

SHOULD WE STUDY THE HISTORY OF ASIA?¹

We are just beginning to realise in America, says Mr. H. G. Wells,² "that quite a lot of things happened between Adam and the *Mayflower* that we ought to be told about . . . The United States has been like one of those men we read about in the papers, who go away from home and turn up in some distant place with their memories gone. They've forgotten what their names were, or where they lived, or what they did for a living. They've forgotten everything that matters."

If this indictment be true, the forgetfulness has been up to the present neither unnatural nor without its usefulness. For every nation, whose national quality is destined to prove of lasting value to civilization, it is necessary that there be two stages of experience. First, there must be a period of relative segregation. This is the time for the national quality to be developed by the welding together of the constituent parts. At this stage, nationalism may, as in the case of the Jews, even exhibit a kind of fierce tenacity and jealousy of its character which amounts to what we call chauvinism. It may be so conscious of the worth of what it has to guard that it regards any dilution of the national spirit by foreign contacts as a contamination of the well-springs of life. But to such a people, again as in the case of the Jew, there comes a second period when, under penalty of possible stagnation, it is necessary to put the achievements of national character out to service on behalf of mankind. After this, the centrifugal idea of political life must work in harmony with the centripetal, lest what has been gained by the earlier struggles of nationalism be wasted through selfish isolation.

We are come, the writer believes, to one of those crises of our American history in which new occasions make it necessary for us to prepare for new duties.

Somewhere on that long line which separates what is known as European Russia from the country to the east there stands a

¹ The present paper forms, in large part, the Introduction to the writer's forthcoming "*Outline History of Asia*," to be published by the Atlantic Monthly Press, in alliance with the Little, Brown Co., on April 10. It is printed here by the kind permission of the publishers of that volume.

² "*The Secrets of the Heart*," p. 155.

stone which on the one face bears the word EUROPE and on the other face the word ASIA. In most respects the distinction to which the stone directs attention is illusory, but illusions of this kind exert a powerful influence on the course of history. The minds of historians have been wont to imprison both themselves and their subjects within national and continental boundaries which are generally quite artificial. We are very far as yet from escaping the bondage of these national, not to say Eurocentric, views of history. A recent writer, complaining of this, declares that relatively the scope of our historical enquiry is less than that of Herodotus. The history of Greece has been studied as the story of a people who had nothing in common with the outside world except when foreign campaigns against 'barbarians' had to be undertaken and invaders repelled. The history of Rome was, of course, more 'far-flung' in its scope. Yet even here it was only because the arms of Rome had to be followed east and west in their triumph over inferior peoples. Renan represents not only the attitude of his own times but that of more than a generation since when he affirms that only three national histories have been of any particular consequence to the modern world, namely, those of Judaea, Greece and Rome.

It would be hard to overstate the degree to which this one error in the field of history has extended to other departments of study. The philosopher, for example, has concluded that, since his history begins with Greece, there too must commence the story of his own science. Text-book after text-book, each purporting to be a history of ancient philosophy, has been produced without so much as a hint that philosophy ever had a domicile beyond the Greek colonies of Asia Minor. Thus men in general came to think of history as having two faces, one turned to the west, full of meaning, movement and importance, the other turned eastward, nebulous and dreamy, and out of all possible relation to the world in which we live. Some have gone so far as to teach a doctrine of biological distinction and to quote with glib conviction one hackneyed couplet of Kipling without reference to the succeeding and complementary lines:

"But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed,
nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, though they
come from the ends of the earth".

Now, of course, for this failure to perceive the unity of history in general, and in particular the importance of assigning place to the story of Asia, there are certain readily discoverable causes.

1. We must remember that the era of comparative science has but very recently begun. No large synthesis in any field was possible until a certain progress had been made with analysis. Until late years the subjects of scientific study were thought to be as easily kept in water-tight compartments as were the subjects of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. Chemistry, physics, geology, astronomy and the like were conceived of as parallel lines such as might be indefinitely prolonged without danger of meeting. The same thing was true of the languages, the national literatures, and even the religions of men. All or any of these might be studied without anyone supposing it to be necessary that the individual should be introduced to an authentic family circle. Under such circumstances, there was nothing strange in the keeping of even European histories within their national boundaries. The idea of the intrusion of Asia could only be viewed as a menace like that which Athens beheld in the armies of Darius Hystaspes.

2. The period of intercourse and intercommunication which existed as between Europe and Asia up to the 14th century, and which the dominion of the Mongol rather assisted than hindered, was somewhat rudely interrupted as the sway of the Ottoman Turk increased in power and extent. Of course this interruption did not come all at once. Nor did it ever reach the point of an absolute barrier, as some historians have described it. Nevertheless, the three great land routes by which soldiers, merchants and missionaries had hitherto passed from Asia to Europe, or from Europe to Asia, were effectively blocked. From this time, except in the case of Russia, Asia and Europe were for the time being definitely estranged.

A new direction was given to human energy through the work of men like Prince Henry of Portugal and the great company of navigators who followed his lead. Their work was, of course, to restore the broken communications and to re-open the road to Cathay. But it was long before these efforts gave back to the knowledge of men much more than a mere fringe of the Asiatic continent, and in the meantime the voyagers on unknown seas had beheld new goals and fallen under the spell of continents before unguessed at.

3. So, for America in particular, the path of destiny was blazed westward, and Cathay ceased to be the cynosure of adventurous eyes. With the tasks which came fast and thick to hand, in the garnering of the new strange things which crowded upon the explorer, it is not surprising that the colonists of the western continent began to lose consciousness of the ancient world which lay even beyond the home of their fathers. Much even of the ancestral home sank below the horizon of memory, though for one purpose or another men still went back to Europe as Robinson Crusoe went back to his wreck. The story which Mr. John Buchan has sketched for us in "*The Path of the King*" is still strange to the average American.

In this paper the writer is not concerned with the task of describing the obligations of the United States to Europe. They are not only obvious, but they are of so concrete a character as to make it clear that no array of pedantry, however determined, will be able to diminish the interest of European history for the American student.

But, while Europe is knocking at one door, with great commonwealths growing up to self-consciousness all around the Pacific Rim, and yet so far relating themselves to one another only by a policy of fear, we have slowly begun to recognize that the European door may very well prove to be the back door of our domestic establishment, while what we have hitherto scarcely deemed a portal of access at all is rapidly assuming the dignity of a front entrance. So all Asia confronts us with a new interest and a most immediate and insistent appeal. The old Asia, shut off from the West by the inrush of the Turkish hordes, is developing a modern attitude towards the most modern characteristics of the western world, and neither world may disregard the other. A great ocean, bearing, we trust, a prophetic name, carries with its waves the influences of the West to the East and those of the East to the West. No Mrs. Partington of politics, sweeping with the broom of partisanship, may banish these influences from our respective shores.

Some consequences of the neglect of these considerations have already been exposed in a previous paper.³ Many more could be instanced, illustrating the ignorance of even Presidents and Secretaries of State, not to mention a truly formidable list of Senators and Congressmen. But, fundamentally, this dangerous ignorance

³ See *Our Asiatic Neighbors*, by Prof. Payson J. Treat, in this issue.

goes back to lack of instruction upon Asiatic problems in our schools and colleges. When two years ago a questionnaire was sent out from the University to the senior classes of the Seattle High Schools the first question asked was, How many Japanese are there in the United States? Fifty-three per cent confessed their ignorance; the other forty-sevn per cent merely exposed that ignorance, without confessing it, by giving estimates all the way from 5,000 to 20,000,000. In a further question over seventy per cent stated that they got their (mis) information from the newspapers; only thirteen per cent were indebted to books. Such results, in the light of our individual responsibility for foreign policy, seems to place squarely upon our schools and universities the obligation to inaugurate special education along the neglected lines.

In the very nature of the case, this must be no cursory or superficial survey. Only by showing how deep the roots of present-day happenings lie in the past can we appreciate the developments which have come from those roots and which constitute our immediate political problems. To the casual observer of things Asiatic it might seem sufficient to present to our students just a sketch of social and political conditions as they are at the present day. But the moment we try to lay our hands on these it is found that, as the drinking-horn of Thor communicated with the vast and universal ocean, so the existing condition of things in India, China, Japan, and so on, is vitally consequent upon all that precedes to the very beginning of the story.

Apart, moreover, from the present relation of Asia to our eduactional, religious, commercial and political problems, there are reasons which Americans will at once recognize to be valid for studying, at least in outline, the record of the Asiatic continent. These reasons may be condensed as follows:

1. It may well be that we have in Asia the cradle of the human race itself. Too many 'cradles' have been suggested, it is true, to incline one to be dogmatic on such a subject. But the ancient story of Eden as the abode of our first parents may not un-fittingly be so modernized in the light of the discoveries of men like Raphael Pumpelly and Roy Chapman Andrews so far as to suggest the center of the Asiatic continent as the starting point of the long human pilgrimage which is history's imaginary beginning. At least this much seems certain, that somewhere on the high plains of central Asia, long before the increasing aridity of the land forced the dispersion of the more enterprising members

of the community into other climes, there was formed a civilization out of which were quarried the foundation-stones on which was to be reared the edifice of culture for the rest of the civilized world.

2. Of course, all the currents flowing from this supposed source of history may not be traced throughout their entire length, nor easily throughout any part of that length. Nevertheless, once again, it is fairly plain that, in following the course of Asiatic history from as early a point as we can reach, we find ourselves associated with strong tides of developing life which carry us far beyond the bounds of Asia, tides whose pulsations are still strongly felt in the events of our own times. We think of those strong and steady movements which gave to the valleys of the Huang Ho, the Indus, and the Euphrates the age-long civilization of China, India and the Sumerian. We recall the great sweep of wave after wave, Semite, Hittite, Scythian—this last shaking the might of Assyria towards its fall and furnishing for the Hebrew prophet the slogan, "The Day of Yahweh!" We think also of the devastating movement of the Hun which, in the east, led to the raising of the gigantic rampart of the Chinese Wall and, in the west, did so much towards bringing down the splendid edifice of Roman imperialism. We remember, again, the tremendous impact of the Mongol in the 13th. century which swept away so much of the occidental civilization of Russia. It spread so far east and west that, while Japanese mothers stilled their children with the threat, "The Mogu are coming!", economic distress affected even the shores of England through the inability of the terrorized fishermen to sell their herrings to the Scandinavian merchants. Last, but not least, we remember the westward march of the conquering Ottoman whose book of destiny is not yet to the last page inscribed.

3. On all these currents, even on those which, laden with the debris of empires, seemed barbarous and destructive, were borne those elements of culture upon which we plume ourselves today. It would be sufficient to prove our point by reminding ourselves of the fact that a mere list of the things for which the west is indebted to the civilization of one Asiatic country, China, suggests a considerable part of the history of modern culture. The present is indeed an age of stupendous advance, but, granting the utmost to the creative genius of our own time and race, we should never have run our mile but for the furlong achieved by the pioneers of the Middle Kingdom. We need only recall her silk cul-

ture, her porcelains, her knowledge of the magnetic needle, her use of paper, printing, gunpowder and tea, her genius for road-making, not to mention speculation upon abstruser themes.

To this mere hint of things for which the west is indebted to China we may add the debt of Europe and America to that large part of the population of Asia which we call Semitic. Not to anticipate what must be said of religion, the fact is not to be neglected that the Semite was the middle-man in literature and commerce as well as in religion. Palestine and the head of the Red Sea offers on the map that narrow strip of land through which passed the products of the Far East, the silks and pig-iron of China and the spices of India, on their way to the markets of Alexandria and Rome. Through almost the same corridor were carried to the western world the beast stories and other venerable fables of India in various linguistic disguises. In the vernacular of the Arab many of the romantic themes in prose and poetry, possibly even the poetic forms themselves, entered Europe soon to be acclimatized in the literatures of Spain, Provence and Italy. By the selfsame channels came likewise back to Europe treasures which she had well-nigh lost in the ages of barbarism, namely, the wisdom of Aristotle and other sages of ancient Greece.

4. One more point with reference to the past may still engage our attention, namely, the dependence of the modern world upon Asia in the matter of religion. It is not too much to say that every great religion which has claimed to be a world faith has had its cradle in Asia. Judaism, Christianity and Muhammadanism have all sprung from one comparatively restricted area in western Asia. India has produced Hinduism, the creed of over two hundred million souls, and Buddhism which, expelled from the country of its nativity, took on new life with new elements of belief and practice among the millions of Central Asia, China, Japan, Burmah and southeastern Asia. China, moreover, has kept its faith in Confucius, though at the same time she has permitted the philosophy of Lao-tzu to degenerate into charlatanry. Persia too has given birth to the system of Zoroaster and, since the decline of Magianism, has reached out to the west with all forms of eclecticism, from the Mithraism which attracted the reverence of the Roman soldiers to the Manichaeism whose votaries were burned in York and Orleans and was crushed in the Albigensian crusade. So on down to the Babism and Bahatism preached today in our American cities. No one, east or west, today, who takes

any interest in religion at all, can possibly dispense with the attempt to understand something of the history of Asia.

All we have said so far applies to the story of the past. With it in mind, it certainly cannot be said that Asia belongs to another world to which our own may be indifferent. It surely is not a world which let the legions of the west thunder past while she herself "plunged in thought again." If Europe at times invaded Asia, three times in succession was Europe almost conquered by the Asiatic, namely, by the Arab, the Tatar and the Turk. Nor is it sufficient to dismiss the humanity of the Orient as impersonal, when in the mind of one who reflects a moment there move across the stage of history such figures as those of Zoroaster, whose fire-temples gave new light to the east, the great First Emperor of China, who built the wall, the camel-driver of Mecca, who created an empire still a problem for Europe, or such thunderbolts of war as Jenghiz Khan and Timurleng. If the tides of history are indeed moved by human as well as by physical forces, this is true of Asia as well as of Europe and America. No continent has ever been more prolific in the great personalities without which history loses its main significance.

What of the present?

History has sometimes been divided into three great periods. First comes the *Potamic*, or period of the river-valley civilizations, such as those of the Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus and the Huang-ho. Secondly, comes the *Thalassic*, or period of civilizations developing around an inland sea, such as the Mediterranean. Thirdly, comes the *Oceanic*. But of this Oceanic period one stage is passing away under our eyes. It is that during which the ocean regarded as its center is the Atlantic. There can be little or no doubt—and the words of foresighted statesmen not a few might here be quoted—that the course of empire which once passed westward across the Atlantic has at length reached the shores of a vaster ocean, the Pacific. Henceforth the Pacific and the countries around the Pacific, with their hinterlands and their island groups, will almost inevitably become the particular domain of Clio, the Muse of History.

The Pacific era is destined to become the era of a new America, a new China, a new Japan, a new India, and a new Australasia. In some cases the story is barely begun. In others the evidence is coming in too rapidly for most people to deduce from it the right conclusions. Already, to match the great ports

of Europe and the Atlantic seaboard, Hongkong and Shanghai have obtained a place among the "big four" of the world's emporiums. Already our civilization, along the four paths of diplomacy, education, business and religion, has come to a point where it stands on tiptoe to carry its mission to the nations of the Orient. It is beginning to be intelligently realized that the future, not merely of a locality, but of a whole nation, and not merely of a nation, but of civilization itself, internationally considered, may depend upon the alert and instructed use of the present opportunity.

Of this opportunity we dare not become mere passive spectators. The Greeks made much of an element in History to which they gave the name '*Pronoia*', or *Foresight*. It is an element which we hold to be both Divine and human. But upon the "other than ourselves", however we conceive of it, we can never unload our own immediate responsibility. The directive foresight of men by which the evolution of the race is influenced is something which may never, under any pretext, be left unexercised. It is vain to talk of evolution if we mean thereby nothing but a series of happy accidents by which things come out not altogether badly. The human mind and the human will alike are at least among the most important factors in evolution today. The political obligations of democracy amount to nothing less than our responsibility for making our wills intelligently co-operative in bringing the course of history to its proper goal.

With a foreign policy largely in the hands of constituencies whose desires are followed in the main by the politicians who represent them, it is of the utmost importance that the individual atoms of the individual constituencies should know enough of the peoples of Asia that the foreign policy of the United States may keep our ocean true to its auspicious name. With business men anxious to promote that intercourse which shall create demand for the products and manufactures of outside lands, it is of the greatest consequence that business be founded upon real appreciation, sympathy and mutual understanding. With our educationalists seeking to carry to Oriental lands the educational institutions, standards and curricula, and especially the morale, of our own schools, it is essential that they do not at the start vitiate their endeavor by ignorant depreciation of Asiatic standards and ideals which in the past have done so much in the way of subduing barbarism and extending culture. Above all, with our thousands of

missionaries, ready at the risk of comfort, health and life to bear to the Orient things which they most surely accept and prize, it is of the first moment that they have first learned enough about the old religions of the countries to which they are sent to prevent their destroying in the name of Christ the things which Christ would approve. To do this would be in the name of the Spirit of God to oppose that Spirit which has never left itself without witness in the world.

The understanding of these things will not make the study of our subject the less sincere or the less intensive. Rather, it will enable us to feel that, in order to understand aright the part, some knowledge of the whole is needed. We shall see each separate event the more clearly, and understand it the more completely, as we behold it associated with that which is at once its cause and its complement.

An historian of a past generation (Mr. E. A. Freeman), while protesting against the disposition to divide history into what is ancient and what is modern, rather curtly assumes that western history is alone of any special interest because it alone is the exemplification of the three great characteristics of law, liberty and pure religion. It is not our purpose to minimize the importance of any of these. But surely we may see that these things are not to be studied only on European or American soil or by the light of western example.

There are doubtless many questions regarding Asia which we must not too easily foreclose. We must, for example, ask whether it is altogether fair to think of Asia as a single entity. We must consider whether all the talk about an "oriental mind" is the outcome of fact or is a mere product of "occidental stupidity". We shall certainly have to consider whether there is any hard and fast distinction between East and West.

We shall have to enquire again whether the statement be true that what we call progress is a note of civilization foreign to the atmosphere of Asia, and indeed if this progress is the only element of civilization which deserves the attention of the historian.

Such questions will be treated in their due time and place. Without anticipating, it is hoped that the life of Asia and her children will be found to provide as organic and consistent a story as the life of any other region of the globe. For the present we must be content with the statement that we do not intend to stress the history of the East to depreciate the story of the West. Rather,

by reference to the East, we hope to make the history of the West more intelligible than it is to most people at the present day. For if there be any lesson which a wide survey of history teaches more plainly than almost anything else it is this, that civilization, as we know it, and as we trust it may in fuller measure become, is neither Oriental nor Occidental. Rather is it the product of human effort both east and west, the one direction correcting, complementing and stimulating the other. Startlingly true are the lines:

“Men look to the East for the dawning things, for the light of the
 rising sun,
But they look to the West, to the crimson West, for the things
 which are done, are done
So out of the East they have always come, the cradle that saw the
 birth
Of all the heart-warm hopes of man, and all the hopes of the
 earth,
And into the waiting West they go, with the dream-child of the
 East,
To find the hopes that they hoped of old are a hundred-fold in-
 creased.
For here in the East men dream the dreams of the things they
 hope to do,
And here in the West, the crimson West, the dreams of the East
 come true.”

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