

A KEY TO THE ORIENT

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A Key to the Orient by Clapham Pennington

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CLAPHAM PENNINGTON

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By

Mrs. Clapham Pennington

Mrs. Margaret C. Pennington

Philadelphia:

JOHN J. McVEY.



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE Orient to most people of the Occident is a sealed book.

Works there are indeed, and by the greatest scholars, on the Oriental Religions; and others, though very few, of the history of oriental lands; and books of oriental travels describing the general aspect of the countries, the outside of the houses, the scenes in the streets, but leaving the inside life, the real thought and feeling of the people, dark.

But our people are not interested. The resignation and charmed calm of the Orient are too unlike the restless discontent and perpetual motion of the Occident.

The West does not understand the East, and does not wish or try to understand.

Author's Preface

But at the same time, she criticises her, and severely, judging everything by her own standards, making no allowance for difference of nature, custom, tradition, thought, and feeling, but saying it is so here, and it must be so there.

The English drink pale ale in India, saying it suits in England, therefore it must suit here. Carlsbad and Vichy tell the end of the tale, and many an Indian cemetery besides; and as long as the West judges the East by herself, she will be always in the wrong.

It is my hope in this little book to try and make people take interest in the East, and think of it as it really is. This is an humble effort, but perhaps it will lead others to study for themselves.

And one thing I can claim. I know the real life of the East, not as one knows it who walks in the streets, but as one who has been behind the lattices.

Most oriental travellers are men, and

Author's Preface

therefore the inside life is absolutely closed to them ; and they would do better to pass it over in silence, for in relating from hearsay they make many mistakes.

And of the women who at present give us accounts of the East, the majority are missionaries, and with all due respect, their view of oriental life is not always one which other people would take, and liable to be, one may say, made to order.

I know the inside life of the East, first, from oriental literature, and then from what I have seen, for I have been most fortunate in having had access to oriental homes from the highest to the lowest.

I love to tell of what I have seen, and I could tell much more ; but unless one enters into the thought and feeling of the East one hardly understands, and I do not wish to be misunderstood.

We must learn, first, that things are not the same everywhere. Musk in our own country is a vulgar and objectionable per-

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fume. But under skies to which ours are pale, and amid colors beside which ours are faded, with the jewels and the tinsel of the Orient, musk is sweet.

And so with all things. But I have found a pleasure so intense in my oriental studies and my oriental experiences that I want to share it with other people. There are many books far beyond mine which they may read, if they can be persuaded. There is much for them to see and hear, many pleasures and surprises in store for them.

But I will hope that for some at least my little book may be—a key to the Orient.

MARGARET PENNINGTON.