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PREFACE

This book, which is the result of three years' almost uninterrupted labour, of a journey of six months' duration to the country concerned, as well as of previous travel in adjacent regions, and of communications maintained ever since with the most qualified resident authorities in Persia, is issued in the not, I hope, vainglorious hope that, until superseded by a better, it may be regarded as the standard work in the English language on the subject to which it refers. When I went out to Persia in the autumn of 1889 as correspondent to the 'Times,' my immediate object was to furnish to that paper, in a series of communications, necessarily limited in number and length, a résumé of the political situation in the Shah's dominions.[1] At the same time I profited by

the opportunity to collect a great deal of additional information, which it was not of my power to utilise upon that occasion, and to fill many gaps of which earlier study had revealed the existence in the contemporary knowledge of Iran. It is the information thus amassed, and since supplemented by continuous investigation and correspondence, that forms the material of these volumes.

As I advanced further into the examination of my subject, I very soon realised how inadequate were our existing sources of knowledge about Persia. Though excellent, and in some cases monumental works upon the country had been published in the first quarter, and even as late as the middle of the present century, there had not since the latter date appeared a single comprehensive work upon the country as a whole. Individual writers had selected and had, in some cases, adorned different branches of the subject with productions of a strictly circumscribed character. But even in their compositions I was habitually confronted by the refusal to describe this or that locality, or to discuss this or that question, on the ground that it had been so exhaustively done by earlier writers — a reluctance which, as I pushed my studies ever further and further back, and either never found the masterpiece in question (because it had never existed), or found it already rendered quite obsolete by the archaeological discoveries or the political events of a later time, I ended by ascribing as frequently to indolence as to an honourable respect for the labours of predecessors. So scattered, indeed, did all correct information about the country prove to be, that a traveller, meditating the proper literary equipment for at all an extensive journey in Persia, would almost require a separate baggage-animal to carry the library of indispensable tomes. In proportion, therefore, as I advanced, so did the horizon of my task expand before me, until I realised that there was genuine and imperative need for a compendious work dealing with every aspect of public life in Persia, with its inhabitants, provinces, cities, lines of communication, antiquities, government, institutions, resources, trade, finance, policy, and present and future development — in a word, with all that has made or continues to make it a nation.

Having accepted this responsibility, I have endeavoured to atone for a lack of personal fitness, which I shall be the first to acknowledge, as well as for the blanks left in my own travels, by such diligence of study or of inquiry as the reading of books, or the reference to competent authorities, has permitted. Of the works, between 200 and 300 in number, which have been written in European languages on Persia during the last five centuries, I have either read or have referred to nearly every one myself; and I can truthfully say that, among the many hundred references in these volumes, there is hardly one that is not an honest reference, i.e. the result of my own independent reading, instead of copied secondhand from any other work. To such of my readers as may smile at this exertion, I would reply in the words of Voltaire, 'Remember what books I have read, in order to save you the trouble of reading them, and be thankful;' and to such as express surprise I would rejoin that without such application neither could I have ascertained what other travellers or writers have said or done, or, still more, have left unsaid or undone; nor should I have had it in

my power to fill so many of the considered lacunae of history, which the ordinary historian, bent upon big effects, is apt to pass over; nor would my picture have presented the unity of design with which I aspired to invent it.

For although the primary object of this work may be described as political, there will yet be found a good deal of History in its pages; whether I narrate the earlier records of important provinces, tribes, and cities, or whether I endeavour to trace the steps by which Persia has passed, and is still passing, from barbarism to civilisation, as she exchanges the slow beat of the Oriental pendulum for the whirr of western wheels; or whether I pick up the floating threads which, when woven into a single strand, will exhibit a connection between Europe, and especially between Great Britain, and Persia, extending over three centuries, and equally emphatic in the departments of international intercourse and of trade.

Similarly, in the domain of Archeology I have not forgotten that, while Persia is primarily the battle-ground of diplomatists and the market of tradesmen, it also contains antiquarian remains in great number that have employed the pens, and still engage the intellects, of famous scholars. Their labours have equipped me for a task upon which I have not perfunctorily entered, and in which the enthusiasm of the student may meet with a serviceable ally in the testimony of the eye-witness. To the professor, therefore, as well as to the politician and the student, I make my appeal.

To the question of Topography I have devoted an attention which a better-known country would scarcely have claimed. There are few places of importance in Persia which are not either described or referred to in these volumes, whose index may to some extent answer the purpose of a condensed Gazetteer. Finally, I hope that the Map, which has cost me a year's anxious labour and supervision, may be regarded as a decisive advance upon any previous publication. Its original execution by the skilful hand of Mr. W. J. Turner, and its appearance here, I owe to the liberal-minded generosity of the Royal Geographical Society, who undertook and placed in my hands the responsibility for its production. For notes as to the authorities from which it has been compiled, and the principles which have been observed in its construction, I will refer to the memorandum which I wrote to accompany its first appearance in the Proceedings of the Society for February 1892. Here I will only say that there is barely a name on the surface the identification and the spelling of which I have not personally supervised. It doubtless contains many errors; but these, I would fain hope, are the result, not of carelessness, but of data as yet in many parts imperfect. The smaller maps have been specially drawn for this work, under my instructions, by Mr. Sharbau, Cartographer to the Royal Geographical Society, whose elegant and accurate workmanship none can fail to admire.

If, in the handling of these, or, still more, of the political and general branches of my subject, about which I shall have something to say in an introductory chapter, my readers, comparing this book with similar ones on Western countries, find conspicuous defects of treatment or information, may I beg of them to remember that in the East there are no official sources of

knowledge accessible to the public, no blue books, no statistics scientifically compiled, no census, no newspapers, no periodicals — none of that magnificent paraphernalia of which it is still doubtful whether it adds to the sum of human happiness or is the parent of intellectual confusion. Figures and facts — which are, in their very essence, an insult to the oriental imagination — are only arrived at in Persia after long and patient inquiry and by careful collation of the results of a great number of independent investigations; and I can truly say that single lines in this book have sometimes cost me hours of work and pages of correspondence.

Among the special features which I have incorporated, the following may be mentioned. At the end of such chapters as relate to a particular province or part of the country, I have compiled a list of the principal routes in the neighbourhood that have been followed and described by previous writers. In a country without railways or a Bradshaw, a new comer, if he diverge from the beaten track, is likely to be quite unconscious whether his route has been traversed before, or whether he is upon virgin ground. If the former, I present him with the means of comparison; if the latter, I acquaint him with the responsibilities of discovery. I had originally hoped to append to my second volume a bibliography of Persian Geography and Travel; but to such dimensions has my list of titles swollen that I must reserve it for a separate publication. Instead I have affixed to the discussion of each locality or subject as complete a catalogue as my reading has furnished, of the works relating thereto in European tongues. Many tables, pedigrees, and catalogues that have never previously been published are also included in the text.

For the political opinions expressed therein I desire to claim the sole responsibility. They have not been derived from, and are very likely not shared in their entirety by, the British Legation at Teheran. Still less have they been borrowed from any of the friends whose services I shall presently acknowledge. If they are ever found to be unpalatable to the admirers of Persia, they have certainly not been arrived at in any spirit of unfriendliness to that nation whose best interests I desire to serve, nor are they uttered without a profound conviction in every instance that they are true. The proportion of the whole truth that ought to be told in the domain of statecraft is a question open to dispute. But at least let me side with those who abhor the diplomatic lie. Finally, let me add that the whole of these two volumes, with the exception of the chapter on Persepolis, was already in print when I became officially connected with the India Office; and that the views expressed are therefore, in every case, those of a private individual only, and have been formed in entire independence of official authority or inspiration.

As regards orthography, I have endeavoured to strike a mean between popular usage and academic precision, preferring to incur the charge of looseness to that of pedantry. The transliteration of Persian or Arabic names into a language which is deficient in the symbols that represent some of their sounds is intrinsically difficult, and is complicated in this case by the Indian pronunciation of Persian names, with which Englishmen are more apt to be

familiar, but which is not that encountered in Persia itself. In many cases I have bowed to convention, which after a time constitutes a law, spelling Bushire rather than Abu Shehr, and Meshed rather than Mashhad. Elsewhere I have endeavoured to combine approximate accuracy with as faithful a reproduction as possible of the sound of the native pronunciation. If I have sometimes been betrayed into inconsistencies, they are such as it is almost impossible to escape.

Should these volumes in any degree correspond to the fond ideal of the writer, it will only be because of the lavish assistance of which I have been the fortunate recipient. Neither my journey nor my studies would have availed for this object had they not been reinforced by the ready co-operation of every authority upon the subject to whom I have appealed, and more especially by a flood of information, extending to the very date of issue, which has reached me from correspondents in Persia itself. Neither could I have published these pages with any real confidence in their accuracy had they not, in the order of their composition, been despatched to Teheran for revision by more competent hands than my own, as well as been submitted, in many cases, to the judgment of equally eminent authorities at home.

Of these coadjutors the first, alike in authority, and in the extent of his assistance, has been General A. Houtum-Schindler, a gentleman who, after filling many important posts in the Persian Service, is now acting as adviser to the Imperial Bank of Persia in Teheran. To the advantage of long residence in the country he adds the erudition of a scholar and the zeal of a pioneer. He has personally revised nearly every page of these volumes, besides supplying me with much of my original information; and I tremble to think how many errors they might have contained but for his generous and never-failing co-operation. Few men so excellently qualified to write a first-rate book themselves would have lent such unselfish exertion to improve the quality of another man's work. Among others who have helped me in Persia itself I must mention the names of Mr. J. R. Preece, now British Consul at Isfahan; Mr. J. J. Fahie, Assistant Superintendent of the Indo-European Telegraph at Shiraz; my various hosts of 1889-90, and others to whom my gratitude is not the less profound that they prefer the omission of their names from this acknowledgement. In England, Sir F. Goldsmid has graciously given the benefit of his revision to the chapters relating to Seistan and the South-East provinces, upon which he is our chief authority, besides helping me in other matters. Colonel Sir E. C. Ross, recently British Resident at Bushire, has lent a similarly generous testamur to the chapters dealing with South Persia and the Gulf; and Colonel Stewart, our capable Consul-General at Tabriz, to the majority of the chapters relating to the North of the country. Mr. Cecil Smith, of the British Museum, has kindly read the accounts of Pasargadae and Persepolis, which places he has himself visited. Finally, I have profited, in more respects than I can name, by the scholarly and experienced counsel of Sir Alfred Lyall.

The photographs that adorn the text were either taken by myself or by Persian students of the Royal College at Teheran, or by personal friends, among whom I

may mention Major Sawyer and Mr. Herbert Weld-Blundell. A few engravings have been reproduced by the courteous permission of the Librairie Hachette of Paris.

So wide a scheme, I am well aware, cannot have been carried out, even under the favourable conditions above described, without the commission of some blunders or mistakes. The sincerest compliment that a reader who detects any such can pay me, will be to amend a future edition, if ever called for, by an assistance for which I shall be truly thankful. I have already alluded to a supplementary volume. This I hope to bring out in the course of the present year. It will contain a Bibliography of Persian History, Geography, and Travel, Chronological and Topographical Tables, copies of Treaties and Conventions, lists of Dynasties, tables of Weights, Measures, and Coinage, and a good deal of additional or statistical information which I have collected while preparing these pages. It will be a work appealing to the student rather than to the general reader; but I hope that some of the latter class also will do me the favour of adding it to their libraries.

In conclusion I cannot desire a better fortune for this my second and more ambitious work, than a repetition of the indulgent acclaim that was accorded, more than two years ago, to the humbler credentials of my first.

GEORGE N. CURZON

1892

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