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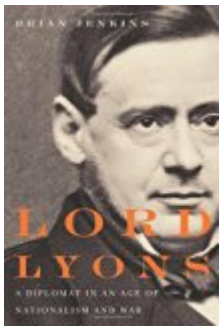

Brian Jenkins. *Lord Lyons: A Diplomat in an Age of Nationalism and War.* Montreal: Mcgill Queens Univ Press, 2014. 541 pp. $49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7735-4409-3.

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In *Lord Lyons: A Diplomat in the Age of Nationalism and War*, Brian Jenkins provides the first comprehensive assessment in nearly a century of British diplomat Richard Bickerton Pemell Lyons, the second Lord Lyons. Jenkins, professor emeritus at Bishop's University, previously studied Lyons as part of his well-known larger work on Britain and the United States during the U.S. Civil War. He has built upon that initial interest in Lyons as Britain's ambassador to the United States and has investigated Lyons's entire career in this meticulously researched biography. Jenkins makes a strong case that Lyons was one of the first to professionalize the position of British diplomat and that his conduct set the standard for his successors in the foreign service.

This is a biography that necessarily focuses on Lyons's various diplomatic postings because, as Jenkins writes, Lyons's "[e]ntire adult life was one of diplomacy" (p. 3). Jenkins reviews Lyons's upbringing as the son of a naval officer turned diplomat, his undistinguished performance at Oxford, and his start in the foreign service as an unpaid assistant in Greece in 1839. Lyons's intense attachment to his mother developed early and, as Jenkins speculates, seems to have been responsible for some antipathy toward women throughout his life. Lyons never married, and Jenkins argues that his professional skills must have been all the more impressive to overcome the career challenge of being a bachelor in a field that expected diplomats' wives to manage the critical social life of Britain's legations and embassies.

After quiet but effective early service in Greece and Rome, the ambitious Lyons was noticed by the Foreign Office, which sent him to Washington, DC in 1858. He remained there even after a change from Tory to Whig government at home, keen to avoid a confrontation with a nation his superiors considered aggressive and expansionist. Lyons continued that commitment after the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. As minister in Washington he built a strong relationship with Secretary of State William Seward while counseling his own government to avoid intervention in the American conflict. At times of crisis such as

the Trent Affair, in which the Union captured Confederate representatives on a British ship on the high seas, Lyons balanced between deterrence and conciliation. He advised London to increase the British North American naval squadron and beef up Canadian troop levels in order to show Washington that it could not act with impunity, but he also helped to negotiate the peaceful resolution of the crisis.

After Washington, Lyons was promoted in 1865 to be ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. In Constantinople he dealt with the Porte's worries about Britain's credibility after it failed to intervene against Prussia in the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis. Working skilfully with the French ambassador, he restored Ottoman confidence and hold on its European territory while also reining in French ambitions to gain full control of the Suez Canal. While sticking to Britain's traditional policy of upholding the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity—as long as it did not require another Crimean War—Lyons believed that its decline was inevitable. He worked to prop up the empire in order to make that decline more peaceful. While he never managed to make the Ottomans adopt necessary reforms, he solidified Britain's influence with the government.

Lyons reached the pinnacle of the British foreign service when he was appointed ambassador to France in 1867. He remained in Paris to report on the tumultuous events of the next several years there: Prussia's victory over France in war, the fall of the Second Empire, the Paris Commune, and the numerous struggles to establish a competent and credible government for the Third Republic. Throughout, Lyons labored to maintain good relations between Britain and France in a time of increased hostility among the publics of both countries and continuing instability in the French government. That rapprochement was particularly important now that the center of power in Europe had shifted to Berlin. Lyons's energy and health gradually failed him, however, and he retired in 1887, dying soon after.

Jenkins aims in his discussion of Lyons to alter some well-worn views of the diplomat, most of them based on the 1913 work of one of Lyons's Paris colleagues, Lord Newton. Most historians since Newton have followed his lead in branding Lyons as painfully shy, overly cautious, and something of a workaholic who did not drink, smoke, gamble, or have much of a social life beyond the excellent dinners he gave—a bland figure at best. Delving into volumes of Lyons's own papers and those of friends and colleagues, Jenkins provides ample evidence to counter the received wisdom, showing that Lyons enjoyed society and a wide circle of friends, worked hard but not obsessively, and was praised for his common sense and his amicable relationships with officials of his host governments.

Jenkins's analysis of Lyons's long career argues persuasively that Lyons was one of Britain's first truly professional diplomats. Having grown up outside the social circle from which the foreign service usually recruited, he was never a political appointee. Instead, he achieved the most prestigious of diplomatic appointments--the Paris embassy--based on his experience and skills. Lyons prided himself on his nonpartisanship and earned praise from both the Tory and Whig administrations he served. He set the tone for future heads of mission with this apolitical status.

Moreover, Jenkins demonstrates that Lyons created rules of professional conduct that became absorbed into the "Foreign Office mind," again setting standards for the behavior of Victorian diplomats. He carried on extensive confidential correspondence with his superiors, believing it his duty to provide them with information on which to base policy, and he further considered it his duty to implement that policy without allowing his personal opinions to interfere. That said, as Jenkins shows, Lyons was not a "slave" to instructions from the Foreign Office (p. 442), using

tactful language and his own good judgment in conveying those instructions—or even, on occasion, not conveying them when they seemed counterproductive, as during the Trent Crisis, when his long silence unnerved the Lincoln administration more than the stern statement sent by his superiors would have done. Lyons aspired to remain at each post for a long time, becoming part of society there. To that end, he refused to take part in espionage and became known at home and abroad as a straightforward and honest representative. He emphasized easing tensions and avoiding confrontations in his dealings with his host nations, determining that Britain should not make demands when it could not enforce its will. While fiery protests might have played well in the British press, Lyons resisted the temptation to build up his popularity at home when doing so might roil the waters at his posting instead of smoothing them.

But for all his conciliation, Lyons also advocated a strong defensive stance, backed up with naval and military force, to deter other nations from acting against Britain's interests. He believed firmly in the value of Britain's credibility in international affairs and worked hard in Washington, Constantinople, and Paris to convey Britain's resolve and repair its reputation when necessary. In doing so, he was carrying on a tradition of diplomatic relations common to both political parties in Britain. Jenkins' discussion of Lyons's dealings with the Union during the U.S. Civil War makes clear how effective Lyons was. He played a key role in avoiding war between Britain and the Union by advocating a clear signal of Britain's military power while also carrying on tactful, confidential negotiations that allowed the United States to back down with dignity.

In terms of Lyons's personality and conduct, Jenkins paints a portrait of a man who was not flashy but was affable and well liked. Lyons made friends among the statesmen of his host nation and created a supportive atmosphere for his subordinates, something like a "boys' school of which he was the headmaster" (p. 441). He maintained that British legations and embassies should symbolize the nation's power and status with a certain amount of grandeur, but he was far from snobbish, dining frequently with his juniors and winning their loyalty with his consideration.

Jenkins notes more than once that Lyons preferred a quiet life, which is partly to blame for his characterization by historians as shy and unimaginative. But the author makes a good case that he deserves recognition as Victorian Britain's model professional diplomat, maintaining peace and upholding national interests abroad in times of change and crisis. Although the level of detail in this biography can become overwhelming at times, Jenkins's exhaustive work with primary sources makes this the fullest and most reliable discussion of Lyons's public and private lives yet published. It is a welcome addition to the field.

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