

# EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

(1862—1926)

*Christopher Buck*

THE BRITISH ORIENTALIST Edward Granville Browne was a public intellectual, with a public. As a young man, Browne mastered Turkish, Persian, and Arabic. This linguistic gift was foundational to his cross-cultural contributions as a British writer in travel, literature, religion, and politics. His travel narrative, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (1893), which arguably is his most enduring work, vividly recounts Browne's yearlong adventure in Persia (now Iran) in 1887–1888. *A Year Amongst the Persians* was published by Adam and Charles Black in 1893, and at first, the book drew scant attention. Shortly after Browne's death in 1926, however, the book was issued by Cambridge University Press in a new edition, with a prefatory memoir by Sir E. Denison Ross. This time, the book enjoyed an enthusiastic reception. The book has remained in print ever since. *A Year Amongst the Persians* is widely acclaimed as one of the great travel classics and an important contribution to world literature generally.

Browne's claim as a British writer rests on his unique legacy in expanding Britain's cultural, literary, mystical, religious, political, journalistic, and medical horizons to new vistas in Persia and farther abroad, through travel adventure, translation, activism, personal narrative, and history. Browne's work, often reprinted, continues to be read. His magnum opus, *A Literary History of Persia* (four volumes, 1902–1924), to cite one example, was reissued in paperback by Cambridge University Press in 2009.

Browne was anything but a “dry” academic. He was passionate about “Persia” (the name for Iran current in English until 1935, when Reza Shah made “Iran” the official name of Persia).

One of the luminaries of Cambridge University, Browne had stylistic vigor and verve that, while reserved, lends an “enthusiasm which gives his writings a special charm” (Margoliouth, p. 393). This charisma of discourse springs from Browne's personal interest in his topics—which interest blurs, if not transgresses, the boundaries between scholarship and activism, of history and advocacy. His energy of style epitomizes Browne as the quintessential participant-observer. Browne was anticolonialist by conviction and cosmopolitan in social outlook; his family's wealth, beyond providing Browne with financial independence, also purchased independence of thought. This, in turn, enabled Browne to emerge as a voice of conscience and a bellwether of foreign Britain's policy. As a discoverer of the Babi religion (later succeeded by the Baha'i Faith), Browne was England's metaphysical adventurer par excellence, opening to the Occident new spiritual horizons of the Orient, in an intrepid precognition of an increasingly internationalized world.

Even prior to the belated appreciation of *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Browne's “public” reached beyond the learned readers of his scholarly publications. During the last two decades of his life, Browne generated popular interest as a critic of Russian (and British) imperialism and colonialism. In focusing on Persia in the areas of culture, religion, literature, and politics, Browne's writings not only expanded Britain's horizons of interest and knowledge of world affairs, but gave pause for national self-reflection in matters of foreign policy. “Persia” stood for the world outside of Britain. Persia, moreover, exemplified how the Great Powers, especially Britain and Russia, had taken advan-

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

tage of weaker nations in order to exploit them. Serving as a minority voice in Britain's national self-conscience, Browne had much to say regarding how Britain should best conduct itself in world affairs and to what "world role" England should aspire.

After reviewing his life, this essay highlights some of Browne's most significant contributions as a British writer: in travel, literature, religion, politics, and medicine. This categorization of Browne's works roughly corresponds to the characterization of Browne's major areas of interest by Reynold Nicholson, the editor of a 1932 bibliography of Browne's manuscript collection. Space does not permit a review of Browne's scholarly articles, of which there are many; the eighteen articles that Browne published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1889–1908; cited in the bibliography below) offer a fair representation of Browne's further contributions as a scholar.

### LIFE

Edward Granville Browne, born February 7, 1862, was the eldest son of his illustrious father, Sir Benjamin Chapman Browne, who from 1886–1916 ran a successful firm of shipbuilders and engineers, R. & W. Hawthorn, Leslie & Co., in Newcastle upon Tyne, where he served as mayor (1885–1887) and was knighted for his success in overseeing the Royal Jubilee Exhibition and Royal Agricultural Show in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1887. After Sir Benjamin's death in 1917, Edward Browne inherited his father's wealth.

The young Edward was sent to Glenalmond College, a leading boarding school in Perthshire, Scotland, and from there to Eton College, another boarding school, located near Windsor, Berkshire. These stultifying Scottish and English schools, where the classics predominated in dulling rote pedagogy, did nothing to arouse passion for learning or to quicken young Edward's intellect. Browne quit school in 1887, when he was fifteen. At that impressionable age, Browne read, with great interest, of the Russo-Turkish (or Russian-Ottoman) War, and became sympathetic to the

Turks in their struggle against imperial Russia. This marks a lifelong pattern in which Browne characteristically—and perhaps quixotically—consistently favored the underdog, even if undeserving.

Sympathetic to—and idealistically wishing to assist—oppressed Turks under siege, Browne dedicated himself to learning Turkish via the Orientalist William Burckhardt Barker's *A Practical Grammar of the Turkish Language* (1854). His naïveté was such that he was later surprised to discover that Turkish is written from right to left. Later on, Browne was tutored by an Irish clergyman who had learned Turkish as a private in the Crimean War. This prelate was later driven from his local parish for his open defense of the Turks, who were disfavored in the eyes of the British public because of the 1876 Batak massacres, in which Ottoman troops murdered thousands of Bulgarian civilians. Browne's mastery of Turkish was augmented by study with Sir James Redhouse, the sole Ottoman Turkish scholar in Great Britain.

With no interest in his father's field of engineering, Edward agreed to Sir Benjamin's recommendation to study medicine at Cambridge; he began his studies in October 1879. During his first year there, Browne took up the study of Arabic under Professor E. H. Palmer, Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic. In 1880, Browne began learning Persian, and he continued his study of Arabic and Persian over the next two years. Browne's first instructor in Persian was an eccentric East Indian undergraduate who tutored Edward in the *Gulistan* (English trans., *The Rose Garden*) of the thirteenth-century Persian poet Sa'di (considered the single most influential work of Persian prose and poetry) in exchange for humoring his tutor by listening to him play his fiddle.

In June 1882, Edward Browne passed the Natural Sciences Tripos, Part 1 (second class), and earned his second M.B. For this, he was rewarded by his father with a summer trip to Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in July and August. On his return, Browne took the Indian Languages Tripos, in the course of which he studied, as required, Hindustani, Sanskrit, Arabic,

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

and Persian—all languages of the Indian subcontinent. Browne passed his exams admirably and, in February 1884, obtained his first-class honors degree in the Indian Languages Tripos.

After leaving Cambridge, Browne returned to medicine by commencing, in October 1884, his clinical training at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, where he was mentored by Sir Norman Moore, to whom Browne later dedicated his Fitzpatrick Lectures (1919–1920) on Arabian medicine. Meanwhile, Browne furthered his study of Persian apace (tutored at that time by a “very learned but very eccentric old Persian”—that is, “Mirza Muhammad Bakir, of Bawanat in Fars, surnamed Ibrahim Jan Mu'attar” (*A Year Amongst the Persians*, 1893, p. 12); in the course of this pursuit he became attracted to Sufism (Islamic mysticism) and was even given a Sufi name, Mazhar-'Ali, by Haji Muhammad-'Ali Pirzadih. Trained in medicine, and now versed in languages, Browne continued to pursue an interest in Sufism that evolved toward scholarship in the Babi religion—that is, “of Babi doctrine and history which first won for me a reputation in Oriental scholarship” (*Literary History of Persia*, vol. 4, 1924, p. 153).

The Babi religion marked the historical inception of what is now known as the Baha'i Faith, an independent world religion. This was not easily foreseeable at that time. Yet Browne intuited as much, and endeavored to research “Babism” with a passion that imbued his early publications with an undercurrent of verve, creating a certain suspense and intrigue. This is especially true of his travel classic, *A Year Amongst the Persians*. In fact, while still in London, studying medicine, Browne had met several Persians, among the most notable of whom was a student, Aqa Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad Khan, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, later governor of Bushihr in Iran (and a Baha'i, the father of Hasan M. Balyuzi), whom he would later meet in Shiraz in March 1888 and who was cryptically referred to as “Mirza 'Ali” in *A Year Amongst the Persians* (pp. 269–340 and passim).

On May 13, 1886, Browne received his master of arts degree, and in 1887, he passed his final examinations at the College of Surgeons,

the College of Physicians, and the University of Cambridge (where he took the Conjoint Board exams). Arrangements were made for Browne to practice medicine as a house physician, for one year, under Dr. Samuel Gee, starting on April 1, 1888. Then, on May 30, 1887, Browne received a telegram announcing that he had been elected a fellow at Pembroke College. This enabled him to travel to Persia for the next year, beginning in September 1887—the experience that led to the writing of his travel classic, *A Year Amongst the Persians*.

In October 1888, on his return from the yearlong sojourn in Persia, Browne took up his position as Cambridge University's first lecturer in Persian, a five-year initial appointment, and during the next decades he shaped a career as a scholar of considerable prestige. In 1902, Browne succeeded Charles Rieu as Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, and in 1903, he was appointed a fellow of the British Academy. On January 26, 1911, he was elected to the Royal College of Physicians of London—under a special bylaw enabling those trained in medicine, yet not practitioners, to be elected to the College for distinguished service in another field. In 1912, Browne was appointed president of Pembroke College, University of Cambridge.

In 1906, at the age of forty-four, Browne had married Alice Blackburne-Daniell. They raised their two sons, Michael and Patrick, at Firwood, Cambridgeshire, in a spacious home on Trumpington Road. In 1919–1920, Browne delivered his Fitzpatrick Lectures on Arabian medicine at the Royal College of Physicians; the lectures were published by Cambridge University Press in 1921. In February 1921, in honor of Browne's fifty-ninth birthday, he was honored with a festschrift. On November 26, 1921, at the Persian Legation in London, Browne was presented with a portrait of himself, by an eminent Persian artist, along with an album of eulogizing poems by sixteen Persian poets (including Persia's poet laureate, Bahar), and the occasion included the announcement that the Shah of Persia had conferred on Browne the Order of the Lion and Sun of Persia. In 1924, Browne suffered a severe heart attack. His devoted wife, Alice, nursed him

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

until she herself passed away in August 1925. Browne, inconsolably grieved, survived only six months more. He died of pneumonia on January 5, 1926, and was buried at Elswick Cemetery, Newcastle upon Tyne.

### TRAVEL: A YEAR AMONGST THE PERSIANS

Although Browne's 1893 travelogue, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, and Thought of the People of Persia*, is regarded as one of the great Victorian travel classics, it reads more like an ethnology in its anecdotal, first-person narratives of his various encounters and observations in Persia. Browne recounts an adventure that is at once cultural, intellectual, and spiritual. The narrative flow of his travelogue sustains interest in his itinerary, but equally noteworthy are his narrative's excursions into Persian philosophy, mysticism, and religion (more or less intertwined in Persian culture). In the following excerpt, Browne first sets his eyes on the fabled city of Shiraz:

Suddenly we turned a corner, and in that moment ... there burst upon my delighted gaze a view the like of which (in its way) I never saw.

... At our very feet, in a grassy, fertile plain girt with purple hills (on the loftier summits of which the snow still lingered), and half concealed amidst gardens of dark stately cypresses, wherein the rose and the judas-tree in luxuriant abundance struggled with a host of other flowers for the mastery of colour, sweet and beautiful in its garb of spring verdure which clothed the very roofs of the bazaars, studded with many a slender minaret, and many a turquoise-hued dome, lay the home of Persian culture, the mother of Persian genius, the sanctuary of poetry and philosophy, Shiraz. ... Words cannot describe the rapture which overcame me as, after many a weary march, I gazed at length on the reality of that whereof I had so long dreamed, and found the reality not merely equal to, but far surpassing, the ideal which I had conceived.

(*Year*, pp. 259–260)

*A Year Amongst the Persians* covers a wide range of topics, treated, for the most part, with matter-of-fact reportage, yet with curious fascination. One unusual story illustrates a popular Shia antipathy toward Sunni Islam, in which the early

Muslims' failure to accept 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, as the Prophet's legitimate and rightful successor, is retold, with a surprising twist. The story recalls that, in early Islamic history, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE, the first four caliphs (successors) after were Abu Bakr, 'Umar I, 'Uthman, and 'Ali (in that order). Shia Muslims consider the first three—Abu Bakr, 'Umar I, and 'Uthman—as usurpers of 'Ali's rightful claim to the caliphate. The story that Browne recounts begins so:

A poor man was once travelling along on foot and alone in the desert when he espied coming towards him a most terrible-looking dervish ... [the dervish] was moreover armed with an enormous and ponderous club, which he kept swinging to and fro in a manner little calculated to re-assure our traveller. The latter, indeed, liked the appearance of the dervish so little that he determined to climb up a tree, which fortunately stood close by, and wait till the fellow had passed.

The dervish, however, instead of passing by, seated himself on the ground under the tree ... [and pulled] out of his pocket five little clay figures, which he placed in a row in front of him. Having arranged them to his satisfaction, he addressed the first of them, which he called 'Omar, as follows:—

“O 'Omar! I have thee now, thou usurper of the Caliphate! Thou shalt forthwith answer to me for thy crimes, and receive the just punishment of thy wickedness. Yet will I deal fairly with thee, and give thee a chance of escape. It may be that there were mitigating circumstances in the case which should not be overlooked: inform me, therefore, if it be so, and I promise thee I will not be unmerciful. ... What! thou answerest nothing at all? Then it is evident thou can'st think of no excuse for thy disgraceful conduct, and I will forthwith slay thee.” Saying this, the dervish raised his mighty club over his head, and, bringing it down with a crash on the little image, flattened it level with the ground.

(*Year*, pp. 179–180)

The dervish, after demanding of 'Umar an explanation as to why 'Ali was denied his rightful successorship, next addresses Abu Bakr, and then, in turn, apostrophizes 'Ali, and thereafter the Prophet Muhammad himself. Each of the clay figurines answers the dervish's demand for an explanation with mute expression and dumb

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

silence, and meets with the very same fate. Whereupon the dervish, last of all, addresses God:

Only one clay figure now remained, and to this the dervish addressed himself. "O Allah!" he said, "Thou who hadst knowledge of all the troubles which would befall the family of him whom Thou didst ordain to be the successor of Thy Prophet, tell me, I pray Thee, what divine mystery was concealed under that which baffles our weak comprehension! ... Wilt Thou not hear my prayer? ... Art Thou also silent? ... Nay, Thou shalt answer me or—"

"Wretch!" suddenly exclaimed the man in the tree, his terror of the dervish for the moment mastered by his indignation, "Art thou not satisfied with having destroyed the Prophet of God, and 'Ali, his holy successor? Wilt thou also slay the Creator? Beware! Hold thy hand, or verily the heavens will fall and crush thee!"

On hearing this voice, apparently from the clouds, the dervish was so terrified that he uttered one loud cry, dropped his uplifted club, and fell back dead.

(*Year*, p. 181)

Browne learned that he would be recommended for appointment as lecturer in Persian in a telegram he received after having arrived in Kirman: "Please authorise name candidate for Persian readership, Neil" (*Year*, p. 429). Then, in a paragraph dated Thursday, July 11, 1888, Browne wrote: "Last night I received a telegram from Shiraz informing me that a telegram addressed to me there had arrived from England, in which I was requested to signify my acceptance of the post of Persian Lecturer, to which I had been appointed at Cambridge. Accordingly, I went into the city an hour or two after sunrise to despatch an answer" (*Year*, p. 499). Browne returned to England on October 10, 1888.

Geoffrey Nash observes that "Browne's journey was underwritten by a secret mission, a yearning after a new oriental cause" (p. 141). Nash, who refers to Browne as "the English Babi" (p. 147), further notes that Browne had romanticized the Bab (d. 1850), the founder of the Babi movement and precursor of Baha'u'llah, founder of the Baha'i religion. This travel narrative, moreover, has a dramatic quality not only in its description of Browne's quest to learn more about Persian culture in general and of the Babi

religion in particular, but also because of the fact that Browne became temporarily addicted to opium while in Kirman. The experiences that Browne memorializes in *A Year Amongst the Persians* are foundational to Browne's future scholarship on the Babi and Baha'i religions.

In 2013, Pembroke College at the University of Cambridge digitally scanned Browne's original diaries, on which *A Year Amongst the Persians* was based. These images are now available for purchase on DVD.

### LITERATURE: A LITERARY HISTORY OF PERSIA

Browne's firsthand experience in Persian culture, and his mastery of the Persian language by total immersion for a full year, prepared him to undertake an ambitious project: *A Literary History of Persia*—his magnum opus. In this masterly survey of Persian literary, philosophical, and religious heritage, published in four volumes (1902, 1906, 1920, and 1924), Browne takes his readers on different journey—a journey through the centuries of Persian literature (broadly defined). An ambitious overview of Persian culture from prehistory to the twentieth century, the project took Browne over twenty-five years to complete. Volume 1 spans the earliest period of Persian literature, until Firdawsi (1020). Volume 2 examines the early medieval period, with a special focus on the poet Sa'di (1184–1283). Volume 3 covers the Tartar Dominion (1265–1502), and volume 4 surveys Persian literature from 1500 to 1924.

As his model, Browne chose Jean Jules Jusserand's *Literary History of the English People* (1894). Yet that model, standard and excellent as it was, was too narrow in scope for Browne, whose ambitious project involved a much grander scheme. Far more than a "literary" history, Browne's masterwork, in essence, was a veritable intellectual and spiritual history of Persia, an aspiration he describes in his preface to volume 1:

For it was the intellectual history of the Persians which I desired to write, and not merely the history of the poets and authors who expressed their

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

thoughts through the medium of the Persian language; the manifestations of the national genius in the fields of Religion, Philosophy, and Science interested me at least as much as those belonging to the domain of Literature in the narrower sense.

(p. viii)

*A Literary History of Persia*, volume 1, *From the Earliest Times Until Firdawsi*, appeared, in 1902 (published by Unwin in London and Charles Scribner's Sons in New York), as part of the Library of Literary History series. For his intended audience, Browne had in mind "the ordinary reader," especially "that small but growing body of amateurs who, having learned to love the Persian poets in translation, desire to know more of the language, literature, history, and thought of one of the most ancient, gifted, and original peoples in the world" (p. ix). Browne's lucid expository style is sufficiently technical and detailed to interest scholars, but this may perhaps come at the sacrifice of his intended "ordinary readers." *A Literary History of Persia*, as a whole, is packed with information and, as such, is a rewarding—but not easy—read.

Throughout his writings, Browne consistently refers to "Persian genius." For Browne, the "manifestations of the national genius in the fields of Religion, Philosophy, and Science" include, inter alia, the following: By "Religion," he was impressed, early on, by Sufi mysticism; in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Browne singles out the Babi and Baha'i religions, in recognition of "the Persian genius by which the new faith was inspired" (p. 321). By "Philosophy," he notes the distinctive character and influence of Persian theosophy, which "became diffused in Europe, and gave rise to the Christian Scholastic Philosophy" (*Literary History*, vol. 1, 1902, p. 381). By "Science," Browne has in mind "what is generally called Arabian science—from exegesis, tradition, theology, philosophy, medicine, lexicography, history, biography, even Arabic grammar—the work contributed by Persians" (vol. 1, p. 204). By "Literature," Browne speaks broadly and roundly of the "Persian poetical genius" (vol. 1, p. 473), not to mention Persian wit and wisdom.

*A Literary History of Persia*, volume 1, is organized in four "books": book 1 covers ancient

Persia and its pre-Islamic literature, culture, and religion, while books 2 through 4 span the years 226–1000 CE. An overview of the history and thought of Sufism (mystical Islam), titled "The Sufi Mysticism" (pp. 416–444), appears as the penultimate chapter of volume 1 (chapter 13, titled "Religious Movements of This Period") and is the chapter that appears to have generated the widest scholarly and popular interest.

*A Literary History of Persia*, volume 2, *From Firdawsi to Sa'di* (1906), is narrower in its time frame, as it "includes most of the greatest poets and writers of the Persians" (p. ix) from the beginning of the eleventh to the middle of the thirteenth century. As with the first volume, what appears to have generated the greatest interest, among Browne's audience, is chapter 9, on Sufi poets: "Faridu'd-Din Attar, Jalalud-Din Rumi, and Sa'di, and Some Lesser Poets of This Period" (pp. 506–543). (The great Sufi poet Rumi, who died in 1273, is said to be America's best-selling poet in the twenty-first century.) The fact that the first two volumes of *A Literary History of Persia* conclude, more or less, with treatments of Sufism may reflect Browne's own personal interest in these Persian mystics, before he was attracted to the Babi religion.

*A Literary History of Persia*, volume 3, *The Tartar Dominion (1265–1502)*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1920, includes more discussion of Sufism in chapter 3, "The Poets and Mystics of the Il-Khani Period." This interest in Persian mysticism is further sustained in volume 4, *Modern Times (1500–1924)*, which appeared in 1924: among that volume's various discussions in reference to Sufism are chapter 5, "Some General Considerations on the Later and Especially the Religious Poetry of the Persians," and chapter 8, "The Orthodox Shi'a Faith and Its Exponents, the Mujtahids and Mullas," which adumbrates Persian religion in its wider developments. Persian script is used throughout volume 4, rather than transliteration in Latin characters.

What stamps this four-volume project so indelibly with Browne's mastery of his subject matter is the fact that he himself undertook many of the translations—from the original Persian

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

(and Arabic) to English—with which this project is so richly endowed. The translations themselves repay reading—although these volumes constitute more of a collective “reference work” than a narrative to be read from start to finish. The sheer mass of erudition that these volumes contain—not to mention their breadth across centuries of history, thought, and culture covered—is equally impressive in depth and breadth.

### RELIGION: THE BABI AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS

Exploring the origins of what, in time, emerged as a new world religion—the Baha’i Faith, as the religion is known today—Browne combined qualities of both investigative journalist and participant-observer. Although his *Traveller’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (2 vols., 1891) was criticized by some contemporaries as ill-spent genius, Browne justified his investigations as a witness to “the birth of a faith which may not impossibly win a place amidst the great religions of the world” (*Traveller’s Narrative*, vol. 1, p. viii).

Browne’s diary demonstrates that his interest in the Babi religion was kindled when, on July 30, 1886, while pursuing his avid engagement in Sufi philosophy, he chanced upon Comte Joseph Arthur de Gobineau’s *Religions et philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale* (1865) in the Cambridge University Library. (A facsimile of Browne’s diary entry appears in *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne* edited by Moojan Momen, figure 4, p. 18.) After the chapter on Sufism, Browne read, with rapt fascination, Gobineau’s dramatic, firsthand accounts of the savage religious persecutions to which the Babis were subjected at the hands of fanatic Muslim clerics, acting in league with the Persian government. Browne was deeply moved by these eyewitness accounts, and what most impressed him was the valiant fortitude with which the Babis endured such torments, perpetrated in the name of Islam. “And I confess myself strongly attracted to *Hadrat-i Nuqta-yi ula*,” Browne later wrote in an August 20, 1889, letter to the Russian Orientalist Baron Viktor Rosen (quoted in Youli Ioannesyan, p. 153). This Persian title, which may be translated as “His

Holiness, the Most Exalted Point” (around whom spiritual realities revolve) refers to Sayyid ‘Ali-Muhammad Shirazi, known as the Bab (the “Gate,” 1819–1850), the prophet-founder of the Babi religion. Browne presciently considered the Bab to be “one of those giants which may alter the whole history of a nation”—that is, Persia/Iran (quoted in Ioannesyan, p. 153). Geoffrey Nash argues that Gobineau’s narrative, in and of itself, not only sparked Browne’s iridescent fascination with the Babi religion but was “accepted with quixotic trust” (p. 150) by Browne and thus served as his “master text” (p. 150) in his subsequent treatment of all things Babi.

Journal articles (see bibliography) excluded, Browne’s major works on the Babi and Baha’i religions are three titles for which he was editor and translator—*A Traveller’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (1891); *The Tarikh-i-Jadid; or, New History of Mirza ‘Ali Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Huseyn of Hamadan (1893); and *Kitab-i Nuqtatu’l-Kaf, Being the Earliest History of the Babis*, by Haji Mirza Jani Kashani (1910)—as well as Browne’s own *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (1918).

### A TRAVELLER’S NARRATIVE

The Persian manuscript of *A Traveller’s Narrative* was given to Browne on April 20, 1890, just outside of ‘Akka (now Acre) in Palestine. Browne eventually identified the author of this anonymous work as ‘Abdu’l-Baha (1844–1921), the illustrious and gifted eldest son of Baha’u’llah (1817–1892), the prophet-founder of the Baha’i faith, and Baha’u’llah’s designated successor. This historical account of the origin and rise of the Babi and Baha’i religions is ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s second of three book-length works, the first being *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (1875) and the third, *A Treatise on Politics* (c. 1892–1893), arguably a sequel to *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. *A Traveller’s Narrative* is thought to have been written in 1886. Browne first met ‘Abdu’l-Baha on April 15, 1890, and he describes

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

him in the introduction to volume 2 of *A Traveller's Narrative*:

Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk's, and strongly-marked but pleasing features—such was my first impression of 'Abbas Efendi, "the master" (*Aka*) as he *par excellence* is called by the Babis.

(p. xxxvi)

Browne's "first impression" soon became a lasting impression:

Subsequent conversation with him served only to heighten the respect with which his appearance had from the first inspired me. One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I should think, scarcely be found even amongst the eloquent, ready, and subtle race to which he belongs. These qualities, combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at the influence and esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father's followers. About the greatness of this man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt.

(p. xxxvi)

In an 1892 article for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Browne conjectured that *A Traveller's Narrative* (an anonymous work) "was inspired, if not written, by Baha'u'llah" ("Some Remarks on the Babi Texts," p. 278). Some twenty-eight pages later in that paper, however, Browne hastens to add that "the author of the *Traveller's Narrative*" was "very probably one of Beha's own sons" who "wrote under his immediate sanction" (p. 306). In an article later the same year, Browne surmises, from his "perusal of certain letters written by Beha'u'llah's son 'Abbas Efendi' ['Abdu'l-Baha], that the latter "might perhaps be the author of this history, the peculiar style of which appeared very similar to his" ("Catalogue and Description of Twenty-Seven Babi Manuscripts," p. 663). Having later learned that the Persian original was lithographed in

Bombay on December 9, 1890, Browne concludes that the author was indeed 'Abdu'l-Baha ("Catalogue and Description," pp. 664–665).

In the preamble of *A Traveller's Narrative*, the author is cloaked in anonymity as an unknown narrator. The author of the *Narrative* indulges in a literary artifice, suggesting that the instant treatise was the result of a lengthy investigation, the facts of which he "sought out with the utmost diligence during the time of my travels in all parts of Persia, whether far or near" (p. 2). That the writer could be a European "traveler" is implied by the writer's claim to be conversant with European scholarship. The alternative (and more likely) Persian identity of this unnamed historian is suggested by his native fluency in Persian. The English reader, of course, would assume that the author is Persian, since the work is composed in Persian. In either case, the narrator's purpose is clear. Owing to the fact that "various accounts are contained in the pages of Persian history and the leaves of European chronicles" (p. 3) presented conflicting accounts, the writer of *A Traveller's Narrative* undertook to write "a summary of the facts of the case" (p. 3) concerning the Bab. In point of fact, a substantial part of the work—some fifty pages (*A Traveller's Narrative*, pp. 25–85 and *passim*)—concerns Baha'u'llah, as Browne himself observed in a letter dated May 6, 1890, to the Russian Orientalist Baron Rosen—noting that the *Traveller's Narrative*, in this respect, is "chiefly valuable because it treats less of the Bab than of Beha [Baha'u'llah]" (Ioannesyan, p. 144).

As recounted in his lengthy "Introduction," Browne was given an audience with Baha'u'llah. This historic meeting took place on April 16, 1890. Browne's pen-portrait of Baha'u'llah is doubtless the most oft-quoted passage in all of Browne's writings:

Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold ... a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called *taj* ["crown"] by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued:—"Praise be to God that thou hast attained! ... Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile. ... We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come. ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? ... Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind ... " Such, so far as I can recall them, were the words which, besides many others, I heard from Beha. Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely to gain or lose by their diffusion.

(*A Traveller's Narrative*, pp. xxxix–lv)

(In 2012, the acclaimed Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf released his film *The Gardener*, which won the Golden Award from the Beirut International Film Festival in Lebanon for that year. In this film, Makhmalbaf refers to Browne's audience with Baha'u'llah and includes a brief quotation from Browne's description of that historic meeting.)

The interview lasted around twenty minutes, during which time Baha'u'llah read aloud excerpts from a "tablet" that Browne later translated in *A Traveller's Narrative*. A translation of the

excerpts from the Baha'u'llah's "tablet" (Baha'i euphemism for epistle or other brief writing) by Shoghi Effendi ('Abdu'l-Baha's appointed successor and leader of the Baha'i community from 1921 to 1957) is current among Baha'is today, but that translation may easily be compared with Browne's in *A Traveller's Narrative* (volume 2, pp. 71–72; the original Persian is in volume 1, pp. 91–93). Shoghi Effendi's translation reads as follows:

The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves. That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated. ...

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.

(Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings*, pp. 287–289; see also *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 13–14)

This was a "tablet" revealed in honor of Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali of Isfahan (d. 1920), an illustrious Persian Baha'i teacher who traveled widely throughout the Ottoman empire, then was exiled to the Sudan and imprisoned there for his faith, released in 1877, and later settled in the Haifa/Akka area in Palestine (now Israel) in 1903. Browne met Haydar-'Ali in Isfahan. This same tablet was quoted in Baha'u'llah's last revealed book, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (c. 1891). Given the fact that Baha'u'llah was to become widely regarded in the next century as the founder of a new world religion, this interview takes on added significance as a rare firsthand description by someone from the West. Baha'u'llah, in an epistle to Aqa Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad Khan, Muwaqqar al-Dawla (d.

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

1921), commended Browne's earnest sincerity in investigating the new religion: "The youth mentioned therein attained Our presence. Although this Wronged One had not consorted for many years past with people from foreign lands, We received him on several occasions. Portents of sincerity could be discerned on his visage" (quoted in Hasan Balyuzi, p. 52). Browne had three or four more audiences with Baha'u'llah that same week. The *Lawh-i Bisharat* (Tablet of Glad-Tidings) was intended for Browne and sent to him by express order of Baha'u'llah himself. (This was a different tablet from that revealed for Haydar-'Ali.) The *Lawh-i Bisharat* was part of a much broader effort by Baha'u'llah to proclaim his mission to the political and religious leaders of the world. Evidence suggests that Baha'u'llah may have revealed the *Lawh-i Bisharat* for E. G. Browne—or rather through him, since Baha'u'llah evidently intended that Browne should translate and publish the *Bisharat* in order to make the nature of the Baha'i teachings more widely known. See Buck and Ioannesyan, 2010.

In translating *A Traveller's Narrative*, little did Browne know that he was rendering, for an English-speaking audience, not just a work of Babi and Baha'i history, but of Baha'i scripture as well, since 'Abdu'l-Baha is its author. For Baha'i scriptures consist of the works of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, which Baha'is regard as revelations directly inspired by God, and the works of 'Abdu'l-Baha, seen as inspired interpretations of the Baha'i revelations. The various passages from Baha'u'llah's writings, as quoted in *A Traveller's Narrative*, are scripture within scripture (i.e. "canon within canon," to borrow a term from systematic theology). So, while Baha'is today use Browne's translation of *A Traveller's Narrative*, the writings of Baha'u'llah that are quoted with that work have since been retranslated by Shoghi Effendi and subsequent Baha'i translators. The Baha'i republication of Browne's translation of *A Traveller's Narrative* (by permission of Cambridge University Press) can be readily accessed online at [reference.bahai.org](http://reference.bahai.org). Notably absent from the Baha'i edition of *A Traveller's Narrative*, however, are Browne's extensive footnotes and appendices ("Notes"), which are

considered tendentious in the extreme, as Browne took sides in the leadership crises that arose, first after the martyrdom of the Bab, and then after the passing of Baha'u'llah. In the original Cambridge edition, particularly problematic is "Note W" (pp. 349–389), which is unbalanced in its bias in favor of Baha'u'llah's younger half-brother, Mirza Yahya, known as Subh-i Azal ("Morn of Eternity"), who contested Baha'u'llah's leadership. In a letter dated April 10, 1892, to Baron Rosen, Browne writes:

I am less anxious for the English volumes to go than the Persian, firstly because I doubt if they would meet the approval of any Babi; (the Beha'is would not like Note W) .... Indeed my feelings about the *Traveller's Narrative* are curiously mixed: I sympathize profoundly with the Babis as a whole, but hardly know what to think as between Beha and Subh-i-Ezel. ... As between Babis and Muhammadans I have no doubt which way my sympathies lie; as between Ezelis and Beha'is I have: or rather my sympathies in different senses lie both ways ...

(Ioannesyan, pp. 171–172)

### THE TARIKH-I-JADID

In 1893 Browne published his translation of another Babi history, the *The Tarikh-i-Jadid; or, New History of Mirza 'Ali Muhammad the Bab*, by Mirza Huseyn of Hamadan. Unlike *A Traveller's Narrative*, this work, including its four appendices (pp. 320–447), is almost exclusively focused on vindicating the leadership claims of Mirza Yahya (Subh-i Azal). In his lengthy "Introduction" to the translation (pp. vii–lii), Browne waxed nostalgic for the "golden age of the new religion" (p. viii) and bemoaned the "phase of intestinal dissension" (p. vii) to which he felt it had irretrievably fallen. Browne took sides, privileging, as his frontispiece, a photograph of Mirza Yahya.

By privileging this countervailing "history," Browne characterizes the history that he had previously translated, *A Traveller's Narrative* (1891), pejoratively as a tendentious narrative written by "the son [i.e., 'Abdu'l-Baha] of one aspirant [i.e., Baha'u'llah] to the supreme authority and that now divided Church [i.e., the Babi

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

religion] to discredit the perfectly legitimate claims and to disparage perfectly blameless character of his less successful rival [Subh-i Azal]" (p. xvi) and whose "undisputed and absolute sway over the Babi Church is absolutely conclusive" (p. xx).

So intent was Browne on proving that Yahya was the designated successor to the Bab that the scholar "published three different texts which he interpreted as the Bab's will concerning 'the appointment of Mirza Yahya as the Bab's successor'" (Ioannesyan, p. 140). This patent partiality toward Yahya notwithstanding, Browne concedes the obvious fact that Baha'u'llah "gradually became the most prominent figure and the moving spirit of the sect" (p. xxi) and that the latter's writings were "terse, lucid, vigorous, and eloquent" (p. xxvii).

By the time the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* was published in 1893, thirty years had elapsed since Baha'u'llah had publicly proclaimed (in 1863) himself to be the one whose imminent advent the Bab had passionately and frequently foretold, a station never claimed by Yahya. The vast majority of the followers of the Bab, meanwhile, had turned toward Baha'u'llah, who passed away in 1892, having appointed his son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, as his successor. It would be many years before Browne would recognize this succession.

### KITAB-I NUQTATU'L-KAF

In 1910, Browne published the *Kitab-i Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* ("Point of the Letter Kaf"), the earliest overall history of the Babi movement. The original work, completed in 1852, was composed by Haji Mirza Jani Kashani (d. 1852). Following a theological preamble (pp. 1–99), the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* covers the years 1260 AH/1844 to 1268 AH/1851–1852. In 1882, Browne discovered the two manuscripts of the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. One manuscript (Suppl. Persan 1071) included the historical narrative and theological preamble, but with no colophon. The other manuscript (Suppl. Persan 1070) consisted only of the theological preamble appended to a copy of the Persian *Bayan*, and

bore a colophon dated 1279 (1863). Browne's introductions (with the unacknowledged assistance of Muhammad Qazvini) are in Persian and English.

For the complex history of this Azali-influenced text, see the 2004 paper by William McCants and Kavian Milani in the journal *Iranian Studies*, which announces the discovery of an earlier manuscript at Princeton University. In his article, "Noqtat al-kaf," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2008), Kavian Milani concludes: "Textual and manuscript evidence suggests that the historical narrative is not the work of a single author, and that it was originally written in a form most closely preserved in the Haifa manuscript" (referring to a manuscript preserved in the archive of the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel). The *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, moreover, was "penned by multiple authors who used different systems of dating."

### MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE BABI RELIGION

Browne's 1918 book, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, persists in the tendentiousness demonstrated in the earlier volumes on this subject. First, he concedes that "this book" is "somewhat lacking in coherence and uniformity" (p. viii). Perhaps the best example is Browne's most serious omission: although the frontispiece of the edition features a handsome, studio photograph of 'Abdu'l-Baha, there is scarcely any mention (save in a handful of scattered footnotes) of 'Abdu'l-Baha's historic 1911–1913 tour throughout Egypt, Europe, America, and Canada, promulgating Baha'i principles of equality, unity, and social justice, during which time Browne himself met with 'Abdu'l-Baha on three occasions (on December 18 and 19 of 1912, in London, and again on March 9, 1913, in Paris).

### BROWNE'S SCHOLARSHIP TODAY

Browne's works on the Babi and Baha'i religions still offer much of value to the modern reader. Moojan Momen's compilation of the best of

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

Browne's work on the topic, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne on the Babi and Baha'i Religions* (1987), renders Browne's work more accessible. One of the chief virtues of Momen's editorial work is his identification of certain Baha'i contacts in Persia whose identity Browne sought to protect by giving each an alias—with the exception of the Baha'i poet 'Andalib, the "Nightingale," whom Browne met in Yazd in 1888. Among the illustrious Baha'is whom Browne met during his time in Persia, according to Momen, include Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali and Aqa Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad Khan (Muwaqqar al-Dawla).

After publishing four volumes on the Babi and Baha'i religions between 1891 and 1918, Browne finally came to accept that Baha'u'llah's son, 'Abdu'l-Baha (who died in 1921), was in fact a rightful successor. Did Browne rue his pro-Azali, anti-Baha'i bias? The Islamic polymath Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) famously stated that "even horses stumble, and even scholars err"—and Browne was no exception. He took Gobineau practically as gospel: in *Literary History*, volume 4, he says of Gobineau, "I personally owe more to this book than to any other book about Persia" (p. 153). This included Gobineau's assertion that Subh-i Azal was the rightful successor to the Bab.

The Baha'i notable and attorney Mountfort Mills (d. 1949) reportedly persuaded Browne, late in life, that the latter "had been veiled by the preoccupation with conflicting claims and disturbances which followed the Martyrdom of the Bab" (referring to the Bab's execution on July 9, 1850, in Tabriz, Persia, by decree of Islamic authorities, before a firing squad of 750 muskets led by a Muslim commander, after the Bab survived an earlier attempt at execution by a Christian regiment, an extraordinary event witnessed by a throng of about 10,000 onlookers). "After hearing Mr. Mills' explanation of the evolution of the Faith from the Bab to Baha'u'llah, and its subsequent stages under 'Abdu'l-Baha leadership," Holley further reports, "Professor Browne ... expressed his desire to translate later Baha'i works, but died before this contribution to the Faith could be made" (Holley,

p. 510). In the end, however, it appears that Browne made oblique amends. In an obituary, "Sir 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbas: Died 28th November, 1921," published in 1922 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Browne paid unambiguous tribute:

The death of 'Abbas Efendi [*sic*], better known since he succeeded his father, Baha'u'llah, thirty years ago as 'Abdu'l Baha, deprives Persia of one of the most notable of her children and the East of a remarkable personality, who has probably exercised a greater influence not only in the Orient but in the Occident than any Asiatic thinker and teacher of recent times.

(p. 145)

Considering Browne's meetings with remarkable men over the course of his own illustrious career, here, his praise of 'Abdu'l-Baha as likely the most influential "Asiatic thinker and teacher" of his day takes on added significance.

### *POLITICS: THE PERSIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION*

In mid-career, Browne's primary interest apparently shifted from religion to politics. Browne, who bitterly opposed the Anglo-Russian Convention of August 31, 1907—carving out three spheres of influence in Persia (the north for Russia; the south for Britain; the central region neutral)—was a minority voice of Britain's national conscience. An impassioned proponent of Persian nationalism and one of the foremost anti-imperialist voices of his day, Browne gained a reputation as a British foreign-policy dissenter and thus a political radical—foreshadowing Edward Said's "counter-orientalist" critique of Western colonialism.

Browne took great interest in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911—perhaps more so than any other European—and his activism on behalf of Persian nationalism is noteworthy. In writing contemporary history, Browne tried to write (and consequently to "right," or mediate) the immediate future. Indicative in tense, yet subjunctive in mood, Browne's scholarship on Persian literature endeared him to

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

Persians, who appreciated his love for Persia—with its rich, metaphysical culture—along with his political writings in support of Persian nationalism. Browne thereby gave Persian dissent an international voice.

The historian Abbas Amanat has suggested that Browne was the person who coined the term “Constitutional Revolution” for the modernizing events in early-twentieth-century Persia, as the English equivalent to the Persian *inqilab-i mashruta* (literally, “revolution of constitutionalism”). As the name implies, the goal was to transform Persia into a constitutional government and a liberal democracy. Browne’s activism in support of the Persian Constitutional Revolution largely explains his continued predilection for Azali Babism, since, as Browne himself points out, it is “a remarkable fact that several very prominent supporters of the Persian Constitutional Revolution were, or had the reputation of being, Azalis” (*Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, p. 221).

Browne published two volumes on the Persian Constitutional Revolution: *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (1910) and *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* (1914), the latter based partly on the manuscript work of Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali Khan (“Tarbiat”) of Tabriz. Of *The Persian Revolution*, Shiva Balaghi writes that it is “a significant record of events of the early stages of the Constitutional Revolution as experienced by a European academic with wide ranging connections to some of the key players in that Revolution” (p. 66). In certain respects, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* can be regarded as a fifth volume of Browne’s *Literary History of Persia*, but with an avowedly partisan advocacy of Persian constitutional reform, with freedom of the press in service of democratic ideals. As a scholar, Browne was imbued with the ethic of impartiality. But as an activist he obviously had an agenda to prosecute. Regarding this bias, Mansour Bonakdarian insightfully observes:

Though Browne’s account of the events in his book on the Iranian revolution are generally considered remarkably accurate, it should be kept in mind that his book was not a holistic or impartial record,

contrary to his expressed commitment to the “truth only.” In other words, Browne was rejecting both British as well as Iranian interpretations of the Iranian events that diverged from his, seeking to silence alternative native (Iranian) commentaries on the situation in order to magnify the views of particular groups among the Iranian constitutionalists. In this sense, Browne was painstakingly tailoring and refashioning the Iranian voices heard in Britain in accordance with his own sympathies and his fervent aspiration to rescue Iran from the clutches of imperialism.

(p. 18)

To further stimulate interest and influence British public opinion in Persia, Browne wrote pamphlets, editorials, and articles. In October 1908, Browne and H. F. B. Lynch established the Persia Committee, an activist group comprising journalists and other writers, as well as some members of both houses of Parliament, with Browne serving as its vice-chairman. The purpose of the Persia Committee was to influence British foreign policy as well as public opinion, both within Britain and abroad, arousing sympathy in favor of the Persians’ right of self-determination. Browne, moreover, demanded that the British and Russian zones of influence in Persia, established by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, be abolished. Browne’s eighteen-page pamphlet, “The Persian Crisis of December, 1911: How It Arose and Whither It May Lead Us”—privately printed for the Persia Committee by Cambridge University Press in 1912 and including a map showing the Russian and British spheres of influence—examplifies the committee’s activism.

### MEDICINE: ARABIAN MEDICINE

Browne dedicated his four Fitzpatrick Lectures and subsequent book, *Arabian Medicine: Being the Fitzpatrick Lectures Delivered at the College of Physicians in November 1919 and November 1920*, to Sir Norman Moore, M.D., president of the Royal College of Physicians, in “admiration of his catholic scholarship, in gratitude for his inspiring teachings and in memory of three fruitful years passed under his guidance at St Bartholomew’s Hospital” (p. iv). Properly speaking, Browne explains at the outset of his first

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

lecture, Arabian medicine is not so much a product of indigenous Arabian ingenuity as it is Greek in origin, with later Indian, Persian, and Syrian influences superadded, inasmuch as Arabic functioned as the learned language of the Islamic world.

Lecture 1 (pp. 1–32) defines the term “Arabian medicine,” outlines the definitive periods of Arabian and Islamic history, recapitulates the transmission of Greek learning, including contributions by Syriac and Persian sources, and treats of the “aptitude of Arabic for scientific purposes” (p. vii). Lecture 2 (pp. 33–64) treats the evolution of scientific terminology in Arabic, asks whether dissection was ever practiced by Muslim physicians, and surveys contributions of four early Persian writers on the practice of medicine: (1) ‘Ali ibn Rabban; (2) Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyyaar-Razi; (3) ‘Ali ibnu’l-’Abbas al-Majusi; and (4) Abu ‘Ali Husayn ibn Sina (Avicenna). Lecture 3 (pp. 65–96) recapitulates the sum and substance of Arabian popular medicine, notes the major translators of medical texts from Arabic into Latin, covers the practice of medicine in the time of the Crusades, offers anecdotes about notable cures in Arabic and Persian literature, treats of “psychotherapeusis” (which Browne does not define), notes applications to love and melancholia, surveys Persian medical works, and discusses the introduction of European medicine into Muslim lands. Lecture 4 (pp. 97–126) appreciates the medical contributions made by the Moors of Spain (especially the School of Toledo), surveys Persian medical literature from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, looks at biographical works of the thirteenth century, discusses Muslim hospitals, discusses letters of “Rashid the Physician,” offers outlines of Muslim cosmogony, physical science, and physiology, and ends with a conclusion, worth quoting here: “Above all there has grown in me while communing with the minds of these old Arabian and Persian physicians a realization of the solidarity of the human intelligence beyond all limitations of race, space or time, and of the essential nobility of the great profession represented by this College” (*Arabian Medicine*, p. 126).

This egalitarian spirit pervades Browne’s works and is a testament to his quality of character, beyond his proficiency as a scholar.

### CONCLUSION: “ALMOST A PERSIAN”

No definitive biography of Browne has reached publication, although John Gurney, a former university lecturer in Persian history and culture and emeritus fellow of Wadham College, has written a multivolume biography of Browne that as yet is unpublished. A complementary biography, in Persian, has been completed by Hasan Javadi, who is negotiating publication.

Experience, the mother of personal narrative, is often captured in diaries and recorded in personal notes. In 2013, Pembroke College released digital scans of Browne’s travel diary. Close study of Browne’s entries may reveal further particulars of his yearlong sojourn in Persia, the finer points of which he set down in meticulous detail. What becomes immediately apparent, even by the most cursory viewing of these images, is the thoroughness and sheer perseverance by which Browne pursued his research interests. The rich and varied experiences of that pivotal year spent in Persia in 1887–1888 bore fruit throughout Browne’s career. His extraordinary fluency in Persian, coupled with his mastery of Arabic, translated into his writing in ways that go far beyond an “anthropological” interest, to become a thoroughly humanitarian consideration, with an international dimension and universal implications.

By what measure can the contributions of Edward Granville Browne as a British writer best be assessed? Browne wrote extensively on two of the most controversial topics of human discourse generally: religion and politics. Of the significance of Browne’s interest in the Babi and Baha’i religions, for which he was roundly criticized by an anonymous reviewer in the May 25, 1892, issue of the *Oxford Magazine*, it should not be forgotten that Browne first established himself as a scholar on the basis of this very research. In retrospect, Reynold Nicholson (Browne’s successor at Cambridge) offers this as-

## EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

essment: “I am not sure whether, taking a long view, we ought not regard it [i.e., Browne’s scholarship on the Babi and Baha’i religions] as the most original and valuable of all his contributions to our knowledge of Persia” (“Introduction,” *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. x; also cited in Arthur Arberry, “The Persian,” p. 176). Now that the Baha’i faith is arguably well-established as the youngest of the independent world religions—what Browne himself, in 1892, prophetically forecasted as “this new world-religion” (“Babiism,” p. 333)—Browne’s investigations take on added significance.

What of Browne’s contributions in the arena of politics? Suffice it to say that Browne was a vocal and, to a certain extent, effective activist when it came to influencing public opinion regarding Britain’s foreign policy. Mansour Bonakdarian has carefully studied Browne’s unpublished work in detail, archival research that greatly augments a proper understanding and appreciation of Browne’s published work. Of Browne’s contributions as a British writer to public discourse and national conscience in Britain, Bonakdarian gives this estimate: “His representations and contextualization of those representations were to inform and shape British political discourse and historical understanding, not just about Iran but, at a different level, also about British foreign and colonial policies and Britain’s role around the globe in general” (p. 22).

What brought Persian religion and politics together in Browne was his personal identification with Persia, which surpassed sympathy and exceeded even empathy. Indeed, it might be said that Browne’s almost total alter identity was that of a Persian. On January 16, 1912, in the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper, Browne publicly proclaimed Persia as “the country which I love after my own nation better than any nation in the world” (quoted in Bonakdarian, p. 7). And almost twenty years earlier, in fact—in a February 10, 1894, review of *A Year Amongst the Persians*, published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*—the British politician and statesman Lord Curzon had respectfully observed of his younger contemporary that Browne, “in his enthusiasm for his subject, while

never losing his critical balance, becomes almost a Persian himself” (quoted in Christopher Ross, p. 396).

“In an intrinsic and spiritual way, I know myself as an Iranian,” Browne mused in an unpublished letter, in Persian, dated 1328 AH (1910–1911), adding that “accordingly, I am joyful of anything that brings about Iran’s progress and am grieved and saddened by anything that causes Iran’s degradation and decline” (translated in Balaghi, p. 64). By integrating two cultural souls in one, British and Persian, Browne transcended, in principle, all cultural and political boundaries, even though he wrote extensively about contemporary British and Persian political issues. In advocating, to a British public, Persian nationalistic interests, Browne awakened a sense of internationalism. In Browne, the humanities become humanitarian.

Beyond all this, Browne promoted training in Oriental studies as a practical way to prepare candidates in the Levant consular service and the Egyptian, Sudanese, and Indian civil services for administrative and diplomatic careers abroad. In so doing, Browne attracted such diplomats and future historians of the Middle East as Sir Reader Bullard, Laurence Lockhart, and Sir Ronald Storrs to Cambridge.

Besides being a public persona, Browne had a notable dimension of humanity, evident, for instance, in the fact that, after World War I broke out in Europe, he devoted himself to treating the wounded in Cambridge’s hospitals. For this service, he received no honor or distinction. He was publicly recognized by the imperial government of Iran for his service on behalf of Persia, however, by award of the Order of the Lion and Sun of Persia in the 1921 ceremony at the Persian Legation in London.

Of Browne’s prowess as a writer, Reynold Nicholson aptly wrote: “Perhaps the most distinctive features of Browne’s scholarship are its breadth and unity on the one hand, and its vitality and power on the other” (p. 379). Browne expanded Britain’s consciousness of international relations in relation to contemporary world affairs and enlightened its national conscience. A universalist spirit, he brought to life “a realiza-

# EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE

tion of the solidarity of the human intelligence beyond all limitations of race, space or time” (*Arabian Medicine*, p. 126).

Although *A Year Amongst the Persians* belongs to world literature, it has a greater claim to literary immortality. Browne’s original research on an emerging world religion, his advocacy of self-determination for Persia—and for all developing nations in principle—and his promotion of intercultural understanding establishes Browne as catalyst of an emerging world solidarity. Browne’s genius was guided by a moral compass, which was world-encompassing. He constructed a cultural bridge of turquoise whereby West and East—which Britain and Persia microcosmically represented—may meet. In Browne, the twain did meet, transcending borders and cultural boundaries. Browne had the power to inform, fascinate, and engage his audience regarding the country of Persia which, in a very real sense, represented the rest of the world. Such is Browne’s enduring legacy as a British writer.

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