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*Article by* **G. Michael Wickens, Kamran Ekbal, Juan R. I. Cole**

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# BROWNE, EDWARD GRANVILLE

**BROWNE,** EDWARD GRANVILLE, eminent British Iranologist, born on the family estate Gloucestershire, 7 February 1862, died near Cambridge, 5 January 1926.



## Browne's Life and Academic Career

E. G. Browne came of a wealthy family engaged in shipbuilding. He was at first strongly dominated by his father, Sir Benjamin Browne, who sent him to the preparatory school at Glenalmond, to Eton College, and finally to Cambridge University, where he was to study engineering or, as an ultimate compromise, science and medicine. The boy followed his father's wishes and eventually qualified, and for a short time practiced, as a doctor. But at the age of only fifteen, in 1877, his interest in the Middle East had been aroused by the Russo-Turkish War, in which characteristically his sympathy lay with the side that was unpopular in Britain, the Turks. At this point his "Oriental" studies began,

with Turkish, to which Persian and Arabic were soon added. He had (and continued to have) little or no interest in philology as such, and his methods seem to have been entirely pragmatic: the autodidactic use of any manuals and texts he could find, consultation with real and pretended experts, and the genial exploitation of various native speakers, who could nearly always be found in England in the great days of empire. The results, to judge by the reports of his contemporaries and his own published work, were stupendously successful.

Upon his graduation in the Cambridge Natural Sciences Tripos in 1882, he was "bribed" by his father to persevere in his medical studies with the gift of a summer trip to Istanbul (or, as it was still known in Europe, Constantinople). In 1884, on his own initiative, he also took the so-called "Indian" Languages (in fact, languages of the Islamic world) Tripos at Cambridge. There followed three years of further medical study, internship, and practice, interrupted, whenever the occasion allowed, for pursuit of his private, "Oriental" interests. In 1887 be achieved both his final medical qualifications and a fellowship from his Cambridge college (Pembroke), which enabled him to spend his celebrated year in Iran—for it was by then unquestionably Persian studies that were claiming his main attention. It was this visit that generated the remarkable book, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, which, despite its romantic and archaic title, approach, and style, remains a classic source. It was first published in 1893, after being more than once turned down, and has since been reprinted several times under various auspices (chiefly A. C. Black and Cambridge University Press).

After his return to Britain in 1888, Browne's life was spent almost wholly in Cambridge, remaining outwardly quite unspectacular. He was first University Lecturer in Persian and then, from 1902 until his death, Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic; the latter post was one of two prestigious but ill-paid chairs nominally in the field of Arabic studies then maintained in the university. Until 1906 he lived a vigorous, if somewhat self-centered, social life as a bachelor in his college; in that year he married Alice Blackburne-Daniell, a well-to-do and influential Roman Catholic, who enlisted his vague but generous sympathies both for Roman Catholicism and for the cause of an independent Ireland. They had two sons, neither of whom followed his father's interests, though later both lent them moral and financial support. Browne suffered a massive heart attack in November, 1924; his wife died in June, 1925, six months before his own death. The last year or so of his life was

little more than a gallant holding action.

To appreciate Browne's remarkable academic achievements (as well as some of his peculiar shortcomings) at their proper evaluation, it is necessary to understand something of his personal position and the world in which he lived and worked. He was bred to wealth and status and was (particularly in his mature years) a very rich man in his own right. This meant that his time was largely his own (his statutory duties were minimal) and that he could please himself in virtually everything he did and said. He could choose his own projects, pay for them and their publication if necessary (as it often was), and personally employ such colleagues and helpers (several Iranians among them) as the university would not hire. But this situation carried its disadvantage as well. If he was generous and clever and often charming, he was also egotistical (several tributes bear witness to his fascinating but nearly always one-sided discourse); and, as frequently happens in such cases, his judgment could be willful and erratic and the self-discipline necessary for the finest academic work very difficult to achieve. His almost continuous antagonism to his own government and the establishment (related to general Middle Eastern diplomacy and the Persian "Question," Ireland, South Africa—liberals in those days were pro-Boer—anti-Germanism and concomitant pro-Russian and pro-French policy, inadequate educational measures, and so on) largely does him credit, no doubt; it certainly cost him deserved public recognition and influence. It also, however, sometimes contained elements of the arbitrary and the cranky, and anyone less privileged might well have had cause to be more circumspect. As with most of his contemporaries, all his ways seem to have been firmly set before he reached the age of thirty. He had, too, something in him of upper-class Victorian-Edwardian philistinism: Early in life he engaged in tennis, squash, and rowing, and later he took up fishing, but he had no time for art, music, religion, or indeed for languages or cultures outside his chosen field. His early enthusiasm for Turkish studies soon waned, while for "Indian" culture he seemed to cherish a marked antipathy most of his life, considering it to represent a debased version of all that he loved in Iran. He was no sybarite: Given endless cigarettes and tea, he could apparently easily dispense (for himself and his guests) with good food or wine.

Browne's work in promoting Persian studies was epoch-making, for it must be remembered that in his lifetime (and sometimes still) Islamic studies were conceived, as the title of his chair suggests, primarily in terms of Arabic. His long-time friend, colleague, and successor R. A. Nicholson, a Persianist of

almost equal note, included in his introduction to posthumous *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS belonging to the late E. G. Browne* (Cambridge, 1932) a memoir and almost complete classified bibliography of fifty-five major items that Browne had published. Although these works cannot all be listed here, some of the largest or most important demand comment.

First, unquestionably, is the monumental *Literary History of Persia*, the four volumes of which appeared in 1902, 1906, 1920, and 1924. It is a work that fully displays Browne's strengths and weaknesses: broad in scope (and ranging far beyond literature as such), dense with nearly always accurate detail, and based almost entirely on original sources (many of which were at that time accessible only to Browne himself) but also diffuse and at times irrelevant (volume I, for example, consists largely of prolegomena, though originally intended to comprise the entire work). It also abounds in examples of Browne's and his society's prejudices, as well as reflecting some unfortunate Iranian cultural attitudes of the time (volume IV, for example, though packed with valuable material, does scant justice to the literature, art, and general high culture of the whole period 1500-1900). Volumes II and III, though now dated in information and approach and selective in interest, are fine pieces of work. The copyright to the whole enterprise, which initially had a checkered publishing history, has long been vested in Cambridge University Press, and reprints have been frequent.

Two of Browne's special concerns gave rise to a considerable number of publications from about 1890 to 1920. These concerns were respectively Babism/Bahaism and what he perceived to be the rise of true liberal democracy in Iran (see ii and iii below, with bibliographies). He also edited, translated, and encouraged others to work on a number of important classical texts that had come to his notice during the preparation of his *Literary History*. Among the most important of his own contributions are editions of *Tadhkiratuʾsh-Shuʿará* of Dawlatšāh (1901), *Lubábu'l-Albáb* of ʿAwfī (with Mīrzā Moḥammad Qazvīnī; 2 vols., 1903, 1906), and in the Gibb Memorial Series *An Abridged Translation of the History of Ṭabaristán* of Ebn Esfandīār (1905), *Taʾríkh-i-Guzīda* of Mostawfī (2 vols., 1910, 1913), and the revised translation of *Čahār maqāla* of Neẓāmī ʿArūżī (*Cahár Maqála*, 1921). Browne's own interest in such works was not always strictly literary, but his use of them was to prove in the long run most fortunate, for they include fine and often rare examples of medieval Persian prose. One anomalous work, *Arabian Medicine* (1921), the publication of his Fitzpatrick lectures before the Royal College of Physicians,

represents a marriage of his enforced earlier studies with his own chosen field of endeavor.

Much of Browne's time and phenomenal energy were channeled into helping individuals and causes or carrying out "chores." He gave personal (including financial) assistance to a great variety of students and to Iranian and other émigrés. His role on the Persia Committee, which endeavored for some years (particularly between 1908 and 1912) to influence the British government and public opinion, was crucial—though the ultimate results were disappointing (see iii below). It did, however, win him high regard in Iran, in addition to the respect he already enjoyed among educated Iranians for his dedicated scholarship. He promoted "Oriental" studies at Cambridge in various ways, especially by encouraging academic training for candidates in the Levant Consular Service and the Egyptian, Sudanese, and Indian civil services. Many academic or quasi-academic figures emerged from this unofficial nursery of talent, among them the late Sir Reader Bullard, Laurence Lockhart, and Sir Ronald Storrs. After the early death of the Turcologist E. J. W. Gibb in 1901, Browne took responsibility for putting a large part of Gibb's *History of Ottoman Poetry* into final form and seeing it through the press. He was the leading executive and academic figure in publishing the invaluable Gibb Memorial Series, from a fund established by Gibb's family in 1904. Finally, it should be mentioned that he did a great deal of cataloguing work on the rich Islamic collections housed in Cambridge, which culminated in his *Handlist of the Muḥammadan Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1900); a supplementary list published in 1922 also included manuscripts located in the individual colleges.

Mention has already been made of the significant failure of British (and indeed foreign) public and academic authorities to honor Browne as fully as might have been expected in the light of his achievements. The following list includes virtually all the significant marks of recognition that came his way: 1903, Fellow of the British Academy; 1911, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians; 1922, Vice-President of the Royal Asiatic Society; 1921, on his fifty-ninth birthday, an address and presentations from admirers in Iran (where he was also made a member of the Order of the Lion and the Sun); on his sixtieth birthday a festschrift entitled *A Volume of Oriental Essays Presented to E. G. Browne . . .* (ed. Sir T. W. Arnold and R. A. Nicholson, Cambridge, 1922) but nicknamed *ʿAjab-nāma* (Book of wonders), as a play on his initials. (Typically, this book drew a sour review or two, which, though aimed at the mediocre

quality of some of the articles, must inevitably have spoiled Browne's pleasure in the gesture.) Also on this occasion Browne received further letters and addresses from Iran and a number of Western countries. Ironically, his death gave rise to a host of notices conferring upon him the most extravagant praises.

*Bibliography:*

Browne's significant scholarly books have been mentioned in the article. Most of his numerous articles can be found listed in *Index Islamicus*. Three further biographical sources (all rather hagiographical in tone) are the entry by Sir Denison Ross in *Dictionary of* [British] *National Biography* (1922-30), Oxford, 1937, pp. 123-25; Ross's prefatory note to later editions of *A Year Amongst the Persians*, which largely duplicates and enlarges on his entry in *DNB*; and A. J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays*, London, 1960, pp. 160-96, which draws heavily on Ross's notices, as well as on the autobiographical parts of *A Yeaṛ . . . .* See also bibliographies to ii and iii below.

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ii. Browne on Babism and Bahaism

Browne first developed an intense curiosity about Babism when he read Gobineau's account in the summer of 1886, and one of his pursuits during his subsequent year-long sojourn in Iran (1887-88) was making contact with the Babis and gaining access to their manuscripts. Browne deeply admired the heroism of the Babis in the revolutionary period 1848-52, found a "sublime beauty" even in the Bab's more ungrammatical writings, and was impressed by Gobineau's account of the Babi leader Ṣobḥ-e Azal. He was thus rather taken aback to discover, upon making contact with "Babis" in Iran, that almost all had become Bahais, followers of Azal's older half-brother Bahāʾ-Allāh, who had replaced the *Bayān* with the *Aqdas* (Browne, 1889, pp. 486-87, 901, 933; idem, 1893, repr. 1926, pp. 328-29).

In true nineteenth-century style, Browne was after the pristine origins of the movement, considering later developments to be departures. He thus considered the Azalīs more reliable than the Bahais in putting him in touch with the Babi past and regretted the rivalry between the two groups. He seems early on to have taken the Azalī side in the struggle; when Iranian Bahais reproached him for inclining to Azal, he did not deny it and blamed Bahai

violence toward Azalīs (1893, repr. 1926, pp. 578-79). In his 1889 papers for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* he set out for the first time in English a detailed account of the evolution of Babism and the rise of Bahaism after 1850. He entered into frequent correspondence with Azal and his followers and in the spring of 1890 voyaged to Cyprus, where he spent two weeks with Azal, then to ʿAkkā (Acre), where he spent a week with the Bahais.

Among Browne's Azalī contacts in Istanbul was Shaikh Aḥmad Rūḥī, who told him late in 1890 about a manuscript entitled *Hašt behešt*, a polemic against Bahaism. Although this book had just been written by Rūḥī himself and Āqā Khan Kermānī, both sons-in-law of Azal, Rūḥī misrepresented it as the work of Āqā Javād Karbalāʾī, an eyewitness to events of early Babism. Karbalāʾī had become a Bahai, but Rūḥī told Browne that he had been an Azalī. Browne was at first excited by *Hašt behešt*, wrongly considering it a primary source for early Babi history and a vindication of Azal's right to head Babism after the Bab's death (1892, pp. 680-84, reporting Rūḥī's correspondence); he much later came to realize the true authorship of *Hašt behešt* (idem, 1932, p. 76, para. 1; for more recent scholarship on this work and on Kermānī, see Bayat, pp. 160-61).

At ʿAkkā Browne had acquired a copy of the account of Babi and Bahai history by Bahāʾ-Allāh's son ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ, which he published with a translation and extensive annotation, as *A Traveller's Narrative* in 1891. Browne spoke highly of Bahāʾ-Allāh and ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ in his introduction to this work, but the notes (II, pp. 356-73), written later, show a willingness to believe charges that Bahāʾ-Allāh had ordered some of his enemies assassinated; this later attitude was much influenced by the anti-Bahai calumnies of *Hašt-behešt*.

In 1893 Browne published an English translation of Mīrzā Ḥosayn Hamadānī's *Tārīḵ-ejadīd*, a late pro-Bahai account of the Babi period. Again his notes to this work betray an implicit belief that even late Azalī accounts of Babi history are somehow more authentic than Bahai accounts, whereas in fact both represent evolution away from the original ideas of pristine Babism. But Browne's interest in this subject was fading, and he turned later in the 1890s to his literary history of Iran, to which he devoted the rest of his life. His enthusiasm for the study of Babism waned for several reasons. An *Oxford Magazine* review (25 May 1892, p. 394) attacking his work on this topic as a waste of time stung him deeply. In addition, the constant polemics between Azalīs and Bahais pained him, as did those between partisans of ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ and those of his brothers after Bahāʾ-Allāh's death.

When Browne became caught up in the Constitutional Revolution in 1905-11, he showed some peripheral interest in whether or not the small minority of Azalī's and Bahais were participants. He concluded, however, that the Bahais, with their emphasis on world unity, were too cosmopolitan to be good nationalists, and he thought Iran needed nationalists at that point (Browne, 1910, pp. 424-29). In 1910 he published, at the urging and with the cooperation of the Shiʿite scholar Mīrzā Moḥammad Khan Qazvīnī, the manuscript of *Ketāb-e noqṭat al-kāf*, which they attributed to Ḥājī Mīrzā Jānī, an early Babi who had perished in 1852. Qazvīnī wrote the Persian introduction, and Browne wrote an English preface, in which he attacked the Bahais for attempting to rewrite history (in *Tārīḵ-ejadīd*) in order to lessen the importance of the Bab in favor of Bahāʾ-Allah and accused them of suppressing *Noqṭat al-kāf*. Although it is true that this manuscript probably circulated infrequently among Bahais, the many copies of it in Bahai collections in Iran and in Haifa demonstrate that they hardly suppressed it. Furthermore, some material and attitudes expressed in *Noqṭat al-kāf* certainly postdate 1852. The work should probably be recognized, therefore, not as the "original" history, which the *Tārīḵ-ejadīd* was meant to supplant, but as an alternative tradition about early Babism, containing primary material but redacted from an Azalī point of view before the final break between Azal and Bahāʾ-Allāh. Mīrzā Abu'l-Fażl Golpāyegānī and other Bahai scholars replied to Browne that they had seen Ḥājī Mīrzā Jānī's early chronicle of Babism and that *Noqṭat al-kāf* was not it. A number of Azalīs and Bahais wrote or published important memoirs or chronicles in response to this publication of *Noqṭat al-kāf*; Browne deposited those sent to him in his collection but wrote nothing about them (Balyuzi, pp. 70, 72-73; Browne Coll., Cambridge University, F. 57[9] "Resāla-ye Sayyed Mehdī Dahajī"; Mīrzā Abu'l-Fażl Golpāyegānī and Mehdī Golpāyegānī, *Kašf al-ḡeṭāʾ*, Tashkent, 1919).

Browne's last substantial work on Babism was the publication of a miscellany of essentially unedited materials, some of them translations, entitled *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (1918). He also included a few specimens of Babi and Bahai poetry in the fourth volume of his *Literary History of Persia* (1924) and remarked favorably on the crisp style of Bahāʾ-Allāh's *Ketāb-e īqān*. His obituary of ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ, written in 1921, was, in contrast to the rather tense communications of a decade earlier, warm and appreciative and showed admiration for his promotion of racial unity in the segregated United States.

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Browne's notebooks and correspondence, both at Cambridge and in private hands, shed further light on this subject.

(Juan Cole)

iii. Browne and the Persian Constitutional Movement

E. G. Browne was incomparably more sympathetic and devoted to the Persian Constitutional movement than was any other European. Through his numerous publications, his lectures, and the letters he published in daily newspapers, he took an active part in organizing and influencing British opinion. The Persia Committee, founded in October, 1908, by Browne and H. F. B. Lynch and composed of prominent members of both houses of Parliament, as well as writers and journalists, functioned as an active and influential pressure group both inside and outside England.

Browne's deep interest in politics had begun in the early years of his life. His admiration for the Turks in their losing struggle against Russia in the war of 1877-78 first attracted his attention to the East. It was this political commitment to weaker nations struggling against political and military penetration by the European powers that led him to begin learning Turkish, followed by Arabic and Persian, and thus laid the foundations for his brilliant academic career (see i above). Nevertheless, Persia soon supplanted Turkey as the focus of his interest and came to dominate not only his scholarly but also his political activities. He admired the "stability of national type, and power of national recovery" of Persia throughout its long history and was fascinated by such ideals as the "interdependence of all mankind" and the "obligation of tolerance towards those of other religions" that he discovered in the classical Persian epics (Browne, 1917-18, pp. 312, 313).

His own profound and humane yearning for a "universal brotherhood of mankind" (Nicholson, p. viii) corresponded to the basic principles of the Babi and Bahai religions (see ii above). It was this same deep-rooted humanitarianism, rather than any reasoned theory of nationalism, that led Browne to identify himself with popular movements striving for liberty. Independent in forming his views and fearless in expressing them, he generally found himself in opposition to the official policy of his government (see i above). His belief in a plurality of nations, each preserving its distinctive

character, all coexisting freely and aiding one another, was decisive in his special dedication to the Persian cause. His manifold writings on the Constitutional movement, as well as his publication of its authentic documents, were aimed at arousing sympathy for the Persian reformers (Browne, 1909, p. 5). He asserted the Persians' right of self-determination (1917-18, p. 320) and consistently deplored the means employed by England and Russia to crush the movement, especially revealing the atrocities committed by the Russians in Persia (1912a, pp. 6, 15; 1912b). A vehement opponent of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which had established Russian and British zones of influence in Persia, Browne demanded complete abolition of these zones (1917-18, p. 329), comparing partition of Persia with that of Poland (1912a, p. 17). He perceived the Constitutional movement as essentially a nationalist, rather than a democratic (1917-18, p. 323), cause, and the Persians thus fighting for their very existence as a nation (1910, p. xix).

Browne was able to obtain valuable information for his publications from the best sources available. He was not only acquainted with Jamāl-al-Dīn Afḡānī and Mīrzā Malkom Khan but also knew many of the national leaders who had been exiled to France and England after the bombardment of Parliament by Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah in 1908, among whom Sayyed Ḥasan Taqīzāda, ʿAlī-Akbar Dehḵodā, and Moḥammad-ʿAlī Tarbīat were the most prominent. Browne was also kept well informed by correspondents in St. Petersburg and some of his former students who had entered the British consular service.

The events in Persia were of such importance to Browne that he even discontinued work on his monumental *Literary History of Persia*, the second volume of which had just been published (1906), in order to dedicate himself fully to organizing support and assistance. Indignant with the manner in which the British foreign minister, Edward Grey, was conducting affairs in Iran, the Persia Committee, with Browne as its vice-chairman, published resolutions, staged large public meetings, and pressed for Russian withdrawal from Persia. By 1911 the executive committee consisted of forty-six members, among them thirty-three Radical members of Parliament, who subjected the House of Commons to sustained debates on Persian affairs. During 1911-12 Persia was the central issue in a general "Grey must go" campaign. To all such activities pamphlets published by Browne were fundamental.

In addition to his political work, Browne did not neglect the literary aspects of the Constitutional movement, which were attractively presented in *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*. This account of the flourishing of a free press, as

well as the large quantity of excellent patriotic and political verse included, was aimed at counterbalancing the "reactionary and obscurantist policy" of *The Times*, which had criticized the "mischievous and dangerous" character of the free press in Iran (Browne, 1914, p. xii), and at refuting those who sought for political reasons to represent the Persians as decadent and incapable of governing themselves (Browne, 1910, p. xii; idem, 1914, p. xv; idem, 1909, p. 6). In particular, he emphasized the work of the secret and semisecret societies (*anjomans*) established during the revolutionary period, which provided free education in night schools, arranged for medical treatment, and organized lectures on the duties of citizenship (1909, pp. 13, 21; 1910, pp. 244-46).

Browne was held in the highest esteem by Persians. Although he had at first been disliked in Iran because of his sympathies for the persecuted Babis, he soon evoked gratitude for having taken Persia and its literature as his own and for supporting the Persian people as few others had done. To all Persians living in exile he was of infinite help and utmost generosity. When Tabrīz was occupied by the Russians in 1911, the Constitutionalists sent telegrams asking for his assistance. As for his services to Persian literature, a contemporary Persian newspaper article compared them to the Ghaznavid Sultan Maḥmūd's patronage of Ferdowsī (quoted by E. D. Ross in his introduction to the 1926 edition of Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians*, pp. xix-xx). Browne was awarded the Persian order of the Lion and the Sun, and on his sixtieth birthday he received Persian representatives who presented him with a moving illuminated address from his admirers in Iran (Arberry, p. 189). Persians today still remember Browne as one of the great men devoted to their country and its people.

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