

Proceedings of the Central
Asian Society

THE FUTURE OF BRITISH
RELATIONS WITH PERSIA

BY

MR. H. F. B. LYNCH, M.P.

READ APRIL 8, 1908



Library

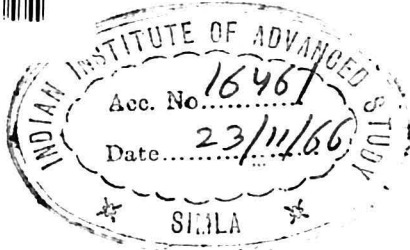
IAS, Shimla

TMP 050.954 52 L 991 F



00016461

~~INDIAN~~
 050.954 52
 L 991 F



11/10/83

THE FUTURE OF BRITISH RELATIONS WITH PERSIA

IN the absence of Mr. Valentine Chirol the chair was occupied by Sir Mortimer Durand, G.C.M.G., K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., who, in opening the proceedings, said : I think that the less the Chairman talks on these occasions the better, so I will do nothing more than introduce Mr. Lynch, who has kindly promised to address us on 'The Future of British Relations with Persia.' You all know that there is no one better fitted than he is to deal with the subject.

MR. LYNCH said : Sir Mortimer, ladies and gentlemen—The subject to which I would invite your attention this afternoon is the situation as regards British interests in Persia, arising out of the signature of the Anglo-Russian Convention. I need not in any way discuss that Convention this afternoon, because it has already been very fully and lucidly examined during the debates that have taken place in the House of Lords and the House of Commons. My own contribution to those debates was unfortunately cut short by limits of time ; but if any member of this Society will do me the honour to read the speech in full, as it has been published by the courtesy of the editor of the *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*—copies of which I have put upon the table—he will be able to gauge, at all events, the facts on which I rely in that reply to Sir Edward Grey—facts which, I submit, justify me in the conclusion that this Convention, to put the case very moderately, was a grave political mistake. Probably most members of this Society are aware of the general effect of the treaty upon Persia. That effect was to divide the country into the three spheres which I have delimited on the map which hangs on my right hand. I have taken the delimitation from the map exhibited in the tea-room at the House of Commons by the Foreign Office. The first sphere is that of Russia, extending from the Turkish frontier near Kermanshah down to Isfahan and

Yezd, and to the Afghan frontier. There is, secondly, the neutral zone, or no-man's-land; and there is, thirdly, the British line, from the Afghan frontier down through Birjand and Kerman to a point arbitrarily determined near the port of Bunder Abbas. This sphere has sometimes been alluded to as Southern Persia, but that, I think, is a wholly incorrect designation. The British sphere comprises what we have been accustomed to know as South-Eastern Persia—the territory adjoining the Baluchistan and Afghan frontiers. I might speak at considerable length as to the political inexpediency of that line of demarcation; but I would only now dwell upon a point which is very important in relation to the future—namely, the statement that this line, having been drawn to Bunder Abbas, secures the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Its actual effect is nothing of the kind. Bunder Abbas, as I shall show later on, has a very shallow shore, and does not possess good natural facilities for a port. If the object be to control the mouth of the Gulf, you must be in a position to exert influence over Kishm and the smaller islands of Larak and Henjam, across what have been called the Clarence Straits. That is the strategic position which it is important to hold. Unfortunately it is a position which we have not obtained, though we might easily have obtained it had the line been drawn a little further west, to the port of Lingah. I cannot see upon what grounds Russia could have objected to this.

The Russian sphere brings Russia many hundreds of miles further towards the waters of the Gulf. It has been said that she requires ports in warm water. We have discussed this question at the Central Asian Society more than once, and I am sure that we have not discussed it in any jealous or grudging spirit. The truth is that all this talk about warm-water ports in the Persian Gulf is, to a great extent, idle talk. After all, Russia does possess ports on the warm water, and these are much nearer to the Gulf than our ports are. For example, Odessa, the great Russian centre in the Black Sea, is certainly nearer to the ports of the Gulf than any port in Great Britain. These Black-Sea ports are also close to the centres of Russian industries. You may ask yourselves, if that be the case, why Russia does not do an enormous trade with the Persian Gulf. How is it that we have practically monopolized that trade? The answer consists very largely in the fact that we practise the principle of Free Trade. I am glad to see here my friend Mr. Harold Cox, who is such an eloquent exponent of this principle. The effect of our Free Trade and of Russia's Protective policy has been, in no small measure, to deprive Russia of the power of effec-

tive competition with us in these regions. The Russian tariff, with all its consequences, has kept her Gulf trade within very narrow limits. On the other hand, her tariff acts as a powerful incentive to the land trade between Persia and herself, for Russia taxes Persian products at 5 per cent. or less on entry, while the corresponding competing products from other countries are taxed at much higher rates. By that means Russia develops the inland trade with herself, and that is the reason why probably the greater part of the exports from Persia go into Russia, and go in by the land frontier.

I am sure we all listened with pleasure to the very excellent address given us a few weeks back by the London correspondent of the *Novoe Vremya*, the great Russian newspaper. I think we were all in the mood to congratulate M. de Wesselitsky upon having seen realized that *rapprochement* between this country and Russia of which he has always been such a persuasive advocate in this country and in his own. I noted with very great interest that M. de Wesselitsky told us that what we had secured from Russia in the Convention was that she had given up all claims in the Persian Gulf. That is, no doubt, a notable declaration, coming from such a source. He said, too, that we had overrated the assimilative powers of Russia—that, to use an Americanism, she had already bitten off more than she could chew, and that we might set our minds at rest as regards Russian ambitions towards the Persian Gulf. We were all pleased to hear that admission, and I hope it will form part of the policy of the Russian Government in relation to Persia in the future. But, at the same time, I think it does not absolve us from taking precautionary measures to ensure that there shall be no temptation for her to depart from that wise policy.

This Society sought last summer to perform a useful function in endeavouring to influence the details of a then possible Convention between the two countries. The treaty—for such it really is—was negotiated with such extraordinary secrecy that it was practically finished and ready for signature before we had any intimation of its purport. However, the Council of this Society took action. We memorialized the Foreign Office in respect to the disadvantages that would accrue from putting the termini of certain of our great trade-routes into the Russian sphere, and we uttered a note of warning on various points of that kind. Our memorial was sent in in August, and, unfortunately, was too late to have any effect. But this Society has, no doubt, performed a very useful part in educating public opinion on all matters relating to the safety of the

British dominions in Asia. I would like you to remember that we are a very young Society, having only been formed in 1901. I had the honour to read the first paper delivered before the Society in January, 1902, and that paper was on the Persian Gulf. We were formed too late to prevent that event from which all our subsequent failures in Persia have arisen—namely, the refusal on the part of the Government of this country, in 1902, to advance a loan to Persia. I dare say you know the terms of that loan. We were offered a loan of several millions sterling on the security of the Customs of the Gulf ports at something like 6 per cent. interest. The Chancellor of the Exchequer could have borrowed the money at 3 per cent., and could thus have made 3 per cent. on the transaction, so laying a nice nest-egg for old-age pensions. (Laughter.) He failed to do this, and he failed, no doubt, because of the extraordinary unfamiliarity of these questions to British statesmen. This is what the then Chancellor, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, said at Bristol on September 29, 1902: ‘Others wanted us to lend money to the Shah, or to guarantee railways in Persia, or in China, or in Mesopotamia, or in some other country in which they happened to take a momentary interest.’ Such was the airy fashion in which he dismissed the question of this loan, and the Russians at once took it up. It was an extraordinary error, not only of judgment, but also of political perspective. Although our Society, then only recently formed, was unable to bring pressure to bear to revoke this decision, a little later on, in the spring of 1903, we certainly were instrumental—owing largely to the admirable lecture and the action taken by Mr. Gibson Bowles, whom I am glad to see here—in persuading the Government of the day to recede from the German proposals in respect to the Baghdad Railway, to which they were preparing to give their adhesion. I am sure no one here has regretted the fact that the Government did so recede. I mention these events to show that, as a Society, we have done some good, and also to point a lesson for the future. There are very grave questions coming up for decision in Asia. There is the whole question of how we shall develop the British position arising out of the Anglo-Russian Convention; and there is the question of the Baghdad Railway, and what attitude the Government should take up in relation to that ambitious enterprise. These are serious questions, calling for debate and consideration, and also for some kind of propagandist organization. I do not know whether that can be undertaken by this Society, but I certainly think it becomes the duty of those who have knowledge of these questions, and of the

grave consequences they involve, to educate and to inform public opinion, so that, at all events, the gross ignorance that now exists about them may no longer be a blot upon the intelligence of this country. (Cheers.)

In the remarks which I shall venture to address to you on the subject of our future in Persia, I shall return to the earlier methods of the Society—namely, a spoken address, to be followed by debate. I will lay certain points before you, to be threshed out in discussion, so that we may come, as I hope, to a clearer conception of the problem. I shall confine myself to the single topic of what should be the future of our policy toward Persia; and, in order that I may do so profitably, I would ask you to consider in what our policy towards Persia consists in its fundamental aspects. What is the basis of British policy towards Persia? I can state it perhaps most lucidly in the language in which it has been authoritatively expressed by the Government of India in a very weighty dispatch which has recently been presented to Parliament ('Persia,' No. 1, 1908). It is a dispatch from the Government of India, dated September 21, 1899; but it is by no means out of date in its statement of British aims and policy. It is quite as applicable now as it was when it was penned. This is what Lord Curzon and his colleagues wrote to Lord George Hamilton: 'We desire deliberately to say to your lordship, with a full consciousness of our responsibility in so saying, that, difficult as we find it in existing circumstances to meet the financial and military strain imposed upon us by the ever-increasing proximity of Russian power upon the northern and north-western frontiers of India from the Pamirs to Herat, we could not contemplate without dismay the prospect of Russian neighbourhood in Eastern or Southern Persia, the inevitable consequence of which must be a great increase of our own burdens; while the maritime defensibility of India would require to be altogether reconsidered were the dangers of a land invasion to be supplemented by the appearance of a possible antagonist as a naval Power in waters contiguous to Indian shores.'

The Government of India could not regard without dismay the prospect of Russian neighbourhood in Eastern or Southern Persia. Well, that opinion is very generally shared, and not only by those of us who are closely conversant with the problem, but also by those thinkers who look upon these questions from an outside and perfectly impartial point of view. The subject has been admirably discussed by the American naval writer, Captain Mahan, in his 'Problem of Asia'—one of the weightiest books of the kind which I

know. He considers what would be the effect of Russian absorption of Persia and of the consequent appearance of a Russian fleet in the Gulf, and he comes to the conclusion that this would have a damaging effect upon the British naval position throughout the world. He says : ' The maintenance by Russia of a navy in the Persian Gulf sufficient to be a serious consideration to the efforts of Great Britain would involve an exhausting effort, and a naval abandonment of the Black Sea or of the China Sea, or of both. Naval divisions distributed amongst the three could not possibly give mutual support.' If that be the opinion of expert naval writers on this subject, then, obviously, what we have to do is to take M. de Wesselitsky's assurances seriously, as they were intended : to assume that Russia has abandoned her designs upon the Persian Gulf, and for our part to maintain and develop our existing position in Persia at large, so as to render a Russian approach to the waters of the Gulf practically impossible.

How can we carry this policy into effect? First and foremost, by exerting ourselves to convert the integrity and independence of Persia from what is rapidly becoming a diplomatic and legal fiction into a reality. That policy was considered by the Government of India in 1899 in the dispatch which I have quoted, and it was rejected after a review of all the circumstances. The Government of India could not see its way to the conversion of the Persian Government from a moribund into a solvent institution. But much has happened since then. Persia has endeavoured to imitate the methods of Japan. She is doing her utmost to effect reforms. A Parliament has been established. Discussion of public affairs is promoted by nearly a hundred newspapers, of which forty-seven are printed in the capital. I have taken some trouble to investigate the existing situation ; and the balance of well-informed opinion inclines to the belief that, if circumstances are not too strong for them, the Persians are quite likely to work out their own salvation. I can scarcely think, however, that they are likely to achieve this result without some assistance. I do not know why Persia should not be encouraged to follow in this respect the example of the kingdom of Siam. In Siam the King and his Ministers are assisted by from 150 to 200 Europeans, many of them being specially picked men. I think those conversant with affairs in that country will bear me out that this sprinkling of Europeans over the Siamese Administration has brought about a marked and even, some say, a wonderful improvement in the affairs of Siam during the past decade. It seems to me that the resisting power of the Persians themselves requires to

be increased in a similar way—by an admixture of European officials; and such strengthening should be the first object of British diplomacy, because it is obvious that, if we are to continue to hold India with a handful of men, as we do at present, if we are not prepared to adopt universal military service, then the alternative policy lies in the maintenance of effective buffer States, which, by their geographical position in relation to India, render it difficult for Russia to adopt military operations against our great dependency (hear, hear). Well, that I put first; and I think the views of the Indian Government, as set forth in the passage of the dispatch to which I have just referred, might be modified to meet the change of circumstances.

In the second place, we should do all we can to develop the existing British position in Persia, and this part of my subject I will deal with under four heads—first of all, the Persian Gulf; secondly, the British sphere; thirdly, the neutral sphere; and fourthly, the sphere of Russia.

As regards the Persian Gulf, all members of this Society are aware that our trade in those waters is very considerable. The question of its value was gone into by the Government of India in 1899.* They pointed out that the annual trade in the Persian Gulf, including the Persian ports of Bunder Abbas, Lingah, Bushire, and Mohammerah, the Arab ports on the opposite coast, and Bahrein, for the years 1895-97 averaged £5,747,100, of which local trade amounted to £1,708,000 and external trade to £4,039,100. Of this external trade, over 80 per cent. was British—trade with British possessions. For the same three years, out of a total of 2,161 steamers which entered and cleared from the Gulf ports, 2,039 were British, and their tonnage represented 84 per cent. of the total tonnage. But these figures of the Government of India are inadequate. They do not include Busrah, where the average annual trade for the same period was £2,157,000, the great bulk of it being with British possessions.† For the years 1904-6, we may estimate, from the extremely imperfect figures available, that the average annual trade—local and external—at the Gulf ports, enumerated in the Government of India's dispatch, was about £5,860,000, of which £3,500,000 was British. In addition, the trade of Busrah now averages £3,500,000 per annum. When I

* See 'Persia,' No. 1, 1908, p. 7.

† The figure given by the Government of India for the trade of Busrah for the three years 1895-97 is evidently mistaken. It probably represents their estimate of the average annual trade.

addressed the members of this Society in 1902, Russian and German trade in the Gulf was *nil*. I do not say that Russian or German goods were not imported, but they were brought in British bottoms, and they were not accounted for separately. The Germans have now instituted a regular monthly service by the Hamburg-American line, and the Russians have a service from Odessa six times during the year. The dimensions of this trade at present are insignificant.

What steps should we take in the Gulf to promote our great interests in that region? We already do practically everything that gets done there. We buoy its waters; we survey and map its shores and inlets; we maintain order in the Gulf, put down piracy, and police it. At the same time, in the interests of commerce we might go further in this direction. There is one great defect: from its entrance to its head the Gulf is not lighted, and this makes navigation slow and dangerous. The provision of lighthouses is a measure which might commend itself to the Indian Government, especially as nearly the whole of the shipping is British. Secondly, we should undertake to dredge the bar at the mouth of the Shat-el-Arab—the united waters of the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Karun. At high water there are good 18 feet on the bar; but this is not sufficient for great modern steamers, since the tide rises and falls as much as from 8 to 10 feet, necessitating considerable delays on the part of ocean steamers bound for Busrah. This improvement should be undertaken by Turkey—and Turkey cannot well plead a lack of money while she is devoting large revenues to the finding of kilometric guarantees for railways constructed by Germany. Revenues should be permanently laid aside for this purpose. My third recommendation in respect to the Gulf would be the provision of much greater facilities for handling cargo at the ports. This work should be undertaken by the Persian Government; but I think we should avoid anything in the nature of direct interference, because that might lead to dangerous precedents. Further, I should be inclined to suggest that we should concentrate our efforts in the Gulf on two points—namely, at Bunder Abbas at one end and at Mohammerah at the other. Probably our Resident in the Persian Gulf would continue to reside at Bushire, because Bushire occupies a central position and he is the *de facto* ruler of the Gulf. But in other respects I think we should concentrate on the two places which I have named, because in respect of the development of trade and internal communications the future will belong to them rather than to Bushire. The road from Bushire to the interior

traverses the steep mountain-passes known as the Kotals, and is probably not capable of much improvement except at enormous expense.

I now come to the British sphere, and naturally the first point is what we should do with Seistan. A great deal was made by the Government in the recent debates of the fact that this province is included in our sphere. Was anyone so foolish as to propose the omission of Seistan? What we required was that the British sphere should correspond to facts. The line of demarcation should have been drawn—as Sir Mortimer Durand is said to have drawn it some years ago—so as to include, not merely Seistan, but Kerman, Yezd, Isfahan, and Kermanshah. This was the Durand line,* of which only a small section has been embodied in the British sphere under the Convention. Much was made of the strategic value of Seistan, and this is undeniable. It is at present a desolate and most unpleasant region to live in. It is subjected to invasions of sand, which is whirled up at a velocity reaching seventy miles an hour by a fierce wind that lasts four months of the year. The inroads of the sand undermine the houses. I believe I am right in saying that the expedition for the delimitation of Seistan under Sir Henry McMahon lost 50 men and 4,900 camels. It is about as inhospitable a place as any on the face of the globe. No doubt it might be possible to restore this region to its ancient fertility by means of irrigation. But if we adopt that course, we shall be facilitating a military advance toward India. From the point of view of a layman, it would seem best to leave Seistan much as it is, because, in that case, it will be more difficult for an army to get down to India. Strategic considerations have also to be considered in connexion with suggestions for extending the Quetta - Nushki Railway to Kerman, Yezd, and Isfahan, with branches from Bunder Abbas and the Karun. That seems to me a doubtful policy on strategic grounds; but the same objection would not be open to the branch-lines, as they would run from south to north, and not from west to east. We might at least obtain the requisite concessions. What certainly should soon be done is to make a road from Bunder Abbas to Kerman. You observe from the map that the distance between the two places is not great—some 250 miles as the crow flies. But, owing to the configuration of the country, the road would have to be taken round by Rigan. The best account of that route is con-

* It is only fair to Sir M. Durand to state that this line was distinctly not a proposed line of partition. It merely indicated the regions where British trade and influence were, and still are, supreme.

tained in the *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* for 1905 (vol. xxi.), in the form of a paper, by Major Sykes. Major Sykes pronounces this route as quite feasible ; but it crosses a pass 8,000 feet high, and it is 430 miles long, whereas the direct distance between Bunder Abbas and Kerman is, as I have said, less than 250 miles. Rigan, however, would probably lie on the route of a future Nushki-Kerman Railway, should it ever be built. It might also be advisable to open up a road from Bunder Abbas to Shiraz via Lar, as to which I would refer members to a paper by Lieutenant A. T. Wilson in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, February, 1908, and especially to his summary of the route on p. 168. The two roads which I have suggested are the most obvious requirements of our commerce in the British sphere.

Turning now to the neutral zone, I should suggest that we should concentrate on Mohammerah and the valley of the Karun. Here we have concessions in our hands only awaiting development. There is first of all the Bakhtiari road, as to which progress has been very remarkable. The road was constructed by a member of this Society—Mr. Arthur Taylor—in 1900, and was open for traffic in the following year. In that year 100 tons of traffic were carried over it, while in 1906 the total was 1,280 tons, conveyed by 19,900 animals. The revenues are collected and enjoyed by the chieftains of the country, who last year received over £3,000 on this account. The undertaking has, no doubt, been a success ; but the road is in bad repair, and considerable works are required. A railway along this route is not impossible ; but, of course, in so mountainous a district the cost would be very considerable. I was last autumn travelling in Bosnia, where mountain railways can be studied with advantage. They are made on the 2 feet 6 inch gauge, and the engineers have adopted a system whereby, on the steeper ascents, the train takes up cogs without stopping. But, of course, construction in such a country costs a good deal of money, so that, whereas the average outlay in the most mountainous districts was £30,000 a mile, the cost of the same gauge under more ordinary conditions averaged £8,000. You could not hope to make a similar railway along the Bakhtiari route under an average of, at the very least, £10,000 a mile ; and this would involve a total outlay of three millions sterling. Whether this capital expenditure would be in any way recouped by the traffic I should not like to say ; but, at any rate, a concession for a railway should be obtained. In the second place, British subjects hold a concession for a road from the Karun through Dizful, Khoremabad, Burujird, and Sultanabad

to Teheran. Burujird and Sultanabad are in the Russian sphere ; but they have already constructed the section from Sultanabad to Kum and Teheran. The remaining sections from Sultanabad to the Karun should be linked up as soon as possible. Some of you may suggest railways rather than roads ; but I hold that roads or caravan-tracks must precede railways. The first aim must be to get into business relations with the people of the country ; and when trade has been firmly established the question of railways may be considered. I should like to urge that we should lose no opportunity, in respect of all these roads, to obtain concessions from the Persian Government for railways in the future. We should do that in order to prevent our being supplanted by the Russians or by the Germans. You will recall that the late Shah, Nasr-ed-Din, gave the British Government a solemn assurance, to which they still hold, that when railways are promoted by Russia in the north, Great Britain shall have similar facilities in the south. We have, therefore, a perfect right to ask that such facilities should be given, and that the concessions, at least, should be in our hands, to be exploited as soon as favourable opportunities may arise.

Finally, I should like to allude to what may be done in the Russian sphere. Here Great Britain has many important trading and other interests. Some 30 per cent. of our telegrams to India and the Far East pass over British wires through the Russian sphere by way of Isfahan. Thence one line proceeds to the Gulf, and is connected by cable with India, while another is taken right across Persia through Kerman to the same destination. In addition to the telegraph, we have constructed a carriage-road from Teheran to Kum, and we hold a concession for its prolongation to Isfahan. This section should be taken in hand without delay. It would be most unwise to allow this main road to fall into Russian hands, and to rely upon the 'open door' in Persia. We only of all the Powers faithfully practise the 'open door' policy anywhere. The Russians may profess this policy in Persia, but they have plenty of ways of getting round it. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that the concessions which we already possess in the Russian sphere should not be allowed to lapse, but rather that they should be rendered effective as soon as possible, so that British trade, which has been hard hit by the terms of the Convention, may suffer the least possible damage therefrom. It must be admitted that these road enterprises have not yet paid expenses, and can, therefore, not be regarded from a strictly commercial point of view.

They were undertaken to enable British trade to penetrate into the country, and they have hitherto entailed considerable financial loss. It might be better, though probably more costly, if such works were to be undertaken, not by private firms, but by Government, as, indeed, has been the case with the Russian roads in Persia.

I have now completed my survey of the situation created by the Convention, and I have asked you to consider what steps we ought to take to safeguard our interests in the Shah's dominions under the new conditions. I have endeavoured to show the far-reaching effects upon our Empire of any absorption by Russia of large portions of Persia, and, with this danger in view, I have urged that we should put forth a strenuous endeavour to maintain the integrity of Persia. I have shown in detail by what means we shall seek to maintain and develop our position in Persia, and in particular that vast preponderance of interests which we still possess in the neutral sphere. (Cheers.)

DISCUSSION

THE CHAIRMAN said: Before the debate upon Mr. Lynch's paper begins I should like to say a word or two.

In the course of his remarks he touched upon the Anglo-Russian Convention, and following Lord Crewe, who spoke on the subject not long ago in the House of Lords, he referred to 'the Durand line' in Persia. The phrase was used by Lord Crewe in connexion with a proposal I was supposed to have made, when Minister at Teheran, that Persia should be divided into British and Russian 'spheres of influence' by a line running from Khanikin, on the Turkish frontier, through Kermanshah, Hamadan, Isfahan, Yezd, and Kerman to Seistan and the Afghan border.

I have now been allowed by Sir Edward Grey to see the papers on the subject, and, as I expected, I find that I made no such proposal.

In saying this, I am not criticizing the Convention. Not only am I under the orders of the Foreign Office, but I have in the past suggested the possibility of a general agreement between Russia and England for the settlement of their relations in Asia. Moreover, as to the terms of the Convention, I am aware that the situation in Persia may not have been as favourable to us when the Convention was negotiated as it was when I was Minister in Persia, and that, in any case, when a general agreement was being discussed, the situation in Persia was not the only thing to be considered. All I wish to make clear is that I did not propose the arrangement which has been accepted by His Majesty's Government, or anything at all resembling it. I have the express permission of Sir Edward Grey to explain what my views really were, and to disclaim responsibility for recommendations which I did not make:

What I did when Minister in Persia was to point out the actual position which we held, and to make certain proposals for strengthening that position. I showed that our trade was in full possession of the country up to and including a line drawn from Khanikin by Kermanshah, Hamadan, Isfahan, Yezd, and Kerman to Seistan. I showed that up to and including that line our political influence was paramount and almost exclusive. Russia had only just begun to touch the fringe of this southern zone at Seistan and Isfahan. Neither her Consular establishments nor her trade extended beyond these points. In the North, on the other hand, we had our Consular establishments right up to the Russian border; and our trade, though suffering from Russian

competition, was by no means excluded. The southern zone was very much more in our hands, politically and commercially, than the northern zone was in Russian hands. The English Bank did business all over Persia, and was the only bank which could legally issue notes. Our telegraph department controlled a large part of the Persian telegraph system. Our political influence was still great even in the North, and our power was much feared.

In these circumstances I should never have thought of proposing to divide Persia into British and Russian spheres of influence bounded by the Khanikin-Seistan line. I did not, as a fact, propose to divide the country into British and Russian spheres of influence at all.

I repeat that I am not criticizing the Convention. I do not wish to express any opinion as to the arrangements made under the Convention, viewed as a whole. All I do wish to say is that I did not advocate any such arrangement with regard to Persia as has been attributed to me. The proposal, viewed as an isolated proposal, would have been indefensible, and I disclaim all responsibility for it.

Mr. J. D. REES, M.P., said : Mr. Lynch's address was so interesting and eloquent that it seemed quite short, but following speeches must actually be short. The remark that has just fallen from the chair bears out what I have always said—that we must bear in mind that the Convention does not relate to Persia alone ; that the Persian portion is only a part of a whole, which is generally acceptable. Mr. Lynch spoke as if, under the line drawn to demarcate the British sphere, we had no interest in the island of Kishm. We have had a station there, as a matter of fact, for many years, and I hope it is not to be assumed from what he said that we have left that strong strategical position open for Russia.

Mr. LYNCH : It is quite a small station.

Mr. REES : Still, we are there, and I don't think anybody else could get there. I am in general agreement with Mr. Lynch that we should apply for every possible concession in Persia, on the ground that, if we do not, somebody else will. We should in every direction, from the Gulf northwards, peg out our claims for roads and railways. I notice that the German Foreign Secretary said some days ago that the Anglo-Russian Convention expressly excluded the Persian Gulf, whereupon I asked Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons whether our position in the Gulf had not been expressly confirmed in connexion with the Convention, and whether this fact had been duly communicated to Germany. He replied that it had. So the speech of the German Foreign Secretary had not the somewhat sinister significance which it might have seemed to convey. Mr. Lynch said that it was only because we were Free Traders that we had in the Gulf a great commercial preponderance, while the Russians had not. He thought it was because we had most of the carrying ships and the Russians had

not. Perhaps we had the ships because we had Free Trade (laughter), but, at any rate, there were the facts.

Mr. Lynch was quite correct, he thought, in his opinion that our troubles in Persia and Russian ascendancy therein began when we refused to guarantee the loan raised in 1902. Great Britain ought most certainly to have taken up that loan. He (Mr. Rees) believed that just now the Germans had declared that their interests in the Baghdad Railway were purely and exclusively commercial. Why did we not before they became political cut in with capital to help in the construction of the line, or obtain the concession for the Gulf section, or at least arrange for complete internationalization? It was certain that this railway could in time be made right through, and it might then be too late to internationalize it, and we might then be completely cut off from participation.

Much was said in the lecture of the obligations of Persia toward ourselves in respect to pre-existing concessions. An important question was whether they would be bound by previous contracts now that there was the new factor of the Convention, which might be held to clean the slate. He had sent in a memorial to Sir Edward Grey pointing out that it was very important that we should know that the Persians adhered to their previous engagements, and particularly to the engagement that if Russia received railway concessions in the North, we could claim corresponding concessions in the South. Mr. Lynch had collaborated with him in this matter. The lecturer criticized the Government very forcibly for negotiating this Convention without giving any opportunity for prior discussion of its terms, and said that we only knew its details when their modification was no longer possible. He (Mr. Rees) thought that if this audience heard the tone of many of the questions put to Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons, it would feel that it is no easy matter for the Foreign Office to make so strong a stand for the protection of Imperial interests as we could desire. Our Ministers had to work under the greatest difficulties, having regard to the views of many of their followers. If the details of proposed agreements with other Powers were in the early stages made public, the Foreign Office would not be able to carry on the business of this country effectively—at any rate, while Parliament was sitting. (Hear, hear.)

He thought we ought to have some warship in the Gulf larger than the Indian marine vessels and the cruiser from the East India Squadron usually sent there. He had repeatedly put this matter forward. The East India Squadron's biggest ship, the *Highflyer*, was comparatively small, and we wanted a higher flyer there. (Laughter.) But how were we to make the necessary provision for the defence of Imperial interests when we had members in the House of Commons who, whenever the army question came up, urged that the army in India ought

to be greatly reduced because of the Convention, and the navy ought to be largely cut down? These critics included men, he was sorry to say, who had themselves served in India. Such reduction would be a fatal step, and he trusted it would never be assented to by the Government of this country. The present Government, indeed, had given satisfactory assurances in this behalf, in spite of the insistence of their followers on the extreme left, who were always digging pits in the amiable hope that their leaders would fall into them.

COLONEL C. E. YATE, C.S.I., C.M.G., said: Personally I cannot accept Mr. Rees's contention that, taken as a whole, the Convention is an acceptable one. I think we all cordially agree in our desire to promote a friendly understanding with Russia, and we can all endorse the principles of that understanding as laid down in the preamble to the Convention. It is only when we come to examine the way in which the principles there laid down have been applied in the subsequent articles of the Convention that we have cause to doubt whether Russia is really sincere in her professed desire to avoid all misunderstanding with Great Britain in the future. Great Britain has given Russia every real and practical proof of her sincerity that any one Power can give another. She has handed over to Russia every place in Persia where that country has the smallest interest whatever. She has given over Meshed, the main objective of our Indian trade from Quetta and Bundar Abbas, where the Indian Government have maintained an Agent and Consul-General for the last twenty-five years, and where we have large interests connected with Herat and Western Afghanistan. She has given over Tabriz, where we have had a Consul-General for years and years, and which is the place at which all the British trade through the port of Trebizond, on the Black Sea, enters Persia. She has handed over Teheran, the capital of the country, and she has handed over every other place where Russia has any footing whatever.

Russia, on the other hand, by stretching out her hands and taking to herself such places as Yezd, Isfahan, and Burujird, where she has practically no commercial interests whatever, has knowingly, purposefully, and wilfully taken to herself the power and opportunity to raise a conflict with British interests at any moment she pleases; and if she is really desirous of avoiding such conflicts, we should like to have some more real and practical proofs of this beyond mere words and protestations. When we consider the magnitude of British interests in the roads from the Gulf ports to Shiraz and Isfahan; when we consider the magnitude of British interests in our hard-won concession for the navigation of the Karun River, and for the roads from the Karun to Isfahan on the one side, and Burujird and Sultanabad on the other, I do not see how, under present circumstances, misunderstandings and conflicts of interests are possibly to be avoided

in the future; and if Russia is really sincere in her professed intention to avoid all cause of conflict, then let her give proof of it, as Great Britain has given proof of her sincerity, by signifying her agreement to such places as Yezd, Isfahan, and Burujird, where British interests predominate, being included within the British sphere.

We have had the terms of the Convention fully debated of late in both Houses of Parliament. Lord Lansdowne, you may remember, in winding up the debate in the House of Lords, gave expression to a hope—mind you, a hope only—that the agreement would be loyally and honourably interpreted by the Russian Government, and that the British concessions might receive fair play at Russia's hands.

What sort of a treaty is this in which British interests have been left on so precarious a footing that we have no firmer ground to stand on than that of pious hopes? British interests should rest on duly recorded rights, not on hopes and appeals for fair play; and the position is an humiliating one for us to be in. I see that the *Times of India*—than which no paper in the East has fuller knowledge and clearer insight in these matters—has said that, whether looked at from an Imperial or a local point of view, the treaty is one of the most deplorable instruments that a British Minister has ever put his hand to. It is indeed the irony of fate that all that has been done by the Government of India for the protection of Imperial interests in Persia should have been thrown away by the Home Government. As Lord Curzon has pointed out, the expenditure of the Home Government in Persia has been only £15,000 a year, while the expenditure of the Government of India has amounted to £70,000 a year, which is a large sum for any Government to spend on a country like Persia. Lord Curzon also pointed out that no supporter of the treaty had ever faced the question as to why those regions in Persia which ought to have constituted the British sphere had been converted into the neutral zone.

As to Kasr-i-shirin, I have always myself been in favour of meeting Russia with regard to railway construction in Western Persia. So long ago as June, 1906, I advocated, in the *Nineteenth Century*, our joining in with Russia in any scheme she might suggest. But that is a very different thing to surrendering the whole railways in Western Persia gratuitously into Russia's hands as we have now done. Had we retained our right of joint action, we should have been assured of equality of treatment for British imports with Russian exports. We might also have come to an agreement with Russia for joint action in future contingencies; we might have had Russia, as our avowed ally, instead of being left to fight our railway battles alone. Russia, on the other hand, might have obtained a warm and unanimous ally in England, as undoubtedly she would have done; whereas, by her overreaching and grasping policy, she has obtained only a cold, critical, and divided assent to the Convention from the English people, who have

to wait and see whether she is really going to give them fair play or not.

MR. T. GIBSON BOWLES said : I rather regretted to hear Mr. Rees express distrust of the intervention of the House of Commons in foreign affairs. I myself believe that to be not only rightful, but useful, necessary, indispensable ; that not only has the House every right to voice the opinion of the nation as to a treaty before it is made, but I also believe that it has a most useful part to play in the discussion of details, which cannot be abandoned without grave disadvantage to the Government of the day. I observe from what has been said here that a number of uncertainties have already arisen as to the interpretation of the Convention and as to some of its effects, even on the part of gentlemen so well informed on Eastern affairs as those who have addressed us. Such uncertainties as exist would probably have been cleared up in the course of a debate in the House of Commons, if the draft of the Convention had been debated as a Bill is debated, with capacities for amending it. I think that an urgent necessity of our constitutional machinery is some such body as the Committee of Foreign Relations which exists in the United States as a link between the Executive and the Senate. I hold that, instead of having more, the Government should have less liberty to negotiate such treaties without reference to Parliament, and should in that respect be kept more in control by the popular assembly. That would make for safety.

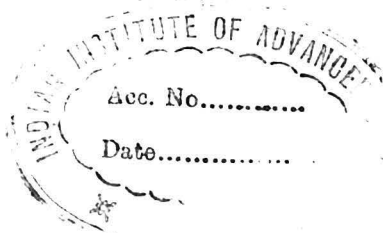
The phrase we have heard so repeatedly this afternoon, 'spheres of influence', is a strange one. It represents nothing known to international law or diplomacy. It is not a sovereignty. It is not an alliance. It is not a protectorate. It is not annexation. It is a phrase intended to cover purposes of aggression : by it you really mean spheres of annexation, when you are strong enough to carry out that annexation. I observe that the lecturer, who gave us such an admirable exposition of the case, and Mr. Rees and Colonel Yate, go further than the phrase implies : they esteem a sphere of influence to be absolutely completed annexation. They all talk as if Russia actually and absolutely possessed her sphere of influence, and as if Great Britain possessed hers ; while as to the third remaining sphere, it was to be wrangled for between the two. That is an exaggerated view.

MR. REES : I deprecated that view myself.

MR. BOWLES : Then I mistook the tone of Mr. Rees's remarks. I understood him to assume that everything in the Russian sphere had become wholly Russian, and that she could work her will there, and the same with England in the English sphere. But there arises the question whether the antecedent contracts made by Persia have disappeared because England and Russia have arrived at a paper Convention as to spheres of influence. It is impossible to conceive that these contracts are thus abrogated. They still exist.

The CHAIRMAN : They are specially safeguarded by the Convention.

MR. BOWLES : But even supposing nothing had been said in the Convention respecting them, that instrument could not possibly have affected preceding contracts made by Persia herself. I confess I do not like these contracts between two great countries, marking out spheres of influence in a third. They are immoral. They are even impolitic. It is extremely inadvisable, if you have purposes of annexation and aggression, to mark them out in the eyes of the world beforehand. (Laughter.) If I may use terms of legal contradiction, it is a sort of daylight burglary. Mr. Lynch's complaint, however, is not that we have made this bargain, but that we have not got the best of it. His attitude reminds me of the story of two men sharing the same bed. One complained that the other had taken up too much of the bed, and left him insufficient room. 'No,' said the other; 'I have only my share.' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'but you take your share out of the middle of the bed, and leave me to take mine out of the two sides.' (Laughter.) The Russians have taken by far the best share of the Persian bed, and have left us only one of the sides. (Renewed laughter.) But may I be allowed to call the attention of this important meeting to the fact that the bed is Persian, and not English or Russian, and to the view which the Persians themselves may be supposed to take of this process of occupying the bed? The Persian must feel—and, in fact, I know he does feel (for I have recently returned from the East, and was last at Constantinople)—that he has been partitioned by England and Russia, so far as they can now partition him, and he is extremely disturbed about it. I think we can well understand that feeling. He is disturbed, first of all, because of the implied threat to bring him to an end; while, in the second place, he knows that such a division of spheres of influence never takes place except when it is felt that the Power subject to it is in a disjointed, degraded, and almost moribund state. (Cheers.) The Persians cannot be expected to look upon the Convention with any pleasure or satisfaction. As a matter of fact, the result has been, what an Eastern State often looks for, the advent of a third saviour—or what the French would call the *troisième larron*. The Persian, feeling that he is going to be ground between the upper millstone of Russia and the nether millstone of England, has turned his eyes to Germany. Germany is making the best of her opportunities: she has sent to Persia one of her ablest Ambassadors, and is lending money to Persia. The net effect will be to set up a German influence in Persia such as has never existed before, and which will afford this country matter for serious reflection in the future. (Cheers.) This irruption of Germany into Persian politics is the more significant because Germany and Turkey are almost agreed on a general course of policy. There are 30,000 Turkish troops on the Persian frontier at the present time; they have occupied Persian territory, and I believe that in this matter Turkey is, and will be, supported, so far as she can be, by Germany.



You may thus have in Persia before long a serious operation of factors which will materially alter the state of things in that part of the world. You may have to recast your spheres of influence. You may have to map out yet a German or a Turco-German sphere. What then?

As to the Persian Gulf I would say a word. I am a bit of a sailor myself, and naval matters always interest me. I am told that M. de Wesselitsky said here that Russia had given up the Persian Gulf, but complaint has been made to-day that the Gulf is not included in the scope of the Convention. I cannot see that this is of consequence. The Persian Gulf is always ours so long as we are predominant at sea. So long as we predominate there nobody will touch it; nobody can touch it. Therefore I attach no importance whatever to the absence of any declaration in the Convention of English predominance in the Gulf.

Mr. Lynch is of opinion that on the whole the Convention is a grave political mistake. Well, as I have already indicated, I am extremely doubtful of its morality and of its prudence in the long-run. But from one aspect I cannot fail to welcome it. I have long been anxious to see reconciled the wearing conflict of interests between England and Russia; and it is to me satisfactory to see the statesmen of both countries coming to an agreement. Though I am forced to admit that Mr. Lynch may be right in thinking that we have only a small part of the bed, and though I feel that there are objections also to the Tibetan and Afghan parts of the treaty, I cannot but welcome this Convention on the whole as a first step to a better understanding with Russia. Although we may not have got the best terms, I think from that point of view that the Convention was worth making. As to whether it will be kept, I think the condition of Russia at the present moment offers very considerable guarantees that it will be acted upon. Russia has kept her treaty-contracts with us in the past; and even apart from the question of good faith, I think the circumstances of the present and of the immediate future are such as will induce and even compel Russia to keep this Convention faithfully. On the whole, therefore, while I recognize that there are disadvantages and difficulties in this Convention, yet from the point of view of *rapprochement* between England and Russia I cannot fail to regard it with very considerable satisfaction. (Cheers.)

MR. LOVAT FRASER said: At this hour I do not wish to speak on the general question of the Anglo-Russian Convention, and I only rise to take exception to a passage in the remarks of the last speaker. Mr. Gibson Bowles said in effect that he was quite satisfied that British paramountcy in the Persian Gulf would be maintained so long as the British navy was predominant at sea. That kind of view is all very well, but I would like to ask Mr. Gibson Bowles whether he would maintain the same attitude if another Power obtained some

sort of naval station in the Gulf. (Hear, hear.) Such a possibility is by no means imaginary. Attempts of the kind have been made already. Russia tried some years ago to establish a coaling-station at Bunder Abbas, and very nearly succeeded. France attempted to obtain a coaling-station at Bunder Jisseh, on the coast of Oman, near the entrance to the Gulf, and was only thwarted at the eleventh hour. It is tolerably well known that Germany tried to lease a large tract of land on the shores of Koweit Harbour, ostensibly in connexion with the Baghdad Railway. (Hear, hear.) The presence of the British Fleet in the vicinity of Port Arthur did not deter Russia from hoisting her flag over that fortress. The point I wish to urge is that we must not be too confident because our naval predominance appears so strong. We must be watchful and vigilant, and must be ready to resist to the uttermost any attempt by any Power, however friendly, to establish a position on the shores of the Persian Gulf. This is essential in the interests of India, for the advent of any definite foreign influence in the Gulf would have an extremely disturbing effect upon the situation in India. (Applause.)

MR. HAROLD COX, M.P., said: The last speaker has urged that it would be dangerous for another Power to obtain a footing in the Persian Gulf. What I wish to point out is that, so long as any other Power can only get to any naval station it may desire to establish in the Gulf by sea, it would not greatly matter, because that naval station would be ours whenever we wanted to take it. The real danger comes in if any Power obtains a footing in the Gulf to which she has access all the way by land.

I may add that I am one of those who feel very great doubt as to the value of this Convention. I was confirmed in these doubts by the language Sir Edward Grey used in the House of Commons. After going through the various clauses of the agreement, and apologizing for most of them, as it seemed to me (laughter), the Foreign Secretary said that if we had not conceded all these points to Russia, we should have had no agreement at all. I venture to ask, What is the use of making an 'agreement' with a man who requires you to make the whole payment, and will pay nothing himself? (Hear, hear.)

MR. E. PENTON (the Hon. Secretary) said: The Quetta-Nushki Railway has been carried to Nushki, but not beyond. With regard to Seistan, I hope I may be permitted to say one word in its defence. Mr. Lynch has painted its climatic conditions in very lurid colours. I had the pleasure of spending a very happy fortnight there a few years ago during the hot weather, and I did not find the country quite so bad as it was painted. A little description of the country, however, might be interesting. When you enter Persia from Baluchistan, after rounding the Kuh-i-malik-Siah, you travel for about ninety miles through a desert. This desert has been formed because the waters of

the Helmund have changed their course. There is no doubt that this area was once populous; indeed, I believe one authority has said that he discovered the ruins of a city the size of London. I did not see any ruins answering that description; but if you care to stand on any of the small watch-towers of the British posts that lay between the Kuh-i-malik-Siah and our Consulate at Nasratabad, you can observe in every direction deserted villages. One night I entered one of these villages—or it might almost be called a town—and I found all the buildings in perfect condition with the exception that some of the lower parts were submerged in the sand. Within twenty miles of Nasratabad you strike the country watered by the Helmund, which you immediately find fertile and carrying a large population. This is entirely due to the waters of the river, and I believe that the changing of the course of these desert rivers is not an uncommon phenomenon. The fertility of the country is testified to by the fact that it is generally believed that Seistan was the granary of Alexander the Great when he invaded the Punjab.

MR. LYNCH said in reply: We have had a very interesting discussion, and a very varied one, and I should be wanting in courtesy to the speakers if I refrained from touching upon a few of the points that have been raised.

First of all, as to Seistan, I think Mr. Penton will admit, if he reads the report of the McMahon Mission, that I did not exaggerate the statements of that report respecting the climate of that province. Indeed, I left out many of the most doleful aspects of the picture—as, for instance, that in winter tempests are frequent, the gales attaining a velocity of 120 miles an hour. The gist of the report was that the present condition of the country is a deplorable one, and, indeed, dangerous for man and beast, but that it is capable of being made into a granary by means of irrigation. The last speaker considers that we should endeavour to restore the ancient fertility of Seistan. I certainly do not yield to him in my desire to see two blades of grass grow where one grew before. But it is manifestly a strategical question. Seistan is capable of forming a great granary and depot for an army, and, as we do not want it for crossing into Central Asia, shall we put it into such a state as to benefit a possible foe crossing it against us?

As regards the Persian Gulf, I confess I find myself in agreement with Mr. Harold Cox. The question is whether Russia shall come to the Persian Gulf by land or by sea. The British position has been defined by Lord Lansdowne, who has stated that we should regard it as an act of hostility for Russia to possess a port in the Persian Gulf; and this statement, made when he was Foreign Secretary, has practically been endorsed by the present Government.

I listened with great interest to the remarks of Mr. Gibson Bowles, who complained that I had not alluded to the effect of the Convention

on Persia, and the attitude concerning it of the Persian people. I can only say that, if he will do me the honour to read my article in the *Asiatic Quarterly*, he will find that I had a good deal to say on that aspect of the question in the speech which I intended to deliver to the House of Commons. I showed that it was no pleasant thing for the Persians to see their country playing the part of a *corpus vile* for dissection.

SIR MORTIMER DURAND, in closing the proceedings, expressed his thanks to the lecturer, on behalf of the audience, for his instructive and interesting address.

The following remarks have been received from a member, who was prevented from speaking by the lateness of the hour :

MR. PREECE : Mr. Lynch, in his paper read at the Central Asian Society on the 8th instant, in speaking of the possibility of a railway being made from Bunder Abbas to Shiraz, referred to a paper read by Lieutenant Wilson, in which it was pointed out that a line run from that port to Shiraz via Lar presented no difficulty. In 1884 I made a journey from Shiraz to Bunder Abbas and Jashk, a report of which was communicated to the Geographical Society ; in this report I pointed out that the route via Darab and Forg was perfectly feasible, and that no engineering difficulties to the construction of a railway existed along it. The late Sir Frederick Goldsmid accepted this route, and it has also been referred to by Lord Curzon in his book on Persia, as also has the Lar route. From Saadabad a little to the south-east of Tarun I believe an easy route could be found to Kerman. So that up to that point one line would suffice ; thence a junction would have to be made to Shiraz on the west, and Kerman to the north.

Mr. Lynch lamented that the Clarence Straits, west of Bunder Abbas, did not come within our sphere. As these straits are part and parcel of the port Bunder Abbas, I imagine we could utilize them ; if not, it would in deed be a pity, as they afford the only deep water available in those parts where a port could effectually be created.

In contrasting the two routes from the sea at Bushire to Shiraz and the Karun to Isfahan, Mr. Lynch, gave preference to the latter ; but I, who probably have traversed both the routes oftener than any European, and know their capabilities thoroughly, am inclined to think that the difficulties of the former are much overrated, and that they are much less than that of the Bakhtairi routes. From Bushire to the hills near Dalaki is plain sailing ; about twelve miles to the west of that village exists a short pass called Kun Surkh, rising just above the village of that name. It is possible that a long incline up the hills could be made without much difficulty, bringing one on to a small plain, at the end of which the defile of the Shahpur River is reached ; and the road follows this defile till it comes out behind the village of Khist, on the Konar Takhteh plain. It is possible, on investigation, that an easier route

would be found by following the Shahpur River from the point where it debouches into the plain from the hills; the proposed route then follows the Shahpur River until the Kamaridj Hills are reached. The above remark equally applies to an investigation of the Shahpur River from this point, where it leaves the hills, to its entering them from the Kazarun plain. I had always promised myself the pleasure of making these investigations, but regret I never had the chance. After reaching the Kazarun plain, the alignment would go straight to and through the Shahpur Valley, coming out at what is really a continuation of the Dasht-i-Barm; it would follow this plain for some few miles, passing the village of Naudun, and then, turning to the left, would enter a series of defiles, which would ultimately bring it out in the Dasht Arjin plain through the depression near to Kalah Mushir. From this point to Shiraz is perfectly simple, and requires no commenting on; so, also, is the continuance of the line to Isfahan. By this route the four severe passes of Malu, Kamaridj, Dokhtar, and Meyan Kotal would be turned. The roads from Bunder Abbas to Shiraz and Kerman would, I think, however, be a better commercial speculation, as they would open up larger markets and tap fine grain-growing countries.

Mr. Lynch has had the advantage of seeing a mountain railway in Bosnia. I regret I have not; but I have always had the idea that for a railway in such mountains as we have in Persia a mono-rail line, such as Behr's or Breiman's would best lend itself to the contours of the hills, and would be cheaper in construction than even a narrow-gauge line such as Mr. Lynch suggests.

