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Following his election to Parliament and extensive travels through Asia, George Nathaniel Curzon (1859–1925) published in 1894 this consideration of the present state of Japan, Korea and China within a changing international landscape. Later viceroy of India, Curzon was fascinated by the rich cultural heritage of the Far East, yet he remained a staunch supporter of British imperialism. He explains that the book's purpose is to delve deeper into political, social and economic conditions, rather than present a travel narrative of 'temples, tea-houses and bric-à-brac'. After devoting a substantial section to each country, Curzon closes with 'The Prospect', exploring what he envisages for the future of the whole region. The favourable reception of this title and his 1892 work, *Persia and the Persian Question* (also reissued in the Cambridge Library Collection), highlighted Curzon's diligently acquired knowledge of Asian affairs and how they affected Britain's imperial interests.

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HIS MAJESTY LI HSI, KING OF KOREA

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PROBLEMS
OF
THE FAR EAST

BY THE
HON. GEORGE N. CURZON, M.P.

FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD
AUTHOR OF 'RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA' AND 'PERSIA'

JAPAN—KOREA—CHINA

'And first we must begin with Asia, to which the first place is due, as being the place of the first Men, first Religion, first Cities, Empires, Arts; where the most things mentioned in Scripture were done; the place where Paradise was seated, the Arke rested, the Law was given, and whence the Gospell proceeded; the place which did beare Him in His flesh, that by His Word beareth up all things'

PURCHAS, *His Pilgrimes*

LONDON
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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1894

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TO THOSE
WHO BELIEVE THAT THE BRITISH EMPIRE
IS, UNDER PROVIDENCE, THE GREATEST INSTRUMENT FOR GOOD
THAT THE WORLD HAS SEEN
AND WHO HOLD, WITH THE WRITER, THAT
ITS WORK IN THE FAR EAST IS NOT YET ACCOMPLISHED
THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED

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PREFACE

THE work of which I here publish the first part, though the outcome of two journeys round the world in 1887–8 and in 1892–3, does not pretend to be a book of travel. Rather is it an attempt to examine, in a comparative light, the political, social, and economic conditions of the kingdoms and principalities of the Far East. By this title I signify the countries that lie between India and the Pacific Ocean. They include both the best known and the least known of Oriental nations—Japan and China in the former category; Korea, Tongking, Annam, Cochin China, Cambogia, and Siam in the latter. In respect of race, religion, and habits, Burma should fall within the same class; but since it is now an integral portion of the Indian Empire, it will be purposely excluded from this survey.

The above-mentioned countries have each their special features of climate, scenery, architecture, religion, and life, differentiating them from each other, and still more from the rest of the world. To the traveller these idiosyncrasies cannot fail to appeal; nor can he be indifferent to the atmosphere of romance in which those fanciful regions, when once he has

left them, appear ever afterwards to float. To such æsthetic impressions I would profess no invulnerability; and the descriptions which will be found in these pages of the capitals of Korea and China, and of other scenes, will prove the completeness of my occasional surrender. On the whole, however, I have relegated these aspects of my journeys to the background, and have preferred to discuss the problems, perhaps less superficially interesting, but incomparably more important, and vastly more abstruse, which are suggested by the national character, resources, and organisation of those countries as affected by their intercourse with foreign or Western Powers. What is the part which they are now playing, or are capable of playing, on the international stage? What is the political future that may, without foolhardiness of prediction, be anticipated for the peoples and lands of the Far East?

In preparing and comparing my observations upon these countries, I very early found that to attempt to deal with the political features of eight different States within the compass of a single volume could only be achieved at the expense both of unity and exactitude—a conviction which was fortified by the natural subdivision of my subject into a twofold heading. Japan, Korea, and China suggest a number of problems, substantially similar if not actually interconnected. Their maritime outlook is towards the Pacific Ocean. The remaining countries of the Far East are in a different stage of evolution; and partly owing to their intrinsic weakness, partly to the degree

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in which they have already been brought under European control, illustrate a different argument. They are also alike in turning a backward gaze upon the Indian Seas. Following this natural classification, I have confined the present volume to the examination of the three first-mentioned States, reserving for a future work the territories of the Indo-Chinese peninsula.

In the case of Japan I must confess to having departed widely from the accepted model of treatment. There will be found nothing in these pages of the Japan of temples, tea-houses, and bric-à-brac—that infinitesimal segment of the national existence which the traveller is so prone to mistake for the whole, and by doing which he fills the educated Japanese with such unspeakable indignation. I have been more interested in the efforts of a nation, still in pupillage, to assume the manners of the full-grown man, in the constitutional struggles through which Japan is passing, in her relations with foreign Powers, and in the future that awaits her immense ambitions.

Similarly in China I have been more concerned with the internal structure of that mysterious archaism, with the policy of its rulers, the strength or weakness of its resources, and with the pulse that throbs so defiantly beneath the bosom of its amazing people, than with the sights and scenes of Treaty Ports, or the superficial features of native existence. In Korea I hope that I may claim in some respects to break almost new ground. In the few and singularly inadequate accounts of that kingdom that have

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appeared in Europe, and that have left it, next to Tibet, the least known part of Asia, no serious endeavour has been made to examine its political status—a question of great complexity and of international importance—or to determine its bearing upon surrounding States; and I doubt whether to most persons at home Korea is known except as a land of white clothes and black hats. If a disproportionate space may appear to have been allotted to its treatment, as compared with that of China and Japan, it will be because of an intrinsic novelty that is not yet exhausted, and of a general ignorance that in view of present events deserves to be appeased.

If, in spite of a good deal of descriptive matter that may perhaps interest or assist both the reader and the traveller, it be objected that the trail of politics is over all this work, I answer that such is the principal claim that I venture to make for it. Other writers of great ability have recorded their impressions of the social or artistic sides of Eastern life. But, in their interest in the governed, they have too frequently forgotten the government; nor does the photograph of a fleeting moment lend much assistance to the forecast of a wider future. For myself, in essaying this more ambitious task, I can honestly disclaim, on the several occasions when I have travelled in the East, any *a priori* prepossession for this or prejudice against that people. I have no anterior theory to support, and no party interest, unless the British Empire be a party interest, to serve. But to my vision all the nations of the East seem to group themselves as sec-

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tions or parts, of varying age and utility, in the most wonderful piece of natural and human mechanism that the world now presents, namely, the political evolution of the Asiatic Continent. What function is fulfilled by each in the movement of this vast machine, how far they individually retard its progress or contribute to the collective thunder of its wheels, is to me the most absorbing of problems. What will become of this great fabric in the future, whether its minor atoms will break up and split asunder, thereby adding to the already formidable strain upon the larger units, whether the slow heart of the East will still continue to palpitate beneath the superimposed restraints of Western force or example, or whether as has been predicted, some tremendous cataclysm may be expected, in which the tide of human conquest shall once more be rolled back from East to West, are speculations to the solution of which I have no fonder wish than to subscribe my humble quota of knowledge.

Finally, these volumes are part of that scheme of work, now nearly half realised, which ten years ago I first set before myself in the examination of the different aspects of the Asiatic problem. What I have already endeavoured to do for Russia in Central Asia, and for Persia, or the countries on this side of India, *i.e.* the Near East—what I hope to be able to do hereafter for two other little-known Asiatic regions, directly bordering upon India, *i.e.* the Central East—I attempt to do in this volume, and in that which will follow it, for the countries lying

beyond India, *i.e.* the Far East. As I proceed with this undertaking, the true fulcrum of Asiatic dominion seems to me increasingly to lie in the Empire of Hindustan. The secret of the mastery of the world, is, if only they knew it, in the possession of the British people.

No Englishman need grudge the splendid achievements and possessions of the mighty Power whose hand is outstretched over the entire north of Asia, from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific. He need not be jealous of the new-born Asiatic zeal of our next-door neighbour in Europe. He may respect alike the hoary pride of China, and the impetuous exuberance of renascent Japan. But he will find that the best hope of salvation for the old and moribund in Asia, the wisest lessons for the emancipated and new, are still to be derived from the ascendancy of British character, and under the shelter, where so required, of British dominion. If in the slightest degree I succeed in bringing home this conviction to the minds of my countrymen at home, I shall never regret the years of travel and of writing which I have devoted and hope still to devote to this congenial task.

My sincere thanks are due, for revision or advice in different parts of this work, to Mr. Cecil Spring-Rice, of H. B. M.'s Diplomatic Service, the delightful companion of my later journeys; to Mr. W. C. Hillier, late Consul-General in Korea; and to Mr. J. N. Jordan, of the British Legation at Peking.

GEORGE N. CURZON.

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