

**EASTERN PROBLEMS
AT THE CLOSE OF THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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Eastern Problems at the Close of the Eighteenth Century by Alfred L. P. Dennis

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE history of the world, in its largest aspect, is the history of the intercourse between East and West. This intercourse has been potent in many important directions; in affairs of race, religion, and trade, the vital relation between Asia and Europe has either created or solved difficult problems in human existence. It has also been continuous, and though there have been years when this interchange has seemed of small effect, the true interpretation of world history can be given only when the struggle between Orient and Occident is recognized as an ever present factor. Then the simplest events of daily life in regions where the forces of two civilizations have joined battle for dominion become significant of great issues. The struggle is, furthermore, a signal example of the unity of history; older than historical chronicles, the contest touches the lives of men and nations to-day as it did when Jason sailed in search of the Golden Fleece, or when the champions of Greece crossed over to Asia in pursuit of Helen.

This conflict between East and West is an essential part of the thought and life of the ancient world. The Homeric epic derives from it; it is embodied in the story of Zeus and Europa, who is shown as the daughter of an Asiatic king; it is the inspiration of Herodotus and Xenophon; Marathon, Salamis, and Platea tell of the antagonism of two continents. The struggle between Hellas and Persia is the first

historic expression of that antagonism; the story of that conflict is the first chapter in the history of the Eastern Question, and the lasting glory of Alexander is that he levelled the ground for Western institutions in the border lands of Asia, and marked the flood-tide of European influence in the Orient. But even in his lifetime and with his consent the forces of the East made known their conservative strength, and in three centuries pushed the focal point of the struggle back even to Epirus. For the place of Actium among the world's great battles is only half realized unless the stake of empire between the opponents is truly estimated. Rome, as the later champion of the West, the shield and sword of Europe, fought in Antony the Asiatic peril and a leader inspired by an Orientalism which would have made Egypt the ruler of both worlds. Virgil and Horace became the poet apostles of a Roman empire which should wage war against a despot about whom were grouped the forces of the East from Arabia, India, and "*ultima Bactria*." The victory of the West, and the epochal day when the entrance of Egypt into the empire transformed the idea of Roman dominion, gave clear title to a high calling in the mind of the Roman people. The feeling of the later republic became conviction of duty in the heart of Augustus, and he dreamed to make of himself an Alexander. Thus the march of the Roman legions along the road of the "Great King" lifted the affairs of Asia Minor, the Armenian Question, the battles against the Parthians on the Euphrates frontier, to a position of world importance in the second phase of the Eastern Question. In the place of Hellas and Persia stood Rome and Parthia. For whatever meaning the expansion and the fall of the Roman Empire held for the people of western Europe, the fate of the eastern imperial frontier was pregnant for all the world. That border line became the defence of a Europe unprepared to meet the threat of Asiatic dominion. The victory of Tours was won against a mere flanking party; the brunt of the battle against Asia was borne by a much maligned

state, which for centuries held in check the forces of a civilization whose power was growing, while that of Byzantium was waning before the double attack of the untiring East and the ungrateful West. The leadership of the Orient was at first given to the rulers of Iran, later to the Semitic tribes of Arabia breathing the inspiration of an unshaken religious faith, and finally to Turanian peoples from the heart of Asia; their attack was the manifestation of forces which governed half the world, and with which modern Europe has not yet fully reckoned.

In the days of Alexander Europe had camped on the Indus; fifteen centuries later she was forced to be content with Acre and parts of Asia Minor; and before two thousand years had passed she was compelled to draw her line of defence against Asiatic conquest under the walls of Vienna. Since that day the decline of Ottoman power and the advance of commercial crusaders from Europe have defined the Eastern Question of modern history in terms familiar to all. In the narrower definition, it is the problem of the succession to the empire at Constantinople, that is, the Balkan peninsula, the Levant, and those provinces of Asia which drain into the Black, Ægean, and Mediterranean seas. As such this question is only the application to a specific geographical field, and to particular peoples, of Eastern and Western forces which are in conflict throughout Asia.

In the past the line between Europe and Asia was clearly drawn. Over against the static East, subjective in thought and theocratic in rule, stood the dynamic West, objective in its ideals and democratic in its political tendency; the relation of the two continents, whether in peace or war, was simple. But to-day the West is no longer all Roman: the nationalism of the Occident has found its own hemisphere too small, and is trying to find an answer to its own industrial problems on an alien soil; the battle of Slav and Teuton and Latin is to be fought out in a strange land; and the conditions of these minor

struggles are thus modified. The rulers of Asia are called to readjust the balance of power in a fight essentially local, between one or another of the powers of Europe or America ; and the Armageddon of Orient and Occident is set for an unknown day. The result is that the oldest Eastern Question, that which centres at Constantinople, has companion problems in Egypt, Persia, Central Asia, and China. They are all similar and all go to make the problem of Asia, of which each is at once a phase and a microcosm. The problem of Asia being near the heart of world history, the progress of Western economic and political questions to an Asiatic and Oceanic stage evolves world politics ; and in Asia these politics deal with issues between West and East which block the road to imperial expansion throughout the Orient.

It is, therefore, as parts of a world-problem that colonial affairs in Asia and the Turkish Question reveal their true meaning ; nor is this a new thing, for the Eastern Question, to use the conventional term for the Turkish Question, is an old force in history. It has been neglected, its influence discounted, and even its existence denied by local historians in the West, who write of the German Reformation with scarce a word about Turkish armies, and who tell of the rise of France to the leadership of Europe, but say little of the alliance of the "Most Christian King" and the "Grand Seigneur." Yet there is no fundamental difference in the Eastern Question of the fifteenth and twentieth centuries ; then as now the Ottoman power profited by the jealousies of Western states, intent upon gaining economic advantage in the trade of the East ; for earlier still, geography, the great constant in politics, had determined the true value of Constantinople as an imperial city, and of Egypt as *forum utrique orbi*. Indeed, one object of this monograph is to insist upon the need of a *History of the Eastern Question*, which will tell the rôle of Asia in the life of our own races and states, and will win recognition for the East, the slighted factor in European history. The colonial

expansion of Europe has been described both as an extension of the history of the home countries and as a movement of inherent importance. The real meaning of its history lies in both aspects, and also in the interacting relation of Asia and Europe through its medium. The influence of an Asiatic domain, which is itself subject to Asiatic tradition and history, upon the life and ideals of its Western parent or governor, cannot be lightly estimated. The plan of our investigation, therefore, is based on these thoughts. It does not include the history of certain Asiatic countries at a given period, nor an account of political events in either hemisphere: it is rather an attempt to discover the conditions which governed colonial affairs and the Eastern Question in the closing years of the eighteenth century, and to measure the influence which these extra-European problems exerted in a period of stress when the storm centre is believed to have been in western Europe, and to observe the evolution of Asiatic questions during that period. The story of the French Revolution and of Napoleon Bonaparte has been told so often that the choice of that period for study may seem a mistake. Yet it gives just the situation with which to test the claim of the importance and significance of Asia. The events are well known, little new material is available, and no startling interpretation is to be dreaded. The view usually taken by students of the Eastern Question is that the Napoleonic period was comparatively barren of results in the evolution of that problem, and that held by some students of Western history is that the colonies occupied a minor place in the great European struggle, and that though Napoleon's dreams might be of the Orient, his politics dealt only with European affairs. If, therefore, the influence of Asia in Europe, and the development of her problems, can be shown to have been appreciable in a period so hostile, those who support the plea for recognition of the East may find encouragement.

Only the preliminary chapters of this investigation appear at present in a pamphlet for use as a dissertation for the