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SOME PROBLEMS OF
THE PERSIAN GULF

BY

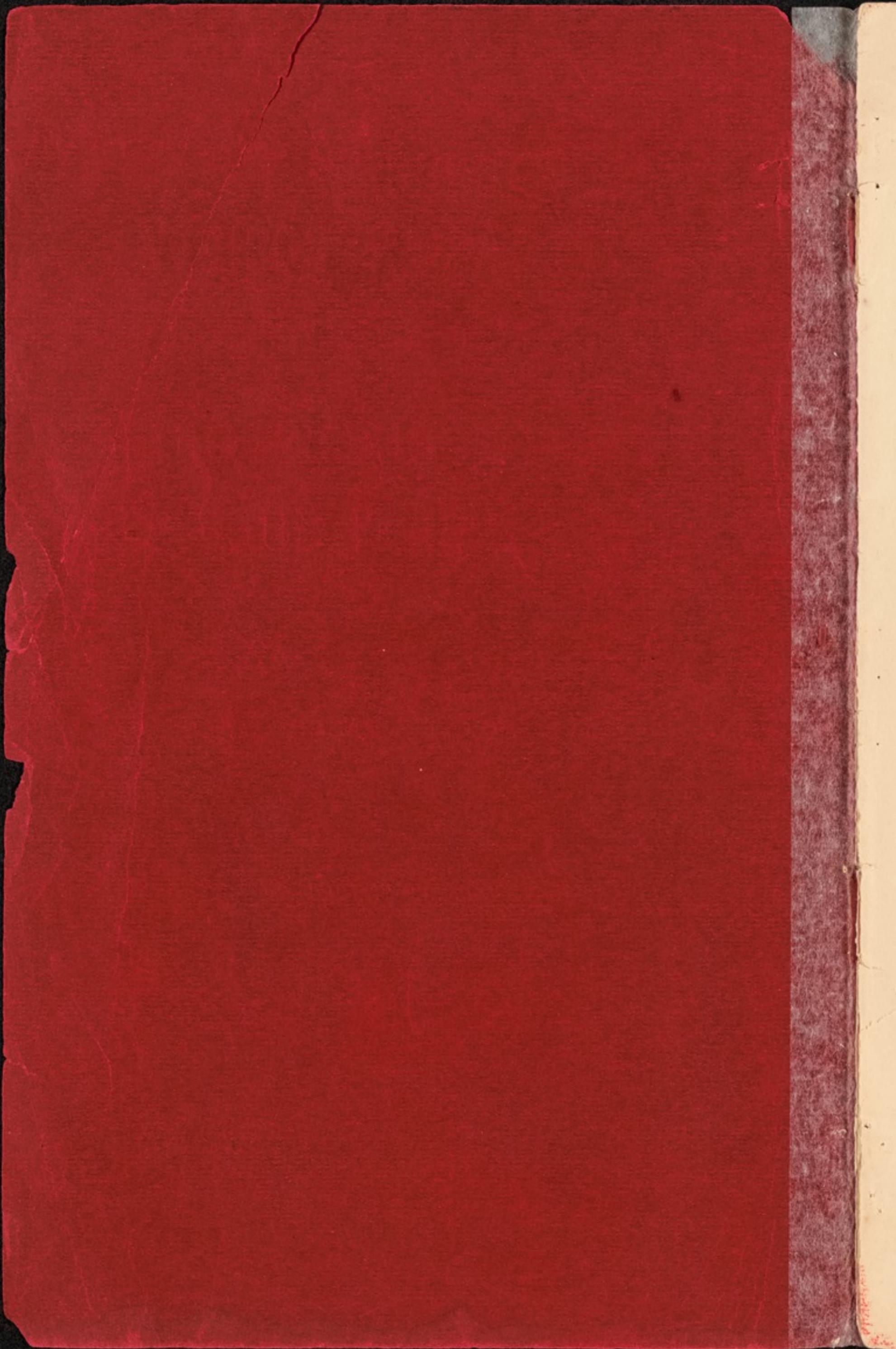
MR. LOVAT FRASER

Read January 8, 1908

LONDON

CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY, 22, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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SOME PROBLEMS OF THE PERSIAN GULF

MR. VALENTINE CHIROL, the Chairman, in opening the proceedings, said: It is my pleasant privilege to introduce Mr. Lovat Fraser, who is to read to us a paper on 'Some Problems of the Persian Gulf.' He has been for some years editor of the *Times of India*, Bombay, and all those who are acquainted with Indian journalism will admit that under his control no paper maintained more fully in India those high standards of thoroughness of work, independence of judgment, and undisputed integrity which we like to associate with the traditions of British journalism. (Cheers.) In Bombay Mr. Fraser was naturally brought more closely in contact with problems that concern the Persian Gulf than residents in other parts of India, for Bombay may almost be said to be at the door of the Persian Gulf. And not only did he study those problems with great attention and interest, but he visited the Gulf, and only last year was there for some time. He was thus able to study on the spot, and in consultation with most of our political officers and other authorities, the problems of which he is going to speak to us this afternoon.

MR. FRASER'S paper was as follows:

The other day I met a clerical friend who said he had undertaken to read a paper on 'The Press and Religion.' I asked him how he proposed to treat the question. He answered that he was very much perplexed, and thought the only thing to do was to treat it after the fashion of the celebrated chapter on Snakes in Iceland. Happily—or perhaps unhappily—no such difficulty confronts me to-day. The Persian Gulf literally bristles with problems, some of them extremely difficult and fraught with important consequences to the British Empire. Not the least of these problems is that of persuading the British public to try and find out where the Persian Gulf is. When I was honoured by a request to address the Central Asian Society on this subject, I formed the intention of dealing in considerable detail with certain special aspects of the Persian Gulf

question. Recent incidents, however, have led me to think that it might be more useful if I recalled to your recollection the basis upon which Great Britain claims special predominance in the Gulf, and the manner in which that predominance was established and has been maintained. The other day an incident occurred on the little island of Abu Musa, off the Pirate Coast, which has received considerable attention in the German and the English Press. I do not propose to discuss that incident here, except to say that, in so far as what occurred received the countenance and support of the British representatives, the steps taken were thoroughly justified. But in the comments of the German Press a disposition was shown, not for the first time, to question the whole status of Great Britain in the Gulf, and this disposition was accompanied in some quarters by what appeared to be a misapprehension of historical facts and actual conditions. It may be useful, therefore, to recite afresh at this juncture, in the briefest possible form, the successive steps by which the special position of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf has been created.

There have been many declarations concerning Great Britain's position in the Gulf, but for the purposes of this paper I will select only three. The first is the vigorous statement penned in his book on 'Persia,' by Lord Curzon, who knows more about Gulf affairs than any living Englishman, and who has done more than any other statesman, past or present, to maintain and strengthen British prestige in these landlocked waters. He wrote: 'I should regard the concession of a port upon the Persian Gulf to Russia by any Power as a deliberate insult to Great Britain, as a wanton rupture of the *status quo*, and as an intentional provocation to war, and I should impeach the British Minister who was guilty of acquiescing in such a surrender as a traitor to his country.'

That emphatic pronouncement follows a statement of the facts upon which our rights are based; and though, of course, it has no official validity whatever—it was published, I think, after Lord Curzon had been Under-Secretary of State for India—it has never been modified, and there can be no doubt that the policy it implies was steadfastly pursued while Lord Curzon, as Viceroy, was the official guardian of the Persian Gulf. The next declaration has an official character. It was made by Lord Lansdowne, when Foreign Secretary, in the House of Lords on May 5, 1903, in reply to a speech by one of our Vice-Presidents, Lord Lamington, who, as Governor of Bombay, afterwards became closely familiar with the manner in which the Persian Gulf question affects India. Lord

Lansdowne said: 'I say it without hesitation, we should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal.'

That celebrated declaration is the official expression of what has long been the equivalent of our Monroe doctrine in the Middle East. Thirdly, in a despatch written to the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg on August 29 of last year, at the time of the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention, Sir Edward Grey drew fresh attention to the 'special interests possessed by Great Britain in the Gulf, the result of British action in those waters for more than a hundred years,' and set forth that 'the Russian Government have in the course of the negotiations . . . explicitly stated that they do not deny the special interests of Great Britain in the Persian Gulf, a statement of which His Majesty's Government have formally taken note.' That is the most recent, and in some respects the most important, of our affirmations concerning the Gulf, because it embodies a formal admission by Russia never before made.

What are the nature of these special interests? What have we done in the Gulf in the past to justify us in advancing these exceptional propositions? The shortest summary must suffice. The first Englishman who ever visited the Gulf was Ralph Fitch, who traversed it from end to end in 1583, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in the company of three other Englishmen. They were captured by the Portuguese and sent to Goa, and thus it came to pass that the first of our race who set foot in India made the acquaintance of the country from the inside of a Portuguese gaol. The object of Fitch was the development of trade, and his journey was one of the occurrences which led to the formation of the organization which ultimately became the East India Company. It was not, however, until 1618 that the British flag was first flown in the vicinity of the Gulf. In that year one of the Company's trading vessels was sent from Surat to Jask, near the entrance to the Gulf, but it does not appear that it passed the Straits of Hormuz. Trade with Jask continued for three or four years, but the obstruction of the Portuguese, who held the city and island of Hormuz, became so pronounced that it was resolved to attack them. An arrangement was made with the Shah, who had already sent an army to besiege Hormuz. The terms on which the British agreed to help the Persians were that they were to have half the plunder of Hormuz, were to receive half the customs dues of

Gombroon, on the mainland, now known as Bunder Abbas, and that they were to be exempt from the payment of all duties at Gombroon.

A remarkable clause of the treaty was that by which the Company engaged 'to keep two men-of-war constantly to defend the Gulf.' On January 19, 1622, the British force laid siege to a Portuguese fort on the island of Kishm, opposite Hormuz, which surrendered on February 1. That was the first occasion on which the British arms were carried to victory in the Gulf. On April 23 Hormuz surrendered and was sacked, and its ancient glories were soon almost obliterated. A British factory was established at Bunder Abbas, and the remains of the lonely tombs of some of the earlier Britons who were stationed in that heat-stricken spot may still be seen on the outskirts of the town. The two warships 'to defend the Gulf' were duly sent, for the Persians never possessed, and never will possess, the secret of the sea. Very soon these two warships were increased to five. Into the subsequent encounters between British and Dutch and Portuguese and Arabs, and the help the British gave in expelling the Portuguese from Muscat, I have not time to enter. It is clear, however, that British prestige steadily increased in the Gulf during the next century and a quarter, and the British flag was both respected and feared. In 1759 the British suffered a temporary reverse, when ships sent by the French, but flying the Dutch flag, wrecked the factory at Bunder Abbas. In 1762, however, a new factory was opened at Bushire, and six years later we find the Company's ships helping the Persians in an effort to overthrow an Arab corsair who had seized the island of Kharak. The date 1772 is interesting because in that year the first surveying expedition was sent from Bombay to the Gulf. In 1785 Lieutenant McClure, of the Indian Navy, took up the survey work, and carried out the first really important survey of the Gulf, thus setting on foot an undertaking which has been continued to this very day. The charts of the Gulf are solely the result of British enterprise.

Among other notable events at this period was the capture of the Company's fourteen-gun brig *Fly* by a French privateer off the island of Keis. I wish I could pause to tell you the subsequent Homeric adventures of that unlucky crew, as related by Low in his history of the Indian Navy: how they were taken prisoners to Bushire and then released; how they fitted up a native vessel and sailed for Bombay; how they were captured by Arab pirates and kept prisoners for months on the Pirate Coast; how, when they

were about to be killed, they offered to show where their sunken brig, with its treasure, lay off the island of Keis; how they escaped while the pirates were killing the islanders; how they drifted to the mainland on a raft; and how they struggled on foot along that terrible coast to Bushire. Out of all that ship's company only two survived to the end. They had rescued and saved, as an almost sacred duty, the despatches they were carrying when captured; and on their arrival in Bombay the Government, after a fashion not confined to those days, rewarded them with—a letter of thanks!

Mention of the pirates brings me to the greatest work that Great Britain has undertaken in the Gulf, the suppression of piracy. The Arab tribes seem to have always fought one another on sea and land, and to have occasionally united to attack the passing stranger, but they never really entered upon organized and persistent piracy till they were, at the beginning of last century, welded together by the great Wahabi movement in Arabia. The boldest of the pirates were the Joasmi tribe, whose headquarters were at Ras-ul-Kheima. All along the Pirate Coast there are lagoons and backwaters, in which their vessels sheltered, and behind which their towns were built. The Company adopted the practice of leaving the pirates severely alone, and their ships were ordered not to fire on them. Even an attack on the Company's brig *Viper*, in Bushire Roads in 1797, did not sting the British to active reprisals. By 1806, however, the pirates had become so aggressive that a Joasmi fleet was cornered off the island of Kishm, and a treaty was signed at Bunder Abbas. The pirates, however, cared little for treaties, and soon recommenced their work of depredation. In 1808 they attacked the Company's cruiser *Fury*, and were beaten off with heavy loss; but when the *Fury* arrived in Bombay, the Governor of the day gave the commander a 'wiggling' for 'daring to molest the innocent and unoffending Arabs.' The commanders of war-ships were ordered not to fire unless the Arabs fired first, on pain of dismissal; and as the Arabs never fired first, but preferred to board and overcome resistance by sheer force of numbers, the inevitable soon happened. In the same year the small schooner, *Sylph*, eight guns, part of a squadron carrying Sir Harford Jones's Mission to Persia, was separated from its consorts, boarded, and captured, the commander not daring to fire. Even the Bombay Government was stirred into activity by this wanton outrage. A military expedition, which included the York and Lancaster Regiment and the Loyal North Lancashires, was despatched to Ras-ul-Kheima, and burned the town and the pirate fleet. The

expedition then crossed the Gulf, and the town of Lingah was destroyed. The fortress of Laft, on the island of Kishm, in the centre of the Clarence Straits, was captured in an extraordinary manner. The force attacking the fortress was beaten off, but next morning the British were astonished to see the Union Jack waving from its walls. An officer had gone ashore in the night, found that most of the defenders had fled, obtained admission, and hoisted the flag. Afterwards the piratical craft at Shargah and other towns on the Pirate Coast were destroyed, and finally at Shinas, on the coast of Oman, a thousand Wahabis were killed. It was on this occasion that the Wahabi leader, Bin Saood, wrote to the British authorities: 'In truth, then, war is bitter; and only a fool engages in it, as the poet has said.'

Even this lesson did not suffice for the Joasmis. By 1812 they were sweeping the seas once more, and in 1815 they had even captured a vessel so far away as the coast of Kathiawar. In 1816 a British squadron menaced Rus-ul-Kheima again, but made no impression. In 1817 the Joasmis built a fort at Basidu, on the island of Kishm, a spot where the British flag now flies. In 1818 they were ravaging the west coast of India, and in 1819 a fleet of sixty-four pirate vessels, manned by seven thousand men, was off the coasts of Cutch and Kathiawar. But the cup of the iniquities of the Joasmis was full to overflowing. A powerful force was assembled at Bombay under Sir William Grant Keir, including the two British regiments which had fought in the Gulf seven years before. Ras-ul-Kheima was cannonaded and finally carried by assault, 300 of the Arabs being killed and 700 wounded. The other Joasmi ports were visited in turn and their fortifications blown up. At Sohar, on the Oman coast, there was considerable fighting. Finally, in 1820, a general treaty of peace was concluded with the pirate chiefs. The York and Lancaster Regiment still bear the word 'Arabia' on their colours in commemoration of these forgotten campaigns.

It will scarcely be believed that after these successful operations it was proposed that the British should cease to police the Gulf, and leave the pirates to work their own will. The suggestion was put forward solely on the ground of the cost involved, but that strong Governor of Bombay, Sir John Malcolm, soon made mince-meat of it. Sir William Grant Keir's expedition dealt piracy in the Gulf its death-blow. The Beni Yas, whose head-quarters are at Abu Dhabi, made a desperate attempt to hoist the blood-red flag again in 1834. Anticipating a suggestion afterwards heard in

comic opera, they even prepared boiling oil in which to place the Christians they captured. They were promptly suppressed, however, and an episode which began with cauldrons of boiling oil ended in a trial in the Bombay High Court. The various treaties subsequently entered into with the leaders of the tribes on the Pirate Coast, known as the Trucial Chiefs, terminated with the general treaty of 1853, which still obtains. It would be too much to say, however, that piracy has entirely disappeared from the Gulf. Isolated acts of piracy occur almost every year—almost invariably emanating nowadays from territory alleged to be under Turkish control—but are usually swiftly punished. When I was in the Gulf I heard a political officer relate a story of a boat cruise after pirates from Turkish territory; and there can be little doubt that if the strong hand of the British was withdrawn, Arab fleets would again commence their depredations. The last Indian mail papers contained a shocking story of piracy in the Gulf, in which a victim's arms and legs were chopped off.

I have lingered over the story of the British suppression of piracy, because it is the most interesting page of our connexion with the Gulf. It has been well pointed out that it was not alone the protection of our own trade that was sought, but that we were 'solicitous for the common good, and were serving other nations as well as ourselves.' An almost equally long story might be told concerning the strenuous British efforts for the suppression of the slave trade, extending over many years and still unfinished. I might speak of our control of the arms traffic, or of our sanitary organization, which in the last ten years has successfully kept at bay the repeated appearances of plague in the Gulf. I might explain how we preserve a reasonable degree of peace between the Trucial Chiefs, and protect the Sheikhs of Bahrein and Koweit from external aggression, and prevent the native dhows from being plundered in the date season, and maintain order at the annual pearl fisheries. But, though much more might be said, perhaps I have said enough to show that our claim to paramountcy in the Gulf rests on a long sequence of events in which, at a heavy expenditure of blood and treasure, we have kept the peace unaided and unsupported. We have sought no peculiar privileges. We have taken no territory. We have held point after point in the Gulf and given them back. Our flag flies to-day only on a patch of land at Basidu, and over our telegraph station on the island of Henjam. All nations have been able to benefit by our work, and trade is unrestricted and open to all. But if we have imposed a self-denying

ordinance upon ourselves, we impose it equally upon others. We can brook no rivalry in the Gulf, and above all, we cannot contemplate the creation of territorial interests by any other Power.

Why have we undertaken this work? Why do we so strenuously maintain our special position in Gulf waters? There is no need to claim that we have exercised peculiar unselfishness in this self-imposed task. True, we have been unselfish enough in our manner of performing it, but we need not disguise the fact that we have been driven to take up our burden in the Gulf mainly by considerations of self-interest. The maintenance of British predominance in the Gulf is an essential part of the defence of India. I will not here discuss the question whether any other Power could establish an effective naval base in the Gulf, or whether if established it could really menace India from such a base. I rely rather on a far broader postulate. The mere presence of another Power in the Gulf, whether its post be fortified or unfortified, would have a gravely unsettling effect upon India. The people of India would not stop to think whether, from such a post, their country could be really threatened. The fact that another flag was flying in a region where the British had been supreme for a hundred years would suffice to persuade them that our strength was declining, and such confidence as we now inspire would instantly be diminished. It is not from strategic reasons alone that we are compelled to maintain our special position in the Gulf. We have to think also of the moral effect which the intrusion of another Power would produce upon India. When I see English newspapers placidly remarking, as they do sometimes, that they see no reason why this Power or that Power should not be allowed to obtain a footing in the Gulf, I wonder whether the writers have ever seriously thought of India in this connexion.

I have dwelt over-long on matters that are, no doubt, perfectly familiar to most of you, but the nature and the necessity of British paramountcy in the Gulf cannot be too often expounded and emphasized. I fear we are approaching a period when it may be challenged far more seriously than has ever been the case in the past, and it is as well that we should be prepared. In this connexion I feel constrained to express regret that the Anglo-Russian Convention should have left our position in the Gulf so liable to misconception. It is true that, as I have already quoted, Russia has formally acknowledged our special interests in Persian waters. But those special interests were not confined to the sea only; they

extended over a wide area of Southern Persia. They included the broad plains of Isfahan. Our sphere of interest should have, at least, been demarcated by a line drawn through Isfahan to the Karun River. As it is, we seem to have almost deliberately divested ourselves, by implication, of any special interests throughout Southern Persia west of Bunder Abbas, and to have left the door open so that any who wish may enter. My information is that the clauses affecting Persia have created a very unfavourable impression upon the inhabitants of the South, and have appreciably diminished our prestige.

I pass, in conclusion, to a consideration of one or two points of special interest in the Gulf, about which I wish to say a few words. And first, about Bunder Abbas. The dominating fact about Bunder Abbas is its appalling climate. Even Tavernier says that in his day every one left Bunder Abbas in April. I find it difficult to believe that Great Britain or any other Power could ever establish a naval or military base of any sort on the sandy wastes of Bunder Abbas itself. It was thought for a long time that a summer station might perhaps be built on the long mountain that lies about sixteen miles behind the town. Recent investigation has shown that such a station could not be made, except at a point a considerable way farther inland. Therefore, I doubt whether Bunder Abbas will ever be of any use to anybody, except as a possible place from which to annoy Great Britain and to stir up India. I know the stock reply is that if the Portuguese could hold the iron rocks of Hormuz, a modern Power ought to be able to garrison Bunder Abbas. Well, I doubt whether the Portuguese ever had a very large garrison at Hormuz. At the height of their power in the East they held fifty-two establishments and 15,000 miles of coast with 20,000 men. When Hormuz was captured, the garrison numbered 2,500, and probably not all these were Portuguese; moreover, the force had been doubtless strengthened in expectation of attack. I fancy that during the 110 years that the Portuguese held Hormuz the mortality must have been very great, and I doubt whether any large body of European troops could be maintained on the island or on the mainland nowadays.

These suggestions do not, however, apply to the other islands off Bunder Abbas. Henjam, where we have recently established our cable station, has a better climate. The Persian authorities dislike the revival of our cable station on Henjam, but they forget that if it was not for our support they would be a country without any seaboard whatever, as they were, in effect, once before.

At Basidu, on the island of Kishm, where we still retain a considerable tract of territory, we ourselves maintained troops, and made the place the headquarters of the Indian Navy, for forty years. Many of our buildings still stand mouldering on the plain, and attest the fact that it is habitable enough. The adjacent Clarence Straits form an admirable shelter for ships. Should trouble ever arise in the Gulf, these islands at the entrance will be of supreme importance, and it must not be forgotten that we already possess locations upon two of them, where our flag is hoisted daily.

On the opposite side of the entrance to the Gulf stands the vast volcanic peninsula of Musendam, where we possess certain rights that are reasonably well defined. In a climate less accursed, the deep fiords of Musendam might become one of the strongest and most impregnable naval stations in the world. The deep and narrow Elphinstone Inlet, a long cleft several miles in length, penetrating to the heart of the mountains, is one of the most wondrous and majestic spots imaginable. But it is the most desolate place on earth, and even its wild inhabitants desert it for the greater part of the year. Great Britain has a special right of access to the heart of the Elphinstone Inlet, which has never been allowed to lapse. It was acquired when the cable to the Persian Gulf was laid. The cable was carried through Malcolm Inlet, on the Arabian Sea, across the Maklab Isthmus, and down into Elphinstone Inlet, where a telegraph station was built on an island still known as Telegraph Island. The appalling heat made life insupportable on this small and barren rock, and eventually the station was transferred to Henjam. From the top of the isthmus a splendid view is obtained of the broad expanse of Malcolm Inlet, a wonderful sheet of water of the deepest blue, fringed by purple mountains. In these great landlocked harbours the whole of the British fleet might anchor; but even if the necessity ever arose, it seems impossible to conceive that any practical permanent use could ever be made of these magnificent shelters, rendered useless by a climate that even the hardiest of mankind find intolerable.

We come, then, to the conclusion that both sides of the Straits of Hormuz are likely, whatever may befall in the future, to be allowed to continue for the most part to take care of themselves; but that statement does not apply to the territory on the Arabian side, either nominally or actually in the possession of Turkey. There is more than one practicable harbour along that portion of the coast, notably Al Bida'a, in the peninsula of El

Katar and Ojeir, in the deep bight opposite Bahrein, of which an enterprising Power might make considerable use. I have for some time held the belief that if our supremacy in the Gulf is ever sought to be undermined, the effort may begin with some development in the territory which Turkey claims to control. Great Britain has never recognised or acknowledged the position which Turkey has taken up in El Katar, but our opposition has always been confined to more or less formal protests. It does not, of course, follow that our protests have not had considerable effect. We have, in fact, prevented a threatened development of Turkish interests in this region within the last few years. The time has arrived, however, when we should strongly insist upon the abandonment of Turkish claims to El Katar, and the restoration of the principal local sheikh to his former independence. Turkey has only intruded into this territory within the last forty years, and has never made her position good. The Turks have been guilty of an attempt to filch territory, which is in direct contravention of the policy we have sought to maintain in the Gulf. If our claim to paramountcy is justifiable, and worth anything at all, it should operate just as much against the Turks in El Katar as against the Russians if they came to Bunder Abbas, or the Germans if they appeared on the Karun River. El Katar is the weakest spot in the present position, and we ought to safeguard ourselves there far more effectively than we have hitherto done.

As to Koweit, it remains, and will always remain, the best possible terminus for the Baghdad Railway. Sheikh Mubarak is under our protection, and our relations with him were never better than they are to-day. He has resisted all temptations to alienate any portion of his territory, and he is not likely to do so now. We helped him both when he was menaced by the Turks, and when the late Bin Rashid of Nejd threatened to sack his capital. He would like to see the railway terminus on the shores of his splendid harbour, but he will never acquiesce in the creation of rights by a foreign Power at Koweit. That the Baghdad Railway will be built some day is certain. The most recent information appears to suggest that that day is more distant than is generally supposed. The difficulties in crossing the Taurus Range have been under-estimated, and I am told that a new alignment for this section may have to be selected. But when the line reaches Baghdad, as it will most assuredly do some time or other, it is imperative that some arrangement should be made whereby Great Britain will build the section from Baghdad to the sea. Our

paramountcy in the Gulf makes this arrangement just as essential as any of the other considerations I have advanced; and though we could raise no objection if the promoters of the line decided to make their terminus at Basra, in Turkish territory—which is quite practicable if the bar of the Shat-al-Arab is dredged—the co-operation of Great Britain should be regarded as a more desirable alternative.

Before I close, there is one matter to which I should like to draw your attention. It is a curious thing, that while large sums have been expended for more than fifty years in excavations in Mesopotamia and Egypt, no distinguished archæologist has ever turned his attention to the ancient remains that exist in the Persian Gulf. There is good reason to believe that the Gulf was the cradle of the earliest of human civilizations. The race that crossed the Red Sea and created the marvellous monuments of Egypt probably came from the Gulf; the highest type of the Chinese races perhaps came from there also; the race that came up 'out of the sea' and made Chaldea famous unquestionably came from somewhere in the Gulf. When we turn back to the beginning of things, we almost invariably arrive at this mysterious inland sea. It is strange that men of science should have disregarded it so long. It is not as though there are no accessible remains on which to commence work. The interior of the island of Bahrein contains hundreds of thousands of mound tombs, stretching across the desert wastes far as the eye can see, which would certainly repay closer investigation. Sir Edward Durand, Mr. Theodore Bent, and some Belgian inquirers have made cursory examinations of one or two of the larger tombs, and at the present time Captain Prideaux, the British Political Agent at Bahrein, is making further excavations. It seems desirable, however, that a properly equipped and systematic search should be made to see if any further light can be thrown on the origin of these strange relics. So far, the solid masonry chambers within the mounds have revealed no traces of any written characters, and have yielded very few objects of any kind. They must, however, be of vast antiquity. Two or three years ago it was proposed that the Government of India should send trained experts to conduct an inquiry, but it is understood that Lord Curzon thought, no doubt rightly, that there was ample work in India itself for the official archæologists. At the same time, Government aid has been freely given to Dr. Stein in his notable researches in Central Asia, and it is unfortunate that equal interest should not be shown in a region so peculiarly our own sphere as

Bahrein. On the opposite mainland, too, there must be extensive remains of the earliest Phœnicians which do not appear to have been even visited. I know no modern records concerning the site of their once famous city of Gerrha. There are the remains of other great cities in and around the Gulf which, though of later date, deserve the attention and the interest of the archæologist and the historian. That earlier Hormuz, which first made the name renowned throughout the East, and which was located near the present town of Minau, east of Bunder Abbas, has never been investigated. Then there are the remains of Keis and Siraf, and other trading centres which might at least yield some harvest; and Kalhat on the Oman coast—which even in the time of Albuquerque showed signs of having once been a noble city—and other sites and scenes of bygone greatness, are at least worthy of some sort of exploration. Their very remoteness has caused them to be left unregarded through the centuries. Whether they are now explored or not, it is certain that the Gulf itself, as it exists to-day, will attract in the near future a far larger share of attention from the great nations; and as it was once the centre of human interest, so in some degree it may again become ere long the theatre of events of great interest to the world in general and the British Empire in particular.

The paper was illustrated by many lantern-slides of photographs taken by Mr. Fraser, together with a few by Mr. Murray Stewart, of Hongkong.

DISCUSSION

THE CHAIRMAN said : The exceedingly interesting paper which Mr. Fraser has read to us deals undoubtedly with a question which has been of great importance to this country, and which will be of still greater importance in the future. I entirely share his views with regard to the necessity of retaining the paramount position which we have achieved for ourselves, and which we deserve to retain in those waters. I particularly wish to say this, because I perhaps differ from him and from other higher authorities in this room with regard to the criticisms he has passed on the recent Anglo-Russian Convention. I consider an instrument of that kind must be judged not alone according to the intrinsic merits of the particular provisions under discussion, but according to the circumstances in which the negotiations were carried out, regard being had to the general political situation, to the temper of the country, and to the sacrifices the country is prepared to make in defence of its interests. When subjected to those tests, the Anglo-Russian Convention, I venture to think, though falling far short of the hopes I at one time entertained, represents more gain than loss in the present condition of affairs in this country. I dwell on this point, which, after all, is but a side issue of the lecture, because my views thereon do not in the least denote any weakening of, but, on the contrary, intensify, my conviction that we are absolutely bound to make every sacrifice in order to retain our paramountcy in the Gulf.

We have several gentlemen here this afternoon who will, no doubt, be ready to speak to us, and I will first call upon Lord Lamington, late Governor of Bombay, who has given close attention to the Gulf question, and has been in the best possible position to study it.

LORD LAMINGTON said : I would like to re-echo with full approval the encomiums of the Chairman of the address we have listened to. As Mr. Chirol has told us, Mr. Fraser has for years given particular attention and study to Central Asian questions. He has visited the Persian Gulf, and obtained the personal knowledge and experience he has placed at our disposal this afternoon. He possesses the gift of clear and vigorous description, and he has also illustrated his lecture by excellent specimens of his photographic skill. Mr. Chirol has spoken with modified satisfaction of the Convention with Russia. I confess that I am not so well pleased as Mr. Chirol with the treaty, though I recognize that where a Government is embarked in negotiations of this character the outside observer cannot have cognizance of all the various

influences at work. He can only direct his gaze to a few phases of the question, whereas the responsible Ministers engaged in negotiation have to look at a thousand considerations ; their gaze has to be not merely local, but world-wide. But the fact remains, we have a strong predominating position in the Gulf ; and though, as Mr. Fraser says, we may draw some satisfaction from the Russian diplomatic recognition of our ' special interests ' there, I would ask why, if those interests are so clear and indisputable, were they not included in the Convention itself ? (Hear, hear.) Had our claims been debatable, I can quite understand that it might be proper to give only diplomatic assurances. But they are so clear and so well attested by the history of the last hundred years and more that I do think it is to be regretted—and we may regret it still more in the future—that the occasion was not taken to emphasize this position, and to make it clear that we could not allow our paramountcy to be challenged by any other European Power. Mr. Chirol has spoken of Bombay as almost at the doors of the Gulf, and Mr. Fraser has pointed out that our work in that inland sea has been dictated by considerations not merely of philanthropy, but of self-interest ; and if we look back on the history of the past eighty or one hundred years we see that our forefathers were actuated in what they did by the desire to secure our position in India unchallenged from this direction. The Bombay Government of those days had charge of our interests in that part of Western Asia, and, almost unconsciously, perhaps, it acted on the principle that our strength in India was in some degree dependent upon our position in the Gulf. Our maintenance of troops as far north as Baghdad at that time could not have been actuated by hope of commercial gain ; it must have been due to considerations of our strategic position in those regions. Mr. Chirol has said that in judging the Convention we must take into account the temper of our people. No doubt. And the people must be awakened to take cognizance of the necessity for the maintenance of our paramountcy. From this point of view we ought to be very grateful to Mr. Fraser for his lecture, which will, it may be hoped, do something to draw public attention to the subject.

In regard to the Baghdad Railway, I would emphasize Mr. Fraser's suggestion that we should control the portion of the line from that city to the Gulf. If we cannot secure full control of it, we should at least have partial control. (Cheers.)

COLONEL C. E. YATE said : I should like to add my thanks to Mr. Fraser for the address he has given us, and for his reminder of the great sacrifices in blood and treasure we have made to secure and maintain our paramountcy in the Gulf. We must not forget that those sacrifices go back not merely 100 years, but nearly 300. It was in the treaty of 1662, as Mr. Fraser has told us, that the East India Company first made an engagement ' to keep two men-of-war constantly to defend

the Gulf,' and the work of protection and survey has been practically continued by us ever since that distant date. I believe all present are prepared to join Mr. Fraser in saying that Great Britain 'can brook no rivalry in the Gulf, and above all we cannot contemplate the creation of territorial interests by any other Power.'

The incident at Abu Musa to which Mr. Fraser referred at the outset of his lecture has been much commented on by the German Press, and I think it illustrates the importance of prompt and decisive action at the outset of any proceedings calculated to infringe our rights in the slightest way. I trust that our representatives in the Gulf will have the support both of the British Government and of public opinion in any action they may be compelled to take to prevent the creation of anti-British interests in those regions. There can be no more striking instance of the folly of letting things slide than the story Mr. Fraser has related of the Turkish occupation of El Katar. Had the Turks never been allowed to land no trouble would have arisen. We confined our protests to paper, and they are there to this day. The Porte has never helped us in policing the Gulf, and cannot even raise the money to pay for the coal for a steamer to go up or down the Gulf. We have never acknowledged the Turkish claims; they have never been made good, and I agree with Mr. Fraser that the time has come to definitely insist on their abandonment.

The only portion of the lecture with which I am not in full agreement is that which relates to the Baghdad Railway. I would go further than Mr. Fraser does as to British control. British interests in Baghdad are greater and of far greater antiquity than those of any other Power, and it is not right that Great Britain should be content simply with one small section from Baghdad to the sea. When we think of the importance to India of the proposed extension from Baghdad to Persia, when we think of the large pilgrim traffic already existing from India to the holy places near Baghdad, and when we consider the large Indian population already resident there, it would not be right for England to give political and financial assistance save on condition of having some control of the line from a point much higher up the river than Baghdad—namely, from that point where the canals for restoring irrigation to Lower Mesopotamia will take off. If we are to have any share in the development of that country—and I take it that development will be a corollary of railway construction—we should have full control of the canals for irrigation. When we recall that the Uganda Railway was built with Indian labour, we may draw the conclusion that no other Government could construct the Baghdad line so well and cheaply as the Indian Government. Having regard to the intense heat of summer in those regions, the employment of European labour is impossible, and, in the absence of local labour, I doubt if any other Government could successfully carry out the under-

taking. It is to India that I look for the labour for the construction of the railway and for the opening up of the canals, and it is to Lower Mesopotamia that I look for a profitable field for the employment of our industrious Indian subjects in the future.

I entirely agree with Mr. Fraser in his criticisms of the Anglo-Russian Convention, and particularly when he says that our sphere of interest should have been demarcated by a line drawn through Isfahan to the Karun River; but as I have already given my opinions on that subject in this month's *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, I will not refer to it further here. Finally, Mr. Fraser has told us that if our supremacy in the Persian Gulf is sought to be undermined the effort may begin with some development in the territory which Turkey claims to control. Turkey is a Power we have every wish to keep on friendly terms with. We are old allies, and our estrangement is entirely due to the tortuous policy of the present Sultan, who should be given to understand that his aggressive policy and attempts to upset the *status quo* in the Gulf cannot be allowed. As to Persia, she should be reminded that if it was not for our support she would be a country without any seaboard whatever, and should be told that we cannot listen to any frivolous objections to our establishing such stations as we may require on the islands or coast.

MR. J. D. REES, M.P., said: The conjunction of chairman and lecturer to-day is a happy one. I have always felt that the *Times of India* and the *Times* on India are the best possible things of their kind. The weekly issue of the *Times of India* is always welcome to those who in this country take a moderate and reasonable line on questions of Asiatic policy.

The last speaker is of opinion that the Baghdad Railway should be internationalized, or we should have command through Lower Mesopotamia. But how is this to be done? We have repeated the mistake made in Persia some years ago, when we left the Russians to give the Shah's Government the accommodation then required. We have allowed German financiers to secure the concession for the line, and it is not easy to see how we can recover the position we have thus lost. Before Parliament rose Sir Edward Grey admitted in reply to me that this question of control, particularly south of Baghdad, is of great importance; but he did not say, and I doubt if anyone in this room can say, how we are to recover the position we have lost. If our financiers are prepared to pay up the money for the last section there should be no great difficulty. What we must do in any case is to hold on to the Sheikh of Koweit, and refuse admission of the line to his territories unless it is internationalized and we make the last section.

Lord Lamington asked why it was that the Gulf was not specifically included in the Anglo-Russian Convention. I think the answer is that the scope and purpose of the Convention was expressly confined to the

land frontiers and buffer States between the territories of the two signatory Powers. At the same time I think it regrettable that we had not a separate Convention on the subject, and I agree that our sphere of influence might well have been drawn from the Karun River to Isfahan. But it is to be remembered that long ago Russia acquired a strong position in the north, and that we have not so much given away advantages as we have accepted a position that had grown up. It is easy to blame the Liberal Government for having given away an important position which ought to be ours, but that Government is not responsible for the position which grew up before it took office, and a position which is merely crystallized by the Convention. (Hear, hear.) We must consider accomplished facts when dealing with such questions. I think it may be said that the Convention was the best way out of a difficult situation. The arrangement in regard to Afghanistan was a very satisfactory one, and I think we must take that into account as a set-off to disappointments in respect to Persia.

Our Chairman referred to the limitations under which the Foreign Minister has to work in negotiating treaties. He must carry with him the House of Commons, and anyone who sits in that assembly, and has occasion, as my friend Mr. Lynch and I have had, to speak on subjects of Asiatic policy, cannot feel so very confident of the House being actuated by the Imperial spirit with which such questions should be approached. The votes, even of small sections of the House, have to be taken into account in the shaping of our international policy. A grudging spirit is often shown even in respect to our naval obligations, and it is not adequately realized that, without the maintenance of at least a two-Power standard fleet, our treaties and conventions would not be worth the paper on which they are written. Another limitation under which policy is laid down and defined is the existence in this country of the ex-official turned anti-official, a class of men who lose no opportunity of embarrassing the Government they formerly served, and misrepresenting—grossly, as I think—all circumstances connected with our administration of India. (Cheers.) This is a serious limitation, because it must be remembered that, however mischievous people may be, however little they should be credited, there are always ill-informed people ready to accept their teaching. (Cheers.)

MR. H. F. B. LYNCH, M.P., said: Mr. Rees has told us that in the Anglo-Russian Convention which has just been signed we are only recognizing accomplished facts [MR. REES: To a great extent]—to a great extent. Well, I entirely traverse that view. (Hear, hear.) Let us consider the matter. After all, our position in Persia, and the position of Russia in Persia, are only in respect to trade. Neither Power has territorial as distinct from commercial interests in that country. It is by trade we measure the respective influence of the two Powers. What of the great trade routes which are mainly utilized and supported

by British merchants? The greatest of them, as tested both by the volume and the value of trade, is the route from Baghdad to Teheran. Scarcely a bale of Russian goods has passed over this route, yet it has been entirely handed over to Russia, and placed in the Russian sphere. Several of us, including our Chairman, have been occupied in endeavours to develop the great trade route between the Karun River and the Persian centres of Isfahan, Kashan, and Teheran, thus putting a wedge right through into Northern Persia. We have not safeguarded this important route. We talk of 'continuity of foreign policy,' but surely in this Convention we have controverted this principle. We have practically debarred the British merchant from opening up his own trade routes which under the Convention are to lie in whole or in part in the Russian sphere. For even the routes lying partly in the neutral sphere have their upper ends under Russian control, and therefore it is the Russians who will develop them if they find it is to their interest to do so. We ought to recognize the facts. We have given over to Russia our principal trade route in Persia, and we have not safeguarded our potential route of the future, over which we exercise special rights. And now we are told that we have done this because we were guided by some great political considerations in some other parts of the world. I even observe that the other day Sir Arthur Nicholson, our Minister in St. Petersburg, said that, had we not signed this Convention, there would have been war with Russia. A circumstance that lent a distinctly dramatic flavour to his remarks was that they were made on the anniversary of the surrender of Port Arthur. I hold that such a Convention as that with Russia should never have been signed by this country except after defeat in a disastrous war—a war such as that which culminated in the capitulation of Port Arthur. I say that if we were obliged to sign this Convention in order to avert war, why were not the people of this country and the House of Commons taken into the confidence of the Government? We never heard, either in the Press or anywhere else, that any such threat had been made by Russia.

In the most interesting paper to which we have listened, we have been told of the enormous expenditure, not only of money and skill, but of blood, which Great Britain has incurred to safeguard our interests in the Persian Gulf. I am carried forward in imagination to a period, not perhaps very remote, when the President of the Central Asian Society will be reviewing the work of some Government which may have surrendered all our interests in the Gulf, the cost and value of which we have heard so eloquently set forth to-night, and we shall be told it is due, forsooth, to the temper of our people. Ladies and gentlemen, I, for my part, think the fault lies not in the temper of the people, but in the way in which we carry on our foreign affairs. They are carried on in these important matters, not according to the opinions of experts, but according to the opinions of men who in these matters are

amateurs, whether at the Foreign Office or the India Office, who have very little knowledge of local conditions, and who throw away important interests such as those the lecturer has described this afternoon. We should all of us do our best so to influence public opinion as to stand in the way of Ministers, whether at the Foreign Office or the India Office, making such concessions, and we should urge that in such matters they should have the advice of a special body of experts. (Cheers.)

The CHAIRMAN: I am afraid the time has arrived when we must close this interesting discussion; but I do not think I can allow the last speech to pass over without comment. I do protest in the strongest way against the attack made by Mr. Lynch, without one tittle of proof, against one or two of our public departments. Certainly the strength of that attack has not to my mind been increased by the misconstruction placed upon language I used, in order to give an opportunity for that attack. However, I do not wish to prolong this discussion. It is much pleasanter to propose a vote of thanks to Mr. Fraser for the excellent and interesting lecture he has delivered.

The vote of thanks was seconded by DR. COTTERELL TUPP, and carried with acclamation.

MR. FRASER, in replying, said he recognized the force of what the Chairman had said about the necessity of taking a large, and not a local, view of the Anglo-Russian Convention. He admitted, too, that the general policy of arriving at a better understanding with Russia was good, and he agreed with Mr. Rees that the provisions regarding Afghanistan were a distinct and valuable advance. At the same time, he adhered to his contention that the British sphere of influence in Persia was unfortunately demarcated, and should have been far larger. He thanked Lord Lamington for his kind remarks concerning him, and dealt with Lord Lamington's argument that the Persian Gulf should have been included in the Convention. He thought this would probably have been difficult, as so many territories were concerned; and he considered that, on the whole, they perhaps ought to accept the view of the Government that the Gulf could not very well be introduced. At the same time, it would be a good thing if the Gulf could be made the subject of a separate Convention. Colonel Yate's hope that the new gazetteer of the Gulf would be a means of disseminating information to the British public was not likely to be realized. He understood that the gazetteer was to be a secret publication. He thoroughly agreed with Colonel Yate that in an emergency prompt action in the Gulf was imperative, and that Great Britain ought not to have confined herself to formal protests when the Turks first went to El Katar. Lord Curzon set an example of promptitude in dealing with a dangerous situation when he was instrumental in

compelling the Sultan to tear up his projected treaty with the French about Bunder Jisseh. As to the Baghdad Railway, however, he thought it impossible that we could ever now hope to have any influence in the regions beyond Baghdad, or to control the head-waters of the canals. We lost our chance a hundred years ago, when the then Vali of Baghdad asked the Government of India to send officers to drill his troops as a prelude to throwing off the Sultan's yoke. The Government of India sent the officers, but when the Home Government heard about it, they insisted upon their return. He agreed with Colonel Yate that the last sections of the Baghdad Railway would probably have to be constructed with Indian labour. As to what Mr. Rees had said about the Convention dealing only with accomplished facts, he ventured to express dissent. The Russian sphere had been extended as far south as Isfahan, where Russia had no interests whatever. He could not quite follow Mr. Lynch in his extreme denunciation of the Convention, which he thought was too sweeping. That Russia had dreamed of a war with England in this connexion was incomprehensible, and he was unable to believe it possible. Russia was hardly in a position to go to war, even with Montenegro. (Laughter.)

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps I may explain, in view of what has been said, that Sir Arthur Nicholson's remark was wholly different to what Mr. Lynch thinks. He said that, in view of the troubles which have broken out in Persia, and the gravity they had acquired, there might have been intervention had not the two Powers been pledged meanwhile to respect the independence of Persia, and that there was a possibility of such intervention leading to war.

compelling the British to tear up his projected treaty with the French about India. As to the Baghdad Railway, however, although it is possible that we could ever hope to have any influence in the regions beyond Baghdad, or to control the headwaters of the canal. We lost our chance a hundred years ago, when the Shah of Baghdad asked the Government of India to send officers to drill his troops as a tribute to the memory of the Sultan's valor. The Government of India sent the officers, but when the Home Government heard about it they insisted upon their return. He agreed with Colonel Yale that the interests of the Baghdad Railway would probably have to be connected with Indian labor. As to what Mr. Lloyd said about the Convention dealing only with accomplished facts, he seemed to be expressing the opinion that the Russian sphere had been extended as far south as India, where Russia had no interests whatever. He could not quite follow Mr. Lloyd in his extreme denunciation of the Convention, which he thought was too sweeping. That Russia had dreamed of a war with England in this connection was inconceivable, and he was unable to believe it possible. Russia was hardly in a position to go to war, even with Montenegro. (Laughter.)

The Chairman: Perhaps I may explain, in view of what has been said, that Sir Arthur Nicholson's remark was wholly different to what Mr. Lloyd thinks. He said that in view of the troubles which have broken out in Persia, and the gravity they had acquired, there might have been intervention had not the two Powers been pledged meanwhile to respect the independence of Persia, and that there was a possibility of such intervention leading to war.

