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Appendix I.: THE CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY

By LIEUT.-COLONEL A. C. YATE
(Hon. Secretary, Central Asian Society).

STUDENTS of history are well aware of the obscurity which veils the origin of many institutions which have made their mark in the world. It occurs to me, therefore, to record here briefly the circumstances which gave birth to the Central Asian Society; and it is to Colonel Sir Francis Younghusband and Sir Edward Penton that I am indebted in the first instance for the information upon which this exordium is based. For, although I was an original member of the Society, it was not till 1905 that I left India for good. When we consider what the term "Central Asian Question" meant in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, we may wonder that it was not until the twentieth century, when the "Middle East" was already dawning, that the Central Asian Society began its corporate existence. "The fact that there was no suitable association for the discussion of the political aspects of Central Asian problems" had for some years been fermenting in the mind of Major (as he then was) F. E. Younghusband. Towards the end of 1900 it came to his knowledge that Dr. Cotterell Tupp, late of the Indian Civil Service, likewise entertained the idea of founding a society for the study not only of geographical, economic, social, and scientific, but also of political questions affecting the territories situated between Eastern Europe and India. A meeting took place between Major Younghusband and Dr. Tupp—a meeting at which Colonels Sir T. H. Holdich and Algernon Durand were present. It was then decided to form a society and to approach the Royal Asiatic Society for the favour of the use of their rooms.

The first meeting took place in those rooms on December 13, 1901, when General Sir T. E. Gordon presided, and was elected President for the ensuing year, Major Younghusband being Hon. Secretary, and Dr. Tupp Hon. Treasurer. Among the Members of Council then appointed I find Major-General Sir Edwin Collen and Sir Evan James. It was decided to hold the meetings on the first Wednesday in each month of the lecture season (October to June) at the rooms of the Royal Asiatic Society, and on January 15, 1902, the first lecture was given by Mr. H. F. B. Lynch on "The Persian Gulf." Major

Younghusband being then unexpectedly ordered back to India was succeeded as Hon. Secretary by Mr. Edward Penton, who continued to fill that office until the beginning of the late war. From 1914 to 1918 the Central Asian secretariat was in the able hands of Miss Hughes, the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society. In a leaflet dated May 28, 1903, Mr. Penton placed on record the eleven lectures delivered before the Society in the first seventeen months of existence, among the lecturers being General Sir T. E. Gordon, Mr. A. R. Colquhoun, Mrs. Archibald Little, Lord Ronaldshay, Mr. T. Gibson Bowles, and Mr. (now Sir) George Macartney, on subjects ranging from Persia to the Pacific. My collected copy of the Society's publications starts with the papers read during the session of 1903-04. I find no record of the publication of the lectures of the period January, 1902, to May, 1903. Probably the Society's funds did not, so early in its career, admit of expenditure for printing. In November, 1901, the Society numbered thirteen members, in January, 1902, thirty, and in May, 1903, ninety-seven. The publication of the journal then commenced, and the expense was then more easily met with ninety-seven members than it is under post-war conditions with about 140.

From 1903 onward to the present time the Society, with a membership gradually on the increase, has steadily pursued the aims for which it was founded. The evidence of that is to be sought in the personality of the lecturers themselves, and in the public importance of the subject-matter of the papers read, and of the discussions that ensued. At this moment it will not be out of place to review those papers and discussions in their relation to the incidents of the late war and the situation of the present hour. When Sir Valentine Chirol in 1906 addressed the Society on "Pan-Islamism," Abdul Hamid was still seated on the Ottoman throne, and yet even then we find M. de Wesselitsky, while disclaiming for the Moslems of Russia any Pan-Islamic tendency, and not even hinting at "Pan-Turanianism," remarking that "there is a literary Pan-Turkism, an attempt to create a literary language for all the Musulmans of Russia of Turco-Tartar race common to them with the Turks of the Ottoman Empire," and "it seems to me that Pan-Islamism might become a very real danger if Musulmans felt themselves unfairly treated by Christians." In this war we have seen Islam go through this ordeal, and, as the outcome thereof, to use Lindsay Gordon's phrase, "two things stand like stone," one that Islam has rallied to the British Empire, and the other that, while Sunni Turkey fell foul of its professed best friend, Germany, over the Black Sea fleet and the Caucasus, Shi'a Persia, after coquetting and intriguing more or less all round, is now posing pretentiously before the Peace Conference in Paris. When in January, 1912, Professor

Margoliouth lectured on this self-same topic, viz., "Pan-Islamism," he showed clearly that the Young Turks entertained ideas of Pan-Islamic propaganda, and argued that it was under European protection that "the most favourable conditions possible existed for the propagation of Islam." At both these lectures the Central Asian Society had the good fortune to listen to the views on this subject of Mr. Ameer Ali, always an impressive and attractive speaker, views which have very recently led to friendly, but none the less definite differences of opinion between him and Sir V. Chirol. If Professor Margoliouth is right, then the Memorandum addressed by H.H. the Aga Khan, the Right Hon. Ameer Ali, Sir Abbas Ali Baig, and others, quoted in *The Times* of March 25, and sympathetically if critically commented on in *The Near East* of March 27, misses its mark.

Not unnaturally, Persia has figured largely in the lecture list of the Society. In the first twelve years of its existence "Persia" was the theme which inspired the pen of no less than fifteen lecturers, among whom may be mentioned Lords Lamington and Ronaldshay, Sir Percy and Miss Ella Sykes, Professor E. G. Browne, Mr. Lovat Fraser, General Sir T. E. Gordon, and Mr. H. F. B. Lynch. The importance of the subject seems also to justify a mention of the lecture given by me in February, 1911, on "The Proposed Trans-Persian Railway." When preparing that paper I had a conversation with M. Timiriazeff, President of the Russo-British Chamber of Commerce, and towards the close of 1911 I attended a very interesting gathering at Paris of Russian and French promoters of that railway. Subsequent writers on this and cognate topics, such as Mr. Evans Lewin and M. G. Demorgny, both of whose books appeared in 1916, refer to this lecture as still the recognized authority. Personally, when I reawaken my reminiscences of the whole affair, I am devoutly thankful that the Anglo-Franco-Russian scheme of 1912 for a Trans-Persian Railway came to nothing. When it is at some future time constructed it should be in a greater measure under British control. In May, 1902, Lord Ronaldshay had told the Society all about the Nushki-Seistan route; in 1916 Sir Hugh Barnes, writing in the *Indiaman*, urged the Government of India to build the Nushki-Seistan Railway, and in February, 1919, Colonel Webb Ware, in an admirable lecture, enhanced by a long and lucid speech from Sir Hugh Barnes, told a crowded audience how India had just connected itself by rail with Persia. Thanks to that connection, and to Brigadier-General Sir Percy M. Sykes and the troops under his command, Kirman was purged of Hun propagandists, and Bolshevism was checkmated on the Trans-Caspian Railway.

The recent tragic events in Afghanistan remind us of the close ties which unite that kingdom to India. It was in 1900 that Mr. John

Murray, subsequently a member of the Central Asian Society, brought out the Ameer Abdur Rahman Khan's autobiography, and in 1907 Sir Mortimer Durand selected that same potentate—a ruler whom Sir West Ridgeway once classed among the greatest men of his day—as the subject for his lecture. As one who had been in Kabul with Sir F. Roberts, and instrumental in placing Abdur Rahman Khan on the throne, and in 1893 the head of a mission sent to him by the Viceroy of India, no one was better qualified than Sir Mortimer to speak of an Ameer who inaugurated in 1880 a rule and policy at Kabul which has aided us in this momentous war. The death of the Ameer Habibullah is to be deplored, and might well have been made by the Central Asian Society an occasion for demonstrating and publicly recognizing the boon which forty years of stable government in Kabul has proved to be for the British Empire. If there is a Society that knows Afghanistan it is the Central Asian. All the Trans-Caspian territory and the Khanates are at this moment at a loose end, and a "mandate" is wanted to gather them into that fold which recognizes Great Britain as its shepherd. Men, however, throw away their chances. Afghanistan is no mean instrument, and her patience merits reward. Russia must be coerced, says Sir George Buchanan. The compass which tightens from Archangel, Omsk, the Volga, and the Don may tighten too from Kabul and Herat.

As may be supposed, the Baghdad Railway has been well discussed within the "Central Asian" walls, by none more effectively than by M. Chéradame in May, 1911; and, indeed, the fertile topic of railways converging on India has been dealt with there by Colonels Picot and Beresford, Mr. Lynch, Mr. C. D. Black, and others, while Mr. Percival Landon, Mr. F. D. Harford, Mr. A. Boddam Taylor, Mr. E. T. A. Wigram, Mr. Demetrius Boulger, and Sir Thomas Holdich, have made us familiar with Mesopotamia. Two bulwarks of the Indian Empire, Baluchistan on the west and Burma on the east, were respectively dealt with by men who had ruled them, viz., Colonel C. E. Yate and Sir Frederick Fryer, while India's power for offence and defence found able exponents in Sir Edwin Collen and Sir Thomas Holdich. Chinese Turkestan drew old memories from Sir Thomas Gordon and Sir Henry Trotter, while Sir George Macartney favoured us with his more recent experiences. On Asiatic Turkey and Asia Minor we heard the late Sir Mark Sykes, Mr. W. J. Childs, and Sir W. M. Ramsay, and with China, Mongolia, Japan, and Siberia we spent some pleasant and instructive afternoons. Commander O. Locker-Lampson and his armoured cars, ranging from Archangel to Erzeroum, held an audience spell-bound, and finally Mr. J. O. P. Bland, with General Sir Edmund Barrow, who was Sir Alfred Gaselee's Chief of the Staff at Peking in 1900, in the chair, paved the way for the restoration to China of the astro-

nomical instruments taken away from Peking by the Germans in 1900, and since then kept at Potsdam. It was my old friend, Colonel E. St. C. Pemberton, R.E., an ex-councillor of the Central Asian Society, who on December 11, 1900, in the discussion which followed Mr. Bland's address, brought forward the question of making Germany disgorge. He had seen the instruments at Potsdam about 1907, and again later seen the desolate sites on the walls of Peking. The subject was well ventilated at that meeting of the Central Asian Society, and not in vain. Suffice it to mention that *The Times* of December 12, 1918, took especial notice of what General Barrow and Colonel Pemberton had said on the 11th to the "Central Asian" meeting, and strongly endorsed their view that the instruments ought unquestionably to be restored. As I write, *The Times* of March 19 lies before me, and says: "The German Government has decided to return to China the astronomical instruments which were transported from Peking to Germany in 1900. Negotiations have been opened for the shipping of the instruments to China.—*Wireless Press* (through the wireless stations of the German Government)."

A very able journalist, who has attended all our lectures for years, wrote very recently to me: "In my opinion, the Society is more alive to-day than ever before," and this success for China bears this out. During the eighteen years of its life the Society owes its success to an able series of Chairmen of Council: Sir T. E. Gordon, Sir F. E. Younghusband, Sir V. Chirol, Lord Lamington, Sir Alfred Lyall, Sir T. H. Holdich, Lord Ronaldshay, Sir Mortimer Durand, Sir Henry Trotter, and finally Lord Carnock. The Honorary President of the Society is the Earl Curzon of Kedleston. Illustration by lantern slides has accompanied most of the lectures, and in this connection the services of Mr. Simpson, of the Royal Geographical Society, have been most helpful.

The war just concluded has introduced thousands of male and female subjects of his Britannic Majesty to Asiatic countries which under ordinary conditions they never expected to visit. It is hoped that many of these will join the Central Asian Society on their return to England, and thus bring double grist to the Society's mill—the grist of brain for the lecture-field and the grist of funds for the production and maintenance of a "Central Asian Journal" such as the Society may regard with pride.