

CHAPTER XXVII.

PERSIA.

[*ED. NOTE.*—For the subject of this chapter *v.* Sir Percy Sykes: *A History of Persia*, 2nd ed. (1921), Vol. II, chs. LXXX–LXXXIII; Sir Arthur Hardinge: *A Diplomatist in the East* (1928), ch. IX; E. G. Browne: *The Persian Revolution, 1905–9* (1910); Lord Ronaldshay: *The Life of Lord Curzon* (1928), Vol. II, ch. VI, pp. 99–101, and ch. XXIII; Sir Arnold Wilson: *The Persian Gulf* (1928), ch. XVI. A short summary of developments after 1905 may here be given to make intelligible some of the allusions below. Throughout 1905 there were disturbances which ultimately took the form of a demand for representative institutions and a constitution. These became too strong to be resisted, and on August 5, 1906, the Shah, Muzaffur-ud-Din, issued a rescript promising to form a national assembly (Mejliss) representing the whole people. Elections then took place and the Shah formally opened the first session in person on October 7, 1906. Disputes began but the Shah signed the Constitution on January 1, 1907, dying on the 8th. He was succeeded by his eldest son Mohammed Ali Mirza, who pledged himself to the Constitution in a message to his people of February 11, 1907. Though this by no means allayed the public discontent, the Anglo-Russian Entente was concluded before Mohammed Ali's rule was seriously shaken. He was, however, hostile to the Mejliss, and conflict was frequent. He was ultimately compelled to seek refuge in the Russian Legation at Tehran (July 15, 1909), and thence exiled to the Crimea. His second son, Sultan Ahmed Mirza, aged 12, already recognised as the Valiahd, succeeded him with Asad-ul-Mulk as Regent.]

I.—THE “CURZON DESPATCH” AND THE REPLY OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, 1899–1900.

[*ED. NOTE.*—On September 21, 1899, nine months after the arrival of Lord Curzon in India, the Government of India sent a long despatch to the Secretary of State for India in Council upon British policy in Persia and the Persian Gulf. On July 6, 1900, the Secretary of State, Lord George Hamilton, sent a reply.

As the result of debates in the House of Lords on February 6 and 10, 1908 (*Parl. Deb.*, 4th Ser., Vol. 183, pp. 999–1047, 1306–1353), and in the House of Commons on February 17 (*Parl. Deb.*, 4th Ser., Vol. 184, pp. 460–563, especially pp. 543–50), a substantial extract from the despatch of the Government of India was published as a command paper (*A. & P.* (1908), CXXV, (Cd. 3882), pp. 457–67. *cp. Parl. Deb.*, 4th Ser., Vol. 184, pp. 1711–5). Though described on publication as an extract, many of the most important sections of the original document were in fact reproduced.

The Editors have thought it needless to reprint paragraphs 1–27, as these are given with substantial accuracy in the Parliamentary Paper, a few sentences only being slightly summarised. The Editors have omitted paragraphs 28–39, which deal with the Russian advance in Khorassan, Seistan, etc., in considerable detail. Paragraphs 40–46 describe French, German, Turkish and other interests in the Persian Gulf. Paragraphs 42–46 are printed in full.

From the standpoint of Anglo-Russian relations the vital part of the despatch is contained in paragraphs 47–62, which are now printed in full, although already published in the Parliamentary Paper with some omissions. The remaining part of the despatch is technical and relates mainly to details of consular establishment, etc., which have been accordingly omitted.]

No. 319.

The Government of India to the Secretary of State for India in Council.

F.O. Persia 615.

My Lord,

Simla, September 21, 1899.

. . . . 42. It should be noted that in the recent papers, with copies of which we have been favoured by Her Majesty's Government, we have found a repudiation of French ambitions in the quarter under discussion, no less explicit than that which we have already quoted from the lips of Count Mouravieff. On July 19th, 1899, M. Cambon said to Lord Salisbury that “France had no political aspiration whatever in the Persian Gulf; that she did not desire any kind of fortification or settlement or political privileges, or anything beyond the maintenance of those rights already insured to her by treaty.” We have been gratified to read this assurance, by which we hope that succeeding French ministries may hold themselves bound. But we regret that it has

not been communicated, not merely to Her Majesty's Government, but also to the French Agents in those regions, who do not appear to be equally acquainted with the views of the Government that they serve.

43. In recent years Germany has begun to display a positive and an increasing interest in Persia and also in the Persian Gulf. This interest has been the historical, and perhaps the natural, sequel of a commercial policy that has for some time aimed at securing the control of the principal railways in the Turkish dominions in Asia Minor, and of a political ambition, that more recently still, would appear to aim at the protection of the Ottoman Empire, alike in Europe and Asia. The obvious corollary to a system of German railways in Asia Minor, would be similar railroads to the Persian border and through Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf. Already, as Sir M. Durand has informed the Foreign Office, the Germans have procured a concession for the construction of a road from Khanikin, on the Turko-Persian frontier, to Tehran, and have apparently only abstained from pressing for a railroad in the same quarter, because of the violent opposition with which the Russian Minister met the proposal at Tehran. The second son of the Shah, Prince Malik Mansur, has been spending several months in 1898-99 in Germany, where his education and proclivities are reported as having acquired a marked philo-Teutonic tinge. German military instructors have been proffered for the reorganisation of the Persian army. Prolongations of the Turko-German railways to Baghdad and to the Persian Gulf have been and are still being freely discussed; and the German Government are endeavouring to procure an interest in the overland Turkish Telegraph to Fao. In the Gulf itself a German Consulate was established in 1897 at Bushire, to safeguard the interests of six German subjects in the entire ports of that sea. A Bremen firm opened business at Bushire, but the specially chartered steamers which were sent out from Germany appear to have been a failure. At Basrah a more resolute attempt is being made to capture the local market. Quite recently a number of Germans have for some time been engaged in a study of the situation at Bunder Abbas. During the spring of the present year, a German man-of-war, the "Arcona," visited Maskat, Lingah, and Bushire; and reports have reached us of the likely appearance, at no distant date, of a German line of merchant steamers in the Gulf.

44. While we regard these symptoms of increasing German interest in the Persian Gulf as emphasising the international aspect which the Persian question appears more and more destined to assume, and therefore as adding to the complexities of an already sufficiently difficult situation, we do not question the *bonâ fide* commercial enterprise which is carrying German trade there, as to so many other open seas and ports in the world, and we can conceive that we may even find, in the existence of German political interests, an occasional ally or safeguard for our own. German interests, however, have a tendency to grow with some rapidity, and by steps which are not always acceptable to their neighbours: and we think that the need for an early decision upon the future policy to be adopted by Her Majesty's Government is not diminished, but is enhanced, by the appearance of so active a competitor upon the scene.

45. Apart from the recurrent symptoms of activity on the southern and western shores of the Persian Gulf, with which Her Majesty's Government are familiar, the Turkish Government have also in recent years displayed an increasing interest in its political fortunes. A determined attempt has been made to fortify the shadowy pretensions of the Ottoman Ports to suzerainty over Koweit. A Turkish title has been conferred upon the Sheikh; and forces have more than once been assembled at Basrah for a contemplated expedition against that place. Intrigues are constantly in progress at Bahrein. During 1898 and 1899 a Turkish corvette has been a frequent visitor at Lingah, where, the Sheikh being of Arab descent, Turkish interests are supposed to exist. Finally, the decisions of the Venice Conference and the proceedings of the Sanitary Board at Constantinople have enabled Turkey to claim an interest in the navigation of those waters, of which she has not been slow to take advantage.

46. The only other recent evidences of foreign intervention in the Persian Gulf,

of which we are cognisant, are a concession for the pearl-fisheries in that sea, which was given in 1898 by the Persian Government to a Spaniard and a Belgian, under Russian auspices; and the contemplated appearance at the Gulf ports of customs officers of Belgian nationality, similar to those who have already been placed in charge of the customs houses at Kermanshah and Tabriz, and whose influence, said to be omnipotent at the present moment with the Sadr Azam, is known to be entirely enlisted on the side of France and Russia.

47. We have gathered together these symptoms of external, and notably of Russian or of Russophil, interest in Southern Persia and in the Persian Gulf, not because we desire to invest them individually with an importance to which they are not entitled, but because collectively they indicate, in a manner that is not open to misinterpretation, the policy and ambitions of foreign Powers, and because we desire to impress upon Her Majesty's Government the fact that in an area, by land and by sea, which Great Britain regards with good reason as falling within her sphere of influence, that influence is being directly and increasingly challenged by other nations, who, in proportion as their foothold becomes more securely established, will resist any preferential claims, upon whatever foundation in history or in fact they may rest, and will claim for themselves an equality of right which in theory it may be difficult to contest.

48. More particularly do these considerations apply to the case of Russia, whose advance across the deserts that form a natural barrier of division between Northern and Southern Persia, cannot be regarded with anything but uneasiness by the Government of India, and the appearance of whose flag in the Persian Gulf would import a novel element of unrest into a situation that is at no time without its anxious features. We desire deliberately to say to Your Lordship, with a full consciousness of our responsibility in so saying that difficult as we find it in existing circumstances to meet the financial and military strain imposed upon us by the ever increasing proximity of Russian power upon the northern and north-western frontiers of India from the Pamirs to Herat, we could not contemplate without dismay the prospect of Russian neighbourhood in Eastern or Southern Persia, the inevitable consequence of which must be a great increase of our own burdens; while the maritime defensibility of India would require to be altogether reconsidered, were the dangers of a land invasion to be supplemented by the appearance of a possible antagonist as a naval power in waters contiguous to Indian shores.

49. We cannot pretend to divine the future, or to say whether any European Power, and if so which, will at any time push her advance to the point of claiming a maritime outlet in or near to the Persian Gulf. The fate of Mesopotamia lies beyond our ken: and it may be that in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, some stronger Power may one day exercise dominion at Baghdad, may occupy Basrah, and may demand access for its vessels to the neighbouring waters of the Gulf. Such a consummation, it is in our opinion, in the interests of British policy, as long as may be possible, to postpone. But upon the question of allowing any European Power, and more especially Russia, to overrun Central and Southern Persia, and so to reach the Gulf, or to acquire naval facilities in the latter even without such territorial connections, we do not conceive that any doubt whatever can be entertained; and we imagine that it will be accepted as a cardinal axiom of British policy that no such development would be acquiesced in by Her Majesty's Government. We would arrive with the greater confidence at this conclusion, since we were lately informed by Your Lordship that on April 15th of the present year, Lord Salisbury communicated to the Persian Government with reference to rumours of the cession of a port in the Gulf to Russia, that "Her Majesty's Government felt it to be their duty to renew the intimation that it would not be compatible with the interests of the British Empire that any European Power should exercise control or jurisdiction over the ports of the Persian Gulf."

50. Such being the existing situation in Southern Persia, and the principles of policy accepted by Her Majesty's Government being as already stated, we pass to a consideration of the manner in which these principles should be translated into action,

and of the steps which should, in our opinion, be taken at the present juncture for the protection of the common interests of Great Britain and the Indian Empire.

51. We are aware that, more than half a century ago, there were exchanged, and have more than once since been repeated, certain explicit assurances concerning the integrity and independence of Persia between the governments of Great Britain and Russia. The first of these assurances were entered into by Lord Palmerston and Count Nesselrode. The former in a despatch, dated September 5th, 1834, placed on record that "the governments of Great Britain and Russia are acting, with regard to the affairs of Persia in the same spirit, and are equally animated by a sincere desire to maintain, not only the internal tranquillity, but also the independence and integrity of Persia." Count Nesselrode, in despatches, dated October 20th, 1838, and January 29th, 1839, reiterated these pledges on behalf of his government. Again in 1873 the continued existence of these mutual assurances was referred to with satisfaction by Count de Brunnow, as reported in a despatch by Lord Granville, dated July 10th, 1873. Finally, on March 12th, 1888, M. de Giers intimated, through M. de Staal, to Lord Salisbury that the Russian Government "have no objection to placing again on record that their views on this point are in no way altered"; and a communication to the effect that the engagements between Great Britain and Russia to respect and promote the integrity and independence of the Persian kingdom had again been renewed and confirmed, was accordingly made by Sir H. D. Wolff to the Shah.

52. Whilst it may be presumed that these pledges, so frequently renewed, are still in existence, and while we have no desire to infer that they are within measurable distance of being broken, we are yet of opinion that they are in themselves quite insufficient to arrest the centripetal progress of Russian influence in Persia, or to save either the Persian kingdom, or British interests in it, from the erosive agencies that we have described. Within the limits of a nominally still existing integrity and independence so many encroachments upon both those attributes are possible, that by almost imperceptible degrees they pass into the realm of constitutional fiction, where they may continue to provide an exercise for the speculations of the jurist, long after they have been contemptuously ignored by statesmen.

53. If this proposition is accepted, and if we cannot rely upon written pledges to safeguard the future of Persia, it behoves us to examine the various alternative policies that have been or can be proposed. The first of these is the policy of a regeneration of Persia by Anglo-Russian means; *i.e.*, joint action by Great Britain and Russia to insist upon reforms, to reorganise the administration and finances, to develop the resources of the country, to lend the requisite means, in fact to convert the Persian Government by combined philanthropy from a moribund into a solvent institution. This policy was discussed and rejected by Sir M. Durand in his Memorandum of September 1895, on the ground that Russia would denounce us to the Shah to begin with, and would play us false afterwards; and in his despatch of February 1899, he again "proceeds upon the assumption that we cannot hope to come to terms with Russia, and persuade her to join us in a policy of reform and development." We concur with Her Majesty's Minister in believing that the reform of Persia by a policy of friendly co-operation between Russia and ourselves is out of the question; and we do so in the main for the reason, which no one familiar with Persia will deny, that Russia is interested not in the reform of Persia, but in its decay; that in the background of her ambitions is the vision of a country and a people falling from inherent debility into her grasp; and that any policy which might tend to strengthen the country or to revivify the people, is to be resisted as tending to thwart the fulfilment of those ambitions. We might give many illustrations in support of this proposition; but we will content ourselves with one. Sir M. Durand has lately supplied to the Foreign Office the version given by the Sadr Azam of the agreement between the Persian and Russian Governments, by which the former bound itself in 1889 not to grant any railway concessions to any other Power than Russia, except with the consent of the latter, for a period of 10 years. Whatever be the real facts of the case, there can be no doubt that this engagement, as long as it has lasted, and so long as it continues to last, is an effective barrier to any genuine

development of the country. It was due to expire in the present year. Our latest information from Sir M. Durand is that it has, under pressure from the Russian Government, been renewed for another term of five years.

54. The alternative policy recommended by Sir M. Durand is that we should plainly intimate that any Russian encroachments in Northern Persia will provoke corresponding measures for the protection of British interests in the south. In his Memorandum of September 1895, Her Majesty's Minister suggested that this declaration should be made to the Russian Government. In his despatch of February 1899 he proposed that it should also be made to the Persian Government; so that both parties should be well aware of the steps that would follow upon any further Russian aggression. It has been objected to this policy that such an engagement might impose upon the British Government an unwelcome obligation to intervene and to add to British responsibilities in Southern Persia, at the moment most opportune to Russia, and least opportune to ourselves. There is force in this objection; although we think that it might be met by introducing sufficient elasticity into the proposed intimation to leave Her Majesty's Government free to act for the protection of British interests in Southern Persia, not in a specified manner at a specified moment, but in what manner and at what juncture might commend itself to their judgment. Moreover the value of the objection is somewhat weakened by the consideration that did Russia take any such step in Northern Persia as is here contemplated, counter-action of some sort, with or without a previous intimation, would in all probability be imposed upon Her Majesty's Government; while the knowledge that a Russian advance in the north might be the signal for a corresponding British move in the south would, it can scarcely be doubted, operate as a deterrent upon any premature activity on the part of Russia, since she might thereby gravely jeopardise the realisation of her own dreams of ultimate access to Southern Persia and the Persian Gulf.

55. Nevertheless before we recommend that such a policy should be essayed, we desire to raise the question whether, though it be impossible to conclude an agreement with Russia for the joint patronage and development of Persia, it might not yet be possible to come to an understanding with her for the separate patronage and development of that country in distinct and clearly defined compartments by the two great Powers, in other words for a recognition of British and Russian spheres of interest in the dominions of the Shah. This is a solution the desirability of which has not been lost sight of by Sir M. Durand, but which for certain reasons he did not feel called upon to discuss. Recent events in China have familiarised the public mind with the idea of such spheres of interest, although their existence would appear to be still somewhat lacking both in clearness of definition and in precision of outline. The Viceroy has observed in recent telegrams from Lord Salisbury to Sir M. Durand with reference to a Persian loan and to mining concessions in that country, indications of a willingness to concede to Russia liberties in the north of Persia, parallel in scope and substance with those conceded to Great Britain in the south; and it is worthy of consideration whether in an expansion of this suggestion might not be found a feasible scheme.

56. We have already alluded to the line across Persia drawn by Sir M. Durand from Khanikin on the Turkish frontier, through Kermanshah, Hamadan, Ispahan, Yezd and Kerman to Seistan, as indicating the northern limits of the sphere within which British political influence and trade are paramount. To some extent this partition is assisted by geographical conditions, the great deserts of Central Persia constituting a natural barrier between the north and the south, and roughly dividing the one from the other. But this situation is modified both in the west of Persia, where there are no deserts, and where there is no physical line of demarcation between the respective spheres of influence; in the centre of Persia, where Ispahan can hardly be said to constitute the natural frontier of any geographical zone; and also in the extreme east where Seistan, the inclusion of which in the British sphere would be an obligatory point, lies not to the south but to the north of the great desert. These considerations might not affect the success of any engagement that was carried out with equal *bona fides* by both parties; but they might become a fruitful source of friction were such a

good understanding not to be counted upon in the future. In any case, we would recommend that the line of partition, suggested by Sir M. Durand, should be so far amended as to substitute Kashan for Ispahan. It would be undesirable that any Russian railway should penetrate further south than Kashan, which indeed is separated by a considerable range of hills from Ispahan, or that Russia should have right of access to the very fringe of the latter district.

57. We have observed that in China the Agreement recently concluded between Her Majesty's Government and Russia as to spheres of interest has related to railways only. Either party has pledged itself not to seek on its own account or on behalf of others for railway concessions in the rival sphere, and not to obstruct, directly or indirectly, applications for such concessions, supported by the other in that sphere. *Primâ facie* there does not appear to be any reason why such an agreement should not equally be extended to mines, roads, and other industrial or economic undertakings. The value of such an understanding is considerable; because although political influence is not expressly mentioned, yet in eastern countries commercial and industrial enterprises are the familiar agencies through which political influence is exercised by alien powers, and because that influence is apt to follow in the wake of railways and trade. We do not think, if such an agreement were arrived at with Russia, with reference to the Persian territories lying north and south of the predicated line, that there would be an end to Russian designs in Southern Persia or in the Persian Gulf. Such a result might, perhaps, ensue from an engagement that no political influence should be exercised by either party on the opposite side of the line. But there would be manifest difficulties in arriving at any such understanding; since it would be out of the question to remove the British representatives, either at Tehran, at Tabriz or at Meshed, whose functions necessarily involve the exercise of some sort of political influence, while a corresponding objection would no doubt be felt by the Russian Government. But even an engagement limited to railway and commercial exploitation would have this effect, that it would deprive Russia of the means by which political or territorial ambitions in the rival sphere could most easily be carried out, and would render it difficult for her to push them to success, as long as Great Britain remained on the alert.

58. There are, however, difficulties and drawbacks in the case of such an understanding which it would be impolitic to ignore. We have already hinted at one of their number. The facts with reference to Seistan which have been mentioned by the Viceroy in his Minute, by Sir M. Durand, and also in this despatch, indicate the absolute necessity of including that district within the British sphere. Nevertheless Seistan is physically and administratively a part of the province of Khorasan, from which it is severed by no clear line of division, the Governorship of Seistan being vested in a member of the old ruling family of Kain, the two existing heads of which are brothers, residing respectively at Tabbas and Birjand. It also seems exceedingly doubtful to us whether Russia would, by any such agreement as we are discussing, forgo her designs upon Seistan itself, and still more her chances of reaching the eastern extremity of the Persian Gulf. Nor again is it clear that she would be willing to cancel the engagement with regard to railway construction, which she has recently renewed with the Persian Government, and to hand over the southern half of Persia to possible railway exploitation by British agency, in return for a monopoly of similar exploitation (which may be said to be already at her disposal) in the northern half. These, however, are considerations which could only be decided by the attitude of Russia herself, were she approached on the subject by Her Majesty's Government. We indicate them merely for the purpose of showing that we are far from confident that the suggestion, if put forward, will meet with a favourable reception.

59. A more serious drawback, from the point of view of British interests, is the fact that the capital of Persia would lie in the northern or Russian sphere, and that Russian influence there, already predominant, could hardly fail to become supreme. The situation that has recently arisen in China would present itself with tenfold gravity and emphasis. A desire would not merely be intimated to connect the capital with the Russian railway system; but a line itself would, we may imagine, at once be made to

Tehran, while corresponding lines would in all probability be constructed from the Russian frontier in Georgia to Tabriz, and in Trans-Caspia to Meshed. With the three great cities of Northern Persia thus permanently linked with the Russian system, the power of pressure exercised by the Russian Government, which is already considerable, would be positively overwhelming. The results would, in all probability, be felt beyond the limits of Persia. They would aggravate the already formidable offensive strength of Russia against Northern Afghanistan, and would increase the weight and influence of her position throughout Central Asia. In Persia itself, the Shah would tend more and more to become a Russian puppet, and Northern Persia a Russian proconsulate. We should look with great anxiety, in such a case, upon the fate of such institutions as the Imperial Bank of Persia, and the Indo-European Telegraph Department, whose headquarters are in Tehran. We should fear a marked diminution of influence on the part of Her Majesty's representative at the capital; and we do not conceal our anticipations that in the long run such a partition might involve the permanent break-up of the Persian kingdom, and, if it did not ultimately lead to rival Russian and British Protectorates in the north and south, might at any rate result in the selection of another capital, and in the rule of more than one native prince in Persia.

60. Neither will it be overlooked by Her Majesty's Government that, while any such arrangement with Russia might preclude that Power from obtaining control over Central and Southern Persia and in that way reaching the Persian Gulf, it would not for one moment retard, but might on the contrary accelerate her advance to the same objective through Mesopotamia by way of Baghdad. This is an issue which we should regard with scarcely inferior repugnance; but the problem is one which we do not feel called upon to discuss upon the present occasion, and which would require to be examined on independent grounds. Nor again would an Anglo-Russian agreement preclude France, or Germany, or any other Power from endeavouring to acquire in Southern Persia or in the Gulf the position from which Russia would *ex hypothesi* have debarred herself. There might even be combined action between them for that object. These however are features inseparable from the solution which we are discussing, and which would be of a less formidable character, if the influence of the principal competitor were removed from the scene. We should strongly deprecate the political rivalry of any European nation in the neighbourhood of the Persian Gulf; even though such a situation, while fraught with constant annoyance, might not, as in the case of Russia, constitute a positive menace to the Indian Empire.

61. There remains the further danger, distinctly contemplated by Sir M. Durand in discussing the question of a possible understanding with Russia, that she would not abide by the terms of any such understanding. Sufficient grounds for this induction may unquestionably be found in the history of Russian advance in Central Asia during the past half century. But an appreciation of the inclinations and idiosyncrasies of both parties to an agreement, in the light, where possible, of past experience, is an element in the drawing up of a fresh bargain which is not likely to be lost sight of by either agent, whether it be regarded as involving a discount from, or an appreciation of, the value of the new contract. Moreover such contracts, if not of perpetual duration, or even if ultimately infringed by one of the two parties, have been shown in many cases to be of immense value, in the respite that they afford from the strain of an otherwise ceaseless rivalry, and in the opportunity presented for a peaceful consolidation of existing interests.

62. We have now placed before Your Lordship the *pros* and *cons*, as they present themselves to our eyes, of the alternative policies in Persia. While not sanguine as to the prospects of success, we are ourselves of opinion that the experiment of an understanding with Russia as to future spheres of interest in that country is worthy of being made, in the interests both of Persia itself, and still more of harmony between the two great Powers, upon whose relations the peace of Asia may be said to depend. Should Her Majesty's Government decide upon making any overtures to the Russian Government in the direction indicated, and should they either be rejected, or result in

failure, it will still be possible to adopt the alternative recommended by Sir M. Durand! Indeed, if the terms of a reasonable arrangement are proffered by one party, and are refused by the other, the natural corollary would appear to be that the originator of the proposal should reserve to himself the right to protect by whatever means may be at his disposal the interests which he has endeavoured to conserve by friendly co-operation; and should meet what would in such a case be conscious aggression on the one side by retaliation on the other.

68. In any case, however, though still more in the case of a failure to arrive at an understanding with Russia, we conceive that it is incumbent upon Her Majesty's Government and upon the Government of India to come to an early decision upon the subsidiary question, raised by Sir M. Durand, namely as to the steps that require forthwith to be taken in order to safeguard British and Indian interests in the so-called British sphere in Persia from the competition with which we have shown them to be threatened. . . .⁽¹⁾

89. We have now completed our survey of the proposals that have been submitted to us for examination, and of the situation in Persia as it presents itself to our eyes. In commending our views to the earnest consideration of Your Lordship and of Her Majesty's Government, we trust that we may have succeeded in impressing upon both, the gravity of the situation with which Great Britain and India are jointly faced, and the necessity, while there is yet time, of meeting it with definite and united counsels. We conclude by reiterating the confident hope, already expressed in our despatch of August 10th, 1898, that in the last resort, and in any sudden emergency, we may rely upon Her Majesty's Government for the protection of interests which are vital both to India and to the British Empire.

We have, etc.,
 CURZON OF KEDLESTON.
 E. H. H. COLLEN.
 C. M. RIVAZ.
 C. E. DAWKINS.
 T. RALEIGH.
 R. GARDINER.

⁽¹⁾ [Here follow details as to charges of British establishments in Persia, etc.]

No. 320.

Lord G. Hamilton to Government of India.

F.O. Persia 623.
 (No. 14.) Secret.
 My Lord,

India Office, London, July 6, 1900.

. . . . 5. I pass on to the careful and exhaustive review contained in your letter of the 21st of September, relative to the present situation in Persia, and the course of British relations with it. The most vital interests of the Government of India in that country concern the defence of the Indian Empire against any attack proceeding from the borders of Beluchistan or Southern Persia, and from the ports in the Persian Gulf. But any measures which may be suggested for meeting or averting that risk must take into account the resistance which they are likely to encounter from foreign Powers, whose own interests in Persia and in the Gulf have been greatly extended in recent years. It is in this respect that the situation has undergone a material change of late.

6. As regards Russia, her advance on the borders of Persia and her assimilation of the territory absorbed by her in Central Asia, have ensured to her a safe stepping stone for a fresh move. Our base of operations remains on the sea while

Russia has moved, and as she has advanced her influence has increased. If we lay down the principle of the independence of Persia, we are met by the fact that Russia has already gained on land a position which dominates and threatens almost the whole of Persia, and enables her, under cover of concessions and monopolies, to exercise a practical and exclusive control over a considerable proportion of the administration of the country. The very independence which we struggle to maintain may become the most effective instrument which Russia can use against us. Already our influence in Northern Persia has yielded to the pressure of Russia, which could annex that part of Persia without our being able to offer any effective resistance.

7. Your Excellency is also aware of the course of events in the Gulf, which have already modified that theory of "unchallenged supremacy both naval and commercial" to which you refer in paragraph 12 of your letter under reply. France has resolutely asserted her right to a joint protectorate over Muscat with all the consequences that may flow from the guarantee of 1862. Germany is interested in the development of railway enterprise, and her agents have lately proceeded to Koweit. Russian ships have visited Bunder Abbas and adjoining islands, as well as other ports in the Gulf. In these and various other ways the unquestioned position, which was formerly asserted and exercised by us, has, even in the Gulf itself, been encroached upon. Though we still possess a practical monopoly of trade in the Gulf, signs are not wanting that this advantage will be gradually challenged, partly by the extension of railways to the sea and partly by the greater activity of foreign trade. It can hardly be maintained that, in view of such a competition, civilized Powers can be permanently denied the benefit of access to the ports of Persia because their admission will infringe upon a monopoly which we have hitherto enjoyed.

8. But these changes, which are the inevitable consequence of improved facilities both of internal communication and sea transport, render it the more necessary that we should closely watch over the objects and aims of our past policy in Persia, so that under the changing circumstances of the future we may effectively safeguard those interests and spheres of influence in Persia which are essential to India. Your Excellency discusses the possibility of coming to an agreement with Russia, as to the spheres of influence to be exercised respectively in Persia by the two countries. There is much to be said in favour of such an understanding, if it could be established and maintained. But the probability is, that if any such overtures were made by Her Majesty's Government to the Russian Foreign Office, the Shah would be informed of the proposal in such a manner as possibly to convey to his mind the idea that the partition of his territories between Great Britain and Russia was the immediate object of the present policy of Great Britain. For these and other reasons I see no advantage at present in making any such proposals to the Russian Government, or in making any fresh announcement to the Shah's Government on the subject of our settled and declared policy in Southern Persia. We have, at the present moment, great trading interests in the Persian Gulf, we have a frontier conterminous with Eastern Persia, and the limits of the protected State of Khelat extend to the sea-board. We are under treaty engagements with the trucial chiefs in the Gulf, and they look to us to protect their rights. If ever Persia or the Sultan of Muscat would prove unable to maintain order or repress disturbance on their seaboard, we have, from the overwhelming character of our commercial interests, the prior claim to step in and maintain order in the Persian Gulf. The only question is how far recent events and concessions require that fresh action should be taken to reserve this claim and maintain our rights, in view of the gradual intrusion of other foreign interests into fresh spheres of influence and territory.

9. Her Majesty's Government has, as your Lordship is aware, taken two steps of late which may lead to important results, and which have impressed upon the Persian Government a sense of the grave issues involved in losing sight of the legitimate interests of Great Britain and India in the ports of the Gulf and in Southern Persia. On the 15th of April 1899 Lord Salisbury informed the Persian

Government that "Her Majesty's Government felt it to be their duty to renew the intimation that it would not be compatible with the interests of the British Empire that any European Power should exercise control or jurisdiction over the ports of the Persian Gulf." On the 20th of March last Her Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires at Tehran was instructed to remind the Persian Minister for Foreign Affairs "of the written promise given by the Persian Government on the 23rd of October 1897, that the Customs of Southern Persia shall never be placed under foreign supervision and control," and "Her Majesty's Government must hold the Persian Government to the strict observance of this engagement, of which they were reminded in December last."

10. In regard to concessions for railways, the conveyance to the Persian Government of an equally precise intimation was authorised in the telegram from the Marquess of Salisbury to Mr. Spring Rice on the 4th of April last, when a reference was made to "the promise of the late Shah that Great Britain shall have priority in the construction of a Southern Railway to Tehran, that if concessions for railways are given to others in the North a similar concession shall be granted to an English Company in the South, and that no Southern Railway concession shall be granted to any foreign company without consultation with Her Majesty's Government." The Persian Government was accordingly reminded of this engagement.

11. In the Gulf itself an examination of the ports, harbours and islands is being conducted, and further reports on the subject from the Captains of Her Majesty's ships are awaited.

12. Your Excellency may be assured that all vigilance will be exercised in closely watching the course of affairs in Persia, and that whilst Her Majesty's Government do not propose to adopt for the moment any departure from their past line of action, they readily admit that the conditions there may so alter as to necessitate some change in the procedure and measures required for protecting Indian interests in Persia. In the meanwhile your Excellency in Council is considering the subject of military preparations and the scheme of defence discussed in my Secret Despatch No. 5, dated the 23rd of February last, and I have under my consideration your letter No. 51 (Secret, Military Department) dated the 29th of March 1900.

I have, &c.

GEORGE HAMILTON.

II.—SURVEY OF BRITISH POLICY, 1905.

No. 321.

Memorandum on British Policy in Persia.

(8526.)

Confidential.

Foreign Office, October 31, 1905.

In a Memorandum dated December 1895, and in a despatch of the 12th February, 1899, Sir H. M. Durand, then His Majesty's Minister at Tehran, submitted his views upon the existing state of affairs in Persia, and made certain suggestions regarding the best steps to be taken in order to improve our position and to counteract the growth of Russian influence. Various of his recommendations, such as those concerning the establishment of British Consular posts at Kerman, Bunder Abbas, and Kermanshah, in Seistan and on the Karun, and the improvement in the position of our Consuls at Ispahan and Tabreez, have since been carried into effect.

In a despatch of the 21st September, 1899,⁽¹⁾ the Government of India discuss and amplify Sir H. M. Durand's proposals. They describe British—*i.e.*, Anglo-

⁽¹⁾ [*v. supra*, pp. 856-63, No. 319.]