

D

0000016766



THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY

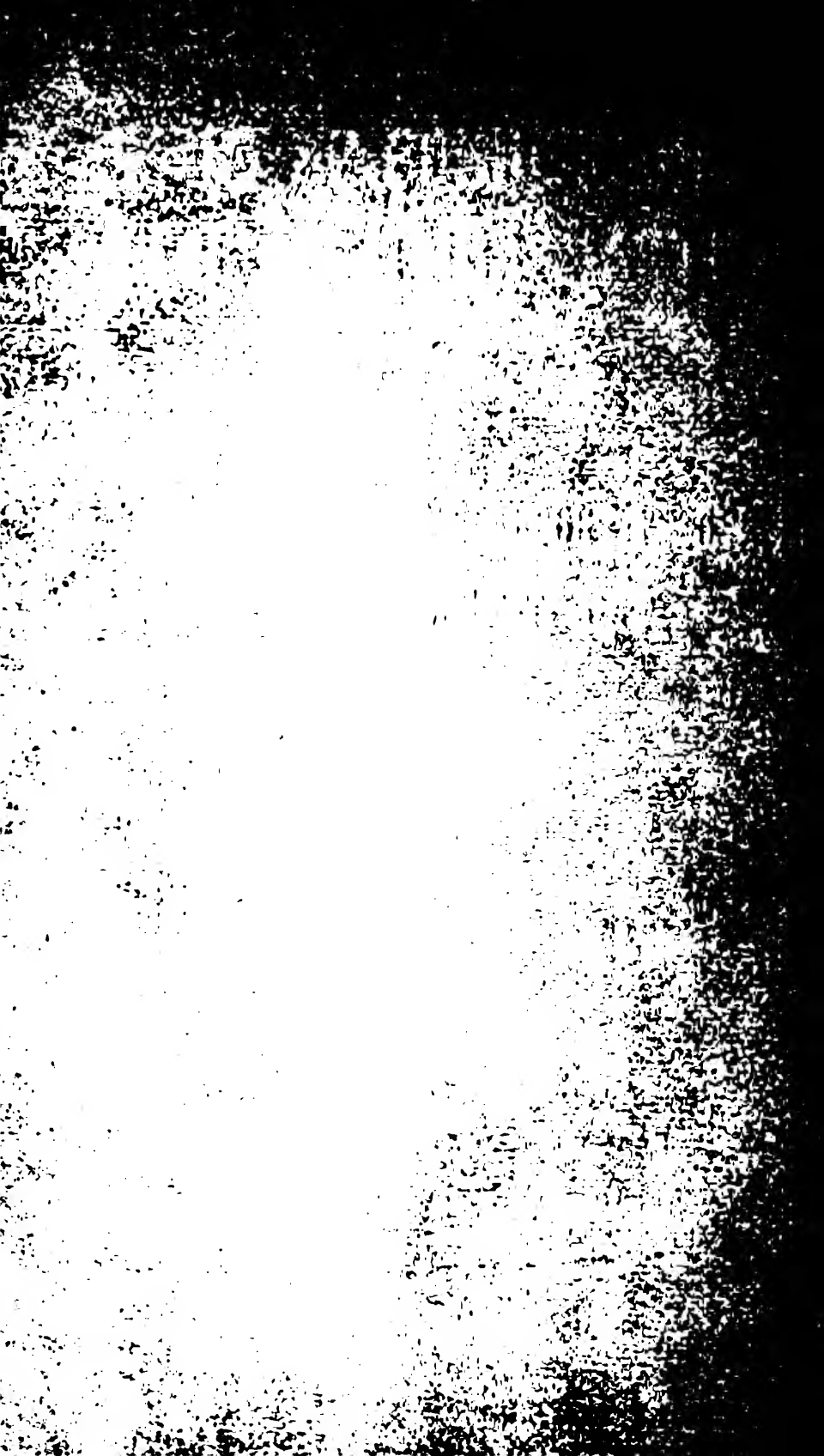
OUR RECENT PROGRESS IN SOUTHERN PERSIA,
AND ITS POSSIBILITIES

BY

H. R. SYKES



LONDON
CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY, 22, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1905



Proceedings of the Central
Asian Society.

OUR RECENT PROGRESS IN SOUTHERN PERSIA,
AND ITS POSSIBILITIES.

BY

H. R. SYKES.

READ MARCH 1, 1905.

OUR RECENT PROGRESS IN SOUTHERN PERSIA, AND ITS POSSIBILITIES

SIR THOMAS HOLDICH, in introducing the lecturer, said: It is well known that the Central Asian Society moves freely over all parts of Asia in the subjects which are brought forward at its meetings. Turning from the Far East, which has occupied our attention recently, we are to-day to consider the more familiar ground of Southern Persia. It is a subject which has many points of interest; they may be military, commercial, political, or historical. And we shall, I am sure, derive much pleasure in listening to a gentleman bearing the distinguished name of Sykes—a name always welcome to the Society. Our lecturer to-day has had most recent opportunities for observing how affairs are progressing in Southern Persia. I will now ask Mr. Sykes to read his paper.

In the paper which it is to be my privilege to read to you this afternoon, I shall deal, as its title suggests, with a series of events that have recently occupied a foremost place on the commercial and political arena of Southern and South-Eastern Persia. I shall endeavour to show that the apathy with which our Foreign Office had too long regarded the gradual advance of Russia has at length been dispelled, to be followed by a recrudescence of activity in those portions of the Shah's dominions which, adjoining our Indian frontier, we have every right to regard as coming within the legitimate sphere of our influence.

With this opportune revival I do not entirely credit the Foreign Office. Much is due to the energy and influence of Lord Curzon, and one must search for the origin of the events of the last two years at the selfsame source from which sprang the missions to Lhasa and Kabul. Foremost among these events I would certainly class the construction

of the new transcontinental wire across some 750 miles of Persian territory. For some years the old line, viâ Tabriz, Teheran, Bushire, and thence by cable to Karachi, has been growing insufficient for modern requirements. The rate of transmission is always slower through a cable than through an overhead wire. It was costly to maintain, and was wearing out. The convention for the new line across Persia was signed at Teheran on August 16, 1901, and the following are among the more important conditions of the agreement.

A three-wire line was to be constructed by the Persian Government from Kashan to the Baluchistan frontier, viâ Yezd and Kerman, traversing wherever possible inhabited districts. It was to be built under the direction and supervision of the British telegraph staff then controlling the international line in Persia, the British Government agreeing to procure for the Persian Government the material, and to arrange for the carriage of the stores to the sites required.

The Persian Government agreed to lease the use and transit revenue of the line when complete to the Indo-European Telegraph Department at a rental of 4 per cent. on the capital expended on its construction, three-fourths of such rental to be retained by the British Government to recoup them for the advances made, and one-fourth, subject to a minimum of 25,000 francs, to be paid annually to the Persian Government.

The maintenance of the line is to remain in the hands of the British Director and his staff, the cost being defrayed by the British Government. The Persian Government retains the revenue derived from the local traffic on the Persian wire; and as regards international messages, originating or terminating in Persia, the Persian Government shall receive two-thirds of the receipts of all *bona-fide* terminal messages.

This convention is to remain in force until January, 1925, or for so much longer as the debt due by Persia for the construction of the line remains unpaid.

So, in general terms, we have built the line for the

Persians ; and we have advanced them the money for its construction, which we recover from the traffic later on.

The actual building of the line commenced more than two years ago, and was completed early last summer. For months before its commencement stores were accumulated at various ports on the Persian Gulf, whence they were moved up-country and dropped at various points on the route. The work of construction was pushed forward at a rapid rate, and between Kashan and Yezd, a distance of 237 miles, an average of fifteen miles per week was maintained, notwithstanding a delay at one point of twenty-one days owing to bad weather. At Yezd thirty days were wasted in waiting the arrival of material from the coast, and the work was then advanced another 218 miles to Kerman, which was reached in October, 1903. Thence, after a few days' halt, the line crossing the Zain-ul-abad Pass was carried forward 115 miles to Bam, and in due course another twenty-five miles to Azizabad. Here, however, an unfortunate delay of six weeks occurred.

There was more than one route by which the desert to the Baluchistan frontier might be crossed, and the Government had not come to a decision as to which of these should be adopted ; and when the point was finally left for Mr. King Wood, the chief constructor, to settle himself, he found his progress seriously handicapped by the want of transport, which had dwindled away during the period of inactivity. Indeed, he was only enabled to retain his Persian workmen, whose terrors of the desert ahead were now augmented by a spell of heat excessive for February, owing to the fact that he had omitted to pay them their last month's wages. This delay was all the more unfortunate as the spring was now advancing, and the heat and other horrors of the Lut were growing daily more formidable. But eventually the desert was crossed viâ the wells of Shurgaz and Gurg and the village of Nasratabad Ispi, whence the line was carried due east seventy miles to Kuhl-i-Malek Siah, where it joined the newly-constructed line from Quetta.

The cost of this line through Persia works out at about

£130 per mile, and is about equally divided between the cost of material, working expenses, and transport; and with regard to the latter item, by far the largest expense consisted in carrying the material up-country to the various sites, an average distance of not more than 300 or 400 miles. For whereas it cost about 30s. per ton to transfer the material from English to Persian ports by sea, a distance of several thousand miles, it cost six or seven times that amount to carry the same material less than one-tenth of the distance across Persian plains and passes. Moreover, the large advance it created on all transport rates throughout all Southern Persia seems to point to the fact that the available transport of the country is only just sufficient for its normal requirements.

I was fortunate enough during my recent travels in Persia to meet the line in course of construction on two occasions: once between Yezd and Kerman, and again just as it was entering the Lut after the six weeks of idleness at Azizabad. The whole of the work has been splendidly and most efficiently carried out. The materials are of the best; no detail has been overlooked; no nut or bolt or insulator in which the least flaw was discernible has been employed. The line from Kashan to Bam carries three wires, two of them for British international use, while the third, the Persian wire, fulfils local requirements. Beyond Bam a single wire only is carried to Kuh-i-Malek Siah, and the masts, instead of twenty, now only number ten to the mile. The difficulty of carrying even a single-wire line across a desert country like the Lut, and of supplying during this period of construction men and animals, not only with provisions, but even with water, is evidenced by the fact that no fewer than 1,000 transport animals were required for this section of the work.

The benefits that this new line confers upon all classes, and particularly upon Europeans, in Yezd and Kerman is immense. When I first saw Kerman, a little more than two years ago, it was connected with the outer world by a most unreliable wire of Persian construction and control. In the winter months it was seldom in working order, and

we were obliged to send on telegrams 220 miles for transmission from Yezd. Moreover, it was only possible to telegraph in Persian characters. To-day our officials are in touch with Simla and the Foreign Office, and Reuter's news reaches Kerman daily.

But it is eastward of these centres that I anticipate the full weight of its importance will be felt. Its presence should have a most salutary effect on the lawlessness and brigandage so common in those less-known portions of Persia and Baluchistan through which it passes, owing to the prompt notice of outrage which can be given to the authorities. And so, by making the passage of caravans safer, it should be the means of stimulating new trade along routes which, owing to bad repute amongst other causes, have fallen into disuse. Baluchistan will be a great gainer, and it is even possible to look forward to an increase of trade along the Quetta-Nushki route; for whatever may be the advantage of the Bandar Abbas routes to and from India on the score of cheapness, they are still far from safe, and I see greater possibilities for the westward development of this route (*i.e.*, from Kuh-i-Malek Siah across the Lut to Kerman, and even Yezd) than northward into Khorassan, where our trade is blocked by Russian bounties and quarantine officers, not to mention the difficulties our traders experience of finding loads for the return journey to India.

A little development of the Lut along the course of the line between Kuh-i-Malek Siah and Azizabad, such as the digging of a few wells and the construction of an occasional rest-house, might do much towards the realization of this scheme.

Thus, I anticipate that, like the railway, though of course to a less degree, the telegraph may help to develop the country through which it passes. It will then possess a decided local and commercial influence. Now, it has been pointed out that commercial influence in these days, especially in regions where government is weak or remiss, readily becomes political. So although the first effect will probably lie in the direction of pacification and civilization, to the benefit of our traders, we may look to it as pro-

ductive of something more far-reaching and more substantial in effect than a mere development of trade, so that the final result cannot be shown under the heading of pounds, shillings, and pence.

It offers us important vested interests and an undoubted political influence through the very heart of Persia, and whatever may be the effect north of the line, there can be no doubt that south of it—that is to say, between the line and the seaboard of Persia and Baluchistan, where the question of our supremacy is vital to our Imperial interests—the presence of the line will have an influence second only to that derivable from the existence of a railway.

I will pass on now to what I consider one of the most hopeful signs of official awakening to the great importance of the Persian Question. I allude to the large increase which the past two years have shown in the number of our consulates. At the commencement of 1903, including the Resident at Bushire, we had in all Persia only nine or ten consular officials. To-day we have fifteen. In that year there were added to the list a permanent Consul at Shiraz, and a new Vice-Consul at Turbat-i-Haideri.

The appointment of a permanent Consul at Shiraz gives the Resident at Bushire liberty to devote the whole of his attention to matters concerning the Gulf. Until two years ago it was his custom to retire from the coast and spend the hot months in Shiraz, thus dividing his attention between the two stations. The necessity for this annual migration has now been removed.

The appointment of a vice-consulate at Turbat-i-Haideri, within eighty miles of Meshed, where British representation already appears to be out of proportion to the amount of British trade, might strike the casual observer as superfluous. The Government of India was, however, obliged to place a Consul there to protect our Indian traders from the pressing attention paid them by the Russian quarantine officers, on the plea of preventing the introduction of plague from India.

The following year, 1904, saw a still further addition to our consular staff, and the number of our officers was raised from twelve to fifteen.

A Consul was appointed at Ahwaz, a town of no small importance, situated on the Karun, Persia's only navigable river. From here an excellent road has been constructed by Messrs. Lynch to Ispahan, a distance of 270 miles, as against 485 miles from Bushire; so that, in view of the costliness of land-borne as opposed to sea-borne traffic, Ahwaz, rather than Bushire, appears to be the natural port of Ispahan. The climate is fair, and the district is free from the curse of fanatical population, which is not the case at the neighbouring town of Shuster. Kermanshah, too, has been added to the list. This large and flourishing town on the Baghdad-Teheran route is the first of any importance reached (from Baghdad) after entering Persian territory, and the annual trade passing through it is valued at over a million sterling.

Then, we have sent a second political officer to Sistan, on the flank of our Indian Empire, where it is most important to watch carefully our commercial and political interests. During last year he has spent much of his time travelling between Sistan and Meshed, and may eventually take up his position at Birjand, a considerable town lying some 200 miles north of Sistan on the Sistan-Meshed and the Bandar Abbas-Meshed trade routes. There is one very interesting point with regard to the creation of these new consulates which is clearer if their positions be marked off on a map of Persia. It will then be seen that three of them—Kermanshah, Ahwaz, and Shiraz—lie at points on the principal Gulf trade routes, while at Turbat and in Sistan we are strengthening our position on the flank of our Indian Empire. We are thus additionally safeguarding our interests on two flanks of Persian frontier, the only two of which our trade has any chance of entering Persian territory—the one by sea, the other along the overland routes through Baluchistan or Afghanistan, and where it is so important that our influence should be maintained.

There is a point in the system of administration of our consulates in Persia which I venture to suggest calls for remedy. Whereas a proportion of our consulates are under the Foreign Office in London, the remainder have

been appointed by, and are maintained at, the expense of the Government of India. I should prefer to see all these consulates under one control, and I have no hesitation in saying that this control ought to be the Government of India. We might then be in a position to consider the advisability of a general system of Eastern Consuls under an Eastern Department. The Indian Political Service would probably be the best source from which these officials might be derived, but they should be caught young enough and receive a special training.

There is much in the nature of his surroundings that an Indian Political on entering Persia will find new. He is no longer amongst a race of his fellow-subjects. He is apt to forget this. The Persian is poor, but inordinately proud, and withal very sensitive; and he is apt to forget this also. Taet is a most important qualification, and the failure to remark this axiom may hinder the British cause in Persia. Besides this, there is a new power at work in the land which he must learn to recognise as being permanent. The introduction of Belgians to superintend the Customs has been a most astute move on the part of Russia. Their presence at once disarms suspicion; moreover, it was not unlikely that the eradication of the evils of Persian administration would be a source of irritation to many. The Persian—an unprogressive Conservative of the most pronounced type—cannot brook innovations, especially when they affect his pocket, and Russia preferred that the odium which might be invoked by constitutional changes should be borne by other shoulders than her own. She is now going a step farther, and we hear of a proposal to employ Belgians for the purpose of administering provincial finances. When the time is ripe we may perhaps see the Belgians superseded by Russian officials. But though this state of things is not entirely in favour of British interest, still, there is much that our Indian official in Persia, and even the Government of India itself, may do, and much that may be left undone, to make chances of friction between Belgians and our traders of less frequent occurrence. For the Belgian has come to stop, and nothing

we can do can have any effect in checking his acquisition of power, whereas opposition can only serve to turn his sympathies where his interests already are—to Russia.

Incidentally the work of the Belgians is good, and we are placed in the false position of opposing what is obviously a good thing for the country. An excess of energy, then, in certain directions on the part of our Consuls is not conducive to harmonious relations with the powers that be; and in the exercise of their duties they should be warned against an unbending attitude, which will oftener than not fail to obtain the desired result.

The Perso-Afghan Frontier Commission, under Colonel McMahon, which has just finished most important work in Sistan, might very well engage our attention for a few moments. The necessity for a redelimitation of this boundary, which, as you probably all know, was originally delimited by General Goldsmid in 1872, arose in consequence of the river Helmund, which for some miles constituted the frontier between the two States, relinquishing its old bed and forming a new one a few miles within Persian territory. Disputes arose between the villagers, a few shots were exchanged, and the British Government, in accordance with the treaty of 1857, claimed the right to arbitrate.

The striking difference between the scale of the present mission and Goldsmid's mission is indicative of the increased attention which is now being paid to Persian affairs. Goldsmid arrived in Sistan from Bandar Abbas early in February, 1872. His following, including a staff of six, escort, servants, and camel-drivers, was seventy-three. McMahon has over 1,500 men with him; and whereas ninety camels sufficed to transport Goldsmid's stores and baggage, McMahon requires over 2,000. Throughout his stay in Sistan Goldsmid was shamefully treated. His work was constantly hindered by Persian intrigue. The property, and even the lives of his followers, were often in danger. His attempt to fly the British flag met with a storm of fanatical resentment on the part of the Sistanis, and both he and his surveyors were repeatedly refused

admission into forts and villages. After six weeks of such treatment, can we wonder that he was obliged to withdraw from Sistan? Travelling viâ Meshed, he reached Teheran on June 5, delivering his award on August 19. His decision had the advantage of pleasing neither party, and notice of appeal was given, but the appeal was disallowed.

The six weeks spent in Sistan by the Commissioner and his small staff in no way sufficed for an accurate survey of the country, and it has been far from easy for McMahon to establish which of the many streamlets that flow northward through Sistan was the original bed of the Helmund constituting Goldsmid's boundary.

McMahon's mission left Quetta at the end of 1902, and reached Sistan through Afghan territory early the following year. There was some small opposition offered to his crossing the Helmund into Persian territory near the Band-i-Sistan, but this and all subsequent opposition was easily traceable to Russian intrigue.

For some years previous to the mission's advent, Russian influence had been gradually gaining ground in Sistan. Ever jealous of our increasing trade along the Quetta-Nushki trade route, she employed every means at her disposal for its annihilation; for British trade meant British influence in Sistan, and this was contrary to Russia's interests. She therefore sent as her consular representative one of the cleverest men in her service, a man whose reputation for intrigue was beyond question, and whose conscience would in no way interfere with Russia's object of driving the British and British trade out of Sistan. In this endeavour he was assisted by Belgian Customs officials and Russian quarantine officers. The governorship of Sistan— one of the last remaining hereditary posts in Persia—was in the hands of the Hashmat-ul-Mulk, whose position now became most difficult and delicate. For he well knew that his tenure of office depended on the Shah's pleasure, which in its turn was equally dependent on the will of Russia, who holds at Teheran the power of the sword tempered by that

compelling influence, power of the purse. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the circumstances the Russian Consul found in the Hashmat-ul-Mulk a puppet that would dance to his music, and to such an extent did he play on the old man's fears that our Consul was thwarted in every direction.

The allegiance of our Baluchi chiefs was strained to the uttermost by the promise of land and villages and presents of arms. It is greatly to their credit that in some cases they handed over these weapons to the British authorities, saying they did not think they ought to keep them and asking whether the Russians were really, as they said, going to annex Baluchistan. Such were some of the means employed by Russia to maintain and increase her influence in Sistan. Her desire to possess this territory is not unnatural. Sistan lies on the direct route to the Gulf. It forms a rich oasis which may be compared to Egypt, fertilized as it is by the never-failing waters of the Helmund, and surrounded on all sides by vast deserts. Here might be grown an almost unlimited supply of grain, and, notwithstanding a disagreeable climate, Russia would find herein a most convenient halfway house in view of the contemplated development of her railway system to the Gulf or the Indian Ocean. For that purpose she must feel that her supremacy in Sistan is a point of vital importance, and that as long as we remain the controlling influence in those regions her hopes of reaching the sea are somewhat remote.

Colonel McMahon's arrival saved the situation. The Russian Consul now found himself face to face with an influence he failed to master, and after repeated attempts to do so he left Sistan, and the power of Russia was felt by all parties, but particularly by the Persians, to be a diminishing quantity. For two years McMahon and his staff have been carrying on the work of delimitation. He is escorted by two companies of infantry and a troop of cavalry, and the mission has been constituted on a scale which demands universal respect. Determined that the flag incident of Goldsmid's mission should not be repeated,

and as a protest against the Sistanis on that and a subsequent occasion, McMahon provided himself with a Union Jack of gigantic proportions which floated at the head of a pole some 60 feet high. It might appear that such an incident as this is scarcely worthy of mention, but to the Persian mind matters of this kind are matters of great moment.

During the first year elaborate and accurate surveys of all Sistan and the surrounding districts were carried out, and the award was made and agreed to by both the Persian and Afghan Commissioners before it was sent for ratification to Teheran and Kabul.

On October 15 last the actual delimitation commenced. The straight line between Kuh-i-Malek Siah and Band-i-Sistan was marked out by pillars, the erection of which was no small matter. In some cases, water for the party as well as for the mixing of cement had to be carried a distance of twenty-five miles.

Our influence in Sistan has been augmented by the recent opening at Nasratabad of a branch of the Imperial Bank of Persia, and buildings are now in progress which I am informed bid fair to outdo the British Consulate in magnificence. The advent of a British bank was rapidly followed by that of the Russian rival, notwithstanding the fact that there is little local trade in Sistan, and certainly not enough to occupy two banks. The British Bank was established here largely at the request of the Government of India, who wished to do all in their power to encourage the Quetta-Nushki route, and I am glad to hear it is paying its way.

While increasing our political influence in Southern and South-Eastern Persia, our Government has not been neglecting commercial interests. The Commercial Intelligence Committee of the Board of Trade recently sent an expert—Mr. W. H. Maclean—to travel through Western Persia, and his report on British trade was published during the summer of last year. Since then, at the suggestion of the British Consul at Kerman, a commercial mission has left Bombay with a view to examining the

condition and prospects of trade in South-Eastern Persia and Baluchistan. It has been thought that these districts offer greater facilities for trade with India than with Great Britain. The Government of India thereupon addressed a letter to the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, suggesting that they should place themselves in communication with the Chambers of Commerce at Calcutta, Karachi and Cawnpore, and invite their co-operation, at the same time undertaking to grant the delegates a sum to be agreed on as representing the actual travelling expenses, including transport for each individual and a reasonable amount of baggage and camp equipment, as well as providing an escort.

But subsequently the Bombay Chamber of Commerce withdrew their delegates, two Parsee gentlemen, on the pretext they had been authorized to pay only the salaries of their delegates and the cost of samples collected, and intimated that unless the Government of India could guarantee every other expense, as well as the catering and the appointment of a responsible Government official as President, they would be obliged with regret to withdraw from the undertaking.

Finally the mission, under the presidency of Mr. Newcomen, and accompanied by a hospital assistant, a native consular agent, and an escort of six sowars, left Bombay for Bandar Abbas about the middle of October last, and proceeded from that port to the districts of Sirjan and Rafsinjan, and thence to Kerman. From here it was arranged that they should visit Bam, and leave the country by the Gishan Pass, Bampur, and one of the Baluchistan ports. A few weeks ago, however, news reached London from Calcutta that owing to the disturbed state of Persian Baluchistan, where the Sirdars are refusing to pay tribute and have fled to the hills, the mission thought it advisable to reach the coast viâ Shiraz and Bushire. This reported rising of the Baluchis, which I fear is all too probable, comes at a most unfortunate moment, and must interfere materially with the mission's scope for usefulness, for I gather one of its main objects was to open up trade

relations with the districts of Bampur and the Makran coast.

It is instructive to note with what jealous eyes Russia regards this purely commercial enterprise. She cannot lay claim to any trade relations with this part of Persia, which owing to its geographical position must necessarily rely for its commerce on sea-borne trade in which British interests are still paramount, notwithstanding the heavily subsidized Russian line which sends a periodical vessel into the Gulf; and therefore the hostile criticism of the Russian press serves to remind us again that Russia has already earmarked this territory as her own, and deeply resents any further British intrusion.

I have so far dealt with some of the more important events of the last two or three years in Eastern and Southern Persia, and have, I trust, shown that within this period events have followed one another in such rapid succession as to leave no doubt that our administrators realize the significance of the Persian Question, and that it would be well to be not unprepared when the moment arrives.

Not only does this appear to be the feeling in India—where under the capable rule of Lord Curzon, whose foreign policy is perhaps the strongest of his many strong points, we may rest assured the question will not be allowed to fall into abeyance—but also in London, where we have recently had a guarantee from the Foreign Secretary that any attempt on the part of a foreign Power to establish a naval base in the Persian Gulf will be regarded as an unfriendly act to be resisted by every means at our disposal. It will be noted, too, that this straightforward statement was followed the next cold weather by Lord Curzon's tour in the Gulf, as though he were setting the seal to Lord Lansdowne's policy. It would doubtless be immeasurably to our interests if Persia and Afghanistan could remain for ever in *status quo*—that is to say, as buffer States between India and our neighbours in the North. But Persia is at this very moment undergoing the process of Painless Identification at the hands of Russia, whose advances surely cannot be fostered by the prospects of

increased trade with a bankrupt and poverty-stricken country; while from the westward another Power bids fair to push her way down through what might be made the phenomenally rich plains of Mesopotamia on to the shores of the Gulf. And this being the case, it cannot be many years before we find ourselves face to face with the railway problem. I cannot believe that railways will ever be constructed in Southern Persia as a purely commercial enterprise, but must be of a more or less strategic nature.

I cannot speak from personal experience of the routes leading from Ahwaz or Bushire into the interior. I believe they offer certain difficulties to the engineer, but from Bandar Abbas a route extends to the Iran plateau practically free from mountain ranges. It lies through Minab and over the Gishan Pass, and Regan can be reached at a distance of 275 miles, less than thirty of which could possibly be described as mountainous country. From Regan to Kerman, 170 miles, you could almost drive a coach and four. Regan would make a convenient junction whence a branch striking across the desert and following the course of the Indo-European telegraph-line would join a continuation of the Quetta-Nushki line somewhere in the region of Sistan.

At Kerman you are on the Iran plateau, and access to Teheran is easy. There is no doubt such a line as this would enable us to deal a severe blow to Russian trade over a great portion of Persia, for Manchester goods could then be put on the Teheran market at a cost for freightage of one-third to one-fourth that of Moscow goods.

But there is a much broader and more far-reaching aspect of the railway question which we shall find ourselves bound to consider.

Until the discovery of a sea-passage to India by way of the Cape of Good Hope, Persia lay on the highway of the nations. Since that time, however, the great caravan routes have fallen more and more into disuse, and the land has yielded her sway to the ocean. But we seem at the present moment to have arrived at an epoch when the question of recovering for the land a portion at least of her ancient

heritage is coming to the front. It is sometimes asked whether, in view of this possibility, we are altogether wise in trusting to our sea-power to safeguard our possessions on the land, and whether, in view of Russia's large extensions of railways in Northern Asia and consequent expansion, we are following a sound policy in withholding ourselves from a corresponding increase of railway communication in the South. And this naturally involves the great question of an overland route to India. I suppose there is nobody who would advocate such a scheme unless it were largely, if not entirely, under British control. A glance at the map of the middle East will show that such a line must pass between the shores of the Caspian and the Persian Gulf; therefore I think, in view of its possibility, it behoves us to watch very closely our interests, not only in the Gulf itself, but northward across those ranges that divide the littoral from the Iran plateau.

As a means of opening up a country, developing trade and industry, for rapidity of mail and passenger service, a railway stands supreme. But it has this serious disadvantage—its capacity is always limited; at times of extra pressure it is apt to become congested, while the occurrence of a flood or some similar contingency may contrive to render it entirely ineffective at times of great national requirement. But the sea tenders no such difficulties. There is no fear of congestion, but there exists an unlimited permanent way, and the cost of transport is infinitely cheaper. I cannot believe that an overland route to India would serve any material purpose beyond insuring a speedier delivery of the mails, and obliging at considerable discomfort the occasional traveller or official who is in a desperate hurry to reach his destination four or five days sooner than he otherwise could do. I am therefore led to the belief that as it is by sea-power that we have expanded in the past, so by sea-power we shall continue to maintain our Empire in the future, although by railway enterprise we shall be enabled to develop it.

With Russia the case is wholly different. Her vast territorial possessions must be maintained and developed

by railways. Still, she is ever seeking an outlet in a warm sea; and though no one would grudge her this possession, we at least cannot allow her—it would be antagonistic to all our interests in the East—to descend with that object on to the Persian Gulf and establish there a second Port Arthur: for that is what it would inevitably mean. Yet this is exactly what Russia contemplates, in proof of which there is to be seen in St. Petersburg to-day a map published in Russia, showing a complete project for the opening up of Persia by a railway system destined to join on with the British lines in India by way of Afghanistan. She proposes to link up her territories with the cities of Persia by building the three following routes. One is an overland route from Baku to Resht and Teheran. Another, emanating from the present railhead at Erivan, on the Russo-Persian borders of Transcaucasia, will eventually work its way through Julfa, Tabriz, and Teheran, thence viâ Kashan, Ispahan, and Shiraz, until it emerges on to the Gulf at Bushire. Thirdly, Ashkabad in Transcaspia is to be linked up with Meshed; and once Meshed is reached, the way lies open for an extension southward to Sistan, and thence, if needs be, to the shores of the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean. That would bring Russia on to the flank of our Indian position.

With regard to her schemes for the continuance of her railways through Afghanistan I will say little. We might, I suppose, take a leaf out of her own book by making a secret convention with the Amir, as Russia has done with the Shah, prohibiting the construction of railways within his territory for an indefinite period. The one at least would be as binding as the other.

It is one thing to sketch in proposed railway routes on a map; it is quite another matter to carry out the project. And this brings me to the question, When are we to see the consummation of these schemes?

Before we can attempt to solve this problem, we shall have to determine the value of more than one unknown factor. Russia is at present occupied with a disastrous war in the Far East. It appears that the one controlling

influence at St. Petersburg is his Imperial Majesty the Czar. It lies with him at any moment to declare peace or to carry on the war to indefinite lengths, and therefore on the state of his mind depends the condition in which Russia will emerge from the struggle. In the event of her losing all access to a warm sea in the Far East, the time will come when she will exert her energies in the direction of the Gulf or the Indian Ocean; but the intervening period can only be determined when it becomes known to what extent her resources have been strained by the exigences of the present struggle. It may be ten, or twenty, or even fifty, years before she finds a suitable opportunity for the realization of her desires. The war has stayed off for the time being the instant of the Persian Question, but when it does come, I feel it will descend upon us with redoubled vehemence.

I cannot view with equanimity the possibility of a Russian port in the Gulf, and an envious rival slowly but surely strengthening and fortifying her position on the flank of our Indian Empire, in those very waters which we alone have policed for centuries, where we have exterminated piracy at great expenditure of British money and still more valuable British blood, and which we rightly regard for all time as a British sea.

DISCUSSION.

SIR EDWIN COLLEN : I had no intention of speaking this afternoon, but as I was a member of Lord Curzon's Government when the Persian Question was exhaustively debated, I should like to say that I agree with the lecturer in his view of the situation. The establishment of a strong Consular Service was one of the recommendations made, and, personally, I would go a step further and increase the actual number of Consuls now appointed. One point struck me in this connection, and that is that Russia supports her Consuls with considerable means. We do not always do so. With escorts of Cossacks and generous support local dignity is enhanced, and I believe it would be an advantage if we took a leaf out of Russia's book, and allowed larger escorts of Indian cavalry to be attached to British Consuls in Persia, although I am aware some sowars are detailed for this service. It would be easy to pick out men who would form an admirable escort and would be examples of proficiency; they would also be able to procure intelligence, which is one of the functions of efficient Consular Service. I also consider that it would be well if consular affairs and diplomatic arrangements in Persia were transferred to the Government of India.

The lecturer remarked on the necessity for training and enlisting men for special Eastern Service. I agree with him that it would be better to train them for Persia than to appoint men with Western experience.

I endorse his opinion that Sistan must not be allowed to fall into the hands of Russia. It is on the flank of an advance to Kandahar, and any such occupation must be strongly opposed.

COLONEL YATE : In the first part of his paper Mr. Sykes referred at some length to the new Central Persian Telegraph. I agree with him that it has a salutary effect on lawlessness and brigandage. Linked up with Kuli-i-Malik Siah, it should help the trade route between Quetta and Kerman as well as that between Quetta and Meshed. There are good possibilities of trade along the Kerman route. The desert between Bam and Sistan has been described as difficult country, but Goldsmid found no difficulty in marching his Mission across, and the telegraph has found no difficulty either. In time to come I trust that a good opening for trade will be found in this direction.

As to the Consuls, I am in accord with the lecturer and Sir Edwin Collen, that they should be under the Government of India

instead of partly under the Foreign Office and partly under India, as they are at present. The training for Consular Service in Constantinople and the Levant is excellent, but it is not what is required for Persia, where Indian and other problems have to be dealt with. Shipping questions and Turkish, for instance, are mainly taught in Constantinople, but those are not needful in most parts of Persia. Let us have a regular Middle Eastern Consular Service emanating from the Indian Services.

Mr. Sykes made some remarks with regard to the attitude of Consuls in dealing with Belgian officials. I trust that the difficulties experienced by some of the British Consuls is now a thing of the past. He mentioned the Russian Consul in Sistan, and his efforts to drive out the British and British trade through the Belgian officials. I can testify to the truth of this, but I fully hope that this is a thing of the past, and that friendly feeling will always exist in future between the two local Consulates. The fault in this instance was certainly not due to the British Consul.

The lecturer mentioned, too, that the Commercial Mission to Persia has not been able to complete its journey according to the route planned, owing to the disturbed state of Persian Baluchistan. This is most unfortunate. Persian Baluchistan is part and parcel, so to speak, of our own Baluchistan and Mekran. It is the same country; the people are the same. Persian Baluchistan does not belong to Persia proper. It was seized by the Persian Government, and we allowed them to occupy a country which is not an integral part of Persia, and it is needful for us to keep a careful watch over it. Lawlessness in Persian Baluchistan reacts on British Mekran, where we have had trouble enough already.

Another important point mentioned by Mr. Sykes was the Bandar Abbas-Kerman railway line. He said that Regan could be reached at a distance of 275 miles, less than thirty of which could be described as mountainous country. Such a description is new to me; from what I have heard, I have been led to think that such a line was impossible. If such a line is possible within reasonable expenditure, it is a matter of great importance, which requires to be well considered.

Mr. Sykes dwelt on the advisability of a main route by sea, not by land. I entirely agree with him. It seems to me that but small advantage is to be gained by an overland railway from Europe to India. I cannot understand anyone choosing to travel by rail through a hot, dusty country for twelve days when a first-class P. and O. steamer is available. The railway, it is said, will shorten the journey; but steamers can be quickened, too. One day was saved in the last P. and O. contract, which comes to an end in three years. The voyage can be still further quickened under the

next contract, and there will be little differences in the time occupied by either way.

MR. LYNCH: I am sure we are all agreed that we have listened to a well-informed, comprehensive, and masterly paper. I should like to allude to one or two points. Mr. Sykes has qualified himself for writing the paper mainly by long residence and travel in the south-eastern provinces of Persia, and has come under the influence of the operations conducted by Lord Curzon. The Viceroy is putting into operation views formed by him as a traveller in Persia, and he has achieved remarkable results. But we must not forget—we should be slow here to forget—the man to whom we owe the breaking down of the barriers against British trade in Persia, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff. To him, as emissary of the Foreign Office, we mainly owe the various developments, the course of which you have followed through the paper this afternoon. This brings me to a point on which we do not all agree. The Central Asian Society, however, does not exist for entire agreement, but for debate and exchange of ideas. I disagree as to the advisability of placing the British Consular Service in Persia under the Indian Government. From my experience, I have not found that training in India is the best qualification for diplomatic office in Persia. I know of cases in which that training has been a barrier between the official and the people of Persia, with whom he is on different terms from the people of India.

The great question of Persia is not merely of interest to us as specialists; it is of vital consequence to this country, for on the Persian borderland the battle for supremacy in Asia will ultimately be fought. We must focus opinion on that most dangerous point; we must excite the interest of the British people and of the governing classes. We must bring home, not only to the people, but to the House of Commons, all the requirements of our position in Persia. The more British effort is directly brought to bear on that scene, the greater will be the effect. To have one portion of the Consular Service on the immediate borderland of India under the Government of India, and the other portion trained and directly controlled by the Foreign Office, seems to me the best solution.

We shall very soon be face to face with the renewal of Russian energies in Persia, and we must prepare for it. I only fear that the little we have done will seem as nothing compared with what Russia will do when she strikes.

The various steps taken by Great Britain in Persia have been met by corresponding steps taken by Russia—steps which have been more far-reaching. To know what the sequence of events has been, we must remember that the ball opened in 1898-1900. The

Persian Government, after the death of the late Shah, came to us for a loan of £2,000,000. We were to receive a great number of advantages. But we were engaged in the South African War and refused the loan. Since that time, when we failed to provide the money, the history of the dealings of Great Britain and Russia in Persia has been entirely in favour of Russia. You must prevent the present Government from repeating such a grave mistake. We, as travellers, administrators, or merchants, try to stem the Russian advance, but we have to depend on the support which you, the people of Great Britain, through the Foreign Office, can give to the Consuls on the spot.

What was the transaction? In 1900 we were offered interest on a small loan at the rate of 6 per cent. per annum, and, as security, a revenue far greater than was required to pay the service of the loan, namely, the Customs of the Gulf ports which are immediately under the noses of our ships. The Chancellor of the Exchequer refused the loan. On a security of 6 per cent. per annum, he would have borrowed at $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent., and pocketed the $3\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. increment in the interest of the British taxpayer. It was therefore excellent business as well as good politics to grant the loan. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time. He went down to address his constituents at Bristol, and told them that nobody thought of retrenchment. He drew a woeful picture—he had just resigned—of the demands made upon him day by day for more and more expenditure. After giving instances, he added that there were some people who wanted him to lend money to Persia, to guarantee railways in China, Mesopotamia, Persia, and elsewhere. It was not to be thought of.

From the date of that extraordinary blunder we lost our leverage in Persia. The Railway Convention debars you from building railways; there is only the Telegraph Convention, the agreement for which was signed before the question of the loan was under consideration.

As to the Belgian Customs officials, it might be said with justice that if the first blunder was the failure to grant the loan, the second was our adhesion to the tariff between Russia and Persia. It was open to Great Britain to say that Persia might frame a tariff, but that we, under the favoured nation clause, could not allow our trade to be treated worse than the trade of any other country. But why did we sign such an agreement? It was merely assisting Russia to damage British trade. This agreement is known as the Anglo-Persian Commercial Treaty of 1903, by which duties were enormously increased. On Manchester goods they went up 6 per cent.; on sugar $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.; on tea 66 per cent.; on

opium 13 per cent.; on wheat $13\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.; on barley 25 per cent. Not only this; articles of trade between Persia and Russia are subjected to much more lenient treatment. I am not going to argue that the taxes are paid by the foreign importer; I do not follow Mr. Chamberlain; they are not paid by the British merchant, but by the consumer, and the consequence is that the trade which Persia can do with this country is considerably narrowed.

We have heard something this afternoon in favour of the Belgian Customs officials. That they have introduced regularity, I concur. But they are instrumental in wringing out of the Persian peasant higher sums, and in so far they are a great evil. The capacity of the people to buy is diminished by these great exactions. They will revolt, and then there will be a great strain on the Belgian administration.

Now that there is a pause in Russian activity, there occurs the opportunity for making hay while the sun shines, and for so establishing our position in Persia that at no future date it may be imperilled by such manœuvres as I have described.

DR. COTTERELL TUPP: It appears to me that the whole tenor of the debate has been marked by an entirely exaggerated fear of the influence of Russia in Persia and elsewhere. I do not think that the speakers have sufficiently allowed for the absolute destruction of Russian political influence. We shall never again have to fear Russia as we have done during the past thirty or forty years. Do you believe that a country absorbed in internal revolution and defeated in a disastrous war can make any effort towards expansion and the increase of her influence? Her whole influence in Asia is destroyed. Where she has dominated and terrorized she has been disliked and hated, now she will be defied and opposed. I do not believe that Russia is able to injure us or impede our action in Persia. We must in future conduct our political schemes without the smallest regard to her power or wishes. The Russian bugbear which has threatened our power for fifty years is now at an end, and we can act as we please in Asia without dread of any European complications.

MR. J. D. REES: I should like to express the interest and pleasure I have felt in hearing Mr. Sykes' able paper. With regard to Russia, it seems to me that if she took a forward course international complications might ensue, and the Powers might intervene to maintain her in her present position. Her disasters will not render her a negligible quantity in Persia and elsewhere. I should like to ask the lecturer whether he can tell us anything of the effect on Persia of Russia's failure in the Far East? And on another point: I do not want to go into the legendary history of Rustum, but Mr. Risley,

in his learned treatise on the Indian census, thinks that the invasions of Aryans came across Seistan when the climate resembled that of the banks of the Helmund in the present day. Can he give us any information on the matter ?

Then as to the controlling influence of the Czar. I cannot regard him as other than the mere figure-head of the Romanoff family, and though he wields special influence, I think the extent of it is extremely problematical.

Sir Edwin Collen wished the British Consuls to have, in Persian parlance, the large lantern to light them on their way. I quite agree that an escort would give them dignity. Mr. Lynch doubts the propriety of appointing Indian officials as Consuls in Persia. He seems to hold the view of Indian officials that is usual in British politics, namely, that their influence is bad ; they represent force. I was told the other day that an ex-Indian official, a candidate for Parliament, was declared, in a company of Parliamentarians, to be 'an autocratic Indian who pretends to be a Radical.' Mr. Lynch evidently agrees with this view, and that it is better to have men who have been through the refining influence of the Foreign Office. I am bound to confess, I think, that there is a great deal to be said for the non-Indian, but there is room for both ; they may be valuable examples one to the other, and friendly rivalry can do no harm.

As to when Russia strikes : this cannot be within measurable distance, in view of her recent defeats. Too much has been made of the Russian bugbear. Russia is terrible in diplomacy, but not in arms. If she had originally been withstood when the Caucasus was in revolt at the time of the Crimean War, she would never have come across the Caucasus. Lord Lansdowne is doing so well at the Foreign Office that we may safely, I think, leave things to him. Mr. Lynch criticised severely, and with the authoritative knowledge with which he always speaks on Persian questions, the recent action of Britain towards the Persian Convention. I consider we could not have done otherwise. We may be hard hit. Yes, but we have always had the most favoured nation clause ; on paper we have it still. The Convention may have given advantages to Russian trade to the detriment of British, but the piece-goods people do not consider that they are seriously affected. I am bound to stand up for the Government, for I think they have hardly received fair treatment in the criticisms that have been made. True there is an enormous duty on tea, something approaching, in fact, what we ourselves charge the product of a British industry worked with British capital.

MR. PENTON : I should like to make one remark in connection with the lecture and the discussion, and that is that the Commercial

Mission to Persia has been called the Bombay Mission. That is a mistake. The mission was due to the Cawnpur Chamber of Commerce in its origin ; Bombay withdrew.

MR. SYKES, in his reply, said : I should like to thank you for the kind manner in which you have received my paper, and I wish to say a few words on several points raised in the debate. In preparing the paper I had the debate in view, and touched on a great many subjects in order to produce a good discussion, and here at least I think I have not failed. Sir Edwin Collen said it would be a good thing to give the Persian Consuls sowars as escorts. We do, in nearly every case ; they are taken from the Sikh cavalry. Kerman has six ; Meshed twelve ; Turbat-i-Haideri twenty-five ; Sistan nearly twenty-five ; only Bandar Abbas is without them. The list of Consuls has been increased during the last two or three years, and I have confidential information that the end of the extension has not yet been reached. Colonel Yate referred to the Quetta-Nushki trade route. I am glad to say that the latest reports are to the effect that within the last twelve months the trade has been doubled. This is largely due to the presence of Colonel McMahon in Sistan. Tea has diminished, but cottons have increased.

With reference to training in India for the Persian Consular Service, there are considerable difficulties. There is considerable difference between Persia and India as to the treatment of the Persians and the people of India. Unless Consuls recognise this important fact, endless difficulties may arise. In speaking to a Persian, one must be most careful to use exactly the right word for his station of life, and it is most necessary not to rub him up the wrong way by accident. I have not studied the question of the tariff very closely, but I believe that in practical working it has not proved so disastrous as was at first thought. The whole onus has fallen on the Persian peasant ; this is particularly hard, especially in the matter of tea. He can only buy the cheaper kinds, and the increase of duty on cheap teas is 95 per cent.

Then as to the question that, Russia being now engaged, we should take a more forward policy : I think that she will be engaged for some time, and that when disengaged she will not be in a position to do much in Persia. The Shah will want to come to Europe again ; he will be glad of some pocket-money, and we can perhaps find it for him. To press matters now would not be good policy. Russia poses as the only true friend of Persia. She could point to us and say : Here is England pressing you when we are engaged. It is all very well to disregard Russia's power ; the last year has shown that she is not so formidable an antagonist as we feared, but we must not go to sleep and say she never will be.

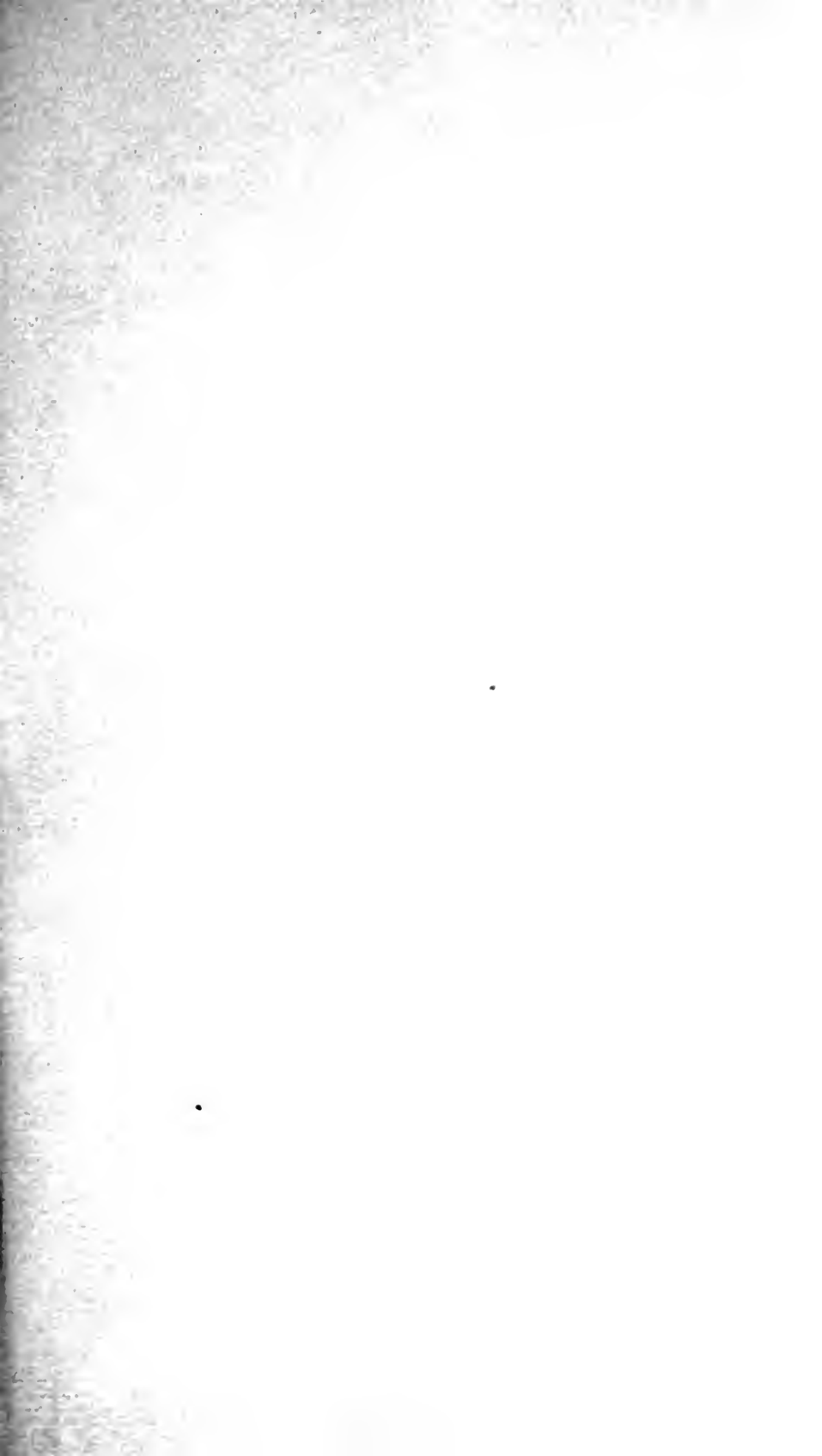
She works quietly and slowly; we hardly see any advance till, suddenly, it is brought home to us in an unpleasant manner.

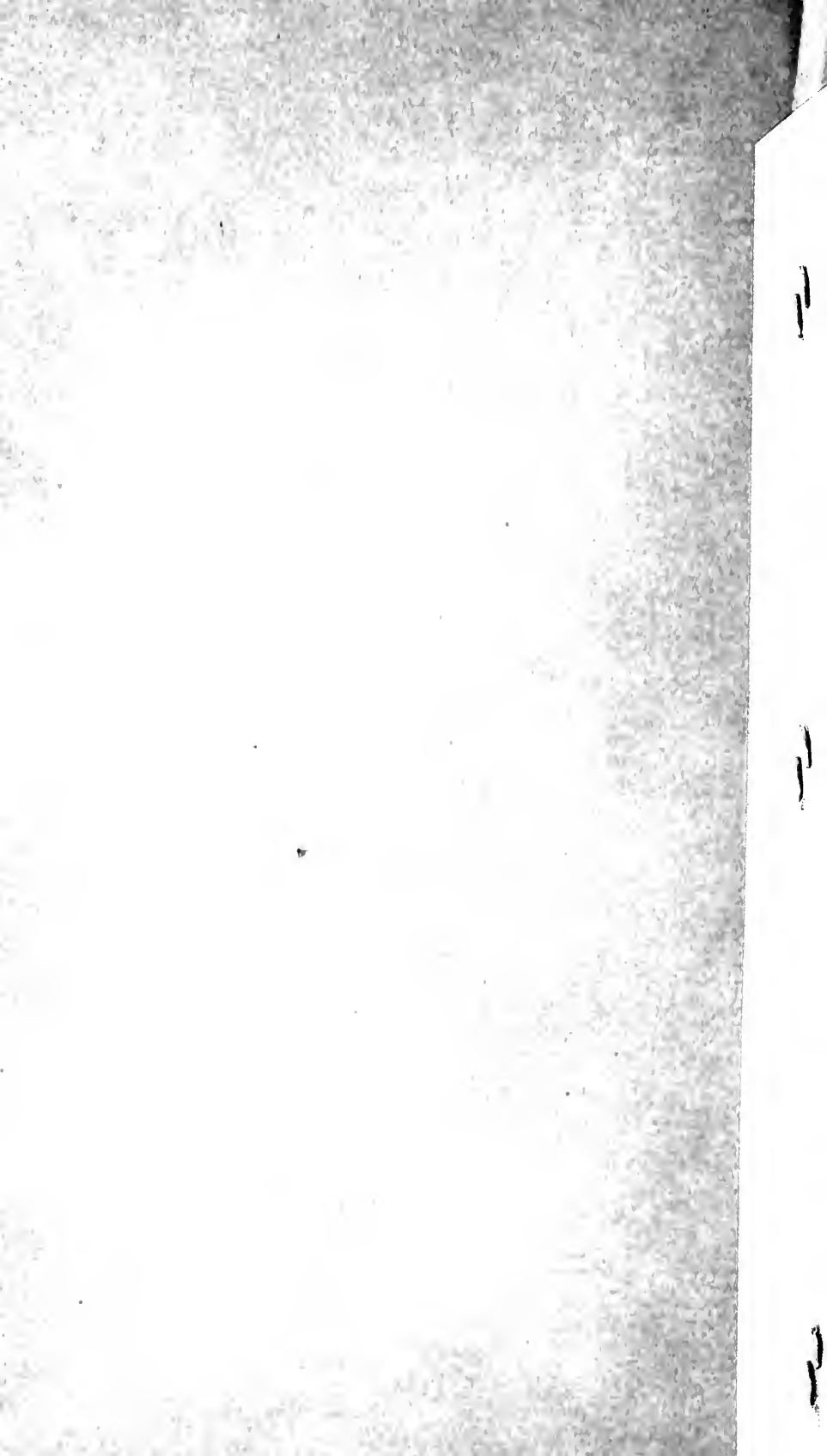
With regard to the effect in Persia of Russia's defeats in the Far East, I must explain that I left Persia last April, when the war had been in progress only a few months. Crossing the desert between Sistan and Kerman, I was out of reach of the telegraph, and heard little of what was transpiring in the Far East. But I have heard lately that the effect in Persia is disastrous to Russia, and that she has lost much of her prestige.

SIR THOMAS HOLDICH: At this late hour I will not detain you long. I entirely agree with Mr. Lynch and other speakers that we have listened to a most masterly paper, which has led to a very interesting discussion. I should like to make just a few remarks upon one or two points on which I have special information. On one matter I do not quite agree with the lecturer, and that is with regard to the railway from Bandar Abbas to the Persian plateau. I do not know the source of his information, but from what I saw it would not be easy to construct the line, and this is also the opinion of the engineer officer who made a survey subsequent to my visit.

Long before her present difficulties Russia had closely examined Persia with regard to railway enterprise, and the more she looked at the country from this point of view, the less she liked it. It has been very different in Siberia. In Persia there would be immense expense and great difficulties. From her position Russia would be compelled to lay her lines from north to south, and she would thus come upon every geographical difficulty. I am aware that Russia has been thrown back by the disastrous war with Japan, but is there not the same condition of affairs on the Persian frontier? In one case she had to meet a well-prepared enemy; in the other she would have no enemy, no opposition, and it is quite likely that things would go on as before.

Colonel Yate alluded to the overland connection between Europe and India. In my opinion it must come, unless the world's general development goes backwards. I cannot see why the advantages which railways bring elsewhere should not occur in such a line of communication. Without considering travellers and freight, the acceleration of the mail service alone would be enough to decide the question. I am sure that I am only expressing the wishes of everyone present when I convey to the lecturer your thanks for his admirable paper and the useful discussion to which it has given rise.







D 000 001 676

