

The Shuster Mission
and the
Persian Constitutional Revolution

by
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To My Father

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country was under the nominal suzerainty of the Shu'a' al-Sultanah during the time the Shah was in Europe.¹¹

The year 1903 was marred by signs of the underlying political and social unrest which continued throughout the following years. Some of the difficulties were intrigues directed against the Amin al-Sultan involving the religious authorities of Karbala and Najaf. As usual the religious followers of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad (*Babis*) took the brunt of this agitation, and the result was a number of persecutions throughout the country. The agitation was also directed against the Belgian customs authorities who were more than zealous in enforcing the new tariff regulations that had gone into effect that year.¹² The Shah's trips to Europe had also excited a good deal of opposition, while a downturn in the economy gradually brought the prosperity of the preceding few years to a halt.¹³ As may be expected, much of the agitation was led by the clergy, but not without the connivance of the local authorities. These open manifestations of discontent combined with the intrigues which always flickered in the shadows of the central government to bring about the downfall of the Amin al-Sultan's government in September of 1903.

The institutions that governed Persia were changing. Earlier in the preceding century it had frequently happened that a minister just fallen was done away with altogether. Now, in 1903, the Amin al-Sultan, Atabak-i A'zam, the most powerful man in Persia after the Shah, was in less danger of losing his life than he would have been fifty years before, but he still found it prudent to get as far as possible from the centers of power. He was allowed to go off on a trip around the world and his place was taken by the 'Ayn al-Dawlah. But even that appointment was a sign of the changes that had taken place in Persia. 'Abd al-Majid Mirza, 'Ayn al-Dawlah, was a Qajar, a grandson of Fath 'Ali Shah, and his appearance at the head of the government represents a change in policy as well as the culmination of a process that had been

going on throughout the whole century. The Qajar family had gradually transformed itself from a group of carefully watched prince-governors into the most influential element in the bureaucracy.

By 1903, the central government was considerably stronger than it had been at the time of the Tobacco Concession. An attempt by the clergy to direct the same sort of agitation against the new tariff and the proliferation of Belgian administrators failed completely. The benefits of the relatively honest and efficient Belgian administration which by 1906 included the customs, post office, treasury, and mint were much too apparent to the central government. It would not allow the structure which the Belgians had thus laboriously created to be blown away by the winds of religious scruple.¹⁴ Moreover, communications and transport had improved somewhat in the years since 1892 — all to the benefit of the control of the central government. At the same time, it is to be noted many of these improvements were initiated and pushed to completion by a crop of local governors, all Qajar princes and products of the central government at Tehran, who took a new view of the role of the government,¹⁵ a view which boded no good for the old system.

Events outside of Persia had at the same time brought about a situation which was to have serious repercussions within the country. The slackening of commercial and economic activity was largely a reflection of the same phenomenon which had begun in the Russian economy at the turn of the century. The Russo-Japanese War brought further signs of strain in Russia's already creaking economy and worked to the detriment of the Persian merchant doing business on credit with Russia. The result was a sudden cessation of easy credit at the Russian bank. Moreover, the goods on which Persia had come to depend throughout the last years of the nineteenth century could not be so readily obtained. Persia had become, in part at least, an adjunct of the Russian economy, and changes in that economy brought dislocation in the Persian economy.¹⁶ The prestige of the Russian government suffered greatly as a result of its defeat by the Japanese. Then, in 1905, its prestige was dealt another blow by the revolution which swept the country. The events of that revolution were carefully

¹¹The text of the Shah's order recalling the Amin al-Sultān to office reveals the extent to which he was bothered by the way things were going. In the margin he wrote, "It is apparent to me that from the hour we appointed you Prime Minister we have had no peace day or night and therefore I am writing this order to reinforce your influence on affairs of government. You must administer to the best of your ability and perform the job correctly." *Ihrāhim Safā'i. Rahbarān-i Mashrūṭah* (Tehran, 1347/1967), II, p. 77; Cd. 1387-3, p. 12. See also Cd. 2146.

¹²Cd. 2236-152, p. 41.

¹³Lorimer, *Gazeteer of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 2111-2112; Cd. 2236, pp. 3-5; Cd. 2236-52,

¹⁴Lorimer, *Gazeteer of the Persian Gulf*, p. 2616.

¹⁵Cd. 1-79, p. 24; Cd. 429-106, p. 6; Cd. 1387-3, p. 12; Cd. 1386-120, p. 8; Cd. 1386-109, p. 6.

¹⁶Cd. 2236-118, p. 6.

stitutional government, therefore those of the nobility and chiefs of Persia, who hold the same opinion and with all sincerity wish to become partners to this agreement, will be received by us with all honour and respect into this society of associates.

Clause 5. — The partners to this agreement are agreed as far as it is possible faithfully to protect each other's honour, position, and interests.

Clause 6. — The associates to this agreement hereby proclaim that they consider and have constituted themselves the protectors and stewards of the Medjliss, so that from now onwards the members of said Medjliss may know that they have powerful supporters, so that fearlessly and untroubled they may give expression to their opinions for the good of the country and constitution, and may not fail in the execution of their duties, moreover, that should they know anybody to be an intriguer or biassed they may fearlessly let us know, and on proof of the truth of the assertion we will remove them, and we patriots consider it our bounden duty to uphold the Medjliss.

SOULET-ED-DOWLEH, Sardar-i-Ashayir
 MUIZ-ES-SALTANA, Sardar Arfa (Sheikh of Mohammerah)
 GHOLAM REZA KHAN, Sardar Ashraf (Vali of Pusht-i-Kuh)

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The richest single source of published material for the study of Persia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the British Parliamentary Papers. The reports and diplomatic correspondence buried in that great mass of paper, once dug out, throw considerable light on Persian history and the economic, cultural, social, and political processes that it comprises. In general, the material in the Parliamentary Papers is either in the Annual or Miscellaneous Series of Consular and Diplomatic Reports, or else in the diplomatic "blue books" published by the government at irregular intervals to illuminate some specific incident in Anglo-Persian relations. The series of diplomatic and consular reports on trade and commerce and anything else Her Majesty's representatives saw fit to include appeared sporadically at first. By the 1860s they were published with some degree of regularity, although under varying titles and in varying formats. In the 1880s they were regularized into a standard set and were reporting all of the figures and statistics on the flow of trade that British commercial attachés all over the world could gather. The statistics reported for Persia are admittedly suspect, but where they provide no absolute figures on the imports and exports of the country, they do give an index which can be used to survey trends in the economy. Moreover, the comments on Persian business conditions and methods with which the statistical sections of the reports are introduced often provide useful supplementary information. The diplomatic "blue books," as they were called, were of course edited thoroughly to produce a picture as flattering as possible to the British government. However, when the documents published in them are compared with the originals now available for study in the Public Records Office (or, for that matter, with scholarly reproductions of them, e.g., Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War*) they reveal that, while the editing has left out important information, they do not contain substituted false information.

Where possible, all references have been made to published documents. Where that has not been possible, the reference is to the Foreign Office Confidential Print, which is now readily available on microfilm. Only where the innards of Foreign Office thinking were of direct importance to the course of events in Persia, as for example, in late October and early November, 1911, has reference been made to unpublished documents in the Public Records Office.

While no other single set of diplomatic documents provides so much information as the British on the workings of Persian internal politics, many reflect something of the progress of events in Persia and some, such as the Soviet Union's *Mezhdunarodnyi Otnosheniia v epokhu imperializma*, are indispensable. Published French and German documents are disappointing. *Die Grosse Politik* contains only one report from Quadt and that is of no consequence. On the other hand, *all* of the German documents are available on microfilm and they have been sifted through rather extensively in the course of preparing this volume. The American documents are also helpful, but I was able to discover little new in either the Swedish or Austrian documents and I have not used the French archives at all. Still, all of these archives are diplomatic archives and they tend quite naturally to reflect Western viewpoints and to concern themselves mostly with affairs that were of interest to Westerners. Since they have constituted a major source of information about the events discussed in this volume, they have probably skewed the perspective taken on some of those events. However, I have tried to overcome that disadvantage by seeking corroboration in Persian sources and using the latter exclusively where possible. They are discussed below.

The only thorough going history of the Persian revolution in a Western language is that published by E. G. Browne in 1910. Browne's work is a valuable source of information, of dates and places, and of accounts of eyewitnesses not elsewhere published, but it must be used with care. Its interpretative material and value judgments may be ignored almost completely. His account is a polemic against tyranny and by substituting Stuart for Qajar and Parliament for Majlis the reader will more likely find himself in seventeenth-century England than nineteenth-century Persia. He was, in short, an old-fashioned Whig historian, and although that breed has been out of fashion for some time, one must regrettably report that the interpretation he cast around the revolution has

remained a standard. It has provided the framework for most explanations of the Persian revolution current in the West and in Persia itself. Morgan Shuster's book on his mission to Persia partakes of some of the same qualities as Browne's. However, it is also a memoir and so bears more directly on the events of 1911. Shuster was consistently and aggressively on the side of the future; if only the future had been on his. In this connection, it might be mentioned that some material from other members of his mission has come to light, but that the amount is disappointingly small. The McCaskey papers reveal only the rapidity with which the Seligmans got in touch with Shuster after the appointment of the mission, but no details about the connection between the banking house and the Shuster mission.

Monographic material on Persia before World War I is scarce. Excellent work has been done on some of the problems of diplomacy, but studies on the workings of the institutions of the Qajar state are few. Hamid Algar's recent work is one bright exception and so are the works of Nikki Keddie and Marvin Entner. Entner's work is particularly valuable, because it lays to rest some ancient myths about the economic relations between Russia and Persia. Russian trade did not grow throughout the century, but only after the 1880s when the Russian government began paying bounties. More interesting still, Persia was not disadvantaged by the treaty of Turkmanchai, as the Persian nationalist interpretation long maintained; it benefited. It was that benefit that the Russians eliminated in the negotiations with Naus at the turn of the century, but then not nearly so much to the disadvantage of the Persians as the British. It was British cries of self-righteous indignation that gave the myth so much of its carrying power (see also Greaves, 1965).

Until the last decade or so, Persian literature on the revolution was disappointing. Persian histories and memoirs on the revolution told only the story of the fight against tyranny and foreign intervention. The best of the older histories (Kasravi, Nazim al-Islam Kirmani) were "the best" because along with a fairly accurate narrative of events they incorporated contemporary documents which are of great value to the historian in his efforts to make his way through the complex events of those complex years. More recently, memoirs and diaries (Mustawfi, Dawlatabadi, Hidayat) have thrown more light into the darker recesses of the Persian side

of events. Although a good deal of useless polemic still tends to surface in some Persian writing about the revolution (Ra'în), every historian of the period owes a vote of thanks to Ibrahim Safa'i for his diligent collection and publication of documents.

One final note: in section IIb below are listed the documents from the British Parliamentary Papers which were either used or referred to in this study. References to them throughout the study have been by command number only. In order to facilitate finding documents the reader may wish to investigate, the papers have been listed in catalog fashion with the command number brought to the left to serve as a catalog number.

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