

1928 Compth

2nd Prize, Class A

A44

'Ex Oriente Lux.'

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How far is the introduction of Western civilisation beneficial to the Eastern nations possessing a culture of their own?

In the inevitable inequality of human achievement, as revealed in the story of mankind no less than in the history of nations and individuals, we may trace the working of a natural law of reciprocity. This principle of give and take is unmanent in the whole vast web of the universe, and is shown clearly in the inter relations of the world's inhabitants. Thus it is that we see to-day the renaissance of a continent, in the reawakening of Asia from a torpor of centuries under the stimulus of the forces of European civilisation. The West, possessing what we are pleased to call a higher civilisation, as the result of collective advances which place it in the vanguard of the race, has succeeded in imposing that civilisation upon the oriental peoples while there were in a condition little fitted to resist it. And so the epoch that beheld the consummation of western progress and Christian idealism in the debacle of 1914, has also beheld the unchanging East in the throes of change; and beholds to-day a new Asia rising on the ashes of the old. It is only natural, in the face of insistent criticism, that the question should be asked as to how far the East has benefited from contact with

The West:

Since the conclusion of the Great War, the claim of the white race to superiority has not gone unchallenged, and the very presence of the white man in the East has served as a pretext for stronger attack. Yet we need only consider the Western nations, in comparison with the rest of mankind, to realise that they are unique in respect of growth of knowledge, collective power, organisation and human co-operation. These are the influences that have been most instrumental in bringing about ^{the} metamorphosis amongst the Eastern nations. It is a commonplace, but none the less true on that account, that Europe is the political continent, whereas Asia is the religious. And it is ~~in~~ this very pre-occupation with religion that precludes the oriental peoples from demanding and exercising political rights. Asia's refusal to admit this fact has been cited as the fountain-head of her present political unrest, for, absorbed in contemplation of the invisible world, she can never claim the same natural or acquired faculty for government as the West. As Sir Henry Mance has finely observed, hers is a civilisation of 'status', compared with a Western civilisation of 'contrast'.

For, although the present situation in Asia seems to indicate a return of the dynamic force which on three occasions in the past has driven a spear-head of Eastern conquest into the

very heart of Europe, yet the natural condition of the East is static. In some respects, this may seem all the more surprising, as the Kaleidoscope variety of the pageant of the Orient presents to our view a picture of diversity and changing thought, rather than an impression of unity and conformity. Nevertheless, until the beginning of the present century, the great eastern peoples, who had carried many of the arts to a high degree of perfection before those who now exploit them had emerged from barbarism, were buried in a trance so profound that four hundred years of outside interference were required to arouse them. The present ferment may be no more than a temporary aberration from the ways of established order, but the old order is certainly changing. What of the new? If Asia has indeed caught a vision of her higher destiny, to what extent is it due to western notions, and how much of it will draw its life from western sources?

This question inevitably touches upon the favourite theme, so often exploited by cheap journalists and alarmist authors, of the 'Revolt of Asia'. For that great movement, the result of many factors — some of which are entirely outside the scope of our subject — is yet inseparably connected with the influence of European civilisation. Whether it is more than a passing fever due to the alien virus of western ideas only the future can show. But, although we are assured that this

strenuous effort at self-determination on the part of the oriental nations is essentially the outcome of an internal process of many years standing, yet we cannot overlook the fact that it has been greatly accelerated by a concerted resistance to the inroads of European influence. The most conspicuous feature, then, of the modern East, a movement so wide-spread that it constitutes a question of universal importance, is in great part a result of the introduction of western civilisation.

It is surely not a digression, at this point, to pause for a moment to notice what is entailed by this vital question. For, without a clear understanding of the issues at stake in Asia to-day, it is scarcely possible adequately to estimate the extent and nature — beneficial or detrimental — of Western influence. We have, then, in the vast arena of the Asiatic continent, the meeting-ground of two distinct civilisations, established on fundamentally different ideas and principles. East confronts West, — the ancient possessor and the modern intruder. Now, after many centuries, the tide has turned, and the robe of Eastern apathy is swiftly making to a flood. No longer do the East and the West face each other as possessor and possessor, but rather as rivals claiming an inheritance on conflicting terms. On one side is the indisputable right of birth, on the other — to put it simply — the right of conquest. Supporting the former claim, is the paramount right of the native to live unmolested in the land of his

fathers, under as little or as much administrative ~~as~~ authority as he chooses to tolerate, but, above all, under his own authority. In support of the latter, and, indeed, largely justifying it, is the sum of resulting benefits — the benefits of stable government, the maintenance of law and order, the fostering of internal economic development, and the inseparable accompaniments of scientific progress. So we come to the crux of the whole matter — are these benefits real, and to what extent do they outweigh the consideration of native rights?

In dealing with Asia at all, it is difficult to sense the true atmosphere and conditions prevailing in what seems to the European watcher an immense and at times bewildering phantasmagoria of shifting national elements. However, our province is limited, inasmuch as we are concerned only with those eastern nations possessing a definite culture of their own. Here we have by no means a clear-cut division, for, assuming it true that 'the Orient begins at the Landstrasse', there is the Near East to be considered, as well as the teeming peoples of further Asia. But for the purposes of this study, which can in no way pretend to be comprehensive, it should be sufficient to deal with the great representative nations and cultures of the Orient. Now undoubtedly the three offering best opportunity for examination are India, China and Japan. Each of these constitutes

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a rich historic civilisation which has come under the alien influence of the West. The degree of impact varies in each case, while in each case we see much remaining of the old order in a system absorbing by a thousand channels the newer spirit of western ideas. What has been the result?

In India, whatever may have been the motives first leading to its acquisition, Britain, as the representative of modern civilisation, is endeavouring to-day, in the face of almost incalculable difficulties, to pursue the altogether admirable policy defined in the Government of India Act of 1919. That is to say, Britain is taking the existing foundation - a relic of former dynasties and ancient cultures from time immemorial - and attempting to work into the scattered future all that is best of western methods and ideas. So we have an excellent opportunity of studying the effects of modern civilisation on an eastern people, more particularly, since in India alone has western ascendancy been translated into terms of direct rulership. Thus, the introduction of the primary accompaniments of the European system has been a comparatively simple matter, and we see in India the western principles of science, industry and representative government applied in varying measure to a mixed native people. It is a great experiment, of course, and as yet

we cannot answer completely for its success or failure. But let us consider something of what it has achieved.

First and foremost, Britain has guaranteed the 'Pax Britannica' — India, for so many centuries a helpless prey to foreign conquerors, is at least secure in that regard. No small part of the gain has been the keeping of domestic harmony in a community divided by such fanatical hatreds as inflame the Moslems and the Hindus. Inestimable relief has been offered from visitations of famine and disease, while the combatting of this latter menace on hygienic lines is waged continuously. It is difficult for any westerner to conceive of the conditions existing in India even to-day. — but the ghastliness of these surviving practices should only remind us of what has been in the past, and is no more. The unspeakable lot of the Indian widows at the present time, is a paradise in comparison with what it was in the dark days before British rule. Then again, science and industry, those inseparable adjuncts of the western system, have been introduced with ~~all~~ their ^{many} advantages. Thus India reaps the benefit of all the mechanical appliances of our civilisation, with the consequent stimulus of economic and internal development.

Nor is this all. Such a list might be prolonged indefinitely — benefits which western civilisation, and western civilisation alone, can give to a nation which has spent its existence,

for hundreds of years, in a backwater of human progress. Education has been responsible for an increased mental receptivity, with a corresponding intellectual and political reaction. Moreover, the principle of Democracy, that fundamental ideal of representation so peculiar to the nations of the West has been gradually introduced. It is doubtful, of course, whether the Eastern mind will ever comprehend the meaning of the democratic principle, in which the sovereign power is vested in the will of the people ^{as a whole} ~~alone~~. In the same way, it is doubtful whether the East will ever comprehend the scientific attitude towards life, well defined as the ultimate aim of western civilisation in the words of a celebrated scientific economist: 'With power where religion could only exhort us, to the reality which art and music have dreamed of, science will corrupt us or science will destroy us, so that henceforth civilisation shall be either for all or for none.' But it is certain that the dethronement of theocracy and autocracy, the traditional and indigenous forms of government, and the adoption - however superficially - of the scientific point of view, have constituted the most significant reforms in modern Asia. We do not claim for a moment that these innovations have been entirely beneficial in their effects - in some ways, they have done much harm, and have proved extremely disturbing and disintegrating factors. But speaking

Frederick
Soddy

A. F. Whyte
K.C.S.I.

generally, they have worked their way in as liberating, emancipating and elevating forces, that is to say, as distinct advantages attendant upon the introduction of western civilisation. So that, for this particular case, we may sum up the position in the words of a great British legislator: 'India has gained more, far more, than she has lost by British rule.'

This epitome of the more obvious benefits of western influence in the East, applies equally to the other eastern nations. In China, of course, we have a more vexed question, for here we find a close contact between western civilisation and that which is natural to the old Celestial Empire, without any justification for the interference beyond the most primitive of reasons. When, some sixteen years ago, the most ancient dynasty in the world fell in a single night, to be replaced by a Republic on western lines, it was felt that the process of reconversion was complete. That the step was premature, the condition of China to-day bears convincing evidence. But we are heartened by the spectacle of a national government emerging from the chaos of conflicting parties, and the new phenomenon of the ^{invention} ~~growth~~ of a central unified machinery for the whole vast nation. China has felt, possibly more than any other eastern people, the antinatal pangs of labour in the new birth, but when her hour is past, we may with confidence anticipate the growth of a new nation, turning aside from

the purely materialistic activities imposed in past years by the Powers, and devoting her hardly-won freedom to science, art and economic progress.

Passing from China in travail to the Japan of to-day, we find a people who have deservedly won the title of 'the Westerns of the East.' For Western civilisation in Japan is no exotic plant, but a naturalised crop which has already come to harvest. In the space of seventy years, Japan has developed from an insignificant island state in an ancient seclusion into one of the great powers of the modern world. The story of the Liberal and Labour movements in this marvellous little country, which has cast the slough of centuries in the span of a lifetime, is possibly the most stimulating chapter in recent reform. And although we are told that the recognition of the failure of Japan's great imperialistic experiment has resulted in a complete change of thought and policy, so that to-day she strives after excellence of civilisation in other spheres than material aggrandisement and territorial expansion, still we cannot forget how much has been due to western influence. In renewing their never-ending quest, the Japanese people are turning once more upon themselves, exploring their own resources of spirit and seeking a way to victory along paths that are linked to the glories of the past. But the Japanese themselves would be the last to deny that the genesis of their present prosperity came from the West. And

Yusuke
Tsurumi.

so with the light of the rising sun of Japan, the new dawn breaking across the Orient has been revealed, showing the full renaissance of Asia to the wondering gaze of Western eyes.

In these representative eastern nations, then, we observe the results of European civilisation, introduced upon a steadily broadening scale. How deep the roots have struck, as yet we may scarcely judge, for the East, which sees the things of the invisible and supernatural world as more significant than the events of our visible earth, must always remain more or less of a mystery to the impetuous, factual westerner. Deep-buried in the womb of the future lies the ultimate destiny of East and West, whether the East will work out science from religion, or the West religion from science, we may not know. Perhaps the two will meet on a higher plane — the plane of a common humanity. At least, for the present, we may watch the dual endeavour to found a happy, co-operative and progressive community for all mankind. 'In this great work the West has played a dominating part for over three centuries; it has often erred grievously and soiled its record with blood. Yet on the whole the judgement... will hold its own: the world is better for Western energy and Western light.' Nowhere is this more true than in those nations of the Orient, with their ancient cultures, who have found in these alien forces the promise of a new life.

F. S. Marvin

APPENDIX

As books of reference, I have consulted:

Asia in the xxth century - A. F. Whyte.

Western Races and the World - F. S. Marvin.

The Reawakening of the Orient - Shovel, Trueman, Satter.

The Orient and the Occident - Sir Valentine Chirol.

The Problem of China - B. Russell.

The Religious and Social Problems of the Orient -
M. Anesaki

Mother India - Katherine Mayo.

The Revolt of Asia - Upton Chase.

- and other manuals and periodicals.