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THE BRITISH ACADEMY

The Persian  
Constitutional Movement

By

Edward G. Browne

Fellow of the Academy

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# THE PERSIAN CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT

By EDWARD G. BROWNE

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

*Read* Wednesday, February 6, 1918

THE subject on which I am to address you to-day is not of my own choosing, and I confess that I should have preferred to discuss some topic at once less controversial and more academic than this. Politics are out of place in such an assembly, yet here is a subject of which it is hardly possible to treat, even in broad outlines, without introducing, to some extent at least, political considerations of a somewhat controversial character, though I shall do my best to avoid them, or to reduce them to the smallest possible proportion. For the rest, I was requested to discuss this subject, and though I should not myself have ventured to suggest it, I did not feel justified in avoiding it on account of the difficulties of treatment which it presented. In view of this fact, however, I venture to claim your indulgence for any faults of omission or commission of which I may be guilty.

What I have to say will fall mainly under three heads. First of all I desire to remind you (for the facts are doubtless more or less familiar to all present) of certain considerations as to the history of Persia, the character of its people, and the part played by them in the political, no less than in the intellectual and artistic, life of the human race. My object in this preliminary portion of my address is to show how considerable is the debt which the world owes to Persia, and how necessary it is that, in thinking of her present and her future, this debt should be borne in mind.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to explain the genesis and briefly trace the history of the Constitutional or National Movement, of which the origins go back at least a quarter of a century, though it did not begin to attract general attention until 1906.

Thirdly, I shall venture to indicate briefly what, in my judgement, should be the attitude adopted towards Persia by this country: an attitude rendered not only possible, but, as it seems to me,

necessary, in view of recent happenings in Russia. We are witnessing in these momentous days a great break with the Past, the passing of many old institutions and forms, and the creation of many new ones, whereof the outlines are as yet but dimly discerned. Most of us, I suppose, feel much less confident in our foresight than we did four years ago, and are disposed to speak with greater humility and less assurance of future developments, yet it is the duty of each one of us to contribute what he can from the field of his own special studies towards the solution of some of the many problems with which mankind are now confronted. With these preliminary remarks I pass to the first section of my paper, viz.—

I. *Some Considerations as to the History and Character of the Persians.*

If I were asked to state in two words the chief characteristics of the Persians throughout their long history, I should reply, stability of national type, and power of national recovery. As regards the first, I cannot refrain from citing the remarkable testimony borne by Sir Henry Rawlinson, that great pioneer of research in the realms of Persian archaeology, and his brother Professor George Rawlinson, in their Introduction to the translation of the *History of Herodotus*<sup>1</sup> (vol. i, pp. 103-4):

‘His portraiture of the principal nations with which he is concerned—the Persians, the Athenians, and the Spartans—is most graphic and striking. Brave, lively, spirited, capable of sharp sayings and repartees, but vain, weak, impulsive, and hopelessly servile towards their lords, the ancient Persians stand out in his pages as completely depicted by a few masterly strokes as their modern descendants have been by the many touches of a Chardin or a Morier. . . . They possess in the pages of Herodotus an individuality which is a guarantee of truth, and which serves very remarkably to connect them with that peculiar Oriental people—the “Frenchmen of the East” as they have been called—at present inhabiting their country. . . . This curious continuity of character very strongly confirms the truthfulness of our author, who is thus shown, even in what might seem to be the mere ornamental portion of his work, to have confined himself to a representation of actual realities.’

What is true of the national type is also true in a somewhat more limited degree of the national tongue. The Persian language

<sup>1</sup> *History of Herodotus*, by Professor George Rawlinson, M.A., assisted by Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson, K.C.B., and Sir J. G. Wilkinson, F.R.S. (new edition of 1862 in 4 vols.).

has not changed more in the last thousand years than English in the last three hundred, and Firdawsí is as intelligible to a modern Persian as is Shakespeare to an Englishman of the present day. There can be few classical poets of any nation who so fully live in the hearts of their people and on their tongues as do Sa'dí and Háfiz, who flourished respectively in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of our era. If at times we are tempted to rebel against the stream of common sense and somewhat worldly wisdom which issues from the former, we have only to recall other familiar passages in which he emphasizes the interdependence of all mankind, the duties of rulers towards their subjects, the compassion due from all towards the poor and the orphan, and the obligation of tolerance towards those of other religions, to realize how broad and humane was his outlook compared to most of his contemporaries, not only in the East but in the West. And as regards Háfiz, that singer of incomparable sweetness, his most successful and sympathetic translator, Miss Gertrude Bell,<sup>1</sup> thus concludes a comparison of him with his contemporary Dante :

'The picture that Hafiz drew represented a wider landscape, though the immediate foreground may not be so distinct. It is as if his mental eye, endowed with wonderful acuteness of vision, had penetrated into those provinces of thought which we of a later age were destined to inhabit.'

That even the illiterate Persian muleteer will often beguile the long and tedious march with the songs of this incomparable poet is at once a tribute to his hold on the hearts of his countrymen and an explanation of the fine literary turn which often characterizes the speech of even the most unlettered of his modern compatriots, and which lends such a charm to the conversation of even the humblest of them.

Let us turn now to the second characteristic, the power of national recovery. Few nations whose history can be clearly traced back for more than two thousand four hundred years, and who still possess their own contemporary records of some of the earliest events of that long period, have passed through and recovered from so many terrible vicissitudes as have the Persians. The great and glorious empire, heir to Assyria, Babylonia, Chaldea, and Media, over which Cyrus and Darius ruled, succumbed to Alexander of Macedon, and five centuries and a half elapsed ere it was restored in its ancient extent and almost in its ancient splendour by the

<sup>1</sup> *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz* (London, Heinemann, 1897).

Sásánians. Four and a half centuries later, in the middle of the seventh century after Christ, it again succumbed to the Arabs, whom for the first and probably the last time in their history the unifying force of a great religious reformer, the Prophet Muḥammad, had welded into one single people animated by one great idea. For a century the Persians were a subject race and their country a province of the Caliphs, but with the rise of the 'Abbásid Caliphate in the middle of the eighth century after Christ their influence again began to mould the form both of Church and State, and by the middle of the ninth century, under various dynasties, some of Arabian, some of Persian, but most of Turkish origin, they began to recover an independent political existence. In the middle of the thirteenth century came the awful calamity of the Mongol Invasion, which inflicted so irreparable an injury on Central and Western Asia and South-Eastern Europe; and this was followed rather more than a century later by the devastations of Tamerlane, whose triumphant progress was marked by pyramids of human skulls. A century later we once more find Persia strong and united under a truly national dynasty, the Şafawís, which reached its culminating point under Sháh 'Abbás the Great, the contemporary of Queen Elizabeth, the Emperor Akbar, and the Ottoman Sultan Sulaymán the Magnificent, and which presented so fatal a bar to Turkish ambitions that Busbecq, Ferdinand's Ambassador at Sulaymán's court, was constrained to write: 'Tis only the Persian stands between us and ruin. The Turk would fain be upon us, but he keeps him back. This war with him affords us only a respite, not a deliverance.' At this time the alliance of Persia and her friendship were eagerly sought after even by the great European Powers, England, Spain, France, and Holland. Many notable Europeans who visited or resided at the splendid court of Sháh 'Abbás at Ispahán—at that time, according to the Persian saying, 'half the world'—have left valuable records of their travels and experiences. Of our own countrymen the brothers Sir Anthony and Sir Robert Shirley, who long and faithfully served the Persian king, aided him in the organization of his army and in particular his artillery (in which arm the Ottoman Turks had hitherto greatly excelled the Persians), and acted as his ambassadors to James I of England and Philip III of Spain, are perhaps the most interesting. In 1622 the English helped the Persians to expel the Portuguese from the Island of Ormuz, in the Persian Gulf, and six years later Sir Dormer Cotton, Ambassador of Charles I to the Persian Court, landed opposite this island at the old port of Gambroon, now renamed Bandar-i-'Abbás.

The glorious Şafawí period was brought to an end in 1722 by the Afghan invasion and sack of Ispahán, the horrors of which are vividly depicted by Father Krusinski and other contemporary European residents. A few years later (1736-47) Nádir Sháh revived for a brief period the military glories of Persia, defeated and expelled the Turks who had invaded the western provinces, and carried the Persian arms beyond the Indus to Lahore and Delhi. Fifty years later, towards the end of the eighteenth century, arose the Qájár dynasty, of whom the seventh monarch, Sultán Aḥmad Sháh, now sits on the Persian throne. To the later days of the long reign of his great-grandfather, Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh (1848-96), whose three journeys through Europe made him so familiar a figure in the West, we shall have to go back in tracing the origins of the Constitutional Movement, but before doing so we must briefly glance at those achievements in the domains of thought and art on which, far more than on even the most brilliant military triumphs of her long and varied history, Persia is entitled to claim the respect, the consideration, and even the admiration of all civilized peoples. These achievements fall broadly under the heads of Religion, Philosophy, Science, Literature, and Art, and I shall briefly consider them in this order.

### 1. *Religion.*

The Persians, who have only too often had reason to hope for little good in this world, have always shown a marked predilection for religious and philosophical speculation, and it is, I think, characteristic that the three chief attempts to explain the Problem of Evil, two dualistic and one pantheistic, should have emanated from Persia; to wit, the Zoroastrian, the Manichæan, and the Şúfí theories of its genesis and nature. It is also noteworthy that Persia gave birth to one of the oldest religions, Zoroastrianism, and one of the most modern, Bábíism or Bahá'ism. The former, apart from its intrinsic interest and importance, greatly affected Jewish and indirectly Christian and Muhammadan theology, especially in what concerns the Resurrection of the Dead and the nature and functions of the Angels. The latter, which arose only in 1844, and which attracted so much attention in 1852 in consequence of the terrible persecution to which its followers were exposed, has not only spread widely in Asia beyond the Persian frontiers, but has had during the last eighteen years a very remarkable success in America, where a very active propaganda has been carried on (especially in the years 1900-2) by Persian missionaries, with

some of whom I am personally acquainted, who, so far as their appearance and subtle methods of persuasion go, might be reincarnations of Násir-i-Khusraw and other great Isma'ílí propagandists of the eleventh century. At least twenty-five centuries separate the Báb from Zoroaster, and during all this time, so far as the records still preserved enable us to judge, this active, restless, speculative Persian mind has been incessantly at work trying to read that great riddle of the meaning of life and the destiny of man which Háfiz says that none hath solved and none can ever solve. And as regards the last thousand years, every student of Muhammadan theology knows how much it owes to Persia, and how many of the two-and-seventy sects which represent its different developments were influenced if not produced by the Persian mind. Dozy emphasizes this point when he says:<sup>1</sup>

*'Mais la conversion la plus importante de toutes fut celle des Perses ; ce sont eux, et non les Arabes, qui ont donné de la fermeté et de la force à l'Islamisme, et, en même temps, c'est de leur sein que sont sorties les sectes les plus remarquables.'*

Even the Arabs, during the period of their greatest ascendancy, could not ignore their dependence on the Persians in all constructive statesmanship, and one of their governors inquired with some irritation why it was that, while the Persians had been able to do without the Arabs for centuries, the Arabs in the time of their supremacy could not dispense with Persian help for a single day, or in a single department.

Time does not allow me to enlarge further on this attractive topic, but I would ask any one who is disposed to charge me with exaggerating Persia's contribution to religious thought to take the volume containing the letter *M* in any good Encyclopaedia or Dictionary of Religions and consult the articles *Manichaeans*, *Mazdak*, *Mithraism*, *Muhammadan Sects*, and *Mysticism*, in which, unless I am much mistaken, he will find ample justification for my assertions.

## 2. *Philosophy and Science.*

Turning now to the cognate realms of Philosophy and Science, let us remember first of all under what singularly unfavourable conditions the great Neo-Platonist Plotinus thought it worth his while to seek for first-hand knowledge of Persian philosophy, and how three hundred years later it was the Sásánian king Khusraw Anúsharwán, still known to his countrymen as 'the Just', who gave refuge and entertainment

<sup>1</sup> Page 156 of Chauvín's French translation, entitled *L'Islamisme*.

to the seven Neo-Platonist philosophers whom the Edict of Justinian had driven forth from their Athenian home, and who made it a condition of his next treaty with the Romans that they should be allowed to return thither and remain unmolested.<sup>1</sup> That they did not find at the Sásánian Court the Utopia which they had imagined we can well believe; but how many kings, in any country and at any period, when concluding a treaty with a powerful enemy after a successful war, would have troubled their heads about seven poor exiled scholars not only of alien but of alien enemy nationality?

Passing now to Muhammadan times, we must always bear in mind, if we wish to do justice to the great part played by Persia in the evolution of the so-called Arabian civilization of the 'Abbásid Caliphate, especially during the ninth and immediately following centuries of our era, that until the fall of that Caliphate, in the thirteenth century, Arabic was the learned and polite language of the Muhammadan world to an even greater extent than was Latin that of mediaeval Christendom; and that even now in Persia all serious works on Theology and Philosophy are written in Arabic, so that the student who reads only Persian forms a very inadequate idea of what the Persian intellect has contributed to the common stock. Avicenna (Ibn Síná), who for centuries remained the chief channel through which the philosophical ideas of Aristotle and the medical science of Hippocrates and Galen were accessible to mediaeval Europe, was a Persian, though all his important works, and indeed everything he wrote save a few quatrains, are in Arabic. The same applies to the great physician who, because he was born in the ancient city of Ray, situated near the modern Persian capital Tīhrán, is known as ar-Rází, 'the man of Ray,' which was corrupted in mediaeval Europe into Rhazes. Of his extant works Brockelmann enumerates nearly fifty, all of which are in Arabic, though much of his life was spent in Persia, and the most exciting part of it at the court of the Sámání princes in Khurásán and Transoxania, who claimed descent from Bahrám Chúbín and who were the chief promoters of the renaissance of Persian literature after the Arab conquest. The same applies again to the great archaeologist and astronomer al-Bírúní, whose fame rests on his work on the *Antiquities of India* and his *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, both written in Arabic, and whose little Persian manual of Astronomy has never been published, and is represented, so far as I know, only by a fine and ancient manuscript in the British Museum. In every field of Arabic literature we find the Persians

<sup>1</sup> See Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, edited by Dr. J. B. Bury (London, 1898), vol. iv, pp. 266-7.

prominent, not only in philosophy and science, but in history, geography, exegesis, theology, and mathematics, and even in Arabic grammar, lexicography, and poetry.

### 3. *Persian Literature.*

If we confine our attention to Persian literature in the narrower sense of the expression, meaning only what is written in the Persian language, the field which we survey is undoubtedly less rich and varied than if we include the Arabic literature produced by Persians. Yet even then it is a literature of which any nation might be proud, especially in the domain of poetry, more particularly mystical poetry. It is almost impossible to estimate the comparative values of different literatures, since, apart from personal bias, few people are really conversant with more than two or three literatures; but few critics would deny that in any equitable list of the really great poets of the world in all ages, Persia would certainly be represented by two or three names at least. Indeed it is rather a case of *embarras de richesses*; if there had been far fewer poets and each one had written far less, they would have been more diligently read and more highly appreciated. Thus the *Mystical Mathnawi* of Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí contains some 20,000 verses; the *Sháhnáma*, or 'Epic of the Kings' of Firdawsí, 60,000; and the poetical works of 'Aṭṭár at least 70,000. Naturally the same level of excellence is not always maintained, and it becomes almost impossible for the most diligent reader to be sure that he has discovered the finest passages in one of these prolific writers, let alone the endless procession of others who extend through the last thousand years. For it is certainly an error to imagine, as some pretend, that no first-class poetry has been produced in Persia since the time of Jámí, i. e. since about A.D. 1500. Some at least of the poets of our own time are of a very high order, and the political Revolution of 1906 brought into being a new school of poets and a new style of poetry possessed of real merit and originality.

Time does not permit me to discuss other branches of Persian literature, but in prose it must be admitted that Arabic is as a rule more concise, more lucid, and more graphic. A very florid and to us distasteful prose prevailed under Tamerlane and his successors, with whom it passed into India and there continued. From that debased style too many Europeans, and especially too many of our own countrymen who have learned Persian in India, have formed their ideas of Persian prose literature, but a far finer and simpler style prevailed in Persia from the eleventh to the fourteenth century and

again from the sixteenth century down to the present day. In particular there are some excellent historical, biographical, and ethical works, books of travels and treatises on politics, while the last few years have seen the development of an admirable journalistic style.

#### 4. *Art.*

To the Art of the Persians I need only refer, for it is far more widely known than their literature, and its beauty is patent to all and is pursued by many who have least sympathy or liking for the talented people who produced it. In architecture, miniature-painting, illumination, calligraphy, and the textile and plastic arts the achievements of the Persians will hardly be denied by any educated person, and it is unnecessary to say more about them in this place.

One more observation I must make, however, before I conclude this preliminary portion of my paper. Some who admit the great qualities of the Persians in the past contend that they have lost their virtues and become hopelessly degenerate, while Morier's clever satire *Hajji Baba* has given currency to the idea that their character is singularly weak and worthless. This view I by no means share, and I will go further and assert that you will seldom find an Englishman who has lived in Persia, knows Persian, and has associated with Persians of all classes and conditions who has not conceived a very genuine affection and admiration for this people. Many European residents in Persia either know the language very little or not at all, or, knowing the language well, practically see only two classes of the people, officials and domestic servants. To judge the people fairly you must know also the *mullás* and men of learning and letters, the merchants, the craftsmen and artisans, the peasants, the muleteers, and the rest. Few who have this knowledge remain indifferent to the people. I might quote many testimonies to the wit, the gaiety, the courage, the fidelity, the self-devotion, and the kindness and humanity which are to be found amongst the Persians alongside the darker qualities for which alone some travellers and writers seem to have eyes; but I will content myself with calling your attention to one recent book, the Reverend Napier Malcolm's *Five Years in a Persian Town*<sup>1</sup> (Yazd). As a missionary the author mixed intimately with all classes, and though he dislikes their religion his liking for them is very evident. He finds in them 'much to lament, but something to admire and very much more to like'.

'A people', he continues, 'who are open-handed, good-natured, affec-

<sup>1</sup> Published by John Murray in 1905.

tionate, not always extravagantly conceited, and above all intensely human, are a people one cannot help getting to like when one lives among them for any time.<sup>1</sup> He was evidently deeply impressed by the fortitude and steadfastness shown by the Bábís during the persecution which he witnessed, which, he says, 'was sufficient to convince any one that there is plenty of strength in the Persian character, if only it can be called out,'<sup>2</sup> and 'which has opened people's eyes to the enormous strength of Persian character under partially favourable moral conditions'.<sup>3</sup> I choose this one testimony out of many because, as the Arabic proverb says, '*Virtue is that whereunto the enemy beareth witness,*' and this writer, on his own admission, has a great dislike for Islám, expresses the wish that the Persian language was at the bottom of the sea, and apparently looks forward to the occupation of southern Persia by some European Power, so that he cannot otherwise be described as pro-Persian.

I have now concluded these preliminary remarks, which I trust may not be considered unduly lengthy, for they constitute a definite part of my argument. We hear much now of the rights of small nations to self-determination, even from the most unexpected quarters, and ideally it is no doubt desirable, so far as practicable, that each really national unit should be autonomous. But in the case of certain exceptionally talented nations this is especially desirable, not only on their own account but for the good of the whole human race. There can be no doubt that politically both Greece and Italy profited much from a sympathy largely based on a recognition of what human civilization owed them for their contributions to art and literature. It is my contention that Persia stands in the same category, and that her disappearance from the society of independent states would be a misfortune not only to herself, but to the whole human race. Unhappily there are a hundred scholars to plead the claims of Greece and Italy for one who can plead the not less cogent cause of Persia.

## II. *The Origins and Development of the Constitutional or National Movement in Persia.*

Thirty years ago when I was in Persia the old régime held universal and undisputed sway, and, except for the existence of the Indo-European telegraph, the conditions of life were entirely mediaeval. There were no railways, no banks, no paper money, no cabs, no hotels outside the capital, and of course no telephones. The few newspapers

<sup>1</sup> *Op. laud.*, pp. 135-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

which appeared at irregular intervals were lithographed, and, being produced by courtiers and officials, contained hardly any news and no criticism, had a very restricted circulation, and no sale save such as was secured by supplying them to Government employés and deducting the subscription from their salaries. Printing, which had flourished to a certain extent in the early part of the nineteenth century, had been entirely superseded by lithography. The only method of travel was on foot or horseback, and anything approaching speed could only be attained by using the Government post-horses, for which permits were easily obtained, at a fixed charge of one *grán* (at that time worth about  $7\frac{1}{2}d.$ ) per horse per *parasang* (about  $3\frac{3}{4}$  miles), which worked out at the moderate rate of  $2d.$  a mile for each horse, besides gratuities. On the main roads posts were maintained with some regularity from the capital to the chief provincial towns once or twice a week, taking about five days to go from Tihrán to Shíráz, a distance of some 600 miles. Gratuitous lodging was afforded to travellers in caravan-sarays (the most beautiful and commodious of which date from the spacious days of Sháh 'Abbás the Great), and accommodation was also obtainable in the post-houses at the end of each stage for a small gratuity, but the traveller had for the most part to carry his own food. The high-roads at the time I speak of were extraordinarily safe, and the people, almost without exception, civil, friendly, and helpful, though often very inquisitive. The Government was a pure despotism, mitigated by the lack of centralization and the quasi-independence of the provincial governors, which often made it possible to escape oppression by the simple process of moving into another district under a more benign rule. Side by side, with little attempt at correlation, existed the *Sharí'at*, or Ecclesiastical Law, administered by the *mullás* or '*ulamá*, and the '*wf*, or so-called Civil Law, which really amounted to little more than the methods which each governor chose to adopt in order to enforce his authority. Cruel and vindictive punishments, such as cutting off hands, ears, and noses, hamstringing, throat-cutting, immuring in mortar, and the like, common in the earlier days of Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh's reign, had greatly diminished at the time of which I am speaking and never came under my personal notice. Their disappearance must be reckoned one of the good results of the Sháh's travels in Europe,<sup>1</sup> which rendered him very desirous of passing as an enlightened ruler, and extremely sensitive to European opinion. Indeed he used to subscribe to a press-cutting agency, and cause all references to himself in the European Press to be translated for him into Persian by two independent translators to ensure that their

<sup>1</sup> His first journey was in 1873, his second in 1878, and his third in 1889.

purport, if disagreeable, should not be unduly softened to the royal ear.

These travels in Europe, however, had other less desirable results. They created a need for large sums of ready money, to provide which became more and more the chief preoccupation of the Sháh's ministers. An easy but fatal method was offered by various syndicates of concession-hunters, and the Sháh, with ever-increasing recklessness, began about 1889 to mortgage the natural resources and potential wealth of his country to foreigners on disastrous terms. Of the Reuter Concession, the Russian Railway Concession, the Lottery Concession, and others I need not speak here; their cumulative effects are well summarized by Dr. Feuvrier, the Shah's French physician, who, under the date April 14, 1890, writes in his diary, '*De concession en concession la Perse sera bientôt tout entière entre les mains des étrangers.*'

One of these concessions, however, namely, the Tobacco Concession granted to an English company in March 1890, demands a somewhat fuller notice, because it was one of the direct though remote causes of the Constitutional Movement, and because then for the first time the Persian people opposed their united will to the Sháh and his Court and overcame them, thanks in large measure to the support given to the popular cause by the *mullás*, '*ulamá*, or Doctors of Religion, often inaccurately described as 'the priests'. I do not propose to go into the details of this episode (of which the significance was by no means realized at the time): these will be found fully described in Dr. Feuvrier's interesting book<sup>1</sup> and elsewhere. Suffice it to say that as soon as the motley collection of functionaries whom the Tobacco Corporation designed to employ—'*venus d'un peu partout*,' as Dr. Feuvrier says—began to arrive, in the spring of 1891, and the Persian people realized what interference with one of their few luxuries and chief industries was intended, they began to show great restiveness. Deputations of merchants petitioned the Sháh to rescind the concession, alarming popular manifestations of discontent took place, and finally the ecclesiastical authorities, 'to whom', as Dr. Feuvrier says, 'it has not often fallen to champion so popular a cause,' issued a *fatwá* or edict declaring the use of tobacco to be illegal until the concession should be repealed. The people followed this lead with remarkable unanimity; hardly a pipe or cigarette was to be seen in public, women denounced such of their male relatives as indulged themselves in the seclusion of their houses, and even the Sháh found

<sup>1</sup> *Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse.*

himself suddenly deprived of his tobacco. Under these circumstances the concession became worthless, and, after a protracted struggle, was finally abrogated on January 26, 1892, at the cost of an indemnity of £500,000 to the *cessionnaires*, which sum the Persian Government was compelled to borrow at 6 per cent. from the British-owned Imperial Bank of Persia.

This unfortunate transaction had several important results, viz. :

- (1) It created the Persian National Debt, which was later to prove so formidable an obstacle in the way of reform.
- (2) It taught the people that, acting in conjunction with their spiritual leaders, they were a match for the Sháh and his courtiers and ministers; and it also awakened the more thoughtful to the extreme peril to which their country was exposed by the reckless mortgaging of its resources to foreigners.
- (3) It led indirectly to the assassination of Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh four years later (on May 1, 1896), on the eve of his jubilee; for the man who shot him had suffered severe punishment in connexion with the Tobacco Riots, and was, moreover, a disciple of Sayyid Jamálu'd-Dín, who had played so great a part in exciting and maintaining the popular opposition to the Sháh.

I hope you will not think that I have devoted too much time to an event which belongs to the prodromata of the Revolution; but it is more important for my present purpose to make clear the nature and underlying causes of the Revolution than to attempt any such detailed description of its course as I have given elsewhere. Without knowledge of its remoter causes we cannot understand why a people like the Persians, so conspicuous throughout their history for loyalty to their kings (*Sháh-parastí*), should suddenly demand Constitutional Government and a Parliament; why complete indifference to politics should suddenly be changed to eager interest in them; or why the new movement, in its essence Nationalist rather than Democratic, aroused, especially amongst the younger men, and even women, such intense enthusiasm. My own conviction is that the mere tyranny of an autocrat would hardly have driven the patient and tractable people of Persia into revolt had tyranny at home been combined with any maintenance of prestige abroad or any moderately efficient guardianship of Persian independence. It was the combination of inefficiency, extravagance, and lack of patriotic feeling with tyranny which proved insupportable;

and a constitutional form of Government was sought not so much for its own sake as for the urgent necessity of creating a more honest, efficient, and patriotic Government than the existing one. In 1906, when the Persian Revolution first began to attract general attention in Europe, superficial observers were apt to treat the idea of a Persian Parliament as a mere whim of Muẓaffaru'd-Dín Sháh, a novelty imported from Europe along with motor-cars, gramophones, and other Western innovations. To take this view is entirely to misjudge the importance and misunderstand the nature of a movement which, whether it be approved or deplored, had behind it the whole-hearted support of all the best elements of the Persian nation, including even so essentially Conservative a class as the *mullás*, or so-called 'clergy'. Indeed the strong support given to the popular movement by some of the best and most distinguished of the ecclesiastical leaders of Persia was perhaps the most striking phenomenon of the Revolution.

Before proceeding further, it may be helpful if I endeavour to distinguish clearly the chief periods into which the six years 1906-11, so momentous in Persian history, fall.

The *First Period* is that of the struggle to induce or compel the Sháh to grant a Constitution and a Parliament. It really began in December 1905, and finally triumphed, thanks partly to the moral support of the British Legation at that time, in the autumn of 1906, the first Parliament, or *Majlis*, being opened on October 7 of that year.

The *Second Period* is that of the First Parliament or National Assembly, which met on October 7, 1906, and was forcibly dissolved, with bloodshed, by the notorious Colonel Liakhoff, the Russian commander of the Sháh's Cossack Brigade, in the *Coup d'État* of June 23, 1908.

The *Third Period* is that known to the Persians as the 'Lesser Autocracy' (*Istibdád-i-Şaghír*), which began with the *Coup d'État* above mentioned, and ended with what is called the 'National Victory' (*Fatḥ-i-Milli*) or capture of the capital and deposition of Muḥammad 'Alí Sháh by the Nationalist forces on July 16, 1909.

The *Fourth Period* is that of the Second Parliament, which was formally opened by the present Sháh, Sulṭán Aḥmad (then a mere boy of about twelve), on November 15, 1909, and forcibly dissolved, in consequence of the Russian ultimatums and invasions, on December 26, 1911.

Of the period subsequent to 1911, a period, so far as Persia was concerned, of bitter suffering and black despair, and which is divided

into the time preceding and the time following the outbreak of the present War, I propose to say very little, partly because it presents few features on which one cares to dwell, and partly because of the ever-increasing difficulty of obtaining correct and trustworthy information as to the true course of events. I shall prefer rather to consider at the conclusion of my paper the brighter prospect which has opened for Persia since the fall of the Russian autocracy and the suspension of the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 announced in the welcome and encouraging speech delivered by Lord Curzon on the 21st of last month.

Of this Agreement, which really dominated the whole situation in Persia for the last ten years, I have hitherto said nothing, and now that it is suspended, we may hope for good, perhaps the less said about it the better. Its original aim of removing as far as possible the long-standing rivalry between England and Russia in Asia was no doubt admirable; and as explained to an anxious and apprehensive Persia by Sir Cecil Spring-Rice in his celebrated Memorandum of September 4, 1907, four days after the conclusion of the Agreement, and again a few days ago by Lord Curzon in his speech in the House of Lords, it appeared comparatively innocuous; but as a matter of fact any co-operation between Great Britain and the Russian Autocracy, whose territorial ambitions in Persia had been openly avowed since the time of Peter the Great, could only be obtained by a gradual surrender of the original British interpretation in favour of the Russian. Thus the so-called Russian 'Sphere of Influence' (which included all north and most of central Persia, with the capital, the most notable cities except Kirmán and Shíráz, and the richest and most prosperous part of the country) was originally defined simply as a commercial sphere wherein England would seek no concessions; but from an early period, and more especially after the threatened understanding between the ex-Tsar of Russia and the German Emperor at Potsdam, on November 5, 1910, the Russian Government regarded it as a political sphere of which they desired to take effective possession as soon as possible, and in which meanwhile they would tolerate no Persian authority not submissive to their wishes. This brought them into violent antagonism to the new National or Constitutional party of Persia, whose chief aspiration, as we have seen, was to secure the complete financial and political independence, as well as the territorial integrity, of their country. During the reign of that resolute autocrat Muḥammad 'Alí (January 1907–August 1909), the grandson of Násiru'd-Dín and father of the present Sháh,

Russia's policy was to support him and his creatures against the people and Parliament, while after his deposition she embarrassed the Persian Government by the more or less open support of various rebellious malcontents and reactionaries, ranging from the ex-Sháh and his brothers and favourites to Persian princes domiciled in Russia like Dáráb Mírzá, turbulent and bloodthirsty lordlings like Raḥím Khán, Rashídu'l-Mulk, and the infamous Shujá'u'd-Dawla, and mere bigands like Ná'ib Ḥu ayn, or assassins like Nawrúzoff,<sup>1</sup> Ivan the Georgian,<sup>2</sup> and 'Abbás<sup>3</sup> or Ispahán, all of whom were removed from Persian custody after their capture on the ground that they were Russian subjects, and sent to Russia to undergo some punishment, of which, if it were ever inflicted, no news ever reached Persia.

As I have said, I purposely refrain from going into the mass of detail which a formal proof of Persia's hard treatment at the hands of her neighbours, especially of Russia, would require, and which is accessible in print to all. The unfamiliarity of the names of the Persians who played the chief parts for good or evil in those momentous years is to most Europeans an added difficulty. To such of you as have not already studied the question I can only hope at best to convey a few of the most salient points.

First, then, as to the work of the two National Assemblies, the character of the new constitution, and the reason it inspired such deep and widespread enthusiasm in Persia. We are, perhaps, a little disillusioned of parliaments and disposed to doubt whether constitutional or democratic government is a panacea for all ills. But we must remember that Muhammadan civilization, which has moulded the form of the State in Persia and the neighbouring lands, is six hundred years younger than Christian civilization, and we must go back in mind to the time of King John and the Magna Charta if we would enter into the feelings of the Persians in this crisis in their history. The Persian, hitherto a mere chattel of the Sháh, and exposed to the arbitrary oppression of every local governor and every tax-gatherer, with no law to which he could appeal and no judge who would give him justice, found himself a man with rights as well as duties, and hopes as well as fears; and it is noteworthy that the popular demand was originally for a 'House of Justice' to protect them from a particularly oppressive governor, and that only later did it extend to a Parliament

<sup>1</sup> One of the assassins of 'Alī Muḥammad Khan, on August 2, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> One of the three assassins of Ṣanif'u'd-Dawla, the Minister of Finance, on February 6, 1911.

<sup>3</sup> He attempted to kill the Mu'tamad-i-Khaqán, and actually did kill his cousin, on February 1, 1911.

and a Constitution. Again, though Persia is singularly homogeneous in religion, race, character and speech compared to the Turkish or the Russian Empire (its people being still, as Herodotus found them, *ὁμόγλωττοι παρὰ μικρόν*), there exist amidst the preponderant Muslim population Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian communities, who, though generally fairly treated, had never hitherto enjoyed equal rights with their Muhammadan fellow subjects, and who now found themselves admitted to such equality and allowed to send their elected representatives to the National Assembly. That they were grateful for these privileges was shown by the eagerness of some of the Parsees of India to give financial help to Persia in the critical days of 1910, and by the loyal support given to the Constitution by many of the Armenians, who supplied the best general of the Parliamentary forces in Yeprem Khán, and one of the most trusted of their counsellors, poor Bedros Andreassian, who was one of the patriots hanged by the Russians at Tabríz in January 1912. How much he was trusted by the Persians is shown by the fact that he was one of the two men who were allowed to know the total sum at which the Persian Crown-jewels were valued by the French expert M. Falconburg in April 1910, the other being my oldest Persian friend, with whom I first became acquainted thirty-five years ago when he was at school in England, and who, having held many important diplomatic and other posts, played a very prominent part in the Constitutional Movement, and was Minister for Foreign Affairs in the latter part of 1910. He is, I suppose, the only living Persian who knows the value of these celebrated jewels, on which the sorely-pressed Persian Government wished to raise a loan which the Russian Government succeeded in preventing. The franchise was not extended to the women of Persia, who nevertheless, as Mr. Morgan Shuster testifies in his remarkable book *The Strangling of Persia*,<sup>1</sup> proved themselves on many occasions the staunchest and most loyal supporters of the Constitution, and in the dark days of December 1911 urged their men to stand firm in face of all dangers in defence of the Nation's Cause.

The first National Assembly was chiefly engaged during its twenty months' existence in a struggle against the intrigues and violence of Muhammad 'Alí Sháh to which it finally succumbed, and it was only the second National Assembly, elected after his deposition, which had any real chance to carry out a constructive policy. The two most urgent matters were to improve the financial condition of the country and redeem the resources so recklessly pawned by three

<sup>1</sup> London, Unwin, 1912, pp. 183-9.

successive Sháhs, and to provide an adequate military force to maintain security and check disorder. To aid them in this task they were not only willing but eager to employ foreign advisers of their own choice whom they could trust, but they had already had bitter experience of such advisers as put their own or their nation's interests before those of Persia. Finally they appealed to the President of the United States to lend them a first-rate financial adviser with the necessary staff, and received, on May 11, 1911, Mr. Morgan Shuster, who from the first succeeded in winning their affection and confidence in an extraordinary degree, and whom the National Assembly readily invested with the most extensive powers. On his advice the command of the new Treasury Gendarmerie was offered almost unanimously to a distinguished British officer who had equally won their affection and confidence, and whose appointment as Military Attaché at the British Legation was on the point of expiring. Russia objected to both appointments, and succeeded first in inducing or compelling the British Government to prevent the officer in question from accepting the post, though even *The Times* declared<sup>1</sup> a few days earlier that neither the British nor the Indian Government had the power to do this. Later on the British Government directed much energy to forcing the Persian Government to accept British officers for the South Persian Rifles, but for the moment Swedish officers were employed by the Persians as a second-best to the Englishman of their own choice whom England would not grant them, and every one knows in what direction the sympathy of these Swedish officers turned after the outbreak of the War, and how much trouble would have been saved if the original plan of the Persians had been carried out. This the Russian autocracy prevented, and soon afterwards by violent measures, which most of you will remember, and deeds of bloodshed and 'frightfulness' which cannot easily be forgotten, drove out Mr. Morgan Shuster, destroyed his most promising work, blasted the hopes of the Persians, and brought about the chaos and misery which has prevailed in Persia ever since. We were told by *The Times* that the independence of Persia was 'not worth the bones of a single British grenadier', and that at all events the friendship, not of the Russian people, but of the now departed Tsardom, must be retained. Well might we exclaim:

'Bíchara'í ki díl bi-tu dád 'ízzat-ash bi-dár;  
Bá khud khiyál kun ki bi-chand-ash kharída'í!'

'Hold in honour that unfortunate who has given thee his heart:  
Consider with thyself for what a price thou hast bought him!'

<sup>1</sup> August 4, 1911.

There is, however, nothing to be gained by going back on a past the contemplation of which can yield but little pleasure or satisfaction. It is both pleasanter and more profitable to consider on what general lines the better and more generous policy adumbrated in Lord Curzon's speech of January 21 last should be carried out, and I will therefore conclude my paper by mentioning five points which seem to me of capital importance if our object is to secure the existence of a stable, self-respecting, independent, and friendly Persia.

(1) The complete abolition of the so-called 'Zones of Influence' created by the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907, which will always be fraught with painful memories, if not with potential dangers.

(2) Generous financial help on reasonable terms, unaccompanied by humiliating or menacing political or commercial conditions. Persia has considerable natural wealth, notably oil-wells, and various minerals, metals, and precious stones. Much of this wealth was recklessly mortgaged in the pre-constitutional period by shortsighted and irresponsible rulers to raise the ready money they required for their extravagances; and since the forcible dissolution of the Second National Assembly and the expulsion of the American financial advisers, towards the end of 1911, I think that other concessions of a far-reaching character have been wrung from the Persian Government on terms which I am afraid cannot always be called generous or even just. All these arrangements should be revised as far as possible, and Persia should have full power to raise loans in the open market on the best terms available on the security she has to offer, so that, by the establishment of a sinking fund, by rigid economy in expenditure, and by the gradual lapse of the periods of time for which concessions were granted, she may in due course free herself from the financial fetters which have clogged her footsteps for the last thirty years. Is it not pitiful to reflect that the sum which Persia so urgently needed to borrow in 1910, and which was haggled over for so many months, was about equivalent to one hour and a half's expenditure of Great Britain on the present war?

(3) As already said, Persia has always shown herself ready and willing to employ foreign Advisers, provided she could choose men whom she could trust to render her loyal and single-minded service. In choosing such Advisers as she may need in the future to help her in reorganizing her finances and her army, she should be allowed the utmost possible freedom. Few foreigners in recent days have succeeded in so short a time in winning the affection and confidence of the Persian people as did Mr. Morgan Shuster, and it would be

a graceful concession to Persian sentiment, a notable pledge of a new and wholly friendly policy, and a compliment to our American allies if he or one like him could be persuaded to take up the work of financial reform where he left it more than six years ago.

(4) British policy in Persia should be directed entirely from England, and the dual control of Persian policy by the British and Indian Governments, which not only in recent years, but for the last century, has led to much confusion, inconsistency, and heart-burning, should be completely abolished.<sup>1</sup>

(5) Last, but most important, every effort should be made to ensure that Great Britain shall be represented in Persia by diplomatic and consular officers who are known to be friendly and sympathetic to the Persian people, a people so quick to respond to sympathy and appreciation. The names of several of those who have in the last few years been removed to other countries will occur to all who have followed the course of events in Persia since the Revolution. Their return would create an excellent impression, and would do more than anything else to convince the Persians that the new and more friendly policy outlined by Lord Curzon is seriously meant, and commands the warm approval of most thoughtful and well-intentioned people in this country.

Granted reasonable friendliness on the part of her 'powerful neighbours', I have little doubt that Persia is capable of working out her own salvation on constitutional lines far superior to the old autocracies under which she has repeatedly achieved greatness. This, of course, is a matter of opinion, and I am aware that others hold the contrary view. But I do not think that any candid student of the last ten or eleven years of her history will venture to maintain that the Persian Constitution was ever allowed a fair chance of success, and it is for this fair chance that I plead. And if the reign of Peace and Righteousness for which a tortured world prays is to come, it must be based on a recognition of the rights of all nations, and not merely of the nations of Europe.

<sup>1</sup> See especially the history of the unseemly disputes between the Mission sent to Persia under Sir John Malcolm in 1808 by Lord Minto from India, and that sent direct from London (1807-11) under Sir Harford Jones.

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313            1862-1926.  
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307  
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