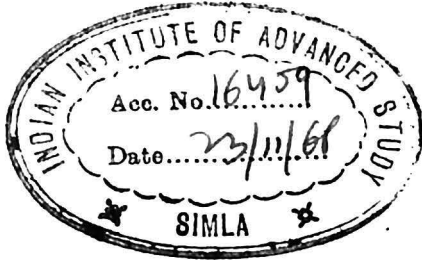


PRESENTED TO THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SIMLA

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7/10/83

THE PERSIAN CONSTITUTIONALISTS

THE CHAIRMAN (Lord Ronaldshay, M.P.), in opening the proceedings, said : We are here this afternoon to hear an address from Professor Browne dealing with the Constitutional Movement which has arisen and developed in Persia in recent years. Professor Browne is, I think, eminently qualified to speak on this subject. I do not know whether he has been in Persia in recent years or not, but I understand that he is one of the most fluent European speakers of the Persian tongue that we have at the present time. He is well known to the educated classes in Persia, and I am glad to say he has brought with him some leaders of the Constitutional Movement, including Sayyid Taqí-záda, and we shall probably have an opportunity of hearing their views. Professor Browne really needs no introduction, for he is well known to all who take an interest in Persian matters, and his deep concern for the progress of the Constitutional Movement has been shown by the letters he has contributed in recent months to the *Times*, the *Spectator*, and other prominent journals.

In the short time at my disposal this afternoon it is impossible to enter at all fully into the history of the Constitutional Movement in Persia, or to describe at any length the successive stages of the drama which has been enacted in that country during the last three years. With the main outlines of that history most of those present are, no doubt, familiar, and as regards the details of numerous matters whereon difference of opinion exists in this country, I am sure that you will wish to hear the first-hand information which my Persian friends, especially Sayyid Taqí-záda, Deputy for Tabriz, and the Mu'ázidu's-Saltana, Deputy for Tehrán, will be able to give you, rather than the second-hand information which I can impart.

All of you are probably familiar with the name of Sayyid Taqí-záda, whom I now have the pleasure of introducing to you, for it has been, since the Persian Parliament first met in October,

1906, much before the public. His high character, his true patriotism, his efforts for reform, and his devotion to the best interests of his country, are matters of common knowledge. A British officer in Persia, with whom I am not personally acquainted, sent a message to him through me a few days ago, and in the covering letter which he addressed to me apologized for any trouble that the conveyance of this message might cause me on the ground of 'his friendship and admiration for an honest and fearless man who has fallen on evil days.' I cannot choose better words than these to introduce to you Sayyid Taqí-záda, a man who won the esteem and affection, not only of his own countrymen, but of our countrymen, alike in the days of his power, when he so wisely directed and controlled the Constitutional or Popular Party, and struggled so heroically to reform the fiscal system of Persia, establish equal justice amongst all Persian subjects, and make his country strong, solvent, self-supporting, and progressive, and in the days when, during last June and July, he was a refugee in the British Legation at Tehrán, to whose protection he owes his life. With him in both phases of his career was his colleague, the Mu'ázidu's-Saltana, one of the Deputies for Tehrán, whom I also have the pleasure to introduce to you. Both of these, through myself or other interpreter, will gladly answer any questions which you may like to ask, and no one at present in London can, I think, speak with so much authority as these two on recent events in the Persian capital. For this reason, then, I desire in these preliminary remarks to be as brief as possible, and rather to suggest points for further discussion than to attempt any systematic essay on the history of the Persian Constitutional Movement. And in particular I wish to touch on certain points where, as it appears to me, misunderstanding has arisen in this country—I do not say generally, but in the minds of certain politicians, writers, and journalists.

Now, in the first place, some persons have taken the view that the Constitutional Movement in Persia was fictitious and artificial, and have implied that the late Shah granted his people a brand-new Constitution made in Europe, just as he might have introduced taxi-cabs into Tehrán, and that the Persian people neither wanted it nor knew how to profit by it. Such a view, in my opinion, can only arise from ignorance of the facts, or malicious misinterpretation of them. The Constitutional idea was vigorously preached and popularized in Persia at least twenty-two years ago by that remarkable man Sayyid Jamálu'd-Dín al-

Afghán, and also by the late Prince Malkom Khán, who was for so many years the Representative of Persia in London. But the actual emergence into being and activity of a real popular party, determined to check the extravagance of the Court and resist undue foreign influences, dates from the obnoxious Tobacco Concession granted by Násiru'd-Dín Sháh in 1890. Public opinion, which had hitherto been supposed not to exist in Persia, was strongly aroused, and was supported by the weight of the ecclesiastical authorities, and, after a long and fierce struggle lasting through the whole of 1891, the Shah was finally compelled to yield to the popular demand, and withdraw the Concession on January 5, 1892. This episode, of which very full particulars will be found in an interesting work, entitled 'Trois Ans à la Cour de Perse,' by Dr. Feuvrier, who was physician to Násiru'd-Dín Sháh from the autumn of 1889 until the autumn of 1892, is of the greatest importance, since from it dates, on the one hand, the gradually increasing influence, political and commercial, of Russia, and on the other the growth of a real public spirit and public opinion amongst the Persians, strongly opposed to the extravagances of the Court, and fully alive to the ruinous nature of the course on which the Shah and his Ministers—especially the late Atábek, or Amínu's-Sultán—had now embarked.

The Tobacco Concession, and its withdrawal under popular pressure, had other important results. The Atábek, who had hitherto leaned on the English, formally visited the Russian Legation on February 10, 1892, to do penance for his past Anglo-phil sentiments, and to give promises (which he certainly observed during the remainder of his life—*i.e.*, until August 31 of last year, when he was killed by 'Abbás Ághá) that in future he would support Russian influences. This incident, which took place when the present *ententes* were undreamed of, is triumphantly chronicled by the Shah's French doctor, who loved the Russians and the Atábek, and cordially detested the English. Another important and deplorable result of the Tobacco Concession was that Persia was compelled to pay half a million pounds sterling as compensation to the Concessionaires, and this money she had to borrow (in April, 1892) from the Imperial Bank of Persia at 6 per cent. Thus was established an utterly unproductive National Debt, which resulted in an annual drain on the already exiguous revenues of £30,000 a year. A third, but less immediate, result of the state of things which arose in 1891-92 was the assassination of Násiru'd-Dín Sháh on May 1, 1896, by Mirzá Rizá of Kirmán,

who had suffered cruelly for his participation in the riots directed against the Tobacco Concession.

The late Shah, Muzaffaru'd-Din, succeeded his father in May, 1896, and died soon after the granting of the Constitution, at the beginning of 1907. He was of much gentler disposition than either his predecessor or his successor, or, indeed, than any other sovereign of the Kájár House. Averse from cruelty and bloodshed on the one hand, and unwilling to say 'No' to his courtiers on the other, freedom of speech and misgovernment increased *pari passu*; the causes of complaint and opportunities for complaint grew together. This resulted in a great strengthening of the popular movement in favour of a Constitution, especially as the state of the country grew steadily worse. In 1898-99 Belgian officials were introduced to supervise the Custom-houses, and they soon introduced a new tariff, which was at once very unpopular with the Persians and very damaging to English commerce. In 1900 a sum of £2,000,000 was borrowed by the Shah from the Russian Government, one condition of the loan being that the interest was to be secured on the Custom-houses of Persia (excepting those of the Gulf ports, and the south), and another that the previous loan of £500,000 from the Imperial Bank of Persia was to be paid off, so that Russia should be Persia's sole creditor. Two years later, in April, 1902, the Shah borrowed another sum of 10,000,000 roubles from Russia, and granted at the same time a concession for a Russian road from Julfa, on the Araxes, to Qazwin, through Tabríz.

In 1903 the struggle between British and Russian influence was very acute. On the one hand was Lord Curzon's visit to the Persian Gulf, Viscount Downe's mission to present to the Shah the Order of the Garter, which he had hoped to receive during his visit to England in August, 1902, an Anglo-Persian Commercial Convention, and Colonel McMahon's Sistán Boundary Commission. On the other, a Russo-Persian Commercial Agreement, which heavily penalized British imports, and various other more or less successful attempts on the part of Russia to extend her influence, including the establishment of a subsidized service of Russian steamers from the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf ports. At this time the pro-Russian party at the Court was headed by the late Atábek, a man of great power and ability, but quite reckless of his country's interests, while the Anglophil party was headed by the Shah's physician, the Hakímu'l-Mulk, of Tabríz, who also enjoyed great influence with the Shah. Finally, in the autumn of this year (1902) the Atábek's intrigues triumphed, and

the Hakímú'l-Mulk was dismissed, and very shortly afterwards he died at Rasht, under circumstances which suggested that he had been poisoned by the Atábek or his adherents. The Atábek, however, did not at the moment profit by his decease, for he was denounced by the ecclesiastical authorities as an infidel who was selling his country to the Russians, and in December he had to flee the country, and take refuge in Russia. He was succeeded as Prime Minister by the much-hated and now notorious 'Aynu'd-Dawla, with the demand for whose dismissal the popular agitation, which culminated in the granting of the Constitution, first began in 1905.

The agitation against the misgovernment and tyranny of the 'Aynu'd-Dawla began to assume a serious form in December, 1905, when a number of *mullás* and merchants left Tehrán, and took sanctuary in Qum as a protest against the increasing misery and oppression; and, finally, to pacify the people, and induce the *mullás* and merchants to return to Tehrán, the late Shah promised to grant a Constitution, and convoke a National Assembly, or *Majlis*. For the moment tranquillity was restored, but in July, 1906, no further steps having been taken by the Shah to fulfil his promises, a number of *mullás* and merchants, headed by the *mujtahids*, Sayyid 'Abdu'lláh Tabátabá'í and Sayyid Muhammad, again took sanctuary at Qum, while a number of their followers assembled in the Masjid-i-Sháh. Troops were sent to dislodge these latter from the mosque, and a conflict ensued, in which some fifteen of the people, including a Sayyid named 'Abdu'l-Hamid, were killed. On the death of this Sayyid the following lines were composed :

Az naw Husayn shahíd bi-mayl-i-Yazíd shud :
'Abdu'l-Hamid kushá-i-'Abdu'l-Majid shud.
Bádá hazár martaba nazd-i-khudá qabúl
Qurbáni-yi-jadíd-i-tu, yá ayyuha'r-Rasúl !

‘ Once more Husayn hath died to please Yazíd :
 ‘Abdu'l-Majid* hath slain 'Abdu'l-Hamid.
 May God accept anew, O Prophet mine !
 A thousand-fold this sacrifice of thine !’

The excitement now became intense, and the Constitutionalist began early in August to take refuge in the British Legation, first by tens and scores, but soon by hundreds, until finally some 14,000 of them were encamped in the Legation grounds. Their

* 'Abdu'l-Hamid was the name of the murdered Sayyid, while 'Abdu'l-Majid is the personal name of the 'Aynu'd-Dawla.

behaviour was admirable ; they were perfectly orderly, and eager for advice and counsel from their English protectors. Each guild made its own arrangements for feeding its members, and maintaining order and discipline, but they declined to leave the shelter of the Legation until a rescript from the Shah was transmitted to them through the Legation, promising that the 'Aynu'd-Dawla should at once be dismissed, and the National Assembly convened without delay.

The elections began to take place almost at once, and before they were completed the National Assembly met on October 7, 1906, in the Baháristán, and continued to sit until it was forcibly destroyed on June 23 last in the manner with which you are all acquainted. On November 25 appeared the first number of the *Majlis*, in which its debates were fully reported, and on December 27 it was followed by the *Nidá-yi-Watan*, which appeared first weekly, then bi-weekly, then every two days and finally, from September, 1907, onwards, daily. Other newspapers rapidly followed, and soon almost every town of importance had its local press, and the total number of newspapers in Persia reached the number of eighty or ninety, many of them being of quite remarkable merit. The Fundamental Laws were promulgated on December 30, 1906, and a supplement to them was issued in the reign of the present Shah on October 7, 1907, exactly one year after the convocation of the National Assembly. This supplement comprised 107 articles. Articles 1-7 deal with General Dispositions ; Articles 8-25 with the Rights of the Persian people ; Articles 26-29 with the Powers of the Realm ; Articles 30-34 with the Rights of Members of the Assembly ; Articles 35-37 with the Rights of the Throne and the Royal Prerogatives ; Articles 58-70 with the Functions of the Ministers ; Articles 71-89 with the Powers and Functions of the Different Tribunals ; Articles 90-93 with the Functions of the Provincial, Departmental, and Municipal Councils, or *Anjumans* ; Articles 94-103 with the Finances and Fiscal Reforms ; and Articles 104-107 with the Army. At the end the present Shah, after stating that he had perused them, found them correct, and approved them, added the words : ' Please God, our Royal Person will observe and regard them all, and our sons and successors also will confirm these sacred laws and principles.'

We must return, however, for a moment to the late Muzaffaru'd-Din Sháh. At the time the National Assembly was convened arrangements for a new foreign loan of £400,000, of which England

and Russia were each to provide half, were almost completed. The first act of the *Majlis* was, however, to refuse to sanction this fresh step on the path of bankruptcy. They had suffered too much from the result of previous loans to tolerate any further addition to the National Debt of Persia, and they were at least resolved, before resorting to so desperate a measure, to see what could be effected by radical reforms in the complicated and corrupt financial system which had prevailed for so long, and under which there had latterly been a yearly revenue of £1,430,000, a yearly expenditure of £2,000,000, and consequently a yearly deficit of £570,000. Pending the reorganization of the finances, it was decided, if possible, to raise an internal loan, and to establish a National Bank.

On January 4, 1907, Muzaffaru'd-Din Sháh died, and was quietly succeeded by his son Muhammad 'Alí, the present Shah, who was crowned on January 19, having taken the oath of fidelity to the Constitution prescribed by Article 39 of the Fundamental Laws. The new Shah resembled his grandfather rather than his father, being a born despot, imbued from the days of his youth by his Russian tutor, the notorious Shapshál Khán, who was originally trained for the Eastern Consular Service at the Russian Oriental Institute, with Russian ideas of autocratic administration. Naturally he very soon came into conflict with his Parliament, especially on financial questions. Hitherto all the revenues of the country had been regarded as the personal property of the Shah; now it was proposed to fix his Civil List at a definite yearly sum, and to put a stop to the sale of governorships and other irregular procedures, whereby the royal purse had been so copiously replenished in the past. In March, 1907, the Financial Commission, consisting of twelve Deputies from different parts of Persia (five from Ázarbayján, two from Tehrán, two from Fars, and one each from Khurásán, Hámadán, and Kirmán), of whom my friend Sayyid Taqí-záda was one, began its labours, and for seven months worked from sunrise until three hours after sunset at unravelling the appalling tangle of the *Kitábchas*, or account-books, kept in the most cryptic manner by the *Mustawfis*, or State accountants, and, finally, after Herculean labours, they produced their first Budget in October, 1907.

It has so often been stated by ill-informed or hostile critics of the *Majlis* that it did no useful work and spent its energies in barren discussions, that it seems to me very necessary to insist on the valuable result which it achieved in this most important

sphere. The reform of the fiscal system, the abolition of innumerable abuses connected with the collection and expenditure of the national revenues, and the transformation of the yearly deficit into a yearly surplus, were evidently the first essential measures which must be adopted if Persia was to be made an independent, solvent, self-supporting State. The net result of this first Budget, constructed with so much labour, was to convert the yearly deficit of £570,000 into a surplus of £230,000, or, in other words, to effect a saving of £800,000 a year, out of which £120,000 a year was assigned to the Shah's Civil List, leaving a balance to the good of £110,000 a year. This saving was effected almost entirely by economies in the expenditure, dealing especially with the various forms of waste connected with—

1. *Tuyúlát* (or the allocation to individuals of the revenues of particular villages).
2. *Tas'irát* (or the payment, at a very low rate, in cash of dues which should be paid in kind).
3. *Tafáwut-i-'amal* (increased revenue since last assessment, owing to growth of prosperity, this increased revenue having hitherto been pocketed by the Governor).

Measures were also taken to bring about the appreciation of silver, which measures effected a saving of some 130,000 *túmáns* (£26,000) a year. Pending a fresh survey and assessment, no attempt was made to increase the income, since to have attempted such reassessment without full data, not procurable in the time, would have been certain to produce widespread discontent, and probably actual revolt. The reassessment, which was in contemplation, would have required, even had the money to carry it out been actually available, at least two years' work, and the help of European experts would almost certainly have been needed.

One absurd theory which has been advanced in certain quarters is that the Shah's uncle, the Zillu's-Sultán, was the real promoter of the agitation which led to the granting of the Constitution. How improbable this theory is will be apparent to all when it is known that his yearly pension was reduced by the Financial Commission from 75,000 to 12,000 *túmáns*, while that of the Shah's brother, Shu'á'u's-Saltana, was reduced from 115,000 *túmáns* to 12,000 *túmáns*.

Another great reform was effected in the method of collecting the taxes. Formerly every fiscal official from the highest to the

lowest, took his tithe of the money which passed through his hands, and of ten *tímáns* wrung from the wretched peasant not much more than one *tímán* finally reached the Treasury. The local councils, or *anjumans*, were charged with supervising the fiscal machinery, and, by a proper system of checks and receipts, insured that no taxpayer should be compelled to pay more than the sum due from him to the State.

The attempt to organize a Territorial Militia and to get rid of the Cossack Brigade unfortunately failed, but the establishment of equal rights amongst all Persian subjects, without regard to religion, was another great reform for which the *Majlis* deserves the highest credit.

I have purposely avoided so far the discussion of the Anglo-Russian Agreement, the official explanation of its nature, the question of how far it has been observed, and other controversial matters which have lately been pretty fully ventilated in the Press ; but, should time permit, I shall be glad to say a few words on these matters also.

DISCUSSION

SAYYID TAQI-ZĀDA, at the call of the Chairman, then addressed the meeting in Persian, and his remarks were interpreted by Professor Browne. He thanked all present for their attendance, and the evident sympathy with which they had received him. He pointed out that the history of Persia in modern times had been far from satisfactory. She had receded instead of advancing with the advancement of civilization. Her decline in the last century was as great as her progress in the days of the Achæmenian dynasty. It was the purpose and desire of the Constitutionalists to bring Persia into the current of progress, and during the short time that the Majlis existed earnestness was given of the enlightenment of their ideals. One thing established by the Constitution was religious equality—(Loud cheers)—a real religious equality, and not a theoretical one. Before that non-Mussulmans had been treated as not on the same plane in the matter of liberty of observance as the followers of the Prophet. The unjust differentiation fell most heavily on the Zoroastrians. Christians enjoyed some protection, and also Jews, by reason of the support on which they could count from powerful States in Europe ; hence it was the Zoroastrians who laboured most under disabilities. The clerical element in Persia was against the framing of a fundamental law of religious liberty, but the reformers succeeded in getting it through, and obtaining recognition of the great principle that in the eye of the law and the Administration there should be no difference between Christian or Muhammadan, Zoroastrian or Jew. When a well-known Zoroastrian merchant named Faridún was murdered, the greatest pains were taken to secure the arrest and exemplary punishment of those implicated in the crime. One of the chief offenders was in the Shah's service, and His Majesty was much incensed because this individual was not spared the due punishment of his misdeeds. His Majesty seemed to think it intolerable that a personal servant of his own should be brought before an ordinary judicial tribunal.

The system of Government which the Majlis found in existence was effete and corrupt. There were in office no less than fifty-seven Ministers of one sort and another ; but a reorganization of the public services on business lines permitted of the reduction of the number to seven. The Constitutional Government was also faced with the pressing problems of the extreme misery of the peasants, groaning under the

burden of extortionate taxes, and the disorderly state of affairs in the outlying provinces, and particularly Balúchistán, where villages were raided and people were taken into slavery. Even the Governor of the district named Kúchán had seized innocent persons and had sold them in order to increase his revenues. Parents of children would sell them to the local satraps, who sold them elsewhere, gaining considerable profit by the transaction. A Committee was appointed to prepare laws to bring an end to this deplorable situation. Of this Committee he (the speaker) was a member, and one of its most active members was now imprisoned in chains by arbitrary decree in the Bágh-i-Sháh. The Code drawn up by the Committee was modelled largely on the Belgian law, partly on the French, and partly on the law prevalent in Bulgaria. The question of excessive taxation was also taken up, and already when Parliament was dissolved 150 villages had been properly surveyed and reassessed.

The state of public finance was notoriously deplorable when the Constitution was granted—so deplorable that the task of reconstruction seemed hopeless. But, undeterred by the difficulties in their way, the reformers made genuine and self-sacrificing attempts to place the revenue and expenditure of the country on a sound and practical basis.

What he most desired to say to this assembly was that, above all else, the Constitutionalists stood for the non-intervention of foreign Powers. That could not be said too often or too emphatically. They were confident that, however critical their fortunes might seem to be, the Shah would never be able, apart from foreign intervention, to re-establish permanently a despotic autocracy. The Constitutional principle had taken too deep root for absolutism to be restored. It was the possibility of intervention which alone enabled the Shah to pursue his present course. The reformers had reason to fear that if they triumphed against the Royalist troops, Russia would intervene on behalf of the Shah. The wisest and most patriotic men in Persia felt that a sick nation was better than a dead one—that it was better to suffer from tyranny and misrule than to have foreign intervention, with its possibilities of absorption into another nation. It was on account of threats of intervention made by the Russian Minister at Tehrán immediately before the *coup d'état* of June 23 last that the National Volunteers had been deterred from putting forth their full strength, and this consideration was the cause of the prolongation of the struggle.

The CHAIRMAN having announced that the Sayyid was prepared to answer any questions bearing on the aims and objects of the Constitutional Movement, and on the course of recent events in Persia,

DR. RUTHERFORD, M.P., asked whether the Sayyid was of opinion that the withdrawal of the Russian officers now commanding the Persian Cossacks would insure for the Nationalists a rapid and easy victory.

SAYYID TAQÍ-ZÁDA said that, given the withdrawal of the Russian officers, the Shah would have no troops with which he could effectively oppose the Constitutional forces in Ázarbayján and elsewhere. If it were laid down that under no circumstances would Imperial Russian troops cross the frontier—the thing of which they were most afraid—the victory of the Constitutionalists would not be in doubt.

Asked what attitude the followers of Bábiism had adopted in respect to the Constitutional Movement, the SAYYID said that orders had come from Acre, the headquarters of the cult, that the Bábis were not to take sides in the Constitutional struggle. Religious reformation was their primary object, and they subordinated other considerations thereto. In this connection, Professor BROWNE pointed out that the Bábis could not be oblivious of the fact that the Nationalists had been largely supported by the priesthood, though there was a strong reactionary element in that body. This element, as the Bábis foresaw, would have discounted the movement as anti-orthodox had the hated sect identified itself therewith. There was no reason to suppose that the sympathies of the Bábis, though not openly manifested, were directed otherwise than towards the party which stood for religious freedom.

Questions were then asked as to the constitution and methods of procedure of the Majlis.

SAYYID TAQÍ-ZADÁ said that the Majlis had 162 members, elected from all parts of the country. It usually met four days a week—ordinarily, on Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays. The sittings began at three o'clock in the afternoon, and went on until the business for the day was finished, often not till 9 or 10 p.m. On other days committees had a great deal of work to do. The Financial Committee, of which he was a member, worked for seven months, and their sittings sometimes lasted from sunrise until two or three hours after sunset. The enormous Pension List was overhauled, name by name, and where there was no just claim the pension was abolished, while in other instances it was reduced. Before the Fundamental Law was promulgated, a law governing elections to the Majlis was drawn up. Its provisions were somewhat too complicated to explain there in detail. There was a property test for the franchise. In large towns voters were required to have property to the value of 1,000 *túmáns* (£200), while in rural areas the property standard was lower. The age standard for qualification was twenty-five years. The electoral law was based on various European systems, and particularly on the German model. In each town six men were chosen to draw up a register of persons entitled to vote and to issue voting papers. This body of six men was given a title corresponding with the English 'Bench.' The electoral districts were constituted, and in due course warrants for the election to take place were received in each constituency from the capital.

On the day of election, as each man voted his name was crossed off the electoral roll for the occasion, to prevent a second vote from the same person. At the close of the voting, each paper was read out, so that the number of votes for each candidate could be checked by anyone present. The name of the particular voter was not declared, and, indeed, the voting papers were unsigned, so that the system was one of secrecy, like the English ballot. The proportion of electors voting varied considerably according to the place of election. In Tehrán, Tabriz, and other towns where the Constitutional Movement was strong, from 90 to 95 per cent. of electors went to the poll, while in other towns and in rural areas the proportion frequently did not exceed 50 per cent.

At this stage SIR ARTHUR WOLLASTON said he would like to ask Professor Browne whether he was to infer from what had been said that when Russia regretfully interfered and Persia came under the same category as Khiva or Bukhára, the Bábís would rejoice in the existence of a Russianized Persia ?

PROFESSOR BROWNE said that there could be no doubt that the Russians had been extraordinarily anxious for a long time to please the Bábís and exercise an influence over them. A well-known Russian officer had published a translation of one of the chief Bábí books, and had been studying their system in 'Ishqábád. The interest of the Russians in Bábí tenets might be scientific only, but in some quarters ulterior political motives were suggested. The Bábís numbered in their ranks many intelligent officials in the postal, telegraphic, and other services. The main interest of the Bábís was to secure the spread of their religion, and as it was a reforming, Puritan faith, he (Professor Browne) at one time felt that the regeneration of Persia was in their hands. But his sympathy was now transferred to the Constitutionalists, for he felt that their programme was more practical than that of the Bábís.

In answer to MR. H. F. B. LYNCH, M.P., SAYYID TAQÍ-ZÁDA said that the voting for the Majlis was direct, and not through the medium of an electoral college. The electoral law was promulgated before the Constitution was fully drawn up.

MR. LYNCH asked if the revival of the Constitution would necessarily carry with it the revival of the electoral law under which the members of the first Majlis were chosen.

SAYYID TAQÍ-ZÁDA replied that the Shah was reported to have again sworn fidelity to the Fundamental Law, at the same time asking the Prime Minister to draft a new electoral scheme, raising the property qualification, and excluding from the franchise certain classes of persons formerly included. The Constitutional Law referred to the three estates of the realm, and assumed their existence. Any attempt on the part of the Shah to govern without a Majlis would be illegal as

an abrogation of the Constitution. His Majesty might give instructions modifying the procedure of elections, but a Parliament was an inseparable feature of the Constitution.

ANSWERING DR. RUTHERFORD, M.P., the SAYYID said that the qualifications for membership of the Majlis were, in the main, the same as the qualifications of electors. The minimum age for election, however, was thirty instead of twenty-five—the voting age—and members were required to be literate and to be of good sense and reputation.

MR. DAVID FRASER said that as they had been told much that evening as to the enthusiasm of the Persian people for the Constitution, it was pertinent to ask how it was that the scheme for forming a National Bank in Persia had fallen through. When the British and Russian Governments offered a loan of £400,000 to meet grave difficulties in the financial situation, the offer was declined, and the Majlis declared that the money could be raised by the people themselves. The project of a bank with a very large capital was started, but he understood that the response to the request for money was very small, and the scheme had to be abandoned for want of support. If the people were so keen on making the Constitution a success, how was it that a greater demonstration of the keenness was not forthcoming in the shape of subscriptions ?

SAYYID TAQÍ-ZÁDA said that in the first place they must bear in mind the extreme poverty of Persia, and the very small amount of ready money available there ; and, secondly, there existed two formidable competitors, the Russian Bank and the Imperial Bank of Persia. Notwithstanding, considerable efforts were made, and even ladies came forward to give of their jewellery in the furtherance of the scheme. In Tehrán alone the sum of 1,000,000 *túmíns* (£200,000) was raised, and a similar amount was collected at Tabriz. Of course, the net result fell far short of what was required ; but regard must be had to the extreme difficulties of the situation, amongst them being the dislike of the Shah's creatures and many of the priests to the project. It seemed hardly fair to say that an effort was not made by the Persians.

MR. DAVID FRASER said he was in Persia at the time, and he was told that only 100,000 *túmíns* were raised, and that the greater part of that sum was derived from the sale of jewellery or by subscription from school-children. Except in Tehrán, the Persian Constitution-*alists* themselves do not appear to have been willing to take advantage of a new National Bank as a means for deposit.

SAYYID TAQÍ-ZÁDA replied that a large amount of subscriptions was promised, and the money would have come in had the project been proceeded with. Replying to a further question from Mr. Fraser, he said he had no means of knowing how much was actually paid in cash. He knew that a hundred people in Tehrán subscribed 5,000 *túmíns* each, and two people alone subscribed 100,000 *túmíns*.

MR. GIBSON BOWLES : All I can say, sir, is to express my personal thanks for the most interesting mass of information which has been put before us by Professor Browne, and has been supplemented by the Sayyid. The question of interest to us is not the particular amount subscribed to a projected Persian Bank, but the international position in Persia. That is of importance to England and Russia, and of the greatest importance to the Persians themselves. As I understand it, the Persian gentlemen here this afternoon are Constitutionalists, while the Shah is anti-Constitutionalist. Of course, one can understand the growth of the Constitutional feeling in Persia, but as the Shah is opposed thereto the position is rendered somewhat difficult for us. We are no longer in the days of Lord Palmerston, who was ready to intervene on behalf of any oppressed nationality. Our Government is placed in a difficulty in being asked to support the Constitutionalists against their monarch. But, sir, there is a larger view of the case on which I should like some information from these gentlemen. The Anglo-Russian Agreement was certainly a most ominous agreement for Persia. When two European Powers announce to the world at large that they are going to guarantee the integrity and independence of another country, everybody knows that that country is in grave danger of losing both its integrity and its independence. (Laughter.) But when, in addition to that, two great nations proceed to map out the country in question into what are called 'spheres of influence' as between the two, then the danger of disintegration is greatly increased. I, for my part, can well understand the feeling of dismay as well as of disappointment with which every Persian must have received the news of the signature of the Convention. I know it was explained that this was an agreement by which England and Russia did not partition Persia, but one in which they prohibited each other from doing anything in the way of partition. Well, now, that is extremely satisfactory so far as it goes at the moment, but what I particularly wish to ask is whether Russia is engaged not to occupy Persian territory without the consent of England. That a secret understanding to this effect should be necessary, or be thought to be necessary, is a very serious thing, and almost a menacing thing, because it suggests that in certain circumstances Russia expects England to give her consent to the advance of Russian troops into Persian territory, and indeed, to its occupation.

PROFESSOR BROWNE said there had been various rumours of Russian troops having crossed the river Araxes. It was generally understood that there was some understanding come to that troops were not to enter Persian territory without the consent of the other signatory Power. The Sayyid told him that it was believed in Persia that so long as England did not give permission, Russia would not occupy Persian territory. Speaking from the English point of view, it seemed

to him that if Russia once intervened in Persia, her influence would soon be strongly felt in the Persian Gulf. Sistán was a province to which the British Government attached great strategic importance. Russian trade and influence had been pushed forward in the direction of Sistán in a rapid manner, and this fact could not be overlooked. From the standpoint of our British interests, both strategic and commercial, it was highly desirable to give Russia no excuse for direct intervention.

The CHAIRMAN said he was afraid they had put a somewhat severe tax upon the patience of their Persian visitors by the numerous questions asked. They were much obliged to Professor Browne for his extremely able lecture, and for the mass of information he had placed at their disposal. He wished on behalf of the audience to thank Professor Browne, and also the Persian delegates for their presence, and for the courtesy with which their leader had replied to the questions addressed to him. (Cheers.)

After interpreting these remarks to the Persian delegates, PROFESSOR BROWNE said that the debt was entirely on their side. They—for he identified himself with his Persian friends—were much obliged for the opportunity to state their views, for they desired above all else to lay their case before the British public. For himself, he had been dragged from the peaceful world of books into the turbulent arena of politics much against his personal inclinations. He disliked the rôle of an agitator, but he felt that it was a peremptory duty he owed a country he respected and loved to come to her aid in any humble way he could. She was in jeopardy, and had been so since the fateful June 23 last, when her Parliament was destroyed, and from that day to the present one her critical situation had never been out of his thoughts. The misery of the people in present circumstances and the overthrow of the Constitution pressed on him almost like a personal bereavement. He hoped all present would aid in disseminating the facts of the situation amongst their friends, and he would be happy to supply literature on the subject to those present who would give in their names and addresses for the purpose.

The proceedings then closed.

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