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PERSIAN SOCIETY UNDER THE QĀJĀRS

By PROFESSOR ANN LAMBTON, O.B.E., B.A., PH.D., D.LIT.

Report of a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society at the Royal Society's Hall, Burlington House, Piccadilly, W.1, on Wednesday, December 7, 1960.

The President, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir William Dickson, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., A.F.C., took the chair, and at the conclusion of the lecture, presented to Professor Lambton the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal awarded to her by the Society in 1960.

The PRESIDENT: Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to introduce to you today Professor Ann Lambton, who is going to talk to us about Persian Society in the time of the Qajars. We are more than usually fortunate in our lecturer, because Professor Ann Lambton is the greatest living British authority on Persia. She has been deeply interested in Persia since about 1931. She has spent many years there, including the five years that she was Press Attaché at the British Embassy, Teheran, during the war, and several visits since. She has travelled throughout the length and breadth of Persia and she really combines something which is quite unusual. Not only has she a profound and unrivalled knowledge of classical Persian literature and history, but she has complete command of the Persian language and her Persian Grammar is a standard work. She has also an up-to-date knowledge of Persian politics and people, and is the author of several books and articles, including *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* and *Three Persian Dialects*.

Since 1952 she has held the post of Professor of Persian at London University. So we do have here an authority second to none, and I am sure you will be interested in her lecture. I have the greatest pleasure in introducing her.

THE Qājār period, beginning with the rise to power of Āqā Muḥammad Khān after the death of Karīm Khān Zand (which occurred in 1779) and ending with the deposition of Aḥmad Shāh in 1925, sees the transformation of Persia from a medieval Islamic monarchy with an administration following the traditional pattern which had prevailed in the eastern provinces of the former 'Abbasid Caliphate to a constitutional monarchy with the outward forms of a western European representative government. This period also saw a major change in the relations of Persia with her neighbours and the Great Powers: indeed it was partly because of this changed position, coupled with the advance in technology and the spread of liberal ideas in Western Europe, that Persia felt the need to accomplish this transformation. From the turn of the eighteenth century onwards the pressure of Great Power rivalry in Persia, which almost inevitably flowed into the vacuum created by the relative weakness and disunity of Persia, became a permanent and important factor in the internal situation.

The treaty of Turkomanchai (1828) shows the change in Persia's relationship with the Powers. By article 7 'Abbās Mīrzā was recognized as heir to the throne. On his death in 1834 both Russia and Great Britain appear to have recommended to the shah through their envoys in Persia

that he should settle the succession on Muḥammad Mīrzā,* and when the latter, on the death of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, marched on Tehrān to assert his claim to the throne, he received help from both the British and Russian envoys. From his reign onwards the pressure of the Great Powers on internal events became increasingly clear. Husayn Khān, who was sent on a mission to Britain to congratulate Queen Victoria on her accession, had an interview with Prince Metternich in Vienna en route, in which he described the attitude of the shah as follows: "The shah is sovereign of his country, and as such he desires to be independent. There are two great powers with whom Persia is in more or less direct contact—Russia and the English power in India. The first has more military means than the second: on the other hand, England has more money than Russia. The two powers can thus do Persia good and evil; and in order above all to avoid the evil, the shah is desirous of keeping himself, with respect to them, within the relations of good friendship and free from all contestation. If, on the contrary, he finds himself threatened on one side, he will betake himself to the other in search of the support which he shall stand in need of. That is not what he desires, but to what he may be driven, for he is not more the friend of one than of the other of those powers: he desires to be with them on a footing of equal friendship. What he cherishes above all is his independence, and the maintenance of good relations with foreign powers."†

When it became clear that Persia could not close her frontiers to the encroachments of the Great Powers she sought to counter the pressure coming from them by herself adopting modern western methods; and throughout the nineteenth century there is a gradual feeling towards modernization and westernization, to which increasing travel, modern education, and the growth of newspapers, among other things, made their contribution. The problem before Persia was a twofold one: on the one hand to accept help from the Great Powers, first France and Great Britain, and later Russia and Great Britain, to modernize and develop the country without falling under the political or economic dominance of either; and on the other hand, since modernization involved the spread of governmental influence on a much wider scale than heretofore, to ensure that this should be felt by the population to be less, and not more, oppressive (though few, if any, realized this to be a problem).

Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh and his son 'Abbās Mīrzā both recognized the imperative need for modern weapons to enable Persia to resist Russian arms.‡ Both Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh and his successor, Muḥammad Shāh, seem in some measure, to have believed that they could make use of one or other of the Great Powers to regain lost territories. The episode of the three Persian princes who came to London after the accession of Muḥammad Shāh in the hope of obtaining British support in an attempt to win the throne of

* *Correspondence relating to Persia and Afghanistan*, London, 1839, pp. 1-3.

† G. H. Hunt, *Outram and Havelock's Persian Campaign*, London, 1858, p. 127.

‡ Mīrzā Buzury, 'Abbās Mīrzā's minister, told Morier in 1809 that no pains had been spared to acquire a knowledge of military tactics, and the theory of fortifications, which they had gleaned from French and Russian books translated by 'Abbās Mīrzā's order (*A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor to Constantinople, in the years 1808 and 1809, 1812*, London, 1812, p. 283).

Persia is a comment on the extent to which foreign intervention was considered part and parcel of political life in Persia. Charming though they appear to have been as persons, there is yet a lack of realism and ineffectiveness in their approach to the outside world.* A similar lack of realism characterized the actions of many of their fellow countrymen, in particular in their attitude to modernization. Few seem to have realized the very great effort and application which would be required if modernization and westernization were to be successfully accomplished.

Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh (1848-96) had probably a clearer appreciation of Persia's position in the world than his predecessors and of the need for change if she was to retain her independence. During his reign the number of persons who had a knowledge of Europe and liberal movements in Europe steadily increased. The growth of this class, their writings, and influence on society towards the turn of the nineteenth century is one of the most striking features of the period, but one which I shall not have time to touch on today. Nāṣir ud-Dīn, realizing that Persia could not transform herself without foreign help and that, in any case, foreign intervention could not be prevented, conceived, therefore, a policy of inducing foreign powers to invest in Persia in the hope that they would contribute to the development and prosperity of Persia because they had a stake in the well-being of the country themselves. This clearly emerges from his letters to Mirzā Husayn Khān Mushīr ud-Dawleh on the subject of the ill-fated Reuter Concession.† The greed of the various parties concerned and the rivalry of the powers, coupled with the disunity of Persian society, were, however, an insuperable barrier to such a policy. Also the absolute power which the ruler enjoyed and the hideously sychophantic atmosphere by which he was surrounded almost inevitably warped his judgement. Nāṣir ud-Dīn at the end of his reign was, if not reactionary, indifferent to reform, whereas in his early years he had been relatively enlightened and liberal.‡ By the end of the nineteenth century there had been, in some fields, striking changes in Persia but there had been very little, if any, progress towards administrative reform. It was the failure in this field, coupled with popular resentment at foreign exploitation of Persia and the belief that the shah and his government were selling the country to unbelievers, which eventually provoked the constitutional revolution of 1905-6.

The Qājār period is a long one. It can, perhaps, be conveniently divided into four phases: the reigns of (i) Āqā Muḥammad Khān (1779-97), (ii) Fath 'Alī Shāh (1797-1834), and Muḥammad Shāh (1834-48), (iii) Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh (1848-96) and the early years of Muzaffar ud-Dīn Shāh, and (iv) the constitutional period (1905 onwards). Political and social con-

* J. B. Fraser, *Narrative of the Residence of the Persian Princes in London in 1835 and 1836*, London, 1838, pp. 66 ff.

† See Farhād Mu'tamid, *Sipahsālār-i A'zam, Tehrān*, A. H. (solar) 1325, pp. 151 ff.

‡ Cf. Curzon, who mentions the internal and external difficulties facing Nāṣir ud-Dīn (*Persia and the Persian Question*, London, 1892, i, pp. 400-1), and *Majmū'eh-i Athār-i Mirzā Malkam Khān*, in which the editor, Muḥammad Muḥīṭ Ṭabāṭabā'i, draws attention to the contrast between Nāṣir ud-Dīn's behaviour as a young man and his actions as an old man (Tehrān, A. H. (solar) 1327, p. 86).

ditions varied in each of these: the change between the first phase and the last is a striking one. Underlying all these phases, however, there is an attitude of life and conception of the place of the individual in society, which largely determined how the government worked, whatever its form. Thus, although the change in outward forms was striking, the change in the structure of society was less marked.

The Qājārs, like various other Persian dynasties, were by origin Turkish or Turkoman tribal leaders. We know little about their distant origins—the accounts of the court historians, who provided them with convenient genealogies, can be neglected. They were among the tribes who came back to Persia with the Safavids. In the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās they were divided into three branches; one was sent to Marv, another to Qarābāgh, and the third branch, from which the dynasty sprang, was settled in Astarābād, an area peopled by Turkoman tribes for many centuries. The background of the Qājārs was, thus, the background of the steppe: and even in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in spite of the pomp and luxury of the court and Nāṣir ud-Dīn’s European journeys, that background was not very far away. It is seen in the readiness with which most of the Qājār princes adopted a camp life, and led their troops in forays and expeditions; in Āqā Muḥammad Khān’s contempt for the officials of the bureaucracy; and in the passion of Fath ‘Alī and Nāṣir ud-Dīn for the chase, which nearly drove one of the latter’s ministers, I’timād as-Saltāneh, at times, to distraction. William Ouseley mentions that Fath ‘Alī, like most members of the Qājār family, preferred a nomadic to the settled life, a village to a city, and a tent to a palace.* Sir John Malcolm, comparing the practice of the Qājārs with that of the later Safavids, states, “The reigning family has hitherto disdained those enervating and luxurious habits which led the last Seffavean monarchs to confine themselves to their harems. They not only attend personally to public business, but are continually practising manly exercises, and engage in field sports with all the ardour of a race who cherish the habits of their Tartar ancestors. The present king [Fath ‘Alī] is an expert marksman and an excellent horseman: few weeks pass without his partaking in the pleasures of the chase.”† The royal court was constantly on the move. At the beginning of the century there were no wheeled carriages in Persia and the shah always rode unless he was ill, in which case he would travel in a litter. Great attention was paid to the royal stable and the finest horses from every part of the kingdom were sent to the shah.‡

The Qājārs were never able fully to achieve family solidarity, though the steps taken by Āqā Muḥammad Khān enabled his heir apparent, Bābā Khān (or Fath ‘Alī Shāh as he was known after his accession), to succeed to the throne with little difficulty; but he had nevertheless to contend with various rebellions by members of his own family and others. The death of Fath ‘Alī was followed by struggles between rival claimants

* *Travels in Various Countries of the East, more particularly Persia*, London, 1819-25, iii, 151.

† *The History of Persia from the Most Early Period to the Present Time*, London, 1829, ii, 396-7.

‡ Cf. Malcolm, ii, 403.

to the throne; and that of Muḥammad Shāh by widespread disorders. The outlying areas, notably Kurdistān and Balūchistān (apart from the provinces disputed with Russia in the North-West and North-East and with Afghanistan) were at best very imperfectly assimilated to the empire. Āqā Muḥammad Khān and Nāṣir ud-Dīn both fell to the hand of assassins. The steps taken to conceal the death of Fath 'Alī and Nāṣir ud-Dīn until adequate measures could be taken to prevent the outbreak of disorders are also indicative of the delicate nature of the balance between government and anarchy.

It was the custom of the Qājārs—a custom followed by the Saljūqs, an earlier dynasty also of Turkoman descent—to give provincial governments to princes of the ruling house, even when these were mere boys. They would be sent to their governments accompanied by a vazir or *pīsh-kār*, in whose hands the administration would often largely remain.* This system, had the power of the paramount ruler been unquestioned, might have worked quite well; but, in fact, it had two main drawbacks. In the case of ambitious princes it encouraged them to use the provincial resources to rebel, and secondly it meant that in each provincial capital there was a copy (on a smaller scale) of the court at Tehrān with all the burden which that imposed on the local population.†

Marriage alliances were used, as they had been by the Saljūqs, as a means to consolidate the royal power, to cement alliances, and to terminate, or prevent, blood feuds.‡ Qājār women were given in marriage to local tribal leaders, important members of the bureaucracy, and leading religious dignitaries, and women taken from these and others into the royal household. Some of the Qājār women exercised considerable influence, notably Mahd 'Ulyā, who, after the death of her husband, Muḥammad Shāh, presided over the council of state until her son, Nāṣir ud-Dīn, arrived in Tehrān from Āzarbāyjān, where he had been governor.§ The shah's wives were also sometimes centres of intrigue around whom the discontented, or the enemies of a particular minister, would gather, as happened, for example, in the case of Mīrzā Husayn Khān Mushīr ud-Dawleh, whose fall from office was partly due to the opposition of the hostile party assembled round 'Anīs ud-Dawleh, Nāṣir ud-Dīn's favourite wife.||

The tribal heritage of the Qājārs was not their only legacy from the past. They also revived much of the administrative machinery of the Safavids; and they took over the theory of the ruler as the Shadow of God upon earth, and the pomp and circumstance of the royal court, which offered a great contrast to the tradition of the steppe. The irresponsible nature of the shah's power is clearly shown in a letter from Mīrzā 'Alī,

* Cf. 'Abdullāh Mustawfī, *Sharh-i Zindagī-i man*, Tehrān, A. H. (solar) 1324-5, i, 40. From the reign of Fath 'Alī onwards Āzarbāyjān was the seat of the *vālī* 'ahd and hence the most important provincial government.

† Cf. *The Persian Princes*, i, 5.

‡ The Qājār rulers were notoriously prolific; Fath 'Alī had a vast number of wives and some ninety children. (Mustawfī, i, 40). Fraser puts the number higher, at 120-130 sons and some 150 daughters (*The Persian Princes*, i, 4).

§ R. G. Watson, *History of Persia*, London, 1866, p. 359.

|| *Sipahsālār-i A'zam*, pp. 134 ff.

deputy minister for Foreign Affairs, to the British minister, Mr. McNeill, dated January 6, 1838/8 Shawwāl, 1253, in which he states, "the Monarchs of Persia, as far back as memory reaches, or is preserved in history, have always been despotic over Persian subjects, in like manner over their lives, and property, and families; and reputations, and lands, and goods; so that even if they should order a thousand innocent persons to be put to death, it would be in no one's power to call them to account."* Curzon, writing in the latter part of the nineteenth century, states the shah "has absolute command over the life and property of everyone of his subjects."† The superiority of the position claimed for the shah *vis-à-vis* all other persons is also emphasized in a memorandum by Hājji Mīrzā Āqāsī to Fath Muḥammad Khān, the representative of Kāmran, the ruler of Herāt, dated 14 Rabī' I, 1253/18 July, 1837, in which he says in reply to a demand that the shah should treat Kāmran as his brother, "The treatment of the King, the Asylum of the Faith, to Feridoon Meerza (the King of Persia's brother), is that of a master to his servant. Let Prince Kāmran be like Feridoon Meerza, for higher expectations would be presumptuous. It might, indeed, be proposed that he should be treated with more favour than His Majesty's brother; but no one can presume to aspire to be regarded as brother to the King of Kings; for all are the devoted servants of the great King."‡ On the other hand, when Sir Harford Jones had an audience with Fath 'Alī in 1809, he was introduced as "Ambassador from your Majesty's Brother, the King of England."§

The Qājārs, having possessed themselves of the throne and become absolute monarchs, were forced by the nature of the case to support their power, which was in fact often instable and precarious, by continually impressing on their subjects the high and almost sacred character of their power. "Everything," as Malcolm states, "connected with the royal name and authority is treated with a respect increased by the form which attends it. If the king sends an honorary dress, the person for whom it is intended [whether he is a royal prince or not] must proceed several miles to meet it and clothe himself in his robes of favour, with every mark of gratitude and submission. If a firmaun, or mandate, is written by the monarch to any of the officials of government, this is also met at a distance by the person it is addressed to, who, after raising it to his head, gives it to his secretary to read, and all stand in respectful silence till the perusal is finished."||

Various European travellers have left accounts of the splendour of the Qājār courts and the tremendous importance attached to titles and outward symbols and demonstrations of power. Sir R. Ker Porter describing an assembly held by Fath 'Alī writes, "He [Fath 'Alī] entered the saloon from the left, and advanced to the front of it, with an air and step which belonged entirely to a sovereign. . . . He was one blaze of jewels, which literally dazzled the sight on first looking at him. . . . While the great king was approaching his throne, the whole assembly continued bowing their heads to the ground, till he had taken his place. A dead

* Correspondence, p. 102.

† Correspondence, p. 51.

§ Morier, *Journey*, p. 189.

† Persia, i, 391.

|| History, ii, 407-8.

silence then ensued, the whole presenting a most magnificent and, indeed, awful appearance; the stillness being so profound among so vast a concourse, that the slightest rustling of the trees was heard, and the softest trickling of the water from the fountains into the canals.”*

“In no court,” wrote Malcolm, was more rigid attention paid to ceremony. Looks, words, the motions of the body, are all regulated by the strictest forms. When the king is seated in public, his sons, ministers and courtiers, stand erect, with their hands crossed, and in the exact place belonging to their rank . . . Nothing can exceed the splendour of the Persian court on extraordinary occasions. It presents a scene of the greatest magnificence, regulated by the exactest order. To no part of the government is so much attention paid as to the strict maintenance of those forms and ceremonies, which are deemed essential to the power and glory of the monarch.”†

The progress of the shah through his domains, or of a governor through his province, was attended by pomp and circumstance and the presentation of costly presents to the shah or the governor by the local population. Likewise, if the shah favoured one of his subjects by a visit, this was apt to be an expensive affair for the host, presents being usually expected by the shah and his retinue. The arrival of a foreign embassy was regarded as an occasion when the shah ought to appear in all his grandeur; and since the power and wealth of a foreign government was judged by the pomp which surrounded its envoy and the respect accorded to him, foreign envoys were careful to make a display themselves and to demand that due respect should be shown to them as the representatives of their sovereigns. To withhold such marks of respect on the part of the Persian government was tantamount to a deliberate insult and an intention to impress the power of Persia on the minds of her subjects and neighbours.‡

On the other hand the shah, in the tradition of the ideal Persian and Islamic rulers, was accessible to all for the redress of grievances. The possibility of an appeal to the throne was, in fact, one of the few checks upon the rapacity of officials; though admittedly its effectiveness was limited by the fact that the shah sometimes shared the spoils of office with his officials. Moreover, the accessibility of the shah was open to abuse in that false accusations were often made and officials were in some measure forced to provide themselves, by whatever means, with money to satisfy the cupidity of their superiors and to save themselves from disgrace and punishment. As Malcolm pointed out “when the court is corrupt, innocence is no security.”§ Mu‘ayyir al-Mamālik, who was brought up at the court of Nāṣir ud-Dīn, and wrote an account of the private life of that monarch, however, states that “It was possible for everyone to receive an audience with the shah and most suppliants submitted their petitions without an intermediary to the hand of the shah himself. Members of the lower

* *Travels*, quoted by R. G. Watson, *History of Persia*, pp. 139-40.

† *History*, ii, 399-400.

‡ Cf. the ill-treatment of ‘Alī Muḥammad Beg who was carrying a letter from Lieut. Pottinger to Mr. McNeill in 1837 (see *Correspondence*, pp. 66 ff.) and the incident of Mirzā Hāshim Khān in 1854 (see G. H. Hunt, pp. 161 ff.).

§ *History*, ii, 352.

classes were easily able to obtain an audience and present their complaints orally; and if the right was on their side they seldom returned disappointed. If anyone had a complaint against the shah's son, the Nā'ib as-Saltāneh, he would submit a petition to the shah through the *ṣadr-i a'zam*; if anyone had been oppressed by the *ṣadr-i a'zam* he would demand redress through one of the *ulamā*, one of the eunuchs of the palace, or 'Aziz as-Sultān. In short there was a possibility of escape from tyranny and oppression for the people; they knew there was someone who would give them redress."* These claims are, no doubt, somewhat exaggerated; nevertheless, the appeal to the shah was not negligible. But, because of the irresponsible nature of the ruler's power, life and property were fundamentally insecure.

After the Qājār family the leading members of society were the great tribal leaders, the Bakhtiāris, the Kurds, the Afshārs, the Qārā Gozlūs, the Arabs, the Qashgā'ī, the Balūch, the Turkomans, and others. They often held considerable lands in the areas they inhabited. Their power derived from the military forces which they were able to assemble from among their followers and which they were bound to provide when called upon by the shah. The heads of the great tribes, the Ilkhānis and Ilbegis, were nominally appointed by the shah; but in practice he was usually forced to appoint to these offices the natural leaders of the tribes. In many cases the tribal leaders held provincial governments; and in some of the more remote areas they were virtually local rulers. They showed a constitutional inability to combine; the threat which they offered to the ruling house was, therefore, usually localized. This weakness of the tribal leaders was deliberately fostered by Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh and his successors, who encouraged dissensions among the tribes, making tribal feuds instruments of state policy. Frequently relatives of the tribal leaders, or even the leaders themselves, would be kept at court as hostages for the good behaviour of the tribe;† and their restoration to their people would be "dependent upon their willingness to serve as tools of the policy and conduits to the exchequer of a corrupt administration."‡ The tribal leaders also often found it expedient to have their representatives in the capital or the main provincial centre to transact their business and to watch over their interests.§ The virtues most prized among the tribal leaders were generosity and courage; but once settled in the towns or compelled to become courtiers they did not materially differ from other high officials. As a whole the tribes had, as Malcolm points out, the virtues and vices of their condition: they were sincere, hospitable, and brave; but rude, violent, and rapacious. Their women folk enjoyed a far higher degree of liberty than the townswomen.||

The dividing line between the tribal leaders and military officers was not clearly marked; and that between the civil and military officials was also fluid. In the early Qājār period the shah led the army in battle himself. By the reign of Nāṣir ud-Dīn this had ceased to be the case, and the command of the army was exercised by one of the Qājār princes until 1871

* *Yaddāshthā'i az Zindagi-i Khuṣūṣi-i Nāṣir ud-Dīn*, Tehrān, n.d., p. 60. See also Mustawfī i, 126.

† Cf. W. Ouseley, i, 307.

§ *History* ii, 463.

‡ See Curzon, ii, 272.

|| Cf. Morier, *Journey*, 240.

when Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Mushīr ud-Dawleh was appointed *sipahsālār* in place of Kāmrān Mīrzā, for whom Fīrūz Mīrzā Nuṣrat ud-Dawleh had deputized.* The provincial governors usually commanded the military forces in the province in which they were; and military expeditions against refractory tribal groups and others were a not uncommon part of their duties. Officials such as the *beglarbegīs*, whose functions in the nineteenth century were those of a police officer, were usually, though not always, members of the military classes.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the army consisted of the shah's body-guard and irregular horse and militia levied in the form of contingents from districts and tribes, serving under their own leaders, the provision of such contingents being sometimes one of the conditions upon which provincial governors held office and landowners received grants of land. The royal body-guard was formed of *ghulāms* and a standing army. The former numbered, according to Morier, 3,000 men.† Malcolm puts them at between 3,000 and 4,000, and states that "the body-guard was formed promiscuously from Georgian slaves and the sons of the first nobles of Persia," who were well mounted and well armed. The Qājār princes holding provincial governments had similar, though smaller, body-guards.‡ By the middle of the nineteenth century the size of the body-guard of the shah appears to have decreased. Watson puts it at little over 1,600;§ Curzon, however, puts it at 2,000.|| The standing army in 1809 was composed of some 12,000 men, levied from the tribes and the city population, though principally from Māzandarān and the Qājār tribe. It was divided into bodies of 3,000 men, which did duty in turns in the palace as *kashīk-chīs* or guards. The main body of the shah's military forces, however, was formed by tribal levies. They were required to attend court annually at the feast of the New Year; if their services were not required that year they would be given leave to return to their homes.¶ The provincial governors were also able in time of need to levy contingents from the tribes and villages in their governments.

During the course of the century there were various attempts to substitute for the irregular forces regular or semi-regular forces, formed and disciplined in European fashion. A number of military missions and military instructors from various nations were employed to this end. Mīrzā Taqī Khān Amīr Nizām, Nāṣir ud-Dīn's first *ṣadr-i a'zam*, instituted various reforms, particularly in regard to pay and recruitment; the contingents furnished by the villages and tribes were required to serve for a definite period and while in service received provisions and a small annual payment; and in 1851 the *Dār ul-Funūn*, the first school to teach modern sciences, was set up partly in order to provide officers for the new army. Mīrzā Taqī Khān's military reforms, however, proved abortive. The next attempt was made by Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Mushīr ud-Dawleh, who be-

* *Sipahsālār-i A'zam*, p. 54.

† *History*, ii, 356.

‡ *Persia*, i, 396.

§ Morier, *Journey*, pp. 240-3; *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople, between the Years 1810 and 1816*, London, 1818, p. 214.

† *Journey*, p. 242.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

came *sipahsālār* in 1871. The order for his appointment states that it was the royal wish to bring about a new order and discipline in military affairs. Full powers in military matters were accorded to him.* Army finance had been the object of much pecculation: the pay and rations of the troops was often in arrears and the effective numbers of the contingents were often much less than was stipulated; and nepotism prevailed in the army as elsewhere. Mirzā Husayn Khān realized the evils of this situation.† With a view to reorganization and the introduction of European discipline on a more thorough-going scale he centralized army finances and gave the minister of war (*vazīr-i lashkār*) full control over, and responsibility for, the military budget. Some small measure of success attended his efforts. Curzon, writing about 1890, states the army was composed of irregular tribal cavalry, semi-regular infantry, cavalry and artillery, equipped, drilled, and clothed more or less on European lines; irregular infantry, raised and supported by local districts and cities; irregular cavalry and semi-regular cavalry and regular infantry supplied on a territorial basis by quota.‡ But the problem of the regular payment of the military forces and the provisioning and equipment of the army was never satisfactorily tackled. Pay was often, if not usually, in arrears, and the lack of adequate commissariat arrangements prevented the army becoming an effective fighting force.

The civil administration of the Qājār empire was based on the pattern of the Safavid empire. All officials were the shah's deputies. He was the sole executive; officials had thus no real responsibility; they were elevated and degraded at the shah's pleasure. The most important branch of the administration was that dealing with finance; and the *mustawfī al-mamālik*, the head of this division, was the most important official after the *ṣadr-i a'zam*, or prime minister. Āqā Muḥammad Khān, the founder of the Qājār dynasty, personally supervised the administration, which during his reign was on a relatively small scale, his two main officials being the muster-master (*lashkār nevis*) and the *mustawfī*. Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh also personally directed the administration;§ during his reign the administrative system was considerably expanded; a *ṣadr-i a'zam* was appointed; a *mustawfī al-mamālik*, under whom were *mustawfis* for each province or group of provinces, whose duty was to prepare the revenue assessment of the province or provinces under their charge, pass the accounts of the province, and verify and sanction drafts on the provincial revenue; a chief muster-master, who came to be known as the *vazīr-i lashkār* or minister of war, each regiment having under him its own financial officer and muster-master (*mustawfī* and *lashkār nevis*); a *munshī al-mamālik*, a kind of chief secretary; a *ṣāhib divān*, whose main function appears to have been to sign documents; a *mu'ayyir al-mamālik* or mint-master; a *khaṭīb al-mamālik*, who read the *khuṭba* in the name of the shah at the New Year and on other ceremonial occasions; a *munajjim bāshī* or chief astrologer; and a host of other officials belonging to the court and to the central and local administration.

* *Sipahsālār-i A'zam*, pp. 55 ff.

† Cf. Letter quoted in *Sipahsālār-i A'zam*, p. 63.

‡ Curzon, i, 576.

§ Cf. P. A. Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et Perse*, Paris, 1821, p. 240.

The members of the bureaucracy at the beginning of the period held a clearly inferior position in society to the tribal leaders and landowning classes, who regarded them with slight contempt. They were often men of education and polish; unlike the tribal leaders they seldom practised martial exercises or field sports.* As the administration became more complicated the relative status of the higher ranks of the bureaucracy rose. Many of the tribal and landowning classes were absorbed into their ranks, while members of the bureaucracy often became large landowners themselves; and the distinction between the various classes became less sharp, their leading members all forming part of the entourage of the shah.

Towards the middle of the century Nāṣir ud-Dīn seems to have realized that the old forms of government were no longer in keeping with the trend of the times. About the year 1858, after the dismissal from the office of *ṣadr-i a'zam* of Mirzā Āqā Khān (who had opposed Nāṣir ud-Dīn's desire for modernization), the shah set up six ministries: interior, foreign affairs, war, finance, justice, and lastly stipends and *awqāf*. The ministers in charge were to act independently of each other, referring when necessary to the shah, and only holding a council of ministers should some important matter come up. All orders were to be signed by the shah himself.† A number of other ministries were later added. It was not till 1871 that a *ṣadr-i a'zam* was again appointed.‡ In 1859 an assembly known as the *maṣliḥat khāneh*, a kind of consultative assembly, was set up.§ The office of chairman was given to 'Isā Khān I 'timād ud-Dawleh, one of the Qājār leaders, who was nearly related to the shah's mother. The membership of the assembly was wider than that of the council of ministers, and included *mustawfīs*, various other officials, and *mullās*; orders were given that similar assemblies should be set up in the provinces. There are records of such assemblies being held in some provinces, but it does not appear to have become the general rule. It seems probable that the shah intended to set up something in the nature of provincial councils.|| It follows, however, from the irresponsible nature of the power of the shah, that the authority of this council could only be advisory; and in effect its function was often confined to an academic discussion of action already taken by the shah. Perhaps for this reason it was from the beginning virtually a dead letter. In 1871 a supreme council (*dār ash-shawrā*) was set up;¶ this, too, was a purely advisory body.

Government office was regarded as the road to wealth. The high offices of state, whether provincial governments, or civil or military appointments at the centre or in the provinces, usually went to the great families. First among these was the Qājār family, and after them the foremost tribal families, and families who drew their strength mainly from their landed estates, intermarriage between whom was not uncommon. Nepotism was a marked feature of the administration. There was also a strong hereditary tendency in office: on the death, or transfer, of a high official, his office was

* Cf. Malcolm, *History*, ii, 414.

† Mustawfī, i, 119.

‡ See *Sipahsālār-i A'zam*, p. 100; Mustawfī, i, 156; and Curzon, i, 426.

§ See *Rūznāmeḥ-i Vaqāyi'-i ittifāqiyeh*, No. 452, 21 Rabi'II, 1276.

|| Mustawfī, i, 126.

¶ *Sipahsālār-i A'zam*, p. 128.

not infrequently given to his son, even though the latter might be a child. The hereditary tendency was specially marked in the office of *mustawfi*, partly because of the skill and training required for this office; the records of the *mustawfis* were, moreover, regarded as their private property, there being no state archives; and this made it more difficult for someone from another group to become a *mustawfi*. The office of *mustawfi al-mamālīk* was frequently a stepping-stone to the office of *ṣadr-i a'zam*. At best the rule of the high officers of state, especially in the provinces, was patriarchal with the traditional virtues of an Islamic ruler being, to some extent, practised; at worst it was venal and oppressive, the land and its inhabitants being squeezed to the last drop, until no remedy was left them but flight.

It was not, however, an invariable rule that the high offices of state should be held by men belonging to the great families. There are notable exceptions. Hājji Muḥammad Husayn Khān Amīn ud-Dawleh, who became *beglarbeg* of Isfahān under Āqā Muḥammad Khān, was originally a grocer. He first became the *kadkhudā* of a quarter, then *kalāntar* of the city, and after that a *dābit* or tax-collector of a rich district near Isfahān; he then made himself agreeable in the sight of Āqā Muḥammad Khān by a large *pishkash* (or present) and got himself appointed *beglarbeg* of Isfahān. From his intimate knowledge of the markets, and all the resources of the city, and of its inhabitants, he managed to increase the revenue; he then became the partner of every shopkeeper, farmer, and merchant, setting up those who were in want with capital and increasing the means of others who were already in trade. He thus appeared to confer benefits, when, by his numerous monopolies he raised the prices of almost every commodity.* His fortunes continued to prosper under Fath 'Alī Shāh, to whom he became *mustawfi al-mamālīk* in 1806.† Mirzā Taqī Khān Amīr Nizām, Nāṣir ud-Dīn's first and greatest *ṣadr-i a'zam*, was also of comparatively humble origin; his father was a cook, and later a steward, in the household of Qā'im Maqām. Amīn us-Sultān, another of Nāṣir ud-Dīn's chief ministers was also of relatively low birth.‡ It was thus possible, though difficult, for any able man, irrespective of birth, to attain to high office and thus to wealth. This possibility perhaps did something to mitigate the evils of the administrative system in the eyes of the population.

Salaries were often nominal; officials were expected to live on the country. The perquisites of office on the other hand were great; but so also were its dangers. A fall from favour was often followed by mulcting, exile, and even loss of life. Hājji Ibrāhīm, Āqā Muḥammad Khān's *lashkar nevīs* and chief minister, after holding the office of *ṣadr-i a'zam* under Fath 'Alī Shāh, was thrown into a cauldron of burning oil; the hated Hājji Mirzā Āqāsī, Muḥammad Shāh's *ṣadr-i a'zam* was exiled to Karbalā after the death of his master, and Mirzā Taqī Khān Amīr Nizām was dismissed as the result of intrigue and murdered.

* Morier, *Second Journey*, 131.

† Lisān ul-Mulk Sipīhr, *Tārīkh-i Qājāriyeh, being the final part of the universal history entitled the "Nāsikh ut-Tawārīkh,"* Tabriz, lith., A. H. 1319, p. 66.

‡ See Curzon, i, 426.

Intrigue and corruption (which Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Mushīr ud-Dawleh once called the mother of all evils) were the constant concomitants of public life. Both derived from the prevailing insecurity and both in turn fostered that insecurity. Office was largely obtained and held by gifts to the shah and others. Further, since power was measured by wealth and power meant relative security, there was a general tendency to seek to accumulate wealth. This was partly expended by its holders to defend their interests; they also used it to enable them to live on a grand scale, partly because open-handedness and hospitality were among the prized virtues of society, but also in order to attract clients, which itself meant an increase of power. Moreover, because of the fundamental insecurity of society there was a tendency for the weak to attach themselves to some patron. The obligation to protect a dependent was generally acknowledged; and since an insult to a dependent was regarded as tantamount to an insult to his protector, attachment to the train of a powerful man was a way of achieving relative security.

The tribal leaders, landowners, and the high officials of the bureaucracy were not the only important classes in the land: there were two other groups, one which in some measure limited their power and the other which to some extent provided the liquid funds without which they could not have lived as they did, namely, the religious classes and the merchants. The religious institution continued to be subordinate to the political as it had been under the Safavids; and throughout the period there was an increasing tendency towards secularization. As in the case of the bureaucracy there was often a strong hereditary tendency in the religious offices. And because of the nature of the religious institution the religious classes, more than the bureaucracy and the holders of temporal power, represented an element of stability in society; and from time to time they appeared as the leaders of local movements of self-help and resistance to the extortion of the government. The most important religious dignitaries were the *mujtahids*, whose influence was great, though its nature somewhat difficult to define. Appeals to the shah through a *mujtahid* or recourse to a *mujtahid* in case of a dispute with an official were not infrequently effective. Some *mujtahids*, no doubt, abused their position, but in general they provided a sanctuary for the oppressed. The *shaykh ul-islām*, the highest religious official in each of the large cities, and the *imām jum'eh*, who was in charge of the Friday mosque in the principal cities, were nominated by the shah; they and the *qādis* and many of the *'ulamā* received stipends from the shah, which in the case of the *shaykhs ul-islām* were far from negligible. The fact that these officials of the religious institution were appointed by the shah to some extent limited their independence and the confidence which the people reposed in them; but in general, to the extent that they avoided connection with those in power and gave evidence of integrity, they were looked upon by the people as their protectors. They were sometimes men of true religion and integrity; but frequently they were venal, ignorant, and bigoted.

Shi'ī orthodoxy, however, was not the only form of religious expression: many found their need best answered by membership of one or other of the Ṣūfī orders, as full members or as a kind of lay brother. The in-

fluence of these orders on society is difficult to evaluate; occasionally they were subject to persecution; and sometimes their members were used by the state as informers. Among the Šūfis, as among the religious classes in general, there were men of piety and true religion as well as a not inconsiderable number of impostors and others who, posing as Šūfis, battered upon the community.

Movements of social revolt, because orthodoxy was associated with the ruling institution, tended, as in earlier times, to take on a religious colouring; and because there was no separation between church and state unorthodoxy was almost automatically regarded as a threat to the existing régime. The most important example of this in the nineteenth century is the Bābī movement, which shows both messianic and social tendencies. The movement began about 1844, but it was not till after the death of Muḥammad Shāh in 1848, by which time the *bāb* was already a prisoner, that the movement was accompanied by bloodshed. In the confusion following the death of Muḥammad Shāh there were numerous clashes between the *bāb*'s followers, bands of whom had been roaming the countryside proclaiming the advent of the *mahdī*, and their opponents.* For the first four years of Nāṣir ud-Dīn's reign the Bābīs continued to be militant; after an attempt in 1852 to assassinate Nāṣir ud-Dīn they were subjected to a brutal persecution, which brought their militant phase effectively to an end.

Broadly speaking fanaticism was not a marked feature of Persian life under the Qājārs. There was little cause for Sunni-Shī'ī strife since the two communities, for the most part, did not live cheek by jowl. Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, though subject to certain disabilities and marks of discrimination, were tolerated; ugly incidents, including the persecution of the Bābīs, occurred from time to time but were the exception and not the rule. Hostility to the West was associated in the public mind with the defence of Islam. The conception of a national state had little appeal for the man in the street, but the idea of Islam in danger at the hands of infidels immediately evoked response. Opposition to, and intrigue against, rivals frequently took the form of attacks against alleged unorthodoxy or disloyalty to Islam. Unscrupulous use was often made of religious prejudices. Muḥammad 'Alī Mīrzā; 'Abbās Mīrzā's brother and rival, attempted to cast odium on the latter and his efforts to form a modern army by seeking to show that in adopting the customs of infidels 'Abbās Mīrzā was subverting the religion of Islam. In order to counteract this, 'Abbās Mīrzā caused a passage of the Qur'ān favourable to the improvement of the means of attack and defence in the cause of religion to be copied and disseminated throughout the country.† Similarly, the opponents of Nāṣir ud-Dīn's policy of modernization claimed to be the defenders of Islam, representing his projected reforms as contrary to the Qur'ān. On the other hand the protagonists of the movement for reform at the end of the nineteenth century, which culminated in the grant of the constitution, interpreted the rule of law which they were demanding to mean the rule of the *shāhī 'a* and claimed to be the defenders of the country in the

* E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, C.U.P., 1930, iv, 151.

† Morier, *Second Journey*, p. 213.

face of those who, they alleged, were selling the lands of Islam to infidels.

The merchant classes, in the absence of banks, played an important part in the provision and transmission of funds. The Qur'ān, by its prohibition of usury, made large-scale operations in credit difficult; but legal devices were devised to circumvent this. In the nineteenth century, although Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Armenian merchants played an important part, the main internal trade of the country was probably in the hands of the Muslim merchants. It was to them to whom the government looked in emergencies. When Nāṣir ud-Dīn marched on Tehrān on the death of Muḥammad Shāh to establish his claim to the throne, the necessary funds were advanced to him by a Tabrizī merchant. Similarly, officials whose pay was in arrears (as was often the case) and others in difficulty had recourse to merchants to tide them over. When a provincial governor was not chosen from a great or wealthy family it was customary for him to find some merchant to guarantee his remission of the provincial revenue due to the central government. Sometimes government officials would be in actual partnership with the merchants as in the case of Amin ud-Dawleh (mentioned above); in some of the remoter provinces on the other hand the governor himself might virtually monopolize trade or certain branches of it.

In the larger cities there was a *malik ut-tujjār* who was, in effect, the head of the local merchant community; he received his title from the shah or the provincial governor. There was a strong hereditary tendency in this office also. The leading merchants ranked below the leading members of the bureaucracy, the military, and the landowning and religious classes, though they sometimes achieved assimilation to these by marriage alliances, the acquisition of land, or government service. On the whole the bazaar merchants tended to be closely allied to the religious classes and it was a familiar phenomenon for the bazaar, on the instigation of the *'ulamā*, to close in protest at some action by the government. In spite, however, of the important role played by the merchants in the community, there was no development of merchant companies or of a strong middle class. On the other hand the craft guilds had a vigorous corporate life.

The main function of the masses, whether in the town or the country, was to pay taxes to the government, the local leaders, or both. For hundreds of years this had been their function, and the gulf in mutual understanding and wealth between them and the rest of the population was wide. In the course of time they had developed a technique to enable them to some extent to cheat and defraud their oppressors. But on the whole their lot was woefully insecure. To the extortions of the tax-collector and the degradation of personal servitudes were added the horror of periodic outbreaks of cholera and plague, famine and high prices caused by actual shortages or by hoarding and cornering; the fear of raids by marauding Turkomans and others; and, in the cities, rioting by the mob, who could easily be incited to violence by the unscrupulous. The degree to which insecurity prevailed both in different parts of the empire and at different periods, however, varied. In the latter part of the reign of Nāṣir ud-Dīn, security, outwardly at least, was relatively good, and the writ of the gov-

ernment ran through most of the country.* In general, however, the only remedies open to the people in the case of extortion and injustice were an appeal to the shah, recourse to one of the religious leaders, the taking of *bast* or refuge, and, in the last resort, flight. The great Shī'ī shrines, especially at Shāh 'Abd ul-'Azīm and Qumm, were favourite sanctuaries; *bast* could also be taken in the royal stable,† foreign legations, and, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the telegraph office.

The canvas I have attempted to sketch is a broad one: there are many aspects of society that I have not touched upon; much remains to be filled in. Intrigue, insecurity, venality, the intensely personal nature of power, and a lack of realism, often coupled with vanity, are plainly to be seen. To some, including perhaps the Persian reformer, these features may seem almost to fill the canvas. But they are not all: the witness of foreign travellers on the whole is of a hospitable, friendly, likeable people; and in the pages of their narratives one meets many instances of civilized, courteous behaviour, generosity and dignity, gaiety and courage.

The PRESIDENT: Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen. On your behalf I wish to thank Professor Lambton immensely for coming here and for the quality of her lecture. I shall not attempt to comment on it because there are others present who are better able to do so, but she gave us a fascinating picture of the history of those times. Persian history goes back so far that if one can obtain a brevet of a certain period it is to some degree helpful in understanding the problems which modern Persia faces.

I should have liked to question Professor Lambton, as would many of you, and I am sure she would have liked to answer our questions. But, unfortunately, our hosts require this hall and we have not many minutes of time left. So if we end now, Professor Lambton, it is not because we do not want to ask you a lot more—we do.

Before we leave I have a happy duty to perform as President of the Society. It is to present the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal to Professor Lambton.

As time is short I will not go into a long history of the medal. Let me say, briefly, that the Society owes the medal to the generosity of Lady Evelyn Sykes and the children of the late Sir Percy Sykes who created a trust fund from which these medals are supplied. We welcome two representatives of the family here with us today, Lady Reilly and Mrs. Sinclair.

The medal is awarded by our Council to any distinguished person, traveller or writer deemed to have increased man's knowledge or stimulated man's interests in Asian countries or worked to further the cultural relations between the Commonwealth and Asian countries. The medal is struck by the Royal Mint. The Council does not necessarily award the medal every year but only to those who truly fulfil the charter of the medal. The Council had no doubt that Professor Lambton, on all counts, is a most worthy recipient of this award.

I have already given a very imperfect account of Professor Lambton's

* Cf. Curzon, i, 405-6.

† Cf. Malcolm, ii, 493.

qualifications to talk to us, her great knowledge of Persian history, customs, and language, but she does stand for more than that. I think it correct to say, and ambassadors in the audience will agree, that she is one of our most valued links with modern Persia, a great and friendly country, and an ally in the Central Treaty Organization area.

Professor Lambton visited Persia last year and she is continually renewing her knowledge of that country. She knows the people of all classes, has many friends among them and is deeply respected in Persia. In this and in her work of teaching students of Persian at London University and encouraging enthusiasm for knowledge and understanding of Persia, her problems and her people, Professor Lambton is implementing one of the major objects of this Society, which is the furtherance of understanding between nations of the East and of the West. That is an object to which the Society most sincerely holds.

Therefore, Professor Lambton, on behalf of the Society, I have the honour to present to you the Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Medal and to offer your our warmest congratulations. (*Applause.*)

PROFESSOR ANN LAMBTON: I am deeply sensible of the honour which has been conferred on me by the presentation of this medal. To anyone who is a student of Persia it must be a matter of great satisfaction to receive a medal donated in memory of Sir Percy Sykes, with whose work and interest we are all familiar. I should like to express my grateful thanks to the Society for the honour.

