

THE STRANGLING OF PERSIA

STORY OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY
AND ORIENTAL INTRIGUE THAT RE-
SULTED IN THE DENATIONALIZATION
OF TWELVE MILLION MOHAMMEDANS

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

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ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAP



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aspersion on the Government's actions or motives. The doughty editors, however, always managed to resume after a few days or weeks. The principal papers in Teheran at this time were the *Esteklal*, the organ of the so-called Moderate Party in the Medjlis, and the *Irani-Noh*, the organ of the Democrats. The latter was perhaps the best and most fearlessly edited journal in Persia, and it did yeoman service for the American finance officials from the day of their arrival in Teheran.

On May 22 the *chef de ceremonie* of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, conducted us to the temporary offices in the *Darbar*, or government center, which had been provided for us. Here the Vice-minister of Finance and the different chiefs of the offices were presented to us and a great quantity of tea and cigarettes was consumed. Also much time. Each chief was desirous of having a series of private interviews running over several days in order that he might properly explain the organization of his office, his own thorough grasp of the needs of the situation, and the failure of the Government to provide him or his employees with sufficient pecuniary lubricant to grease the wheels of his department.

The Minister of Finance, Mumtazu'd-Dawla, was aiding us in every possible way, and we had just reached a tentative basis for commencing work when, on May 23, eleven days after our arrival, there was a Cabinet "crisis" and he resigned. It seems that the Prime Minister and Minister of War, Sipahdar, felt that the Finance Minister was not signing checks and warrants with the freedom and abandon which the Premier had a right to expect.

I was somewhat disturbed by this Cabinet change right at the outset of our work, but later grew to take such things more philosophically.

Among the various officials of the Finance Department whom we met was a Mr. Lecoffre, a British subject, of French extrac-

tion, who had been in Persia for a number of years. He was a great deal more of a Frenchman than anything else, and he occupied the post of *Controlleur*. After all the other officials had left our office, Mr. Lecoffre sat down, looked me in the eye, and said: "I am glad, Mr. Shuster, that you have come, because *between us* we shall be able to straighten the miserable finances of these people." I thanked him for the encouraging thought.

On May 25, Mr. Hills and his family, who had been compelled to remain behind in Constantinople on account of the serious illness of their infant daughter, arrived at Teheran. Unfortunately another of his children fell ill just after their arrival and he was compelled to give up his post and return to America. They left Teheran on June 2, to the great regret of our entire party.

On our arrival at Atabak Park we had found fifteen or twenty very efficient Persian servants, who had been placed there by some Persian gentlemen who were entertaining us for a day or so until we could get our bearings. When we took over the *ménage* two days later we naturally retained these domestics, who had all been highly recommended to us. It was not until several weeks afterwards that the rumor began to reach me that the Americans were believed to be *Bahais*,¹ and that we had come to Teheran, not to reform the finances, but to proselytize. Finally the Minister of Finance very gravely called my attention to the matter, and suggested that I should discharge our servants as "they were all *Bahais*." This was news to me. I had never thought to put our personal servants to a religious test as to their orthodoxy, especially as it is against civil service principles in America. I told the Finance Minister that the

¹ The *Bahais*, *Bahaists* or *Babis*, are a religious sect among the Persians who are greatly disliked by the Muhammadans. Up to quite modern times they were cruelly persecuted by orthodox Moslems. They are now tolerated, and include many of the most enlightened and patriotic Persians.

Americans were *not* Bahais, but that I did not propose to have the Persian Government or people pass on the religious faith of ourselves, or our servants, or the color of our neckties, and that if the Government had not something more important than that to think about, it should find something. That was the last I heard officially, but the tale was spread broadcast by certain elements who were antagonistic to our work, and we were cartooned in some of the local newspapers. Finding that we were attending to our own business, the public soon forgot the matter.

About this time I received an insight into the so-called "intrigues" which were going on in connection with our arrival and contemplated duties. Nearly every one with whom I talked brought out, at some point in the conversation, the word "intrigues." "The Cabinet is making *intrigues* against you." "The Belgian Customs officials are *intriguing* against the Americans." "This is a terrible place, Mr. Shuster, for *intrigues*." "Persia is the land of *blague* and *intrigues*." In sheer self-defense I was compelled to tell every one that Americans thrived on intrigues and rather liked to see them going on.

The first tangible one which we met, however, was engineered by a Mons. Mornard, a Belgian Customs official, who held the post of Administrator-general of the Customs Department of Persia. This gentleman had been a Customs employee in his own country of very inferior grade, and had gone to Persia as an assistant to his notorious countryman, Mons. Naus, who had been employed by Muzaffaru'd Din Shah to organize and establish the Persian Customs Department, a thing which he did with such startling success that he quickly became extremely influential and wealthy, and was highly regarded by the Russian Government. One of the first acts of the original Persian Medjlis was, on February 10, 1907, to compel the Shah to dismiss Mons. Naus, who by that time occupied a number of high positions. He is now reported to be enjoying his handsome

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