



Máh-Kú Prison.

PREFACE

The year 1848 has long been known as “The Year of Revolution” in Europe. King Louis Philippe was forced to abdicate the French throne and, disguised as a tradesman, flee the country. While a republic was declared in France, Hungary declared its independence from Austria. Meanwhile, in Vienna, as revolutionaries marched on the royal palace, King Ferdinand abdicated his throne and fled Austria. Rebels in Italy, following the lead of Hungary and Austria, drove out Italian viceroys and rulers and sent the pope packing. In the dead of night and in the disguise of a humble priest, Pope Pius IX fled Rome. Meantime, in England, one hundred thousand members of the Chartist movement assembled to march on Parliament. Sweden, Denmark, and Ireland also experienced 1848 revolts.

A more peaceful but no less radical and transformative uprising occurred in a village in upstate New York that same year. This movement was unique in that its three hundred participants were almost exclusively women—save for Frederick Douglass, the former slave. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 is considered to be the first women’s rights conference ever held. However, announcements for the gathering appeared in newspapers on July fourteenth, the very day after another conference, declaring the emancipation of women, had just concluded. Unfortunately, a Eurocentric world has long overlooked what occurred in the Persian village of Badasht, a place name which one day may be as familiar as that of Bethlehem.

The following narrative dramatizes what occurred in Persia in July of 1848, and how those revolutionary, albeit nonviolent, events may very well have been prime cause in the repercussions felt throughout the rest of the world. Since the 1840’s, power has increasingly been stripped from both kings and clerics and fallen into the hands of the people. Interestingly enough, during that same decade of the 1840’s, millennial fever was sweeping both the Judeo-Christian and Muslim worlds. While Jewish rabbis and scholars such as Judah Alkalai and A.H. Silver regarded 1840 as the period of the time of the Messiah, and “Adventists” such as William Miller pointed to 1844 as

the biblically indicated date for Christ's return (and German Templars moved to Palestine and built homes at the foot of Mt Carmel to be on hand for that Second Coming), Muslims pointed to the year 1260 A.H. (A.D. 1844) as when the Qa'im (or, Mahdi)—the Promised One of Islam—would appear as spiritual sovereign. Notwithstanding these expectations and prophecies regarding the 1840s—and the revolutionary social changes initiated during that decade—most Jews still await their Messiah, as most Christians still anticipate the return of Christ, and Muslims, their Qa'im. Were the expectations and prophecies, therefore, incorrect? Were these worldwide social changes of the 1840s merely a coincidence? In his book, *Thief in the Night: The Case of the Missing Millennium*, author William Sears addresses this conundrum:

If an overwhelming abundance of evidence points to only one possible conclusion, and that conclusion proves to be false, it is never wise to cast aside all the evidence as being wrong. It is always wiser to assume that perhaps the evidence is correct, and that another and entirely different interpretation of the facts, or a completely different conclusion might be drawn from this same evidence.¹

This historical account offers an alternative conclusion. Biblical prophecy specifies that “twin witnesses” (Rev. 11:3) will be necessary to inaugurate the long-awaited Promised Day, while the Qur'án prophesizes that “two trumpet blasts” (39:68) will announce that day of renewal. In the following re-telling of the dramatic events of July 1848, in the land now known as Iran, consider if the Persian prisoner and the Persian nobleman who served as prime movers of that historic Conference of Badasht, where the emancipation of women was first proclaimed, might be the twin Bearers of a new divine Message for humankind.

We begin our story in prison—where most prophets of change end up. *

* The following chapters are excerpts from the author's recently completed historical novel, *The Orphan and the Exile*.



NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRAN

Indicating places of importance in early Bahá'í history