A YEAR AMONGST THE PERSIANS
IMPRESSIONS
AS TO THE LIFE, CHARACTER, & THOUGHT OF THE PEOPLE OF PERSIA
Received during Twelve Months' Residence in that Country in the Years 1887–1888
by
EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

With a Memoir by SIR E. DENISON ROSS
and a Foreword by SIR ELLIS H. MINNS

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MAP OF PERSIA at end
FOREWORD

by

SIR ELLIS H. MINNS, LITT.D., F.B.A.

HEREWITH E. G. Browne’s *Year Amongst the Persians* attains to a third edition, and duly takes its place among the classics of life and travel in foreign parts, a place beside Morier’s *Hajji Baba* and Doughty’s *Arabia Deserta*, which Browne himself so often quoted. The first issue in 1893 came from Messrs. Black at a time when the Cambridge Press, perhaps discouraged by its ill success with Doughty, was not inclined for that sort of book. In 1926 it was the turn of Cambridge, full of piety towards the author of the *Literary History*, so lately lost. Now Cambridge has more work than it can tackle, and again most happily it is Messrs. Black’s turn; but Cambridge has given every assistance, authorized the photographic reproduction of the text, and supplied its blocks for the portrait, the map and the binding, so the book will appear as comely as ever. We have also been granted the use of the memoir by Sir Denison Ross, whose career as a younger contemporary was always intertwined with Browne’s, so that no one so well as he could evaluate his work.

Browne’s year was more than sixty years ago: the surface of Persian life has changed completely what with a new dynasty, wars, railways and oil, but by all accounts the spirit is much the same, and it is the spirit that the book mirrors; the incidents of travel we can find anywhere, but it needed this particular traveller to draw out and portray for us the inner mind of the Persian, not only of the westernized class, or of the prosperous and educated, but of the persecuted Bābis, at first so difficult of access.

This was the personality upon which centred the wonderful society in Pembroke College during the nineties described by Denison Ross. Of this I, not a pupil but through and through influenced by Browne, am almost the last survivor left here. Hence my right to speak of him, for I used to listen to his talk night after night as he would quote endless Arabic and Persian verse with its magnificent rhythms, or in other mood would support the cause of all who claimed to be oppressed and deprived of their rights.

So I understand how Browne found a way to a people’s heart and kept his place there. Even now to speak of Browne to a Persian, to say that I really knew him, is to meet an instant response of wonder and delight. In a Persian’s memory he is the great champion of a nation which has not had many champions in the struggle for freedom.

PIMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
CHRISTMAS 1949

EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

A MEMOIR

by

SIR E. DENISON ROSS

THAT one of the world’s most fascinating and instructive books of travel should have been allowed to remain out of print for many years is past comprehension. Yet such has been the fate of Edward Browne’s *Year Amongst the Persians*, which, published in 1893, somehow failed to attract the attention it deserved. Having by the present re-issue obtained, as it were, a new lease of life, it will, we may hope; at last take its rightful place among the great Classics of Travel. It is, however, more than a mere record of travel, and goes far beyond the ordinary limits of such works, for apart from its lively and entrancing descriptions of Persia and its people, it is an infallible guide to modern Persian literature and thought, and as such should always find its place on the student’s shelf beside the author’s monumental *Literary History of Persia*.

The pleasant, if difficult, task has been imposed on me, as one who for forty years enjoyed the intimate friendship of the author, to prefix to this new issue a short biographical memoir. The life of Edward Granville Browne, outside his year in Persia, was singularly devoid of adventure, and in the events of that year his biographer can add nothing to what he has himself related so vividly in the present volume. My sole aim, therefore, is to give a picture of the manner of man he was; to convey to the reader his personality, his charm, his gifts, his prejudices and his enthusiasms without attempting a chronological survey of his life. Dates and details in no way help us to understand the mind of a scholar, in his own day the greatest exponent of Persian life and letters.
Edward Granville Browne was born at Uley, near Dursley in Gloucestershire, on 7th February 1862. His father, Sir Benjamin C. Browne, for many years the head of R. and W. Hawthorn, Leslie and Co., engineers and shipbuilders of Newcastle-on-Tyne, came originally from Gloucestershire, and his mother was a Northumbrian. He was sent to a preparatory school, to Glenalmond and to Eton, but nowhere did his teachers discover how to make him happy, nor, apparently, how happy he might have made them. Like many another man of latent gifts, he underwent the discipline of purely wasted years undiscovering and undiscovered; but it is perhaps inevitable under any system of public schooling that the most impressionable period of a boy’s life must be spent in trying to be exactly like every other boy; and woe betide the one who cannot conform! Of his happy college days, and his simultaneous study of Medicine and Oriental Languages he tells us all we need to know in the Introduction to the present volume. The turning-point in E. G. B.’s career was the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. All through his life his sympathies were unfailingly drawn towards any nation that was small and oppressed, and when he saw Turkey being crushed by the great Russian Tsar, the picture of the gallant struggle against defeat made by the losing side and the cant of the anti-Turkish party in England made him feel he “would have died to save Turkey.” It is important to remember that this deep feeling for the Turks was, in this lad of sixteen, totally unconnected with any prejudices such as would naturally have stirred in him after he had begun to study the languages and history of Islamic peoples. It was the misfortunes of a Muhammadan power that brought him to the threshold of the treasure-house of Oriental lore, of which nature had made him one of the rightful inheritors. If he was to serve Turkey in any capacity, Turkish must be studied, and, all unknown to himself, with the first perusal of Barker’s _Turkish Grammar_, his career as an Orientalist had begun. The youth to whom Latin and Greek

as taught in our schools had made no appeal whatever, whose dormant genius no master had ever suspected, suddenly found his own soul, and although fortune decreed that he should devote some of his best years to the study of medicine, all his spare moments were nonetheless given to acquiring Islamic languages. In 1882 he took the Natural Sciences Tripos, and in 1884 the Indian Languages Tripos.

In 1882 he had spent the Long Vacation in Constantinople, but Persia and not Turkey was destined to be the lodestar of his life, and this was no doubt due to the superior attractions of Persian literature, especially in the field of Sufi mysticism, which, while he was studying medicine, took a very firm hold of his imagination; and it now became his chief ambition to visit the country that had given birth to Ḥāfir and to tread “the pure Earth of Shirāz.” When at last in 1889, thanks to his Pembroke Fellowship, he was able to undertake this journey, and entered the country of his dreams, he encountered in the Bābī movement a phase of Persian life which was to occupy his devoted attention for many years to come. It was no doubt the long and often weary, but always instructive, hours he had spent with Mīrzā Muḥammad Bāḵīr in Limhouse, that had fitted him to grasp from the first the hair-splitting heterodoxies of this sect, which had produced so many brave martyrs, and whose sufferings made such a ready appeal to his sympathetic mind. His understanding of spoken Persian when he first came among the people was already of a standard rarely attained by Europeans after years of residence, for he was at once able to discuss metaphysics, and to grasp the full meaning of quoted verses which were new to him. Anyone who has merely read Persian poetry in texts knows that this last was no simple achievement; for although modern Persian is in many respects an easy language, especially in regard to its incidence and the regularity of its verbal forms, it happens to be in the matter of vocabulary as difficult as any other language, seeing that it has a claim on any Arabic word whatsoever,
and the very simplicity of its grammatical terminations and Indo-Germanic construction make it elusive as a poetical medium. E. G. B.'s memory was astonishing, and he not only understood what was said to him, but usually remembered conversations verbatim. As a feat of memory alone A Year Amongst the Persians always struck me as unique.

It is a strange fact that a gift for languages in almost all cases is a gift for a particular group or type of languages, and it is quite conceivable that if E. G. B. had not been accidentally attracted to the languages of Islâm, he would never have taken up linguistic studies at all. I do not think other tongues ever came easily to him, for although he readily learnt to read, speak and write Arabic, Persian and Turkish, he never acquired the same fluency in other languages, and obviously found French and German far less easy to speak than those infinitely more difficult idioms; but he confesses that he never derived much pleasure from Hindustâni, which was one of the subjects in his Tripos, although it is an Islâmic language. Certain people are only able to pick up quickly certain languages, but it is further a fact that they have particular gifts in respect of those languages. E. G. B. had no ear for music, and he did not pronounce imitatively even those languages he knew best. But he spoke them with the same fluency that characterised his English talk. He was not really interested in languages as such; neither Semitic nor Iranian philology made any appeal to him, although at one period he developed a keen interest in the earliest examples of modern Persian and its dialects, as witness his articles in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1894, 1895 and 1897.

INTELLECTUAL LIFE

I think that the intellectual life of this scholar may best be depicted by an enumeration of the special phases of enthusiasm through which he passed. They almost admit of chronological arrangement, though they do not coincide exactly with the list of his various writings as they appeared. Relying on personal memories and reminiscences I should set them out as follows:

1. The Islâmic languages, with special regard for Persian poetry, 1879.
2. Persian Şûfîsm, especially the Masnavi of Jalâlu’d-Dîn Rûmî, 1880–1887.
3. The Bábis, his interest being first aroused by reading Count Gobineau’s Religions et Philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale, a work for which he had the profoundest admiration, and secondly by meeting and receiving the confidence of many Bábís in Persia (see pp. 223 sqq.), which led him to devote precious years to the study of a subject which was not perhaps wholly worthy of so much strenuous labour, especially in view of the later development of Behá’ism and the resultant obscuring of the Báb, 1890.
4. The history of Persian literature, in which subject he laid the foundation of his later work by a careful study of the Biographical Anthologies known as tadbîkâras, 1895.
5. When he first set about his great work on the Literary History of Persia he became much engrossed by the story of the deciphering of the cuneiform Persian and of Pahlaví and by the great controversy between Sir William Jones and Anquetil du Perron, 1900.
6. With the second volume he became especially interested in the Shâhnama of Firdawsi, and at this time began to appreciate fully the great pioneer work of Theodor Nöldeke.
7. Volume III brought him for the first time into close touch with the history of the Mongols, and led him to suggest to the Gibb Trustees the publication of the two greatest works dealing with this subject, namely the Jâhân-gushâ of Juwaynî and the Jami’u’r-Tavarîkh of Rashidu’d-Dîn. In this connection may be mentioned the deep interest he took, as early as 1880, in the Ismâ’îlîs of Persia and in the literature of the Hurûfís.
8. The next phase was the deep concern he showed in the Persian revolution and the controversial and tendentious
literature to which it gave birth, 1909–1914. From 1905, when the revolutionary movement began in Persia, E. G. B. devoted much of his time to the cause of Persia. He was instrumental in forming the Persia Committee, composed of prominent members of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament, which from 1908 to 1912 exercised considerable influence on public opinion both in England and in Europe. In 1909 he published a *Short Account of Recent Events in Persia*, and in 1910 a *History of the Persian Revolution 1905–1909*, and in 1914, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, all with the object of explaining to the West that a new spirit of sound nationalism had been born in the country.

(9) With his preparations for the fourth volume he became entirely engrossed in the rise of the Safavids, especially in the founder of the dynasty and in the revival of Shi‘ism, 1918–20.

(10) Arabic Medicine. In 1919 he was invited to deliver a course of four FitzPatrick lectures at the College of Physicians on Arabic Medicine, which appeared in book form in 1921. This was the first occasion he had of utilising his combined knowledge of Arabic and of Medicine on an extended scale, although his medical studies had already stood him in good stead in other of his writings, notably in connection with his translation of the *Chahar Maqala*, which has a chapter devoted to Doctors.

(11) Towards the end of his life, when he had seen the fourth volume through the press (1924), he devoted most of his time to making a catalogue of the many valuable manuscripts he had collected, especially in the last decade, by the purchase of the collections of General Houtum-Schindler and of Hájí ‘Abdul-Majid Belsháh.

Apart from his purely literary activities he devoted much time to the promotion of Oriental studies in the University, and was mainly responsible for the creation of a School of Living Oriental Languages in Cambridge in connection with the Sudán Political Service and the Consular Department of the Foreign Office. Mention must also be made of his practical efforts in the production of reliable and inexpensive editions of Arabic and Persian texts, towards which he contributed out of his own resources.

In between these enthusiasms which occupied his hours of quiet work—and it was always a marvel how those hours were extracted from the twenty-four, seeing that he never grudged giving his best to all who came to his rooms, or later on to his house—he devoted much time to the management of the affairs of the E. J. W. Gibb Trust. Among the earliest friends with whom he was brought into contact by his Turkish studies, was E. J. W. Gibb, who devoted the whole of his life to the study of Ottoman poetry. When in 1901 Gibb died, only one volume of his monumental *History of Ottoman Poetry* had appeared, although the rest of the work was nearly complete. As a labour of love E. G. B. took upon himself the most onerous task of seeing the whole work through the press, and completing the unfinished portions; and this involved an immense amount of patient research, seeing that every quotation had to be verified, and that the Turkish originals of the many poems translated in the body of this work had to be traced to their sources, often in rare manuscripts, and copied for the printer. It would be hard to overestimate the selfless devotion to which this undertaking bore witness. But his tribute of esteem to the great Turkish scholar did not end here. In order to perpetuate the memory of E. J. W. Gibb, Mrs Jane Gibb, his mother, left a sum of money yielding a considerable yearly interest to be controlled by a body of trustees and to be employed in the publication of texts and translations of Turkish, Persian and Arabic books, and it fell to the lot of E. G. B. to carry into effect this laudable bequest. In 1934 he established, with five other scholars and the widow of the Turkish scholar, the “E. J. W. Gibb Memorial,” which has since that time published more than forty volumes of texts and translations; and it was E. G. B. who, up to the time of his death, was the moving spirit of the Trust, which has conferred on scholars
and students the inestimable boon of rendering accessible important and rare works, and this at a reasonable cost.

He placed the University of Cambridge under deep obligation by his long and wearisome work on the Muhammadan manuscripts both in the University and in the libraries of various colleges. Only those who have been engaged on work of this kind can appreciate the dullness of examining, paging, and describing large numbers of manuscripts, of which the majority are apt to be well-known works, which, while profiting nothing to the cataloguer, need the same care as the rarer works which turn up as the occasional reward for his labours.

POLITICAL LIFE

No portrait of E. G. B. would be either faithful or complete which did not emphasise his deep interest in current politics. It was in itself a rare thing for a scholar so pre-eminent and productive in his own special line to take so keen and active an interest in the politics of the day; but never did the divine fire of his eloquence shine forth with greater brilliancy than when he was exposing what to him appeared a political injustice or abuse. He was as fearless in expressing his views as he was independent in forming them, and if in many cases—nay, in most—his opinions were not in accord with those of the average Englishman, they have often been justified by subsequent history, and it would be unfair if some allusion to them did not find a place in the present Memoir. We have already seen how his sympathy was aroused for the Turks; other questions which stirred him deeply were: Russia, Home Rule, the encouragement of the Welsh language, and the independence of the Boers. He was always a severe critic of our Persian policy, which he felt was guided by a fear of Russia, and the agreement England made with the latter power in 1907 incensed him beyond measure, and led him to protest with all his strength, but in vain. That such a man should not be altogether a persona grata to the Foreign Office is not per-

haps to be wondered at; but this circumstance is much to be deplored seeing that there was no one in England who could have given the authorities better information regarding the state of Persia. In August 1914 he was opposed to the entry of England into the Great War, and was one of the signatories of the manifesto drawn up by members of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. His views on the subject underwent an immediate change with the invasion of Belgium by the Germans, and although the war filled him with such horror that he could hardly bring himself to open a newspaper, no one entered more thoroughly than he into the work of the local war organisations in Cambridge. Finally, he was one of the first Englishmen to get into touch with German scholars as soon as peace was declared, being prepared to wipe out all bad memories in the name of Science. When, in 1921, the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society was making arrangements for the celebration of its Centenary, E. G. B. was one of the minority who voted in favour of inviting the Germans to participate in the proceedings; and when the proposal was vetoed, he came very near to resigning from the Society.

He was perfectly fearless in all he wrote and all he said, and his views, if idealistic and often premature, were always based on love of justice. No consideration of expediency could move him from his convictions; for him there was no such thing as compromise, and this gentle scholar, who was so apt to tolerate all shortcomings in his fellow-men, was in politics intransigent and unforgiving—and usually on the losing side.

SOCIAL LIFE

E. G. B.'s social life falls into two distinct epochs: the life of the Pembroke Don, and the life of the married man at Firwood. No one who was ever privileged to enjoy them can forget those wonderful evenings and nights spent in his College rooms, which had once been occupied by the younger Pitt. Apart from the
marvellous entertainment which every kind of visitor enjoyed in these rooms, the high table at Pembroke provided in those years, especially from 1890 to 1900, some of the best talk and company to be found in Cambridge. Some names occur to one, as those of Neil, Heriz Smith, and Moriarty, to mention only those who are no longer among the living. It would be hard to imagine a more delightful evening than one which began in the Combination Room and ended at any o’clock in E. G. B.’s rooms. E. G. B.’s hospitality had one characteristic which must have struck all those who had the privilege of enjoying it, namely, that it made no distinction of persons. Just as all were welcome, so were all worth entertaining. In E. G. B.’s rooms, as afterwards in Firwood, no one was ever regarded as a sar-i-khar, or donkey’s head (see this volume, p. 300). He would always give of his best and most brilliant, no matter who composed his audience; the colleague, the professor, the graduate and the freshman were all regaled with the same feast of talk; for E. G. B. was rather a talker than a conversationalist, and no one who listened to him could possibly have wished it otherwise. His fund of anecdote was inexhaustible, and yet one cannot remember ever having heard him merely help a current story on its rounds. His tales were drawn either from Oriental literature or from the adventures of himself or his friends, to which he had the gift of lending a peculiar charm which made even one’s own adventures, should one happen to be the protagonist, seem new, and he would remember sayings verbatim that the speaker had forgotten as soon as uttered. And of what did he talk? And who shall attempt to describe the manner of his discourse? One can recall a hundred topics which sometimes kept his hearers enthralled for a whole evening; such as, the visit of an Oriental; the Irish question; the iniquities of Tsarist Russia; Stephen Leacock’s latest nonsense; Wilfrid Blunt; or the beauties of Oriental poetry, in describing which he would not only quote the original Arabic or Persian without hesitation, but would follow this with a fluent literal rendering in which not a point would be missed. He had a wonderful gift of rendering such poetry into English verse and one can only regret that he did not leave behind him more of such renderings. I am not aware that he ever attempted to write original verse, except in dedicating books to his mother or to his wife, but his translations go to show that he had in him the true poetic feeling. Excepting only his love of Persian carpets, he had no real interest in the fine arts; I do not think he cared any more for Persian miniatures, apart from their subject-matter, than he did for a language, apart from the thoughts it conveyed. I never heard him discuss either Religion or Art. He took no interest in society outside that of Cambridge; London only existed for him as containing the British Museum and a few book-shops, though he did like a good full-blooded melodrama. He cared little what he ate, and had no taste for wines; the only repast I ever knew him to enjoy was his tea at midnight which he brewed himself; he made it very strong, and generally allowed it to get cold, but its preparation on a spirit-lamp played almost the part of a religious ceremony in his life, which might never be omitted. He loved cigarettes and smoked them incessantly, but he never took either to cigars or a pipe, except the bubble-bubble on his first return from the East. He began fly-fishing rather late in life, but in the end preferred it to all other recreations in his summer holidays. While at Pembroke he rowed and had a place in his College boat; he also played tennis and squash racquets, but on the whole he was not a lover of games. In later life he became a rich man, and was thus freed from all financial anxiety, permitted to practise his natural generosity and enabled to buy all the books he needed; and never was an assured competency better bestowed by Fortune. For his liberality knew no bounds, and the number of Orientals alone who, deserving or undeserving, were the recipients of his charity is hard to estimate. But his kindness never seemed to lie so much
in the tangible results as in the infinite trouble he took to help all who came to him.

His married life was of the happiest, and in Alice Blackburne-Daniell he found an utterly devoted wife, a wonderful mother of his two sons, and a help-meet fitted by intellectual gifts to appreciate his talents and to encourage him in his scholarly labours; and the hospitality of Firwood Library quickly made up for the desertion of the Pembroke rooms. Mrs Browne was indeed the ideal wife for such a man, and during their nineteen years of undisturbed happiness she devoted to him all her thoughts and all her strength. In November 1924 he was suddenly stricken with a severe heart attack, which brought his activities to an end. For eight long months every effort was made to restore his strength, but when, in June 1925, his wife, worn out with the constant anxiety, suddenly collapsed and died, there was no one who could take her place, and he never rallied from the blow. He only survived his wife's death by six months, during which time, by a tremendous effort of will, he answered in his own hand all the letters of condolence he had received, numbering over 300 in all, but his life's work was finished.

He was a most punctilious correspondent and wrote letters with the same ease in Arabic, Persian or Turkish as he did in English, and his correspondence in all these languages was voluminous. Both in English and in Arabic he had a wonderfully neat writing, and his own books and manuscripts were always annotated with the greatest care and legibility.

What has been said regarding his correspondence and his hospitality is merely an indication of his great natural generosity in the matter of time, which is the commodity which scholars are apt most to grudge. But with time he was a magician, for he always seemed to find it for his own work, no matter what the distractions of the day and night might have been. I can only say from personal experience that in the many weeks and days I have spent with him, I hardly ever remember to have caught him at work. Occasionally he would write a note or two in one's presence, but otherwise all his time seemed to be at the disposal of his visitors. How remarkable this is when one considers the dimensions of his literary output, including as it did much reading of Oriental proofs, an occupation demanding the utmost care, and considerable strain to the eyes on account of the dialectical points of the Arabic alphabet.

It is not my purpose here to describe his numerous works, or even to provide a list of them; for this I would refer the reader to Professor R. A. Nicholson's Introduction to the forthcoming Catalogue of E. G. B.'s manuscripts.

He was held in the deepest esteem and affection by the Persians, and I cannot support this statement better than by quoting from an article in French which appeared in a Tehran newspaper, *Milbad*, 6th of Rajab, A.H. 1334:

"Je dois maintenant vous exposer, en grandes lignes, les services qu'il a rendus à la Perse. Ces services peuvent se diviser en deux catégories:

(1) Services rendus à la littérature persane.
(2) Services rendus à la cause nationale persane.

"Il n'y a personne dans notre histoire dont les services rendus à la littérature persane puissent être comparés à ceux de Browne excepté ceux rendus par les grands rois tels que Mahmoud Chahzavi le Patron de Ferdowsi et Sandjar Schdjoukide, le Protecteur de Anwari. Et tandis qu'eux travaillaient dans l'intérêt de leur propre pays Browne faisait tout pour la renaissance et la propagation d'une langue qui n'était pas la sienne.

"Passons maintenant aux services qu'il a rendus à la cause nationale persane.

"Dejà en 1887 quand Browne écrivait son ouvrage intitulé 'Un an au milieu des Persans' où il racontait son voyage en Perse, il plaçait le peuple perse d'avoir un gouvernement corrompu à sa tête. A partir de 1906 où la Révolution s'est déclarée en Perse, notre Regretté Ami a consacré une grande partie de son temps à défendre notre cause....

"En parlant des services que notre regretté Ami a rendus à la cause nationale persane je n'ai pas voulu parler des aides matérielles et morales qu'il a apportées aux réfugiés persans, victimes de la tyrannie étrangère, qui avaient pris le chemin de l'Europe pour échapper au sort funeste qui les attendait dans leur patrie même. Le château de Firwood près de Cambridge où vivait Browne était un asile pour tous les Persans qui se rendaient en Angleterre, et l'hospitalité qu'il réservait à nos compatriotes était sans limites.
obeyed grudgingly the calls which various University meetings were wont to make on his time.

In reading this great book of travel, in which the discoveries are confined to the soul of the people, one cannot fail to be struck by the great toleration the author shows towards the weaknesses of the Persians. The fact that one of his hosts had become the terror of those he governed and was guilty of a thousand unjust executions and judgments, does not in any way lower E. G. B.'s admiration of his gracious manners or his fine library. He so loved his Persians that he forgave everything, and only stayed to praise and admire.

He had a certain dislike of things Indian, due perhaps to a difference between the Indian and the Persian spirit, and reinforced by a grudge which he bore Indian Muslims because they pronounced Persian unlike the Persians themselves. Another element in this was his disapproval of Anglo-Indian officials, who were his constant bugbear. His anti-Indian prejudices extended even to Indo-Persian poets, that is, the Persian poets like Amir Khusrav and Sā‘īb who settled in India, although quite late in life, while he was writing the fourth volume of his great Literary History, he was at length compelled to recognise their merits and make the amende honorable. His feelings towards Indian Muslims also underwent a complete change partly on account of the favourable impression created by some young Indian students who came to study Islamic literature under him in Cambridge during the last six years of his life, and partly owing to his great admiration for the writings of Maulavi Shibli Nu’mání of Aligarh.

That Edward Browne was a genius no man could deny, and his genius was of two distinct kinds; he not only fulfilled the condition of possessing the capacity for taking infinite pains, but also had the genius which reveals itself in the inspiration of the spoken word. For it was in his talk and conversation that the scholar, the wit, the enthusiast and the man of heart were
revealed in full bloom, beside which his writings, with all their brilliance, are but so many pressed flowers.

To write dispassionately of so dear a friend has been no easy task, but my aim was to represent this great scholar in the light of common day, so that some lasting memorial should remain of his intellectual progress and his mental outlook, of his steadfast ideals, his simplicity of character and his untiring devotion to the cause of sound scholarship.

E. DENISON ROSS

EXORDIUM

(DEDICATED TO THE PERSIAN READER ONLY)

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Forgiving

PRAISE be to God, the Maker of Land and Sea, the Lord of “‘BE,” and it shall be’; Who brought me forth from the place of my birth, obedient to His saying, “Journey through the Earth”;

Who guarded me from the dangers of the way with the shield of “No fear shall be upon them and no dismay”;

Who caused me to accomplish my quest and thereafter to return and rest, after I had beheld the wonders of the East and of the West;

But afterwards. Thus saith the humblest and unworthiest of His servants, who least deserve His Beauty, and most meditate His Clemency (may God forgive his failing and heal his ailing);

When from Kirman and the confines of Bam I had returned again to the city on the Casp, and ceased for a while to wander, and began to muse and ponder on the lands where I had been and the marvels I had therein seen, and how in pursuit of knowledge I had forsaken the calm solitude of college, and through days warm and weary, and nights dark and dreary, now hungry and now athirst, I had tasted of the best and of the worst, experiencing hot and cold, and holding converse with young and old, and had climbed the mountain and crossed the waste now slowly and now with haste, until I had made an end of soil, and set my foot upon my native soil; then, wishful to impart the gain which I had won with labour and harvested with pain (for “Travel is travail” says the sage), I resolved to write these pages, and, taking ink and pen, to impart to my fellow-men what I had witnessed and understood of things evil and good.

Now seeing that to fail and fall is the fate of all, and to claim exemption from the lot of humanity a proof of pride and vanity, and somewhat of mercy our common need; therefore let such as read, and errors detect, either ignore and neglect, or correct and conceal them — rather than revile and reveal them. For he is lintent who is wise, and from his brother’s failings awarts his eyes, being loth to hurt or harm; nay, meeting bane with balm. W.A.S.S.L.A.M.

1 Qur’an, ii, 111; iii, 42, etc. 2 Qur’an, vi, 11; xxvii, 71, etc.
3 Qur’an, ii, 16, 39, 166, etc.
4 So Burton has well translated the Arabic proverb: “Es-sofum la’atun mina’s-sakar.” (“Travel is a portion of hell-fire.”)
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

"'Ilum ilmun, 'ilum'l-adyun, wa 'ilum'l-abdin."
"Science is twofold: Theology, and Medicine."

I HAVE so often been asked how I first came to occupy myself with the study of Eastern languages that I have decided to devote the opening chapter of this book to answering this question, and to describing as succinctly as possible the process by which, not without difficulty and occasional discouragement, I succeeded, ere ever I set foot in Persia, in obtaining a sufficient mastery over the Persian tongue to enable me to employ it with some facility as an instrument of conversation, and to explore with pleasure and profit the enchanted realms of its vast and varied literature. I have not arrived at this decision without some hesitation and misgiving, for I do not wish to obtrude myself unnecessarily on the attention of my readers, and one can hardly be autobiographical without running the risk of being egotistical. But then the same thing applies with equal force to all descriptions intended for publication of any part of one’s personal experiences—such, for instance, as one’s own travels. Believing that the observations, impressions, and experiences of my twelve months’ sojourn in Persia during the years 1887–8 may be of interest to others besides myself, I have at length determined to publish them. It is too late now to turn squeamish about the use of the pronoun of the first person. I will be as sparing of its use as I can, but use it I must.

I might, indeed, have given to this book the form of a systematic treatise on Persia, a plan which for some time I did actually
entertain; but against this plan three reasons finally decided me. Firstly, that my publishers expressed a preference for the narrative form, which, they believed, would render the book more readable. Secondly, that for the more ambitious project of writing a systematic treatise I did not feel myself prepared and could not prepare myself without the expenditure of time only to be obtained by the sacrifice of other work which seemed to me of greater importance. Thirdly, that the recent publication of the Hon. G. N. Curzon's encyclopedic 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. Moreover, the question “What first made you take up Persian?” when addressed to an Englishman who is neither engaged in, nor destined for, an Eastern career deserves an answer. In France, Germany, or Russia such a question would hardly be asked; but in England a knowledge of Eastern languages is no stepping-stone to diplomatic employment in Eastern countries; and though there exist in the Universities and the British Museum posts more desirable than this to the student of Oriental languages, such posts are few, and, when vacant, hotly competed for. In spite of every discouragement, there are, I rejoice to say, almost every year a few young Englishmen who, actuated solely by love of knowledge and desire to extend the frontiers of science in a domain which still contains vast tracts of unexplored country, devote themselves to this study. To them too often have I had to repeat the words of warning given to me by my honoured friend and teacher, the late Dr William Wright, an Arabic scholar whom not Cambridge or England only, but Europe, mourns with heart-felt sorrow and remembers with legitimate pride. It was in the year 1884, so far as I remember; I was leaving Cambridge with mingled feelings of sorrow and of hope: sorrow, because I was to bid farewell (for ever, as I then expected) to the University and the College to which I owe a debt of gratitude beyond the power of words to describe; hope, because the honours I had just gained in the Indian Languages Tripos made me sanguine of obtaining some employment which would enable me to pursue with advantage and success a study to which I was devotedly attached, and which even medicine (for which I was then destined), with all its charms and far-reaching interests, could not rival in my affections. This hope, in answer to an enquiry as to what I intended to do on leaving Cambridge, I one day confided to Dr Wright. No one, as I well knew, could better sympathise with it or gauge its chances of fulfilment, and from no one could I look for kinder, wiser, and more prudent counsel. And this was the advice he gave me—“If,” said he, “you have private means which render you independent of a profession, then pursue your Oriental studies, and fear not that they will disappoint you, or fail to return you a rich reward of happiness and honour. But if you cannot afford to do this, and are obliged to consider how you may earn a livelihood, then devote yourself wholly to medicine, and abandon, save as a relaxation for your leisure moments, the pursuit of Oriental letters. The posts for which such knowledge will fit you are few, and, for the most part, poorly endowed, neither can you hope to obtain them till you have worked and waited for many years. And from the Government you must look for nothing, for it has long shown, and still continues to show, an increasing indisposition to offer the slightest encouragement to the study of Eastern languages.”

A rare piece of good fortune has in my case falsified a prediction of which Dr Wright himself, though I knew it not till long afterwards, did all in his power to avert the accomplishment; but in general it still holds true, and I write these words, not for myself, but for those young English Orientalists whose disappointments, struggles, and unfulfilled, though legitimate, hopes I have so often been compelled to watch with keen but impotent sorrow and sympathy. Often I reflect with bitterness that England, though more directly interested in the East than
any other European country save Russia, not only offers less encouragement to her sons to engage in the study of Oriental languages than any other great European nation, but can find no employment even for those few who, notwithstanding every discouragement, are impelled by their own inclination to this study, and who, by diligence, zeal, and natural aptitude, attain proficiency therein. How different is it in France! There, not to mention the more academic and purely scientific courses of lectures on Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Zend, Pahlavi, Persian, Sanskrit, and on Egyptian, Assyrian, and Semitic archæology and philology, delivered regularly by savants of European reputation at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne (all of which lectures are freely open to persons of either sex and any nationality), there is a special school of Oriental languages (now within a year or two of its centenary) where practical instruction of the best imaginable kind is given (also gratuitously) by European professors, assisted in most cases by native répétiteurs, in literary and colloquial Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Malay, Javanese, Armenian, Modern Greek, Chinese, Japanese, Annamite, Hindustâni, Tamil, Russian, and Roumanian, as well as in the geography, history, and jurisprudence of the states of the extreme East. To these lectures (the best, I repeat, without fear of contradiction, which can be imagined) any student, French or foreign, is admitted free of charge. And any student who has followed them diligently for three years, and passed the periodical examinations to the satisfaction of his teachers, provided that he be a French subject, may confidently reckon on receiving sooner or later from the Government such employment as his tastes, training, and attainments have fitted him for. The manifold advantages of this admirable system, alike to the State and the individual, must be obvious to the most obtuse, and need no demonstration. All honour to France for the signal services which she has rendered to the cause of learning! May she long maintain that position of eminence in science which she has so nobly won, and which she so deservedly occupies! And to us English, too, may she become, in this respect at least, an exemplar and a pattern!

Now, having unburdened my mind on this matter, I will recount briefly how I came to devote myself to the study of Oriental languages. I was originally destined to become an engineer; and therefore, partly because—at any rate sixteen years ago—the teaching of the “modern side” was still in a most rudimentary state, partly because I most eagerly desired emancipation from a life entirely uncongenial to me, I left school at the age of fifteen and a half, with little knowledge and less love of Latin and Greek. I have since then learned better to appreciate the value of these languages, and to regret the slenderness of my classical attainments. Yet the method according to which they are generally taught in English public schools is so unattractive, and, in my opinion, so inefficient, that had I been subjected to it much longer I should probably have come to loathe all foreign languages, and to shudder at the very sight of a grammar. It is a good thing for the student of a language to study its grammar when he has learned to read and understand it, just as it is a good thing for an artist to study the anatomy of the human body when he has learned to sketch a figure or catch the expression of a face; but for one to seek to obtain mastery over a language by learning rules of occurrence and syntax is as though he should regard the dissecting-room as the single and sufficient portal of entrance to the Academy. How little a knowledge of grammar has to do with facility in the use of language is shown by the fact that comparatively few have studied the grammar of that language over which they have the greatest mastery, while amongst all the Latin and Greek scholars in this country those who could make an extempore speech, dash off an impromptu note, or carry on a sustained conversation in either language, are in a small minority.

Then, amongst other evil things connected with it, is the magnificent contempt for all non-English systems of pronuncia-
tion which the ordinary public-school system of teaching Latin and Greek encourages. Granted that the pronunciation of Greek is very different in the Athens of to-day from what it was in the time of Plato or Euripides, and that Cicero would not understand, or would understand with difficulty, the Latin of the Vatican, does it follow that both languages should be pronounced exactly like English, of all spoken tongues the most anomalous in pronunciation? What should we think of a Chinaman who, because he was convinced that the pronunciation of English in the fourteenth century differed widely from that of the nineteenth, deliberately elected to read Chaucer with the accent and intonation of Chinese? If Latin and Greek alone were concerned it would not so much matter, but the influence of this doctrine of pan-Anglican pronunciation too often extends to French and German as well. The spirit engendered by it is finely displayed in these two sayings which I remember to have heard repeated—“Anyone can understand English if they choose, provided you talk loud enough.” “Always mistrust an Englishman who talks French like a Frenchman.”

Apart from the general failure to invest the books read with any human, historical, or literary interest, or to treat them as expressions of the thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of our fellow-creatures instead of as grammatical treading-mills, there is another reason why the public-school system of teaching languages commonly fails to impart much useful knowledge of them. When any intelligent being who is a free agent wishes to obtain an efficient knowledge of a foreign language as quickly as possible, how does he proceed? He begins with an easy text, and first obtains the general sense of each sentence and the meaning of each particular word from his teacher. In default of a teacher, he falls back on the best available substitute, namely, a good translation and a dictionary. Looking out words in a dictionary is, however, mere waste of time, if their meaning can be ascertained in any other way; so that he will use this means only when compelled to do so. Having ascertained the meaning of each word, he will note it down either in the margin of the book or elsewhere, so that he may not have to ask it or look it out again. Then he will read the passage which he has thus studied over and over again, if possible aloud, so that tongue, ear, and mind may be simultaneously familiarised with the new instrument of thought and communication of which he desires to possess himself, until he perfectly understands the meaning without mentally translating it into English, and until the foreign words, no longer strange, evoke in his mind, not their English equivalents, but the ideas which they connote. This is the proper way to learn a language, and it is opposed at almost every point to the public-school method, which regards the use of “cribs” as a deadly sin, and substitutes parsing and construing for reading and understanding.

Notwithstanding all this, I am well aware that the advocates of this method have in their armoury another and a more potent argument. “A boy does not go to school,” they say, “to learn Latin and Greek, but to learn to confront disagreeable duties with equanimity, and to do what is distasteful to him with cheerfulness.” To this I have nothing to say; it is unanswerable and final. If boys are sent to school to learn what the word disagreeable means, and to realise that the most tedious monotonys is perfectly compatible with the most acute misery, and that the most assiduous labour, if it be not wisely directed, does not necessarily secure the attainment of the object ostensibly aimed at, then, indeed, does the public school offer the surest means of attaining this end. The most wretched day of my life, except the day when I left college, was the day I went to school. During the earlier portion of my school life I believe that I nearly fathomed the possibilities of human misery and despair. I learned then (what I am thankful to say I have unlearned since) to be a pessimist, a misanthrope, and a cynic; and I have learned since, what I did not understand then, that to know by rote a
quantity of grammatical rules is in itself not much more useful than to know how often each letter of the alphabet occurs in *Paradise Lost*, or how many separate stones went to the building of the Great Pyramid.

It was the Turkish war with Russia in 1877–8 that first attracted my attention to the East, about which, till that time, I had known and cared nothing. To the young, war is always interesting, and I watched the progress of this struggle with eager attention. At first my proclivities were by no means for the Turks; but the losing side, more especially when it continues to struggle gallantly against defeat, always has a claim on our sympathy, and moreover the cant of the anti-Turkish party in England, and the wretched attempts to confound questions of abstract justice with party politics, disgusted me beyond measure. Ere the close of the war 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. And so gradually pity turned to admiration, and admiration to enthusiasm, until the Turks became in my eyes veritable heroes, and the desire to identify myself with their cause, make my dwelling amongst them, and unite with them in the defence of their land, possessed me heart and soul. At the age of sixteen such enthusiasm more easily establishes itself in the heart, and, while it lasts (for it often fades as quickly as it bloomed), exercises a more absolute and uncontrolled sway over the mind than at a more advanced age. Even though it be transitory, its effects (as in my case) may be permanent.

So now my whole ambition came to be this: how I might become in time an officer in the Turkish army. And the plan which I proposed to myself was to enter first the English army, to remain there till I had learned my profession and attained the rank of captain, then to resign my commission and enter the service of the Ottoman Government, which, as I understood, gave a promotion of two grades. So wild a project will doubtless move many of my readers to mirth, and some to indignation, but, such as it was, it was for a time paramount in my mind, and its influence outlived it. Its accomplishment, however, evidently needed time; and, as my enthusiasm demanded some immediate object, I resolved at once to begin the study of the Turkish language.

Few of my readers, probably, have had occasion to embark on this study, or even to consider what steps they would take if a desire to do so suddenly came upon them. I may therefore here remark that for one not resident in the metropolis it is far from easy to discover anything about the Turkish language, and almost impossible to find a teacher. However, after much seeking and many enquiries, I succeeded in obtaining a copy of Barker’s *Turkish Grammar*. Into this I plunged with enthusiasm. I learned Turkish verbs in the old school fashion, and blundered through the “Pleasanties of Khoja Nasrud-Din Efendi”; but so ignorant was I, and so involved is the Ottoman construction, that it took me some time to discover that the language is written from right to left; while, true to the pan-Anglican system on which I have already animadverted, I read my Turkish as though it had been English, pronouncing, for example, the article *bir* and the substantive *ber* exactly the same, and as though both, instead of neither, rhymed with the English words *fur* and *fur*. And so I bungled on for a while, making slow but steady progress, and wasting much time, but with undiminished enthusiasm; for which I was presently rewarded by discovering a teacher. This was an Irish clergyman, who had, I believe, served as a private in the Crimean clergyman, who had, I believe, served as a private in the Crimean War, picked up some Turkish, attracted attention by his proficiency in a language of which very few Englishmen
have any knowledge, and so gained employment as an interpreter. After the war he was ordained a clergyman of the Church of England, and remained for some years at Constantinople as a missionary. I do not know how his work prospered; but if he succeeded in winning from the Turks half the sympathy and love with which they inspired him, his success must have been great indeed. When I discovered him, he had a cure of souls in the Conssett iron district, having been driven from his last parish by the resentment of his flock (Whigs, almost to a man), which he had incurred by venturing publicly to defend the Turks at a time when they were at the very nadir of unpopularity, and when the outcry about the “Bulgarian atrocities” was at its height. So the very religious and humane persons who composed his congregation announced to his vicar their intention of withdrawing their subscriptions and support from the church so long as the “Bashi-bozouk” (such, as he informed me, not without a certain pride, was the name they had given him) occupied its pulpit. So there was nothing for it but that he should go. Isolated in the ungenial environment to which he was transferred, he was, I think, almost as eager to teach me Turkish as I was to learn it, and many a pleasant hour did I pass in his little parlour listening with inexhaustible delight to the anecdotes of his life in Constantinople which he loved to tell. Peace be to his memory! He died in Africa, once more engaged in mission work, not long after I went to Cambridge.

One of the incidental charms of Orientalism is the kindness and sympathy often shown by scholars of the greatest distinction and the highest attainments to the young beginner, even when he has no introduction save the pass-word of a common and much-loved pursuit. Of this I can recall many instances, but it is sufficient to mention the first in my experience. Expecting to be in, or within reach of, London for a time, I was anxious to improve the occasion by prosecuting my Turkish studies (for the “Bashi-bozouk” had recently left Conssett for Hull), and to this end wished to find a proficient teacher. As I knew not how else to set about this, I finally, and somewhat audaciously, determined to write to the late Sir James (then Mr) Redhouse (whose name the study of his valuable writings on the Ottoman language had made familiar to me as that of a patron saint), asking for his advice and help. This letter I addressed to the care of his publishers; and in a few days I received, to my intense delight, a most kind reply, in which he, the first Turkish scholar in Europe probably, not only gave me all the information I required, but invited me to pay him a visit whenever I came to London, an invitation of which, as may be readily believed, I availed myself at the earliest possible opportunity. And so gradually I came to know others who were able and willing to help me in my studies, including several Turkish gentlemen attached to the Ottoman Embassy in London, from some of whom I received no little kindness.

But if my studies prospered, it was otherwise with the somewhat chimerical project in which they had originated. My father did not wish me to enter the army, but proposed medicine as an alternative to engineering. As the former profession seemed more compatible with my aspirations than the latter, I eagerly accepted his offer. A few days after this decision had been arrived at, he consulted an eminent physician, who was one of his oldest friends, as to my future education. “If you wanted to make your son a doctor,” said my father, “where would you send him?” And the answer, given without a moment’s hesitation, was, “To Cambridge.”

So to Cambridge I went in October 1879, which date marks for me the beginning of a new and most happy era of life; for I suppose that a man who cannot be happy at the University must be incapable of happiness. Here my medical studies occupied, of course, the major part of my time and attention, and that right pleasantly; for, apart from their intrinsic interest, the teaching was masterly, and even subjects at first repellent can be made
attractive when taught by a master possessed of grasp, eloquence, and enthusiasm, just as a teacher who lack these qualities will make the most interesting subjects appear devoid of charm. Yet still I found time to devote to Eastern languages. Turkish, it is true, was not then to be had at Cambridge; but I had already discovered that for further progress in this some knowledge of Arabic and Persian was requisite; and to these I determined to turn my attention. During my first year I therefore began to study Arabic with the late Professor Palmer, whose extraordinary and varied abilities are too well known to need any celebration on my part. No man had a higher ideal of knowledge in the matter of languages, or more original (and, as I believe, sounder) views as to the method of learning them. These views I have already set forth substantially and summarily; and I will therefore say no more about them in this place, save that I absorbed them greedily, and derived from them no small advantage, learning by their application more of Arabic in one term than I had learned of Latin or Greek during five and a half years, and this notwithstanding the fact that I could devote to it only a small portion of my time.

I began Persian in the Long Vacation of 1885. Neither Professor Palmer nor Professor Cowell was resident in Cambridge at that time; but I obtained the assistance of an undergraduate of Indian nationality, who, though the son of Hindoo parents converted to Christianity, had an excellent knowledge not only of Persian and Sanskrit, but of Arabic. To this knowledge, which was my admiration and envy, he, for his part seemed to attach little importance; all his pride was in playing the fiddle, on which, so far as I could judge, he was a very indifferent performer. But as it gave him pleasure to have a listener, a kind of tacit understanding grew up that when he had helped me for an hour to read the Gulistan, I in return should sit and listen for a while to his fiddling, which I did with such appearance of pleasure as I could command.

For two years after this—that is to say, till I took my degree—such work as I did in Persian and Arabic was done chiefly by myself, though I managed to run up to London for an afternoon once a fortnight or so for a Turkish lesson, till the Lent Term of 1881, when the paramount claims of that most exciting of taskmasters, the river, took from me for some weeks the right to call my afternoons my own. And when the Lent races were over, I had to think seriously about my approaching tripods; while a promise made to me by my father, that if I succeeded in passing both it and the examination for the second M.B. at the end of my third year (i.e. in June 1882), I should spend two months of the succeeding Long Vacation in Constantinople, determined me to exert all my efforts to win this dazzling bribe. This resolution cost me a good deal, but I was amply rewarded for my self-denial when, in July 1882, I at length beheld the minarets of Stamboul, and heard the Mu'ezzin call the true believers to prayer. I have heard people express themselves as disappointed with Constantinople. I suppose that, wherever one goes, one sees in great measure what one expects to see (because there is good and evil in all things, and the eye discerns but one when the mind is occupied by a preconceived idea); but I at least suffered no disenchantment, and returned to England with my enthusiasm for the East not merely undiminished, but, if possible, intensified.

The two succeeding years were years of undiluted pleasure, for I was still at Cambridge, and was now able to devote my whole time to the study of Oriental languages. As I intended to become a candidate for the Indian Languages Tripos in 1884, I was obliged to begin the study of Hindustani, a language from which I never could succeed in deriving much pleasure. During this period I became acquainted with a very learned but very eccentric old Persian, Mirzâ Muhammad Bâkir, of Bawânât in Fârs, surnamed Ibrâhîm Jân Mu'âṭtar. Having wandered through half the world, learned (and learned well) half a dozen languages,
and been successively a Shi'te Muḥammadan, a dervish, a Christian, an atheist, and a Jew, he had finished by elaborating a religious system of his own, which he called “Islamo-Christianity,” to the celebration (I can hardly say the elucidation) of which in English tracts and Persian poems, composed in the most bizarre style, he devoted the greater part of his time, talents, and money. He was in every way a most remarkable man, and one whom it was impossible not to respect and like, in spite of his appalling loquacity, his unreason, his disputatiousness, his utter impracticability. I never saw anyone who lived so entirely in a fantastic ideal world of his own creation. He was totally indifferent to his own temporal interests; cared nothing for money, personal comfort, or the favour of the powerful; and often alienated his acquaintances by violent attacks on their most cherished beliefs, and drove away his friends by the ceaseless torrent of his eloquence. He lived in a squalid little room in Limehouse, surrounded by piles of dusty books, mostly theological treatises in Persian and Arabic, with a sprinkling of Hebrew and English volumes, amongst which last Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* and *Heroes and Hero-Worship* occupied the place of honour. Of these, however, he made but little use, for he generally wrote when alone, and talked when he could get anyone to listen to him. I tried to persuade him to read with me those portions of the *Masnavi* and the *Divān of Hāfiz* set for my examination, and offered to remunerate him for his trouble; but this plan failed on its first trial. We had not read for twenty minutes when he suddenly pushed away the Hāfiz, dragged out from a drawer in the rickety little table a pile of manuscript, and said, “I like my own poetry better than this, and if you want me to teach you Persian you must learn it as I please. I don’t want your money, but I do want you to understand my thoughts about religion. You can understand Hāfiz by yourself, but you cannot understand my poetry unless I explain it to you.” This was certainly true: allusions to grotesque visions in which figured grass-eating lions, bears, yellow demons, Gog and Magog, “Crusaders,” and Hebrew and Arab patriarchs, saints, and warriors, were jumbled up with current politics, personal reminiscences, Rabbinic legends; mystical rhapsodies, denunciations, prophecies, old Persian mythology, Old Testament theology, and Qur’ānic exegesis in a manner truly bewildering, the whole being clothed in a Persian so quaint, so obscure, and so replete with rare, dialectical, and foreign words, that many verses were incomprehensible even to educated Persians, to whom, for the most part, the “Little Sun of London” (Shohreya-i-Landamiyya—so he called the longest of his published poems) was a source of terror. One of my Persian friends (for I made acquaintance about this time with several young Persians who were studying in London) would never consent to visit me until he had received an assurance that the poet-prophet-philosopher of Bawânāt would be out of the way. I, however, by dint of long listening and much patience, not without some weariness, learned from him much that was of value to me besides the correct Persian pronunciation. For I had originally acquired from my Indian friend the erroneous and unlovely pronunciation current in India, which I now abandoned with all possible speed, believing the “French of Paris” to be preferable to the “French of Stratford atte Bowe.”

Towards the end of 1884 Mirzā Bākīr left London for the East with his surviving children, a daughter of about eighteen and a son of about ten years of age, both of whom had been brought up away from him in the Christian religion, and neither of whom knew any language but English. The girl’s failing health (for she was threatened with consumption) was the cause of his departure. I had just left Cambridge, and entered at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, where I found my time and energies fully occupied with my new work. Tired as I often was, however, when I got away from the wards, I had to make almost daily pilgrimages to Limehouse, where I often remained till nearly midnight; for Mirzā Bākīr refused to leave London till I had
finished reading a versified commentary on the Kur'an on which he had been engaged for some time, and of which he wished to bestow the manuscript on me as a keepsake. "My daughter will die," he said, "as the doctors tell me, unless she leaves for Beyrout in a short time, and it is you who prevent me from taking her there; for I will not leave London until you have understood my book." Argument was useless with such a visionary; so, willing or no, I had to spend every available hour in the little room at Limehouse, ever on the watch to check the interminable digressions to which the reading of the poem continually gave rise. At last it was finished, and the very next day, if I remember rightly, Mirzâ Bâkir started with his children for the East. I never saw him again, though I continued to correspond with him so long as he was at Beyrout, whence, I think, he was finally expelled by the Ottoman Government as a firebrand menacing the peace of the community. He then went with his son to Persia (his daughter had died previously at Beyrout), whence news of his death reached me a year or two ago.

And now for three years (1884–7) it was only an occasional leisure hour that I could snatch from my medical studies for a chat with my Persian friends (who, though they knew English well for the most part, were kind enough to talk for my benefit their own language), or for quiet communing in the cool vaulted reading-room of the British Museum with my favourite Sûfi writers, whose mystical idealism, which had long since cast its spell over my mind, now supplied me with a powerful antidote against the pessimistic tendencies evoked by the daily contemplation of misery and pain. This period was far from being an unhappy one, for my work, if hard, was full of interest; and if in the hospital I saw much that was sad, much that made me wonder at man's clinging to life (since to the vast majority life seemed but a succession of pains, struggles, and sorrows), on the other hand I saw much to strengthen my faith in the goodness and nobility of human nature. Never before or since have I realised so clearly the immortality, greatness, and virtue of the spirit of man, or the misery of its earthly environment: it seemed to me like a prince in rags, ignorant alike of his birth and his rights, but to whom is reserved a glorious heritage. No wonder, then, that the Pantheistic idealism of the Maânavî took hold of me, or that such words as these of Hâfiz thrilled me to the very soul:

"Túrūd qâ khâqâra-i 'arsh mi-qanûnd qâtîr,
Na-dînâmî kî dar u khâkâm ebl 'ufâdast."

"They are calling to thee from the pinnacles of the throne of God:
I know not what hath befallen thee in this dust heap" (the world).

Even my medical studies, strange as it may appear, favoured the development of this habit of mind; for physiology, when it does not encourage materialism, encourages mysticism; and nothing so much tends to shake one's faith in the reality of the objective world as the examination of certain of the subjective phenomena of mental and nervous disorders.

But now this period, too, was drawing to a close, and my dreams of visiting Persia, even when their accomplishment seemed most unlikely, were rapidly approaching fulfillment. The hopes with which I had left Cambridge had been damped by repeated disappointments. I had thought that the knowledge I had acquired of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic might enable me to find employment in the Consular Service, but had learned from curt official letters, referring me to printed official regulations, that this was not so, that these languages were not recognised as subjects of examination, and that not they, but German, Greek, Spanish, and Italian were the qualifications by which one might hope to become a consul in Western Asia. The words of Dr Wright's warning came back to me, and I acknowledged their justice. To my professional studies, I felt, and not to my linguistic attainments, must I look to earn my livelihood.

I had passed my final examinations at the College of Surgeons, the College of Physicians, and the University of Cambridge,
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received from the two former, with a sense of exultation which I well remember, the diplomas authorising me to practise, and was beginning to consider what my next step should be, when the luck of which I had despaired came to me at last. Returning to my rooms on the evening of 30th May 1887, I found a telegram lying on the table. I opened it with indifference, which changed, in the moment I grasped its purport, to ecstatic joy. I had that day been elected a Fellow of my College.

CHAPTER II

FROM ENGLAND TO THE PERSIAN FRONTIER

"Pa mi adri, idbi yammamtu arqin
Urid al-khayr, ayyunmaa yalini:
A al-khayr aladhi ana abtighibi,
Aam al-sharr aladhi kama yubtaghibi!"

"And I know not, when bound for the land of my guest, if my portion shall be
The good which I hope for and seek, or the evil that seeketh for me."

(Al-Muthakkhib’si’-Abdi)

So at last I was really to go to Persia. About that there could be no question. For I had long determined to go if I got the chance; and now, not only had the opportunity come, but, in view of the probability that the University would soon require a resident teacher of Persian, I was urged by my friends at Cambridge to spend the first year of my fellowship in the way which would best qualify me for this post. Yet, as the time for my departure approached, a strange shrinking from this journey which I had so much desired—a shrinking to which I look back with shame and wonder, and for which I can in no wise account—took possession of me. It arose partly, I suppose, from the sudden reaction which unexpected good fortune will at times produce; partly, if not from ill health, at least from that lowering of the vitality which results from hard work and lack of exercise and fresh air; partly also from the worry inseparable from the preparations for a long journey into regions little known. But, whatever its cause, it did much to mar my happiness at a time when I had no excuse for being otherwise than happy. At length, however, it came to an end. Bewildered by conflicting
counsels as to the equipment which I should need and the route which I had best take, I at last settled the matter by booking my passage from Marseilles to Batoum at the London office of the Messageries Maritimes, and by adding to the two small portmanteaus into which I had compressed so much clothing as appeared absolutely indispensable nothing but a Wolseley valise, a saddle and bridle, a pith hat (which was broken to pieces long before the summer came round), a small medicine-chest, a few surgical instruments, a revolver, a box of a hundred cartridges, a few books, a passport with the Russian and Turkish 

visas, and a money-belt containing about £200 in gold, paper, and circular notes. At the last moment I was joined by an old college friend, H——, who, having just completed a term of office at the hospital, was desirous to travel, and whose proposal to join me I welcomed. He was my companion as far as Teherán, where, as I desired to tarry for a while, and he to proceed, we were obliged to separate.

We had booked our passage, as I have said, to Batoum, intending to take the train thence to Baku, and so by the Caspian to Resht in Persia. For this route, unquestionably the shortest and easiest, I had from the first felt little liking, my own wish being to enter Persia through Turkey, either by way of Damascus and Bagdad, or of Trebizond and Erzeroum. I had suffered myself to be persuaded against my inclinations, which, I think, where no question of principle is involved, is always a mistake, for the longer and harder way of one’s own choosing is preferable to the shorter and easier way chosen by another. And so, as soon as I was withdrawn from the influences which had temporarily overcome my own judgment and inclination, I began to repent of having adopted an uncongenial plan, and to consider whether even now, at this eleventh hour, it was not possible to change. The sight of the Turkish shore and the sound of the Turkish tongue (for we stayed two days at Constantinople, whence to Trebizond the deck of the steamer was crowded

with Turks and Persians, with whom I spent the greater part of each day in conversing) swept away my last scruples as to the wisdom of thus reversing at the outset a decision which had been fully discussed. I consulted with H——, who raised no objection; and we decided on reaching Trebizond (where the steamer anchored on 4th October) to enquire at the British Consulate as to the safety and practicability of the old caravan road leading thence into Central Asia, and, if the report were favourable, to adopt that route.

There was a heavy swell in the open roadstead, and the wind, which rolled back the rain-clouds on the green, thickly-wooded hills, seemed to be rising, as we clambered into one of the clumsy boats which hovered round the steamer to go ashore. Nor had the gruff old captain’s answer to my enquiry as to how long the steamer would lie there tended to reassure me. “If the wind gets up much more,” he had said, “I may start at any time.” “And if we are on shore,” I demanded, “how shall we know that you are starting?” “Vous me verrez partir, voilà tout,” he replied, and, with a shrug of his shoulders, walked off to his cabin. So I was somewhat uneasy in my mind lest, while we were conducting our enquiries on shore, the steamer might put out to sea, bearing with it all our worldly goods. This disquieting reflection was dispelled by the shock of the boat striking against the little wooden jetty. We stepped out, and found ourselves confronted by one of the Turkish police, who demanded our passports. These had not been presented, as theoretically they should have been, at Constantinople for a fresh visa, and I feared we might consequently have some trouble in landing. However, I assumed an air of confident alacrity, produced the passports, and pointed to the seal of the Turkish Consulate given in London. As the visa—“bon pour se rendre à Constantinople”—to which this was attached was in French, the officer was not much the wiser, and, after scrutinising the passports (which he held upside down) with a critical air, he returned them and stood aside to let us pass.
And this is typical of Turkey, where the laws, though theoretically stringent, are not practically troublesome; in which point it has the advantage over Russia.

Guided by a boy belonging to our boat, we ascended through narrow, tortuous streets to the British Consulate, where, though unprovided with recommendations, we received from the Consul, Mr Longworth, that courteous and kindly welcome which, to their honour be it said, Englishmen (and, indeed, other Europeans, as well as Americans) resident in the Turkish and Persian dominions seldom fail to give the traveller. In reply to our enquiries, he told us that the road to the Persian frontier was perfectly safe, and that we should have no difficulty in hiring horses or mules to convey us to Erzeroum, whence we could easily engage others for the journey to Tabriz. He also kindly offered to send his dragoman, an Armenian gentleman, named Hekimian, to assist us in clearing our baggage at the custom-house. So we returned to the steamer to bring it ashore. As we pushed our way through the deck-passengers to the side of the ship, some of my Persian acquaintances called out to me to tell them why I was disembarking and whither I was going, and, on learning my intention of taking the old caravan-road through Erzeroum, they cried, “O dear soul, it will take you three months to get to Teherán thus, if indeed you get there at all! Why have you thus made your road difficult?” But the step was taken now, and I paid no heed to their words.

The custom-house, thanks to the aegis of the British Consulate, dealt very gently with us. We were even asked, if I remember right, which of our packages we should prefer to have opened. H——’s Wolseley valise was selected; but we forgot that his rifle had been rolled up in it. The Turkish excisemen stroked their chins a little at this sight (for fire-arms are contraband), but said nothing. When this form of examination was over we thanked the muhtar, or superintendent, for his courtesy, gave a few small coins to his subordinates, and, with the help of two sturdy porters, transported our luggage to the one hotel which Trebizonde possesses. It is called the “Hôtel d’Italie,” and, though unpretentious, is clean and comfortable. During the three days we spent there we had no cause to complain either of being underfed or overcharged.

Next morning our preparations began in earnest. Hekimian was of inestimable service, arranging everything and accompanying us everywhere. The Russian paper-money with which we had provided ourselves for the earlier part of the journey was soon converted into Turkish gold; tinned provisions and a few simple cooking utensils and other necessaries were bought in the bazaars; and arrangements were concluded with two sturdy muleteers for the journey to Erzeroum. They on their part agreed to provide us with five horses for ourselves and our baggage, to convey us to Erzeroum in six or seven days, and to do what lay in their power to render the journey pleasant; while we on our part covenanted to pay them £5¼ Turkish pounds (53 down, and the remainder at Erzeroum), to which we promised to add a trifle if they gave us satisfaction.

There remained a more important matter, the choice of a servant to accompany us on the journey. Two candidates presented themselves: an honest-looking old Turkish Kavus of the Consulate, and a shifty Armenian, who, on the strength of his alleged skill in cookery, demanded exorbitantly high wages. We chose the Turk, agreeing to pay him one Turkish pound a week, to guarantee this payment for six months, and to defray his expenses back to Trebizonde at any point at which we might finally leave him. It was a rash agreement, and might have caused us more trouble than it actually did, but there seemed to be no better alternative, seeing that a servant was an absolute necessity. The old Turk’s real name was ‘Omar; but, having regard to the detestation in which this name is held in Persia (for he whom Sunnite Muhammadans account the second Caliph, or successor of the Prophet, is regarded by the sect of
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the Shi'a as the worst of evil-doers and usurpers), it was decided that he should henceforth bear the more auspicious name of 'Alli, the darling hero of the Persian Shi'ites. As for our old servant's character, viewed in the light of subsequent experience, I do him but justice when I express my conviction that a more honest, straightforward, faithful, loyal soul could not easily be found anywhere. But, on the other hand, he was rather fidgety; rather obstinate; too old to travel in a strange country, adapt himself to new surroundings, and learn a new language; and too simple to cope with the astute and wily Persians, whom, moreover, religious and national prejudices caused him ever to regard with unconquerable aversion.

This business concluded, we had still to get our passports for the interior. Hekimian accompanied us to the Government offices, where, while a courtly old Turk entertained me with coffee and conversation, a shrewd-looking subordinate noted down the details of our personal appearance in the spaces reserved for that purpose on the passport. I was amused on receiving the document to find my religion described as "English" and my moustache as "fresh" (tt), but not altogether pleased at the entries in the "head" and "chin" columns, which respectively were "tij" (bullet-shaped) and "dejirmen" (round). Before leaving the Government-house we paid our respects to Sururi Efendi, the governor of Trebizond, one of the judges who tried and condemned the wise and patriotic Midhat Pasha. He was a fine-looking old man, and withal courteous; but he is reputed to be corrupt and bigoted.

In the evening at the hotel we made the acquaintance of a Belgian mining-engineer, who had lived for some time in Persia. The account which he gave of that country and its inhabitants

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was far from encouraging. "I have travelled in many lands," he said, "and have discovered some good qualities in every people, with the exception of the Persians, in whom I have failed to find a single admirable characteristic. Their very language bears witness against them and exposes the sordidness of their minds. When they wish to thank you they say, 'Lauf-i-shund gydd; 'May your kindness be increased,' that is, 'May you give me something more'; and when they desire to support an assertion with an oath they say 'Bi-juz-i-zafiz-i-khudat,' 'By thy precious life,' or 'Bi-marg-i-shund,' 'By your death,' that is, 'May you die if I speak untruly.' And they would be as indifferent to your death as to the truth of their own assertions."

Although we were ready to start on the following day, we were prevented from doing so by a steady downpour of rain. Having completed all our arrangements, we paid a visit to the Persian Consulate in company with Mr Longworth. In answer to our enquiry as to whether our passports required his visa, the Persian Consul signified that this was essential, and, for the sum of one majdavie apiece, endorsed each of them with a lengthy inscription so tastefully executed that it seemed a pity that, during the whole period of our sojourn in Persia, no one asked to see them. Though perfectly useless and unnecessary, the visa, as a specimen of calligraphy, was cheap at the price.

Next day (Friday, 7th October) the rain had ceased, and at an early hour we were plunged in the confusion without which, as it would seem, not even the smallest caravan can start. The muleteers, who had been urging us to hasten our preparations, disappeared so soon as everything was ready. When they had been found and brought back, it was discovered that no bridle had been provided for H——'s horse; for, though both of us had

1 The repetition of the following curse on the three first Caliphs of the Sunnis is accounted by Persian Shi'ites as a pious exercise of singular virtue: 'O God, curse 'Omar; then Abu Bakr and 'Omar; then 'Abd-Deen and 'Omar: then 'Omar; then 'Omar!'

1 Apart from the doubtful justice of judging a people by the idioms of their language, it may be pointed out that, with regard to the two last expressions, they are based on the idea that to swear by one's own life or death would be to swear by a thing of little value compared to the life or death of a friend.