

IN THE HEART OF ASIA

BY

LIEUT.-COLONEL P. T. ETHERTON

(INDIAN ARMY)

AUTHOR OF 'ACROSS THE ROOF OF THE WORLD'

*Christie Gidley
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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY FATHER

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended to form the record of several years spent in Central Asia, where, in my capacity as His Majesty's Consul-General and Political Resident in Chinese Turkistan, I had opportunities of studying various questions of political, economic, and commercial importance.

Central Asia is extending its horizon, and it may in the near future attain a prominence in the economic world to which its potentialities and great mineral resources so rightly entitle it. A wide field for ethnographical research is also opened up, for from it came the hordes that brought about the fall of Graeco-Persian civilisation, from the Mongolian steppes issued devastating hosts, whilst Central Asia was the base from which operated warring tribes and races that spread from the highlands of Asia to the rich and distant lands of Western Europe. Asiatic influence is still apparent in Europe; the greater part of Spain was formerly subject to Asiatic dominion, and it is established in Northern Africa amongst the Moors both by religion and civilisation.

Central Asia can be regarded as a cradle of the human race, although there is now only a slight evidence of the glory that followed in the wake of successive conquerors. Of progress, both material

and moral, there has been little, and it is only in the Far East that an advance towards the democratic ideals of the West has been made.

In so far as economic development is concerned, Central Asia and China will be a centre, and one that offers great scope. Vast areas await development; the Gobi Desert is a plateau capable of unlimited cultivation, and both here and elsewhere within the area in question communications will open up areas for development out of all proportion to their present status. With regard to China, she has been hampered by internal difficulties, and in a country that is mainly agricultural we have the essentials requisite to economic and agricultural prosperity.

In brief, therefore, Central Asia affords much material, from whatever aspect it is regarded, and presents problems of far-reaching interest and import.

In the preparation of this book I desire to record my sense of gratitude to Miss Ella Hepworth Dixon, the distinguished writer and critic, for much valuable help; and to Miss Estelle Watson for the skilled assistance she afforded me in the preparation of the map. I am also grateful to Dr. Eric Chipp for his untiring zeal and energy in reading through the proofs with me, and for much useful criticism and advice so readily accorded.

P. T. ETHERTON.

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