evidence. Still, his family was not entirely plebeian, it possessed some wealth, and the results obtained led one to believe that Mirza Ali Muhammad had received a distinguished education.

Like most, like almost all Asiatics he was possessed from a tender age by very active religious ideas. Not content with fulfilling religious duties or with professing orthodox doctrines, he threw himself with a passion into seeking and examining all that was new. All indications point to his having had a natively open and bold spirit. It is established that he read the Gospels in the translations brought by Protestant missionaries, he often conferred with the Jews of Shiraz, he sought out the knowledge of Guebre doctrine and displayed a marked predilection for those strange books, somewhat suspect, revered, feared even, which deal with the occult sciences and the philosophical theory of numbers. In Muslim Asia this is the great passion of the most brilliant minds and was his from a very early age; it is worthwhile mentioning that all of these efforts combined to draw him back towards what remained of ancient Aramæan philosophy, and it is far from unthinkable, several indications lead one to suspect it, that he had in his possession certain rare documents of inestimable value relating to those doctrines.[4]

Whilst still young he made the pilgrimage to Mecca. But rather than being brought back to strictly Muslim ideas by the sight of the Kaba, what he saw, what he heard, what he felt, pushed him ever further from the trodden path.[5] It is quite probable that it was in the Holy City itself that he took final and absolute leave of

the faith of the Prophet and that he conceived the idea of bringing about the downfall of that faith to replace it with something quite different.

Withdrawn, always busy with pious practices, simple of manner in the extreme, of an attractive gentleness, his extreme youth and the wonderful charm of his features accentuated all those qualities and drew a certain number of enlightened persons to him.[6] Then people began to talk about his learning and the penetrating eloquence of his speech. Men who knew him assure that he could not open his mouth without moving his audience in the depths of their souls. Moreover, expressing a profound veneration for the Prophet, the Imams and their holy brethren, he charmed the severely orthodox whilst at the same time, in more intimate gatherings, the bolder and more troubled minds rejoiced not to find in him that rigidity in the profession of time-honoured opinions that would have weighed heavily upon them. On the contrary, his conversation opened to them all those infinite, varied, motley, mysterious, shadowy horizons with patches of blinding light which so easily transport the imaginations of that land. It was at the foot of the Kaba, the house of Abraham and of Ismael, that Ali Muhammad fulfilled those first devotions that would very shortly take on quite a different character and exceed by far the usual energy of passing and worldly attachments.

Ali Muhammad then, returned from Mecca far more completely dissident than when he had left home. In Baghdad however he wished to complete his impressions by going to Kufa to visit the ruined mosque, without arches, without pillars, today almost without walls, where Ali was assassinated and where the place that tradition assigns to the murder is still shown. He spent several days there in meditation.[7] It seems that this place made a great impression on him, and at the moment when he was about to enter upon a path which could, which indeed should lead to a drama similar to the one that had taken place at that very place where his eyes were fixed, he had to endure painful conflicts within himself. One of his most devoted followers said to me one day, practising kitman on account of the people who could hear us: "It was in that mosque at Kufa that the devil tempted him and led him from the rightful path". But I understood from his expression that, quite on the contrary, he regarded the moral agony felt by Ali Muhammad before the place where the eyes of the soul had shown him the Imam Ali lying at his feet, his body mutilated and bloody, as the end of human hesitation in the person of his master and the triumph of the prophetic spirit. It is certain that he was a completely different person when he returned to Shiraz than when he had left it. All doubt had left him. He was penetrated, persuaded; his way clear; and even if he should find flammable material in front of him, within reach, he was determined to set fire to it. And find it he did.

He had taken an Arab boat, a bangalo, from Kufa to Bushihr, and from there he had returned to his birthplace by joining a caravan that was about to cross the mountains. As soon as he arrived he gathered around him some of his already convinced travelling companions and some of his old listeners, and to this first troupe of faithful he communicated his first writings. It was a diary of his pilgrimage and a commentary on the sura of the Koran called Joseph.

In the first of these books he was above all pious and mystical; in the second polemic and dialectic predominated, and the listeners were amazed to note that he discovered new, previously unthought-of meanings in the chapter of God's book he had chosen, and, above all, that from them he deduced completely unexpected doctrines and teachings. They never tired of admiring the elegance and beauty of the Arabic style of his compositions, which soon had exalted admirers who did not fear to prefer them to the most beautiful passages of the Koran.[8]

I confess I do not share this viewpoint. The style of Ali Muhammad is dull and lacking in brilliance, of tiresome rigidity, of dubious richness, of suspect correctness. Not all of the many obscure points one finds stem from intention, but rather many of them are merely the manifestation of an obvious incapacity. The Koran has absolutely nothing to fear from the comparison; if, one day, the works of the new prophet replace that ancient book they will only be able to be admired by means of a new æsthetic. As we are still subject to the laws and the customs of the old, the Koran, in literary terms, is undeniably the work of a great genius, whereas the sura of Joseph, or, better said, the commentary thereon, closely resembles the work of a schoolboy.

Be that as it may, the impression produced at Shiraz was enormous and the local literati and religious figures thronged around Ali Muhammad. He would no sooner set foot in the mosque than he would be surrounded. As soon as he sat in the pulpit people hushed to listen. His public speeches never attacked Islam, and respected most of the forms; kitman dominated in other words.[9] They were nevertheless bold speeches. He did not spare the clergy; their vices were cruelly flagellated. The sad and painful destinies of mankind were the general theme, and here and there certain allusions, whose obscurity irritated the curious passions of some whilst it flattered the pride of those already fully or partially initiated, gave these sermons such a scathing wit that the crowd grew day by day, and in all Persia people began to speak of Ali Muhammad.

The mullahs of Shiraz had not awaited all this fuss to make common cause against their young detractor. From his very first public appearances they had sent the most skilful of their number to debate against him and to confound him, and these public clashes, which were held either in the mosques, in the schools, in the presence of the governor, military leaders, the clergy, the populace, in a word, everybody, rather than profiting the priests, in fact contributed not little to spreading and exalting the renown of the enthusiast at their expense. He certainly defeated his contradictors; Koran in hand, he condemned them, no difficult feat. It was child's play for him to demonstrate to the crowds, who knew them all too well, to what point their behaviour, to what point their precepts, to what point even their dogma were in flagrant contradiction with the Book, which they could not impugn. With no regard whatsoever for ordinary conventions and with extraordinary audacity and exaltation he unconditionally condemned the vices of his antagonists, and, after having proved to them that they were infidels as regards to the doctrine, dishonoured them in their daily lives and threw them indifferently to either the indignation or the scorn of the listeners. The scenes at Shiraz, these beginnings of

his preaching, were so moving that Muslims who witnessed them and remained orthodox have retained an indelible recollection of them and speak of them only with a sort of terror. They vow unanimously that Ali Muhammad's eloquence was of an incomparable nature and that no one who had not been witness to it could possibly imagine it.

Soon the young theologian only appeared in public surrounded by a numerous troupe of his supporters. His house was always full of them. He taught not only in the mosques and in the schools, but it was above all at his home in the evenings, retired to one of the rooms with the élite of his admirers, that he raised the veil on a doctrine that had still not clearly taken shape in his mind. It would seem that he was at first more concerned with the polemical aspect of things than with dogma, and nothing could be more natural. In his secret conferences his bold statements, far more numerous than when in public, multiplied daily and assumed greater proportions, and they so obviously tended towards the complete overthrow of Islam that they formed a perfect introduction to a new profession of faith.[10] The small church was ardent, daring, reckless, ready for anything, fanaticized in the true and higher sense of the word, that is, that each member counted himself for nothing and was full of a burning desire to sacrifice blood and money for the cause of truth. It was then that Ali Muhammad adopted his first religious title. He announced that he was the Bab, the only Door through which one could accede to knowledge of God. Thenceforth he was known only by this name, in Shiraz and wherever people spoke of him. Even his adversaries gave and continue to give him this title. He is known in no other way. However the Babis, the people of his sect, no longer call him in this way, because at a certain moment they discovered that the title of Bab was not exclusive to him and named him Hazrat-i Ala, or "Sublime Highness". But for the sake of simplicity we shall follow general usage by retaining the title of Bab throughout this history.

Extremely irritated, displeased and worried, the mullahs of Fars, unable moreover to foresee where this movement that attacked them so vigorously would end, were not the only ones to feel put out. The municipal and provincial authorities understood all too well that the people confided to their care, who were never really completely under control, had this time escaped it completely. The men of Shiraz, fickle, insolent, turbulent, bellicose, always ready to revolt, completely lacking in loyalty to the Qajar regime, have never been easy to lead, and their administrators have had many a difficult day. What would be the situation of these administrators if the real leader of the country, the arbitrator of everyone's ideas, the idol of one and all, was going to be a young man who submitted to nothing, who was tied to nothing nor could be won over to anything, who made a pedestal of his independence and who put only too well to his own advantage the daily public tirades he launched with impunity against all that had thitherto been considered powerful and respectable in the town? In truth, the king's men, the politicians, the administration as such had not yet been the object of any of the virulent attacks of the novator; but seeing him so inflexible, so inexorable as regards to the cheating and rapacity of the members of the clergy, it was very doubtful that he would be able to approve of the

same rapaciousness, the same cheating that flourished so well amongst civil servants, and it was easy to believe that the day he cast his eye on them he would not fail to perceive and to rail against that which could scarcely be concealed.

These apprehensions, as clear as day to all concerned, did not fail to strike the royal officers, and, besides, the mullahs were careful to point out to them that this time their interests coincided. Numerous conferences took place and it was decided that, while the governor Mirza Husayn Khan, decorated with the title of Nizam al-Dawla, "organizer of the government", wrote to Tehran to put the matter from the point of view of State interest the important mujtahids of the town would do likewise in the name of the assailed religion and would point out the grave perils that loomed so energetically and noisily.

The Bab and his followers were immediately informed of the actions planned against them. They were not in the least surprised. Rather than attempting to parry Ali Muhammad wrote to the court himself, and his letter arrived at the same time as that of his adversaries. Without in any way adopting an aggressive attitude towards the king, bowing, quite on the contrary, to his authority and justice, he remonstrated that the depravation of the clergy in Persia had long been a well-known fact, that not only had the moral fibre of the nation been sapped and its well-being jeopardized but that the religion itself, corrupted by so many guilty vices, was in peril and in danger of disappearing and leaving the people in the most deplorable darkness, that, for his part, called upon by God, in virtue of a special mission, to avert such misfortunes, he had already begun to enlighten the people of Fars, that the true doctrine had made rapid and obvious progress, that all his enemies had been confounded and were now reduced to impotence and exposed to public scorn, but that all this was only a beginning, and that the Bab, confiding in the magnanimity of the king, requested permission to come to the capital with his main disciples, and there to set up conferences with all the mullahs of the empire in the presence of the sovereign, the important men and the people; that, without doubt, he would heap shame upon them, he would prove to them their infidelity, he would reduce them to silence as he had done with the greater and lesser mullahs who had presumed to oppose him; that if, contrary to his expectations, he were to be defeated in this contest, he would deliver himself into the king's hand and was prepared to offer up his head as well as that of each of his followers.

The government was very uneasy about being deferred to as arbitrator in this matter. For centuries it has not been the policy of Persian sovereigns to seek such occasions. Since the time of Shah Abbas the Great political tradition wills that the official protection afforded to Islam be more of word than of deed. In reality dissidents of all natures, generally, in fact, anything that can hold the power of the clergy in check is looked on with a favourable eye. On this point the current reign does not differ from its predecessors. It more or less follows the example of Muhammad Shah, albeit more gently, for that monarch inaugurated his government by putting to death one of the principal mujtahids of Tabriz, who wished to excite an insurrection. However, Nasir al-Din Shah himself did not hesitate, later on, to divest and to humiliate the Imam Juma of Isfahan, whose courage did not match his ambition.

So, when the complaints and reciprocal accusations of the mullahs and the Babis arrived in Tehran, they occasioned more ill humour and spleen than zeal for avenging offended orthodoxy.

It even appears that the first impression was favourable to the novators. The prime minister, Hajji Mirza Aqasi, a bizarre character, for all his follies not without capacity, and with an extreme curiosity for theological discussions, far from orthodox to boot, showed himself inclined to accede to the Bab's expressed desire and to bring him to Tehran to hold conferences. The king, dominated by his minister, did not express himself in unfavourable terms with regard to Mirza Ali Muhammad. The brighter minds and the curious were already looking forward to an interesting spectacle of which by no means the least part would have been the glee of the scandalmongers at accusations levelled at such and such a man of the cloth. But a very wise man, Shaykh Abd al-Husayn, himself a mujtahid, went to see Hajji Mirza Aqasi, and, having made him appreciate the serious reasons that existed for changing his mind, that which seemed about to happen was abruptly halted and the course of ideas changed.

Shaykh Abd al-Husayn, although a religious figure, is rather what we would call a jurisconsult. He deals little with theology, a great deal with legal questions; in general his sagacity and cool reasoning inspire great confidence, at the same time as his probity and severity have caused him to be held in high esteem. Today he administers for the king the funds destined for the beautification and repairs of the holy buildings in Karbala and Najaf. But at that time he lived in Tehran. He insistently asked the prime minister and the other leading men if it were their intention, if it were wise to destroy the existent religion in order to substitute it with a new and still unknown one. The State, he said, had enough to do raising itself from the ruins under which so many lasting misfortunes had buried it without being thrown besides into the convulsions of a crisis and in all probability of a religious war. Were they really so sure of the Bab's ulterior intentions and of the final consequences of his doctrines that they could consider it sensible to favour him? If the clergy were once again obliged to defend itself, not against the Bab, but against the government, from which it had a right to expect protection, could they imagine that it would not find the necessary force and were they not aware of what might ensue? In short, he made Hajji Mirza Aqasi and all those who had for a moment been carried away by nationalistic thoughtlessness reflect, and obtained the assurance that not only would the conferences not take place and that Ali Muhammad would be forbidden to come to Tehran but that in addition measures would be taken against him and his followers which would reduce them to silence.

The minister did not keep this last part of his promise very faithfully. He was afraid to lean too far towards accommodating the clergy, and at the same time, not wanting to run the risk of provoking resistance and scandals by a severity that his conscience did not dictate, contented himself with writing to the governor of Shiraz, Nizam al-Dawla, that all public preaching relative to the new doctrine must cease at once on both sides, that both attack and defence were prohibited and that Ali Muhammad was to remain sequestered in his home, which, for the time being,

he was forbidden to leave. The Bab and his people submitted unhesitatingly. But the mullahs cried out unanimously that the protection they were supposedly receiving was illusory and insulting to the religion, of which it appeared to put in doubt the sovereign right; they argued that the danger was more imminent than ever and the Bab more powerful than he had ever been. They were right.

When the Babis learned that no harsh measures were to be implemented against their leader and that, consequently, the enemy's hopes were dashed, when they saw that the authorities confined themselves to commanding an impossible respite, they rejoiced triumphantly.[11] Provisionally Ali Muhammad obediently stayed at home, but his disciples and followers, greatly encouraged, did not fail to repeat everywhere they went that the refusal to debate with their leader was an admission of impotence and that it was now quite manifest that the Muslims had no serious arguments to oppose to their doctrine or to their attacks. The general population found this manner of reasoning quite justified. From that moment on conversions took place on a daily basis and both amongst the scholars and even the mullahs themselves, important defections could be noted.

In the heart of the cenacle the excited passions raged ever more fiercely. The Bab spoke more explicitly of himself than he had ever done previously. He no longer presented himself as a seer possessing special powers; nor even as a prophet more or less inspired by God, as Muhammad had been. He declared that he was not the Bab, as had been thought until then, as he himself had thought, that is, the Gateway to the knowledge of truth, but that he was the *Point*, that is, the actual generator of truth, a divine apparition, an all-powerful manifestation, and it was as *Point* that he received the qualification of *Sublime Highness*.[12]

The title of Bab, having now become free, could henceforth recompense the pious devotion of one of the neophytes. It belonged by right to one of that chosen troupe with which Ali Muhammad had surrounded himself and which evinced him the blindest confidence and the most boundless attachment. These apostles, chosen from amongst their companions, were eighteen in number.[13] The Babis continue to venerate their names; they are all more than saints, they are not far removed from absolute divinity, they are not equal however, and he who assumed the highest rank after the *Révélateur*,[14] he upon whom the title of Bab was conferred when the Point was manifested, was a certain priest from Khurasan, called, after his birthplace, Mullah Husayn Bushrui.[15] After the Bab, no other person played such a prominent rôle in the beginnings of the new religion.

Mullah Husayn Bushrui was a man in whom even his adversaries recognized great learning and an extreme energy of character. From his childhood he devoted himself to study, and he was esteemed for the knowledge he had acquired of theology and jurisprudence. When Ali Muhammad began to preach, his imagination was struck by what he could learn in Khurasan of the ideas and doctrines of this figure of whom the whole of Persia had begun to speak, and leaving his region he went to Shiraz, where he soon figured amongst the most fervent adepts of the Sublime Highness. It was a decisive, important conversion. The Bab judged it so; for he chose him as his principal lieutenant and conferred upon him the title he himself had borne. It would seem

that Mullah Husayn Bushrui proceeded with great caution in the examination of the doctrines of which he was to become one of the principal propagators. The universal history entitled: *Nasikh al-Tawarikh,* or *Obliteration*[16] *of the Chronicles,* which has given the history of the events I am reporting from the strictly Muslim, official point of view, assures us that the first meetings of Mullah Husayn Bushrui with the Bab were held in secret and that he had numerous discussions with him before publicly declaring himself a follower. He was convinced. He subsequently spared no efforts and, as the Bab, in obedience to the orders of the court no longer left his house Mullah Husayn Bushrui lived with him to all intents and purposes, shut off with him, never leaving his side, and exciting the faith of his companions and even the already quite fiery zeal of the Revelator by his words, by his example.

We have seen from the above that the reputation of the Bab and the interest aroused by his doctrines were by no means limited to the town of Shiraz, nor even to the province of Fars. From one end of the empire to the other people were speaking of him and were more than eager to learn more about the views and ideas that provoked such discussion. Mullah Husayn Bushrui, designated by his leader and transported by his zeal, was the first Babi missionary. He received orders to go to Iraq and to Khurasan, to preach in all the towns and villages, to attack the old faith and to explain the new, and to multiply the conversions as much as was in his power. In order not to appear to distrusting eyes like an adventurer without rights, without witnesses and without proof, he carried with him the *Account of the Pilgrimage* [17] and the *Commentary on the Sura of Joseph,* which at that time composed the sum total of Babi works. His knowledge and his faith were to supply whatever else was called for.

Mullah Husayn took leave of his master and the other disciples and went first, as he had been instructed, to Isfahan. Since being stripped of its status as capital the population of that city has fallen from the six or seven hundred thousand souls of the Safavid dynasty to eighty or ninety thousand; it is still nevertheless, along with Tehran and Tabriz, an important Persian city. Its ancient glory has not entirely disappeared. Its schools have not lost all their reputation; many students attend them and its clergy is considered perhaps the foremost of the empire. Mullah Husayn Bushrui presented himself boldly, preached, showed his books, and converted almost immediately an important man, Mullah Muhammad Taqi Harati, noteworthy jurisconsult, who became in his turn one of the foremost members of the sect.[18] Crowds gathered to hear the preacher. One by one he occupied all the pulpits of Isfahan, where he was completely at liberty to do what was forbidden in Shiraz. He did not fear to say publicly and to announce that Ali Muhammad was the twelfth Imam, Imam Mahdi; he exhibited and read from the books of his master; he brought out their eloquence and profundity, made much of the extreme youth of the seer and recounted his miracles. In short, he made such an impression that the elderly governor, feared and fearsome for his talents and also somewhat for his cruelty, the Mutamad al-Dawla, Manuchihr Khan, a Georgian eunuch, confessed that he found it in no way impossible that such an extraordinary character as Mullah Husayn Bushrui should be a saint, and that he who had sent him and who had composed the

beautiful texts that had been read to him should not also be the Imam Mahdi, the Hidden One. To avoid error it is necessary to point out here that by assimilating the Bab to the twelfth Imam the missionary was seeking to make himself understandable to the crowd and to gain their trust, in absolutely the same way as St. Paul when he revealed to the Athenians that the God he was announcing was that unknown God to whom they had already raised an altar. In both cases it was a manner of speaking, and we shall see later that there is no relationship between the Babi idea of the *Point* and what Muslims think about the Imam Mahdi.[19]

After having succeeded beyond all expectations in Isfahan Mullah Husayn Bushrui turned his steps towards Kashan and upon his arrival began preaching immediately. Once again he gained many converts, both amongst the people and the scholars, and of the latter a certain merchant of the town named Hajji Mirza Jani; but he failed in his attempt to convince one of the most important mujtahids, Hajji Mullah Muhammad. According to the Muslims he had come up against too formidable an opponent, and after a long discussion, the Hajji, seeing the Babi missionary reduced to silence, dismissed him from his presence. There are however grounds for doubting that the victory was truly so complete, for the victor, showing extreme moderation, did not dare to forbid further preaching, and Mullah Husayn Bushrui stayed in Kashan as long as he wished and was free to set out unhindered for Tehran when he left.

He spent several days in that capital but made no public appearances, and contented himself with seemingly confidential discussions with those who came to visit him. But in this way he in fact met large numbers of people and brought many of the curious around to his viewpoint. Everybody wanted to see or have seen him, and the king, Muhammad Shah and his minister, Hajji Mirza Aqasi, true Persians as they were, did not fail to summon him. He expounded his doctrines to them and left them in possession of the books of the master.[20]

Muhammad Shah, of whom I have already spoken, was a prince of a very particular disposition, by no means rare in Asia, but such as Europeans seem unable to judge and even less to understand. Although he reigned in times when the habits of local politics were still rather harsh, he was both gentle and patient, and his tolerance went as far as calmly witnessing the disorder of his harem, with which however he would have had more than good reason to show displeasure; for, even under Fath Ali Shah, caprices of the imagination were never given such free rein. He is attributed authorship of the following quip, worthy of our eighteenth century: "Madam, might I ask you to show some discretion? I should not wish to impede your pleasure". But in his case it was not an affectation of indifference, it was world-weariness and ennui. His health had always been deplorable: in the final stages of gout, he suffered continuous pain with barely a respite. His naturally weak personality had turned to melancholy, and, as he had great need of affection and obtained nothing of the sort from his family, from his women, from his children, he had concentrated all his affection on the old mullah, his tutor. He had made him his only friend, his confidant, then his first and all-powerful minister, and finally, without exaggeration, literally, his god.[21]

Brought up with an extreme irreverence towards Islam by that idol, he made no more of the Prophet's teachings than of the Prophet himself. The Imams left him indifferent, and if he held Ali in some esteem it was on account of that bizarre mental operation by means of which Persians identify that venerable figure with their nationality. But, all in all, Muhammad Shah was no more a Muslim than he was a Christian, Guebre or Jew. He was convinced that the divine substance incarnated itself in all its power in wise men, and as he considered Hajji Mirza Aqasi the Wise Man *par excellence*, he did not doubt that he was God, and would devoutly ask him for some miracle or other. He would often say to his officers, with an earnest and convinced air about him: "The Hajji has promised me a miracle for this evening, you'll see!" Muhammad Shah then, beyond the Hajji, was of a prodigious indifference towards the success or failure of this or that religious doctrine; on the contrary, he enjoyed seeing conflicts of opinion arise, which to his eyes attested to universal blindness.

The Hajji, in turn, was a very particular kind of god. It is not absolutely sure that he himself did not believe that of which Muhammad Shah was persuaded. In any case, he professed the same general principles as the king, and had inculcated them in him in good faith. But that did not stop him from playing the buffoon. Buffoonery was the system, the rule, the habit of his behaviour and his life. He took nothing seriously, beginning with himself: "I am not a prime minister", he would constantly repeat, and in particular to those he mistreated; "I am an old mullah, of low birth and lacking in merit, if I find myself where I am, it is because the king has willed it so".

He never spoke of his sons without referring to them as whoresons and sons of bitches. It was in these terms that he asked for news of them and had his orders passed on to them by his officers when he was absent. His greatest pleasure was to assemble and review in their most sumptuous array the cavalry of all the nomadic Khans of Persia. When these warlike tribes were marshalled on the plain, the Hajji would arrive dressed as a pauper, wearing a battered and threadbare hat, a sabre attached askew to his robe and riding a small donkey. Then he would gather the participants around him and insult them, ridiculing their finery, demonstrating their worthlessness to them, and finally dismissing them with gifts; for his sarcastic humour was seasoned with generosity.

Besides his mystical ideas he had two passions that played a considerable part in his life: artillery and agriculture.

As to the first of these, he was the first to install a cannon foundry in Tehran; he collected models of all the latest inventions and innovations and had them sent from Europe. He too was an inventor, and I have seen one of his creations. It is a kind of eight or ten foot long sheet metal cone, mounted on wheels. It is supposed to be filled with grapeshot and powder and has an exterior fuse. The Hajji intended to produce a large number of these machines, which, on a day of battle, would be harnessed and pulled along in front of the Persian army. When the action began the fuses would be lit, the horses would be unharnessed and the drivers would flee with all the troops. Then the enemy would not fail to set off in hot pursuit, they would throw themselves blindly over the infernal machines, which would explode, and

the Persians would have no more to do than to rejoice over such an ingeniously won victory.

Whilst having no objection to offer against the Hajji's system, I am more agreeably impressed with his agriculture innovations. He has really created a large number of villages around Tehran and given Persia many useful or attractive plants which it did not previously possess, which constitutes after all a real service. But amidst all these works and nameless prodigalities buffoonery always dominated and furnished the Hajji's administration with the principal trait of its character.[22] Nothing serious, widespread neglect in all areas, a collection of religious ideas belonging to nobody, and, for this reason, a marked penchant for not being at all displeased to see everybody's ideas more or less held in check, combined with a passion for not creating any awkward situations for oneself by ordering anything that could remotely be construed as definitive, such was the situation the Bab had encountered a few months previously and which existed none the less at the moment when Mullah Husayn Bushrui had his discussions with the king and his minister.

The novator brought words of devotion and submission from the Bab. The bearers of the new religion wished to be the bulwark of the dynasty and to work for its greater glory. There was no longer any need to show that public opinion favoured the new doctrine: it was self-evident, and not only in Shiraz, in Isfahan, in Kashan, even in Tehran did Babism make inroads into all classes of society, but it was known that the same was true in Hamadan, in Qazvin, in Zanjan, in Kerman, in Yazd. Mullah Husayn could therefore quite rightly insinuate that it would be more expedient to count on his master's support than to combat him, and better to have him as a friend than as an enemy. From the viewpoint of the Bab's representative the king and his minister could not have even the slightest intention of defending the Muslim faith since they, more than anybody, were completely detached from the interests of the Prophet; as for their personal opinions, there was really nothing to obstruct a compromise, and since the Hajji could claim on so scant evidence to be God it could not seem too illogical to him or to his royal worshipper that the Bab might also be a divine emanation.

Mullah Husayn Bushrui added to these considerations that Persia seemed to be embarking on a new path, that relations with Europe were multiplying daily and becoming more stable, that it was not without importance to favour doctrines like those of the Bab, which were closer to those generally accepted around the world, like, for instance, the abolition of legal impurity, and, more or less, of polygamy; that besides, from a purely political point of view, it had been the design of the greatest sovereigns of Central Asia for centuries, that is, the Grand Mughul Shah Akbar, founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Ismail and Nadir Shah the Conqueror, to found a religion capable of gathering to its bosom and reconciling Muslim, Christian and Jewish doctrines. The Bab heralded just such a fusion, and the king was going to cover himself in glory by taking the lead in such a glorious reform.

Judging by the personality and the ways of Muhammad Shah and his favourite it must have been precisely this prospect of glory that made them repugn Babism and hostile to the views of Mullah Husayn Bushrui. They were forced to understand

that they were being asked to make efforts for a goal that did not interest them. Gout, mysticism, indifference and buffoonery are not natural supports of ambition, and, when sufficient time had been spent conversing with the apostle, when the works of the Bab had been read, appraised, criticized, they found themselves weary of the matter, concerned about possible consequences, bored with the demands it gave rise to.

So they adopted a rigorous tone with the Babi missionary, and in order to get rid of him once and for all declared that if he wished to preserve life and limb he had but to leave Tehran at the earliest possible opportunity. Apart from that nothing was forbidden to him and he received no more explicit explanations. Thus rebuffed, Mullah Husayn would perhaps have found it difficult to maintain the favourable position he had created if the Bab had not been preparing new resources for the new religion at precisely the moment his first emissary was obtaining his first successes.

In fact, shortly after Mullah Husayn had left Shiraz the Bab had sent off in different directions two emissaries upon whom he placed equally high hopes and who, with no less talent perhaps, certainly with no less zeal and faith, would achieve as great a renown as their forerunner. One of these faithful was Muhammad Ali Barfurushi, the other was a woman.

To the eyes of the Babis Hajji Muhammad Ali Barfurushi is a great saint, a figure who could never be venerated enough. His learning, the purity of his beliefs, the brilliance of his devotion, all that subsequently happened to him, most expressly commend him to the veneration of the believers. The Bab deputized him in his own region, Mazandaran, and there he obtained great successes, which would come to hold an important place in the history of Babism. Knowing that Mullah Husayn Bushrui was in Tehran, he had established contact with him and kept him informed of all his actions, for his future steps depended on the success or failure of the Bab's first vicar.

The other missionary, the woman I have spoken of, went to Qazvin, and she is at the same time the object of the Babis' greatest veneration and one of the most striking and interesting apparitions of that religion. The real name of this woman then, was Zarrin Taj, "the Crown of Gold", but she is above all known as Qurrat al-Ayn , "the Consolation of the Eyes"; she is also called Hazrat-i Tahira, "Her Pure Highness", and further Nuqta, or the Point, i.e. the culmination of the incarnated prophecy. She came from a priestly family of Qazvin. Her father, Hajji Mullah Salih, was regarded as one of the most distinguished jurisconsults, and she had been married at an early age to her cousin, Mullah Muhammad, who also had a reputation for learning. In the preceding chapters we have seen that Qazvin had been for about forty years somewhat the centre of Shaykhi doctrine and that able philosophers still teach there. The family of Qurrat al-Ayn played an important and active rôle in this movement, especially her husband's father, Mullah Muhammad Taqi, the most prominent man of the town, one of the most respected mujtahids and a traditionalist famous in all Persia.

Although both Muslims and Babis now heap extraordinary praise on the beauty of the Consolation of the Eyes it is undeniable that the mind and personality of that

young woman were still more remarkable. Having often been present at learned discussions, so to speak on a daily basis, it seems that from a young age she had developed a keen interest in them, and one day it became apparent that she was perfectly capable of following the subtle discussions of her father, her uncle, her cousin, already her husband, and even of reasoning with them and, often, of amazing them with the force and acuity of her intelligence. In Persia it is not common to see women apply their minds to such activities, but it is also not absolutely unheard of; what is truly extraordinary, both there and elsewhere, is to find a woman equal to Qurrat al-Ayn. She not only achieved an uncommon level of perfection in her knowledge of Arabic, but she also achieved eminence in the knowledge of traditions and in the science of the different meanings which can be applied to frequently discussed passages of the Koran and the great authors. In Qazvin she passed with good reason for a prodigy.

It was from her family that she first heard of the Bab's sermons in Shiraz and of the nature of the doctrines he preached. What she learned, however incomplete and imperfect it might have been, pleased her enormously. She entered into correspondence with the Bab and soon embraced all his ideas. She was no longer satisfied with passive adherence; she publicly confessed the faith of her master; she not only spoke out against polygamy but also against the use of the veil, and showed herself unveiled in the public squares, much to the appalled dismay of her family and of all devout Muslims, but to the applause of the already numerous supporters who shared her enthusiasm and whose number her public sermons helped to swell considerably. Her uncle, the scholar, her father, the lawyer, her husband, exhausted all avenues in trying to bring her back to a more placid and reserved form of conduct. She rebuffed them with those unanswerable arguments of a faith impatient to find rest. She has also been accused (apparently on the basis of little evidence) of having organized the group of her followers who slaughtered her father-in-law in the mosque while he was performing his prayers. That was the first act of violence born of Babism. Finally, tired of the vexations, the Consolation of the Eyes left her family and dedicated herself completely to the apostolate of which the Bab had conferred upon her all the rights and confided all the duties. Her theological reputation became immense, and the idea she had of her own value was such that, one day, it is told, as Mullah Muhammad Ali Barfurushi was turning towards the Muslim Qibla to perform his prayers, Qurrat al-Ayn took his arm and said: "No! You must address yourself to me: I am the Qibla!" I have never heard a single Muslim question the virtue of such a singular figure. [23]

These were the two associates, the apostle of Mazandaran and the visionary of Qazvin, Mullah Husayn had notified when he received the order to leave Tehran. It was with these two colleagues he consulted about the next steps to take. For the moment at least they could no longer count on the civil administration going over to the Bab and achieving victory over Islam at a stroke. Moreover, it would be a pity to compromise the generally excellent position they had acquired in the country as a whole by untimely resistance and by stubbornly remaining in Tehran, thereby drawing harsh measures upon themselves, which the king and his minister

obviously had no relish for implementing. They resolved therefore that Mullah Husayn Bushrui would obey and would continue his preaching and his conquests in the provinces. The work would be slower but not a whit less sure, if the past were anything to go by. The direction to take and the regions to convert were clearly indicated: Mullah Husayn had victoriously crossed southern Persia; Qurrat al-Ayn was taking care of the West, the Barfurushi was having success in the North. It remained to undertake the eastern apostolate, and the Bab's lieutenant, taking leave of his two ardent companions, left the capital and headed silently towards Khurasan.

It was then the end of 1847. As was his custom, the pilgrim made the most of the time spent in the villages and towns on his route to lecture, to dispute with the mullahs, to make known the books of the Bab and to preach his doctrines, and prolonged his stay wherever he deemed it profitable. He was invited everywhere. People waited impatiently; he was sought out with curiosity, avidly listened to, believed without much difficulty. It was particularly in Nishapur that he made, in the persons of Mullah Abd al-Khaliq of Yazd, and Mullah Ali the Younger, two important conversions. The former of these scholars had been a pupil of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai. He was famous both for his learning and his eloquence, and for the esteem in which he was held by the public. The latter, also a Shaykhi, austere and respected, occupied the important post of principal mujtahid of the town. Both became fervent Babis and made the pulpits of the mosques resound to the most virulent of sermons against Islam. For several weeks one would have been able to believe that the old religion had been decisively defeated. The clergy, demoralized by the defection of their leader, frightened by the public speeches which lambasted them so mercilessly, were either afraid to show their faces or had fled. When Mullah Husayn Bushrui arrived in Mashad he found on the one hand an excited and divided populace and on the other a forewarned and very worried clergy with its back against the wall and determined to put up vigorous resistance against the attacks it was about to incur.

The combined membership of that clergy was so resolute that it vigorously took the offensive. No sooner had the Babi missionary set foot in the town than a deputation of mullahs left it to go and denounce him to the governor, Hamza Mirza, engaged at the time in a campaign against the border Turkmen and camped on the plain named Ridgan. These representatives vehemently denounced to the prince the dangerous man who had just entered their city. They recounted the scandals attributed to him in Nishapur and went to great lengths to emphasize the impossibility of tolerating such an outrageous infidel in the holy city *par excellence,* that which bore the honour of being the sanctuary of the Imam Riza. They persuaded the prince, inasmuch as it is possible to persuade such a phlegmatic person with considerations of that order, and he ordered that Mullah Husayn be brought to the camp and appear before him. Also by his orders, the fiery neophyte, Mullah Ali the Younger, was arrested in Nishapur and brought before him. The aforesaid's courage and resolution did not come out of the meeting with any great honour. Be it that the threats had scared him or that the gifts had won him over he returned from the camp at Mashad to mount the pulpit of the great mosque and renounce

before the assembled mullahs and the population all that he had professed so zealously a few days earlier. He vehemently disavowed the doctrines he had praised so highly and solemnly cursed the Bab and his companions. Upon which he was released, and he returned to Nishapur with his head held low. A certain number of the converts made in that town followed his example; but Mullah Abd al-Khaliq did not imitate them and turned a deaf ear. On the contrary he displayed obstinacy and swore that nothing would cause him to swerve from the path to which he had committed himself. So the newly enheartened and united clergy, full of courage for following the directive it had received from Mashad, drove Mullah Abd al-Khaliq from the pulpit and forbade him entry to the mosque. Then he was ordered to remain in his house and no longer to appear in the streets.

As for Mullah Husayn Bushrui he was brought to the camp, placed in a tent, and the karauls or sentinels posted around it prevented him from communicating with anyone.

While it was being discussed what to do with him a revolt broke out amongst the soldiers in Mashad. Hamza Mirza was forced to break camp, and as the insurgents, with their leader, the salar, [24] had managed to take control of the town, the prince, very put out and concerned about an event which in fact compromised for a moment the very existence of the dynasty, lost all interest in his prisoner. This latter wasted no time in escaping and in hurrying to Mashad, hoping to take advantage of the tumult in some way. But things did not go as planned; the moment he was recognized he was ordered to leave. The salar had enough problems on his hands without adding to them a quarrel with the powerful clergy of the holy city, supported by a considerable population of layabouts who, living off the kitchen of the great mosque, are necessarily full of absolute devotion towards those who run it. Mullah Husayn Bushrui therefore had no other choice than to flee once more, and he returned to Nishapur.

There, his attitude, which had up till then had been purely that of a peaceful missionary, changed utterly. His security was gravely compromised; the country was ablaze. The salar's sedition had mobilized the entire country. To live amongst arms, one must arm oneself. Mullah Husayn took this step, and, surrounding himself with a group of the faithful, turned to Sabzawar. There, Mirza Taqi Juvayni, a wealthy and respected man, joined his cause and took it upon himself to maintain the band. New recruits joined the Babis, who marched on Miyami and then Yarjamand, which they captured; but they were almost immediately repelled by Aqa Sayyid Muhammad, who, surrounded by his friends, ordered them to withdraw, which they did, feeling that their numbers were not sufficient or rather, well armed as they were, not yet resolved enough to take that final step into all out violence.

They fell back therefore to a village named Khan Kundi, situated three leagues from there, where they were joined by two important men, Mullah Hasan and Mullah Ali who swore allegiance to the cause. The group was growing. The majority of the people seemed to favour the innovators. Mullah Husayn Bushrui, seeing this, did not leave the area; he returned over the ground he had already covered, strengthening the faith and the courage of his neophytes; he did all in his power to

bring about an uprising. Having thus returned to Miyami, he persuaded thirty-six men in the prime of their youth to take up their arms and follow him.

The passions of the opposing parties were at boiling point and a conflict was now inevitable. However, it appears that Mullah Husayn Bushrui did not seek it. Although he was swept along by the train of events and the desire to acquire new recruits, he would have liked to have postponed the struggle, but it was beyond his control. The enthusiasm of his followers did not permit him to take all the necessary measures. The converts spoke so wildly, were so threatening and insulting that finally the Muslims of Miyami attacked them. There was a fight, the Babis got the worst of it, some of them were killed and the leader ordered a retreat. He went to Shahrud.

Entering that town, he and his people invaded the house of the mujtahid, called Mullah Muhammad Kazim, and began to preach the new faith and to exhort in particular the master of the house to embrace it. But it was not a moment for esoteric discussions. The mujtahid answered with insults and, raising his stick, struck Mullah Husayn on the head and ordered him to leave the town. The order would probably not have been enforced without difficulty and the bold action of the mujtahid might have had mortal consequences for him if at the very moment when the invectives were being exchanged and when the cries were about to turn to action the announcement of an event of which nobody had dreamt had not completely transformed everybody's state of mind. Throughout the town people were shouting that a courier had arrived announcing the death of Muhammad Shah. It was true.

4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BABISM

In Central Asia a change of reign is always a highly critical moment. In Persia, in Turkestan, in the Arab states, a longer or shorter period of anarchy establishes itself which assumes a more or less violent and tormented character but which never fails to suspend the action of the law, in function of the principle that the sovereign will has for the time being disappeared. There are concrete reasons for this as well as many reasons arising from mere habit, and I believe it is appropriate to concentrate on the latter in order to explain better the Asiatic mind.

Certainly, the king is dead and his power ceases to act and no longer makes itself felt. But in the ordinary course of events that power intervened only by delegation. The merchants have their laws, their rules and customs; the soldiers, for the most part tribesmen, know only their direct heads; not even three times a year are municipal authorities compelled to submit any of their actions to royal oversight, and as for the general exercise of that authority they are never called to account until the day of their dismissal from office. So in reality there is no really decisive reason for government to grind to a halt at the death of the king.

But from time immemorial the people have conceived the idea that magistrates, of whatever rank, are merely servants of the king, in the completely domestic sense of the word. Then, the notion of the law as sovereign as such does not exist in Asia, which is bizarre; for there more than in any other land the law is immutable, but, however, people stubbornly persist in seeing in that law, more or less contemporary of the Sassanids, nothing more than the expression of the will of the reigning prince, notwithstanding the fact that he is more often than not completely powerless to change the smallest detail of it. The result is that the magistrates, like the people, are imbued with the idea that during an interregnum there is neither legitimacy nor justification for any form of power. It is a watch that has stopped; the springs neither change nor should be changed, but until an authorized hand rewinds it it no longer functions.[1]

Besides, many passions and interests are there to awaken, excite, poke, enflame the general discord. If there are several pretenders to the throne they desire disorder in order to increase their chances of success and of recruiting active partisans.

Disorder suits these partisans, and in order to gain their support they are given a great deal of leeway. Then there is the spirit of adventure, the turbulent

imagination of the masses. Most people have no wish to do any real harm but they love making a lot of noise. They take advantage of the moment to yell, fight in the streets, drink in the Armenian and Jewish quarters, look for trouble, celebrate. There are as many broken heads as good comrades who are enjoying themselves, and the magistrates, great and small, for fear of displeasing some protégé of the new power to be abstain from demonstrating an energy which in any case is lacking to them and from exercising prerogatives they no longer consider themselves to possess. Far from intervening to maintain order, they throw themselves wholeheartedly into the intrigues of the moment; if need be they invent them. For them it is a matter of possible advancement, or at least of not losing their position, not in the least of re-establishing peace.

But it would be wrong however to believe that all this uproar is truly as unbridled and dangerous as it could be in Europe. Asiatics dislike extremes, and go to them as rarely as possible. On all occasions there are more wounded than dead, more insults than blows, more thefts than acts of violence. Everyone does as he wishes; but, all in all, the wishes are not so terrible. Thus, the very small number of Europeans who found themselves in Tehran during the interregnum brought about by the death of Muhammad Shah were in no way badly treated. One of their number even passed through one of the gates of the city whilst the lutis were in the middle of a sabre fight and stealing each other's hats and clothes: the liveliness of the combat did not prevent those scoundrels from greeting the European with a completely respectful *salam alaykum.*

Whatever the case may be, the death of the king and its consequences came as a wonderful help to Muhammad Husayn Bushrui and his troupe. Their predicament came to an end; a new phase began for them. They were now no more than one of the many factions in the State, quite a powerful one since they knew what they wanted and were armed. The Bab's envoy quickly decided on his next move. Convinced that Khurasan could not for the moment provide him with any new partisans he set off for Mazandaran, where the terrain was well primed for the Babis and where he was sure of finding a colleague and partisans no less ardent than himself. When he arrived at Bastam, near the border, he got word from the mullahs that he would be received with gunfire if he appeared with his people. He scorned the threat and having joined up with a reinforcement of neophytes commanded by Mullah Ali Husaynabadi in a nearby village sped up his march and entered Mazandaran.

It was a new theatre, peopled by new actors. The Khurasanis are vigorous, tall, and quite similar to the Turkmen, with whom their blood is very mixed. Their ideas are vehement. They are horsemen and warlike. The Mazandaranis are the antithesis of this portrait in more than one way. Popular opinion widely considers them, perhaps unjustly, the Beotians of Persia. There are endless stories about their simple-mindedness. Anyway, they are thought little inclined to religious speculation. Good marksmen, they do not like war, and if the circumstances in any way permit they dedicate themselves exclusively to agricultural tasks, which they love above all. The main concerns of their life are their enormous rice fields, their fruit

trees, which bring them considerable profits from exportation to Russia, and wood-cutting. There is nothing chivalrous about them, and they are so little concerned with the notion of honour that when the Turkmen tribes see fit to invade from the Northeast of their country to carry off prisoners they generally offer no resistance, flee, hide or give themselves up, but do not defend themselves.

As for the territory, it is no less different from the plains of Khurasan. There lie immense open spaces, often fertile, but little cultivated; large villages where the dwellings are built on top of each other like hives and surrounded by a high, thick wall bear more than a passing resemblance to a Roman circus. As soon as the look-outs positioned there see a group of horsemen on the horizon who look like Turkmen the women and children launch terrible cries to heaven which recall the field workers who, leaving their ploughs, begin to run, hurry home, close the doors, take their muskets, spread out along the top of the wall and fire at the pillagers, who crawl off to safety. Where the cultivated fields are furthest from the village a solitary tower with a small opening at its base serves as a refuge to the farm labourer, who can shoot at the aggressors from its top until the noise brings his companions to deliver him. Mazandaran offers an entirely different picture: deep forest silence; the thick shelters, like those of Brazil, untouched vines, creepers, generations of trees crumbling into dust on top of each other on a spongy soil; the marshes, which cross and feed the only large rivers of Persia proper; finally, the sea.

Mullah Husayn Bushrui, with his troupe, had barely set foot on the soil of the province before he met several characters who formed the first council of the sect and whose meeting later came to be seen by the eyes of the faithful as of great importance.[2] They were, following the order of their dignity: Mirza Yahya, still a child of scarcely fifteen years of age, and who later succeeded the Bab himself; then Hajji Muhammad Ali Barfurushi; then Qurrat al-Ayn and other zealots, followed by a large number of partisans. Hajji Muhammad Ali had watched the movements of the Mullah Husayn in Khurasan very closely in order to be ready to come to his aid and facilitate his retreat if need be. As for the prophetess, who had sought refuge in the forests of Mazandaran after the murder of her uncle and father-in-law had meant she could no longer remain in Qazvin, she had already been there for some time and came to offer to share the dangers and the successes of her associates. The Muslim historian, Lisan al-Mulk, who supplied me with a large number of these details, is quite insistently smug about the composition of the troupe that accompanied the enthusiastic young lady. As it disgusts him to admit that the Bab's heterodox doctrines could have inspired anyone at all he seizes the occasion to attribute very worldly motives to the partisans of the novators and assures that all the soldiers of Qurrat al-Ayn were in love with her, secretly, I imagine, otherwise, instead of marching under the same flag they would have divided up, and it seems that no discord ever broke out in that camp. Lovers or devotees, they were unquestionably the most inspired of the Babis, and the woman who led them exercised an unlimited authority over them.[3]

The three troupes, united in the hamlet of Badasht, camped in the houses of the peasants or in the gardens. They were barely out of Khurasan, since Bastam was

only a league and a half behind them. Qurrat al-Ayn deemed it necessary to fire the zeal of the believers by a sermon.

A sort of throne of planks covered with cloth and rugs was set up on a small plain near the village. Qurrat al-Ayn appeared, unveiled as was her custom, and sat on her heels on the throne whilst the soldiers seated themselves around her in the same way, in the Persian manner. It was not quite how the Presbyterian conventicles took place on the Scottish moors. It was neither the same sky nor the same landscape, neither the preachers nor the listeners had the same attitude or the same doctrines; but if the forms were different the essence was the same: it was a true conventicle around Qurrat al-Ayn, a passionate faith, a limitless enthusiasm, an absolute devotion.

The young woman began by making her audience aware of the great truth that the time had come when the Bab's doctrine would cover the earth and when, according to this doctrine, God would finally be worshipped in a manner agreeable to Him. A new light had appeared, a new law would be born; a new book would replace the old. Such great things could not be achieved without suffering and infinite sacrifices from the generation called upon to accomplish them, and it was not asking too much that even the women share in the work of their husbands and brothers, accept all the dangers. They could no longer shut themselves off in the harems and wait idly to see what the men could do. Leaving aside the customary rules, the modesty of more tranquil times, even their duties, even their native weakness, and especially the fear that is such a natural part of them, they must show themselves to be, in the most absolute sense, the companions of their men, to follow them and to fall with them on the field of martyrdom.

Here I give only the sense of the speech made by the Consolation of the Eyes. I should like to give an idea of it eloquence; but if I were to try to translate literally the written records that remain of it European thought would be disconcerted by certain local turns of speech and would understand nothing of the emotions of which I should like to give at least an inkling, so I shall better attain my goal by limiting myself simply to the theme of her speech. Not that her manner of speaking was overly ornate. Many people who knew her and heard her at different periods of her life have commented to me that, quite on the contrary, for such a notably learned, well-read person, the main characteristic of her diction was an almost shocking simplicity; and, they would add, when she spoke one nevertheless felt moved to the depths of one's soul, filled with admiration, and tears would fall from one's eyes.

And in fact, I was building up to it, she had barely finished her exordium that day when she was interrupted by the sobs of those present. Asiatics are actually quite easy to move; like children they cry easily and with little bitterness. People began then, to moan and to cry out: *Ay jan!* (O, my soul), *Ay matihra!* (O, the pure one!). They struck their breasts, took their heads between their hands and shook them in spasms of emotion. Among those present were many local people attracted by the reputation of Qurrat al-Ayn, by the desire to hear of the new faith that had been on everybody's lips for months, and, finally, by the inextinguishable curiosity that is the great distinctive trait of their race. Those Muslims, seeing the others in tears and struck like them by the victorious influence of the Consolation of the Eyes, were

troubled in their hearts and they too began to cry. From that moment on they were infidels, a Muslim chronicler observed humorously.[4] He was right; they had gone over to the enemy for a few words spoken by a woman.

Qurrat al-Ayn, in tears, went on with her moving speech and set about showing that it was a hard duty but a rigorous obligation for all the faithful. That nobody who was devoted to God could on any account consider themselves dispensed of it and that as even the women were called to the task the young and the elderly, even the children could not consider themselves excluded, God needed all his creatures.

It seems that this speech was particularly effective. Of all Qurrat al-Ayn 's speeches it is one of the most often quoted.[5] And not only did it have a great effect on her audience, but repeated everywhere and commented on by those who had had the good fortune to hear it brought many more followers to Babism.

During the night the three leaders held counsel and decreed that as the disorder reigning in the country meant that the government had other things to do than chase after them or even meddle in their affairs it was no longer necessary to march all together and that it would therefore be better to separate, maintaining communications however, and for each group to head for a particular region of Mazandaran. It did not seem to them impossible to take control of the province. They were in good number and if they could solidly establish the Bab's authority there they would have gained the stronghold they needed for the sect. So Hajji Muhammad Ali set off that very night with his followers to return to Barfurush. Qurrat al-Ayn stayed in the area with her enthusiasts in order to continue spreading the word, and Mullah Husayn Bushrui plunged into the very heart of the country to recruit followers in the remote woodland villages.

A few weeks passed and the Babi's success, both with the townspeople and the country dwellers, became day by day more manifest. They had overcome local apathy. Not only the peasants and commoners rushed to them but, as had happened everywhere, in Isfahan, in Kashan, in Tehran, in Nishapur, men of science, of merit, admired, respected and wealthy men became Babis and began to inveigh against the vices, the ignorance, the triteness and the simony of the clergy. Such a state of affairs could not long be tolerated, and everywhere, despite the difficulty of the situation, the exasperated Mullahs began to defend themselves. Their indignation and terror reached their zenith when they saw Mullah Muhammad Ali, staff in hand and sabre in belt parading around the streets of Barfurush at the head of three hundred well-armed men, yelling like madmen and ready to do anything. The clergy decided it was high time to counterattack if they did not want to run the risk of later being annihilated without even a fight. They did three things: first they assembled the beggars who lived off the mosque's soup kitchens, armed them, transformed them into tufangjis or fusiliers, which they then sent off in pursuit of the three main groups of Babis; then they went to complain to Khanlar Mirza, governor of the province, and finally they wrote to Abbas Quli Khan, leader and governor of Larijan, to inform him of the sad plight of the religion.

Khanlar Mirza had quite other things to worry about at that moment than the mullahs and their problems. He was waiting to see the effects of the ascension of the

young king Nasir al-Din Shah to the throne. The latter, having been formally recognized by the legations at Tabriz, was about to set out for Tehran, and Khanlar Mirza, who did not know what would become of him under the new regime, lent only a fairly distracted ear to the supplications of the zealous Muslims. It was otherwise with Abbas Quli Khan Larijani, a local man with a very direct interest, who moreover, as chief of a tribe, more than any blood prince, one of the most undesirable trades in Persia, was far more assured of his rank and position under any regime. Abbas Quli Khan Larijani did not hesitate to respond to the desperate appeal addressed to him, and he sent one of his officers, Muhammad Big, to Barfurush with three hundred tufangjis, who brusquely entered the town and began to walk towards the Babis. The two parties confronted each other for several days; they paraded; the peaceful townspeople fled, stayed indoors, hid themselves; at the first sign of conflict the women uttered high-pitched cries and emptied the streets, only to return shortly afterwards and watch wide-eyed. In the mosques, the waiz, or preachers, hurled abuse at the Bab; in the public squares the Babis did likewise against Islam; finally when tempers on both sides had risen sufficiently the vociferations gave way to blows and the tussle began.

It began with a lively barrage that laid low a dozen Babis and a few more Muslims. A determined hand to hand battle soon developed. But, warned in time, Mullah Husayn Bushrui and his followers entered the town and cast themselves over the enemy. The latter gave way, and, continuing to fight, abandoned the herb market square where they had been confined and established themselves in the neighbouring caravanserai. It was a very strong position, and there the Babis found themselves up against a fortress, from which they felt it would be very difficult to dislodge the enemy. They threw themselves into the fray however, and things were raging in full flow when Abbas Quli Khan Larijani appeared with most of his tribe. At this point the situation of the Babis began to look none too good.

The nomad chief could not force them to retreat however, and above all he could not liberate the mullahs and their people from their besiegement in the caravanserai of the herb market, and, having failed in this, the fight continued, with neither side giving way; the forces and their courage evenly matched.

At that point Mullah Husayn Bushrui judged it futile to continue the struggle, thinking that, no matter what the outcome, it was not for the time being in his power to take lasting control of the town. He therefore found it appropriate to take advantage of the fact that he was holding his ground to negotiate. A messenger bore a letter from him to Abbas Quli Khan Larijani in which it was stated that his Highness the Bab and his servants were essentially men of peace who wished only good and abhorred violence. That, in his infinite love for mankind, His Highness had ordered him and his collaborators to go and announce the truth in Mazandaran, and that it was for that cause he and his colleague, Hajji Muhammad Ali, had preached everywhere, as was well known to all. But that if the inhabitants of Barfurush really wished to remain attached to their old ideas, regardless of their flaws, it was not in his intentions to use force to convert them and he asked only to be allowed to withdraw with his followers.

Abbas Quli Khan Larijani hastened to accept this overture and responded by praising the conciliatory sentiments of Mullah Husayn; he declared that he was of exactly the same mind and expressed his wish that the talents of the missionary might be exercised in accordance with his expressed intentions outside of Mazandaran. Thus agreed, the combat ceased on both sides and the Babis left the town and went to Aliabad, a village not far from Barfurush. A troop of Abbas Quli Khan Larijani's tufangjis, charged with making them respect the terms of the treaty, accompanied them. The Babis and these fusiliers made the journey together on excellent terms and when they separated exchanged many wishes of happiness. But no sooner had the nomadic tufangjis disappeared in the direction of Barfurush, to whence they were returning than the people of Aliabad, incited by the words of a certain Khusraw Big, chief of the village, got it into their minds to pillage the baggage of the Babis, and for a start, Khusraw Big himself, grabbing the bridle of Mullah Husayn's horse, did his best to drag the latter to the ground by pulling on his leg. Surprised by this unexpected aggression, the Babis retreated in disorder. But Mullah Husayn, an excellent horseman and skilled in corporal activities, stayed in the saddle despite the efforts of the traitor; drawing his sabre, he split his head with a vigorous blow, and, crying out loudly, rallied his men so that they held their own. After a fairly brief combat the people of Aliabad, with no booty and their hands void of all manner of spoils, but well bespattered with their own blood and in a pitiable state, fled, leaving the field of battle to the Babis.

It was not a great victory; it was sufficient however, for it immediately fortified Mullah Husayn's flagging courage and raised his rather fallen hopes. He saw things in a better light, and although he had promised to leave Mazandaran preferred to do nothing of the sort. Perhaps he supposed that the aggression of the people of Aliabad had released him from his word, even though the sardar had kept his; perhaps he supposed nothing at all but that it suited him to stay, and stay he did. He looked for a suitable place to entrench himself. Such a place is neither rare nor difficult to find in the wooded, mountainous region in which he found himself. He soon found it in the place called "Pilgrimage of Shaykh Tabarsi".[6] There he put his people to work, had a ditch dug, put up an earthen and stone entrenchment, and, finally, succeeded as much as was possible in giving the retreat he intended to make the centre of his operations the character and solidity of a castle. He was able to dedicate himself to this task with the utmost liberty. The mullahs of Barfurush, happy to have disposed of their immediate fears, would have been far from charmed at the idea of recommencing a struggle they had found quite onerous; and as for the local authorities, most of them were en route to Tehran, where the arrival of the young king and the ensuing ceremonies, the swearing of oaths, and above all the gifts to be made and the intrigues to follow, brought all who, wrongly or rightly, could boast of being of some importance in Persia.

From the descriptions I have heard of it the castle constructed by Mullah Husayn became quite a sturdy construction. It was surrounded by a wall about ten ells high built of large stone blocks. On this base wooden structures made of enormous tree trunks were erected, in which a suitable number of meurtrières had been cut;

then everything was surrounded by a deep ditch. It was a kind of large tower with a stone base and the upper levels made of wood, embellished with three superposed rows of meurtrières where as many tufangjis as one wished, or rather had available, could be positioned. Many doors and posterns were cut in order to be able to come and go freely; wells were dug so as to have abundant water; underground passages were dug to serve as places of refuge in case of misfortune, stores were established and promptly filled with all sorts of provisions bought or probably taken from the surrounding villages; finally the castle was garrisoned by the most energetic, most devoted, surest Babis that were to hand. There were therefore, in the heart of Mazandaran, where there exists not the slightest knowledge of the art of fortification, where cannons are rare and in any case of very low calibre, two thousand men who, masters of such a defensive capacity, represented a formidable force, which, guided by a skilful hand, could be of considerable effect.[7]

Mullah Husayn and Hajji Muhammad Ali Barfurushi, his colleague, or rather, his lieutenant, judged the situation so, and as soon as the castle was completed Mazandaran began once again to resound with their sermons. But they did not however express themselves in the same way as before. Up until that point they had been above all teachers; they spoke of truths, of duties, of God, of the soul, in a word, of religion. From the heights of their castle they spoke almost exclusively of politics, Babi politics no doubt, but still, politics.[8] They announced that all those who wished to live happily in this world, whilst awaiting the next, no longer had very much time to make their decision. One more year, one year and no more, and his Highness the Bab, messenger of God, would possess himself of all the climes of the universe. Flight was impossible, resistance puerile. The Babis would possess the world, the infidels would be servants. People must hasten to open their eyes, to submit to Mullah Husayn, otherwise it would soon be too late.

This talk, these opinions, these proclamations, these ravings made an enormous impression. They inspired either fear or hope. From all corners people gathered and rushed to the castle. The humble wished only to save themselves; the more fiery rubbed their greedy hands at the thought of world conquest. Around the circular wall a large crowd gathered, a crowd in constant movement, swelling by the moment with new reinforcements. Tents, reed huts, cabins made of branches, or simply a cotton blanket spread on the ground served as a residence to whole families. People milled about, coming and going in all directions. Some drank, others ate; some argued, others laughed; here, someone was preaching and the audience wept, striking their breasts or calling out to the preacher to soften the threats he was proffering against the recalcitrants. There, people bragged and divided up the booty of India and Rum between them. If by chance Mullah Husayn came out of the castle, or even Hajji Muhammad Ali, everyone rose in an attitude of profound respect. These two characters, who always spoke of the Bab, who in turn always spoke of God, were the Bab and the God of that assemblage, who expected all that they had learned from them from them alone. The fieriest enthusiasm and the most sincere faith reigned, and the two leaders were the object of limitless devotion. I have said that when they passed everybody stood in the most reverential of attitudes: when

people approached them they prostrated themselves and only spoke after having touched the ground with their foreheads and obtained permission to raise their eyes. In order to extend even further the over-excitement of the already greatly impressed imaginations Mullah Husayn wanted to take advantage for the new religion of all that was dear to the people in the old, and taking the names of the most popular Imams distributed them amongst his principal officers, not only as vain titles, but also in order to mark positively that they were essentially one with the holy person whose name they bore, but raised to a higher degree. This institution, which in fact ensued quite rigorously from the Bab's doctrines, produced a great effect and contributed not little to assuring the devotion of the faithful and to multiplying the conversions. A man in whom the Bab or his lieutenant discovered by certain signs a similarity with such and such an Imam, revered for centuries, a sayyid, a holy martyr, a famous learned figure, that man, thus designated to admiration and obedience and suddenly finding himself the inheritor of a glory he could well appreciate and which assured him ever greater glory, that man had only the feeblest of objections to oppose and plunged into the current to be swept along.[9]

As for the multitude at large, upon whom such means of persuasion could not have been used without destroying their value, they were convinced that a believer who fell on the battlefield would resuscitate in at most forty days. Each and every one of them was perfectly assured of paradise on Doomsday. But besides this distant reward one was already fully rewarded in this world, since one became king or prince of some country or other, or at the very least governor, irremovable, I like to think. The most ambitious therefore aspired to a rapid death because they had already set their sights on the realm that most appealed to them. So and so made his arrangements for China, another preferred Turkey; a few – and here one sees a trace of European influence – had cast their sights on England, France or Russia.

I must say that nothing in the written doctrines of the Bab justifies such ideas; but all religions are subject to giving birth, above and beyond themselves, influenced by crude imaginations, to a certain number of doctrines that enter the belief and which one might call the theology of the lower classes, who without this nonsense would be reduced to having no beliefs at all, for ordinarily it is not given to them to elevate themselves to anything reasonable.

In short, the soldiers of Mullah Husayn Bushrui and Hajji Muhammad Ali were full of ardour, an incomparable ardour. The two leaders, excited and encouraged by the frequent letters sent by his Highness the Bab from Shiraz,[10] transmitted the absolute confidence that inspired them to the souls of their officers. They in turn reported all they had heard to the soldiers and the soldiers repeated amongst themselves what they had understood. The whole army swore that the Bab had announced and fixed the outcome of the coming days in advance: Mazandaran conquered, a glorious march on Rayy, a great battle, and, on a mountainside near Tehran, a vast and deep mass grave for the ten thousand Muslims killed in the victory.

5

BATTLES AND SUCCESSES OF THE BABIS IN MAZANDARAN

Meanwhile in the capital the coronation festivities were over. King Nasir al-Din Shah had assumed full control of the government. Hajji Mirza Aqasi, ousted from a position he had spent his time making a mockery of, had retired to Karbala, and saw out his final days there making fun of the mullahs and also somewhat of the memory of the holy martyrs. His successor, Mirza Taqi Khan, Amir Nizam,[1] one of the most able men Asia has produced in this century, was determined to put an end to the disorder. He closed the cafés, where too many people were ranting against the government and, in order to put a stop to the habit of hacking each other to death with gamas in the quarter around the Gate of Dulab in the middle of the afternoon, a practice introduced by the Makui Kurds, countrymen of the former prime minister, he had several of the killers bricked into the wall of the mosque at Shah Abd al-Azim and their heads ripped off by means of ropes attached to wild horses. So the Amir Nizam, with his frenzied approach to putting things in order, soon had Mazandaran under control, and when the great men of that province, in Tehran to pay court to the king, were about to return home, he ordered them to take the necessary measures to cut short the Babi sedition. They promised to do their best.

And in fact, no sooner had they returned home than these chiefs began to combine forces and to discuss their strategy. Each of them wrote to the members of his clan to come and join him. Hajji Mustafa Khan sent his brother, Aqa Abdullah. Abbas Quli Khan Larijani called Sultan Muhammad and Ali Khan of Sawad-Kuh. All these gentlemen and their train decided to attack the Babis in their castle before it occurred to them to take the offensive. The royal officers, seeing the local chiefs so well disposed, called a great council, where Mirza Aqa, mustaufi or controller of the finances of Mazandaran, the chief of the ulamas, and many other esteemed figures hastened to join the lords mentioned above. The result of the deliberations was that Aqa Abdullah put together two hundred hand-picked men from his village of Hazar-i Jarib; then a certain number of tufangjis, recruited here and there, and a few noble horsemen of his tribe. With this company he took up position at Sari, ready to initiate the campaign. For his part, the controller of the finances levied a troupe from amongst the Afghans living in Sari and added a few men from the Turkish tribes under his administration. Aliabad, the village so rudely chastised by the Babis and which aspired to revenge, furnished what it could, reinforced by some of

the men of Qadi, who enrolled because they were from a neighbouring village. It was agreed that Aqa Abdullah would assume command and march against the enemy forthwith.

From Ab-i Rud he set out in fine spirits for the high valley of Lar, and having arrived at the village of the same name called a halt. He was hosted by Nizar Khan Girayli. The night passed in the greatest tranquillity, although the proximity of the Babis kept them on their guard. The next day they marched on, additionally reinforced by a troupe of men from the district of Kudar,[2] and finally came into sight of the castle at Shaykh Tabarsi. The garrison had withdrawn inside; outside nothing stirred; the valley was completely silent. At once Aqa Abdullah set resolutely to work. He ordered a sort of trench to be dug and positioned some tufangjis there, who began to maintain fairly rapid constant fire against the wall. This continued all day without producing any result, the Babis content to answer fire only sporadically, so that both parties went off to sleep with no clear notion of the events of the day.

But shortly before daybreak Mullah Husayn Bushrui, opening one of his many posterns, came out suddenly and attacked the men from Kudar, who were sleeping deeply. He was setting about massacring them when Aqa Abdullah, alerted by the noise, rushed up at the head of his men and began to shoot the Babis at point blank range, which put a stop to their pursuit of their victims. The newcomers were mostly noble horsemen, nomads; they were well versed in the use of weapons and knew how to hold their own. Nonetheless, Mullah Husayn threw himself against them just as he had done with the militia from Kudar. Wildly brandishing his sabre and discharging his pistols into the crowd he boldly led his followers into the fight. A well-built young Afghan jumps on him. Mullah Husayn finds a worthy adversary. Sparks fly from their clashing sabres; the Afghan's horse steps into a hole; the rider is thrown to the ground; Mullah Husayn dispatches him at a stroke. Whilst this struggle was going on victory was decided elsewhere for the Babis. Aqa Abdullah, surrounded on all sides by assailants, fell dead with thirty of his men, and the remainder, some safe and sound others in a sorry state, fled in all directions. Many of them had taken no part in the battle. Awoken by gunfire, they had been unable to arrive in time, and, learning of the death of their common leader from those who were fleeing saw no other remedy than to take to their heels with all speed. Thus the routed army reached the village of Farra, where they wanted to stop for a short respite; but the Babis were close on their heels and fell over them. It was not a fight: the bewildered Muslims continued to give way. The village was sacked, and nobody, neither women, nor children, nor the aged, so the story goes, was spared; then the houses were consumed by fire.[3] When I repeat, according to all accounts, that everybody had their throats cut, I do so out of respect for a tradition, adopted by history from time immemorial and piously carried on up to the present day, of taking intentions for facts and affirming the absolute, which in practice never occurs. The real truth is that a considerable portion of the population of that sad village fled safe and sound to the mountains, where they mourned their relatives, their harvests and their gardens, and went on to spread throughout Mazandaran the horror of the

catastrophe that had befallen them. Each and every one of those wretches declared themselves the sole survivor. The impression caused was profound and terrible. The whole province fell into a sort of stupor, probably caused by the idea people were getting of the Babis' exaltation and by the unavoidable soul searching arising from the Muslims' own lack of steadfastness. The mullahs were trembling and already saw themselves annihilated. Nowhere in those around them did they perceive the slightest ardour for defending them, whilst in their adversary they saw nothing but vigour and frenzy. Amidst this general desolation they cried to Tehran for help.

The Amir Nizam threw a fit of violent anger when he learned of what had happened. He was incensed by the picture of terror described to him. Too far from the theatre of action to be able to appreciate the savage enthusiasm of the rebels, what he understood was that they had to be dealt with once and for all before their energy could be even further exalted by all too real successes. Mahdi Quli Mirza, appointed king's lieutenant in the threatened province, set off with full emergency powers. The order was given to draw up a list of those fallen in the battle before the castle[4] and during the sacking of Farra, and pensions were promised to the survivors. Hajji Mustafa Khan, the brother of Aqa Abdullah, received solid marks of royal favour; lastly, everything possible was done to raise the morale of the Muslims and to restore their self-confidence.

One of the first measures the shahzada took on arrival at his command post was to order Abbas Quli Khan, leader of Larijan, to descend with his tribes from the valley of Lar and the outlying areas of Damavand to the new camp that was to be established below Amul. As a consequence the old city saw the arrival of a large number of black tents: Turkish tribes, Persian tribes, or, as they say, Kurds, and a small army soon materialized. Discipline is not very demanding in Asiatic armies. In the presence of these numbers morale rose somewhat. They began to seek out the Babis again, and declared that their presence would no longer be tolerated anywhere in Mazandaran. The measures proclaimed against them multiplied like threats, at the same time as the troops were sent across the mountain trails towards the Babi castle. The expedition soon arrived in the cold region, for Mazandaran is the country *par excellence* of brusque transitions. In the space of a few hours one passes from humid rice fields to orange groves, to a shadowy, European-like forest, to barren high ground, to mountains that are frozen at the height of summer, to snowdrifts that never melt. The shahzada learnt of all this at first hand. Leaving behind the blossoming pomegranates and ripening lemons of Amul, he entered a series of gorges and plateaux where he suddenly found himself enveloped in thick mists that soon turned into snowstorms, not merely unpleasant but taxing in the extreme for both man and beast.

The nomads of Larijan, who composed the main body of the army, were too familiar with those squalls to not do their best to protect themselves from them. With no concern for the expedition they fled in all directions, running either to where they knew crevices in the rocks might shelter them or towards plains with a more benign exposure than the rest of the country, where the hurricane would do

them less harm. In short, they busied themselves entirely with their personal safety and gave absolutely no thought to their supposed status within the army, nor of the goal they were pursuing, except perhaps to heartily curse the leader who had led them into such a predicament. Mullah Husayn Bushrui and his comrade Hajji Muhammad Ali observed the enemy's movements very closely. They counted on the storm; it was very timely and they did their best to take advantage of it. They could not have hoped for better. Notified by his scouts, Mullah Husayn left the castle at first watch. It was the fifteenth of the month of Safar;[5] he was followed by no more than three hundred men; but diehards, as resolute as himself; and, despite the darkness and the accidents of the terrain, he cast these fellows over the royal army, absolutely unprepared for this additional peril and which, scattered everywhere as I have said, had largely regrouped in the mountain village of Daskas,[6] where the prince, very tired, had installed himself in the best house, dined, had gone to bed and was sleeping.

Mullah Husayn had marched as fast as the night, the storm, the copiously falling snow and the state of the road would permit. To all the members of the shahzada's army they encountered, horsemen or infantry, they said: "We are Abbas Quli Khan's men, and he has sent us to your aid, he himself is coming up behind us with more men". These words caused the soldiers of the royal army to lose all their suspicions and allow the Babi troupe to pass without dreaming of sounding the alarm, let alone of offering resistance. In this way the enemy succeeded in reaching Daskas, entered the streets of the village and took measures to surround the house where the prince was sleeping. There were doubtless karauls, or sentinels, placed around this residence; but following an age-old custom in the Orient, a custom in force at the siege of Bethulia as well as around the tomb of Our Lord,[7] a sentinel is a warrior who sleeps to the best of his ability at the post he is supposed to be guarding. Mahdi Quli's soldiers in no way gave the lie to this rule. Wrapped up in their felt blankets, they were stretched out on the ground, heads well covered against the falling snow. Some of them however were aroused by the noise. They asked what was happening; but, upon hearing the agreed response, that it was the sardar Abbas Quli Khan's men, they returned to the duty of continuing to snooze. So the house was promptly and thoroughly surrounded and the entrances to the street secured so that no one could come to the prince's succour. Then Mullah Husayn gave the signal and all his men began to shout: "The prince is dead! Every man for himself!" Thereupon the door was quickly broken down with axes whilst short shrift was being made of the karauls. Having rapidly forced their passage some of them began to set the house on fire at various points whilst Mullah Husayn and the rest of his men attacked with unbridled fury those of the prince's already demoralized officers who came running, and battered them to death. The commotion, the turmoil, the terror can easily be imagined. The poor wretches, surprised as they were, did not even know whom they were dealing with, and imagined devils as much as Babis. They were jostled from room to room, they stumbled on the terraces. The fire had rapidly spread to an imamzada, or small wooden shrine adjoining the prince's house and whose old beams blazed wonderfully. The Muslims could then see the glint of the

sabres, the kanjars, the gamas, the rifles of their adversaries, in the gloomy shadows of the ominous flames. All those who were cut down or shot the Babis threw into the fire. "Burn, infidel!" they said. It was an appalling scene: bravery, fury, religious exaltation were pitted against uncertainty, desperate courage, the desolate renunciation of the possibility of saving one's life. Sawad-Kuh's tufangjis, who were defending the interior of the house where the prince had been sleeping, conducted themselves bravely. Nevertheless, the Babis broke through and entered.

First the two princes were killed, Sultan Husayn Mirza, son of Fath Ali Shah, and Daud Mirza, son of Zill al-Sultan, the king's uncle. Their bodies joined those of their defenders in the burning home. Mirza Abd al-Baqi, member of the Council of State, fell beside them. He too was thrown into the fire. An instant later the head of the army, Mahdi Quli Mirza, was attacked. A Babi on horseback fired at him and missed from atop the courtyard wall. Another, dropping into the small interior courtyard where he was, ran towards him and fired at point blank range but also missed. The prince understood that all resistance was futile. He left the house and, more fortunate than many of the victims of that night, succeeded in escaping from the village and reaching the desert.

Within the space of a few moments his army, already something of a rabble, was scattered by Mullah Husayn's three hundred men. Was it not the sword of the Lord and of Gideon?[8] Whilst most of the fugitives ran blindly, the men of Ashraf, less fearful than the others, resolved to stay together and not to seek the almost certain death that awaited them in the mountains, rendered impassable by the wintry weather. They satisfied themselves with finding a fairly strong position not far from the village, where they piled a circle of large rocks around themselves so as to form an entrenchment.

Some Babis had seen these brave fellows hurrying their work and had run to inform Mullah Husayn of it. He did not want his victory to remain incomplete, so he sent off Hajji Muhammad Ali Barfurushi to destroy the insolent group that was defying him. The Hajji, sabre in hand, ran with his men towards the men of Ashraf. But at the first volley a bullet entered his mouth and he fell to the ground. The Muslims noted with interest that the bullet entered by the mouth, punishing, in their opinion, all the blasphemies uttered against the religion of the Prophet. As for the Babis, they followed their leader, and the Ashrafis would have obtained the reward for their bravery if another band of enemies had not come running to attack them with renewed fury.

So the battle resumed, but the Ashrafis gave no ground. Certain of death if they surrendered, and drawing hope from their resolution, they intensified their fire and, good shots like all Mazandaranis, gave their terrible assailants as good as they got. Day came and illuminated their resistance. Since the place where they had made their stand was surrounded by an amphitheatre of mountains, that handful of young men could be seen from far and wide multiplying their efforts to escape from a seemingly certain death. The remnants of the army, unable to negotiate the snow-bound mountain passes, and being only a short distance away, watched them, and probably prayed for them; but not one leader, not one soldier made any effort to

come to their assistance. The sight of heroism can be just as chilling as it can be inspirational. Finally, one by one, the Ashrafis succumbed. The Babi victory was complete. They gathered up whatever booty they could find in the village, loaded the prince's baggage and that of his men onto the beasts of burden and returned undisturbed to their castle in the presence of the royal army, petrified with fear, although incomparably stronger and more numerous. But such was their despondency that a body of six hundred men, which had neither been engaged nor attacked and knew of the events of the night only by hearsay, notified that the retreating Babis would cross the terrain where they were, decided to a man to flee long before the latter appeared. The truth is that those Muslims were not at all far removed from considering Mullah Husayn a prophet.

We left Mahdi Quli Mirza running far from his burning house and wandering alone in snow and darkness through the countryside. At dawn he found himself in an unknown gorge, lost in some godforsaken spot but in reality less than half a league from the scene of the carnage. The wind carried the sound of musket fire to his ears.

In this sad state, and not knowing what was to become of him, he was found by a Mazandarani on a fair mount who recognized him as he was passing by. The man dismounted, bade the prince take his place in the saddle and offered to serve as his guide. He took him to the house of some peasants, where he installed him in the stable; in Persia this is in no way considered an unworthy lodging. While the prince ate and rested, the Mazandarani remounted and rode off all over the countryside giving all the soldiers he met the happy news that the prince was alive and well. In this way, group by group, he brought all his men back to him, or at least a respectable contingent.

If Mahdi Quli Mirza had been one of those haughty spirits who are not deterred by failure he may well have judged his situation but slightly modified by the misfortune of the night before; he might have considered the matter as the result of surprise, and would have attempted at the very least to try to keep up appearances by holding his ground with his remaining troops, for in fact the Babis had withdrawn and were nowhere to be seen. But the shahzada, far from being able to boast of such steadfastness, was a poor character, and when he saw himself so well protected he hurried to leave his stable and go to the village of Qadi-Kala, from whence he sped with all haste to Sari. This conduct had the effect of magnifying throughout the province the impression produced by the initial reports of the surprise of Daskas. Everywhere people lost their heads: the unfortified towns felt themselves exposed to all manner of dangers, and, despite the harsh weather, caravans of peaceful but distressed inhabitants carried the women and children off into the wilds of Damavand to spare them the inevitable dangers that the shahzada's prudent conduct clearly suggested to all. When Asiatics lose their heads it is not by halves. However that situation could not long go on, least of all for the prince. Being afraid was insufficient justification, he had above all not to irritate the terrible Amir Nizam, who would certainly be far from satisfied when he heard the news. Bringing the wrath of that minister down upon his head was perhaps even worse than having to deal with Mullah Husayn Bushrui. In his perplexity the poor man, not knowing

which way to turn, gave orders to recruit new forces and to form a new army. The populations of the towns showed scant enthusiasm for serving a leader whose worth and intrepidity they had so recently seen in action. However, by means of a little money and a lot of promises the mullahs in particular, who never lost sight of their cause, and who were certainly the most affected by all these events, managed to assemble a good number of tufangjis. As for the tribal horsemen, no sooner do their chiefs get in the saddle than they do likewise, and ask for nothing better. Abbas Quli Khan Larijani obeyed without hesitation the order to send a new contingent. This time however, either mistrusting that the prince's ineptitude would compel his relatives to run unnecessary risks or because of a certain ambition to make a name for himself he allowed no one else to command his men. He himself rode at their head, and in a bold stroke went straight to attack the Babis in their refuge instead of joining the royal army, then announced to the prince that he had arrived at and was laying siege to the castle at Shaykh Tabarsi. Moreover, he announced that he had no need of help or assistance, that his own people sufficed and that further, if it would but please his Highness to witness the spectacle of how he, Abbas Quli Khan Larijani, would deal with the rebels, it would afford him great honour and pleasure.

Turkish and Persian nomads spend their lives hunting, often, too, waging war, and above all talking about hunting and warfare. They are courageous, but not every day, and Brantome's epithet of *journeyman*, which he coined to describe the type of courage he had often witnessed in his experience of wars of the period, might well be applied to them. But what these nomads are in a consistent and uniform manner is great talkers, great razers of towns, great massacrers of heroes, great exterminators of multitudes; in short, naive, openly showing their feelings, very vivid in expressing that which exalts them, extremely amusing. Abbas Quli Khan Larijani, most assuredly a man of good birth, was the very embodiment of the type.

Mahdi Quli Mirza, as we have just seen, could hardly pass himself off as a reckless warrior, but he replaced intemperate intrepidity by another quality useful to a general: he did not take his lieutenants' bragging literally. Fearing therefore that the imprudent nomad might encounter some mishap he immediately dispatched reinforcements. So Mushin Khan Surati and his cavalry, a troupe of Afghans, Muhammad Karim Khan Ashrafi with some tufangjis from the town and Khalil Khan, of Sawad-Kuh, with the men of Qadi-Kala sped off at once. All of these chiefs, either in a spirit of contradiction towards the prince or because they had no wish to see their habitual rival distinguish himself by the exploit he had announced, plied him with the wisest advice and generally did their utmost to cool his ardour. They remonstrated with him that one should never over-estimate oneself and that Mullah Husayn would surely not be easy to overcome. It was well known, moreover, just how formidable the Babi leader was in his imperious resolutions, measures must be taken to protect themselves and the first operation must be to build a stone retrenchment before the walls they wished to raze to the ground, where they would be safe from raids.

Abbas Quli Khan Larijani responded after the manner of a French nobleman of the Middle Ages. "Never", he said to the other chiefs, "never will it be said that men

of my tribe hid themselves behind a pile of rocks in the face of the enemy. Our only retrenchments are our bodies!" Nothing else could be gotten out of the sardar and it became as he wished. So camp was pitched facing and around the Babi castle with no other precautions than the usual sleepy sentinels.

The Babis seemed terrified. They did not appear on top of their walls; they did not appear at the meurtrières of the upper levels: they made not the slightest sound. They even sent out emissaries to ask for mercy. The delighted sardar promised to hang them. Negotiations began and several deputations were sent to Abbas Quli Khan. He refused to mitigate his severity, but the other chiefs did not hide the fact that they would be glad to resolve matters more amicably, and so, with this support, the deputies argued, accepted, gave in and returned to the castle for fresh orders. Thus several days passed in discussions, and the sardar in no way considered it wasted time, quite on the contrary, it was time admirably employed for his greater glory. It goes without saying that surveillance had gone from being mediocre to being non-existent, and that the troops were spread out before the castle as trustingly as if they had been at home.[9]

One night – it was the tenth of Rabi al-Awwal[10] – three hours before first light, Mullah Husayn Bushrui, at the head of four hundred tufangjis, left the castle in the utmost silence. He advanced rapidly towards the camp, and falling on the groups of sleepers he and his men began to cut their throats for all they were worth. They were contingents from Hazar-i Jarib and from Sawad-Kuh. Those militiamen, finding themselves thus assaulted, fled towards where the men of Qadi, of Surati and Ashraf were camped, and, each frightening the other, the whole jumble began to run like a flock of sheep towards the sardar's quarters. To further increase the confusion, the Babis, as they struck and pursued, set fire to the huts and shelters, and bloodcurdling screams, their own, intended to frighten their adversaries, and those of the latter, in no short supply, terrified as they were, created a frightful pandemonium. Nobody recognized anybody; nobody knew where they were. Dazzled by the glare of the flames or blinded by the darkness they fired on each other, and the bullets struck more friends and confederates than assailants.

The awakened sardar, surprised by the sudden invasion that was washing over him, barely managed to find and to mount a horse. Furious, but forced to recede, he fought his way to the far side of the camp, away from the castle, and, unable to make the decision to flee made a last-ditch stand amidst some of his relatives who had rejoined him and were holding their own alongside him. Amongst them Muhammad Sultan, yavar – a title we shall translate as major – threw himself in front of the crowd and begged those who were fleeing to stop, promising to bring them victory over the enemy. At that moment Mullah Husayn appeared on horseback, spurring on his men and striking harder than anybody. Upon seeing him the yavar begged louder and louder and called out: "Stop! Stop! Here he is, that man without religion and without faith! Let us capture him! Strike him! It is he who must fear and not ye!" Whilst the gallant gentleman tried thus to revive the spent courage of his men, the Babis surrounded him; nobody came to his defence, and in a few minutes, despite his resistance, sabre blows hacked him to the ground.

However, his example was not fruitless and found several imitators. Mirza Karim Khan Ashrafi, Aqa Muhammad Hasan of Larijan and a few tufangjis from Ashraf quickly built themselves a small stone rampart and swearing that they would neither flee nor let themselves be taken alive began to fight with that absolute fearlessness which such resolutions always bring forth in Asiatic soldiers. Whilst they were thus occupied Mirza Karim Khan said to Aqa Muhammad Hasan Larijani: "You see that man in the green turban amongst the Babis – fire at him"! He himself then immediately did so.

The man in the green turban was none other than Mullah Husayn himself. He raised his hand to his breast and it was clear that the bullet had struck there. At the same moment Aqa Muhammad Hasan, who had heard his comrade's words and seen their effect, lowered his weapon and pulled the trigger. This time Mullah Husayn was struck in the side. Wounded as he was, the Babi leader continued giving orders and directing the movements of his men until he saw that the sum of possible results had been achieved and then gave the signal to retreat, himself bringing up the rearguard.

The return to the castle did not pass without mishap. The tufangjis of Ashraf, entrenched behind the little wall, sortied with their chief and harassed the Babis. But they were too few to cause any great harm, although all in all the battle had cost the people of the castle a hundred men dead or put out of action, and their leader was wounded. The camp was destroyed however. The disaster was nevertheless far from equalling that of Mahdi Quli Mirza. Part of the army had certainly scattered, but some groups were able to rejoin at daybreak and the rest were rallied in the course of the day. Abbas Quli Khan Larijani had been forced back to the edge of the camp with about fifty men. Abdullah Khan, the Afghan, kept only three men with him, but had resisted stoutly. Muhsin Khan had done likewise with a few Ashrafi foot soldiers.

When day broke the Babis were in their castle and Mirza Karim Khan Ashrafi with his companions was lord of the battlefield. They began to cry out to advert and summon any of their comrades who might still be nearby and able to hear them; and in fact the sardar and the isolated pockets of men spread around the area immediately came to join them. They went over the battlefield and buried those of the dead who could be identified as Muslims. As for the Babi corpses, their heads were cut off; this booty was placed aside as a trophy, and a few days later these remains were sent to Barfurush and the other towns of Mazandaran in order to show that the Babis were not invincible. The sardar, however, sent Abdullah Khan, the Afghan, to the prince, to recount events and, inasmuch as it was in his power, to put himself in the most favourable possible light.

The task was not too difficult. It is true that the Babis had returned to their castle without completing their victory; that they had permitted themselves to be pursued by a handful of men, and that during the next and the following days they had allowed the enemy to bury their dead and to shamelessly decapitate the bodies of their own fallen. The cause of this uncharacteristic weakness was as follows: Mullah Husayn's two wounds were serious; he was losing a lot of blood. His energy

allowed him to stay in the saddle and to continue giving directions and orders for a time; but he soon felt that his strength was waning and that he could no longer persist in struggling against the pain without bringing about a deplorable catastrophe, both for himself and for his men, who could not do without him. He therefore with great reluctance ordered the retreat and abandoned a victory that had been a foregone conclusion. It was high time, for when he reached the castle gate his strength left him completely and he fell from his horse amidst his horrified soldiers.

He was carried dying to his bed. There he summoned his officers and exhorted them to the greatest firmness of intent. He forbade them to believe that he could actually die; they should not be deceived by appearances; in reality, no more than fourteen days after a transitory death, he would be reborn. He made them swear never to abandon the precepts he had communicated to them and always to retain an absolute fidelity, love and respect for his Sublime Highness. As for his body, he advised his most trusted confidants to bury it in secret in such a way that no man might know where it had been placed. There is no doubt that in this way he wished to spare his corpse the ravages of the Muslims and his head exhibition in town squares. Finally he expired, and the new religion, which in him acquired its protomartyr, lost at the same time a man whose force of character and skills would have rendered great service if his life had been prolonged. Muslims naturally have a deep horror for the memory of this leader; the Babis a corresponding veneration. They are both right. What is sure is that Mullah Husayn Bushrui was the first in the Persian Empire to give Babism the status in the minds of the people which a religious or political party only acquires after having demonstrated warlike virility.

After the burial of Mullah Husayn, carried out according to his prescribed precautions, the Babis of the castle had to bury that sizeable number of the wounded who had subsequently succumbed to their injuries. Then they made a new sortie. But the sardar had departed and returned home with his men. Relieved of the need to fight, they opened the tombs of the Muslims, dragged out the corpses, decapitated them and, having planted large stakes in front of the main gate of the castle, stuck the heads on the points. As for the bodies, they cast them into the desert to serve as prey to bird and beast.[11] At the same time they carefully gathered up the mutilated remains of their comrades and buried them with respect. That done they returned to their fortress.

6

FALL OF THE CASTLE OF SHAYKH TABARSI, TROUBLE IN ZANJAN

However, without knowing anything about what had happened at the castle of Shaykh Tabarsi the shahzada, Mirza Quli, had set off with all the troops he could muster to join the sardar Abbas Quli Khan Larijani. En route he met messengers of that lord, who presented him with several severed heads stuck on spears, some quite ambiguous letters, and swore by his head, by the revered head of the king and by Murtada Ali that the Babis had been utterly defeated and destroyed or that if by some chance a few remained, of that they could not be sure, it could certainly not be many. The prince, used to making similarly gratifying speeches to his superiors, was not convinced; but the sight of the heads at least seemed a good sign, and he went on, full of good cheer, viewing the taking of the castle as now a mere formality and fearing that the honour thereof would go to the sardar and be detrimental to his own position. He rode on, absorbed in these reflections, some quite agreeable, others less so, and eventually arrived at a port on the Kara-Su, near Aliabad, and stopped there for the night. Everyone was peacefully preparing his dinner when the confidant of the sardar arrived, Abdullah Khan, the Afghan, with the mission of supplying some serious explanations, and who, aware of the difficulty of his task, went first to Mirza Abdullah Navai, one of the prince's advisors with whom he had a close relationship, and told him quite frankly, inasmuch as frankness is possible, all the details of what had happened hoping in that way to save some face and put the matter in as good a light as possible.

The two friends, after an endless discussion about what should be said and what should be omitted, went together to the prince and recited the story they had agreed upon. Mahdi Quli Mirza was rather surprised. It was not what he had been expecting. But what struck him most was that the sardar could now be considered as having been beaten just as he had been, and that reflection, together with all the accompanying corollaries for his self-esteem, put him in a very good mood. He not only no longer feared that one of his lieutenants might have covered himself with an enviable glory by taking the Babi castle, but he was now not the only one who had failed: he had a companion, and a companion whom he hoped to make bear the brunt of the responsibility for both defeats. Delighted, he assembled his leaders, great and small, and announced the news to them, deploring, naturally, the sad fate

of the sardar, and making fervent wishes that that valiant soldier might have more success on another occasion.

The shahzada's satisfaction was not completely shared by the commanders of the bands. For them this new affair showed that the situation of the country was going from bad to worse. It was not just that a number of men had succumbed in a badly led mission, but that everyone could see that the Babis' authority in the province was growing, that a large number of still undeclared people were just waiting for them to take one step forward in order to join them, that their emissaries were so daring and supported by the atmosphere of fear that no one anywhere dared arrest them although they were well known, and finally, that if another conflict were necessary one could scarcely count on troops who had been beaten and mistreated each time they had come to blows with the sectarians. Reasonable people concluded from all this that rather than wandering all over the mountain, laying themselves open to some new disaster that might ensue at any moment from their incurable carelessness and rare incapacity in all fields they would be better advised to reflect very carefully over what should be done and to strike only when they were almost sure of attaining their goal. But this way of seeing things did not appeal to the prince, and he and his men arrived at the castle of Shaykh Tabarsi, where they pitched a new camp.

That at least was the intention; but the sight that met his eyes made him change his mind. In front of the gate he saw heads atop bloody stakes; on all sides half gnawed, rotting corpses, an infect stench all around. He did not want to stay there, and went to set up camp a farsakh, about a league and a half from that awful place, where there is a village named Kashak.[1] There he established his headquarters, beat the surrounding countryside for recruits and dispatched a group of men to clean up around the castle. Then he began to build a siege wall around the fortress, and decided that this time they would set about the matter in such a way as to shut the Babis in behind their walls, harass them continuously with sustained fire, and so that when they tried to leave the castle they would be pushed back from the high ramparts that were being built. The prince stationed guard posts at regular intervals along the siege wall; he put Hajji Khan Nuri and Mirza Abdullah Navai in charge of provisions. As chief officers he chose Abbas Quli Khan Larijani, who since his lack of success was of more interest to him; then Nasrullah Khan Bandabi,[2] another tribal chief, and Mustafa Khan, of Ashraf, to whom he gave command of the brave tufangjis of that town and of those from Surati. Less distinguished lords commanded the men of Dudanga and Bala-Rastak, as well as a certain number of Turkish and Kurdish nomads, who felt misunderstood in the bands of the great leaders. These Turkish and Kurdish nomads were in particular given the task of keeping watch over the enemy. Their numerous bad experiences had begun to make them acknowledge that it might be a good idea to keep a better watch in the future. The Turks and the Kurds then, were ordered not to lose sight of enemy activity, day or night, and to keep a sharp look-out so as to avoid surprises. Having established these precautions, holes and trenches were dug for tufangjis, who received orders to fire on any Babis who might appear. Towers were built, as

high as or higher than the different levels of the fortress, and by means of continuous falling fire it was made more difficult for the enemy to walk around on their walls or even to cross the interior courtyard. It was a considerable advantage. But after a few days the Babi leaders, taking advantage of the long nights, raised their fortifications above the height of the offensive towers.

So both sides were applying the most ancient procedures of siege warfare.The Alexandrian Greeks, the Romans of Crassus, the Caliphate Arabs would have gone about it no differently. Mahdi Quli Mirza however, in order to neglect nothing, wanted to add something of modern invention to the ancient methods, and had two cannons and two mortars with the necessary munitions brought from Tehran. At the same time he enlisted the services of a man from Herat who possessed the secret of an explosive substance which upon being lit projected itself nearly half a mile and set everything on fire. A test was carried out, with satisfactory results. This composition was thrown into the castle, setting aflame the rooms of reeds, straw or wood the Babis had built inside, either in the courtyard or on the ramparts, and soon reducing them to ashes.[3] While this destruction was taking place the bombs thrown by the mortars and the cannonballs were doing considerable damage to a construction hurriedly raised by people who were not architects, still less engineers, and who had never dreamt that they could be attacked by artillery. In a short time the defences of the castle were dismantled; there was nothing left but beams felled by the fire, debris of charred and smoking wood, piles of fallen stones.

The Babis and their leader, Mullah Muhammad Ali, in no way lost heart. Behind the rubble they dug into the ground and hid in underground passages where the bombs could not reach them, and continued to resist with unflagging energy.

One morning the prince, rendered impatient by the evident progress of his attack and wanting at all costs to conclude matters, ordered that, instead of discontinuing work during the daytime, as was the custom, all the men, with no exception, had to participate in the construction, those who had worked all night as well as those who had slept. Vain protests were offered that many of the men were fasting and needed at least some time to rest. He insisted, he went into a rage, and the stubborn, bored soldiers dispersed in all directions and hid so as not to have to obey. All that Jafar Quli Khan, of Bala-Rastak, and Mirza Abdullah could do was to keep back thirty or so men with whom they marched off towards the site.

The Babis had observed from afar the disorder reigning in the camp and, without knowing the cause, had wasted no time in taking advantage of it. Leaving their ruins and their hiding places, spurred on by the high-pitched screams of their women and children, they fearlessly sprang across the piles of rubble and ran towards the trenches to knock over and set fire to the towers. Seeing them approachng, Mirza Abdullah pounced in front of them and shot down two Babis with his double cartridge rifle. This exploit had the same effect it would have had on a flock of gazelles. It parried the attack, which instinctively turned to the left, where Jafar Quli Khan stood at the foot of a tower of his own construction. That leader, of no less resolve than Mirza Abdullah, imitated him, but not with equal success. The Babis, throwing their rifles over their shoulders, drew their sabres and charged the brave nomad,

who, surrounded, sought refuge in the ditch of his tower. The Babis pursued; his nephew, at his side, had half his head cut off by a sweeping sabre blow. He would doubtless have been killed himself if at that moment the Babis, vigorously assailed by the men of the royal army who had rallied and were rushing to the point of danger, had not had to think of saving themselves and of escaping from the ditch. During the tumult, Jafar Quli Khan raised himself out of the ditch and continued to fight alongside his men, although he was wounded in the side by an axe blow. Finally, he fell. After having created disorder in the trenches and demolished a tower the Babis found it impossible to further extend their advantage. They returned to the fort and were quiet the rest of the day. But again the assailants were disheartened.

The siege had been going on for four months and was making no noticeable progress. The original fortifications had been destroyed; but the Babis had replaced them with an energy that none could deny and worked day and night repairing and extending them. No one could see where it all would end, especially as, as I shall recount later, Mazandaran was not the only part of Persia where the followers of the new religion were giving such terrible proof of their faith, their zeal and their intrepidity. The king and the prime minister, worried by the situation, vented their anger against the leaders they had sent. They did not merely reproach them in the bitterest of terms for their incapacity but threatened to treat them and all the people of the province like Babis if the matter were not resolved very shortly. Then Mahdi Quli was relieved of command and replaced by Afshar Sulayman Khan, a man known for his severity and of great influence, not only over his own tribe, one of the most influential in Persia, but over all warriors, who knew and respected him. He left with the most rigorous instructions.

He went immediately to the castle at Shaykh Tabarsi and reinforced the besiegers with his Turkish cavalry. The construction work recommenced with a feverishness it had not known till then. The leader was strict, his orders known to be unquestionable. With him it was at least as dangerous to retreat as to advance. As soon as a new breach was opened Sulayman Khan threw his troops into it and attacked the fort on all sides at once. The Babis received him with the cold, bedevilled resolve one had come to expect of them.

Mirza Karim Khan however, managed to reach the crest of the wall with some of his men. His fanion bearer, who was following him, immediately fell backwards, struck by a bullet; but Karim Khan reached out and grabbed the fanion, which had not followed its bearer in his fall; then, raising and waving his standard he charged into the mêlée, leading his men through a hail of bullets. He was so far ahead amongst the enemy that the flames of their fuses lit up his face. No less transported than the Babis, he held his position, took one tower, ejected them from it and planted his fanion on the summit.

Seeing this, Muhammad Salih Khan, brother of Jafar Quli Khan, rushed to his aid with a few men from Bala-Rastak, and would have been followed by a large number of soldiers if the frightened Mahdi Quli Mirza had not had his drummers beat the retreat. Hearing the signal that meant they no longer had any support, the two

leaders, who had captured a good position, had to resign themselves to losing it and managed to withdraw. But Sulayman Khan, angered, heaped shame on the prince and on all those who thought and spoke like him. He remonstrated with them that it was by precisely similar actions that they had incurred the wrath of the king. He admonished them severely and declared that the assault would resume the following morning. He based his hopes largely on the fact that the Babis, besides having lost their leader and being few in number, were suffering all the tortures of hunger, their provisions being completely exhausted.

This information had come to them in a rather morally sad fashion. Amongst so many true and resolute people there was one however who lost his courage. He was called Aqa Rasul. The suffering already endured and the knowledge of his inevitable fate had caused his faith to evaporate: thitherto just as exalted and steadfast as his comrades, he deserted. He came to see the prince, who received him joyfully and gave him gifts. What is apt to turn one off great enterprises is that people do not seem prepared to simply return to a humdrum existence when they renounce them; when they weaken they descend from sublimity to wretchedness. Aqa Rasul told them everything that was going on in the fort and filled the Muslims with joy by showing them the certain victory at hand, of which they had still not been sure. He did not stop there but wished to shine in his new position. He had acquired the habit of extremism. Returning to the fort, where his absence had not yet been noticed, he convinced about thirty men from his village, upon whom his noble birth gave him influence and who had only become Babis because of him, to desert, considering it their highest duty to follow their leader, even at the expense of a religion to which they had up till that point given so much.

Having therefore given in to his instigations they left the castle without a word and walked towards the trenches. But the nomads of Larijan who were on guard duty that day and who knew nothing either of the intentions of their new friends or of the agreement reached with the army leaders, fired on them, killing Aqa Rasul and several others, and forcing the remainder to return whence they came. The Babis, who had seen them leave and now saw them returning equally inexplicably, said to them: "You are traitors! Die!" And they were hacked to pieces with sabres. A few days later there was another apostate in the person of Riza Khan, one of the sons of Muhammad Khan, the king's squire, who had followed Mullah Husayn and up until then bravely shared the fortunes of the sect. But he too, weakened by hunger, escaped during the night and went to beg mercy of the prince, who pardoned him. A few other Babis were perhaps less guilty, but no less pardonable. They gathered up their weapons, crossed the sleeping royal army and upon reaching the mountains split up and returned to their villages. They betrayed their comrades but not their consciences. Those who remained had not only finished the last of the provisions but had also eaten all the grass they could gather inside their enclosure and the bark of all the trees. Then they cooked their belts and their scabbards. They then had recourse to the expedient suggested to the besieged leaguists of Paris[4] by the Spanish ambassador: they ground the bones of the dead to make a sort of flour. Finally, in desperation, they decided to commit a sort of profanation.

Mullah Husayn's horse had died of wounds received during the bloody night when its master had succumbed. The Babis had buried it out of respect for the memory of their saint, and some rays of glory, some part of the profound veneration in which they held him wafted above the grave of the poor animal.

A war council was convened and, whilst deploring the necessity of discussing such matters, began to deliberate over whether their profound state of distress entitled the faithful to dig up the sacred steed for food. Grief stricken, they decreed the action forgivable. So they took back from the earth what had been given, shared out the shreds of the horse, cooked them with bone flour, ate them and then took up once more their rifles.

The attack commanded by Sulayman Khan began. Under cover of a furious fusillade planks and tree trunks were thrown across the moat on the west side of the castle, and Mirza Abdullah Navai surged across, followed by the Bandabis, a few Ashrafis and the combatants from Bala-Rastak. Night was falling.The Babis rushed to defend the breach and a frightful uproar began, dominated at intervals by the shrill, heart-rending cries of the women mingling with those of their men. The Babis tried to take advantage of the first moments of the attack to leave the castle en masse and to try and forge a path to the forest. In that way they might have hoped, if not for salvation, then at least to prolong and renew the struggle, but they did not succeed, and their impetuosity broke against the sheer number of their enemies, although the latter had initially given way. They had done so, not for want of courage, but rather because almost all the Muslims regarded the Babis as something more than mere human beings, or at the very least as enchanted beings. So they used any means they could to get the better of them. A man from Talish fired golden coins at those who seemed to him the most formidable of the Babi champions. It is noteworthy that this superstition exists both in Persia and in Scotland, where the covenanters fired with silver bullets at those of their persecutors whom they believed enchanted. And struggling with that rage and exaltation that transformed them into more than ordinary soldiers, the two sides mingled together in one great ruck and fought more with pistol and dagger than with rifle and sabre. The men rolled around pêle-mêle in the moat, on the ruins of the wall, on the debris of the towers. Like a whirlwind of leaves, assailants and defenders fell indistinguishably in the vast courtyard of the fort, the living, the wounded, clinging to each other and pushing like the waves of a sea shaken by the swell. The main entrance had finally been breached. Sulayman Khan's soldiers arrived from all sides and the Babis could neither repel them, disband or make their escape. In the midst of the tumult some of them asked to be allowed to surrender.

They were told to apostasize and that then there could be discussions. The battle eased off a little and they began to negotiate. After resolving a few difficulties it was agreed that the Babis would surrender and that with the sole condition that they leave their castle their lives would be guaranteed. Having agreed to this stipulation Mahdi Quli Mirza and the generals recalled their men and returned to camp. Their soldiers remained alert however to the manner in which the Babis would fulfil their commitment. Those soldiers were in any case curious to see what remained of that

formidable garrison, whose exploits had become legendary even before coming to an end.

The Babis appeared; only two hundred and fourteen remained, including a certain number of women, and they were all in an almost unimaginable state of exhaustion. They were given tents, where they installed themselves; they were given food, and spent the next few hours trying to recover their strength, the leaders of the royal army showed them consideration. But the next morning Sulayman Khan, the shahzada, the leaders, invited the most important Babis to eat with them. They accepted, and the meeting was held in the prince's tent, situated in the middle of the camp. From the first they spoke of religion. The Babis in no way tried to hide their scorn and hatred of Islam and began to argue with their usual virulence and lack of restraint. The Muslims gave few words in answer; for acts were about to speak and they now had the pretext they had been waiting for. At an agreed signal soldiers rushed into the tent and arrested the Babis, while another group came over the unsuspecting Babis in their assigned quarters, bound them and took them to where their leaders were already lying tied up on the ground.

Betrayal is sometimes tempting and sweet to the heart of victorious cowardice; but it has a drawback, it cannot be admitted, even to its victims. It must take on another guise. The prince, Mahdi Quli Mirza, claimed that the honour of the religion, that the expressed laws of his faith and his loyalty towards his sovereign forced him to violate his word. He uttered a few phrases, and when they were said he ordered that Mullah Muhammad Ali Barfurushi and his chief officers be separated from the others; the remaining captives were then lined up side by side and disembowelled one by one. It was observed that the entrails of several of those poor wretches were full of undigested grass. The execution over, it seemed that there was still more to be done and so they also killed the defectors who had been pardoned. There were women and children amongst them; their throats were also cut. It was a full day. Many were killed and nothing was risked. All the Babis being dead, and being sure that henceforth they would at worst meet no more than their shades, the Muslims went to Shaykh Tabarsi castle and wandered around in the ruins. They were astonished at the extraordinary efforts it must have required of men without tools and above all without the necessary knowledge to build so many walls, hollow out so many tunnels, co-ordinate so many defences. They carried off the large number of weapons, furniture, rugs and diverse utensils that they found. Some of it came from the booty the Babis had accumulated from their more fortunate expeditions, notably Mahdi Quli Mirza's baggage, which he had the pleasure of recovering.

News of the definitive victory quickly spread to Barfurush, to Sari, to Ashraf, to the towns and villages of the province and during the following days the mullahs hurried to the camp to see how things had transpired. The story of the Babis' death was told; they congratulated those who had not felt themselves constrained by vain formalities or agreements, those agreements not being valid in the eyes of the law. Then they insisted that Hajji Muhammad Ali and his companions be disposed of immediately without awaiting instructions from Tehran. In short, the mullahs acted

like most men when they find themselves in a position to satisfy their passions. We must be fair: it was not because they were mullahs that they spoke, thought, and acted thus; it was enough that they were men.

Hajji Muhammad Ali and his officers were therefore condemned to be executed in the public square of Barfurush, and they were.[5] They had been told in advance, doubtless as a precautionary measure, that even if they abandoned their religion and returned to Islam their apostasy would bring them no advantage and would not prevent them being delivered into the hands of the executioner. They received that communication with cold disdain and died without a word. For several weeks anyone in the region who passed for a Babi was hunted down and massacred. But that search did not go far. The victors had no wish to revive the struggle, on the contrary; and as a large number of semi-indifferents showed traces of a partiality that might become dangerous, the mullahs and the leaders hastened to put an end to the matter and agreed to speak as little as possible of what had happened. Besides, it was easy to see that, if Babism was snuffed out in Mazandaran it was by no means so elsewhere. All of Persia, we can say, the whole country was shaking under the impression of the new doctrine and awaiting with extreme interest what the conclusions that Mullah Husayn Bushrui had been the first to draw from it would produce.

In Shiraz, the Bab, confined to his house,[6] frightened everybody by the evident power that enabled him to stir up trouble so far away in Mazandaran. Khurasan was full of Babis. Some were of long standing, others new recruits. As we have seen, the seed had been sown in Isfahan, Kashan, Qazvin. Qurrat al-Ayn had left Mazandaran as soon as the war broke out. Most of her followers had joined the garrison of Shaykh Tabarsi castle; the others had gone preaching and converting outside the province. As for her, upon reaching Hamadan she had even extended her influence to the Jews, who, strangely enough, also showed a great interest in the new faith in Shiraz and elsewhere.[7] Then she disappeared and only her closest collaborators would have been able to say what had become of her. In all likelihood she had gone to Tehran like the other leaders of the sect and was in hiding. In Qazvin too the the rot had gone far. It was about to explode at that very moment, in a town where nothing had so far indicated that it had gained ground and of which we have not yet spoken. That town was Zanjan, in Khamsa.

Khamsa is a small province to the east of Kaflan-Ku, or Tiger Mountain, between Arak and Azarbaijan. Its charming capital, Zanjan, is, like all Persian cities, enclosed by a crenellated wall containing several towers.The population is of Turkish descent, and apart from government employees, Persian is little spoken. There are many small, thriving villages in the surrounding countryside; powerful tribes visit, especially in spring and winter.

There was in that town a mujtahid named Mullah Muhammad Ali Zanjani.[8] He came from Mazandaran and had studied with a famous teacher, decorated with the title of Sharif al-Ulama. Muhammad Ali had particularly dedicated himself to dogmatic theology and jurisprudence; he had acquired a reputation. Muslims assure us that he had given evidence of a restless and turbulent mind in his functions as

mujtahid. No question seemed to him to have been sufficiently studied or suitably resolved. His frequent fatwas constantly troubled the conscience and the habits of the faithful. Avidly interested in novelties, he was neither tolerant in discussion nor moderate in dispute. Sometimes he prolonged the fast of Ramadan for reasons nobody before him had given; sometimes he regulated the form of prayers in a very unusual way. He was disagreeable to peaceful people, hateful to people of fixed habits. But they also recognize that he had many followers who considered him a saint, prized his zeal and swore by him. If one looks at him impartially one sees one of those numerous Muslims who, in reality, are not Muslims at all,[9] but who are oppressed by a copious and vivacious stock of religious faith and zeal for which they passionately seek some use. His misfortune was to be a mujtahid and to find, or rather believe to find a natural use for his energy in the overthrow of established ideas in matters which cannot tolerate such agitation.

He did so to such a degree that despite his many supporters, and perhaps because of them, his colleagues openly declared war on him, sent accusations to Tehran, solicited the intervention of the high clergy of the town, well paid for investigating all instigators of novelties, and he was summoned to the capital by the Prime Minister. Muhammad Shah was still reigning. Hajji Mirza Aqasi, as was his wont, conversed with him, tried to embarrass him, mocked him, insulted him, presented him with gifts and ordered him to choose some place of residence, to live in peace with everybody, as far as was possible, but to forget Zanjan, where he was not to return.

It was at the same time that Mullah Husayn Bushrui himself was in Tehran. The disgruntled mullah met and talked to him several times and became a Babi to the depths of his soul. After the departure of the apostle he made direct contact with the Bab and drew from that holy correspondence an enthusiasm that equalled that of any of the leaders of the sect. The news from Khurasan, then from Mazandaran, filled him with a nearly frenzied joy. The glory and merit of Mullah Husayn seemed to him worthy of becoming his own glory and merit. Muhammad Shah was dead; his minister had fled. A new reign, new maxims seemed to facilitate his projects. Taking advantage of the fact that the captain of the palace guard, Amir Aslan Khan, had been named governor of Zanjan, he resolved to defy the injunction he had received not to return there. One evening he removed his turban, put on a soldier's uniform, slipped out of one of the gates of Tehran, and, mounting a horse, set off rapidly in the direction of the town, where he had kept all of his influence.

He made a triumphal entry, far more so than if he had returned several months previously. In fact, as a Babi his old friends were supplemented by all the followers of the new doctrine. A large number of wealthy and respected men, military men, merchants, even mullahs, came out some distance from the town to meet him and accompanied him to his residence, not as a returning refugee, not as a suppliant asking only for rest, not even as a rival strong enough to be feared: it was a master who appeared. From the first moment he called to arms. With no care for either the governor or the mullahs he roamed the streets at the head of a large group of armed men. He preached in the mosques and made them resound with accents no less vehement

than those with which Mullah Husayn had troubled the vaults of the temples of Nishapur. In a short time he had gathered to him fifteen thousand men, and in reality he reigned.[10]

News of some of these details had reached Tehran, and, as the matter of Mazandaran was not yet concluded, the new Prime Minister, Mirza Taqi Khan, extremely worried about this new incipient blaze, sent Amir Aslan Khan the order to arrest the perturber. But it was easier to give the order than to carry it out. The governor understood that one false move on his part would precipitate the armed struggle. He had no support; the mullahs and the small number of Muslims who had remained faithful would doubtless perish. So they consulted and resigned themselves to waiting. Some time then passed in mutual observation.

7

INSURRECTION IN ZANJAN, CAPTIVITY AND DEATH OF THE BAB

That situation could not last indefinitely. It was in the interests of the rebel in particular to put an end to it as soon as possible in order to prevent the fervour of his followers from abating. It was however the legitimate authorities who engaged the struggle, and in fact over a fairly trifling matter, taking into account local custom and the serious reasons that ought to have led the governor to procrastinate.

One of Mullah Muhammad Ali Zanjani's followers had an ongoing dispute with the tax authorities and had several times refused to pay his debt. This is a more than common occurrence in Persia, and if their adversary has influential protection the authorities generally show little assiduity in pursuing the case; they gladly reach some compromise. It would have been wise to follow the custom in this case and not to consider it unworthwhile to appease a party leader with fifteen thousand enthusiasts at his heels. In Asia, the authorities do not always necessarily hold the upper hand; when they do, all well and good; but when they do not, it is tacitly accepted.

Whatever the case, Amir Aslan Khan had the recalcitrant imprisoned. When Zanjani was informed of this he expressed the most outraged indignation, and demanded that the governor reverse his decision and return his man to him immediately. Amir Aslan Khan declared that he was charged with upholding the law; that Mullah Muhammad Ali would not prevent him in this and that the guilty party would not be released. Upon which Muhammad Ali gave orders to break down the prison door and to bring back his protégé.

Amir Aslan Khan had foreseen the consequences of his response and had mustered all the troops he could find, so when the Zanjani's followers gathered in front of the prison from all over town to carry out their leader's command they found the square occupied. Their irritation knew no bounds. They spilled noisily into the bazaars and side streets, shouting and inciting the people to rise up; they began invading the houses, running on the terraces, breaking, smashing, wrecking, tearing, destroying and pillaging everything in sight; then they swarmed into the dwellings of their main adversaries and razed them to the ground; at the same time fire broke out in several places around town.[1]

Seeing that the decisive moment had arrived, Mullah Muhammad Ali abandoned all restraint. He ordered the construction of barricades, and formed his government.

Hajji Ahmad was named his lieutenant; Hajji Abdullah Narraz, chief counsellor; Hajji Abdullah Khabbar, governor or commander of the square; Abd al-Baqi, prefect of police, and the provost of cloth merchants, Mashadi Sulayman, senior minister. Hajji Kazim Galtuqi, nominated chief of the arsenal, at once set about casting two iron cannons and a number of what are known as zamburaks, which are normally placed on camel-back and launch biscayens. Each member of the party received his appointment, his title, his function, and set to work. Their fervent desire to succeed equalled their desire to obey; confidence in their leader was absolute and universal.

No sooner had the Babis completed the most indispensable preparations than they assaulted the governor's men. One of them, Asadullah, a remarkably brave Georgian slave, died after being wounded five times. Another young man, also named Asadullah, son of the sayyid Hasan, Shaykh al-Islam, and of Hajji Dadash, the merchant's sister, was killed by a bullet. On the Babi side a few men fell and a certain Shaykh, renowned for his physical strength and his audacity, was captured. He was immediately brought before two mujtahids, Aqa Sayyid Muhammad and Hajji Mirza Abul-Qasim, who, applying the stipulations relative to apostasy and rebellion, declared him deserving of death. The governor had the sentence carried out immediately.

Night had fallen however, and the two heavily armed sides awaited daybreak on whatever terrain they had been able to capture or defend.

Picture a Persian town. The streets are narrow, four, five or eight feet wide at most. They are unpaved and full of deep holes, with the result that pedestrians must take infinite precautions in order not to break their legs. The houses consist on all sides of about fifteen foot high walls with no windows overlooking the street, topped by an unrailed terrace, some of them dominated by what is known as a balakhana, a sort of open air pavilion, which generally indicates the house of some wealthy person. Everything is built of clay, pisé, [2] sun-baked bricks, with uprights of kiln-fired bricks. This venerable and ancient type of construction, used in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia before recorded history, has some truly great advantages: it is cheap, it is healthy, it lends itself as well to the most modest proportions as to the most vast pretensions; one can use it to make a whitewashed cottage or a palace covered from top to bottom in shining earthenware mosaics, paintings and precious gilding. But, as with all things of this world, these advantages are somewhat outweighed by the facility with which the slightest strain causes such dwellings to collapse. No cannons are called for; if one is not careful the rain will do the job.[3] This explains the particular physiognomy of those famous sites where memory and tradition show immense cities, of which all that remains is the debris of temples, of palaces, and burial mounds strewn across the plain. In the space of a few years in fact whole quarters disappear if the houses are not kept up.

As all Persian towns are built on the same model and composed of the same elements it is easy to imagine Zanjan, with its battlements and towers, its gutterless, winding, narrow, pot-holed streets. In the centre there was a sort of vulgar citadel called "Ali Mardan Khan castle". On the second day of the insurrection Mullah

Muhammad Ali captured it; it was no mean advantage for him and his followers to gain such a foothold.

On the third day the exalted Babis made a prodigious effort to capture the governor himself. The battle lasted all day, but ceased when their leader, Mir Salih, appointed colonel by Mullah Muhammad Ali, was killed by a nomadic horseman from Kankavir named Abdullah Big. There were numerous losses on both sides and no more actions were undertaken that day.

On the fourth day, to the great joy of the Muslims, Sadr al-Dawla, grandson of Hajji Muhammad Husayn Khan, of Isfahan, entered the part of the town under their control at the head of the Khamsa tribal cavalry from Sultaniya. Reinforcements continued to arrive for several days. First, from Firuzkuh and Maragha respectively, Sayyid Ali Khan and Shahbaz Khan, each with two hundred horsemen of his tribe; Muhammad Ali Khan Shahisun, with two hundred Afshar horsemen; then fifty artillerymen with two cannons and two mortars; so the governor soon found himself in possession of all the resources he could desire and surrounded by a good number of military leaders, of whom several had a considerable reputation. But all this was not completely to his liking. While it is true that these fine tribal gentlemen are decorated with titles we translate as general or colonel, in reality they are feudal lords who command their men like kings and accept for both themselves and their men only those orders that suit them. The result was that, while Amir Aslan Khan could see that he was treated with deference, he must have also felt himself under the supervision of numerous advisors and obliged to count on friends who in fact considered themselves his equals or even his superiors. However, they agreed to mount a combined attack on the Babi barricades and defences.

They succeeded with great difficulty in taking a few streets and occupying a few courtyards; but losses were heavy, and after a few days of that arduous labour they realized that, all in all, they had gained very little ground. They resolved therefore to adopt more energetic tactics, and tunnelled under one of the strategically more important points; misjudging the co-ordination of the attack with the explosion, they took the position, but with so many dead that it would almost have been better if they had been repulsed. Nevertheless, by only announcing half of what had actually happened, they had good news of a sort to send to Tehran. It was high time: tormented and concerned as he was about what problems Babism might bring in the future the prime minister, the Amir Nizam, needed reassurance. He sent more reinforcements and an order to stamp it out completely at all costs. He forbade them to send prisoners to Tehran and ordered that all those taken be tortured and executed on the spot. It did not take such an injunction to excite the combatants. In Asia and in Europe alike street warfare, more than any other circumstance, has the power of instilling such fear and such a high degree of tension into all life-conserving instincts that ferocity develops as a natural consequence. The royal troops were no more willing to show mercy than the Babis, and on both sides anyone who fell into the hands of the enemy was assured of his fate. Day after day they fought, day after day they killed each other; but the Babis were losing ground and retreating, albeit

slowly. One of the most terrible days mentioned in the diary of the siege was the fifth of the month of Ramadan.

From daybreak onwards Mustafa Khan, Qajar, with the fifteenth regiment from Shaqaqi; Sadr al-Dawla with his Khamsa horsemen; Sayyid Ali Khan of Firuzkuh with his own regiment; colonel Muhammad Aqa with the regiment from Nasir, otherwise known as the king's regiment; Muhammad Ali Khan, with the Afshar cavalry; major Nabi Big with his tribal cavalry, and a group of men from Zanjan who had remained loyal, launched a furious combined assault on the Babi defences. Resistance was fierce, but disastrous. The sectarians saw irreplaceable leaders fall one by one, brave leaders, and, in their eyes, saints: Nur Ali, the hunter; Baksh Ali, the carpenter, Khudadad and Fathullah Big, all vital to the cause. Some fell in the morning, the remainder in the evening. I have seen the ruins of that fateful day in Zanjan; whole quarters have not yet been rebuilt and may well never be.[4] Some of the actors of that terrible tragedy have related episodes to me on the very spot where they occurred. In my imagination I can see the Babis going up and down onto the terraces carrying their cannons. Often the flimsy, earthen floors would give way; the weapons were recovered and handed up by strong arms; the floors were shored up with beams. When the enemy arrived fanatical crowds thronged around the cannons, all arms reached out to raise them, and when the bearers fell beneath the hail of bullets a hundred competitors fought for the honour of replacing them. Their faith is unquestionable.

Realizing that he had to retreat, Mullah Muhammad Ali made an important decision: he decided to create a diversion by setting the bazaar on fire. As soon as the Muslims saw the flames rise above the vaults of those long avenues which are the arteries of Oriental towns many of them left the battle to go and put out the fire, and immediately taking advantage of the situation the Babis recovered not only the ground they had lost that day but a portion of that which had been snatched from them on the preceding days. If at that moment Muhammad Khan had not arrived, at that time Biglarbigi and Mirpandi, or division general, at present Amir Tuman, there is little doubt they would have taken the town. He reinforced the troops already occupying the town, brought three thousand men from the Shaqaqi and guard regiments, as well as six cannons and two mortars. Almost at the same time Qasim Khan, coming from the Qarabagh frontier, major Aslan Khan with the Khirghan horsemen, and Captain Ali Akbar from Khuy with his infantry entered the town from the opposite side. They had all received orders from the king in their respective fiefs and had sped off at once to join the battle.

With so many troops things were getting better and better for the Muslims. They occupied positions they had so far been compelled to neglect, and the rebels were left without a single position that was not under threat. The general assault began.

Mullah Muhammad Ali set a trap for the king's regiment by expressly arranging two opportunities for pillaging. The trap succeeded, and having lost about twenty men the battered regiment was pushed back by the Babis. As they retreated, the other attacking columns were hardly faring any better, and the Biglarbigi,

dismayed by the aspect of the town, the heaps of smoking rubble, the Babis' fearlessness and the ubiquitous rage, and wanting above all to follow his instructions and put an end to matters at all costs and as soon as possible, the Biglarbigi decided to negotiate and sent an emissary to parley with Mullah Muhammad Ali.

This resolution must have seemed rather unexpected and even strange to the leaders who had conducted the hostilities up to that point. But it was vociferously supported by Aziz Khan, today commander-in-chief of the forces in Azarbaijan, and at that time the king's first aide-de-camp; he was passing through Zanjan on his way to Tiflis to congratulate the Grand Duke, Crown Prince of Russia on his arrival in the Caucasus. Both courtiers preached peace and harmony; and in order to clearly demonstrate their goodwill and that of the government they freed a certain number of captured Babis who had not yet been put to death. The most conciliatory words were sent to the sectarian leader; tempting promises were made, for him, for his men, for his religion; the only thing asked of him was that he simply consent to a discussion, to try to reach an understanding and put an end to a useless and disastrous war. Even the prime minister's brother, Mirza Hasan Khan, who was on his way to the capital from Azarbaijan, approved the Biglarbigi's proposal. Fighting ceased and the two sides eyed each other; a profound silence reigned in the deserted streets; but sentinels were on the look-out everywhere, from the high terraces, from on top of the bala-khanas, from the domes of the mosques and from on top of those air vents similar to what on ships are called "ventilators" and which in the heat of summer serve to cool those semi-underground apartments called "zir-i zamins".

The truce did not last long. Not even a child could possibly have imagined that Mullah Muhammad Ali would fall for the exaggerated kindliness exhibited by the king's commissioners. In fact Orientals often demonstrate great naivety when trying to deceive or in allowing themselves to be deceived: this is what is laughingly known in Europe as *Asiatic astuteness.* What is sure is that after a few artful manœuvres the two sides understood that they could neither trick nor win each other over, nor come to an agreement. All that remained was to resume the tussle and annihilate each other, and they set about this with great gusto. Because the Biglarbigi not only made promises, gifts, recompenses, but also punished severely the slightest hint of flagging enthusiasm, not only did the fury reach thitherto unseen levels of exaltation but on both sides the cruelty reached its apogee. The Muslims may have been frenetic but the Babis matched them all the way, and invented for their prisoners the torture of burning them slowly over their entire bodies with red-hot metal bars. At point of death the head was cut off and thrown in amongst the Muslim soldiers.

Finally, the threats, encouragement and reinforcements followed in such rapid succession and such an overwhelming disparity in numbers and resources arose that the outcome became obvious and imminent; the revolt was going to be crushed, there was no longer any other possibility. The regiment from Garrus, commanded by the chief of the tribe, Hasan Ali Khan, now a minister in Paris, took Ali Mardan Khan castle; the fourth regiment broke into the house of Aqa Aziz, one of the best fortified positions in the town, and reduced it to dust; the guard regiment blew up

the caravanserai, situated near the port of Hamadan; it lost a captain and a number of men in the explosion but finally took the position. Not only were the soldiers admirably inspired by fear, there was also great booty to be won. The belongings of all the richest families of the town had been successively brought to and stored in the fortified retreats Mullah Muhammad Ali had had built in the areas that fell into his hands.

The situation was desperate, and the Babis were aware of the fate that was in store for them. Then hearts began to fail. As at Shaykh Tabarsi castle some of the weaker souls became apostates and deserters; but they were few in number and solitary, no group defections; there were also some devout and steadfast Babis who did not wish to die; a group of twenty-five of them conspired to force a passage through the royal troops. There was Najaf Quli, son of Hajji Kazim, blacksmith; it was he who had made the two iron cannons. Further, there was Haydar, the grocer, renowned in both camps for his bravery, then Fath Ali, the hunter, and others besides. All together they charged the royal troops, who did not guess their intentions, reached the gate of Qazvin and fled out into the desert, then to the mountains, where they managed to reach Taram. From there they set out for Dizaj. But they were seized by villagers, who tied them up and took them back to Zanjan, where on different days they were tortured and killed one after another. It was not a fate that could inspire other Babis to flee. Perhaps they did not even feel the temptation. What is certain is that the number of deserters was very low, even more so than at Shaykh Tabarsi castle, and there were practically no apostates.

I repeat however that nothing could have been more desperate than the situation of the besieged Babis. Their main and strongest positions had been taken from them one by one. They had practically no food or munitions left, whilst their adversaries lacked nothing. They had lost a number of their bravest champions, and saw more fall each day with no hope of replacing them. On the contrary, at every moment they could see regular regiments arriving from Tehran, Azarbaijan, Hamadan, fusiliers from the militia and tribal cavalry.

Soon two more zealots perished: Hajji Ahmad, comb-maker, and Hajji Abdullah, baker. A few moments later Mullah Muhammad Ali, who was fighting and giving orders in the midst of his men, had his arm shattered by a bullet and fell to the ground. His men hurriedly carried him off to a house to bandage his wounds. As the battle had been raging fiercely few people had noticed; they decided to hide the fact and to defend the house to the last. But what resistance can be offered by flimsy walls of mud and sun-dried bricks? Seeing the Babis concentrate at that point and oppose a furious defence to their furious attack the royal troops raged even more furiously. They dragged up a cannon and a mortar to fire against those fragile, blood-soaked walls, whence bullets were continuously hailing down on them. Suddenly the house collapsed; everything that was inside or on top of it rolled pêle-mêle with the beams and building materials; nothing was left standing, but nevertheless the soldiers were unable to capture that nothing; they could not even approach because resistance was unrelenting, so they beat a retreat and went to try some other spot.

After a week of suffering Mullah Muhammad Ali understood that his last hour had come. Not only had his wound been poisoned by the lack of adequate care but he had also been seriously knocked about and bruised by the collapse of the house. Seeing that his rôle was about to come to an end Mullah Muhammad Ali gathered his followers around him on the carpet where he was about to expire; he had them sit in a circle and gave them his final instructions to the accompaniment of cannon and musket fire. They greatly resemble those left to the Mazandaranis by Bushrui.

He made them swear not to be downcast at his loss and to resist the enemy till the bitter end. He demonstrated to them that as, for his own part, he would be reborn in forty days, and that neither in their case would death prove more rigorous, it was really not such a costly exploit; he smiled as he spoke and exhorted one and all to be as gay and of as good cheer as himself and not to be afflicted by the transitory accidents that threatened them. And thus speaking he expired.

His friends buried him in the clothes he was wearing and put his sabre at his side in the grave. The circumstances made strong and rapid direction indispensable, and he was scarcely dead when the terrible void left by his absence made itself felt by the complete lack of command. There was none to be had. Neither brave men nor faithful believers were lacking; but there was no sufficiently powerful personality, and they immediately understood that they were no longer even in a position to sell their lives for what they were worth.

The Babis therefore held a tumultuous and hasty war council, the result of which was that the principal characters, Mirza Riza, lieutenant of the dead leader Sulayman, the cobbler his vizier, Hajji Muhammad Ali, Hajji Ali of Shiraz – sent by the Bab and so badly wounded that he died shortly thereafter – finally Din-i Muhammad and Hajji Kazim Galtuqi, wrote a letter to Amir Aslan Khan and to Muhammad Khan, the Biglarbigi, in which they declared that if their lives and the lives of their comrades were spared they would consent to lay down their arms.

The generals of the royal army were so unsure of the success promised by their overwhelmingly superior forces but which their inferior faith and energy had thus far denied them that they hastily accepted the terms of the capitulation. They declared that not only as military leaders did they renounce any form of punishment of the Babis, but that although religious law formally demanded their extermination, they would not apply it and the vanquished had absolutely nothing to fear. All the promises having been made, understood, explained, written down, the wounded, exhausted and direly ill Babis shouldered their arms, crowded out from behind their barricades and defences and went to the royal camp.

First of all the leaders were asked what had become of Mullah Muhammad Ali. They replied that he was dead; and as this statement was met with incredulity they gave the location of his grave, observing that it would be very easy to verify that they were telling the truth. The generals hurried to the scene; the tomb was opened and they found the Babi leader lying peacefully with his sabre beside him. That sight pleased Amir Aslan Khan, the Biglarbigi and their entourage. It made them laugh, and, at the same time, produced an excitement that soon gave way to renewed rage. The body was dragged from its resting place, stripped naked, and for

three days was dragged around all the streets and squares of Zanjan attached by one foot, showing it less to the people (there was nearly nobody left) than to the gaping ruins, unimpeachable witnesses of his fearless courage as well as his faith. When there was nothing left but scraps of flesh they gave it to the dogs. The booty they gathered in the areas given up by the Babis was shared out amongst the soldiers, but went especially to the leaders. The town was as empty as it was deserted. Religious fury had visited it with murder, fire and destruction; predatory and glana[5] fury. All that was left for the royal troops to do was to start making their way back. It was the third day after the capitulation.

Then Muhammad Khan, Biglarbigi, Amir Aslan Khan, governor, and the other commanders who had guaranteed the Babis safe conduct rounded them all up in the presence of the troops, had the trumpets sound, the drums beat, and gave the order that one hundred picked men from each regiment line up all the prisoners in front of them in single file. They were then ordered to bayonet them all; and did so. Then they took the leaders, Sulayman, the cobbler, and Hajji Kazim Galtuqi, and *blew* them on the mouth of a mortar.[6] This operation, of Asiatic invention, but which, with that superiority European science and intelligence bring to all they undertake, was used by the English authorities during the Indian uprising, consists in tying the patient to the mouth of a piece of artillery loaded only with powder; depending on the amount of the charge various-sized chunks of the victim's limbs are scattered roundabout by the explosion.

The affair now at an end the captives were sorted once more. Mirza Riza, Mullah Muhammad Ali's lieutenant, and every one of any notoriety or importance was chained by the neck and fettered and it was decided to take them to Tehran to adorn the triumph despite the court prohibition. As for the few poor devils whose life or death concerned no one they were left behind, and the victorious army returned to the capital, the prisoners walking in front of the generals' horses.

When they arrived in Tehran the Amir Nizam, prime minister, found it necessary to make further examples, and Mirza Riza, Hajji Muhammad Ali and Hajji Muhsin were condemned to having their veins let. They received this news without emotion; but declared that the bad faith shown to their companions and themselves was not one of those crimes that God Almighty would be able to punish with his ordinary justice; something more solemn and noteworthy would be needed for the persecutors of his saints; as a consequence they announced to the prime minister that soon, very soon, he would perish by the same torture he had caused to be inflicted upon them. I have heard speak of this prophecy; I do not doubt for a moment that those who told me of it were profoundly convinced of its reality. I must note however that when it was recounted to me at least four years had passed since the Amir Nizam had in fact had his veins cut by order of the king. I cannot therefore affirm anything other than that I was assured that the event had been announced by the martyrs of Zanjan.

A few prisoners remained. The initial fury had passed; the greatest worries had disappeared. They could not decide to free them; but neither to spill their blood, and in the end they were left where they were, waiting to see what might happen later on.

The prime minister did not feel that the situation was such that royal power could feel all danger had passed. The nearly successive insurrections in Zanjan and Mazandaran were stifled, to be sure; but agitation reigned in the provinces and was all the more formidable because it manifested itself so little outwardly.[7] In fact, crises of this type arise in the Orient in a completely different manner from in the Occident. In the Occident the people's fever makes itself known long in advance, by writings, declamations, cries, seditious flags, coloured garlands and ribbons, and that type of song that drunken malcontents yell in the gutters of capital cities after dark. When the disease erupts and goes to the brain the patient, in the absence of good sense, generally conserves enough survival instinct to attack only those powers that are unable to defend themselves. There is not one example in either ancient or modern history of a power that did not allow itself to be intimidated being defeated, in fact there are few that have been attacked with any real resolve. In short, crazed Europeans are not as mad as they would like it to be thought.

In Persia feelings are quite different and things proceed in quite a different manner. First there is silence. The explosive idea simmers for a long time; one burns, one sets fire to one's own home rather than trying to ignite one's neighbour's; one is so intent on persuading oneself, on imbuing oneself with the rightness of one's belief that one would never dream of letting others see to what degree one is penetrated by it. It must be noted that there nobody would lift a finger for a political cause. The possibility of such a form of excitation is completely lacking on this ancient land that has seen and weighed up so many things and which is completely impregnated with the notion of their nullity. To move souls nothing less than religious speculation will suffice. In order that a man be prepared to die he needs nothing less than the conviction of being enrolled under God's banner, of fighting directly under God's eye and of being close to touching God's robe. In such a state of mind, in the presence of questions of such an eternal order, the fighter barely considers himself a human being any longer, and it is this that makes him so proud, so absolute, so dangerous. The Babis had been defeated twice; but their principles and their faith had not been dented; the dead might be gone, but the living remained, from whom one could expect not only a courage similar to that of their brethren but thenceforth, in addition, the thirst for vengeance for the beloved victims and the need to share the honour of their martyrdom. With such motives defeat constitutes no more than a greater incentive to continue the battle.

There were Babis everywhere, and the authorities were only too well aware of it. Persia was full of them, and if minds in search of transcendence, if philosophers seeking new combinations, if souls offended by the injustices and weaknesses of the time had up until then wildly embraced the idea and the promises of a new and more satisfying state of affairs, one could easily imagine that turbulent imaginations, enamoured of action even at the price of disaster, that brave and passionate spirits eager for battle, and, finally, the boldly ambitious would be only too keen to rush to join the burgeoning ranks of so many intrepid phalanxes. Mirza Taqi Khan, cursing the laxity with which his predecessor, Hajji Mirza Aqasi, had allowed such a peril to arise and to flourish, understood that the situation could not be prolonged

and wanted to eradicate the evil at its source. He persuaded himself that that source was the Bab himself, author of all the doctrines that were troubling the country, and he wanted to make that source disappear. The Bab, who had been left in Shiraz for a long time, half hidden in his house, surrounded by a growing number of disciples but quite free to act, had however been arrested after the Mazandaran insurrection and taken to the fort at Chihriq, in the Caspian province of Gilan. He was kept there but not closely guarded. The prime minister decided to make him responsible for all that had happened, although he had played no direct part in the insurrections and not the slightest evidence had been found that he had fomented, directed, advised or even approved them, and, judging by Ali Muhammad's personality, as well as by the opinion of many of his followers, the reality of that absolute abstention is not in the least improbable.[8] Nevertheless, Hajji Mirza Taqi resolved to strike the monster of Babism at its head, and he convinced himself that once this blow was struck and the instigator of the turmoil was removed from the scene and no longer capable of any action that everything would return to normal. However – quite remarkably for an Asiatic government, and especially for a statesman like Mirza Taqi Khan, who never looked very closely at an exaggeration of severity – that minister did not begin by limiting himself to ordering the death of the novator. He decided that it would be best to first destroy him morally. To drag him out of his retreat in Chihriq, where an aura of suffering, of saintliness, of knowledge, of eloquence, surrounded him and made him shine like a sun; to show him to the people as he really was, that is, as he imagined him, and destroy his prestige, would be the best way of preventing him from causing more damage. In fact he pictured him as a vulgar charlatan, a timid dreamer who had not had the courage to conceive, let alone direct the audacious undertakings of his three apostles, or even to take part in them. A man of that kind, brought to Tehran and confronted by Islam's most skilful dialecticians could not but yield shamefully, and his prestige would evaporate far better in that way than if, disposing of his body, they allowed the phantom of a superiority that death would have rendered irrefutable to continue to float in people's spirits. So the project was formed to have him arrested, to bring him to Tehran, to show him publicly all along the route, chained, humiliated, to make him debate with the mullahs, imposing silence when he displayed temerity, in a word, to subject him to a series of unequal combats where he would be bound to lose, having been demoralized in advance by so many means designed to break his courage. It was a lion they wanted to enrage, keep on a chain and pull out its claws and teeth, then give to the dogs to show what short work they could make of it. Once defeated it would matter little what they decided to do with him.

This plan was not devoid of merit; but it was founded on suppositions whose principles were far from proven. It was not enough to imagine the Bab without courage or resolve: he had to really be so. The character he had shown in the fort at Chihriq however, did not inspire such conclusions. He prayed and worked continuously. His gentleness was unfailing. Those who approached him were charmed by his countenance, by his manner, by his language; including many of the soldiers who guarded him.[9] His death seemed to him imminent. He spoke of it often, as if of

an idea that was not only familiar to him but also pleasant. What if then, having marched through all of Persia, he did not weaken, if he showed neither arrogance nor fear but remained aloof from his present situation, if he confounded the pack of prodigies of knowledge, of skill and eloquence who would confront him, if he remained more than ever the Bab for his old followers and became the Bab for the indifferent or even for his enemies? It was a great risk for great gain, but also for great loss, and, upon consideration, it was a risk they dared not run.

Regretfully then, the prime minister decided to make do with a simple condemnation to death, and having summoned Sulayman Khan, the Afshar, charged him with bringing to prince Hamza Mirza, the new governor of Azarbaijan, the order to remove the Bab from the fort in Chihriq and to take him to the citadel of Tabriz, where he would later be informed of what to do with him.

The shahzada wasted no time in obeying, and the Bab, closely guarded, in chains, was led out under strong escort from the fortress where he had been living for about eighteen months and taken to Tabriz with two of the disciples who had remained in confinement with him. One was the sayyid Husayn, from Yazd, and the other Mullah Muhammad Ali, son-in-law of Aqa Sayyid Ali Zanvari.[10] The latter belonged to a very rich and respected family of merchants of Tabriz, and his brother had made and continued to make extraordinary efforts to bring him back to Islam and to persuade him to abandon his master.

As soon as Hamza Mirza had delivered the three heretics to the citadel, in obedience to the explicit instructions of the prime minister, who was still weighing over his original idea, he assembled the mullahs and put to them the idea of having a debate with his principal prisoner during which they could not fail to cover him with confusion by revealing his errors and bad faith. But the mullahs pointed out to the prince that the time for such discussions was past and that what was now necessary was to put the Bab to death as soon as possible.

Hamza Mirza did not reply, and ordered the meeting of a council for the same evening, where the Bab would appear before his judges. The assembly was held in the citadel. In the hall were Mirza Hasan, brother of the prime minister and Vazir Nizam, or inspector of the regular army, Hajji Mirza Ali, son of Hajji Mirza Masud, former minister for foreign affairs under Muhammad Shah, lastly, Sulayman Khan, the Afshar. The mullahs having refused to enter into any religious discussion with the captive, the secular branch, more fervent or less prudent, took their place, and when the Bab was led before his judges Hajji Mirza Ali began to put to him in a very vehement tone several questions on the traditions of the Prophets and the Imams. The Bab answered, and his followers claim that he completely refuted his adversary's reasoning. That could not have been difficult for him, for it is certainly one of the most vulnerable points of Shi'ite doctrine. To the authentic traditions they possess in common with the Sunnis, traditions which are established as rationally as one might desire, the Persians have added an enormous quantity, which rest on no valid proof and bear no discussion. I have referred to them in the preceding chapters. The Babis are not the first to have pointed out and shown their inanity. For a long time the Jafaris, as quite recently the Shaykhis, have been trying with some

success to rid national orthodoxy of this jumble of often inept and always gratuitous allegations. But for the mullahs, who by this means alone justify the existence of a priesthood, otherwise completely incompatible with the principles of Islam, this terrain is a particularly sacred cow; they defend it vigorously and demand the support of the political authorities. Nothing then is less surprising than that their representatives wanted to judge and condemn the Bab on his opposition to those central issues. But the debate was dragging, and as Hajji Mirza Ali was obviously getting the worst of it Hamza Mirza abruptly interrupted the discussion, and, addressing the Bab, said haughtily: "I have learnt that you claim to be of divine nature and that you have dared to write a Koran that is shamefully widespread amongst the population. If that be the case, turn towards that crystal chandelier and pray that a new verse be revealed to you".

With no display of emotion the Bab did as the prince asked, turned towards the flame, and, in a calm voice, pronounced some Arabic verses that had not yet appeared in his works and which deal with the nature of light and the characters that mark the decadence of authority.

Hamza Mirza, somewhat surprised, ordered that what the Bab had just said be written down, and continuing in the same provocative tone said scornfully: "Does that come from heaven?"

"Yes", the Bab replied.

Here Muslims add that the prince made the observation that a thing of such origin would surely be carved in the memory of the prophets for all time, and the Bab agreed; but a few moments later when the prince enjoined him to repeat the same verses he was unable to do so without introducing variants. The Babis deny this detail absolutely, and in fact it is hard to believe. If one refuses to accept the supernatural origin the visionary attributed to the verses pronounced in these circumstances one is led to believe that they had been composed some time before and that consequently the Bab, reciting them from memory, had no reason to forget them so quickly. To believe, as do Muslims, that this person could improvise alliterated and ornate holy verses in the Arabic language in the position he was in is to accept one miracle in order to furnish oneself with the means to reject another. This is a good example of Asiatic criticism.

In short, from both Muslim and Babi accounts it is clear that the royal commissioners did not fare well in the encounter. Finally they understood that the mullahs had been right to decline any confrontation with the novator and announced to him that he was going to die.

I shall not only state that this procedure was highly irregular from a European point of view; I shall say that it would have appeared thus in all times and from the point of view of all peoples, ever since there have been races beneath the sun who, to use the expression of Herodotus speaking of the Scythians, have known justice. Babi leaders had troubled the State; but the Bab himself had taken part in no such activity and no proof has ever been found that he encouraged his three disciples in their actions. So he was subject only to religious law, and this is what the three commissioners seemed to admit since, lay persons as they were, they tried to bring him

back to Islam and to prove to him that he had erred in distancing himself from it. But although the Koran condemns relapsed heretics and heresiarchs to death, that doctrine, one might say, has not merely fallen into disuse in Persia, it has never been accepted or practised by the political authorities. In preceding centuries as well as in our times the mullahs have insistently demanded its application and never obtained it. Heresiarchs, heretics of all sorts have always shown themselves more or less openly and have never had anything to fear from the secular arm. For four years the Bab himself had seen the mullahs' fatwas break harmlessly against the government's repugnance; he would probably have gotten away with the irritation produced by the uprising in Mazandaran, and it took nothing less than the formidable insurrection in Zanjan to turn the power of the State against him. So in truth it was neither religious nor common law that killed him, it was reason of State.

In fact, from that viewpoint, he could be considered guilty; and even more so since Asiatics do not see reason of State as we do. Our lofty notion of right and its demands probably shine more on this point than on any other. In defining what authorizes secular power to strike what it considers a guilty adversary we have been led, since the advent of modern societies, to repudiate the famous reason of State and to try to disguise it beneath all sorts of veils, of which the thickest and best embroidered has never succeeded in duping nor in satisfying legal conscience. Throughout our history crimes against right have been committed and will surely continue to be so; but we have always blushed with shame and the condemners have been condemned, not by posterity but by their contemporaries, by their accomplices, by themselves. We however had a convenient and well-tempered weapon to hand, of Oriental make: Roman theory on the crime of lèse-majesty; if there have been theoreticians to propose this ferocious doctrine, happily and thanks to our lineage there has never been a tyranny audacious enough or of sufficient longevity to elevate it to a system or to practise it with confidence. We have been men, that is often perverse, impetuous, evil, unjust; but we have never entered on paths that allowed us to feel comfortable with iniquity, and in the most horrible periods of our annals hypocrisy reigns, becomes widespread, disgusts us, but also honours us. We even owe to the superior nobility of our origin and to the greater moral elevation it assures us a particular class of historical figures, of a very marked character, in whom at first sight we see no reason for vanity, but who, by the very reason of their existence, by the place they occupy in history and inevitable manner in which they are perceived, reveal in the great majority of their contemporaries as well as in the succeeding generations the manifest existence of the very feeling they violate. I refer to individuals such as the judges Conradin, Jeffries, M. de Laubardemont[11] and other accusers and public executioners who all bear a certain indelible stigma in the eyes of our people. Here, when reason of State alone strikes a man it certainly forces him to retreat from the terrain where he is an obstacle; but it infallibly transforms him at the same time into a martyr and makes monsters of his judges, even those who have formerly rendered useful service.

In Asia none of this exists. In truth, preoccupation with justice and injustice is so weak there that the idea of reason of State, which is already an excuse or the shadow

of an excuse invented by a suffering conscience, does not exist there at all. Nor are there traces of those reputations tarnished by public opinion, of those tribunals, like the starred chamber or the chambre ardente[12] or military commissions, of which we speak only with reprobation. There is no hypocrisy either, and when they kill, there is not even a simulacrum of a trial: they kill because they are the stronger, because they are the government; they are not obliged to give any reason for what they do, and public opinion does not ask for one and never will, because it thinks the government is of its very nature a combination created for abuse whose only legitimacy lies in the fact of its existence.[13] In our societies, even during the worst days of the worst revolutions there is not a tribunal set up in some cabaret that does not seek to impose, even upon its victims, recognition of its right to judge them and of the principles by virtue of which they are being judged. If one of them makes it clear that he considers himself judged in advance and that the procedures being followed are derisory, he is called to order. But in Asia the naivety of the judges is complete. Hamza Mirza and his assessors had no intention of offering the Bab any illusions; it was of no importance to them to make him believe there was any doubt about the treatment in store for him. Upon appearing before their assembly he was to be well convinced that he was going to be insulted, but by no means judged in our sense of the word, and they did not seek to deceive him on this point. But they were very curious to see if he would weaken or lay himself open to attack in such a way as to benefit their cause. In other words, power, in Asia, has no morality. This is a fact. It comes from God, as do all things. It is a scourge that has the advantage of being attenuated by its perpetuity. Anarchy is only a greater evil because it presents a sickly fluctuation of contending and therefore irritated forces, which are even more dangerous to the peace, well-being and rights of each individual. The result of this way of thinking is that the government permits itself to act in any manner, and that people are no more inclined to see infamy in the betrayal of a surrender, an assassination, an imprisonment, a confiscation or other similar consequences of the temperament Asiatics regard as in the nature of power than they are to be scandalized over earthquakes. But any wise or even moderately reasonable man who has enough to live on stays as far away as he can from public employ and makes it his duty to direct his feet away from those dangerous paths.

After having decided that the Bab would be killed, they wanted to carry out the sentence without further delay or formality, and in Persia it is quite unceremonious. The man is bound, laid out on the ground; the executioner lifts up his chin and cuts his throat in two movements, back and forth, with a cheap knife. But, when they had the Bab by the arm and were ready to proceed in the aforementioned fashion, somebody observed that by keeping it in the family, the public, or at least a part of the public would not fail to believe that the Bab was still alive. In that case, as far as the main objective went, they would have wasted their time; for if everybody was going to imagine that the Bab was not dead, that he was in hiding somewhere and would soon reappear to fulfil his promises, they would in no way have achieved the desired goal and the unrest, rather than ceasing, would increase. So they resolved to act in such a manner that no one might doubt that it was the Bab himself who was

prisoner and who was being put to death. Then, when they had convinced everyone that there was no possible doubt on that point, the final and supreme act should be carried out in such a way that it could not give rise to the slightest doubt.

Thus agreed, early the following day, Hamza Mirza's men opened the gates of the prison and led out the Bab and his two disciples. The solidity of their neck and hand irons was checked; in addition a long rope was tied to their shackles and held by a farrash, then, so that all might see and recognize them, they were promenaded through the town, through all the streets and all the bazaars, continuously insulted and beaten. The crowds thronged the thoroughfares and people climbed on each other's shoulders to get a better look at the man everybody had been talking about. Well distributed, the Babis and half-Babis tried to excite commiseration or some other feeling they could take advantage of to save their master. The indifferent, the philosophers, the Shaykhis, the Sufis, turned away from the procession in disgust and returned home, or, on the contrary, waiting on the street corners, contemplated the scene with silent curiosity and nothing more. The ragged, turbulent, impressionable masses screamed vulgar abuse at the three martyrs; but they were only too ready to change their ideas if only some circumstance would arise that would push their spirits in another direction. Finally, the Muslims, lords of the day, continued to insult the prisoners, trying to break through the escort to hit them on the face or head, and when they had not been beaten back in time or when a bottle thrown by a child hit the Bab or one of his companions in the face, the escort and the crowd burst out laughing.

After having thus shown them to the whole town they were taken to the home of Hajji Mirza Baqir, theologian, where the Muslims assure us that the Bab, on being questioned about his doctrines, renounced them. Then the cortège entered the house of Mullah Muhammad Mamaqani, one of the most important members of the clergy of Tabriz.[14] There, so say the enemies of the Bab, not content with renouncing all he had taught, he wept and begged for mercy; but the learned man answered ironically in Arabic with the phrase: "In that case, to what end did you rebel?"

After leaving the mujtahid the victims were dragged noisily to the home of another clerical leader, Aqa Sayyid Zanvazi. There, as elsewhere, the insults, the blows, the brutality erupted with extreme violence, and the cries of an ever more infuriated rabble covered the words attributed to the Bab. Around him people were crying: "He admits his crimes!" and they beat him. "He is afraid!" and they slapped him. In the name of the law, the three mujtahids of the town did not neglect to ratify, in the presence of the Bab, the death sentence adjudged to him. That formality had a great effect on the crowd, which probably deduced from it that the novator was even guiltier than they had thus far supposed.

On leaving the house of Aqa Sayyid Zanvazi, one of the two disciples, Sayyid Husayn Yazdi, fell to the ground and wept bitterly, asking for pardon and admitting that all strength had left him. He was put back on his feet and stood in front of the Bab, shaking him, for he was as if drunk and reduced to nothing, and was told that if he cursed his master his crimes would be effaced and he would be pardoned. Sayyid Husayn cursed the Bab. He was told that if he spat in his face

he would immediately be released. Sayyid Husayn spat in the face of the Bab. Then he was untied, his irons removed and he was let go. When the cortège had moved on and nobody was left in the deserted street, Sayyid Husayn got up, and, leaving the town, walked off in the direction of Tehran, where we shall meet him again.[15]

The executioners, encouraged by this success, wanted to see if Mullah Muhammad Ali, the other disciple, could not be brought around to a similar conversion. They believed they had a hold on him because his family was in Tabriz and because he was young, rich and accustomed to a very pleasant existence. They tried to wear down his resolve with the fear, tears and entreaties of his young wife and children, who had been brought to the centre of the bazaar; but he remained aloof. All they could get out of him was that, if they wanted to show him some humanity, they would kill him before his master. Seeing that no more was to be gotten out of him and exhausted by the length of the scene, the prince's servants, the soldiers and the executioners, took the martyrs back to the citadel at sunset; they led them out onto a very high rampart from the time of the Saljuq sultans, formed by a perpendicular wall of baked bricks. Strong ropes were passed under their armpits and they were lowered on the outside of the wall, in such a manner that they remained suspended a few feet above the ground. Opposite, in the vast square, the crowd thronged, and everyone could clearly see the two condemned men. It was a Monday, the twenty-seventh of the month of Shaban.[16]

Then the prince's officers ordered a company of the Bahaduran regiment to step forward. The regiment was composed of Christians, and the Muslims later claimed that they had carried out their orders only with extreme repugnance. The Babis on the other hand assert that they had recourse to Christians because they could not trust the Muslim soldiers.

Meanwhile, whilst the two condemned men were suspended side by side, Mullah Muhammad Ali was distinctly heard to say: "Master, are you not content with me?" At that moment the guns fired. The disciple was killed immediately but the Bab was uninjured and the rope that was holding him up in the air was cut by a bullet. He fell on his feet, got up rapidly and began to flee; then, suddenly, seeing a guard post, he hurried inside.

If instead of that movement, doubtless unconsidered, he had thrown himself into the crowd, stupefied by what it had just witnessed and applauding it as a miracle, there is no doubt, and the Muslims are agreed, that the population of Tabriz would immediately and without hesitation have sided with him. Not one soldier, neither Christian nor Muslim would have dared fire on him again; there would have been a revolt, general insurrection, and in an important city like Tabriz, second capital of the empire, things would have gone quite differently from in Zanjan. The Qajar dynasty would probably have succumbed. But the Bab fled into a guard post, and to explain that action one has to tell oneself that, tortured as he had been all day and disorientated by the painful suspension he had just suffered, he was not really aware of what he was doing and walked at random, driven by a mechanical instinct to withdraw to a covered place.

There was a moment of terrible anguish for the military leaders and the supporters of the prince. At first, like everybody else they believed in the miracle and from the sort of roar of admiration from the crowd they quickly understood their danger. But when the Bab was in the guard post an infantry captain, or sultan, named Ghuj Ali entered after him and repeatedly stabbed him with his sabre. The Bab fell without a word; then the soldiers, seeing him drowning in his own blood and consequently vulnerable, approached and finished him off with a few point-blank rifle shots.[17]

The corpse was exhibited or rather dragged through the streets of the town for several days; then it was thrown outside the city walls and left to the wild beasts.

The leader of the new religion was dead, and according to the calculations of Mirza Taqi Khan, prime minister, a profound peace was going to return to the spirits of the people and remain undisturbed, at least from those quarters. But in this case political wisdom was to show itself lacking, and instead of extinguishing the fire they had in fact stoked the violence.

8

ATTEMPT ON THE KING'S LIFE

We shall see shortly, when I examine the religious doctrines preached by the Bab, that the survival of the sect in no way depended on his presence; everything could function and develop perfectly well without him. If the prime minister had been aware of this fundamental point of the enemy religion he would probably have been less eager to get rid of a man whose existence, in that case, could mean no more than his death.

Not only that: that death had a completely unexpected result. When he began preaching the Bab never dreamed of imparting a political aspect to his doctrine. He wanted to bring about a profound religious reform; but he had absolutely no desire to infringe on the field of State affairs or to trouble the reigning dynasty. When the mullahs tried to use gubernatorial power to put an end to the theological bashing they were receiving, and even demanded royal protection, the Babis offered no resistance to that authority and accepted unquestioningly both its origin and its legitimacy. They responded with complete submission to the initial measures taken against them. It is more than likely that the Bab, absorbed as he always was in purely doctrinal meditations or lost in mystical contemplation, would never have felt any urge to depart from that sort of indifferent submission to worldly power. Although he associated himself, at least consensually, with the conduct of his apostles Mullah Husayn Bushrui and Mullah Muhammad Ali Barfurushi when they revolted in Khurasan and Mazandaran, it would seem that he was influenced by them rather than vice versa. During the two years he was incarcerated in the fort at Chihriq he was so absorbed by his theological work and the composition of his now sacred writings that it would be extraordinary if he had been able to actively participate to any degree in exterior events. He limited himself to largely approving their actions and to dying for them.[1] Neither should we forget that he was barely twenty-seven years old when he was martyred.[2]

But what the Bab himself did not do, could not do and did not know how to do, his awe-inspiring first followers felt it their duty to effect. When they were thoroughly convinced that the Qajar dynasty had abandoned the philosophical ideas even the first of the Safavids himself had not found it prudent to practise, that had appealed to Nadir Shah and were, and still are liked by the mass of the population;[3] when they had understood from their discussions with Muhammad Shah and his

minister[4] that, far from wanting to set off on any adventures, the government intended to remain relatively faithful to the Shi'ite orthodoxy that in no way constricted them, they invented the thitherto non-existent Babi politics. Mullah Husayn Bushrui was the originator of the theory. The Bab remained passive; but the majority of the most respected members of the party accepted it devotedly.

It is an unquestioned point of political doctrine in Persia that, in their twofold quality as heirs of the Sassanids via their mother, Bibi Shahrbanu, daughter of the last king, Yazdijird, and of the Imams, leaders of the true religion, only the descendants of Ali have a legitimate right to wear the crown. All other kings are de facto sovereigns; strictly speaking they are even tyrants; in no case are they considered rightful holders of the empire. Having done so at length in another work, I shall here make no further comment on this absolute, categorical and imprescriptible view, foundation stone of the entire Babi edifice.[5]

They pointed out that the Bab, as a sayyid, inherited all the rights of the race of Ali, from the Persian viewpoint because the blood of Yazdijird ran in his veins, and from the Muslim viewpoint because he was a reflection of the Imamate. It could be objected that if the Bab really had a right to claim such precious prerogatives he would come up against many competitors equally as authorized as he, for sayyids are not in short supply. No doubt; but unlike all those other sayyids, his relatives, he possessed in addition the special grace of being the Bab; and to a Babi this third argument was conclusive. So, for three reasons, two of which were incontestable for all Persians and the third of which had a decisive value for all members of the sect, the Bab was the true and legitimate possessor of the throne of Persia.

It should not be imagined however that the Babi leaders, not Mullah Husayn Bushrui himself and even less so Mullah Muhammad Ali Zanjani, were in too much of a hurry to transform this theory into practice. Asia is a land of compromise, of postponements, of middle courses, where one is always charmed and secretly triumphant if for an ox one has demanded amidst lamentations and oaths or rifle in hand one finally gets an egg. In the same way, during the Mazandaran insurrection or even after the taking of Zanjan, the Babis would have been well satisfied with the pure and simple recognition of their religion. If the king and the prime minister had adopted that policy and shown a few marks of esteem to the leaders of the sect it would have worn itself out in squabbles with the mullahs and ended up only slightly more important than the Shaykhis, and in all probability after fifty years it would have been just one more of the innumerable beliefs that pave the Asiatic conscience. The death of the Bab prevented things from taking that direction.

Instead of crushing and discouraging the Babis as they expected his death plunged them into a state of indescribable exasperation. It severed the final ties that had made them hesitate before declaring themselves outright enemies of the Qajar kings. The novators saw themselves in the light of the Koranic prescription that allows the people to do whatever it will or can against a tyrant, a prince who interferes with matters no prince is allowed to interfere with. The leaders met. They came from every province. Their assembly was held in Tehran itself. There was some hesitation as to the Bab's successor; but finally he was not elected but rather

recognized, for certain exterior signs and certain moral faculties divinely designate the leader of the religion. He too was a very young man. He was only sixteen; he is called Mirza Yahya and is son to Mirza Buzurg Nuri, vizier of the Imam Vardi Mirza, governor of Tehran. He lost his mother at birth, and the wife of one of the Babi leaders, one of the members of the Unity[6], who bears the name Jinab-Baha, "Precious Excellence", alerted by a dream to the wretched state of the august child, took him away and raised him until his fifth year. It is recorded that at that time he was sent to school, but he remained only three days because the teacher beat him and his foster mother refused to allow him to return; so his knowledge, which is boundless, is completely miraculous. The Bab had borne the title of *Hazrat-i Ala*, "Sublime Highness". The second Bab is called *Hazrat-i Azal*, "Eternal Highness".[7]

The election was spontaneous and the result immediately recognized by the Babis. However, Mirza Asadullah of Tabriz, nicknamed *Dayyan*, *or "Supreme Judge"*, a very important member of the prophetic Unity who was not in Tehran when it took place, attempted to gain recognition for himself as the new Bab. He hurried to Arabistan and tried to form a party. But the faithful were soon on his trail and caught up with him near the Turkish border, where they tied stones around his neck and drowned him in the Shat al-Arab. That unfortunate attempt did not encourage dissidents. There were a few notable ones however, even amongst the *Letters of the Living One*.[8] Amongst the nineteen members of the Unity there have so far been three renegades: Sayyid Husayn Qurni, exiled in Baghdad; Mullah Muhammad Zarandi and Shaykh Abu Turab.

As soon as Mirza Yahya had been proclaimed leader of the religion he left the capital, where he would have led a tormented existence and certainly had neither the requisite leisure nor security to calmly provide the leadership expected of him. The government searched for him for a long time, since they had heard of the nomination of the new pontiff and had become uneasy in proportion to the disappointment of their earlier hopes and calculations. The Eternal Highness went from town to town testing the courage and constance of the believers. He had to calm them rather than encourage them, and judged it necessary to do so quite actively. He forbade most expressly any new attempt at an uprising, and declared authoritatively that the moment to fight with temporal weapons, if come it must, had still not yet come. He commended the faithful to careful study of the religion, to contemplation and the practice of their duties; as regards all else he reserved the absolute right to reflect upon and arrange matters. For in fact, in deliberating wisely over the causes of defeat and failure he could not have failed to see them in the lack of method and isolation of the undertakings, which had all taken place in very restricted areas and with insufficient forces, and also in the exaggerated confidence and zeal of the apostles. He also stifled the attempts at schism I have just described. This was no great task. The dissident ambitions were easily defeated, and one of the heretics, whom I cannot name since he is still living, is today one of the most devoted and active lieutenants of His Eternal Highness. In the end, since the prime minister so doggedly continued to search for the man who gave him such cause for concern, the latter left Persia and settled in Baghdad, where he had the double advantage of

being in complete security and of being in permanent communication with the considerable number of Persian pilgrims who come and go every year, attracted by the sanctuaries of Karbala and Najaf. There is no doubt that many of these devotees convert to Babism.

Some time passed, and no external sign betrayed the existence of the sect, which however was growing and strengthening its morale. Everybody knew that the Babis had predicted the imminent demise of the prime minister and announced the manner of his death. It is said that it occurred exactly as had been predicted by the martyrs of Zanjan, Mirza Riza, Hajji Muhammad Ali and Hajji Muhsin. The disgraced prime minister was pursued by the royal hatred and had his veins let in the village of Fin near Kashan, just as had his victims. His successor was Mirza Aqa Khan Nuri, member of a noble Mazandarani tribe, and formerly minister of defence. This new depository of power took the title of Sadr al-Azam, borne by the grand viziers of the Ottoman Empire. It was 1852.

After a few months a strange rumour began to circulate in the bazaars of Tehran, and so persistently that it soon acquired universal credence. It was said that the end of the month of Shawwal would be baneful to the king and that on that day he would assuredly die a violent death. The king was at that time living in the country, in the palace of Niyavaran, situated on the slopes of the Shimiran hills at the foot of the Alburz, four leagues from town. More so than today, this was his habitual summer residence. He occupied the residence with his harem and a certain number of servants. Most of the great figures of the empire have houses in the village, which is rich, beautiful, shady, boasts magnificent gardens, and where running water is abundant. Lesser leaders and soldiers camp in the desert at the edge of the cultivated fields.

The king was one day seated in the garden when some water-melons were brought to him, the first of the season. He had some of them cut open and was praising their freshness and succulence while chatting with his family. At that moment he noticed three men who seemed prostrated by the heat working hard in the sun only a few feet from his tent. He had the uncut water-melons brought to them and for a few moments enjoyed the spectacle of the evident pleasure with which the three gardeners were devouring his gift.

Those three men were Babis. They had been sent with the order to gain access to the king's household and kill him. They had therefore obtained employment as gardeners and were awaiting the opportunity to carry out what they considered their duty. But the goodness the king had shown towards them changed their minds. After consultation they agreed that it would be a crime to kill a benefactor in his own house, especially as they were in his service and ate his bread; that they should at least wait three days to allow the merit of his good deed towards them to be effaced. They communicated both their scruples and the manner in which they intended to allay them to their comrades, and calmly waited for the frist to elapse. In this way they reached the final day of the month of Shawwal.[9]

In the morning the king left the palace on horseback to go for a ride. As usual he was preceded by stablemen carrying long lances, grooms leading horses wearing

embroidered horsecloths and a large group of nomadic cavalrymen with their rifles slung across their backs and sabres next to their saddles. In order not to incommode the prince with the dust raised by the horses' hooves that avant-garde had gone on ahead a short distance and the king was riding in step alone at some distance from the considerable train of great lords, chiefs and officers who accompanied him everywhere. He had just passed through the small, low door of the garden of Muhammad Hasan, sanduqdar or keeper of the royal treasure, when he noticed three men standing by the roadside, the three gardeners, two on his left and one on his right, who seemed to be waiting for him. He felt no suspicion and rode on. When he reached them he saw them bow deeply and heard them all shout: "We are your sacrifice! We petition you!"

This is the customary salutation. But instead of remaining still, as is usual, they hurried towards the king, repeating rapidly: "We petition you!" A little surprised the king cried out: "Scoundrels! What do you want?"

At that moment the man on the right grabbed the horse's bridle with his left hand and fired a pistol at the king with his right hand. The two men on the left fired simultaneously. One of the discharges cut through the pearl tassel hanging around the horse's neck, another riddled the king's right arm and back with buckshot. The man on the right immediately grabbed His Majesty's leg and tried to pull him to the ground. He would doubtless have succeeded in unsaddling him if the two assassins on the left had not kept the king up by making exactly the same effort. At the same time the prince was punching the three of them on the head with his fist and the sideward jumps or other movements of the frightened horse paralysed the Babis' efforts and consumed time.

The men of his cortège, who had at first been stupefied, came running. Asadullah Khan, royal equerry, along with a nomadic cavalryman killed the man on the right with their swords. At the same time other lords seized the two men on the left, threw them on the ground and tied them up. Helped by a few people, the king's physician, Doctor Cloquet, quickly had the prince transported into the garden of Muhammad Hasan, sanduqdar; for nobody had any idea of what was going on and, although they realized the greatness of the danger they had no notion of its extent. For more than an hour there was a frightful commotion all over Niyavaran. Whilst the ministers, led by Sadr al-Azam, hurried to the garden where the king had been taken, the trumpets, drums, tambourines and fifes summoned the troops from all over; the ghulams mounted their horses or came crawling on the ground; orders were flying in all directions; nobody saw, heard, understood or knew anything.

Amidst this disorder a courier arrived from Tehran, sent by Ardashir Mirza, governor of the town, to ask what was going on and what to do in the city. In fact, since the previous evening the rumour that the king had been assassinated had assumed the consistency of a certitude. Armed men patrolled the bazaars menacingly and the merchants had fled. The bakers' shops were surrounded all night by people trying to stock up for several days. This is customary when trouble is foreseen. By dawn the tumult was increasing, so Ardashir Mirza closed the town gates as well as those of the citadel. Although in reality he had no idea who the enemy

was, he put all regiments at full alert, lined up his cannons with their fuses lit and awaited orders.

Things calmed down somewhat. It had become clear that it was simply a matter of an assassination and not an insurrection. The two Babis who had been arrested were immediately taken to the council of ministers where they declared that they had acted alone, without accomplices and that no revelations should be expected from them, as they would make none. Fortunately the king's wounds were insignificant. His Majesty, who had shown great energy in his struggle against the murderers, assured everybody that he felt no serious pain, and returned to the palace on foot. The body of the dead Babi, Sadiq, was tied to the tail of a mule and dragged across the stones all the way to Tehran so that the population could see the conspirators had failed. At the same time messengers were sent to Ardashir Mirza to tell him what he had to do.

Despite the assassins' declaration it was obvious there had been a plot. Every year, around midsummer, there is a rumour that the king is dead. But it is precisely the fear of this that causes such bad news to be invented and accepted as true. There are some disturbances at bakeries and at the stalls of the victuallers of the bazaar; but within a few hours order is restored. This time, nothing of the sort. It had been announced that Nasir al-Din Shah would fall in the month of Shawwal; armed bands had been seen who, necessarily, had only formed to take advantage of the catastrophe. The arrested murderers had identified themselves as Babis and were glorifying in their deed. So the Babis were the enemy. They were afoot; their leaders must be apprehended. Ardashir Mirza must act accordingly.

He kept all the gates closed and had them manned by pickets, who had orders to examine very carefully the physiognomy of all those who attempted to leave the city; and while the population was being incited to climb up on the ramparts to see the mutilated body of Sadiq on the terreplein on the far side of the moat bridge, the prince-governor called together the kalantar, or prefect of police, the city vizier, the darugha, or magistrate, and local mayors, and ordered them to seek out and arrest anybody suspected of Babism. As nobody could leave the city they awaited nightfall to begin their ferret chase, which above all would require skill and cunning.

As in all Asian cities, the Tehran police force is very well organized. This is a legacy from the Sassanids that has been carefully preserved by the Arab caliphs; and as maintaining it was in the interests of all governments, no matter how bad, the worst even more than the others, it has remained intact, so to speak, amongst the ruins of many equally excellent but tottering institutions.The local mayors are in direct correspondence with the kalantar and have a certain number of men called sarghismas under their orders, town sergeants, who wear no uniform or distinguishing marks but whose job is to patrol the streets at all times. They are generally on good terms with the inhabitants and live easily amongst them. They perform all sorts of services, and winter and summer, with care for neither rain nor snow; they sleep at night under the awning of some shop, keeping an eye on all the properties and thus discouraging theft, which is in fact quite a rare occurrence. Besides that, they know all the inhabitants and regular visitors to all the houses and are thus

able to guide any searches to the right house immediately if need be; they know everybody's ideas, opinions, liaisons and business; and when one invites three friends to dinner, the sarghisma is so familiar with everybody that even without having to resort to spying he knows when the guests arrived, what they ate, what they did and said and at what time they left.

The kadkhudas, or local mayors instructed their agents to watch the Babis on their respective beats, and everybody waited.

Almost at the same time clandestine meetings were noticed. Hajji Mirza Taqi, kadkhuda of the Sarchishma district went surreptitiously to the house of a certain Sulayman Khan, son of Yahya Khan. Today that house belongs to prince Abd al-Samad Mirza, the king's brother. The former owner was a wealthy and respected man.

A sarghisma knocked gently on the door, a man came to open it; he was pulled outside, the door was closed and he was arrested. A moment later the sarghisma knocked again; another man came to open the door and received the same treatment. The same trick was successfully pulled several times until no one else came to open the door. They then picked the lock and went in. In the courtyard they found the owner and arrested him; then, going through all the rooms they grabbed fifteen individuals in all, including several women and children. Some informants say that Qurrat al-Ayn was amongst the women; but others insist she had long since been arrested because she kept on preaching despite the ban. Whatever the case may be, as she had a great reputation and besides occupied a high position in society she had been taken, or was then taken to the house of Mahmud Khan, the kalantar, who put her in the custody of his own wife.[10] The others were put in prison.

The various catches were brought in one by one and it transpired that there were about forty captives in all. All subsequent searches were fruitless. The Babis had obviously been warned and were lying low. They attempted neither to meet, since His Eternal Highness had forbidden any uprising, nor to leave the city, as they knew the gates were being guarded. The police were vigilant for several days, but had no success, and although they were convinced the enemies were numerous they could not uncover them. Any hopes of an even greater success having been dashed, the prince had his captives taken to Niyavaran and once there explained the situation.

The prime minister and the king's other advisors were quite put out, to be blunt, they were afraid and full of varied concerns. The king had found the time he had had to fight his would-be assassins alone noticeably long and had not hidden this impression. The people who had not been in his cortège that day immediately began to remark that such and such a lord or officer who had been present might well not be at all averse to a change of regime. Everyone sought to court the king's favour at the expense of his neighbour. One was suspected of serving the interests of the king's brother, who is being kept by the English in Baghdad; another to have laid his hopes on the old prince who was being kept by the Russians in Astrakhan.[11] When neither of these two accusations were laid it was simply asked if they might not well be Babis themselves, and the supposition was in fact far from unlikely; for Babism was essentially a fashionable religion and it was well known that since four

years earlier there were adepts everywhere. There was hardly a person who had not conversed with some member of the sect. From all this bandied finger-pointing, these suppositions, poisoned by rivalry and personal ambition, a profound sense of distrust and fear had arisen and reigned over the entire royal entourage. Everybody watched his neighbour and weighed well his own words.

The two assassins who had been arrested confessed no more at their second interrogation than they had at the first, and never said any more. They were tortured with extraordinary refinement but did not speak, and stubbornly insisted that they had no accomplices and had acted on the orders of their leaders, who were not in Persia. When asked how they could have contemplated such an enormous crime as killing the king they repeated again that they were not accountable to their judges for their actions because they had done nothing but obey their superiors; that, thanks be to God, they were in a perfect state of innocence because they had not hesitated to obey a commandment from a holy authority. As for the action itself, they personally had nothing to say, except that what their leaders wanted was just by the mere fact that they wanted it; however, in this particular case it was clear that the prime author of the death of so many martyrs and finally of the Bab himself, His Sublime Highness, had amply deserved death. They added that they had certain proof of the innocence of their intentions in the fact that they had wanted to carry out their instructions to the letter and had allowed themselves to modify nothing. Those instructions were: "You will cut off the king's head": it was therefore the head that had to be cut off, and that was why they had tried to pull the prince off his horse and throw him to the ground.

"If we had wanted", they said, "to shoot him with our pistols, nothing would have been easier; but you saw that our weapons were not loaded with bullets, and we only fired at him to wound him and make him fall more easily. It is clear that no personal hatred was involved. On the contrary, the king is good; he treated us compassionately and kindly, and we are grateful to him; so we wanted to do no more than fulfil our obligation. Even if you torture us until Doomsday we will be unable to tell you any more".

This obstinacy, this depth, this firmness of religious conviction, and the powerlessness of pain to overcome it began to produce a great impression on the minds of the people of the court and even on the ministers. It was a new demonstration of what they remembered having seen in Mazandaran, Zanjan, Shiraz, Tehran, Tabriz, everywhere Babis had been condemned and put to death; and, as always happens, the prisoners' attitude of independence amidst the suffering inflicted, and the impotence to which it reduced their tormentors, caused more irritation than the actual crime that was to be punished. Having acknowledged defeat at the hands of the two murderers of Shiriman, the inquisitors hopefully pounced upon the troupe of prisoners who had been brought from the city, amongst whom the women, and particularly the children, were surely going to be afraid, give in to torture and tell everything.

They told nothing; and all those prisoners, great and small, repeated with inflexible firmness exactly what the two murderers had said: "We have no accomplices".[12] All efforts, and many were made, came to nothing and broke against the

wall of silence or denials. The interrogators' frustrated vengeance turned to fear. They were no longer sure of their ground, and lacking tangible reality, which fled before all inquiry, saw themselves surrounded by a host of phantoms. Fear took over the king's camp. It was whispered that the initial suspicions laid at the door of such and such an important figure were justified and proved by the prisoners' silence. It was supposed that they hoped to be pardoned at the last moment through the influence of their secret friends. But would they even need to be pardoned? Would a general revolt not break out in an hour, in a minute? Where? Amongst the regiments, the peasants of the mountains, the inhabitants of Tehran! Before them stood two score of mute and silent captives, but who could know what was brewing behind their backs?

Assembled around Sadr al-Azam, the council of ministers decided, under the influence of that statesman, the wisest and surely the most capable in the land, that the situation had gone on long enough and must be brought to an end. It was pointed out that if the Babis were as numerous and as powerful as was said, seeking them out and forcing them to show their courage and gain a renown they would perhaps prefer to avoid was a gratuitous imprudence. It was thus resolved not only not to seek more criminals but to show as much clemency as judicial tradition with regards to treason permitted, and that all the detained Babis who would consent simply to deny that they were Babis would be taken at their word, released immediately and bothered no further. As for those who stubbornly continued to profess their faith, they would certainly die; but it was unjust that their blood be on the king's head alone. There were no two ways about it: either the killing of those people was equitable or it was iniquitous. If it was equitable the king should and would share the merit of the action with his men; if it was iniquitous it was fair that the same men, his servants, take upon themselves a portion of the responsibility and the punishments that awaited their master in the next life. It would show their fidelity.

In the prime minister's reasoning there was perhaps a trace of the feelings he expressed, but there was perhaps also something he did not express, that is, the desire to implicate leading figures and State agencies in what was going to happen, in such a way that if the Babis did revolt again all those stained with the blood of their martyrs would feel just as personally threatened as the king. Arranging matters in that way was very adroit. It was perceived in that light, and everyone began to calculate the immediate danger in opposing such an arrangement. Then they all began to shout that their lives and their souls belonged to the king, that they were his sacrifice, that they demanded to bear the punishment for his faults throughout all eternity, that suffering in his place would be better than paradise, and declared themselves ready to dip their arms up to the shoulder in the blood that was about to flow. The prime minister welcomed this explosion of zeal; he ordered that the stubbornly opinionated amongst the Babis be divided up between the most important imperial officers, the Mirzas, the different public services, the mustaufis, the men of the arsenal, and that the king would judge the true devotion of his subjects, their disinterested fidelity, by the manner in which they put their victims to death. The message was clearly understood.

The entire population of Tehran followed what was happening in Niyavaran around the royal palace with an ardent curiosity, which for many people was anxiety. As nothing is secret in Persia, I have already said so and I repeat, absolutely nothing, no more what happens in the royal council than what happens in the most mysterious recesses of the harem, everything is common knowledge in the bazaar, so all the fluctuating ideas, fears, calculations that had moved the arbiters of the moment, their suggestions and decisions, had been perfectly understood by means of the extraordinary wisdom that is the very essence of the place. A quick end to matters was now expected, and most of the population wished for as little bloodshed as possible and placed its hopes in the prime minister's well-known and oft times demonstrated repugnance for cruelty.[13]

Qurrat al-Ayn had not been taken to Niyavaran; but, locked up in the kalantar's own andarun, had been interrogated by him several times but subjected to no ill treatment. Like everybody else Mahmud Khan, kalantar, seems to have succumbed to the charm of this woman. The Consolation of the Eyes, with her wondrous beauty, her eloquence, her enthusiasm, exerted a seduction that nobody had ever been able to resist. Full of respect and compassion, the kalantar tried, whilst fulfilling his duty, to alleviate the captivity of his prisoner and give her hope for the future. But he was mistaken. Qurrat al-Ayn had no need of hope, and when he broached the subject she usually interrupted him to speak of her religious beliefs, of what was truth, of what was falsehood. Anyone present was always astonished at her faith and freedom of spirit when at any moment the door curtain could be raised to usher in her death sentence.

One morning Mahmud Khan returned from the royal camp, went into the andarun and, after greeting the Consolation of the Eyes, told her that he brought good news. "I know", she said gaily, " and you do not need to tell me of it". "You cannot possibly know what it concerns", said Mahmud Khan, "for it is a request the prime minister had just asked me to make to you and I have no doubt that it will mean your salvation. You will be taken to Niyavaran and asked": "Qurrat al-Ayn, are you a Babi?" "You will simply reply": "No". "We will remain convinced that you are; but we have resolved not to ask more of you, we hope that you will live in solitude for some time and give no more cause for talk". "That is not the news you have for me", replied the Consolation of the Eyes. "It is better than what you say, but you yourself do not know it. Tomorrow at noon you, you yourself, kalantar, you will have me burned alive, and I shall thus bear dazzling witness to God and to His Highness!"

Mahmud Khan replied in astonishment: "You cannot mean it! It is out of the question, you cannot refuse the concession we ask of you. All your followers will submit to it, without any doubt. What are you thinking?" "Do not hope" cried the Consolation of the Eyes in a more earnest tone, "that I deny my faith, even in appearance, not even for a minute, and for such a puerile goal as to conserve a transitory form of no value for a few more days. No! If I am questioned, and I shall be questioned, I shall have the bliss of giving my life for God. You, Mahmud Khan, listen to what I say to you now, and tomorrow my death will serve as a sign that I am

not deceiving you. The master you serve will not reward you for your zeal; on the contrary, you will perish, by his order, cruelly. Try, before dying, to have raised your soul to the knowledge of the truth".

I have often heard both Muslims and Babis retell this prophecy. Nobody doubts it was made; and here is what actually happened later: four years ago a terrible famine was ravaging Tehran. People were dying of hunger in the streets. Exasperated by its suffering the population rose up and crowded towards the citadel to obtain justice from the king, as is usual, for in such cases all the peoples of the world, in Orient and Occident alike, direct their anger at the monopolists, who they accuse of causing their woes. The king ordered the gates to be closed; then, having learned that the people were accusing, amongst others, the kalantar, he had him brought before him. A scapegoat had to be found. It was not at all as if the incriminated magistrate had in any way committed the crime he was accused of; he had done no more than misappropriate a small amount of public funds and considered himself by and large irreproachable, for he had far fewer such exploits on his conscience than many a figure more illustrious than he. However, the king was irritated, the tumult was at its peak, women were banging on the gate of the citadel, their furious cries could be plainly heard. The king had put on the red cape known as the *cape of anger*, which he wears when he orders punishment.

Mahmud Khan was brought trembling before the monarch. Instead of answering the charges he lost his head and began to stammer. The king ordered that his beard be torn out; his torturers grabbed him; he resisted and uttered ghastly cries. The king began to get excited and said: "Beat him with rods!" He was beaten, and the king got even more excited and said: "Strangle him!" And he was strangled. Thus was fulfilled Qurrat al-Ayn's prediction.

It would be opportune at this point to make an observation in the interests of those who more or less understand the surface of things but never really get under the skin. I have no intention of insinuating that one should either believe or disbelieve in the miracles I recount. I do not concern myself with such; but it is important to note that miracles form an important part of religion in Asia at the present time, they are performed, seen, quoted, believed and used as arguments, and, in fact, are arguments, because they are believed not only by the sectarians concerned, but are unhesitatingly accepted even by their adversaries.

This is a very interesting situation to observe, not only from a philosophical viewpoint but perhaps especially from the point of view of historical criticism. One can find many instructive indications that shed great light on ancient problems. For example, according to our way of reasoning, if an apostle of a religion we reject could convince us he is capable of performing miracles, we would find it senseless not to accept the entire doctrine of a man armed with such exceptional powers, whose source could only lie in some special dispensation from on high. But Asiatics do not reason in the same way. To their eyes the miracle is doubtless abnormal and its manifestation reveals an out of the ordinary influence; but they consider that which is out of the ordinary, that which defies the rule, the exception to the common laws of nature, far less rare than we do. They do not accept the existence

of imperturbable natural laws; they recognize in the universe only situations during which phenomena occur according to an order arising from a given ponderance of matter and forms, from such and such a relationship established between the principles and the ends. But that in itself has no character of essentiality, and the application of more or less any influence can suffice to profoundly modify the situation. If you tell an enlightened Muslim that Saint Francis of Assisi made the birds descend from the sky and conversed with them, even though he may esteem Christianity an erroneous, insufficient religion, corrupted at source, abrogated by God, it will never enter his mind to question your good faith or to accuse you of credulousness. The legendary substance will seem to him as easily believable as the orbit followed by such and such a star. His only conclusion will be that, by dint of his meditation, Saint Francis had come to understand the specific nature of birds and possessed an uncommon power over them. The Asiatic will understand and explain in the same way how it is possible to traverse solid objects, walk on water, suspend or rescind, according to one's knowledge, such and such a result of a correlation of natural principles that we call laws, and which for him are no more than purely temporary expedients. This is why miracles are in demand in Asia, why they are admired and why he who performs them is held in greater or lesser esteem; but it is also why a man can witness and believe in them without considering them truly irrefragable proof of the truth of the religion that produces them. God is not the source, God takes no part; it is man alone who, by his knowledge, by his perception, by his natural gifts, by the concourse of some higher power, finds a way to trouble the habits of nature in some fashion. This manner of limiting the theological value of miracles to the faithful so that it in no way concerns those who resist conversion has however greatly hindered Islam. The Koran protested and tried in different ways to explain that miracles could not take place without divine participation; but it struggled in vain against theories elaborated and passed on in their entirety through generations from the ancient sciences. It had therefore to content itself with a sort of compromise, and reserved a special kind of miracle for God alone: the resurrection of the dead. God alone can restore the dead to life; it can happen only in the name and by the virtue of God; no other prodigy has any real dogmatic value. But for this point, and this point alone – Oriental science and imagination are in perfect agreement and admit no limits to the motory and creative power of the word, man's or God's, supposing, besides, that nature, producer of that word, has no laws but only, as I said above, ways of being, resulting from relationships that the word, which produced them, can trouble when applied by a deep understanding, and judging man capable of achieving that understanding – it naturally ensues that anything is possible to an enlightened man, as a man, and that is why miracles prove nothing in terms of a statement of the religious faith of he who performs them. It will thus be seen how, from this ancient point of view deriving from Chaldean science, the most astounding prodigies have often been able to amaze, frighten, confuse populations who did not doubt their authenticity, but yet did not lead them to adopt the faith of the prophets from whom they emanated. Reading stories of this kind (the Bible, the Acts of the Apostles and the Lives of Saints are full of them) European

intelligence is surprised by what it regards as a sort of inept obstinacy. There is no obstinacy, there is no ineptitude, there are only different ways than ours of seeing, of judging and of drawing conclusions, and so on the one hand absolute faith in the possibility of troubling the natural order and on the other extreme difficulty in accepting such phenomena result, in practice, in a different but equally complete scepticism.[14]

The next day things happened just as the Consolation of the Eyes had predicted. She had been taken to Niyavaran and asked very gently and in a manner so as not to offend her, before the princes, the important ministers of State, the prisoners and the people, to declare that she was not a Babi. She replied as she had said she would. She was taken back to Tehran, to the citadel, where they veiled her after the manner of Persian women, as she had long refused to do, and placed her on a pile of that fabric made from coarse straw that is used to line woollen and felt carpets in apartments. But before lighting it the executioners suffocated her with rags so that the flames consumed no more than a corpse. Her ashes were scattered to the winds.[15]

I do not believe the example of resolve set by Qurrat al-Ayn was necessary to the other prisoners, but it certainly did nothing to diminish their steadfastness. They had all watched the interrogation of the young woman with happy, smiling faces, and then seen her go off to meet her end, but the separation and that which would bring it seemed so insignificant to them that no words of farewell were exchanged. When their turn came to prepare themselves all of them, the murderers and the others, replied with the same indifference that they were Babis, heaped blessings on the name of His Sublime Highness as well as on the names of the other martyrs and apostles of their cause, and declared themselves ready to bear anything.

Amongst them was a man arrested in the house of Sulayman Khan. It was that same Sayyid Husayn who, in a moment of physical prostration brought about by excessive tiredness, outrages and blows had denied his master and spat in his face, and who on that account had been freed. He had immediately awoken as if from a dream and set off for Tehran, as I said. As soon as he had entered the gates of the city he went straight to the Babi leaders, told of the martyrdom and desperately repented of his act. A pardon had followed the obviously sincere vehemence of his confession. But Sayyid Husayn had never found rest, and aspired passionately to death. The day had come. Believing himself at the moment of deliverance and purification he was not only calm like the others; his joy exploded in the expression of his face and in his words. When he was asked if he were a Babi he replied with extreme exaltation and irritated his judges extremely by the insults he hurled at them. Today the Babis are full of respect for this martyr and cannot accept that he was ever guilty of anything. They insist that his apostasy was only apparent, that he obeyed the Bab by simulating it, and that as his master's secretary and keeper of all his papers he had had to act in that way in order to bring them to the faithful and tell of all that had happened, because without him the last words of the Bab would never have been known.

So Sadr al-Azam's benevolent intentions were thwarted and it remained only to proceed to the death of the guilty in the pre-established manner. Everybody

received a captive, in some cases two. The prime minister got one. He did not have him tortured and gave the order to kill him with one blow. The mirzas, or ministry employees, got two; they had them slowly slashed to death with penknives and took part themselves. The royal equerry, Asadullah Khan, who had first come to the king's aid and killed Sadiq with his sword, also wanted two. He had them clapped in irons hand and foot and whipped to shreds. They each did their best to prove their love for the sovereign and their zeal by the pleasantly ferocious inventions their imaginations could come up with.[16]

In the streets and bazaars of Tehran a spectacle was seen,[17] seen then, seen on that day, that the population is never likely to forget. Even today, when the conversation turns to that subject one can feel that the years have not diminished the awed admiration felt by the crowd. Women and children were walking between their executioners, their bodies covered in gaping wounds into which burning candlewicks had been stuck. The victims were pulled along by ropes and urged on by whiplash. Children and women walked forward singing a verse that says:

"In truth, we come from God and to Him we return!"

Their voices rang out above the profound silence of the crowd, for the population of Tehran is neither wicked nor believes much in Islam. If one of the criminals fell and was forced back to his feet by the whip or the bayonet, if he still had enough of the blood left that was streaming down all his members he would begin dancing and cry out with increased enthusiasm:

"In truth, we come from God and to Him we return!"

Some of the children died along the way. The executioners threw their bodies under the feet of their mothers and fathers, who stepped proudly over them without a second glance.

When they arrived at the place of execution, near the New Gate, the victims were again offered their lives in exchange for abjuration, and, unlikely as it may seem, further intimidation was attempted. It occurred to one executioner to tell a father that if he did not acquiesce he would cut his two sons' throats on his breast. The two small boys, of whom the eldest was fourteen, listened impassively to the dialogue. They were covered in their own blood and their skin was charred. Lying down on the ground, the father replied that he was ready, and his eldest son eagerly demanded his right to be the first to have his throat cut. It is not unlikely that the executioner denied him that final satisfaction. Finally it was all over; night fell on a mound of shapeless flesh; heads were strung together and hung on the stake of justice, the stray dogs all headed that way.

That day brought the Bab more secret followers than any number of sermons could have. As I just said, the impression made on the people by the awesome impassibility of the martyrs was profound and long-lasting. Scenes from that day have often been recounted to me by eye-witnesses, men close to the government, some in prominent positions. Listening to them one could easily believe they were Babis, so filled with admiration are they for memories where Islam does not cut a very fine figure, and also by the high opinion they admit to having regarding the resources and hopes of the sect and their means of achieving success. The subject is

not spoken of publicly; it is almost an act of daring to mention the name Babi; when the course of the conversation leads to the new religion a carefully injurious paraphrase is resorted to. As the Babis condemn on principle the use of the kalyan, or water pipe, or rather by religious scruple, many men who have no taste for it never fail to display one in order to avoid suspicion; finally, a notable recrudescence of Muslim hypocrisy has broken out amongst men who are in reality notorious dissidents.[18]

Despite all the above Babism, which has remained strictly inactive since the events of 1852, is considered to have made immense progress and to continue to do so on a daily basis. Without doubt in obedience to a general order, which they obey with the same punctiliousness as they previously obeyed its opposite, the Babis now conceal their religion, deny it, and if necessary have no qualms about saying the Bab was a monster; but this concealment frightens the government perhaps even more than attempts at an uprising would. At least then it could count its enemies and would know where to combat them. As the situation now is, it neither knows, sees, nor can guess anything. Faithful to the sensation of fear that gripped it during the trial in Niyavaran, it does not dare to investigate, for fear of finding culprits it does not want and especially of finding them where it would not wish to. When, by misplaced zeal or excessive hatred, the mullahs denounce someone as a Babi, the most that happens is that the person in question is arrested, required to make a profession of faith, which is taken at face value, and immediately released. The general opinion is that the Babis are spread amongst all classes of the population and all religions except the Nusayris and the Christians; but the educated classes in particular, men of letters and science, are the most highly suspect. It is believed, and quite rightly I should say, that many mullahs, including some important mujtahids, high-ranking magistrates, men who occupy important positions at court and are in close contact with the king, are Babis. According to a recent calculation five thousand of the approximately eighty thousand souls living in Tehran belong to the sect. But that calculation seems to me based on tenuous arguments and I am inclined to believe that if the Babis ever got the upper hand in Persia their number in the capital would be greatly superior.[19] For at that very moment the large proportion of people who lean towards doctrines that are at present outlawed and to whom victory would give the courage to declare themselves would have to be added to that figure.

Two years ago the government once again had serious worries regarding the novators: a so-called European importation was the cause. Amongst the Persians who have lived in Europe there was one, very witty, very ingenious, above all a great friend of novelty and anxious to produce some, who had conceived a profound admiration for freemasonry. Orientals have a great fondness for that machinery, for the same reason that makes us appreciate those melodic combinations in Asiatic music that most closely resemble our own. The Persian I am speaking of put it to the king that he could no longer be content to reign as had his predecessors based on the two sole facts of occupation and force; he must acquire a moral guarantee of his subjects' fidelity. By founding a lodge in Tehran of which he would

declare himself Grand Master, he would have the advantage of creating an eternal bond between himself and the members of the lodge because they would swear the Masonic oath, an oath that can never be broken, and, provided that he took care to enrol everybody of any importance, he would find himself, by that master-stroke, at the head of all the forces of the nation, and in such a way that nobody would ever be able to dispossess him.

The king greeted this overture with interest and clearly grasped the brilliant prospects it offered him. For several days he would never see his ministers, his generals, his servants of all ranks without asking if they had been to the Faramushkhana that had recently been opened by his orders, and he strongly urged them to go there. Faramushkhana means "the house of forgetfulness"; it is an approximate onomatopœia of the English word *Freemason.* The Persians have not failed to draw from that fine compound the indubitable conclusion that when one leaves the Faramushkhana one has forgotten everything one has seen, and that it is in that way the leaders are assured of the discretion of their disciples.

For a few weeks everyone strove to be admitted to the Faramushkhana. The person who had had the idea distributed ranks and ribbons, made speeches; tea was drunk and there was a great deal of kalyan smoking. Every time the king asked one of his men: "Well, what did you see? What was shown to you? What did you learn in that chamber?" he always received the same answer: "We heard a speech by so and so who highly recommended civilization and humanity, we smoked the kalyan and drank tea". "Nothing else?" – "May I be your sacrifice! Nothing else".

The king was not happy. He suspected something was being hidden from him; for he could not understand that the terrible mysteries he had glimpsed in freemasonry consisted only in the innocent occupations that were being confessed to him. Besides, there was no way of explaining the marvellous oath on which he was counting. Once his doubts were expressed there were men ready to welcome them; some insinuated that monstrous debauchery must be going on in secret; others were bolder, they made a great statement: they said that the Faramushkhana could be nothing other than a rallying point for Babis.

At that very moment the order was passed to all not to return there, and those who had been, even on the king's orders, became suspect. After a few hesitations the author of the idea was forced to leave Persia and go into exile[20], and even today nobody likes to admit that they drank tea and smoked the kalyan in such a blameworthy place.

Even if the suspicion was unfounded in that case it should not be supposed that the Babis are truly at rest. They write a lot and their books circulate in secret. They are carefully hidden, read with passion, and ever-new weapons are found in them for the polemic against the Muslims. At the same time His Eternal Highness and the apostles who survived the Bab convert many people unobtrusively, and continue their work assiduously. A few months ago it was claimed that Persian exiles had urged the supreme leader to begin a new struggle because the present administration was so bad and disorganized that it could not offer any resistance. It is said he replied that the time was not yet ripe.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Curzon's remark is reported in the editor's foreword to the tenth edition of *Religions and Philosophies* (Gallimard, 1957). Jean Gaulmier and Jean Boissel point out that the literature of the early nineteenth century, in which Gobineau was so widely read and out of which the *Essay on Human Inequality* was produced, can hardly be considered scientific in modern terms. Moreover, his investment in this knowledge was determinedly personal and constituted nothing less than a journey of self-discovery, a search for his own self. "With or without reading, with or without erudite references, Gobineau would still have written the 'novel of origins', his origins", Gobineau, *Œuvres*, 3 vols. ed. Jean Gaulmier (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), vol. II, p. 217.

2 Quoted in Michael D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 13.

3 *Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville et d'Arthur Gobineau*, ed. M. Degros (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 259; *Gobineau: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Michael Biddiss (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 181.

4 *Correspondance entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten (1854–1876)*, ed. Clément Serpeille de Gobineau (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), p. 44; Biddiss, *Racist Ideology*, p. 182. Gobineau's diplomatic reports from his two periods in Persia are to be found in *Les dépêches diplomatiques du Comte de Gobineau en Perse*, ed. Adrienne-Doris Hytier (Genève: E. Droz & P. Minard, 1959).

5 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 1064. Gobineau's exaltation of intuition over European scholarly method is an issue that remains at the heart of his *œuvre*. Jean Calmard asserts: "he never acquired sufficient basic training for his ambitious linguistic and historical projects, although apparently he devoted much time in learning Persian with 'Mirza Agha,' his informant on dialects"; he dismisses *History of the Persians* as "a work devoid of any scholarly value", "Gobineau, Joseph Arthur de", *Enc. Iranica*, vol. XI (Encyclopædia Iranica Foundation: New York, 2003), pp. 20–4: p. 22.

6 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 405.

7 Ibid., p. 1087/406n.3. The phrase is Gaulmier's.

8 Ibid., p. 407.

9 The French editors believe *Religions and Philosophies* returns to the same subject material as *Treatise on Cuneiforms*, the number of references it makes to the latter proving the two works inseparable. Ibid., p. 1065. With the aid of Lalizir, Gobineau was also able to translate Descartes' *Discourse on Method* into Persian. The objects of bigotry and persecution under the Safavids, Jews fared little better under the Qajars. Mullah Lalizir nevertheless may have been a representative of the new intellectual accomplishment in

the Jewish community that was also producing significant numbers of medical doctors at this time. See Janet Afary, "From Outcasts to Citizens: Jews in Qajar Iran", in H. Sarshah, ed. *Esther's Children: Jews of Iran* (Center for Jewish Oral History: Beverly Hills, 2002), pp. 139–74.

10 Gobineau. *Œuvres*, II, p. 1066.
11 Ibid., p. 1069.
12 Ibid., p. 230.
13 Ibid., p. 226.
14 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, I, pp. 633–4.
15 Ibid., p. 635.
16 Ibid., p. 1235, editors' notes.
17 Ibid., p. 637.
18 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, pp. 238–9.
19 Ibid., p. 241.
20 See Geoffrey Nash, *From Empire to Orient, Travellers to the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005), pp.142–3.
21 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 362.
22 Albert Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 61.
23 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 1098/432 n. 2; p. 438, p. 1100/438 n.2.
24 Ibid., pp. 439–40.
25 Ibid., p. 442, p. 422.
26 Ibid., p. 253.
27 Ibid., p. 243.
28 Ibid., p. 246.
29 Ibid., p. 245.
30 Traditionally Yazdijird III called the Arabs "lizard-eaters", A.J. Arberry, ed. *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 30 n.
31 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 445.
32 Ibid., p. 446.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, p. 464. In contrast to Gobineau, Moojan Momen sees the tenth century as a crucial period for the transformation of the extremist (*ghulaw*) doctrines of early Shi'ism by the emerging Twelver Shi'a which "led to an eradication of . . . local variations as well as creating pressure to bring their doctrines more closely into line with the Sunni majority." He associates the late Safavid Mujtahid Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d.1699) with developing the character of modern Shi'ism. Momen, *Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 80, p. 114.
35 Gobineau, *Oeuvres* II, pp. 252–3.
36 V. Minorsky, "Notes sur la secte des Ahlé-Haqq", *Revue du monde musulman*, vol. 40 (1920), pp. 20–97; vol. 45 (1921), pp. 205–302.
37 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II. p. 451, p. 454. See E.G. Browne, ed. *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), vol. 2, p. x.
38 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 329.
39 Ibid., p. 298.
40 Ibid., p. 299.
41 Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, pp. 11–14.
42 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 530.
43 Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy, 1851–1896* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), p. 109.
44 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, 1130/540 n.2. In a letter to Tocqueville dated 5 November 1855 Gobineau introduced the Babis as "a sect more political than religious", before

proceeding to describe their attempt to assassinate Nasir al-Din Shah. *Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville*, p. 238.

45 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 586.

46 Denis MacEoin remarks: "The Shaykh Tabarsi siege was the most markedly religious of the larger incidents, while the Zanjan and Neyriz uprisings were more closely linked to local politics." "Babism", *Enc. Iranica*, vol. III (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and New York) pp. 309–15: p. 316.

47 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 558.

48 Calmard, "Gobineau", p. 22.

49 Renan's guarded response to *Inequality of Races* can be seen in his letter to Gobineau, *Ernest Renan: Œuvres complètes*, 10 vols. ed. Henriette Psichari (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1947–61), vol. X, pp. 203–5. Gobineau wrote to de Tocqueville with some bitterness of Renan: "In his book on the *Origin of Language* . . . [he] copies some chapters from my book *on the Races* [Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines] and takes the greatest care in the world to ignore my name." *Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville*, pp. 302–3. See Geoffrey Nash, "Renan, Islam, and anti-Semitism", in Francis O'Gorman, ed., *Victorian Literature and the Near East* (Ashgate, forthcoming).

50 See Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians, Impressions as to the Life, Character, and Thought of the People of Persia* (London: A.C. Black, 1893), p. 109. It could also be argued that Firdausi's *Shahnama* was an equally, if not more, influential factor behind Browne's rehearsal of this Persian national narrative. See E. Yarshater, *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, no.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) Chapter 10, "Iranian National History", pp. 359–477: p. 396.

51 Gobineau, *Œuvres*, II, p. 269. In her discussion of the Sufi idiom behind the poetry of Hafiz, Gertrude Bell (*Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*, London: William Heinemann, 1928, p. 53) quotes Baron Silvestre de Sacy's theory that Persian Sufi ideas derived from Indian cosmological doctrines. But Arberry emphasised the Arabic investment in Sufism and specifically delimited his subject within Islamic boundaries while acknowledging in passing the outside factors that determined its growth. *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950).

52 *Le Cantique des cantiques, traduit de l'hébreu par Ernest Renan* . . . (2nd ed. Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1861), p. 118; see also Renan's *Œuvres complètes*, vol. VII.

53 Lewis Pelly, "The Miracle Play of Hassan and Husain", quoted in Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*. (2nd ed. New York: Layman's Missionary Movement, 1909), p. 135. The subtitle of Zwemer's book amply proclaims its purpose: "Studies on the Mohammedan religion and the needs and opportunities of the Mohammedan world from the standpoint of Christian missions." Pelly's statement comes from an essay in which he, like Arnold and Renan, discusses the *taziya*, a form of Shi'ih drama presented by Gobineau in his chapters on Persian theatre in *Religions and Philosophies*, and which became for some an epitome of the "Aryan spirit".

54 Browne, *Year Amongst the Persians*, p. 134. Nearly a decade later, in the first volume of his *Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p. 336, Browne characterises the rebellions that took place in Persia in the early years of Islam as "the more open and undisguised manifestations of the old Persian racial and religious spirit – actual attempts to destroy the supremacy of the Arabs and of Islam, and to restore the power of the ancient rulers and teachers of Persia."

55 Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society: Collected Essays* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), p. 37. Kirmani belonged to the Azali Babis, a group whose ideas on the Constitutional Revolution Browne broadly supported. For an academic exposition of the longevity of the idea of Iran as a national entity see Shapur Shahbazi, "The History of the Idea of Iran", in Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stuart, eds. *Birth of the Persian Empire*, vol. 1. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 100–11.

56 Boroujerdi's citations from Enayat's writings. See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: the Triumph of Tormented Nativism* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996) pp. 142–3.
57 Browne, *Traveller's Narrative*, pp. 202–3.
58 He goes on to state: "Among [those] attracted to the Bab in this period figure Matthew Arnold, Ernest Renan, and, in Russia, Turgenev and Tolstoi; little of this enthusiasm survived into the twentieth century." Denis MacEoin, "Bab", *Enc Iranica*, vol. III, (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and New York), pp. 278–84: p. 282.
59 Ernest Renan *Œuvres*, vol. IV (Preface to *Vie de Jesus*), p. 347n.7; IV (*Les Apôtres*), pp. 698–9; V (*Les Évangiles*), p. 86; VII ("Les Téaziés de la Perse"), p. 831.
60 See Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), pp. 23–6.
61 Gobineau. *Œuvres*, II, p. 505.
62 Ernest Renan. "Les Téaziés de la Perse", *Œuvres*, vol. VII, pp. 831–52: p. 831.
63 Gobineau. *Œuvres*, II, p. 521.
64 Momen (*Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 19) names two Babi informants who worked at the French legation: Mirza Riza Quli Tafrishi and his brother Mirza Nasrullah. Although Browne states Gobineau's work "embodies . . . many statements derived from Babi sources" it is usually assumed that Gobineau had no access to written Babi texts at the time he was composing *Religions and Philosophies*. Denis MacEoin points out that in a footnote to his translation of the Bab's holy book the *Bayan* (included as an appendix in *Religions and Philosophies*) Gobineau "implies that he had at one time access to other Babi texts and to Babi interpreters", Gobineau, *Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 757, n. 3; MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 144. But it was probably after he had written *Religions and Philosophies* that Gobineau acquired the earliest extant Babi history, the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, which after his death found its way to the Bibliothèque National in Paris where Browne discovered it. On the provenance of this text see MacEoin, *Sources*, pp. 140–4. On Browne's use of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, and his reliance on Gobineau's *Religions and Philosophies* in his attempt to retrieve an "authentic" history of the early Babi movement see Nash, *Empire to Orient*, pp. 147–53.
65 Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 174, p. 175, pp. 187–8. It should be added that another early authority on Babism, Mirza Kazem-Beg, who published an influential article, "Bab et les Babis", in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1866, a year after the publication of *Religions and Philosophies*, was largely based on the *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*.
66 Gobineau. *Œuvres*, II, p.1128/529n1.
67 Ibid., p. 550.
68 Ibid., p. 551.
69 Ibid., p. 554.
70 Ibid., p. 506.
71 Stephen N. Lambden, "Some aspects of Isra'iliyyat and the emergence of the Babi-Baha'i interpretation of the Bible" (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Newcastle, 2002), pp. 224–5. Lambden also observes that these errors have even directly or indirectly influenced some Iranian writers.
72 Gobineau. *Œuvres*, II, p. 517.
73 Renan, "Les Téaziés de la Perse", *Œuvres*, vol. VII, pp. 831–52; first delivered as a lecture entitled, "Persian Theatre, selected taziyas", on 21 February 1878. In 1860 Renan had cited the *taziya* in *Le Cantique des cantiques* as "a fruit of the Persian spirit, so opposed in everything to Islam", p. 82. Arnold's, "A Persian Passion Play", characteristically tones down the racial division propounded by Renan. Delivered as a lecture to the Birmingham and Midland Institute in October 1871, it was published by *Cornhill Magazine* in its December 1871 issue and again in 1884 in the third edition of *Essays in*

Criticism. See *The Works of Matthew Arnold,* 15 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1903), vol. III, pp. 244–89.

74 As seen in Nikki Keddie with Y. Richard, *Roots and Results of Revolution, An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

75 Most were affiliated at the start to the Bahai faith. MacEoin (*Sources*, p. ii) points out the polemical background to the study of Babism, which since Browne first attempted to do it in an academic way has been embroiled in partisan claims – Bahai, Azali, Muslim and Christian. Bayat makes much the same point at the start of her reading of Babism, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982), pp. 87–131, p. 87.

76 MacEoin *Sources*, p. ii.

77 See Amanat's introduction to Mage's 1995 recent re-printing of Browne's, *The Persian Revolution 1905–1909*.

78 This point is perhaps best exemplified according to one's interpretation of the life and activities of Qurrat al-Ayn, a figure who continues to inspire modern Iranians.

79 A recent reading of Gobineau's writings on Islam is found in Ahmad Gunny, *Perceptions of Islam in European Writings* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2004), Chapter 6. For a more general review of Gobineau the Orientalist see Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp. 69–174. Both writers' estimations of their subject, however, fall into old grooves.

80 Keddie's earlier work in particular elucidated this insight by stressing the ever present need in Iran for understatement or dissimulation of one's real ideas. See Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society*, p. 26.

81 See Geoffrey Nash, "Friends across the Waters: British Orientalists and Middle East Nationalisms", in Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddar, eds. *Empire and After, Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective* (New York: Berghahn, 2007).

THREE YEARS IN ASIA

1 NATION

1 All of these servants of the British Empire had first hand experience of Afghanistan, a land that figured greatly in Iran's diplomacy during Gobineau's two tours (see below, n.9). Monstuart Elphinston (1779–1859) was a British diplomat and traveller in Afghanistan and India. As a youth, Alexander Burnes (1805–41) joined the army of the East India Company and became an Urdu and Persian interpreter before setting out on an expedition exploring the Indus en route trying to establish relations with the emirs. In 1832 he began a journey of reconnoitre under the orders of the British government in India that took him to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Persia, about which he wrote in *Travels into Bokhara* (London: John Murray, 1834). Burnes was sent to negotiate with the Amir of Afghanistan in 1837, and later assigned to the ill-fated British military expedition to Afghanistan that resulted in his death as well as virtually the entire British garrison. J.W. Kaye (1814–76) published *The History of the War in Afghanistan* (1851–3) whilst the disastrous British expedition of 1841 was fresh in mind. George Campbell (1824–86) was the author of *Modern India* (1852).

2 My translation of French *l'aurore* = 'dawn' (tr.).

3 The French editor sees this as a reference to British repression in India following the rebellion of 1857.

4 The French editor refers at this point to Gobineau's *History of the Persians* and his penchant for crediting popular traditions as the retelling of actual facts. The paragraph proceeds to sketch out nearly 900 years of Persian history from the time of Phroartes

(reigned 655–633 BC) the second king of the Median Empire, the foundation of the Achaemenid dynasty by Cyrus I (546 BC), the reign of Darius I (521–486 BC), conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great (334–330 BC), long domination of the Parthians, and the establishment of Sassanian rule by Ardashir I (226 AD). As regards written historical records, Gobineau makes no mention of the deciphering of the trilingual inscription of Darius I on the rock of Bisitun by Henry Rawlinson in 1837 and 1843, thus providing the key to the cuneiform script of Babylonia. See "Persia and the Ancient World", in A.J. Arberry, ed., *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 19–20.

5 One of the stipulations of the Treaty of Turkmanchay forced Persia to deliver its local archives.

6 According to tradition Husayn married the daughter of the last Sassanian king, Yazdijird III, "thus uniting the royal blood of the house of Sasan with the holy race of the Imams and the kindred of the Arabian prophet", Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians, Impressions as to the Life, Character, and Thought of the People of Persia* (London: A.C. Black, 1893), p. 96. In this way an Iranian distinctiveness was claimed for Shi'ism.

7 Paskievich was the head of the Russian army that conquered Erivan in 1827 afterwards ceded to Persia under the terms of the Treaty of Turkmanchay.

8 Anglo-Persian War 1856–7. Gobineau's reports on this period, during which protection of British subjects and protégés was taken over by the French Legation, are found in *Dépêches Diplomatiques du Comte de Gobineau en Perse*, ed. A.D.Hytier (Genève: E. Droz & P. Minard, 1959).

9 Imam Shamil inspired resistance to Russian penetration in Daghistan; Abd al-Qadir led the Algerian fight against the French until forced to surrender in 1847.

10 Uthman (Osman) I founded the Ottoman dynasty *c.*1300–26, beginning his rule in the area around Bursa, north-west Anatolia.

11 An inappropriate expression in this context.

12 Salah al-Din, Kurdish general who deposed the Fatimids and ruled in Cairo, founding the Ayyubid dynasty. He recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187. Nadir Shah seized the throne of Persia after the death of Abbas III, thus ending the Safavid dynasty. He was not a Kurd: "the Qereqlu Afshars to whom Nader belonged were a semi-nomadic Turcoman tribe settled in Khorasan, in north-eastern Persia." Michael Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 18.

2 RELIGION

1 Mazdakism began as a reform movement of the Sassanian state religion, Magism (Mazdaeism), itself a revival of the old Zoroastrianism of the Archaemenids. Though initially favoured by Kobad (Kavadh I), Mazdak was executed (531) and his sect, like its third-century forerunner Manichaeism, repressed with the utmost severity. *Legacy of Persia*, p. 31, p. 335. Gobineau, being a legitimist, unsurprisingly repeats the traditional allegation about the "communistic" doctrines of Mazdakism. Some have seen these ideas surviving into the Islamic period and having a not insignificant impact on early Shi'ih doctrines. See note 3.

2 This statement of belief, the *shahada*, constitutes the first of the pillars of Islam, and is encased within the daily call to prayer, the *adhan*.

3 This and the preceding paragraph contain the kernel of Gobineau's ideas on Shi'ism. The French editors rightly accept the validity of his statement that in the territories they conquered, the Arabs utilised the administration already in place, foregrounding specifically the Abbasid caliphs' employment of Iranian know-how. Gobineau, however, exaggerates the differences between Shi'ih and Sunni Islam, as well as implying that Shi'ism

was a distinctly Persian creation. Typically, he is extremely vague here about the precise historical context(s) to which his remarks are addressed. However in *Religions and Philosophies*, Chapter 4, "Sufism and Philosophy", Gobineau suggests that a "local" Persian Shi'ism developed between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries that "revived and restored almost the entire stock of Guebre ideas and even customs, and put them in the place of Muhammad's prescriptions". But prior to the early sixteenth century, when under the Safavids Shi'ism progressed to becoming the state religion of Persia, the most important Shi'ih ulama had for over four centuries been Arabs. When Safavid Abbas I wished to establish theological colleges in Isfahan he sent to Lebanon and Bahrain to obtain scholars to teach in them. H.M. Balyuzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islam* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), p. 387. On the divergence of Shi'ih traditions from Sunni (which again Gobineau magnifies out of all proportion) see Moojan Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 173–5.

The Arabic term *ghuluw* ("extremist") is often used to characterise those beliefs that exalt the Imams, particularly Ali, above the Prophet of Islam, and these are now considered as characteristic of early Shi'ism. A Persian pre-Islamic connection with these ideas has been proposed, most notably by early Muslim commentators, Nizam al-Mulk and al-Shahristani, but in the form of heretical Mazdakism. See *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, no.2, pp.1001–4. Momen (*Shi'i Islam*, p. 77) states that *ghuluw* views may have been widely accepted in the period up to the sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq (d.765) but afterwards a "change of doctrine occurred among the Imami Shi'a involv[ing] an almost complete *volte-face* on most issues". It is perhaps not surprising to find Gobineau arguing as mainstream views that had come to be held only by the periphery.

4 Again, it is difficult to be sure to which period(s) Gobineau is referring here, as he moves from the Sassanians to what he vaguely terms "the new regime" i.e. the Islamic. His remarks are generally applicable to the Usuli clerics whose power grew from the later Safavid period onwards. He might have in mind here their use of *ijtihad* which Momen (*Shi'i Islam*, p. xx) defines as "the process of arriving at judgements on points of religious law using reason and the principles of jurisprudence".

5 Momen notes (*Shi'i Islam* p. 123) one of the key developments of the Safavids was to begin the separation of church and state that led to the "emergence of an independent body of ulama capable of taking a political stand different from policies of state." While emphasising the "heterodox spiritual discourse" employed by the founder of the Safavid dynasty Shah Ismail I, and his immediate successors, Andrew Newman (*Safavid Iran*, London: I.B.Tauris: 2006, p. 15) sees the Safavid rulers progressively decreeing powers to the mujtahids as part of the project of buttressing their own authority. But it was under the Qajar dynasty that this process became marked, as seen by Fath Ali Shah's seeking a clerical fatwa to underwrite fighting the Russo-Persian War of 1804–13, and the mujtahids' demand for a new war in 1826–7. Momen, *Shi 'i Islam*, p. 138.

6 Gobineau seems to be saying Ismail came to Iran as a Sufi but was afraid of Islam ("cette grande puissance rivale de la sienne") and therefore converted to Shi'ism. The statement is founded on Gobineau's prejudice that a Sufi cannot be a Muslim. In reality, Ismail and his successor Tahmasp continued to demonstrate heterodox tendencies (from an orthodox Twelver point of view) and both to tolerate and appoint Sunnis to high positions. See Newman, *Safavid Iran*, p. 24, pp. 28–32.

7 Gobineau seems to be referring to early divisions in Islam, where a variety of sects favoured Ali; Balyuzi (*Muhammad*, p. 222) points out that Shi'ih means a "faction".

8 Gobineau presumably means the anti-Sunni policy inspired by a high ranking mujtahid that so antagonised the Afghans that they invaded, toppled the Safavid dynasty, and brought Iran back under Sunni rule in 1722. Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, p. 116.

9 Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai (1743–1826), founder of the Shaykhi school, came from the

Shi'ih stronghold of Bahrain but was known as Ahsai because his family came from al-Ahsa in present-day Saudi Arabia. Gobineau's knowledge of Shaykhism was very limited, and what he writes about this sect, particularly in Chapter 2 ("Persian Islamism") of *Religions and Philosophies* is mainly erroneous. On Shaykh Ahmad's thought see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 50–61.

3 THE SUFIS

1 Gobineau states at the outset what comes to be his programme in describing those Persian religious sects existing in uneasy relation to mainstream Shi'ism. They are represented (i) as incorporating ancient elements that pre-date the coming of Islam (ii) they are in diverse ways resistant or antagonistic to it – i.e. Sufis are comprehended within the early "dissidents" mentioned at the end of the previous chapter.

2 No doubt Gobineau has in mind the celebrated Sufi Husayn Mirza ibn Mansur al-Hallaj put to death in Baghdad in 922 at Shi'ih instigation for proclaiming "Anal-Haqq" (I am the truth). Before his death he is reported to have said: "no task is more urgent for the Muslims at this moment than my execution . . . my death will preserve the sanctions of the Law; he who has offended must undergo them." James Kritzcek, ed., *Anthology of Islamic Literature* (New York: Mentor, 1964), p. 97.

3 There follows at this point a tale concerning a prince and a dervish that belongs more properly among Gobineau's *Oriental Tales*.

4 Gobineau was perhaps duped by his informants in relaying this story of Khayrullah, an otherwise unidentifiable figure (Fr. ed.).

5 Gobineau's preference for the term Nusayri instead of Ahl-i Haqq is misleading as he makes it clear he is writing of a sect that is found in (western) Persia while the Nusayris are found today in Syria (where they are known as Alawites) and also in Lebanon and parts of Turkey. He was justly proud of his introduction of the Ahl-i Haqq (People of the Truth) to a European audience. See letter to Prokesch-Osten, 15 December 1859, *Correspondance entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten (1854–1876)*, ed. Clément Serpeille de Gobineau (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), p. 206. He is cited as the premier authority on this sect (in an entry erroneously headed "Ali Ilahi") in the 1st ed. of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1913), and although the 2nd ed. vol. 1 (1960) cites references to the sect by earlier nineteenth-century travellers, Gobineau is still credited as the first to give a general outline of its doctrines. *Enc. Islam* 2nd ed. points out the name Ahl-i Haqq has been adopted by other Islamic sects such as the Nusayris and Hurufis, and that the name Ali Ilahi (adherents to the divinity of Ali) was applied to the Ahl-i Haqq by outsiders, but inappropriately, since the "deified" Ali is not prominent in their system.

In a letter to Prokesch-Osten of 20 September 1857 (*Correspondance entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten*, p. 159) Gobineau reports that for the last year he had been surrounded by members of the Ahl-i Haqq, that is, at least fifteen of his servants at the French Legation were members of the sect, including his two valets de chambre. One of the latter was held in high regard, having the rank of saint.

6 Gobineau is referring to the phonetic similarity between Nusayri and *Nasrani*, the Arabic word for "Nazarene" i.e. Christian (tr.). But he is wrong to draw similarities between Christians and Nusayris. The name Nusayri derives from one of the latter's most important leaders, Muhammad ibn Nusayr. *Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Cyril Glassé (London: Stacey International, 2001), p. 36.

7 Momen (*Shi'ih Islam*, p. 46) points out Abdullah ibn Saba al-Himyari is accredited with having started the extremist doctrines surrounding Ali. "During Ali's Caliphate . . . he was banished by Ali to Madain on account of his saying to Ali: 'Thou art God.'

According to many accounts . . . Ali even caused some of the followers of Ibn Saba to be burned."

8 According to Shi'ih teaching the non-Muslim minorities were ritually impure (*najis*) and their products also subject to the law of legal impurity. Although under Shah Abbas I Armenian Christians and Jews were enlisted into Persia's commercial life (Newman, *Safavid Iran*, p. 72) in due course the law of najis led to innumerable restrictions being placed on the daily life of non-believers like Christians and (even more so) Jews.

9 These terms correspond to stages of religious knowledge rather than, as Gobineau states, different sects.

10 The names Gobineau has supplied for these esoteric groups, based as they are on oral sources which he has transcribed, are likely to be suspect (Fr. ed.).

11 The Ahl-i Haqq (preserving an old Shi'ite extremist doctrine) believe in seven incarnations or manifestations of the godhead: "The first four divine incarnations are the Creator Kavandagar, Mortaza Ali (i.e. Ali b. Abi Taleb), Shah Khoshin, and Soltan Sohak; the subsects disagree about the other three." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), vol. 1, p. 636.

12 Gobineau's insistence on a connection between Buddhism and Sufi groups is highly debatable. (Fr. ed.).

13 *Enc. Islam*, 2nd ed., describes Benyamin, Daud, etc. as angels emanating from the divinity (vol. 1, p. 260).

14 The French editor, lacking a manuscript, is unclear about what is written here ("et pour lui donner la vialité, commença lui-même par la suivre"). The word "vialité" seems invented by Gobineau (tr.).

15 Gobineau refers here to the ceremony of *sar-sipurdan*, "the 'entrustment of the head' (again a Sufi term), an initiation rite in which the neophyte (*taleb*) links himself to a spiritual master (*pir*)." *Enc. Iranica*, vol. 1, p. 636.

16 "guide of the way" from Arabic "rah" = path, road, way (Fr. ed.).

17 Abul-Qasim al-Junayd, a Sufi of Baghdad, d. 910 (Fr. ed.).

18 Gaulmier remarks that this word does not exist in French and is probably "section" or the Latin *rectio:* ceremonial presentation of a sacrificial animal (tr.).

19 That nullifies, chiefly used of marriage (tr.).

20 Gobineau's valet – see above, n.5

21 This should be corrected to *Kitab-i saranjam*, "Book of perfection". The French editors add that the *Book of Kings* should be the "Book of the four angels" (Arabic *malak*, and not *malik*, "king").

22 A huge exaggeration. The heartlands of the Ahl-i Haqq in Iran are Luristan, the regions of the Gurani-speaking population around Kermanshah, in Azarbaijan around Lake Urumiya, in the mountains north of Tehran and on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, as well as in most major cities of Iran. *Enc. Iranica*, vol.1, p. 636.

23 Gobineau's dislike of the small Christian groups he met in Iran is evidenced by a letter to his sister in which he describes all of them, no matter what their faction, as liars, thieves and destitutes, the prey of worthless missionaries. (Fr. ed.). This wholly negative view can be compared with Lt-Col. Sheil's more detached observations on the Nestorians living in the vicinity of the city of Urumiya, whom he found prey to extortion, forced marriage or conversion, at the hands of Afshar nobles. See Lady Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners In Persia* (London: John Murray, 1856), Note E. It might be added that a significant number of nineteenth-century British travellers to the Near East and admirers of Islamic culture shared Gobineau's negative view of eastern Christians.

24 This term reappears in *History of the Persians* to designate feudal retainers to the Achaemenid kings (Fr. ed.).

25 Also known as Manakji Limji Hatari, this Bombay Parsee arrived in Persia in 1854, was the Parsee agent in Tehran for many years, and died there in 1892. Gobineau became

acquainted with him during the winter of 1856–7 when he was defending the interests of British protégés. Manakji developed close contacts with the Babi community several of whom worked as his secretaries. Moojan Momen has informed the present editor that this is the earliest extant document providing figures for the Iranian Zoroastrian community.

26 *Bundahishn*: Zoroastrian scripture written in the Pahlavi (Middle-Persian) language, chiefly concerned with eschatology, and the final judgment.

27 Akbar (1556–1605), third of the Mughal emperors of India, devised a syncretic system of religious belief – Din-i Ilahi – hoping it would appeal to Muslims and Hindus. Having expelled the Afghans who had put an end to the Safavid dynasty, as ruler of Iran (1736) Nadir Shah tried to excise the rigid Shi'ism of the later Safavid period. His proposal for it to become a fifth school (named Jafari after the sixth Imam) alongside the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence dissolved after his assassination in 1747.

28 Aurangzeb (ruled 1658–1707), of all the Mughals the least tolerant in matters of religion, in complete contrast to Akbar (who abolished the tax on non-Muslims) endeavoured to impose Sunni Islam on India.

4 THE CONDITION OF INDIVIDUALS

1 According to Katouzian the position of the shah was precarious precisely because there *was no* written law in Iran. He argues that "Iran has been an arbitrary state and society throughout its history . . . power and authority has not been based in law", Homa Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 10.

2 Gobineau is overstating his case here. Amanat writes: "the Persian monarchical model, a legacy of the Sassanian period (224–640) and before, persisted for centuries in the Islamic world with few interruptions." During the Safavid period, the subjects of the empire "regarded the monarchy, if not the person of the shah, as an exalted institution crucial for preserving Shi'ism". While "the Qajars did not claim to be of Safavid descent, nor did they pretend to rule on behalf of a nominal Safavid shah . . . they nevertheless tried to sustain an air of legitimacy as protectors of the Shi'ite domain and upholders of the Shi'ite religious order." Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 8.

3 Amanat describes a painting by Kamal al-Mulk in which the Shah, adopting a Napoleonic pose, "sits in solitude in the Mirror Hall [*talar*] looking out onto the garden of Gulistan palace", *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 277.

4 Gobineau's exposition of this tense and ambiguous relationship was exemplified in the career of Mirza Taqi Khan, Amir Kabir, Nasir al-Din's first grand vizier (sadr-i azam) who fell from grace and was murdered at the Shah's order in January 1852.

5 Gobineau's picture of the mirza class supports Katouzian's categorisation of Iran as a "short-term society", in which arbitrary rule and the absence of law prevented the "long term accumulation of property, wealth, capital, social and private institutions, even the institutions of learning", *Iranian History and Politics*, p. 11.

6 Codifying ordinances of Louis XIV written by his finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (tr.).

7 The French editors, arguing that Gobineau had read Adam Smith, perhaps when he worked as a researcher for Tocqueville between 1843–4, see this comment as evidence of his opposition to the nineteenth century's mechanistic division of labour. In this he was in agreement with Michelet, as they point out, and also with English late romantic proponents of medievalism, such as Ruskin and Morris. In fact in his disdain for utilitarianism and his extolling of oriental practice, Gobineau puts himself in the company of such British aficionados of the East as David Urquhart and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.

8 Panurge: character in Rabelais' *Pantagruel* (tr.).

9 i.e. press-ganging (tr.).
10 Gobineau is being coy, as the "object" is usually of the same sex (tr.).
11 Gobineau refers in a dispatch to Persian troops attacking the British with bayonets after the latter had taken Bushihr in December 1856 (Fr. ed.).
12 The French editors point out that in his *History of the Persians* Gobineau makes much of a feudal organisation of ancient Iran and the predominance of tribal custom; the suggestion is that Persia has laws and customs that were able to function autonomously. Katouzian notes that proponents of the concept of feudalism in Iran have used A.K.S. Lambton's *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (1953) to make their case, but so too have its opponents, among whom he is included. According to Katouzian, "there is no evidence for the existence of any form of serfdom or bondage in Iranian history . . . The peasant was of course obliged to pass on the surplus of production, in the form of shares, dues, taxes, etc., to some agent of exploitation: the state, the land assignee, the tax farmer, or whoever. But this is no evidence, much less proof, of feudal relations." While propertied classes did exist in Iran, they were dependent on the state:

> The Iranian 'landlord', whether a land assignee, a tax farmer, an endowment beneficiary or even a local smallholder, enjoyed no such [inviolable] right to his title, or security of his income [as the European feudal landlord] . . . In general, the absence of a legal code of conduct – that is the arbitrary nature of power at all levels – leaves little room for personal, let alone political economic or financial security and predictability. (*Iranian History and Politics*, p. 62, p. 66 p. 67)

Although a close and accurate observer of Persian society, Gobineau often let his personal intellectual predilections take over – as seen in his remarks on feudalism, which he romantically favoured as a disaffected aristocrat manqué.
13 Such cases do not support the theory of "never-changing feudal customs, traditions and laws which restricted social and geographical mobility", Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics*, p. 62.
14 Gobineau writes "Scyndhi", but I can find no such place. Possibly misread from manuscript (tr.).
15 Marshy area in N.W India and S.E. Pakistan, part of ancient rajaship of Kutch (tr.).
16 Mathematical Chinese ring puzzle (tr.).
17 Russian Orientalist known to Gobineau (Fr. ed.).

5 CHARACTERS, SOCIAL RELATIONS

1

> From the Central Asian khanates of Khiva, Marv, and Bukhara in the northeast to Herat and Kandahar in the east to Baluchistan and Makran in the southeast, the Persian frontiers witnessed persistent nomadic incursions. Turkoman, Afghan, and occasionally Baluch encroachments into the interiors of Khurasan and neighbouring provinces ravaged the countryside . . . Turkoman raiders' common practice of abducting villagers and townsmen of Khurasan to sell in the slave markets of Khiva and Bukhara . . . was a major menace to the Qajar Government and damaged its reputation. (Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 15)

2 Arabic *tawassuth* = mediation; Arabic *wasith* = interpreter (tr.).
3 Seeking refuge (*bast*) in religious sanctuaries was recognised as a traditional right. The shrine in the village of Shah Abd al-Azim, a short distance from Tehran, was a site specially favoured for this practice.
4 Also lands-knight. From German: *Landsknecht*, a mercenary soldier (tr.).

5 Synonymous with brutal Croatian soldier, seventeenth-century mercenary force in Croatia and later Austria (tr.).
6 Interior apartments – province of the females of the household.
7 "Marriage for a fixed term [*muta*] and usually for a pre-determined financial arrangement is considered allowable by Shi'is. The marriage may be for any length of time, even for a matter of hours . . . Sunnis do not hold temporary marriage to be allowable and indeed consider it to be mere prostitution . . ." Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, p. 182.
8 Child's servant (tr.).
9 Gobineau perhaps has in mind Islamic laws establishing that the testimony of two women is worth that of one man, and that in the inheritance of property women are entitled to half a man's share. In order for a judgment to be delivered against adulterers four witnesses had to have observed the act.
10 Gobineau translates the Persian expression: *damarghat – chagh-i*? (lit. Is your nose fat?) meaning: are you well? Lady Sheil records the same expression in *Glimpses of Life*, p. 78.
11 Riza Quli Khan Hidayat – known as *Lalah-bashi* – had been tutor of Nasir al-Din's younger half brother Abbas Mirza. Amanat describes him as "prolific court poet laureate and chronicler, literary historian, biographer, and lexicographer", *Pivot of the Universe*, p. 64. Hidayat is the author of the last two volumes of *Rawdat al-Safa-yi Nasiri*, most probably a source for Gobineau's account of the Babi movement in *Religions and Philosophies of Central Asia*. The French editors point out two folio volumes of Hidayat's works were in Gobineau's possession.
12 Lisan al-Mulk, historian and author of *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*, a "universal history" the last volumes of which provide the fullest contemporary account of the Babi episode (other than Babi sources). Gobineau cites this as a source for his own work.
13 That is Gobineau and the interpreter Querry, dragoman at the French Legation (Fr. ed.).
14 Names of seventh- and eighth-century French kings (tr.).
15 Antoine Montfleury, French actor and playwright, died 1667 (tr.).
16 Abul-Qasim Firdausi, b. circa 940 in Tus, Khurasan, dedicated his Persian national epic *Shahnama* to Sultan Mahmud Ghazni circa 1010.
17 A type of puppet theatre "usually called karagöz (black-eyed), from the name of its principal character . . . Its form was that of a dialogue between the two characters Karagöz and Hadjeivat, who appear . . . in an endless variety of disguises", Kritzeck, *Anthology of Islamic Literature*, p. 344.
18 *Madonna della Sedia* by Raphael (tr.).
19 Gobineau himself appears in one of these frescoes, together with the minister for foreign affairs, the Turkish chargé d'affaires, Haydar Ali, and the Russian minister, Lagowski. See photo in A-D. Hytier, *Dépêches Diplomatiques*, between p. 156 and p. 157 (Fr. ed.).
20 Better known as the *Hamza-Nama*: ancient prose romance transmitted orally, date written down unknown. Most popular during Safavid and Mughal times. *Enc Ir.*, vol. 2.
21 The last four chapters in *Religions and Philosophies* are devoted to Persian religious theatre – known as *taziya*.
22 Longinus Cassius, A.D. 213–73, Roman rhetorician (tr.).

6 PROBABLE RESULTS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA

1 This was precisely the issue that exercised Gobineau in *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*. The pessimistic vision that underwrote each of the five volumes was the belief that civilizations were built upon the mixing of advanced, energetic races with more passive, effete ones. While such mixing was a pre-requisite of civilisation, it eventually led to the adulteration of the blood of the conqueror with that of the conquered, and the assured eventual decline of the civilisation in question. While there was an

inevitability about European imperialism in the East, it would in the long run produce negative effects for the imperial power.

2 See *Three Years*, Chapter 1, "The Nation", n.12.

3 Karim Khan established the shortlived Zand dynasty in southern Persia with Shiraz as his capital, ruling from 1750 to 1779.

4 In a letter to Tocqueville, 15 January 1856 (*Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville*, p. 256),Gobineau expresses much the same sentiments about the capacity of oriental nations to learn from and soon outstrip Europeans in the production and merchandising of commodities.

RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

1 THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CHARACTER OF ASIATICS

1 By Asia is specifically meant Persia and the lands over which Persia exercised influence – Turkey, Caucasia and the Caspian, Afghanistan and Muslim India. By the mid-nineteenth century, European technological, economic and military ascendancy so far exceeded the rest of the world's as to invest Gobineau's opening statement with all the force of a paradox. However, Gobineau's ideas were influential enough on Curzon perhaps to inspire him to write: "it ought not to be difficult to interest Englishmen in the Persian people. They are the same lineage as ourselves", George Nathaniel Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, 1892, repr. London: Frank Cass, 1966) vol. 1, pp. 12–13.

2 Far from criticising oriental thinking here, Gobineau endorses it, taking up an anti-rationalist position, though one not strange to those nineteenth-century writers like Carlyle who opposed the "practical" mechanistic philosophy of utilitarianism.

3 An example of Gobineau's frequently colourful if inappropriate phraseology, given that he is speaking of an Islamic country.

4 Field Marshall de Monluc, soldier of François I, author of *Commentaries* (1592) – a work much esteemed by Gobineau (Fr. ed.).

5 Gobineau's expression "perfectly heterodox" is tongue-in-cheek: for Muslims' worship of Christian and Hindu saints is entirely unorthodox.

6 While staying in Shiraz in 1811, Anglican missionary Henry Martyn noted the existence of a small community of Jewish converts to Islam, one of whom acted as intermediary between Martyn and some local Shi'ih divines with whom he had entered into debate on the merits of Christianity and Islam. J. Sargent, *A Memoir of Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D.* (New York: American Tract Society, 184?), pp. 325–8. On Persia's Jewish community in general see H. Sarshar, *Esther's Children*; and on the Qajar period specifically, Haidah Sahim, "Jews of Iran in the Qajar Period", in Robert Gleave, ed., *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, pp. 293–310.

7 Muir wrote of the challenge after the death of the Prophet facing the first Caliph Abu Bakr:

> Save a remnant here and there, faith was vanishing, and the Arabs throughout the Peninsula were relapsing into apostasy . . . 'Throughout the land there shall be no second creed,' was the behest of Mahomet upon his deathbed. False prophets must be crushed; rebels vanquished; apostates reclaimed or else exterminated; and the supremacy vindicated of Islam. It was, in short, the mission of Abu Bakr to redeem the dying Prophet's words. (*The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline and Fall* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1891), p. 17)

Whether or not Muhammad did sanction the penalty of death for apostasy, Muir

correctly places the practice in the context of Islam's early struggle for survival within pagan Arabia.

8 *Atash-kadih*: Zoroastrian fire temple.

9 *kitman*: act of concealment, discretion

10 State religion of Persia under the Sassanians, the faith of Zardusht or Zoroaster was eclipsed with the coming of Islam. The Koran makes no mention of Zoroastrianism, but partially endorses followers of Judaism and Christianity as "Peoples of the Book" (*ahl al-kitab*) who paid the poll-tax. Browne points out that a poll-tax was instituted on the Zoroastrians of Bahrain in the lifetime of the Prophet, and quotes a hadith in which Muhammad is reported as having said of the "Magians": "Deal with them as ye deal with the People of the Book", *Literary History of Persia*, vol.1, pp. 201–2. One of the Prophet Muhammad's most prominent helpers was the Persian, Salman Irani, and while in the course of time the Zoroastrians became very much second-class citizens in Iran, their religion still retained respect as a part of the national heritage.

11 Shapur I (reigned 241–71) continued the policy of his father, Ardashir, of establishing Mazdaeism as the state religion. The French editors explain Gobineau's remark in the context of his *Treatise on Cuneiforms* where he argues that the Aryan Persia of the Archaemenids was contaminated by Semitic monotheism.

12 *Three Years in Persia* (Gobineau's note).

2 THE FAITH OF THE ARABS: ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SHI'ISM

1 Chaldaism was a vague concept in the early 1860s. Gobineau used it as a synonym for "sémitisme" in *Treatise on Cuneiforms*, while the German scholar Boetticher (*Horae Aramaicae*, Berlin, 1847) – whose work Gobineau must have known – made the Chaldeans Aryans who had contact with the Semitic Babylonians (Fr. ed.).

2 Gobineau may have acquired knowledge of these pre-Islamic deities from Caussin de Perceval, *Essay on the History of the Arabs before Islamism* (Essai sur l'histoire des Arabs avant l'islamisme, Paris, 1848), and Renan's article "Mahomet et les origins de l'islamisme", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 December 1851. Gobineau's inscription of the word "Meny" has not been identified but perhaps he means Manat, a divinity worshipped by the idolatrous Arabs (Fr.ed.).

3 Gobineau must have had in mind here the difficulties Muhammad had getting the bedouin nomads of the Arabian peninsula to follow the laws and observances of Islam.

4 As seen, for example, in the Arabic letters *alif*, *lam*, and *mim* which preface the first twenty-six suras of the Koran.

5 The French editors write: "We see not a single verse in the Qur'an which has the power to justify this affirmation of Gobineau", In addition, they consider the rationalist free-thinker al-Jahiz (d. 869) an unlikely source for this unreferenced statement.

6 The Sabians mentioned in the Koran (e.g. 2. 62) were the Gnostic, neo-platonic sect found in Harran in Syria which had a profound influence on Persian philosophy (Fr.ed.).

7 Gobineau had written in *Treatise on Cuneiforms*: "Justice, for Asiatics, is nothing but the will of God", and this was associated in his mind with the caprices of arbitrary rule he witnessed during his time in Persia (Fr.ed.).

8 Given that he had generally little that was good to say about Catholicism, Gobineau's endorsement of St Thomas Aquinas can best be construed – as do his French editors – in connection with the work he did for Tocqueville on social morality, in which he supported Christianity "not as a purveyor of truth but as a social bastion", Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*, p. 49.

9 Site of the decisive battle (637) in which Arab armies, led by Sad ibn Abu-Waqas, defeated the Persians and shattered the Sassanid dynasty.

10 Amr ibn al-As and Khalid ibn al-Walid were both from the Quraysh clan that initially opposed Muhammad. Their later exploits as conquerors of Egypt and Syria respectively, though nominally in the cause of Islam, have, however, frequently been explained in terms of the Arab *gazu* (raid) on the grand scale.

11 "The Arabs overturned governments which were in a state of corruption and decay and the hope they held out to the great masses of the people of more equality and kinder treatment brought on a social and religious revolution. It is true, however, that there was no serious attempt at wholesale conversion to the Moslem religion other than the levying of a special poll-tax on non-Moslems." Donald N. Wilber, *Iran Past and Present* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 37.

12 A fervent Sunni of Turkic race, Sultan Mahmud Ghazni (d.1030) established an empire in the Iranian plateau but on conquering India took along with him as well as Islam, the Persian language and culture. During his reign Firdausi composed his *Shahnama* of which Kritzeck wrote: "[its] subject . . . is the history of Iran, its heroes and glory, from legendary times to those of the Sassanian kings. It is decidedly not an Islamic work . . . Like most of the older epics, it is a fiercely patriotic work." *Anthology of Islamic Literature*, p. 114. Gobineau's phrase that the work was "compelled to be Persian" implies it represented a form of resistance to Islam and the Turkic sultan.

13

> Daylaman was an area that coincides with modern Gilan, a province in the north of Iran on the Caspian Sea. Balyuzi wrote: the inhabitants . . . even after embracing Islam, continued to be at variance with the caliphate of the Abbasids and its tenets. The very name Daylaman became synonymous with heterodoxy and heresy. Eventually from the Daylaman land arose the first powerful Shi'ih dynasty: the Buwayhids [Buyids] (A.D. 932–1062). (Balguzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islam*, p. 236)

Gobineau's choice of historic referents is intended to substantiate his main idea: Islam was a cover under which disparate pre-Islamic ideas and ways of thinking, pre-eminently the Persian, were maintained.

14 Gobineau's grand narrative slides over a large stretch of history, including the Saljuq, Mongol and Timurid periods in which Sunni belief and practice were in the ascendancy in Persia.

15 Gobineau here equates Ali with the beneficent deity of Zoroastrianism, Ormuzd. The Semitic Satan (*shaytan*) who contends with the Imams is likened to Ahriman, the evil principle in Zoroastrianism. The Imams are compared to the six ministers or archangels of Ormuzd (Amchaspends). The French editors raise the question as to whether Gobineau may have read Lammenais' *Amschaspands et Dervands* (Paris, 1845), and conclude Gobineau's comparisons are "more ingenious than convincing".

3 BEGINNINGS OF BABISM

1 Mullah Hadi, described by E.G. Browne as "the greatest Persian philosopher of the nineteenth century", merits 12 pages in *Year Amongst the Persians* (pp. 143–55). Gobineau cites him many times in his *Treatise on Cuneiforms*, and devotes several pages to him in the fourth chapter of *Religions et philosophies*.

2 Both Gobineau and his French editors now signpost the significance of his inscription of the Babi movement. Gobineau discerns an openness in early to mid-nineteenth-century Persia to new religious forms, the existing ones being considered as stale and unproductive; he then proceeds to link the incidents surrounding the emergence of Babism with the birth of great religions of the past, an interpretation that strongly attracted Renan.

Gaulmier *et al.* highlight the Babi material as "the fresh part" of *Religions and Philosophies*, the part to which it principally owed its success.

3 This would make Ali Muhammad's birthdate 1824; the correct date is 1819, making him twenty-four/five around the inception of his movement. Gobineau's inaccuracy can be put down to his oral sources. On the computation of the Bab's age in the earliest western accounts see E.G. Browne, "The Babis of Persia: 1. Sketch of Their History and Personal Experience amongst Them, 2 Their Literature and Doctrines", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1889), vol. 21, pp. 485–526, and 881–1009: pp. 508–9. Reprinted in Moojan Momen, ed., *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Babi and Baha'i Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), pp.168–9. The year 1844, rather than 1843, is usually associated with the inception of Babism; it was in the spring of 1844 that Mulla Muhammad Husayn Bushrui met Ali Muhammad in Shiraz. The latter "announced to him that he was the successor to [Sayyid] Ras[h]ti [see n.6 below] and the *bab* to the Hidden Imam", Denis MacEoin, "Babism", p. 310. MacEoin gives a precise date for this event: 12 Rabi I 1260/1 April 1844.

4 A mix of claims about Ali Muhammad, some of which are factual and others not. Amanat (*Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 117–18) states the Bab developed a distaste for the formal madrasa education of the time, but had a thirst for "esoterics and occult sciences as well as other, less-studied fields such as mathematics and astrology." MacEoin sums up the Bab's religious education in the following terms:

> References in some of his early writings . . . suggest that he had little love for business pursuits and instead applied himself to the study of religious literature, including works on *feqh* . . . The Bab's short period of study in Iraq, his composition of *tafasir* and works on *feqh* and *kalam*, his references to theological literature in his early writings, and his idiosyncratic, ungrammatical Arabic all serve to paint a picture of him in his early youth as a would be *alem* with original aspirations and ideas, whose lack of a *madrasa* education, however, excluded from the rank of the *olama*. ("Bab", p. 279)

Regarding Gobineau's claim that Ali Muhammad knew the Gospels and sought out Jewish and Zoroastrian scholars, Lambden ("Some aspects of Isra'iliyyat", p. 224) posits that Gobineau "could not imagine, despite his very limited knowledge of the Bab's writings, Babism originating outside of a western, biblical (Judaeo-Christian) sphere of influence." Lambden goes on to dismiss Gobineau's claims – since widely disseminated – that the Bab had read the New Testament or was influenced by Jewish and Zoroastrian sources, concluding that evidence for such assumptions is "wholly lacking" (p. 225). The claim concerning the Bab's possession of rare manuscripts is purely conjectural.

5 After proclaiming himself to his first disciples in Shiraz, the Bab undertook the pilgrimage. "It appears that he had originally planned to fulfil Shia messianic prophecies in Kerbala, where he summoned followers to join him . . . However, for some reason the Bab changed his strategy." In Mecca he made another proclamation in front of the Kaba, "enacting the part of the expected Imam on the day of his manifestation as indicated in the Shia Traditions", Mongol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 91.

6 Missing from Gobineau's account is Ali Muhammad's connection to the Shaykhi School. (Gobineau writes about Shaykhism in *Religions and Philosophies*, in the second chapter entitled "Persian Islamism". His account, which is largely erroneous, includes the bizarre comparison of the Shaykhis to "the English Puseyites".) The founder of Shaykhism, Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai, was born in al-Ahsa in modern Saudi Arabia around 1750 and died in 1826. He spent large periods of his life travelling between the Shi'ih holy cities of Iraq and Persia, and was invited to Tehran by Fath Ali Shah. MacEoin argues ("From Shaykhism to Babism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal in

Shi'ih Islam", unpublished PhD, University of Cambridge, [1979]) had Shaykh Ahmad's orthodoxy not been impugned by the Qazvini Usuli Mujtahid, Muhammad Taqi Baraqani, Shaykhism would not have developed as a distinct school, and Ahmad's "theories would not have been able to function as a matrix for the speculations of the Bab and his followers" (p. 77). Shaykh Ahmad's designation of Sayyid Kazim Rashti as his successor was itself a rare practice among Shi'ih mujtahids, and set a precedent for the transmission of charismatic authority (almost amounting to the Imamate itself) that led many Shaykhis to attach themselves to Babism after the death of Sayyid Kazim. Paradoxically, however, the Sayyid did not appoint his successor but his followers appear to have been inspired by Kazim's cryptic statements (such as: "Are you not content that I should die and the cause of your Imam be made manifest?") to seek one out. It is therefore in this messianic context that Ali Muhammad made his claims. MacEoin, "Shaykhism", p. 127. It was from the ranks of the Shaykhis that the Bab collected his first disciples, often given the mystic number eighteen and known as the *huruf al-hayy* or Letters of the Living. See MacEoin, "Babism", p. 310.

7 It should be pointed out that Gobineau follows the *Tarikh al-Tawarikh* in giving prominence to Kufa as the place where the Bab awoke to his calling, not Medina or Shiraz as mentioned in Babi accounts. See Browne, "Babis of Persia", p. 903. Matthew Arnold translated an extract from Gobineau's account of the Bab's experience in Kufa, which he connected with the sacrifice of the Prophet's grandson Husayn, and the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. Arnold, "A Persian Passion Play", *Works* (London: Macmillan, 1903), vol. 3, pp. 244–89: pp. 247–9. This "Christianising" of Persian religious expression (for Arnold identifies Husayn with Iran through "Persian" Shi'ism) owes not a little to Gobineau's narrative of Babism.

8 The second "proof" of his mission, after his fulfilment of the Shi'ih prophecies relating to the re-appearance of the Hidden Imam and the prophecies of Rashti, was the Bab's writings. Amanat emphasises the significance here of the Koranic reference to "the 'Book' that is 'sent down' to the Prophet [as] the 'sign' from God". The *Qayyum al-Asma* is a commentary on the Koran's *Sura Yusuf*; its first chapter, known as *Surat al-Muluk*, was begun in Shiraz on the night of 22 May and completed within a few days. It was "the speed with which he 'revealed verses'" that so impressed Ali Muhammad's first follower, Mulla Husayn, who was with him during this short period. *Resurrection*, p. 172. On the *Qayyum al-Asma* see Denis MacEoin, *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), pp. 55–7.

Gobineau's dismissal of the Bab's writings as "the work of a schoolboy" compared to the Koran may have been influenced by what he knew of the criticisms made against the Bab's Arabic during his final interrogation in Tabriz. It should also be pointed out that Gobineau's own grasp of Arabic was very meagre. When it came to translating the Bab's Arabic *Bayan* (included in *Religions and Philosophies* as an appendix and entitled "Ketab-e-Hukkam") he probably relied on Mullah Lalizar. Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 18 n.

9 This remark qualifies the one made earlier about his "expressing a profound veneration of the Prophet, the Imams and their holy brethren". Gobineau implies that Ali Muhammad – like some member of the Ahl-i Haqq – was employing *kitman*, or the adoption of a form of words to hide his real feelings. Together with the assertion that he was reading the New Testament and forming his new religious orientation from the doctrines of Jews and Zoroastrians, the idea that the Bab had scant regard for the faith of Shi'ism is a distortion. The fact that he did on a number of occasions adopt "a policy of *taqiya*, which involved the public renunciation of his original claims" (MacEoin, "Bab", p. 280) has nothing to do with the sincerity of the Bab's connection with Shi'ism – he was after all fixated on Shi'ih eschatology – but sprang from a politic concern to preserve his life.

10 Gobineau jumps the gun here. Scholars are agreed on the need to plot the development of Babism in stages. MacEoin establishes three: (1) 1844–8. Ali Muhammad claimed to be the gate (*bab*) to the Hidden Imam. This period is characterised by "extreme Islamic pietism". (2) 1848–9. Ali Muhammad increased his claim to being the promised Mahdi and abrogated the Islamic legal code. (3) Up to his execution in July 1850. The Bab understood himself to be a prophet independent of Islam producing new scriptures and a new legal system. MacEoin, "The Babi Concept of Holy War", *Religion* (1982) vol. 12, pp. 93–129: p. 93.

11 The suggestion that conditions favoured the Bab and his followers at this point is inaccurate. Gobineau omits to relate action taken against the Babis by the governor of Fars province, Husayn Khan, but mentioned in *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*. Browne ("Babis of Persia", p. 521) states that Babi "apostles, sent from Bushire to Shiraz, are forbidden to preach, and have the tendons of their feet cut by order of Huseyn Khan." It was Husayn Khan who ordered the Bab's arrest in Bushihr, and who interrogated him at a tribunal in Shiraz. Still more important, no mention is made of the vicious treatment meted out against the Bab on this occasion during which he was "humiliated and physically assaulted . . . He was then brought to the Friday congregation in the Vakil mosque" where he publicly renounced his claims in order to save his life. Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 255.

12 Ali Muhammad appears to have adopted a variety of titles with mystical and messianic significance to Shi'ism. Titles like *Bab* and *Nuqta* (point) implied delegation of authority to him by the Twelfth Imam and also by a divine authority. Browne states ("Babis of Persia", p. 907) that Ali Muhammad later abandoned the title "Bab" for a higher one, that of *Nuqta-i Ala* (the Primal Point) or *Nuqta-i Bayan* (Point of Utterance or Explanation).

13 Gobineau does not make it clear how the Bab communicated with these followers. According to Amanat, *Resurrection* (p. 255), during his house arrest in Shiraz his "contacts with the outside world were restricted to a few intermediaries". However, in a note to *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 262, Browne states he was informed by Subh-i Azal that the Bab was kept in the chief constable's house and this gave the Babis opportunities of "seeing and conversing with their Master" As Gobineau's Babi informants were Azali Babis he may have received this idea from them.

The collection of eighteen disciples are known as the *huruf al-hayy*, or Letters of the Living, most of whom, with the exception of Mullah Husayn Bushrui, never met the Bab in person. See MacEoin, "Babism", pp. 310–11; Amanat, *Resurrection*, Chapter 6, pp. 260–94.

14 Gobineau's term. The sense is "someone who brings a revelation from God"; the notion of revelation, of great importance to Islam, passes into Babism.

15 To Mulla Husayn, the first to believe in him, the Bab gave the title *Bab al-Bab* (the Gate of the Gate) implying he would be "the preliminary gate for access to the Bab", Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 172.

16 Gobineau's translation of the Arabic *naskhu* (meaning "transcription") by the word "effacements" (obliteration) is not just inexact but absurd (Fr. ed.) – and also an indicator of his poor command of Arabic.

17 Browne thought this to be Gobineau's "somewhat misleading" translation of the title of a work given in *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* as *Ziyarat Nama*, which Browne took to be a book of prayers to be used when making *ziyarat* or visitation to the tombs of the Imams or other saints. "Babis of Persia", pp. 896–7. On the confusion surrounding this work, see MacEoin, *Sources*, pp. 45–6.

18 Amanat puts Harati among "the middle-rank mujtahids of Isfahan whose previous Shaykhi tendencies led them to welcome the Bab", *Resurrection*, p. 264. Missing from Gobineau's account here is any reference to the Bab's escape from Shiraz during time of cholera (September 1846) and the period he subsequently spent in Isfahan under the protection of Manuchihr Khan, Mutamad al-Dawla. The most interesting aspect of this

episode is the Bab's apparent hold over Manuchihr Khan, who may have contemplated backing the young sayyid, perhaps in order to mount a challenge to Aqasi. But the Mutamad al-Dawla died suddenly in February 1847. The Bab was then dispatched under escort to Tehran, only for instructions to be received en route for him to be taken to the castle of Maku in Azarbaijan, where he eventually arrived in about July 1847. See MacEoin, "Bab", p. 280. Bayat adds that from his captivity in Maku, the Bab "repeatedly wrote letters to Muhammad Shah warning him of the evil consequences of his injustice", *Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 97. It is not clear why the Bab never reached Tehran, where he might have had an audience with Muhammad Shah. It may well have been through Aqasi's order as suggested by several sources. Gobineau, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, has the Shah and Aqasi considering their response to the Bab while he was still supposedly in Shiraz.

19 This interjection, already discussed in the introduction, is one of the more crucial examples of Gobineau's misreading of the significance of Babism. From the negative response of the mujtahids of Isfahan to Mullah Husayn's message it is clear they knew very well what the Bab was claiming, and how his claim would affect their own positions were it to be widely accepted. In his discussion of the role of jihad in the Bab's writings, so central to Shi'ih ideas about the Imam Mahdi, MacEoin, quoting from the Bab's earliest work, the *Qayyum al-Asma*, states: "the gate and representative of the Imam, the Bab was also, in a sense, the Imam himself 'in the worlds of command and creation', and, as such, was entrusted with a mission on behalf of the Imam to all mankind." "The Babi Concept of Holy War", p. 102. In defence of Gobineau, it is possible that his Babi sources, wishing to distance their beliefs from Shi'ism after the terrible events of 1849–52, misled him on this point.

20 Amanat states that Mullah Husayn left the Shah and Aqasi a copy of *Surat al-Muluk*, but says nothing about an audience. *Resurrection*, p. 262. Bayat writes: "Though Bushrui was not granted a royal audience, he succeeded in handling the Bab's dispatch to . . . Aqasi", *Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 89.

21 Gobineau's account of Muhammad Shah's dependence on Aqasi is confirmed by Amanat, who also describes his poor relations with the mother of his heir, the future Nasir al-Din Shah. *Pivot of the Universe*, pp. 29–30.

22 For a contemporary satirical account of Aqasi's irrigation schemes see Browne, *Year Amongst Persians*, p. 127.

23 Most of the males in Qurrat al-Ayn's blood family were prominent Usulis; far from being involved – as Gobineau suggests – in the Shaykhi movement, her uncle Muhammad Taqi was a strong opponent. According to Amanat it was her cousin Mullah Jawad Valiyani who introduced her to the teachings of Sayyid Kazim Rashti, with whom she corresponded. She may have heard and accepted the Bab's message through a brother-in-law whilst in Qazvin. Qurrat al-Ayn separated from her husband and joined the Shaykhi circle in Karbala after the death of Rashti, enthusing many with her sermons. Regarding Gobineau's story of her claim, Amanat says: "some sources report that she even assumed the title of 'the Point of the Divine Knowledge,' which implied that she may have envisaged some revelatory status for herself." Qurrat al-Ayn advocated removal of the veil, and in 1847 performed the act in a meeting (not a public square!) at which men were present, "arousing strong misgivings inside the Babi community", although the Bab himself insisted on her integrity. Mullah Muhammad Taqi, Qurrat al-Ayn's estranged husband's father and a bitter opponent, was murdered by Babis in 1847, without her sanction. *Resurrection*, Chapter 7, pp. 295–331. Gobineau's statement that he never heard a Muslim question Qurrat al-Ayn's virtue is strange given the remarks of Lisan al-Mulk which he reports later on. A standard Muslim criticism of her and Quddus (Muhammad Ali Barfurushi) is to be found in Mohammed Ali Kazembeyki, *Society, Politics and Economics in Mazandaran, Iran, 1848–1914* (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 119–20.

24 On the revolt in Khurasan led by Davalu chief, Hasan Khan Sala, see *Pivot of the Universe*, pp. 114–15.

4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF BABISM

1 Gobineau implies it is the people's fault that chaos ensues after the death of a Persian king. There was no reason why all other sources of power should not continue to exert their authority since Persian society had laws and customs that should allow it to function autonomously – "the law is immutable". In the next breath, however, he accepts after the death of a king "the notion of the law as sovereign as such does not exist in Asia". Katouzian's thesis that from pre-Islamic times it is precisely the absence of written law that defines the arbitrary state in Persia seems a better explanation. As we have already seen Gobineau despised what he saw of Nasir al-Din Shah's arbitrary rule; it seems that here (as in other things) he was wedded to a theory – in this case limited feudal monarchy – which was belied by his own observations in the field.

2 This refers to the so-called "conference of Badasht" which takes its name from the village in Mazandaran where the meeting was held between June–July 1848. Attending were the Babis' most important leaders, including Mullah Husayn Bushrui, Mullah Muhammad Ali Barfurushi and Qurrat al-Ayn. It was here that they abrogated the Islamic shar'ia, discussed the rescue of the Bab, now imprisoned in Azarbaijan, and Qurrat al-Ayn appeared in men's clothing unveiled. See MacEoin, "Babism", p. 311; Amanat, *Resurrection*, pp. 324–8.

3 In *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* Sipihr made broad hints linking Qurrat al-Ayn's preaching activities and sexual promiscuity and continued to maintain this position at his meeting with Gobineau in 1865.

4 He was Sipihr, Lisan al-Mulk.

5 Gobineau's sources here, besides Sipihr, must have been oral. MacEoin notes that, aside from "some interesting treatises" of Qurrat al-Ayn's and some "fragments by Quddus", writings by these are lost and it is therefore "almost impossible to reconstruct the details of Babi doctrine as actually taught by them", "Babism", p. 311.

6 Used as a shrine and place of pilgrimage, the tomb of Shaykh Tabarsi, as a result of the Babis making their stand there, acquired the title "fort". On Persian accounts of the struggle that took place there (October 1848–May 1849) see MacEoin, *Sources*, pp. 161–3. For western accounts see Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Chapter 3, pp. 91–9. For Browne's "pilgrimage" there in September 1888 see *Year Amongst the Persians*, pp. 612–19. Kazembeyki (*Society, Politics and Economics in Mazandaran*, pp. 115–30) presents a revisionist analysis of the Tabarsi episode that highlights local economic and political aspects, and is appreciative of the clergy's role in helping the state suppress Babism.

7 Momen states there were 313 Babis; he also cites the report printed by Browne (*Traveller's Narrative*, p. 216) by the British consul at Rasht, Capt. C. Mackenzie, who estimated the number at between "four and five hundred", Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 91 n, p. 96. Gobineau follows the official number.

8 This slant is criticised by the French editors who argue Gobineau picked up from Sipihr the notion that Babism was a "political rebellion". MacEoin ("Babi Concept of Holy War", p. 117) writes of the Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi:

> The hopelessness of their numerical position and the existing role of martyrdom in Shi'i piety led them to emphasize a desire to die as martyrs in a defensive *jihad* for the purpose of upholding the true faith; at the same time, offensive *jihad* against a government which had shown itself to be the enemy of the truth by its treatment of the Bab was a duty.

9 The French editors use these statements as evidence that Babism is one of the "innumerable varieties of Sufism". Browne may be closer to the truth when he associates the Babis with the "ultra-Shi'ite sects" of the past (especially the Ismailis), in which doctrines such as anthropomorphism, incarnation, reincarnation or "return" feature. *Literary History*, vol. 1, p. 311, p. 410. (See also ibid., p. 170, where he discusses parallels between the Babis and sixth-century Mazdakites.) MacEoin agrees to the early Shi'ih comparison as he states that "the Bab's doctrines, which exhibit many of the gnostic and Neoplatonist features common to earlier Shi'ite sects such as the Ismai'lis and Horufis, tend to become more abstruse" in his later writings. It was specifically in the *Bayan* (which few of the Bab's followers would have known) that the more developed theophanic features appear, including allegorised notions of return in which the spiritual qualities of holy figures of the past are said to re-incarnate themselves in the Babi heroes. MacEoin, "Bab", p. 281, p. 283. See also Amanat, *Resurrection*, pp. 180–1. These beliefs were later absorbed into the Bahai faith. See Bahaullah, *The Kitab-i-Iqan, The Book of Certitude*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1946.

10 The Bab, who had initially escaped from Shiraz to Isfahan, then to be imprisoned in the fortress of Maku, Azarbaijan, was moved to Chihriq near the northwest border in early May 1848, where he remained throughout the Tabarsi siege. See MacEoin, "Bab", p. 280.

5 BATTLES AND SUCCESSES OF THE BABIS IN MAZANDARAN

1 There follows a summary of Gobineau's earlier remarks on Mirza Taqi Khan, Amir Kabir, in *Three Years*, Part 1, Ch.11, pp. 195–6. The earlier account goes on to recount in detail the circumstances surrounding the Amir's fall and execution.

2 Modern district of Kujur.

3 In his summary of the *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*'s account of this incident, Browne writes that the village of Farra was "sacked, burned, and razed to the ground by the Babis, and its inhabitants put to the sword", *Traveller's Narrative*, p. 177. Gobineau's remarks below, however, suggest he was somewhat sceptical of his source.

4 Momen quotes the Russian Minister Dolgorukov's dispatch of 5 January 1849 in which he gives for those the Babis killed a figure of "about 100 men", *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 92.

5 January 10, 1849. Where he adheres to a precise chronology – as he does in narrating the state campaigns against the Babis – Gobineau follows the *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*, as do in certain instances even some Babi/Bahai accounts (MacEoin, *Sources*, p. 154).

6 Wrongly transliterated here. The correct name is *Vaskas*.

7 The French editors connect this allusion to the siege of Bethulia in Judith, 13.1–2 – the first of several Biblical references in this section, including the reference to Gideon (Judges 7. 20) several pages on.

8 It is perhaps not surprising that Gobineau – who had already compared Babi preaching to that of the seventeenth-century Scottish covenanters – should wish to use the Old Testament in order to exemplify for a French audience the movement's religiously inspired militancy. However, he must have known that the Babis' war cry at Tabarsi was "Ya Sahib al-Zaman!" (Oh Lord of the Age), a fact Dolgorukov reports in his dispatch of 22 February 1849. Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 93. Amanat glosses the term "one of the titles of the Imams, specifically of the Twelfth Imam, emphasizing his sole sovereignty at his time of appearance", *Resurrection*, pp. 420–1.

9 A choice example of Gobineau's ironic humour and typical of this section of the narrative in which he chooses to set the quirks and temper of the leaders of the government forces against the inspired fanaticism of the Babis. We should not overlook the contribution his novelist background brings to the text.

10 3 February 1849.
11 Desecration of corpses by both sides – including the Babis' mounting of heads on poles – is confirmed by both Muslim and Babi sources. See Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam, "The Babi-State Conflict at Shaykh Tabarsi", *Iranian Studies*, vol.15, 1–3 (2002) p. 98.

6 FALL OF THE CASTLE OF SHAYKH TABARSI, TROUBLE IN ZANJAN

1 Kasht.
2 Bandpay. For details including numbers and commanders of regular and irregular military forces in Manzandaran in 1848 see Kazembeyki, *Society, Politics and Economics in Mazandaran*, p. 36.
3 "A heavy bombardment of the fort began in the second half of March [1849]", Zabihi-Moqaddam, "Babi-State Conflict", p. 98.
4 Sixteenth-century Catholic uprising against King Henry II and the Calvinists (tr.).
5 The mujtahids took a prominent part in the killing of Muhammad Ali Barfurushi; some sources say even to the point of performing the act themselves.
6 As pointed out in notes to Chapter 4, n. 10, the Bab had been moved to Chihriq by May 1848.
7 This is an exaggeration. Lambden writes: "Jewish converts to Babism during the Bab's lifetime appear to have been non-existent . . . only a handful of six Khurasani Jewish converts of the early 1850s are known." "Aspects of Isra'iliyat", pp. 225–6.

Jewish conversion to Bahaism and Protestantism took place towards the end of the century. See Sahim, "Jews of Iran in the Qajar Period".

8 On Mullah Muhammad Ali Zanjani see Amanat, *Resurrection*, pp. 101–2.

Although Gobineau gives him the title Sharif al-ulama – prince of the learned – his more usual one is Hujjat al-Islam – proof of Islam. Gobineau is right to emphasise the Akhbari mullah's restless, questioning mind, which to conservative Usulis amounted to heresy. MacEoin, however, calls Hujjat "a religious firebrand who had already fallen foul of the secular authorities well before his conversion to Babism", and notes his "puritanical streak" and rigorous application of Islamic law. "Babi Concept of Holy War", pp. 118–19.

9 A further instance of what the French editors call Gobineau's *idée fixe*: that Persia never truly absorbed Muslim culture but recuperated a mass of ancient heterogeneous beliefs. His reading of Zanjani's character and beliefs is metonymic of his interpretation of Babism as a whole.
10 Gobineau is beholden to Sipihr for this figure, as well as for the story of Hujjat's escape to Zanjan. In the battle that ensued some 20,000 soldiers faced between 1,500–2,000 Babis. Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 114.

7 INSURRECTION IN ZANJAN, CAPTIVITY AND DEATH OF THE BAB

1 MacEoin ("Babi Concept of Holy War", p. 119) states: "On 16 May 1850, fighting broke out between a mob organized by the clergy and a small force of Babis, in the course of which one of the latter was killed".
2 Earth rammed between boards, which are removed when it dries (tr.).
3 The French editors evidence several of Gobineau's letters that show he had experience of the fragility of Persian houses.
4 Gobineau had already reported, in the final chapter of *Three Years*, that visible traces still remained of the Babi insurrection when he passed through the city in 1858.
5 The only translation I have been able to find for this word is "morose", "sullen", from the Hindi (tr.).
6 The armed struggle ended in January 1851. The British Consul in Tabriz reported on

25 January that the death of Hujjat "led to the surrender of his followers. The men were massacred by the troops excepting about twelve Hajees and Mollahs who were fired from the mouth of a Cannon. The Women were sent to the house of the Chief Priest", Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 123.

7 For an overview and analysis of the other revolts raised by the Babis at this time – including the first Nayriz (covered in *Nasikh al-Tawarikh*) uprising led by the charismatic Sayyid Yahya Darabi (of whom Gobineau nowhere makes mention) which ended with a massacre of Babis much like the Shaykh Tabarsi and Zanjan sieges – see Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, pp. 121–5.

8 To what extent, if at all, the Bab influenced these insurrections is difficult to gauge. According to MacEoin ("Babi Concept of Holy War"), the Bab's early writings were anything but gentle and pacific, and indeed advocated the violent establishment of a Babi state. Nevertheless, he has to agree that the Babis made little use of this call to offensive jihad, and in their clashes with the state can be said at most to have fought a "defensive" jihad. As for the question concerning what role political and social unrest played in these confrontations, he sees religion playing the major role at Shaykh Tabarsi, while social and political factors were undoubtedly at play in the Zanjan and Nayriz upheavals, especially in the latter where the people had been rebelling against the governor before Darabi's appearance. Thus, in spite of the theoretical call to religious war made by the Bab's writings, the role of jihad in all of these incidents remains indeterminate. Pointing out that the Bab was in correspondence with Darabi and Hujjat as well as Mullah Husayn and Quddus, Bayat (*Mysticism and Dissent*, pp. 121–2) opines: "There can be no doubt that the Babi leaders acted on the Bab's instruction, though they attempted to achieve their own more personal ends as well", Amanat (*Resurrection*, p. 322) sees the assassination of Qurrat al-Ayn's father-in-law, a high-ranking cleric in Qazvin, as the start of a process whereby Babi defiance led to "holy war" at Tabarsi, arguing "it was the Babi rank and file who preceded the leadership in this transformation, and gradually forced it to the point of no return".

9 "Even at Chihriq, the Bab was permitted to address those who came to hear and see him. [The Russian agent Mochinin relates how] 'The concourse of people was so great that, the court not being spacious enough to contain all the audience, the greater number remained in the streets listening attentively to the verses of the new Kuran'." Mirza Kazem-Beg, quoted in Browne, *Travellers Narrative*, p. 276.

10 "Zanvari" is incorrect: Mirza Muhammad Ali was the stepson of a well-known mujtahid, Sayyid Ali Zunuzi. Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 401.

11 The French judges: Conradin Duke of Souabe (1252–68), Laubardement "sinister agent of Richelieu" (Fr.ed.).

12 Burning chamber: also secret courts held at night to judge exceptional crimes (tr.).

13 Gobineau's essay on the workings of power in eastern societies, reiterating his ideas about the arbitrary and absolute nature of that power, takes as its starting point Mirza Taqi Khan's instigation of the Bab's execution as a means of quenching the Babi movement. He seems to be arguing in these paragraphs that the Bab was executed for reasons of state, since there was no evidence to connect him with the recent uprisings. This made him an innocent victim of political expediency – something that would eventually have been condemned in Europe where – in spite of the infamous judges Gobineau mentions – respect for justice and the rule of law ultimately obtained. In the East, however, might invariably equalled right and such considerations did not apply. Browne follows his master in arguing that Amir Kabir intended "to strike terror into the hearts of the insurgents, and to fill their minds with despair by the public execution of the Bab", *Year Amongst the Persians*, p. 68.

14 On the politics of the three Tabrizi mujtahids' involvement in the Bab's condemnation, which Mirza Taqi Khan had ordered, see Amanat (*Resurrection*, pp. 398–400) who

confirms the general tenor of Gobineau's remarks on the arbitrary, unlawful nature of this procedure.

15 Babi sources maintain Sayyid Husayn's renunciation was at the behest of the Bab so that he could report the Bab's last words to his followers. Gobineau is referring to his own description of Sayyid Husayn's martyrdom in Tehran two years later. (See Chapter 8). Browne, *Traveller's Narrative*, pp. 321–2.

16 The Bab was executed on 9 July 1850/28 Shaban 1266. Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 402.

17 According to *Nasikh al-Tawarikh* Ghuj Ali did not finish the Bab off but dragged him back to the execution square where he was killed by a second firing squad. On the speculations found in various accounts as to what might have happened if the Bab had behaved differently after the "miraculous" failure of the first execution attempt, see Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 127. Quoting W.S. Blunt's story claiming to come from someone present at the Bab's death, Momen comments "there are not many other accounts of the martyrdom of the Bab that can claim to be eyewitness reports". See his compilation of western reports on the execution in *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, pp. 77–82.

8 ATTEMPT ON THE KING'S LIFE

1 The issue of Babi militancy reaches its crux in this chapter. Gobineau emphasises the inward, otherworldly character of the Bab in contradistinction to his militant lieutenants. MacEoin would seem to contradict Gobineau's remark that the Bab's presence was no prerequisite for the active functioning of the Babi movement when he writes:

> That the 'Mahdi' had been executed and his followers everywhere defeated seemed to most people clear evidence of the falsehood of the Bab's claims, and the potential following which would certainly have accrued to the movement had even a measure of success attended its struggle with the state was drastically diminished. ("Babism", p. 313)

Bayat (*Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 124) points out a rumour current in Tehran immediately before the trial and execution of the Bab that a Babi uprising in the capital was in the offing. Whether or not this was true, in February 1850 well over a score of Babi leaders were arrested; among these were the so-called "Seven Martyrs of Tehran" – including the Bab's maternal uncle – who were executed in a public square. There can be no doubt that the fiercely repressive policy prosecuted against the Babis by Mirza Taqi Khan, which culminated in the execution of the Bab and the massacres that followed the ending of the Tabarsi, Zanjan and Nayriz sieges, exacerbated the militancy of the leadership that remained and prepared the way for the assassination attempt against the Shah.

2 The Bab was three months short of thirty-one at the time of his death.

3 A policy of religious tolerance. See above, *Three Years*, Chapter 3, "Sufism", n. 27.

4 Such "discussion" did not really take place since the Bab never reached Tehran, nor did Mulla Husayn speak in person to either Muhammad Shah or Aqasi as Gobineau's account claims. Communication was therefore reduced to letters – the Bab's increasingly admonishing the king.

5 In his first letters to Muhammad Shah the Bab promised him "political power over foreign rulers and sovereignty over distant lands should he pay allegiance to him . . . It was [after the Shah's evasive reply and dispatch of the Bab to Maku] that, giving up the idea of a fruitful alliance with the state, the Babis' attitude changed to open belligerence." Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 96. Although Gobineau does not appear to have seen Mirza Jani-i Kashani's *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, the earliest extant Babi history, he seems to have understood – no doubt through his Babi informants – the accruing hatred Babis

entertained for the Qajars as expressed in that work. See Browne, Introduction, *Tarikh-i Jadid, or New History of Ali Muhammad the Bab*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1893).

6 Gobineau explains this term (Arabic *wahdat*) in "Books and Doctrine of the Babis", the chapter which follows the present one in *Religions and Philosophies*.

See Browne's discussion ("Babis of Persia", pp. 920–1) of the "Science of the Letters" and his explanation of the numerical significance of *wahdat*. Gobineau went to great pains to explicate this esoteric "science" in his *Treatise on Cuneiforms*; it also permeates the Bab's writings.

7 Jinab-i Baha, who was in fact Azal's older half-brother, later made a claim to be a new Prophet or manifestation. Better known as Bahaullah, he converted the majority of Babis to his cause and henceforth they changed their designation to Bahais; the remaining Babis mostly followed Azal and are known as Azalis. Momen (*Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 19) claims that since Gobineau's informants were Azali Babis they were responsible for the prominence he gives to Azal. Bayat accepts that the Bab appointed Subh-i Azal as his successor, but points out that Azal never claimed to be a new Prophet. See Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, pp. 126–31.

8 On the Letters of the Living see above, Chapter 3, "Beginnings of Babism" ns.6 and 13.

9 The attempt on the Shah's life was in 15 August 1852/ 28 Shawwal 1268.

10 Since early 1850, after being apprehended and escorted to Tehran in connection with the murder of her mujtahid uncle by Babis, and briefly brought before the Shah, Qurrat al-Ayn had been in confinement in the house of Mahmud Khan Kalantar, chief of police. On her career after Badasht (end of 1848) up until her death in September 1852/Dhu al-Qada 1268, see Amanat, *Resurrection*, pp. 328–30.

11 The Shah entertained a pathological hatred for his half brother, Abbas Mirza, and suspicion fell on him of involvement in the Babi assassination plot. As a consequence the British negotiated his departure to Baghdad. The "old prince" in Russia was the Shah's uncle, Bahman Mirza, who might have lain claim to be regent should Nasir al-Din have been killed. See Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, pp. 218–22.

12 The number of Babis involved in the conspiracy and indeed the number of those actually sent to perform the assassination varies according to sources. Most agree that the leader of the plot was Shaykh Ali Turshizi, known as Azim, and that Muhammad Sadiq Tabrizi – the would-be assassin who was killed on the spot – had been Shaykh Ali's servant. Amanat writes:

> It is wrong to believe . . . that this was a sporadic attempt by isolated members. The assassination was inspired and planned by the remnants of the Babi leadership . . . Contrary to the pacifist view that prevailed much later among most Babis in exile, at this stage Babi activists were still dedicated to the apocalyptic struggle against the Qajar state and the ulama. (*Pivot of the Universe*, p. 207)

13 Gobineau does not say, however, that suspicion even fell on Mirza Aqa Khan Nuri himself. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, pp. 208–9, p. 212.

14 The French editors see in this long passage Gobineau's "unusual psychological penetration which allowed him to catch a glimpse of the infinite complexity of Persian mysticism."

15 Browne (*Travellers' Narrative*, pp. 313–4) sums up the various conflicting accounts of Qurrat al-Ayn's death, several of which refer to her strangulation in public gardens, including that of the Austrian Dr Polak who claimed to have witnessed her execution. Her death, along with that of Sulayman Khan's, was reported in *The Times* on 12 October 1852. Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 12.

16 On the mass execution of Babis see Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, pp. 211–18.

17 The passage that follows as far as "stray dogs that headed that way" is quoted by Renan in *Les Apôtres* (*Œuvres*, vol. IV, p. 698; *The Apostles*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1895, pp. 283–4). Browne, notes: Gobineau and the Hungarian Orientalist Vambery "both assert that amongst the martyrs of that day were women and children, who rivalled the men in the fortitude wherewith they met death; but of this assertion (except as regards Kurratul-Ayn) I have been unable to obtain any corroborative evidence from Musulman or Babi tradition." *Traveller's Narrative*, p. 334.

18 Visiting Persia in the first years of the twentieth century the novelist and travel writer Pierre Loti wrote: "Since Babism, clandestine and persecuted, penetrated Persia, there has been a recrudescence of fanaticism among those who have remained Shiites, and above all among those who still pretend to be." Loti, *Vers Ispahan*, ed. K.A. Kelly, annotated by K. C. Cameron (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1989), p. XVI.

19 Though Gobineau does not commit himself here to giving his own figure for the Babis in Persia his choice of language perhaps inflates their influence. This became a feature of some later British commentators on the Persian scene, such as Curzon and Valentine Chirol, who had both read him. See Nash, *Empire to Orient*, p. 126, p. 130.

20 That is, Prince Malkum Khan, sometime Persian ambassador to London. See Browne, *The Persian Revolution 1905–1909*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1910.

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