Review: An Asian Problem

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journey, are very interesting and excite a desire to learn more of what was actually seen at this present time when changes are occurring throughout the country.

Of the opium question Lord Ronaldshay treats at some length. While acknowledging that towards the suppression of opium more has been achieved than was to be expected, he lays stress on the strength of the forces in China which are impeding the execution of the reform, and his own experience certainly proves that the cultivation of opium is being carried on in districts where officially it is reported to have been extinguished. He also believes in the existence of a party which desires the extinction of the foreign opium trade solely in the interest of native opium. The solution of the question must doubtless rest with the people, without whose co-operation the Government is almost as powerless as that of sixty years ago to effect a reform which touches the purses of such a large section of the population, not only official, but also commercial and agricultural.

Though the blood is beginning to move in the veins of China, it is a relief to turn from the contemplation of that country to Japan. In spite of the burden of present taxation, the industrial and commercial activity is depicted as immense, and only surpassed by that of the naval department, even under a restricted programme. With 12 battleships, 12 armoured and 52 other cruisers, 55 destroyers, and 78 torpedo boats, Japan has twice the tonnage and in battleships twice the number of the vessels with which she faced Russia. The construction of battleships of 20,800 tons and cruisers of 18,400 tons, with an unusual number of 12-inch guns, is being hastened to completion. Lord Ronaldshay's essays on these and similar questions are thoroughly up to date and full of statistics. The only side of Japanese activity which is left untouched is the army.

With Japan's work in Korea and Manchuria the author concludes his review of the Far East. The chapters on Korea contain the history of that unhappy country since 1904. In the chapter on Manchuria, the prominent place is of course occupied by the railway questions with China, and Japan's attitude as regards the open door to trade. As to the latter point, the charge of failure to observe her promise is held by the author to be not proven.

W. R. C.

AN ASIAN PROBLEM.

'The Pulse of Asia: a Journey in Central Asia illustrating the Geographic Basis of History.' By Ellsworth Huntington. London: Constable. 1907. *Maps and Illustrations*. 14s. net.

Is there a climatic pulse in Asia? a definite and measurable recurrence of certain phases of climate, responsive, possibly, to those laws of nature which regulate the Earth's motion in space? Mr. Huntington thinks there is, and he has spent two years in collecting evidence thereof by means of careful and painstaking observations in Central Asian regions. He is fully impressed with the fact that one of the chief factors in determining the course of history is geography, and that among geographic forces changes of climate have been the most potent. So he commences with a careful description of the physical features of five great Asiatic basins—Kashmir, Lop, Turfan, Seistan, and the Aralo-Caspian depression, noting with due emphasis the influence of infinitely varied physical environment on the habits, thought, and character of their inhabitants. He then, with the aid of a well-constructed map which leaves little to be desired in point of clearness, illustrates the change which has occurred in the great Lop basin within the last two thousand years due to the process of desiccation and its consequent results as regards the social life and character of the people. No one will dispute such evidence. It has lately received remarkable confirmation from the observations

of Dr. Stein, whose more elaborate and scientifically constructed maps will be of immense service in the elucidation of Central Asian problems such as these. Nor will any student of Asiatic history question the validity of the arguments which support the proposition (not a very new one) that it was the effect of climatic changes, probably representing deficient rainfall, that, under the eternal law of necessity for existence, first set Central Asian hordes moving from their overcrowded valleys, displacing surrounding tribes and spreading in ever-widening waves of human emigration to the west and the south. At the particular period of the world's history when these tremendous human movements were most active, *i.e.* about two thousand years ago, Europe seems to have been undergoing a climatic change which we might say was "for the better." It was growing warmer and moister, and consequently more attractive to the hardy barbarian than his own sterile wastes. Thus are we relieved from a natural apprehension lest the periods of desiccation should be synchronous over the whole habitable globe. The effect of the drying up of water-supply on a pastoral community is well illustrated by Mr. Huntington when he points out that the difference between, say, 13 inches of annual rainfall and half that amount is equivalent to the difference in food-supply of fifteen sheep or of one; but he denies that the failure of moisture is to be attributed generally to deforestation, the actual amount of rainfall not being influenced by forest growth, but only its distribution. These climatic changes are said to occur in cycles, and Mr. Huntington adopts the theory that just as geological investigation has established recurrent glacial epochs at one end of the scale, and Bruckner has proved the existence of certain recurrent climatic phenomena in periods of thirty-six years at the other end, so we may look for an intermediate pulsation, the beats of which are to be reckoned by thousands of years, which will be coincident with regular fluctuations of rainfall and temperature throughout the world. It may be so, but surely it requires the evidence of a recurrent period of prosperity in Central Asia to prove it. We can only hope that the world is approaching that period in its history at which the pendulum is about to swing back. With the almost universal evidence of gradually increasing desiccation through the continents of Asia and America (especially South America), and similar indications in Western Africa and Northern Europe, we see at present no evidence of an equivalent increase of moisture to counterbalance the deficiency anywhere. Is there really a universal pulse—or are we drifting, like Mars, into eternal sterility? If the perusal of Mr. Huntington's book has not left us fully convinced of the truth of his theory, it has at least left an impression of most delightful reading. It is interesting from the first page to the last—in short, it is one of the best of the many books of Central Asian travelling that have ever been written.

T. H. H.

AFRICA.

THE CONGO BASIN.

'George Grenfell and the Congo.' By Sir Harry Johnston, K.C.B., D.Sc., etc. 2 vols., 496 *Illustrations*, and 14 *Maps*. Hutchinson. 1908. xxiv. + 990 pp. 30s. *net*.

This leading title is followed by a very long sub-title, which, in old-fashioned style, fills the whole of a page, and conveys a somewhat adequate idea of the comprehensive character of the author's truly encyclopædic work. From it the reader will at once learn that he will here find, not only an ample account of the missionary labours and geographical explorations of the "Central African Livingstone," but also some most attractive essays on a multiplicity of topics directly or indirectly connected with the main subject. Thus, with Congoland are included the neighbouring Cameroons and Fernando Pô, besides a detailed history