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LORD CURZON AND E. G. BROWNE CONFRONT THE 'PERSIAN QUESTION'*

CHRISTOPHER N. B. ROSS
Magdalene College, Cambridge

ABSTRACT. *As British efforts to secure the approaches to India intensified in the closing years of the nineteenth century, expert knowledge of the states bordering the subcontinent became an increasingly sought-after commodity. Particularly high demand existed for individuals possessing first-hand experience of Qajar Persia, a state viewed by many policymakers as a vulnerable anteroom on the glacis of the Raj. Britain's two foremost Persian experts during this period were George Nathaniel Curzon and Edward Granville Browne. While Curzon epitomized the traditional gentleman amateur, Browne embodied the emerging professional scholar. Drawing on both their private papers and publications, this article analyses the relationship between these two men as well as surveys their respective views of British policy toward Iran from the late 1880s until the end of the First World War. Ultimately it contends that Curzon's knowledge of Persia proved deficient in significant ways and that Anglo-Iranian relations, at least in the aftermath of the Great War, might well have been placed on a better footing had Browne's more nuanced understanding of the country and its inhabitants prevailed within the foreign policymaking establishment.*

The ability of great powers to extend and maintain hegemony depends in large part on their knowledge of lesser nations. Today, the shortfall of expertise clearly explains part of both the American failure in Iraq and its tense relationship with Iran. Some century previously, Britain too consulted 'experts' as it sought to expand its own power in the same region. Two figures loom particularly large in the history of Anglo-Iranian relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: George Nathaniel Curzon (1859–1925), viceroy of India and British foreign secretary, and Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926), oriental scholar

Magdalene College, Cambridge, CB3 0AG cnr28@cam.ac.uk

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and fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge.[1] While the final decade of the Victorian era saw Curzon establish himself as the leading authority on the kingdom of the shah within elite policymaking circles, Browne in these same years cemented his credentials as Britain's foremost academic specialist on Iran.

In addition to illuminating the divergent paths of the traditional gentleman amateur and the emerging professional scholar, an examination of these parallel lives offers a lesson in the limitations of regional experts in foreign policy debates. Drawing on both their publications and their sporadic but previously undocumented correspondence between 1892 and 1919, this article explores the ostensibly friendly, yet clearly equivocal, relationship between this tory statesman and radical Liberal professor. In the process, it considers their generally contrasting but at times converging views on the 'Persian question'. Finally, the article concludes with a brief assessment of both men as regional experts on Iran and suggests why one developed a considerably more nuanced grasp of the 'land of the lion and the sun' than the other.

I

The similarities between Curzon and Browne are obvious. Born three years apart, Curzon in 1859 and Browne in 1862, they died within months of one another, in March 1925 and January 1926 respectively. Both were sons of large families, Curzon the eldest of eleven and Browne of nine. Both descended from families based far from England's south-eastern metropolitan core – the Curzons from the east midlands and the Brownes from the north-east. Despite possessing very different social pedigrees, Curzon coming from one of England's oldest aristocratic families and Browne from a moneyed middle-class home of Britain's industrial revolution, both were educated at Berkshire preparatory schools before proceeding to Eton.[2] Yet, although both attended England's foremost public school in its Victorian 'heyday' – their tenures overlapping in 1877 – their experiences contrasted sharply. While Curzon embraced the school's ethos and was distinguished for his scholarship, Browne felt marginalized and miserable.[3]

Other influences, however, connected the aristocratic and the bourgeois student. At Eton, both were introduced to the Orient, to become in time utterly captivated.[4] A chance guest lecture at Eton in 1877 by the jurist and imperialist

[1] While Curzon has been the subject of several biographies, most prominently David Gilmour's recent *Curzon: imperial statesman* (London, 1994; 2nd edn, 2003), for a full-length portrait of Browne we must await John Gurney's much anticipated monograph.

[2] Curzon at Wixenford and Browne at Burnside's.

[3] K. Rose, *Superior person: a portrait of Curzon and his circle in late Victorian England* (London, 1969), pp. 42–3; E. G. Browne, *A year amongst the Persians: impressions as to the life, character, and thought of the people of Persia* (Cambridge, 1893; 2nd edn, 1926), p. 7.

[4] It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss both Curzon's and Browne's orientalism as it relates to Edward W. Said's arguments. For such an analysis see chs. 4 and 5 devoted to Curzon and Browne respectively in G. P. Nash, *From empire to Orient: travellers to the Middle East, 1830–1926* (London, 2005), pp. 107–68. While Curzon in many ways epitomized the orientalist tradition which Said excoriated in *Orientalism* (New York, NY, 1978), Browne should by no means be tarred with the same brush. As Abbas

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writer James Fitzjames Stephen (1829–94) sparked Curzon's lifelong fascination. Having recently returned from the Indian subcontinent, Stephen enthralled his audience with tales of Britain's Asian empire, an entity he described as 'more populous, more amazing, and more beneficent than that of Rome'.[5] Curzon thereafter became a strong proponent of Stephen's 'high-minded, visionary form of colonial domination'.[6] While it is unknown whether Browne attended this speech, a much larger event drew his mind's eye to Asia. As he explained, 'the Turkish war with Russia in 1877–8 … first attracted my attention to the East, about which, till that time, I had known and cared nothing'.[7] For the future professor, Turkey's efforts to defend itself against the Russian leviathan exerted a powerful claim on his sympathy. 'Ere the close of the war,' he asserted, 'I would have died to save Turkey, and I mourned the fall of Plevna as though it had been a disaster inflicted on my own country.' The sixteen-year-old Browne's compassion ran so deep that he aspired to enter the British army, obtain the rank of captain, and only then resign his commission to join the ranks of the Ottoman forces.[8] While the close of the Russo-Turkish War in 1878 put paid to Browne's immediate military ambitions, his enthralment with the Orient – more specifically Turkey's neighbour, Persia – only continued to grow.

From Eton, the two young men eventually followed the well-worn path of Britain's privileged few to Oxbridge. Nevertheless, while Curzon and Browne both gained places in Britain's ancient universities, their choice of degrees was much coloured by their class. Curzon, like so many other young ambitious aristocrats of his day, opted to pursue classics at Balliol College, Oxford, then very much a 'school for statesmen' under the forceful mastership of Benjamin Jowett (1817–93).[9] Born and raised at Kedleston Hall, with its neoclassical statuary and

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Amanat has argued, 'Browne's liberal defense of Iran and its revolution, in open defiance of the prevailing imperialism of his time, are essentially at variance with the negative stereotype of orientalism developed in our time by such critics as Edward Said.' A. Amanat, 'Edward Browne and the Persian Revolution of 1905–1909', in E. G. Browne, *The Persian revolution*, ed. A. Amanat (Washington, DC, 2006), p. x. Thus as another scholar reminds us, 'Imperialism and its multifarious consequences were, and remain, undeniable facts. But that does not sanction an ahistorical and crude equation of imperialism with the entire range of Western encounters with and representations of Oriental societies.' M. Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1906–1911: foreign policy, imperialism, and dissent* (Syracuse, NY, 2006), p. xxiv.

[5] G. N. Curzon, *Speeches by Lord Curzon of Kedleston, viceroy and governor-general of India, 1898–1901* (Calcutta, 1901), I, p. v.

[6] K. J. M. Smith, 'Stephen, Sir James Fitzjames', in vol. LII of H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison, eds., *Oxford dictionary of national biography: from the earliest times to the year 2000* (Oxford, 2004), p. 441.

[7] Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 8.

[8] Ibid. Browne's instinctive sympathy for the underdog may well have been fostered by his family's Christian puritanical nonconformism. As Abbas Amanat suggested, 'Browne's tempered dissent must have allowed him to see the weak and empathize with the underprivileged.' Amanat, 'Edward Browne', p. xii. For a more extensive discussion of this aspect of Browne's personality and upbringing we must await John Gurney's biography.

[9] Significantly, it was Jowett, having been one of the first Oxbridge dons to encourage the admission of non-Europeans, who brought Curzon in contact with presumably his first real life Persian, Abolqasem Qaragozlu (1856–1927). Curzon's Balliol friend, Cecil Spring-Rice (1859–1918), described

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abundant evocations of Rome, Curzon was confident that the best education for his class was grounded in the works of thinkers like Cicero and Tacitus, not least because of the plentiful opportunities to compare the *Pax Romana* and the British imperium.[10] Browne's more modest station compelled him, at least initially, to pursue a more pragmatic course. After rejecting his father's path as an engineer, he opted for medicine, gaining entry to the natural sciences tripos at Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1879, the year after Curzon went up to Oxford. Nevertheless, while Browne felt compelled to pursue formal training for a profession, he refused to sacrifice what had become his most ardent passion, the study of oriental languages. During his first degree, he added both Arabic and Persian to his already strong grasp of Turkish. Curzon made other choices. Intent on 'laying the foundations and preparing for the superstructure of his career', he served as both president of the Union and secretary of the Canning Club, becoming widely regarded as Oxford's most promising young tory.[11]

Although both men completed their degrees in 1882, neither was ready to leave university life. Curzon was determined to prove himself to Oxford's classics dons whom he believed had robbed him of a first in greats which was to have complemented the one he had achieved in moderations in 1880. He was successful: between 1882 and 1884 he won two highly sought-after essay prizes in addition to a prestigious fellowship to All Souls College, Oxford. Browne possessed more modest goals. After obtaining his bachelor of medicine and spending the summer of 1882 in Constantinople (a reward from his father for completing his first degree), he decided to postpone further medical training in favour of staying on at Pembroke in order to try for the Indian languages tripos in 1884.[12] During these two subsequent years Browne enhanced his knowledge of West Asia – becoming particularly fascinated by classical Persian poetry and Sufism – and made regular forays to London to meet with Iranian expatriates.

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the latter as one of Jowett's 'oriental pets … and an eloquent opponent of Curzon's in our debating society'. After 1887 known by his aristocratic title, Naser al Molk, Oxford's first Persian went on to become his country's prime minister as well as regent to the last Qajar shah. Spring-Rice as qu. in S. Gwynne, ed., *The letters and friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice* (2 vols., London, 1929), p. 288. For further on the transnational life of Naser al Molk see D. Wright, *The Persians amongst the English: episodes in Anglo-Persian history* (London, 1985), pp. 143–5.

[10] Curzon's classical education exerted a continuing powerful influence. As Robert Irwin posited, 'when one considers the great British imperial proconsuls, such as Lord Curzon or Lord Cromer, their mindset and the ways in which they thought about the native peoples they governed owed more to their reading of Caesar, Tacitus and Suetonius than it did to any substantial familiarity with Orientalist texts'. R. Irwin, *For lust of knowing: the orientalists and their enemies* (London, 2006), p. 288. See also P. Kennedy, *The realities behind diplomacy: background influences on British external policy, 1865–1980* (London, 1981), p. 60; P. Brendon, *The decline and fall of the British empire, 1781–1997* (London, 2007), pp. xv–xviii and passim.

[11] Curzon as qu. in Gilmour, *Curzon: imperial statesman*, p. 28. During this period, Curzon's imperious demeanour inspired the doggerel that would haunt him the rest of his life: 'My name is George Nathaniel Curzon, I am a most superior person. My hair is soft, my face is sleek, I dine at Blenheim once a week.' Balliol College, *The masque of Balliol* (Oxford, 1881), p. 45.

[12] For more on Browne in Istanbul see J. Gurney, 'E. G. Browne and the Iranian community in Istanbul', in T. Zarcone and F. Zarinebaf-Shahr, eds., *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul* (Paris, 1993), pp. 149–75.

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In 1884, the two men's lives began to diverge significantly. Curzon was increasingly devoted to his nascent political career and the country-house social commitments of the 'Souls' and the 'Crabbet Club'.[13] Although he undertook short personal trips around the Mediterranean, a pivotal event was his election as a member of parliament for Southport in 1886. Browne's days and nights during the same years were more onerous and considerably more circumscribed. After leaving Pembroke, he spent long hours at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London. During his three-year training, he was rarely able to steal away to discuss Sufi poets with his Persian friends or peruse the oriental manuscripts of the British Museum.[14] Although he found a certain fulfilment, Browne longed for a career which would allow him to utilize his language skills. He was much disappointed when hopes for employment with the consular service was summarily dismissed with the response that diplomats in West Asia needed German, Spanish, Italian, and Greek more than Persian, Turkish, or Arabic.[15]

In 1887, the lives of the two Oxbridge graduates once more, however, began to converge. Just after he qualified to practise medicine, Browne heard that he had been elected a fellow of Pembroke College. While others might have been forced to decline a relatively poorly remunerated academic post in favour of more gainful medical employment, Browne was heir to his father's sizeable shipping fortune.[16] He took up the fellowship, discovered encouragement to perfect his knowledge of Persian, and soon prepared to visit Iran. At much the same time, Curzon departed on his first round-the-world journey. It was during the course of this trip that the new MP developed the firm conviction that Asia represented the foremost battleground of the future for both armies and diplomatists. Upon his return to London in 1888, he drew up a 'scheme of Asiatic travel' to those countries where 'the future of the British Empire would be decided'.[17] Acquiring expert local knowledge of Asia's various geopolitical 'questions', Curzon believed, would offer the surest means of establishing himself as the supreme authority in parliament on the most pressing matters of imperial foreign policy.

II

Although the Persia of the 1880s was considerably reduced from that of a century earlier, having been dispossessed by Russia of vast territories in the Caucasus and Central Asia, it remained a large country. Its 628,000 square miles were greater than Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland combined. It was not its territorial extent, however, but its geopolitical situation – placed as it

[13] Membership of these two groups offered Curzon a range of valuable social connections. The leading member of the Souls, for instance, was A. J. Balfour (1848–1930), nephew of the prime minister, Lord Salisbury (1830–1903), and a future premier himself. The founder of the Crabbet Club, meanwhile, was the oriental traveller, poet, and hedonist, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840–1922), who eventually developed a close friendship with Browne.

[14] Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 16. [15] Ibid., p. 17. [16] Ibid., p. 3.

[17] Curzon as qu. in Gilmour, *Curzon*, p. 65.

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was between the expansionist Russian empire and an increasingly defensive British Raj – which made it critical. Lord Salisbury succinctly articulated the British position with his observation that, 'Were it not for our possession of India, we should trouble ourselves but little over Persia.'[18] If Iran's population, estimated at between ten and twelve million at the turn of the century, was relatively small this can largely be attributed to the fact that much of the country lacked sufficient rainfall for permanent agriculture. Most Persians resided in small villages, urban dwellers representing fewer than 15 per cent of inhabitants. More than 25 per cent lived as nomads, belonging to one of the more than dozen major tribal entities.[19] Tribal leaders often possessed considerable authority, mainly owing to their command of some of the country's best-trained troops at a time when the Qajar state lacked an effective army. While the chiefs of large tribal confederacies like the Bakhtiari or Qashqai occasionally played significant national roles, three groups – the landed aristocracy, the *ulama* (clerical class), and the *bazaaris* (merchant class) – were far more influential. These notables comprised the 'governing elite of Iran' and possessed 'profound roots in society, and with each other, in kinship associations as well as commercial and social relations'.[20] At the apex of the Qajar state was the shah, a member of the Turkic dynasty which had ruled Persia since the close of the eighteenth century. While his powers were in theory absolute, in practice they were considerably circumscribed. Lacking both a standing army and a centralized state bureaucracy, his authority beyond Tehran was highly dependent upon regional notables. That the Qajar dynasty survived as long as it did is testament to successive shahs' abilities systematically to manipulate social divisions so as to bolster their own declining power.[21] Many Persian monarchs and their courtiers adopted a similar approach to foreign policy. Playing the interests of one imperial titan off against the other, they aimed to exploit the Anglo-Russian rivalry to ensure at least the continued existence of the dynasty, if not the country's sovereignty. Even when successful, however, such policies amounted to little more than delay tactics and they diverted crucial state energy and resources away from overdue reforms. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Britain's repeated efforts to transform Persia into an effective bulwark to Russian expansion had yielded few results and the country's future as an independent nation seemed doubtful. Unable to assuage the geopolitical pressure brought to bear along Persia's northern frontier, British policymakers finally hoped to rehabilitate the kingdom of the shah by means of

[18] Salisbury as qu. in W. J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian relations during World War I* (London, 1984), p. 1.

[19] E. Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 1–2. For a treatment of Persia's 'tribal question' see R. Tapper, 'The tribes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Iran', in P. Avery, G. Hambly, and C. Melville, eds., *The Cambridge history of Iran, vol. 7: from Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 506–41; S. Cronin, *Tribal politics in Iran: rural conflict and the new state, 1921–1941* (London, 2007).

[20] A. M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: the Pahlavis and after* (London, 2003), p. 12.

[21] E. Abrahamian, 'Oriental despotism: the case of Qajar Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5 (Jan., 1974), pp. 3–31; and Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran*, pp. 8–9, 31–3.

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sterling diplomacy. Despite their enthusiastic support for a variety of commercial and financial ventures, such as the establishment of the Imperial Bank of Persia, Westminster's patriotic appeals to invest in Persia, for the most part, fell upon deaf ears. Ultimately, the City deemed Iran a country of high risks and low returns and showed great reluctance to invest in it without formal guarantees.[22] Increasingly bankrupt due to diminished tax revenues and rampant inflation, the Qajars resorted to selling off their patrimony to concessionaires and, ultimately, to securing onerous foreign loans.[23]

It was this enfeebled Persian kingdom into which Browne entered, for the first and only time, in October 1887. During the next twelve months he visited various Persian cities and towns, most prominently, Tabriz, Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, and Kerman. Unlike so many previous and subsequent Western travellers, Browne avoided other Europeans, conversing with a diverse array of the country's inhabitants. Journeying for the most part by caravan and spending nights with ordinary Iranians, he met 'every grade of Persian society'.[24] Unencumbered by an interpreter, Browne enthusiastically engaged in lengthy *tête-à-têtes* with, inter alia, Zoroastrian merchants, Qajar aristocrats, opium-addled dervishes, and Babi heretics.[25] The newly-appointed Pembroke don enhanced his Persian and gained unparalleled insights into the life, politics, and culture of late nineteenth-century Iran. The journey proved a formative moment. According to A. J. Arberry, 'In Persia Browne realized himself fully for the first time; the year of seeing and talking lasted him throughout all the remaining years of his life; the fire which Persia kindled in his heart would prove inextinguishable.'[26] In effect then, as C. A. Bayly observed, 'Iran represented an exotic, living Eastern Greece and Browne quickly identified himself as its Byron.'[27] Over the years, this perspective grew more sophisticated, as Browne became more knowledgeable about the geopolitical importance of the region for British policymakers, but ultimately

[22] P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British imperialism, 1688–2000* (London, 1993; 2nd edn, 2002), pp. 351–9. For a detailed account of the Imperial Bank of Persia see G. Jones, *Banking and empire in Iran: the history of the British bank of the Middle East*, I (Cambridge, 1986).

[23] For further discussion of the Qajars' failed attempts to reform and Persia's ensuing financial crises see S. Bakhash, *Iran: monarchy, bureaucracy and reform under the Qajars, 1858–1896* (London, 1958); P. W. Avery and J. B. Simmons, 'Persia on a cross of silver, 1880–1890', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 10 (1974), pp. 259–86; F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914: a study in imperialism* (New Haven, CT, 1968), pp. 302–85; and, more generally, C. Issawi, *The economic history of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago, IL, 1971).

[24] Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 475.

[25] Though much is often made of the friendships Browne cultivated with the Iranian 'grassroots', including the heretic and the downtrodden, his privileged access to expatriate community networks in London and Constantinople facilitated contacts with high-ranking Persians. The Cambridge don's interview with the Qajar aristocrat, Moshir al Dowleh, confirms contacts well beyond the lower ranks of Iranian society. See ibid., p. 106.

[26] A. J. Arberry, *Oriental essays: portraits of seven scholars* (London, 1960), p. 171.

[27] C. A. Bayly, 'The Orient: British historical writing about Asia since 1890', in P. Burke, ed., *History and historians in the twentieth century* (Oxford, 2002), p. 93.

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it retained its essential empathy and regard for the Persian people. They were never merely the pawns of imperial power struggles as seen so often by Curzon.[28]

While Curzon's first voyage in his scheme of Asiatic travel did not bring him to Iran, the country nonetheless caught his attention in the autumn of 1888 during the course of a trip to Russian Central Asia. The main purpose of Curzon's journey to the tsar's newly conquered territories was to view the freshly completed Transcaspian railway and assess the threat it posed to British India. The line, which stretched some 900 miles from the Caspian all the way to Samarkand, vastly improved Russia's strategic position. Curzon believed the railroad both threatened India and represented 'a sword of Damocles perpetually suspended above [the shah of Persia's] head'. Recognition of Persia's vulnerability prompted a visit in 1889–90.[29]

Curzon journeyed more than three months and 2,000 miles through Persia by horseback, visiting prominent cities, inter alia, Mashhad, Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Bushehr, and Mohammareh (present-day Khorramshahr). He travelled largely by 'riding *chapar*', or by government post horse. Although considerably faster than Browne's choice of a caravan, this method of transport, which carried the lone traveller like 'a piece of animate baggage' from one post-house or *chapar-khaneh* to another, isolated Curzon from local people and cultures.[30] His status as a 'man apart' was reinforced by his ignorance of Persian. Beyond haggling with stall owners in the bazaars and social niceties with officials, he depended on interpreters and attendants. In a revealing exchange in 1893, the future viceroy explained how he gauged popular sentiment in Eastern countries.

How do you manage to get hold of public opinion?

Chiefly by talking to the merchants. Their opinions are not only those of officials, but are anti-official. Then I talk with the officials also, and draw my own conclusions. The opinions of native officials are, however, very difficult to get in the first place, because they are always suspicious of foreigners, and assume that you have some sinister purpose in view; and secondly, because of the incurable love of the Oriental for exaggeration, and his enormous delight in telling you a successful lie.

But that is not popular opinion. Surely merchants and officials know and care very little about the mass of the people?

The peasantry have no articulate opinion. All they desire is to scrape through life without undue extortion from the nearest Governor. Or, if they have any political feelings, no mouthpiece exists for giving them expression. The duty of a British traveller is to describe things as they appear to Britishers.[31]

[28] Moreover, as Ali Ansari emphasized, much of the reason for the West's persistent miscomprehension of Iran stems from the fact that its experts have long been severely lacking in cultural empathy. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, p. 10.

[29] G. N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia and the Anglo-Russian question* (London, 1889), p. 275.

[30] G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian question* (2 vols., London, 1892), I, pp. 29–30.

[31] 'Workers and their work', *Pearson's Weekly*, 13 May 1893.

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Although his investigations appear rather elementary – as well as illustrate precisely the mindset rightly condemned by Edward Said – Curzon nonetheless managed to gather an extraordinary amount of information. Much of his success can be attributed to his status as an MP and personal friend of the prime minister, Lord Salisbury. Indeed, his political office and privileged social position gave him substantial currency with knowledgeable 'men on the spot', most prominently members of Her Majesty's diplomatic and consular services.[32]

Curzon's trip produced articles for *The Times* and one magisterial study, *Persia and the Persian question* (1892). While he would publish other monographs, this volume, in conjunction with the earlier *Russia in Central Asia and the Anglo-Russian question* (1889), firmly established his credentials with policymakers and the press. While the geopolitical arguments dealing with the Anglo-Russian rivalry in *Persia and the Persian question* clearly extended those found in *Russia in Central Asia*, the former possessed far loftier, indeed, scholarly aspirations. Much of the impetus for *Persia* in fact stemmed from Curzon's concern about the limited sources on that nation.[33] Thus, the publication was intended both to secure him expert status within the foreign policy establishment and to provide an enduring intellectual legacy.[34]

Even today the study represents no small achievement.[35] Curzon read virtually every work published on Persia in a European language.[36] He also engaged in a vast correspondence with Persian specialists.[37] Despite the author's desire to rectify the 'inadequate … existing sources of knowledge about Persia', the primary objective remained staunchly political.[38] He was particularly concerned to demonstrate to English readers 'their stake in that country … and why it is so impossible to treat either the ruler or his people with polite indifference'.[39] Nevertheless, while Curzon's interest in the land of Iran was intrinsically linked to high strategy, this should not be exaggerated. Much more held his interest. As

[32] While Foreign Office personnel in Persia significantly assisted Curzon, his most valued source was Albert Houtum-Schindler (1846–1916). A German national resident in Persia since 1868, Houtum-Schindler had held long-term positions with both the Indo-European Telegraph Company and the shah's Persia service. His knowledge of Iran was unrivalled by any other European of his generation. Browne also acknowledged Schindler as possessing 'probably more knowledge about geography, ethnology, and local dialects of Persia than any man living'. Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 203.

[33] Curzon, *Persia*, I, p. x.

[34] Writing to his publisher in February 1891, he emphasized: 'It is not a work of travel. It is to be an authoritative work (I trust) of permanent value, which will be read and referred to, twenty, fifty, and perhaps more years hence, when lighter productions that sold well in their day are forgotten.' Curzon to T. N. Longman, 20 Feb. 1891, as qu. in Earl of Ronaldshay, *The life of Lord Curzon* (3 vols., London, 1927), I, p. 157.

[35] As he outlined in the preface, the two-volume, nearly 1,300 page monograph, would deal 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'. Curzon, *Persia*, I, p. viii.

[36] Before departing for Persia Curzon flippantly claimed that having read every work on Iran in the reading room of the British Museum he knew the country so well that he hardly needed to travel there. Sir I. Malcolm, *The pursuits of leisure* (London, 1929), p. 137.

[37] Curzon, *Persia*, I, p. xii. [38] Ibid., I, p. ix. [39] Ibid., I, p. 2.

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Harold Nicolson (1886–1968), Curzon's later Foreign Office assistant, remembered, his superior remained 'for ever haunted by those plains of amber, those peaks of amethyst, the dignity of that crumbled magnificence, that silence of two thousand years'.[40] Indeed, one of the great themes of Curzon's work was the decline and decay of Iranian civil society, an argument popular with authors writing on Persia since the publication of Sir John Malcolm's influential *History* in 1815.[41]

With *Persia and the Persian question*'s publication in 1892, Curzon was hailed as one of Britain's leading Persian experts as well as one of the foremost strategic analysts of the Anglo-Russian rivalry. While accolades from prominent newspapers and specialist journals pleased him, he cherished approval from acknowledged experts like E. G. Browne. The latter wrote to Curzon in June 1892. After identifying himself as a former classmate at Eton, Browne asserted that *Persia* would 'long remain one of the chief books of reference to which anyone desiring a knowledge of Persia will turn for information'. Informing Curzon that he had read it with care, detecting only '2 or 3 trifling misprints', the Pembroke fellow added,

> I have learned from your book a vast number of things (not only as to the trade, political situation, and geography, but also as to the archaeology of Persia) which I did not previously know and have derived the greatest pleasure as well as profit from its perusal. The exhaustive use which you have made of all that has been written on every branch of the subject has especially aroused my admiration, and I can well believe what you say in the Preface that single lines of the book have sometimes cost you hours of work and pages of correspondence.[42]

This glowing appraisal was not entirely unself-interested. While Browne may have respected the industry and breadth of the work, he also had cause to sing its praises. In addition to offering congratulations, the main purpose of his first letter requested support for a recent Pembroke graduate. This man, a candidate for the Indian Civil Service, wished to travel to Persia to improve his knowledge of its language and people. The second Browne letter suggests that Curzon did indeed attempt to offer assistance. Thus, from its very outset, the relationship between the two men drew on both the scholar's clear effort to connect with a rising star in the foreign policy establishment and the aristocrat's desire for academic validation. Although the dynamic would evolve somewhat in subsequent years, at root it remained substantially instrumental.

While reading Curzon, Browne was also in the midst of beginning to transform the journals he had penned during his 1887 trip into publishable form. In 1893,

[40] H. Nicolson, *Curzon: the last phase, 1919–1925* (London, 1934), pp. 120–1.

[41] Sir J. Malcolm, *The history of Persia, from the most early period to the present time* (London, 1815). As C. A. Bayly argued, Malcolm essentially provided 'the rail-tracks on which many histories of Persia would continue to move until the 1930s'. Bayly, 'The Orient', p. 101.

[42] Browne to Curzon, 8 and 16 June 1892, London, British Library (BL), Curzon papers, MSS Eur. F111.58-9.

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he published his major contribution to late Victorian travel literature, *A year amongst the Persians*. A unique travelogue providing a wealth of insights into late nineteenth-century Iran, its 650 pages were strikingly different in both content and style from Curzon's offering. Most prominently, Browne eschewed a 'systematic treatise' on Persia, opting instead for a narrative on the 'observations, impressions, and experiences' reached over twelve months. The Cambridge academic explained that 'the recent publication of the Hon. G. N. Curzon's encyclopaedic work on Persia will for some time to come prevent any similar attempt on the part of anyone else who is not either remarkably rash or exceedingly well-informed'.[43]

Browne's volume focused primarily on the domestic lives of Iranians. Having met Persians of varying walks of life, he offered much more than a mere account of journeys through historic cities. He opened a window on day-to-day existence and even attempted to illuminate popular thought. Thus, in addition to recounting, for instance, the significance of wine-drinking to the Zoroastrians of Yazd, he strove to highlight what he deemed the 'most striking feature of the Persians as a nation … their passion for metaphysical speculation'.[44] Indeed, Browne devoted an entire chapter to 'Mysticism, metaphysic, and magic'. As John Gurney observed, the Pembroke don's mind was most drawn to 'the exploration of religious and philosophical speculation and experience, especially the mystic, the unusual, the unorthodox'.[45]

Nevertheless, *A year amongst the Persians* was much more than the chronicle of one man's journey to Iran and his various observations on the internal lives of its inhabitants. Browne, who was from the mid-1900s to the First World War one of his nation's foremost foreign policy dissenters, also addressed domestic politics and the Anglo-Russian rivalry.[46] Significant passages were dedicated to such topics as the flaws of the country's Qajar shahs. Asserting that 'people who reason about them in Europe too often suppose that the interests of the shah and of his subjects are identical, when they are in fact generally diametrically opposed', Browne seized opportunities for harsh criticism of Persia's reigning dynasty.[47]

[43] Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, pp. 1, 2.

[44] Ibid., pp. 410–11, 133.

[45] Gurney, 'E. G. Browne', p. 152. Browne became especially fascinated by the Babi faith. For his scholarship on Babi doctrine and history see A. Amanat, *Resurrection and renewal: the making of the Babi movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca, NY, 1989), pp. 423–4, 439; H. Baluyzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i faith* (Oxford, 1970).

[46] For further discussion of Browne's role as a critic of British foreign policy see Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian constitutional revolution*, passim; D. McLean, 'A professor extraordinary: E. G. Browne and his Persian campaign, 1908–1913', *Historical Journal*, 21 (1978), pp. 399–408; A. J. A. Morris, *Radicalism against war, 1906–1914* (London, 1972), pp. 186, 257, 272–4; A. J. P. Taylor, *The troublemakers* (London, 1964), pp. 15, 96, 115.

[47] Browne described the reigning Persian monarch, Naser al Din Shah Qajar (1831–96), as 'a selfish despot, devoid of public spirit'. Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 99. Significantly, Curzon's assessment of the Shah – whom he interviewed during his visit – was similarly negative and Lord Salisbury in fact required him to excise some of his harsher judgements about the monarch from the final manuscript for *Persia and the Persian question*.

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Arguably the most prominent theme, however, was his deep-seated faith in the inherent vitality and genius of the Persian people.[48] In stark contrast to Curzon's depiction in *Persia and the Persian question*, which sometimes reads like an elegy for the demise of a once proud but now effete race, Browne emphasized that, at the grassroots level at least, the Persian nation was not only vital but capable of renewal.

While this major difference of opinion as to the fitness of the Iranian people would continue to divide the two former Etonians in subsequent years, it should be emphasized that their contrasting appraisals were both a product of the same sociobiological thinking common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The application of evolutionary theories to international relations during this era was perhaps best articulated by the Victorian prime minister and mentor to Curzon, Lord Salisbury, in a famous 1898 speech in which he divided countries into living and dying nations, asserting that the decline and fall of the latter was the direct result of their own moral corruption.[49] But, while imperialists like Curzon employed such reasoning to predict the eventual extinction of races like the Persians, radicals like Browne countered that some non-Western nations, most prominently the Aryan peoples of Iran, possessed inherent racial energies which would serve as the instrument of their revival. Thus, as C. A. Bayly trenchantly remarked, 'the discourse of race could be as subversive as it was supportive of the imperial order'.[50]

Although *A year amongst the Persians* garnered little immediate general interest, it received reviews.[51] The most notable appeared by Curzon in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in February 1894.[52] Opening with the statement that 'Mr. Browne's book on Persia is quite unlike any other that has been written', he was highly positive. Asserting that 'as a guide to the mysteries of the native character … [Browne's] book sheds a more penetrating light upon the Persian people than any that has appeared since [the oriental novel] "Hajji Baba"', Curzon pronounced the monograph 'one of the best books on Persia in the English language'. Arguably the most striking observation, however, was that 'in his enthusiasm for his subject, while never losing his critical balance, [Browne] becomes almost a Persian himself'. Such a pronouncement reveals as much about the aristocrat as it does about his subject. Indeed, a similar statement could never have been applied to the author of *Persia and the Persian question*. Curzon thus appreciated his contemporary's special talent for empathetic description.

Curzon's sole criticisms – other than length, the same criticism levelled at his own Persian study – identified 'trivial errors'. He pointed to Browne's

[48] See, for instance, ibid., pp. 91, 99.

[49] Salisbury as qu. in A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian titan* (London, 1999), pp. 691–2.

[50] Bayly, 'The Orient', p. 92.

[51] As Sir Edward Denison Ross remarked in his 1926 preface to the second edition of *A year amongst the Persians*, when initially published in 1893 it had 'somehow failed to attract the attention it deserved'. Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. vii.

[52] G. Curzon, 'Reviews. A new book on Persia', 10 Feb. 1894, *Pall Mall Gazette*.

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mis-attribution of figures in a bas-relief (thus confirming his own superior knowledge) and use of inconsistent spellings for Persian words. Only the latter criticism drew a response from Browne. Making a point of thanking Curzon for his 'most kindly and sympathetic spirit', Browne's reply in the *Pall Mall Gazette* concentrated on justifying his selected Persian spellings.[53] While willing to acknowledge Curzon's command of Iranian history and archaeology, he drew the line when it came to his vastly superior knowledge of the Persian language.

Both *Persia and the Persian question* and *A year amongst the Persians* contain numerous examples of contrasting perceptions of the Persian character. A further stark illustration of this difference appears in Curzon's and Browne's respective introductions to two 1895 editions of James Morier's *The adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1828).[54] One of the most popular satirical novels in nineteenth-century Britain, *Hajji Baba* is the fictional autobiography of its eponymous narrator, a barber's son from Esfahan who, in the early 1800s, experiences extreme vicissitudes of fortune. Penned by a former British diplomat who resided for nearly six years at the court of Fath Ali Shah Qajar (1797–1834) early in the nineteenth century, *Hajji Baba* sketched people and events encountered by Morier. It is now widely considered an orientalist novel par excellence.

Although both Curzon and Browne acknowledged the novel as a personal favourite, they interpreted it very differently. For Curzon, 'Hajji Baba is a Persian of the Persians, typical not merely of the life and surroundings, but of the character and instincts and manner of thought of his countrymen.' The Southport MP, by now under-secretary of state at the Foreign Office, considered Morier's portrait not merely an exaggerated satiric caricature but as fact. In one particularly revealing passage he went so far as to declare,

> Above all, in its delineation of national customs, the book is an invaluable contribution to sociology, and conveys a more truthful and instructive impression of Persian habits, methods, points of view, and courses of action, than any disquisition of which I am aware in the more serious volumes of statesmen, travellers, and men of affairs.[55]

A close reading of *Persia and the Persian question* makes abundantly clear that its elucidation of the Persian national character was lifted almost directly from the pages of *Hajji Baba*. Indeed, Curzon ascribed to the inhabitants of Iran precisely the traits of Morier's protagonist. In addition to being 'consummate hypocrites, very corrupt, and lamentably deficient in stability or courage', they possessed 'above all no national spirit or patriotism'.[56] Thus, Curzon felt supremely confident as to which of Lord Salisbury's categories – the living or dying nations – the

[53] E. G. Browne, 'The Persian language', 17 Feb. 1894, *Pall Mall Gazette*.

[54] That publishers Macmillan and Methuen selected Curzon and Browne to introduce their respective 1895 editions testified to the stature of both as among Britain's leading Persian experts. For Curzon's introduction, see J. Morier, *The adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (London: Macmillan, 1828; 1895) and for Browne's, see J. Morier, *The adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (London: Methuen, 1828; 1895).

[55] Morier, *Hajji Baba* (Macmillan), pp. x, xiv.

[56] Curzon, *Persia*, II, p. 632, I, p. 462.

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Persians necessarily belonged. 'In every manifestation of national spirit or activity', he asserted, 'they appear to have succumbed to a creeping paralysis which is slowly making its way upward from the extremities to the head.'[57] According to Curzon's reading of Morier's classic novel, then, the Persians were but another doomed race whose only hope lay with their potential regeneration at the hands of a benevolent Western power.

Although Browne accepted *Hajji Baba* as a powerful portrait, he recognized the novel's inherent limitations. 'Thoroughly true to nature as Hajji Baba is', the Cambridge don observed, 'he is but one type … of his many-sided countrymen.'[58] While Browne appreciated Morier's deft caricatures, he pronounced them unrepresentative of the diverse people encountered in his own travels. As he warned early on in his introduction,

> Let not the reader then, be so far carried away by the charm of Morier's pages as to lay down the book in the belief that every Persian is a Hajji Baba … Morier, it must be remembered, though he obtained an extraordinary insight into the life of all sorts and conditions of Persians, lived chiefly at the Court, and mixed most freely with the official classes. Not amongst these, as a rule, would one seek for the noblest types of national character.[59]

Unfortunately, the future viceroy never learned the lesson offered by Browne. Reliant on interpreters and convinced that only a thin stratum of elites was consequential, Curzon could do no more than celebrate *Hajji Baba*. This blindness prevented a more nuanced understanding of Iran and allowed Curzon to leave unexamined his conviction that East and West could never be reconciled.[60] Browne, in contrast, was rightly sceptical of such dichotomies.[61] Preoccupied with Persia's decay and lost grandeur, Curzon viewed its inhabitants as 'played out' and failed to detect the early stirrings of a nascent nationalism. He thus dismissed the grassroots opposition to the Tobacco Régie concession of 1890 – which gave a British company the exclusive right to sell tobacco within Iran and a monopoly over its export – as merely the death throes of Eastern fanaticism, when in actual fact the event represented the birth of modern nationalist sentiment in Iran and the 'precursor of the Constitutional Revolution [of 1905–9]'.[62]

[57] Ibid., II, p. 628.

[58] Morier, *Hajji Baba* (Methuen), pp. xi–xii.

[59] Ibid., p. xii.

[60] As he remarked in one passage from *Persia and the Persian question*, 'knowing well, as I do, that the ways of the East and West are wide asunder as the poles'. Curzon, *Persia*, I, pp. 464–5.

[61] While Browne's conviction that the division separating East from West was highly exaggerated can be glimpsed in numerous passages in *A year amongst the Persians*, it was perhaps best articulated in an unpublished essay entitled 'The outlook of Asia'. In the paper Browne declared: 'Indeed the favourite antithesis between East and West seems to me to have been very much overdone, and almost as much might be advanced in favour of a similar antithesis between North and South.' E. G. Browne, 'The outlook of Asia' (unpublished essay, 1911), Cambridge, Cambridge University Library (CUL), Browne Pembroke papers, box 5.

[62] Curzon, *Persia*, II, p. 629. G. N. Curzon, 'Persian politics', *Vanity Fair*, 4 July 1891. As Nikki Keddie further elaborated, 'The protest against the tobacco concession was the first successful mass movement in modern Iranian history, and led to a defeat of the government and triumph of the

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III

In the years after their introductions to *Hajji Baba*, the Pembroke fellow and the up-and-coming statesman had little reason to be in touch. An examination of their correspondence suggests contact was only renewed in late 1911. While both men had risen to prominence as Persian experts, they each became wholly absorbed in their own work and neither seems to have possessed any incentive to correspond. Foremost in Curzon's mind during this period, including his 1899–1905 term as viceroy of India, was his ambition to ensure Persia's status as an effective 'buffer state' between the Tsarist colossus and the glacis of the Indian empire. As David Dilks has shown in *Curzon in India* (1969), the viceroy's overall aim was a more activist British policy toward Persia.[63] His efforts ultimately bore fruit. In 1902 the British foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne (1845–1927), explicitly warned Russia not to encroach any further on southern Persia. The following year, Lansdowne adopted Curzon's recommendation and proclaimed in no uncertain terms that Britain would resist the establishment of a foreign naval base on the Persian Gulf. Curzon's Persian policy as viceroy, however, can hardly be viewed as wholly successful. During his Persian Gulf tour in the fall of 1903, as a result of a diplomatic controversy known as the 'Bushehr Incident', he was prevented from setting foot for a second time on Iranian soil. Although Dilks held the Persians entirely responsible for the affair, such a conclusion fails adequately to acknowledge Curzon's role.[64] Indeed, the viceroy's personal prejudices – notably his deep conviction as to the inherent duplicity and perfidy of the Persian people – played a not insignificant part in contributing to this rupture in Anglo-Iranian relations.[65]

In the realm of academe, Browne was busy in the same years. In 1902 he published the first of his four volume, *A literary history of Persia*. This lifelong project arguably represents his greatest contribution to Iranian studies. In the same year and, coincidentally, at the same age Curzon was elevated to viceroy, Browne was elected Sir Thomas Adams's professor of Arabic at Cambridge. Although his

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protesters in their demand for a total cancellation of the concession. This success undoubtedly gave courage to the conscious opponents of the government and of foreign encroachments, and led many to see for the first time that it was possible to defeat the government, even on a matter involving European interests. The movement involved the first successful alliance between the *ulama*, modernizing reformers, and the discontented population of Iran, particularly the merchants – an alliance which was to reappear in later protests and to come to fruition in the Constitutional Revolution.' N. R. Keddie, *Religion and rebellion in Iran: the tobacco protest of 1891–1892* (London, 1966) p. xix. For further corroboration that the protest represented a major turning point in Iranian history see R. W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1964), pp. 12–15.

[63] See chs. 5 and 6 in volume I, and ch. 2 in volume II. D. Dilks, *Curzon in India* (2 vols., London, 1969).

[64] Dilks's unconvincing explanation for the controversy was simply that the 'Persian passion for etiquette obtruded itself'. Dilks, *Curzon in India*, p. 65.

[65] For a detailed analysis of Curzon's role in contributing to the 'Bushehr Incident', await ch. 3 in C. N. B. Ross, 'Lord Curzon, Persia, and geopolitics, 1888–1921' (anticipated Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 2009).

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academic interests remained predominantly confined to the mystical and spiritual life of modern Iran, as Persia's fate seemed more and more to hang in the balance, he devoted increasing attention to Iranian current affairs and British foreign policy in the major newspapers and periodicals of the day.

After 1905 Curzon's and Browne's lives resumed a somewhat parallel trajectory. After his resignation as viceroy, the former took on extra-governmental commitments, such as the chancellorship of Oxford University, and spoke occasionally in the House of Lords. One of his speeches there ultimately contributed to renewing contact with Browne who, in 1907, had become firmly aligned with the radical wing of the Liberal party. The relationship very much depended on the situation on the ground in Persia. In 1906 revolution came to Tehran. Although its 'long-term causes were rooted in the nineteenth century; its short-term ones were triggered in 1904–05 by an economic crisis brought about by government bankruptcy and spiraling inflation'.[66] Angered as much by the soaring cost of bread as by the Qajar dynasty's profligacy and subservience to foreign powers, a diverse coalition of *ulama*, *bazaaris*, and Western-influenced intellectuals (some of whom were aristocrats) staged two large-scale protests at Qom and Tehran. The second, and more significant, centred on the British legation, where protesters availed themselves of the Persian custom of *bast* or sanctuary. Possessing tacit British support, the revolutionaries occupied the chancery compound until finally the ailing sovereign, Mozaffar al Din Shah Qajar (1853–1907), backed down and signed a royal proclamation acceding to the demand for a written constitution drafted by an elected *Majles* or parliament. The shah, however, died shortly thereafter and was succeeded by his reactionary son, Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (1872–1924). The latter, determined to retrieve his autocratic powers from the newly-established *Majles*, obtained Russian support and launched a military coup in June 1908. This in turn triggered a civil war lasting until the following June when royalist forces were finally defeated and the shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his son. Ultimately, the victory of the constitutionalist party was only assured once it received the backing of the Bakhtiaris, whose 12,000 armed tribesmen constituted the largest contingent on the parliamentary side.[67] As Iran was engulfed in revolution, however, pivotal events were taking place outside the country's borders.

On 31 August 1907, representatives of His Majesty's Government and those of the tsar signed the Anglo-Russian Convention in St Petersburg. The agreement – which contained provisions relating to Afghanistan, Tibet, and Persia – in theory guaranteed the integrity of the shah's dominions but in fact it divided Iran into Russian and British spheres of influence. Not surprisingly such a decision – by a Liberal government no less – was anathema to Browne. With high

[66] Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran*, p. 41.

[67] Ibid., p. 52. For recent treatments of Iran's constitutional revolution see V. Martin, *Islam and modernism: the Iranian revolution of 1906* (London, 1989); M. Bayat, *Iran's first revolution: Shi'ism and the constitutional revolution of 1905–1909* (Oxford, 1991).

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hopes for Persia's democratic nationalists, he was sickened by what he saw as the Machiavellian diplomacy pursued by Sir Edward Grey (1862–1933). And, as it happened, he found an ally in Curzon. Unlike the Cambridge professor, however, the new chancellor of Oxford had no qualms in principle – indeed, his former mentor, Lord Salisbury, had been a strong advocate of reaching a similar accord with Russia a decade earlier. What compelled Curzon to offer the convention its sharpest and most authoritative criticism, on the floor of the House of Lords in January 1908, was his assessment that the British sphere was far too small in comparison with the Russian. That the central and southern cities of Esfahan, Yazd, Shiraz, Kermanshah, Mohammareh, Ahwaz, and Bushehr fell outside the British zone, which was confined to a relatively insignificant corner of the southeast, seemed to him unthinkable.[68]

While Curzon railed against the Anglo-Russian treaty in the House of Lords, Browne stepped up efforts to garner support from the wider British public. In a series of articles in the popular press, he denounced Grey's *Realpolitik* policy as a betrayal of a people beginning the road to constitutional government. While the Foreign Office did its best not to dignify Browne's campaign in public – preferring to rely on the pro-government press, especially *The Times*, to reject the Cambridge don's pronouncements – he was nevertheless widely considered one of the country's foremost authorities on the situation 'on the ground' in Iran.[69] Indeed, that he was cited as an expert opinion in the House of Commons and granted an interview with Grey represented a tacit acknowledgment on the part of the foreign policy establishment of his superior knowledge of Persian affairs.[70]

While diplomats such as Sir Arthur Nicolson (1849–1928) could deride him as a 'fanatic', Foreign Office staff were all too aware of his privileged access to an unrivalled supply of 'men on the spot'.[71] Browne's extensive network of contacts in Iran, which one historian labelled 'virtually … his own intelligence service', was comprised not only of a variety of Persian correspondents but also numerous ex-pupils who had become members of Britain's diplomatic and consular service and further independent sources.[72] While many of his articles in the popular press were devoted to undermining the version of Persian affairs promulgated by the Foreign Office and its acolytes, he also remained determined

[68] Curzon further observed, quite prophetically, 'I have been reluctantly driven to the conclusion that, whatever may be the ultimate effects produced, we have thrown away to a large extent the efforts of our diplomacy and of our trade for more than a century; and I do not feel at all sure that this treaty, in its Persian aspect, will conduce either to the security of India, to the independence of Persia, or to the peace of Asia.' House of Lords, *Parliamentary Debates*, 183 (1908), col. 1014, 29 Jan. 1908.

[69] Browne fought an ongoing battle with David Fraser, the *Times* correspondent in Persia who took every opportunity to denigrate the constitutional movement. See, for instance, D. Fraser, *Persia and Turkey in revolt* (London, 1910), passim.

[70] McLean, 'A professor extraordinary', pp. 400, 406.

[71] D. McLean, 'English radicals, Russia, and the fate of Persia, 1907–1913', *English Historical Review*, 93 (Apr. 1978), p. 347.

[72] Ibid., p. 340; McLean, 'A professor extraordinary', pp. 401–6; M. Bonakdarian, 'Selected correspondence of E. G. Browne', in Browne, *The Persian revolution*, ed. Amanat, pp. xix–lxiv.

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to improve the general perception of the Persian character, again highlighting *Hajji Baba* as a caricature not an accurate portrayal. In numerous articles leading up to the publication of his monograph, *The Persian revolution* (1910), Browne highlighted the 'deeper springs of self devotion, enthusiasm and courage, which from time to time break forth in deeds of almost incomparable heroism'.[73] Given his alliance with Curzon in 1911, it is ironic that Browne's criticism of other Persian experts could easily have included the former viceroy. In a 1908 article, for instance, he excoriated those who had 'seen much of the outside of Asia without having learned in the least degree to understand or sympathise with its people'.[74]

By 1911, Browne and Curzon resumed their correspondence. They discussed their November meeting at the inaugural dinner of the Persia Society at London's Savoy Hotel. An ostensibly apolitical organization established to promote sympathy between the British and Iranian people, the Persia Society had been founded the previous spring by Lord Lamington (1860–1940) in conjunction with various members of the Persia Committee. The latter organization, in effect a foreign policy pressure group consisting of both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary members, had been established by Browne and the Liberal MP, H. F. B. Lynch (1862–1913), in late 1908.[75] The November gathering took place when the state of affairs in Persia looked grim indeed. Having been unsuccessful in attempts to reinstall the ex-shah over the summer, the Russians were greatly increasing their pressure on both the Persian *Majles* and its American financial adviser, William Morgan Shuster (1877–1960), who had been brought in to reform the country's flagging finances.[76] A diverse group sympathetic to Persia, including a large number of radical and labour MPs highly critical of Grey's foreign policy, heard a series of speeches. After addresses from 'Persia hands', including Browne, Curzon appeared as the penultimate speaker. His speech proved memorable and moving. Beginning by conceding that his knowledge of Persia could not match that of many in the audience, he remarked,

But I believe there is no man who has been any length of time in Persia, whether as a traveller or explorer, as a diplomat, or Consul, or missionary, or merchant, upon whom the

[73] E. G. Browne, 'The Persian view of the Anglo-Russian agreement', *Albany Review*, 2 (Dec. 1907), p. 288. Later he went on to explain, 'It has been the modern fashion to ascribe [Iran's] decline to the worthlessness of the Persians, but this estimate of the national character is disputed by many of those who have known them well enough to appreciate not only their charms but their virtues.' E. G. Browne, 'The Persian crisis: rebirth or death?', *English Review*, 3 (Aug. 1909), p. 173.

[74] E. G. Browne, 'The Persian crisis: a reply', *Fortnightly Review*, 502, New Series (1 Oct. 1908), p. 687.

[75] For an extensive treatment of the Persia Committee's activities and membership see Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian constitutional revolution*; and M. Bonakdarian, 'The Persia committee and the constitutional revolution in Iran', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 18 (1991), pp. 186–207.

[76] In November and December 1911 Russia delivered two ultimata to the *Majles* deputies threatening the occupation of Tehran unless Morgan Shuster was dismissed. Ultimately, this pressure produced a coup d'état and the new government sent Shuster home. For a detailed account of these events see R. A. McDaniel, *The Shuster mission and the Persian constitutional revolution* (Minneapolis, MN, 1974).

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country does not leave an impression that time does but accentuate rather than remove; none who can shake himself free of the fascination which it has laid upon him; none who is not ready to the best of his ability anywhere and in any capacity to render service to the country which has placed such a grip upon his imagination.[77]

Making frequent reference to the society's mission of fostering understanding between the British and Iranian nations, the former viceroy quite uncharacteristically remarked, 'Sympathy means the effort and desire to understand another nation from that nation's point of view, to sympathise with its aspirations and ideals even when the horizon is most covered with clouds.'[78]

The central impulse of Curzon's speech, however, must have seemed particularly appropriate in the midst of Russian threats. Persian nationalism needed support.[79] Given his previous pronouncements on the Iranian national character, it is difficult to believe this final statement was made in all sincerity. Indeed, various portions of the speech suggest Curzon may well have been more concerned with winning over the audience than being true to his own convictions. Ultimately, he closed his address with words that, in the minds of observers like Browne, must have echoed down subsequent years.

There is one other respect in which Persia appeals to our sympathy. She is one of the few surviving Mahomedan countries which still retain an independent and autonomous existence. I should be sorry to see those countries stamped under foot. Though their faith is not our faith, yet with them we worship a single Deity, and we recognise that they pursue, and pursue with devotion, a noble and inspiring creed. The Mahomedan countries of the world are as much entitled as the Christian countries to the full benefits of the law of nations. With them equally with European people, treaties ought to be kept. And when they seek even through years of agony and pain to work out their own salvation let us at least give them every help that lies in our power … And among those Mussulman countries of which I am speaking, there is none to whom we ought to be more glad, if the opportunity presents itself to us, to be sympathetic and helpful than to Persia.[80]

Whatever Curzon's true sentiments, Browne was stirred.[81] Indeed, it took little more than a day or two for the professor to request a transcript of the speech. The former viceroy replied that it had been impromptu, but that if Browne sent a typist round he would gladly dictate it from memory.[82] The Pembroke don appears to have done just that and then rapidly had 700 copies of the address published and distributed. Although Curzon was disappointed at the limited coverage his speech received in the national newspapers, the accounts were

[77] Earl Curzon of Kedleston, 'Persian autonomy', 15 Nov. 1911, BL, Curzon papers, MSS. Eur. F111.249, p. 4.

[78] Ibid., p. 5. [79] Ibid. [80] Ibid., p. 10.

[81] Browne felt the speech significant enough to deserve mention in the 'Chronology of the Persian revolution' which he compiled for his *The press and poetry of modern Persia* (1914). See E. G. Browne, *The press and poetry of modern Persia* (Cambridge, 1914), p. 332.

[82] Curzon to Browne, 19 Nov. 1911, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 9, bundle 10.

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substantive enough to reach Iran within a fortnight.[83] Writing to Browne from Tehran on 6 December 1911, Morgan Shuster, one of the professor's numerous prominent contacts in the capital, declared,

> The press reports of Lord Curzon's speech at the Persia Society banquet have produced a most favourable impression among the Persians of all classes, as well as with those foreigners here who are interested in the welfare and success of Persia in her efforts at self-regeneration. I have no doubt that when the full report of the speech reaches here it will create even greater enthusiasm.[84]

Shortly thereafter Shuster received Browne's transcript of the entire speech and dispatched a further letter to Cambridge remarking how many people in Persia viewed Curzon as one of the few men possessing sufficient influence to be able to aid the country in its time of need.[85] Shuster's claim would seem to be corroborated by the Tehran correspondent for *The Morning Post*. Describing the collective mood in the capital in mid-December 1911, just after Curzon had delivered a further address on Persia in parliament and immediately prior to the successful Russian-backed coup d'état, the newspaper reporter observed,

> Earl Curzon's speech on Persia in the House of Lords has been published here, and thousands of copies have been circulated among the public and eagerly read. It is thought that the speech is largely responsible for the renewed determination of the Mejliss to resist the Russian demands … Persia, in fact, still hopes for British support.[86]

Although Browne and Curzon exchanged several letters in the month or so following the Persia Society dinner – the Cambridge professor also sending a copy of his *The Persian revolution of 1905–1909* (1910) – their correspondence gradually died away much as it had previously.[87] Ultimately, their relationship was very much tied to the fate of Persia, and the following months and years were not kind to the country. While Curzon denounced the government's Persian policy on further occasions in the Lords, perhaps realizing Grey's intransigence on the issue, his campaign against the Anglo-Russian entente eventually became less of a priority.[88] Moreover, despite Browne's continued efforts to keep the

[83] Browne further arranged to wire copies of the speech to several of his correspondents in Tehran. H. F. B. Lynch to Browne, 23 and 27 Nov. 1911, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 11.

[84] Shuster to Browne, 29 Nov. 1911, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 9, bundle 10.

[85] Shuster to Browne, 6 Dec. 1911, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 9, bundle 5.

[86] 'England and the Russo-Persian dispute', *Morning Post*, 15 Dec. 1911.

[87] Browne's most recent monograph, which related the vicissitudes of the Persian constitutional movement up to 1909, was largely based on eye-witness accounts relayed to him by his friends and former students resident in Iran. Curzon appears to have been grateful for Browne's kind gesture, expressing 'his utmost gratitude + pride at possessing [the book]'. Curzon to Browne, 7 Dec. 1911, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 9, bundle 10.

[88] In the last weeks of December 1911 Browne wrote to Curzon requesting he preside over a January gathering of the Persia Committee. Disappointed with the negative turn of events on the ground in Iran as well as Grey's seeming intractability, Curzon declined. Browne to Curzon, 20 Dec. 1911, BL, Curzon papers, MSS Eur. F112.250; Curzon to Browne, 25 Dec. 1911, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 9, bundle 10.

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British public aware of Iran's plight, those controlling British foreign policy remained unmoved.[89] Determined to maintain at all costs the delicate balance of power, Grey's response to repeated Russian interventions in the north was to reinforce the British position in the south east, greatly increasing the footprint of its consular presence as well as occupying strategic areas, at critical points, with Indian army cavalrymen. At various occasions before the outbreak of the First World War, tsarist troops occupied portions of the country within their sphere and ultimately contributed to the defeat of Persia's constitutionalist party.[90]

IV

For Browne, the outbreak of war in Europe seemed to signal the end of his days as a pundit and polemicist. Withdrawing from public view, he devoted himself primarily to treating the countless war wounded in Cambridge's hospitals.[91] Not until the late summer of 1917 did Browne's deep knowledge of Persian affairs bring him once again to the mind of British policymakers. Perhaps because they can hardly have forgotten what a thorn in their side he had represented in the run-up to the Great War, Foreign Office officials rightly recognized his potential utility in the dénouement of the conflict. Stressing the need for him to be 'as "objective" as possible' and 'suppress his indignation + other emotions … [leaving] the facts to speak for themselves', the historical section within the Foreign Office's intelligence division requested he author a confidential manual on Persia – what would be known as a 'Peace Handbook' – for use by British negotiators at the already anticipated post-war peace conference.[92] Although Browne initially seems to have possessed qualms about working for the very arm of the government responsible for the egregious convention of 1907, he ultimately took up the commission after he was reminded that the work represented 'an opportunity of placing [his] views before the most influential authorities'.[93] He eventually received official thanks for authoring the manual in the form of a personal letter from Lord Hardinge (1858–1944), a member of the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference who, somewhat ironically, earlier in his career, had been one of the key architects of the Anglo-Russian entente. The Foreign office, however, eventually decided not to publish Browne's handbook on Persia. Ultimately, The foreign policy establishment considered even his

[89] McLean, 'A professor extraordinary', p. 408.

[90] For an engaging study of these years see J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia, and the final struggle for Central Asia* (London, 2002).

[91] Gurney, 'E. G. Browne', p. 171; Arberry, *Oriental essays*, p. 186.

[92] Series of letters from G. W. Prothero (of the FO's historical section) to Browne, between Aug. 1917 and Oct. 1919, CUL, Browne Pembroke papers, box 2, packet 1.

[93] Prothero to Browne, 16 Aug. 1917, CUL, Browne Pembroke papers, box 2, packet 1.

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toned-down depiction of British diplomacy in the pre-war years too controversial for official sanction.[94]

After returning to government in May 1915, Curzon often brought his Persian expertise into various foreign policy discussions. Selected by David Lloyd George (1863–1945) to join the war cabinet in late 1916, the former proconsul subsequently chaired most meetings of both the Persia Committee and the Eastern Committee.[95] Significantly, at a meeting of the Persia Committee on 12 January 1918, Curzon related to his colleagues the contents of a letter forwarded to him by the viceroy of India, Lord Chelmsford (1868–1933). Penned by the latter's subordinate, Henry Dobbs (1871–1934), the communiqué suggested Britain abandon its present heavy-handed Persian policy and, instead, attempt to conciliate the country's increasingly vocal nationalist party. One of the most intriguing proposals contained in the letter was the recommendation that the Tehran Legation's highest-ranking posts should immediately be filled by individuals widely known for their Persian sympathies, notably E. G. Browne as oriental secretary and Lord Lamington as minister, in order to signal a more friendly approach.[96] While Curzon viewed the suggestion as sufficiently compelling to bring to the attention of other committee members, ultimately he appears to have been unwilling to champion its proposals. After a relatively short debate, its advice was dismissed.

Within a fortnight of Curzon having contemplated the appointment of Browne in Iran, the Cambridge don published 'Hope for Persia: the new British policy' in the *Manchester Guardian*. Buoyed by Curzon's recent statement in the Lords as to the future of British policy in Iran, which he described as 'by far the most encouraging official utterance on this subject which has been heard in this country for many a long year', Browne was hopeful. As he observed,

> Those who are acquainted with Lord Curzon's great book on Persia (published a quarter of a century ago, but still by far the best general work on the subject and a monument of careful research and wide erudition), and still more those who remember his eloquent and sympathetic address to the Persia Society on November 15, 1911, at the darkest hour of Persia's fortunes, will feel it to be particularly auspicious that it should fall to his lot to make this momentous and hope-inspiring declaration.[97]

[94] Hardinge to Browne, 3 June 1919, CUL, Browne Pembroke papers, box 2, packet 1; minute by Lancelot Oliphant, 13 Sept. 1920; Stephen Gaselee to Prothero, 15 Sept. 1920, Kew, the National Archives, FO 370/122, 1922/6/405.

[95] This governmental Persia Committee, comprised of representatives from the Foreign Office, War Office, and India Office, should, of course, not be confused with Browne's earlier lobby group of the same name. For an insightful account of the powerful influence the Persia and Eastern Committees exerted upon British foreign policy toward the Middle East, see J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt, and the Middle East: imperial policy in the aftermath of war, 1918–1922* (London, 1981).

[96] Lord Lamington, colonial governor and first president of the Persia Society, was well known in Britain and Iran for his highly sympathetic view of Persia and its inhabitants. 'Persia Committee minutes', 12 Jan. 1918, BL, Curzon papers, MSS. Eur. F.112.271, fos. 32–5.

[97] E. G. Browne, 'Hope for Persia: the new British policy', 26 Jan. 1918, *Manchester Guardian*.

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After offering a synopsis of Iran's woes since the Anglo-Russian Convention, he asserted that the field was 'clear for a new and more sympathetic British policy in Persia, a policy inspired by the sentiments so finely expressed by Lord Curzon in his speech of November 15, 1911'. Plainly hoping to influence Lloyd George's administration, Browne concluded with five policy recommendations:

1. The complete abolition of the 'zones of influence' created by the Anglo-Russian Agreement, which will always be fraught with painful memories if not with potential dangers.
2. Generous financial help on reasonable terms, unaccompanied by humiliating or alarming political or commercial conditions.
3. Abolition of the dual control of the British and Indian Governments in Persian affairs, which not only in recent years but for a century past has led to much confusion and inconsistency in our policy, which should be directed entirely from England.
4. In choosing such European advisers, financial or other, as it may require the Persian Government should be allowed the utmost possible freedom. The one foreign financial adviser who succeeded in entirely winning their confidence was Mr. Morgan Shuster, and it would be a graceful concession to Persian sentiment, an eloquent announcement of a new and wholly friendly policy, and a compliment to our American allies if he or one like him could be induced to take up the work of financial reform where he left it more than six years ago.
5. Last, and most important, every effort should be made to ensure that Great Britain shall be represented in Persia by diplomatic and consular officers who are known to be friendly and sympathetic to the Persian people – a people so singularly responsive to sympathy and appreciation. The names of several of these who have been moved to other countries will occur to all students of Persian affairs, and their return to Persia, where possible, would create an excellent impression, and would do more than anything else to convince the Persians that the new policy outlined by Lord Curzon is seriously meant and commands the warm approval of the great majority of the people of Great Britain.[98]

In subsequent weeks, the Pembroke fellow made some effort to promote what became known as 'Professor Browne's five points', notably outlining them in a lecture before the British Academy.[99] Whether disappointed by their reception or simply not up to the standard of his pre-war campaign, Browne shortly, however, departed the life of a public intellectual – this time for good – and retreated to academia.

Although no correspondence between Curzon and Browne appears to have survived for the years after 1911, the two men were in contact.[100] Another correspondent to Browne mentioned a now lost letter, probably in the autumn of

[98] Ibid.

[99] An account of Browne's lecture appeared in 'The future of Persia. Professor Browne's five points', 7 Feb. 1918, *Manchester Guardian*.

[100] An extensive search of both Curzon's and Browne's correspondence yielded nothing for these years.

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1918.[101] Evidence can also be gleaned from the events culminating in the ill-fated Anglo-Persian Agreement (1919). Although Curzon would not replace A. J. Balfour as foreign secretary until October 1919, the former proconsul was responsible for much of the day-to-day conduct of foreign policy during the months Balfour spent with Lloyd George at the Paris Peace Conference. Moreover, as far as Anglo-Persian relations were concerned, Curzon possessed free rein.[102] Such a situation, at least initially, must have filled Browne with guarded optimism.

Curzon also possessed optimism, but his derived from the extraordinarily favourable geopolitical conditions Britain confronted at the close of the Great War. The tsarist bogey having been swept away by the Russian Revolution and the Central Powers defeated, Britain's victory left it the key arbiter of the entire region. According to Harold Nicolson, Curzon's mind soared with the prospect of finally being able to fulfil his lifelong 'Indian obsession … [by] creating a chain of vassal states stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pamirs and protecting, not the Indian frontiers merely, but our communications with our further Empire'.[103] With just this in mind, between January and August 1919 Curzon laboured with Sir Percy Cox (1864–1937), the long-time British resident on the Persian Gulf and by this time acting minister at Tehran, and three pro-British Persian notables, Vosouq al Dowleh (1868–1951), Firouz Mirza Nosrat al Dowleh (1889–1938), and Akbar Mirza Sarem al Dowleh (c. 1885–1975), who came to be known as the 'Triumvirate'. Dismissing further recommendations from the government of India to recognize the country's growing nationalist sentiment, Curzon provided for a treaty which ostensibly would have transformed Persia into a veiled British protectorate.[104] While the agreement, like the Anglo-Russian Convention before it, offered lip-service to Iranian nationalism with a preamble guaranteeing the country's independence and integrity, its main clauses, most prominently its provision for the dispatch of numerous and exclusively British advisers to reorganize the Iranian government and military, were clearly intended to make the kingdom of the shah an appendage of the British empire in nearly all but name.[105] Suffice to say, the treaty received little enthusiasm on the ground in

[101] In December 1918 one Dr Marrable wrote to Browne, 'I shall be glad to hear of the result of your letter to Lord Curzon.' Marrable to Browne, 4 Dec. 1918, CUL, E. G. Browne papers, box 12, bundle 1.

[102] As William Olson remarked, Anglo-Iranian relations in 1919 were 'Curzon-Iranian relations'. W. J. Olson, 'The genesis of the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919', in E. Kedourie and S. G. Haim, eds., *Towards a modern Iran: studies in thought, politics, and society* (London, 1980), p. 188.

[103] Nicolson, *Curzon*, p. 121.

[104] For treatment of Curzon's repeated dismissal of the government of India's concerns see Olson, 'The genesis of the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919', pp. 190–4 and passim.

[105] For corroboration that the Anglo-Persian Agreement would have effectively made Iran a veiled protectorate within the British empire see, for instance, Abrahamian, *A history of modern Iran*, p. 60; Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, p. 23; Darwin, *Britain, Egypt, and the Middle East*, p. 185; and Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, p. 182. While Curzon repeatedly denied such an intent, a glimpse of his true sentiment can be gleaned from his revealing letter to Lord Milner in January 1920, 'You and I agree

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Iran.[106] After revelations that members of the Triumvirate had been awarded substantial bribes, the Persian parliament persistently refused to ratify the accord and, after languishing for more than eighteen months, it was formally abrogated in early 1921.

Although Curzon's heavy-handed Anglo-Persian Agreement contained provisions which all but made it destined for the 'dustbin of history', it is by no means a corollary that any such treaty concluded between Britain and Iran in the aftermath of the Great War was doomed to fail. Had Curzon chosen to heed Browne's advice, for instance, the foreign secretary could well have profited from the professor's deeper understanding of Iran and its inhabitants. Indeed, had Curzon provided for an accord which fulfilled even four of Browne's advocated five points, the Anglo-Persian treaty might potentially have escaped its eventual fate. That the former proconsul was entirely aware of the Cambridge don's proposals, but consciously chose to ignore them, can be in no doubt. Browne's *Guardian* article, 'Hope for Persia: the new British policy', appears prominently in a volume of contemporary news-cuttings which Curzon meticulously collated and annotated himself.[107] Erroneously convinced of his superior knowledge of all things Persian, Curzon contributed to the continued political instability in Iran which ultimately paved the way for the coup d'etat of February 1921 and the rise of Reza Khan (1878–1944) – later the shah, Reza Pahlavi. Significantly, the first official act of the government that took power in 1921 was the abrogation of Curzon's much-cherished Anglo-Persian Agreement.

V

That moment was, however, not to be glimpsed in the heady moments of late summer and early autumn 1919 when Curzon claimed finally to have answered the long-perplexing 'Persian Question'. Despite perhaps possessing misgivings, Browne turned up, likely at Curzon's urging, to the gala dinner celebrating the announcement of the Anglo-Persian Agreement on 18 September 1919 at London's Carlton Hotel.[108] As he listened to Curzon speak about the bright future of Anglo-Iranian relations, he may well have wistfully recalled the address,

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that these Eastern peoples with whom we have to ride pillion have different seats from Europeans and it does not seem to me to matter much whether we put them on the saddle in front of us, or whether they cling on behind and hold us round the waist. The great thing is that the firm seat in the saddle shall be ours.' Curzon to Lord Milner, 3 Jan. 1920, BL, Curzon papers, MSS. Eur. F112.213A.

[106] For coverage of the widespread Iranian opposition to the Anglo-Persian treaty see H. Katouzian, 'The campaign against the Anglo-Iranian Agreement of 1919', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25 (May 1998), pp. 5–46.

[107] 'Cuttings on Asia and India, vol. v', July 1912 – Mar. 1922, London, BL, Curzon papers, MSS. Eur. F112.593, fo. 46.

[108] E. G. Browne's name appears on the published guest list of the dinner at the Carlton Hotel. 'Lord Curzon on Persia', 19 Sept. 1919, *Times*.

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in similarly lavish surroundings, nearly eight years earlier. Confident at least that, though flawed, Curzon's knowledge of Persia far surpassed any of his predecessors as foreign secretary, Browne could only hope that despite its major defects the Anglo-Persian Agreement would help bring Iran its just measure of stability and prosperity. It was not to be. By the spring of the following year, his initial optimism had vanished. Writing to his friend, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, in order to decline an invitation to join a new Egyptian Committee, Browne wrote,

> I am absolutely sick of politics + intend to devote my energies in the future to scholarship, which I find much more satisfying … And if anything would convince me to alter my decision … it would be Persia rather than Egypt. One oppressed nation is about as much as any individual can take on, and the world is now full of oppressed nations … I hate to refuse any request of yours, but in this case I have decided, after full consideration, not to involve myself in any way in political action for which the result cannot be foreseen.[109]

As this assessment has suggested, Lord Curzon and E. G. Browne shared a good deal as they emerged as British experts on Persia. Both were a product of England's great public schools and ancient universities and each proved Disraeli's maxim that the East was a career.[110] Had Curzon not been born into an aristocratic family tracing its descent back to one of William the Conqueror's lieutenants, he might well have become an Oxbridge don like Browne.[111] Entirely aware of his privileged access to power, the heir to Kedleston dreamed instead of directing an empire. Though family wealth afforded Browne options far beyond most of his contemporaries, his reveries were more modest than those of his former Etonian classmate. Moreover, the social distance he must have experienced with Curzon and his ilk during schooldays and university may perhaps have helped reinforce earlier instincts that left him more sympathetic to the victims of empire.

While both men failed to break free from much of the sociobiological thinking of the age, only Browne managed to develop a nuanced understanding of Persia. Perhaps not surprisingly, while both marvelled at the remains of Persepolis, only Curzon added his initials to the site's ancient columns.[112] Browne, on the other hand, inspired with a deep sense of awe and reverence for the *Takht-e Jamshid*, as Iranians call the Achaemenid ruins, refrained, deeming such behaviour profane.[113] Given their highly contrasting views of Persia and its people, it seems only natural that while Curzon remains reviled by many contemporary Iranians,

[109] Browne to Blunt, 23 Mar. 1920, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Blunt papers, MS 1020–1977.

[110] B. Disraeli, *Tancred* (London, 1870).

[111] As A. C. Benson (1862–1925), the master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, acidly observed in his diary after meeting Curzon in late 1913, 'Curzon's a failure, on the whole … If he hadn't had birth + rank, he wd. now have been an Oxford Professor, I think – not much liked, but rather feared. That's what he really is.' 'A. C. Benson diary', 4 Oct.–21 Nov. 1913, Cambridge, Old Library, Magdalene College, Benson papers, vol. 141, fos. 40–1.

[112] Curzon, *Persia*, II, pp. 356–7.

[113] Browne, *A year amongst the Persians*, p. 277.

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Browne's memory still commands significant respect. Indeed, the continued existence of Edward Browne Street in downtown Tehran, through the many low points in Anglo-Iranian relations these past eight decades since his death, serves as a testament to the degree of admiration for the late professor.

What lessons can be gleaned from the lives of these two remarkable men? In an era when the 'cult of the expert' is even more ubiquitous, this case study might offer some instruction. First, it points to the need to scrutinize carefully regional experts contributing to foreign policy debates; real credentials are not easy to acquire. As Curzon's flawed understanding of Iran makes clear, even exhaustive research and privileged access cannot escape the limits of a world view in which the interests of one nation trump all else. Secondly, the lives and careers here suggest that regional experts could do worse than begin with sympathy for their subjects.[114] Though admittedly at times idealistic, Browne's compassion and empathy, his interest in the grassroots, and his willingness to learn languages, allowed him to gauge the popular *Zeitgeist* in a manner which eluded Curzon.

[114] Browne's skill as a Persian expert thus seems linked to his humanism and empathy. As R. A. Nicholson observed, 'He was the most human of men, and if he ranks among the greatest Orientalists it is because he was also, I suppose, the greatest humanist who has ever devoted himself to studying the life, thought, and literature of the East.' Nicholson as qu. in Arberry, *Oriental essays*, p. 192.

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