

Bahá'í: A Way of Life

by

William van der Hoonard

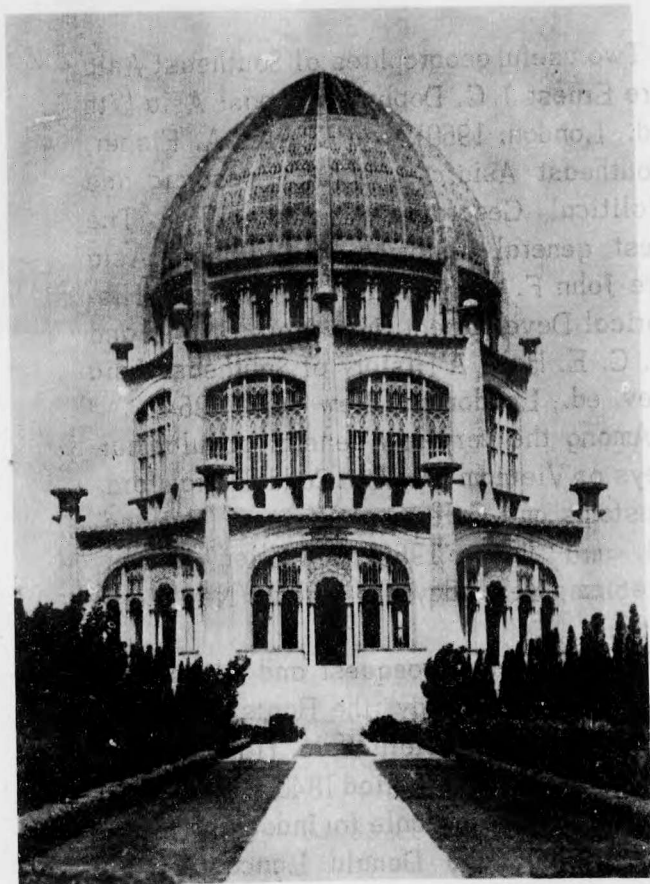
Shiraz is in southern Iran. It is a city of mosque domes and flower gardens, of nightingales and singers, of streams slipping over blue tiles into blue pools.

Bahá'í is the newest of the world religions, for it was launched only a little more than a hundred years ago — in Shiraz — by a young man known as Báb (Gate). He declared that he was the forerunner of an important new spiritual figure. His teachings were profound and poetic and were widely accepted throughout Persia. But they were also considered hearsay by the Islamic mullas, who taught that Muhammad was the greatest and the last of the Prophets, and who feared the Bábis (followers of the Báb) represented a threat to their entrenched position. During two decades more than twenty thousand Bábis were martyred, often being cruelly tortured first. The Báb himself was publicly shot in 1850 before some ten thousand spectators.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

One of the most active Bábis was Mirza Husayn 'Ali, son of one of the government ministers. His life story is dramatic. He was born in Teheran in 1817, scion of a noble and wealthy family. He was a brilliant youth, with an extraordinary power of attraction that was felt by all. He never attended school or college, receiving the mere rudiments of education in the home. He was, nevertheless, early in life distinguished by extraordinary wisdom and knowledge, as well as by a universal kindness and generosity. Being a Bábí, he was imprisoned in an underground dungeon in Teheran. During his stay in this prison he assumed the title of Baha'u'lláh meaning "Glory of God". When finally released four months later, he was too ill to walk unaided. Ragged, emaciated, his neck cut and bleeding from the weight of the iron collar he had worn, Mirza Husayn 'Ali found that his home had been plundered, his estates expropriated, his possessions and even his clothing stolen.

Refusing to recant his faith, he was shortly thereafter exiled to Baghdad. Almost forty years more of exile and prison lay ahead of Baha'u'lláh. Within a few years, under the aegis of Baha'u'lláh,



North American Baha'i Temple at Wilmette, near Chicago.

the Babi Faith was again such a threat to the clergy of Persia and Iraq that they entreated the Turkish government to remove him to Adrianople, from there to the penal colony of 'Akka, which was then in Turkish Syria. In 1863, in Baghdad, he announced to his followers that he was the Promised One of the Báb and claimed that he was the World Redeemer whose coming had been forecast in the scriptures of all the ancient faiths. He addressed the then custodians of society — the Pope, Queen Victoria, the Kaiser, the French Emperor, the Shah, the Czar and the rest — calling them to world peace, and proclaiming his mission as the Manifest-