The death of Rashtī precipitated the first major internal crisis in the Shaykhi school, of which he had been the acknowledged head for some seventeen years. To be more precise, it created a situation in which concealed tensions, disagreements, rivalries and ambitions within the Shaykhi community were brought to the surface. Rashtī did not, for reasons that are unclear, emulate al-Aḥsāʾī in appointing a successor, nor did he leave clear instructions as to the direction of the school after his death. Since he was relatively young when he died, it may simply be that he had not thought it yet necessary to take steps to provide for this eventuality. Without a clear appointment of a successor to the Sayyid, the school rapidly fragmented into several factions, of which the two largest were those grouped around Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shirāzī, the Bāb (1235–66/1819–50) and Ḥājī Mullā Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (1225–88/1810–71).

These two factions in particular expressed diametrically opposed tendencies inherent in Shaykhisim, the first moving away from the outward practice of Islam towards a concentration on the revelation of its inner (bāṭinī) features and, ultimately, a new revelation (zuhūr) following the appearance of the hidden Imam; the second emphasizing the continuing role of the Prophet and the Imams and seeking accommodation with the Shiʿī majority which had formerly excommunicated the founder of the school and his successor. It was inevitable that, once these incompatible interpretations of Shaykhi thought came to be openly expressed, an unrelenting hostility would grow up between the two parties, fiercer if anything than that which previously existed between Shaykhis and Bālāsaris.

Karīm Khān Kirmānī himself acknowledges that Rashtī had not indicated a successor in direct terms and that, on his death, a number of leaders gained a following, while many of his disciples scattered to different places.1 That considerable confusion existed in the minds of

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Rashtī’s followers is apparent from a number of statements in an Arabic *risāla* written in reply to Karīm Khān’s *Izhāq al-bātīl* by an early Babi of Karbala named al-Qatīl ibn al-Karbalāʾī, who had himself been in the circle of the Sayyid’s companions. “Those among the *tullāb* who were possessed of discernment,” he writes, “were confused as to where they should go and to whom they should cling.” He himself, he states at the beginning of the treatise, did not know where to turn during the first four months following Rashtī’s death. This confusion appears to have been compounded by the dissemination of various rumors and reports, some of them vaguely messianic in character, others relating to the question of the direction of the school in the period immediately after the death of the Sayyid.

Among these reports were a number in which Rashtī was said to have alluded obliquely to an “affair” or “cause” (*amr*) which would occur or appear after him. According to Kirmānī, his reply to those who asked him about his successor (*al-khalīfa baʿdahu*) had been to say, “God has an affair which he shall bring to maturity (*li ʾllāhi amrun huwa bālīghuhu*).” Rashtī’s use of the phrase was certainly not accidental, and must have been calculated to evoke specific associations in the minds of his hearers; it was, in fact, the very phrase traditionally ascribed to the fourth *nāʿib* of the hidden Imam, Abu ʿl-Ḥusayn ʿAlī al-Sammarī, when asked on his death-bed concerning the matter of succession.

That Rashtī made use of this phrase in this connection more than once is apparent from a reference in al-Qatīl ibn al-Karbalāʾī’s *Risāla*, where it is recorded that the Sayyid was asked about his successor by Mullā Muhammad Taqi Harawī, to whom he made this reply, adding, however, the qualification “our cause is not like that of the *abwāb*.” The significance of this last statement is not entirely clear: as we shall observe, a section of the Shaykhi community at this period certainly seems to have regarded both al-ʿHāsāʾī and Rashtī as “gates” of the Imām, a belief which was instrumental in facilitating the transition to

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3 Ibid., p. 502.