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EASTERN ART & LITERATURE

By

SIR E. DENISON ROSS

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EASTERN ART AND LITERATURE

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHINA, INDIA, ARABIA, AND PERSIA

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This book is based on lectures delivered for the British Broadcasting Corporation. The original lectures have been considerably elaborated and much new matter added.

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EASTERN ART AND LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

EAST AND WEST

It is not easy to define exactly what we mean by "East" and "West," although the belief in some fundamental distinction is instilled into us all from our earliest days. Purely geographically the definite line is the narrow Bosphorus. Metaphorically we have become familiar with the expression "East of Suez," but neither of these ideas conveys a true indication of such differences as may exist. This side of the Bosphorus gives us the merging of races between whom it is hard to draw a definite line, except under the head of religion. "East of Suez," in speaking of pre-Christian days, would include all the great civilisations of the world except Athens, and would exclude Africa; but when we speak of "Oriental peoples" we know quite clearly what we mean, and we sum up in that single phrase a series of nationalities differing from one another far more essentially than any given races in Europe.

The nearest approach to the removal of this distinction between East and West is to be found in the action of Mustafa Kemal, the President of the Turkish

Republic, who, by commanding the adoption of the European hat, has, as it were, joined the two continents by filling up the Bosphorus with fezes!

Practically the whole of Europe is established on a single model, having a common religion and very similar habits. Among the Oriental races we include not merely the adherents of many totally distinct religions, but races that are so different in appearance one from another that the merest tyro in Anthropology would seldom err in allocating an individual to his country. Nothing could be less like a Bedouin than a Dravidian from Southern India or a Mongol from Northern China. Nevertheless, we have been taught to classify these many nations under one generic term. Another fallacious expression is that of "the Unchanging East." Students of Oriental history would be no more inclined to apply the term "unchanging" to any of the great nations of the East than to Europe, or to any European country for that matter. If we take China as an example, we see a country governed by a long series of dynasties, usually totally unconnected one with another, and with each new dynasty introducing fundamental changes of habit and custom, as, for example, the adoption of the pigtail by the late Manchu dynasty and the abolition of it by the Republic. What can be truly said of certain Eastern nationalities is that they are "enduring," and that the people possess a latent energy, which has preserved them from the loss of their characteristic identity. I confess it is not quite so simple to account for the sudden conversion of the Japanese to modern science, in contrast to the slowness of the Chinese to move in this direction. The standing of Japan among the

nations of the world is distinct from that of any of the other Asiatic countries. She owes this difference to a number of obvious factors; first, to the semi-isolation due to her extensive sea-border; secondly, to her position in an out-of-the-way corner of habitable Asia; and thirdly, to a continual devotion to a single dynasty. Thanks to these three circumstances, Japan has been free both from the aggression of her neighbours and from internal upheavals of a lasting character. If we consider the other great countries of the Oriental world, we see at once that none of them has enjoyed similar immunity. We shall understand better the opportunities which Japan has enjoyed in becoming a self-conscious entity if we consider the history of such countries as India, Persia, and Asiatic Turkey. In the case of India, we must go back to semi-mythical heroic times to find anything approaching a national unity; and from such purely legendary history we must pass to the rule of the Delhi Emperors who, though foreigners, succeeded in welding together the whole of Northern India; but it was not until the whole of India came under British rule that a national Indian spirit was able to find a voice. Persia has preserved in a remarkable manner, seeing the vicissitudes of her story, a national entity, but her geographical position has made her in all times the prey of conquerors, and one feels that had it not been for her language, which was fixed for all time by her great writers in the tenth century, and her undying traditions of the pre-Islamic dynasties, it would have been impossible for her to survive. She is to-day under a heavy cloud of obscurity—thanks more to international jealousies than to any other cause—but even

now she has a political status, which she owes very largely to the brilliance of the Safavi kings, who ruled during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While these kings were on the throne, the grand Sophi was a man to be reckoned with by the Court of St. James, and the embassies of the brothers Shirley no doubt had a lasting influence on our foreign policy. Persia, like Tibet and Abyssinia, owes her immunity from dissolution partly to the very fact that she has refused to progress except in her own way.

Now, with regard to the "mentality" of various Eastern peoples, I take it to be merely a bald excuse, which has become a convention, when Englishmen say that they do not understand this, that, or the other representative of an Oriental race. My opinion is that except for a great difference in habits of life and social customs, due very largely to a difference of climate and religion, it is as easy to enjoy friendly intercourse with men from the East as with one of our own fellow-countrymen, and I am convinced that the mental attitude of the latter—did we know as much about him as he himself knows—would cause us as much surprise as the outlook on life of the so-called "Oriental." The only fundamental and radical difference that I have been able to discover in any particular people is the attitude of the Hindus towards caste, which is the concomitant of their religious philosophy. How that has survived so persistently to this day is one of the most baffling problems. I would therefore merely regard the distinction we make between East and West as a recognition of that mutual ignorance which the people of Europe and the various peoples of the East share and which is in our time being rapidly

reduced, but which can only be finally removed when both parties have taken more trouble to study each other. We must remember how very recent, comparatively speaking, are all efforts on the part of Europeans to understand the East, and how practically non-existent are any efforts on the part of the East to understand the West. The early merchants did not attempt to study the history or religion of the people among whom they were thrown. On the other hand, it is only fair to recognise that in the early days of the East India Company, the young soldier probably took more trouble to understand the manners and customs of India than his modern representative.

It is to the missionaries—notably to the brave and learned Jesuits of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their successors to-day of all denominations—that the West owes its knowledge, small enough even now, of India, China, and so forth. Until recent times the East has never brought anything to the West—save in the shape of an armed invasion—with the result that the West has been obliged to fetch all Oriental commodities, whether literary or commercial, for itself. No Eastern prophet ever came to Europe with sacred books. I have often wondered what might have been the result if the missionaries, in addition to the Scriptures, had carried with them to China the Greek philosophers.

There have been during the last two centuries many movements in Europe to make better known the history, but more especially the literature, of the East to Western readers, but such movements until quite recent times have had in view rather the gratifying of curiosity than the enlightenment of the public. A

great mass of the resultant literature has, of course, been frankly polemical, but apart from this, where the attitude was friendly, the interest has been what I might call a "Museum" interest. There has been no impartial attempt to treat the literary and artistic output of the world as a unity. Fundamentally there is nothing more alien to our traditions in the writings of the Chinese philosophers or Indian dramatists than in those of Aristotle or Euripides; but thanks to the unique position which the Classics have always held in European education we have become so familiar with Greek culture that we have lost all consciousness of its foreignness.

Most of us, if suddenly transported to the sculpture galleries of the British Museum, would be able to tell at a glance whether we were standing in the midst of Egyptian, Assyrian, or Greek works of art. Every schoolchild probably knows an Egyptian statue when he sees one. My principal object in this book is to examine some of the salient characteristics in Art and Poetry which enable us to appreciate the differences not only between the East and West, but also between the various cultured races of Asia.

I wish to carry my readers beyond this preliminary stage of comparative study, to make museums more interesting to them, and to rouse their curiosity in Oriental literature. I shall not attempt to give a general survey of Oriental culture, but merely to indicate some of the more striking features which characterise the art and literature of the East, and, in so doing, I shall deal more with Literature than with Art.

The four countries of which I propose to speak are

China, India, Arabia, and Persia, and these I have chosen because they are representative of four distinct types of culture, and have, moreover, this in common, that they possess both an ancient and a modern history. These countries are associated in the mind of the public with certain types and products; China with porcelain, silk, tea, and opium; India with elephants, tigers, and fakeers; Persia with carpets and gardens; and Arabia with *shaykhs*, Bedouins, camels, and so forth. It is my pious wish that some of those who read this book may, as a result, have a wider range of associations in regard to each of these countries.

One characteristic common to the whole East is its conservative love of convention, which confines the art and poetry of each country within prescribed limits—limits in regard to both subject-matter and treatment. Great artists and writers set the mark of their style on their creations, but they usually adhere strictly to the conventions of their time and country.

I have to make such frequent use of this word "convention," that it is my duty to offer a definition of the word. An art is conventional when it is not purely natural or spontaneous. A convention is a practice based on common agreement or public approval. What we call tradition must, at one time, have been original and natural; convention, then, is following tradition after it has ceased to be natural. Let us take one modern example; when railway-carriages were first invented and accommodation had to be provided for passengers, the stage-coach was taken as the model, with its door between two windows. It took railways nearly one hundred years

to get rid of the stage-coach tradition, even after the carriages had grown to a great length, and provide doors at either end. Most inventions—other than those connected with science—represent a breaking away from tradition. Style in art and literature is the individual note struck by the artist within the limits of contemporary convention; hence, the truth of the saying: *Le style c'est l'homme.*

Egypt perhaps offers the most familiar example of artistic conservatism, and no race was more slavishly bound by such conventions. This did not prevent the Egyptians being among the greatest artists of all time. Their chief characteristics were monumentality and uniformity of type. Except for one brief period in their long history, their artists never aimed at variety, though the creations of that period—the fourteenth century B.C.—prove that they were capable of the most realistic work. Everyone is now familiar with the head of Nefertiti, which has been so faithfully reproduced from the original, which is in Berlin. This is only one of the many beautiful and living portraits which were found in the *atelier* of Amarna.

So strong is this conservative spirit in the East that even when one nation copied a type from another, the borrower invariably set his stamp on his copies, and gave them a new character, as happened, for example, when the Chinese began to take Greek gods as models for their Buddhist statues, as has been clearly demonstrated by the discoveries in Chinese Turkestan.

That sculptures and buildings should have so many points of similarity all the world over is quite natural, in view of the identity of the sculptor's models and the practical purpose for which temples and houses

were built; and yet even in the reproduction of the human form, the Hindus departed from the models and chose to express the superiority of their gods over men, by endowing them with many heads and arms, wasplike waists, and other abnormalities which shock the eye that has only been accustomed to normal sculpture. The Chinese, on the other hand, never departed from the normal in portraying the human form, though they allowed free play to phantasy when dealing with animals—as in the case of the famous Chinese dragon. The demarcation of the Oriental and the Occidental in poetry is somewhat peculiar; for although there is a great difference between the poetry of the Indians, the Arabs, and the Chinese, there is a similarity in the poetry of the Indians and the Persians with that of the West; notably in the epic, a form common to all the Indo-Germanians, but unknown to the Arabs and the Chinese. The Persian epic, however, having first come into existence in post-Islamic times, has lost much of the Indo-Germanic spirit, and outside the epic the poetic forms of the Persians are developed on distinct and original lines.

The dissimilarity between East and West is a comparatively recent manifestation, and music offers a very curious example of such divergence in the process. We all know that harmony in music is of relatively modern origin in Europe, possibly not dating back more than 400 years. Now, the Oriental peoples seem to have no feeling for harmony as we understand it, though they are all fond of music. A thousand years ago there was probably very little difference between the music of Europe and the music of, say, Egypt or Syria, except, of course, in style and scale; the basic principle was

the same—namely, melody with a rhythmic but not an harmonic accompaniment.

Now, all human brains and senses are more or less alike in formation and capacity, but whereas harmony in music has long been second nature and instinct among the people of Europe (excepting, of course, with the definitely unmusical), it has never made an appeal to Orientals; for, had it done so, it would have been adopted by them; whereas, although one may hear a number of good performers of European music among Indians and Chinese (they are usually singers or violinists), there seems to be no sign that harmony will ever captivate the East as it has captivated the West. And whereas, in the West, music is always in a condition of change, in the East, as far as we can tell, musical style is stationary. This, I think, goes to prove that the East once was—even if it no longer is—far more conservative than the West. On the other hand, it may be doubted whether this over-harmonising, which is to-day represented by Jazz, may not cause music to degenerate into mere noise. It is all the more remarkable that harmony should be a monopoly of any group of mankind, seeing that it is based on scientific laws.

It is these conventions at the back of all arts and literatures that make them easily distinguishable from one another. Most of the languages spoken in Europe belong to one and the same family, the Indo-European; and to this same family belong the language of Persia and most of the languages of India. The science of comparative philology, after tracing the words used by these peoples back to their earliest Indian form, has shown the laws which governed the manifold changes

undergone by letters and groups of letters at different stages in different countries. These laws go to prove that there is something in the nature of each people which causes them to modify their speech in a manner peculiar to themselves. We have only to consider the total difference in sound and appearance of French, Italian, and Spanish, which all grew out of spoken Latin. The example of language shows how people of identical stock, residing in adjoining countries, develop an individuality of their own in the matter of speech, and there must be similar laws which have governed the artistic and literary development of all nations, though it is not possible to define them, because we cannot, as in the case of languages, trace their culture back to its earliest form. How much more, then, may we expect to find individuality displayed by the great nations of Asia, whose cultures seem to have had independent origins.

I would like here to say a few words on the subject of language study as a recreation. Of the practical advantages of learning languages it is surely needless to say anything. I would only lay stress on the delights of this pursuit. In the case of Oriental languages, there is the added fascination of learning a new form of writing. One should never be deterred by the thought that one cannot *master* anything so utterly strange as Chinese or Arabic. Thousands of people enjoy tennis who never hope to play at Wimbledon. Even the elementary study of an Oriental language gives a fresh expansion to the brain, and, if some advance is made, visions of new worlds are conjured up. I would especially commend the study of pictorial scripts like those of Chinese and Hieroglyphs. Even if

one only gets a little way, it is fascinating to try and puzzle out, say, the writing on Cleopatra's Needle or on a Chinese tea-chest. Grammars are now available at moderate prices for nearly all the languages of the East. It is never too early and never too late to begin the study of any language.

It is becoming daily more difficult to describe or define the differences between East and West; machinery and politics are constantly bringing Europe and Asia closer together, and the nineteenth century has witnessed such fundamental political changes in China, India, and the Near East that it looks as if the separateness of Asia might gradually disappear. There is, however, one factor which is likely always to remain, and that is the difference of climate. Tropical diseases are being rooted out; means have been found to minimise the effect of high temperatures, and mechanical transport has reduced the discomfort of desert travel, but, in spite of all this, the climates of some Asiatic countries are better suited to *contemplation* than to *action*.

Giving all due consideration to heredity, which moulds our features and to some extent our hearts, any climate undoubtedly has an enormous influence on the speech and temperament of people who live under it. Very wonderful changes are also wrought by local environment; we see this brought about even in a few generations in the case of immigrants from one country to another. How often have we known strangers, settled in England, whose sons are hardly to be distinguished from English boys? Nothing could be more American—at least, superficially—than the American who, a generation ago, belonged to Europe.

We must, therefore, take it that the reason for these salient characteristics in art and letters which differentiate the various Oriental nations are primarily due to climate and the soil of their countries, which make them live and move and even see in a particular way.

This being so, it is of great importance for us to try and appreciate these differences, in order, first, better to understand that East with which we are daily being brought into closer contact, and in order, secondly, the better to understand ourselves.

CHAPTER II

CHINESE CULTURE

Because the history of China is so complete and continuous, and because so many discoveries are attributed to her—and with good reason—we are apt to regard China as a very old country. As a matter of fact, she is only a young country in comparison with Egypt, Crete, Hellas, and Mesopotamia. Her own records claim to go back to the third millennium B.C. (but actually there are no positive dates before about 850 B.C.), whereas we can now carry the chronology of Egypt and Mesopotamia with some degree of certainty to 4000 B.C. One of the most remarkable practices which have been common to all the dynasties that have ruled over China is the compilation and preservation of State records. In the cases of Egypt and Babylonia the chronology of kingdoms and dynasties have been worked out by the patient researches of scholars; in the case of China we have twenty-four dynastic histories which provide all the material for a continuous history, which, however, takes us back beyond the realm of pure history into the period of legend. The origin of the Chinese remains shrouded in mystery. The earliest records contain no allusion to any migration into China. Another characteristic, and one closely allied to this love of records, is the love of written literature, which goes back, at any rate, to the time of the composition of the earliest classics. Although there

was a ruler of China in the third century before our era who actually attempted to destroy the old literary monuments, the classics have, by good fortune, been preserved, and we probably have to-day the works of Confucius precisely in the form in which he wrote them. The stereotyped form of the Chinese written language has been a further preservative; for the Chinese do not employ an alphabet, but write all their ideas in separate characters, which were originally pictures or pictograms; the same system was employed both by the Egyptians in their hieroglyphs and by the various Mesopotamian nations in their cuneiform writing. These systems lend themselves far less to change and corruption than alphabets, and although we are apt to regard as antiquated the Chinese method of recording speech in signs, which for the most part no longer bear much resemblance to the original pictures, the Chinese, for their part, regard their own system as infinitely superior to the employment of an alphabet.

The Chinese Language.—Nothing about the Chinese is more peculiar and characteristic than their language, which possesses two features to which we are totally unaccustomed. The first feature is its mode of writing; for Chinese, as has been said above, has no alphabet, but employs only signs to represent both sounds and meanings. These signs, which are called "characters," were originally pictures representing familiar concrete objects like the sun, moon, trees, mountains, birds, horses, doors, hand, ear, eye, and so forth, which all had easily recognisable forms. There is another class of "character," invented to represent abstract ideas such as "above," "below," "middle," and the numerals, which are made of simple vertical

CHINESE WRITING.

SIMPLE CHARACTERS.

OLD PICTURE	MEANING	MODERN CHARACTER
	SUN	日
	TREE	木
	MOUNTAIN	山
	BIRD	鳥
	HORSE	馬
	DOOR	門
	HAND	手
	EAR	耳
	EYE	目
	ABOVE	上
	BELOW	下
	MIDDLE	中

COMPOUND CHARACTERS.

SEPARATE CHARACTERS		MEANING	JOINED CHARACTERS
日	月	BRIGHT	明
女	子	GOOD	好
宀	女	PEACE	安
宀	豕	HOME	家
人	言	TRUTH	信
方		SQUARE	方
方	户	HOUSE	房
方	糸	TO SPIN	紡
方	攵	RELEASE	放

or horizontal strokes. Each sign had, of course, its sound. Such a system naturally had its limitations and could not suffice for the great mass of abstract notions of a cultured people. Moreover, there were scores of concrete words which were incapable of illustration by means of simple pictures, and thus compound characters came to be invented. The sign for "bright" was made up by combining the signs for the sun and the moon. Further compounds were adopted in which the association of two symbols suggested an idea; for example, "good" or "happy" was represented by combining the signs for "wife" and "child"; a woman under a roof represents "peace," while a "home" is represented by a pig under a roof. "Truth" is represented by a man and a word—a man being as good as his word. Characters for varieties of animal and vegetable life are made up of two elements, the one indicating whether it is a tree, a bird, a plant, or a beast; the other giving only the sound, which is borrowed from the sound of this second element when used alone. Thus the sign for a "square" was called *fang;* this sign, used as a sound indicator, when combined with "door," meant "a house"; with "silk," "to spin"; with "to lead"—*i.e.,* into the open space "to release."

The second peculiarity of Chinese is its use of "tones" in the spoken language; that is to say, the same sound may have a variety of meanings according to the way it is sung. For example, the various words with the sound *fang* are not actually pronounced alike, because their "tone" differs, and the Chinese script has no way for indicating these differences, which renders Chinese especially difficult. Thus *fang,* mean-

ing a "square," is pronounced in the first tone, meaning "a home" in the second tone, meaning "to spin" in the third tone, and meaning "to release" in the fourth tone.

But this is not the only reason why Chinese character writing held undisputed sway throughout her history; another reason is, no doubt, the inherent love of beautiful design, which found full scope in the art of caligraphy. The Chinese are, above all things, an artistic people, and their artistic genius reveals itself in a vast variety of forms and mediums. Among their earliest products are those executed in bronze, notably bowls and vases, which in beauty of form and design have a charm and dignity all their own; and it would seem that they were incapable of producing anything that was not the acme of refined taste. The same is true of most of their pottery and porcelain, though not of all; for some of their early clay figures do not reach the highest standards, while the porcelain of the Manchu period is sometimes quite unworthy of its place of origin.

In architecture they show great independence of outside influences, and, in spite of a certain sameness about all Chinese palaces and temples, there is never monotony, and the outlines and proportions always evoke a feeling in the beholder which differs from that produced by other buildings—a sort of Chinese sensation, as it were. The main feature of a Chinese building is its massive roof with its decorative gutters and brilliant glazed tiles. Archways, generally raised as memorials, pagodas, and graceful bridges, are usually made of wood and brick, though marble is sometimes employed with wonderful effect. The same is true of

Japanese architecture, which has so much in common with the Chinese. Dignity combined with delicacy; simplicity with fine finish; originality without eccentricity.

The debt of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist art—both in sculpture and in painting—to classical Hellenic models imported by Alexander and his successors into India is becoming more evident with the progress of our studies in the culture of Central Asia, which has only been revealed to our eyes within recent years. Those graceful figures of the Buddhist Kwan-yin as a goddess resembling Christian Madonnas, sometimes even bearing a child in her arms, may be traced back by clear stages to Kwan-yin as a god, and further back to the Greco-Bactrian Buddhist sculptures, which are direct copies of purely Greek originals made in Northern India. Two Western arts thus meeting in the Far East!

PAINTING.—The art of painting has been practised in China certainly since the seventh century. It may be called the pre-eminent art of China. Either ink or water-colours are employed, and sketches and paintings are usually made on silk. The key-note to Chinese painting is impressionist idealism. The suggestiveness of poetry is aimed at rather than the realism of prose. Shadows are never shown. It is especially in landscapes that the full quality of Chinese impressionism is displayed; the appearance of material solidity is scrupulously avoided; mountains and clouds have special conventional forms, and no attempt is made to preserve true perspective. The Chinese were the first to treat landscape as a thing for its own sake, and one of their favourite forms was the long *makemono*, or

hand-roll, on which the panoramic landscape was revealed to the beholder by a process of unwinding. The forerunner of the cinema!

The Chinese outlook on life is fundamentally different from that of the Hindus. The Chinese are little given to philosophic speculation or to religious mysticism; they have the greatest respect for ethics; Confucianism is not a religion, but an ethical system, on which both their government and their family life are based. They worship their ancestors, respect their parents, and every man desires to have male children, who shall continue the family worship. Though not religious in the ordinary meaning of the word, in their daily lives they are surrounded by semi-religious practices. It was the Buddhist religion that came nearest to being universally adopted by the Chinese, and under the Mongols in the thirteenth century Christianity received much encouragement in high quarters; but there is something in the character of these remarkable and gifted people which sets national custom above belief in any creed, and it may be said that China is both their inheritance and their religion. Filial piety is regarded as the greatest of all virtues. It is the root from which all other virtues grow. Confucius says: "Parents, when dead, should receive sacrifices according to propriety." An ancestral soul is supposed to retain an interest in the affairs of the living family and to be able to influence for good or ill. Such a soul is held to reside in a tablet kept in the house, and offerings of food and drink are made to it. All important happenings in the family are duly and dutifully announced to the ancestors.

Literature.—It is difficult for those who have not

studied the subject to realise the extent and variety of Chinese literature or its continuity. I have already mentioned the plentiful historical records. These annals are supplemented by contemporary documents dealing with the neighbouring and even more distant foreign countries with which the Chinese had been brought into contact. Among the sciences, geography, astronomy, botany, and zoology are all represented by elaborate works suitably illustrated. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century China surpassed any Western country in the mass of literature produced. During the fifteenth century an enormous encyclopædia was produced which occupied eleven thousand volumes. Even the laborious Chinese abandoned the idea of setting this colossal work up in print, and contented themselves with making two copies. One copy was destroyed some time later, and the only other surviving copy was, until the time of the Boxer riots, preserved in Peking, but its home was then burned down and less than one hundred odd volumes were saved from the flames. But the foundation of her literature is in the ancient classics, which formed the sole basis of a good education until quite recently, when the examinations of mandarins were abolished. Some of these classics are, from a Western point of view, very dull and often unintelligible, but the writings of the great moral teachers—Confucius, who lived in the sixth century B.C; Lao-tzŭ, his contemporary; and Mencius, who lived in the fourth—make a universal appeal, and, though couched in phraseology which is utterly different from our way of reasoning, convey truths which can be appreciated as well in the West as in the Far East.

I will quote a few characteristic extracts from the famous Analects of Confucius, though no translation can give any idea of the brevity, conciseness, and polish of the original:

"Someone asked: 'How do you regard the principle of returning good for evil?' The Master said: 'What, then, is to be the return for good? Rather should you return justice for injustice, and good for good.'"

"Pursue the study of virtue as though you could never reach your goal, and were afraid of losing the ground already gained. Do not be afraid to go slowly, only be afraid of standing still. Though in making a mound I should stop when but one more basketful of earth would complete it, the fact remains that I *have* stopped. On the other hand, if, in levelling it to the ground, I advance my work by but one basketful at a time, the fact remains that I *am* advancing."

"We ought to have a wholesome respect for our juniors. Who knows but that by-and-by they may prove themselves equal to the men of to-day? It is only when they reach the age of forty or fifty without distinguishing themselves that we need no longer to be afraid of them."

From the earliest times the Chinese evinced a taste for poetry, and, indeed, one of the earliest classics is the Book of Odes collected by Confucius. These are lyric poems dealing with love and war.

It is difficult to describe the form poetry takes among the Chinese, for it necessitates an understanding of exceedingly complicated rules of rhyme, which are based, not only on the sounds, but also, in later times, on the tone in which those sounds are spoken. Metre, or the number of syllables, becomes in Chinese

the number of words or characters. They have a great predilection for very short poems of a few lines only, into which is condensed a complete picture or idea. There are, of course, longer poems in plenty, but the most characteristic products of the Chinese muse are these minute poems, lyrics, or dirges replete with inner meaning.

The following examples of Chinese poetry, admirably translated by Mr. Arthur Waley, all belong to the period between the seventh and the twelfth centuries:

Who says
That it's by my desire
This separation, this living far from you?
My dress still smells of the lavender you gave:
My hand still holds the letter that you sent.
Round my waist I wear a double sash:
I dream that it binds us both with a same-heart knot.
Did not you know that people hide their love,
Like a flower that seems too precious to be picked?

Tell me now, what should a man want
But to sit alone, sipping his cup of wine?
I should like to have visitors come and discuss philosophy
And not to have the tax-collector coming to collect taxes:
My three sons married into good families
And my five daughters wedded to steady husbands.
Then I could jog through a happy five-score years
And, at the end, need no Paradise.

The hills and rivers of the lowland country
You have made your battle-ground.

How do you suppose the people who live there
Will procure firewood and hay?
Do not let me hear you talking together
About titles and promotions,
For a single general's reputation
Is made out of ten thousand corpses.

Families, when a child is born,
Want it to be intelligent.
I, through intelligence
Having wrecked my whole life,
Only hope the baby will prove
Ignorant and stupid,
Then he will crown a tranquil life
By becoming a Cabinet Minister.

That so many of the poor should suffer from cold what can we do to prevent?
To bring warmth to a single body is not much use.
I wish I had a big rug ten thousand feet long,
Which at one time could cover up every inch of the City.

Lined coat, warm cap, and easy felt slippers
In the little tower, at the low window sitting over the sunken brazier.
Body at rest, heart at peace; no need to rise early.
I wonder if the courtiers at the Western Capital know of these things, or not?

"Those who speak know nothing:
Those who know are silent."

These words as I am told
Were spoken by Lao-tzŭ.
If we are to believe that Lao-tzŭ
Was himself *one who knew,*
How comes it that he wrote a book
Of five thousand words?

CHAPTER III

INDIAN CULTURE

In dealing with Indian culture we encounter three different types, based on the three great religions which have held sway in India and have given India her great monuments and her arts: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. This list does not, of course, represent all the religions which have been or are now practised in India, but the three that have played the preponderant rôle. Buddhism has almost died out in India (though it still thrives in Burma and Ceylon), and nowadays roughly two-thirds of the population of over 300 millions are Hindus and about one-third are Moslems. How far Hinduism goes back we cannot say. It is generally agreed that the Aryans, who established it in India, were immigrants from outside, and imposed their culture on the native population. Buddhism, which grew out of Hinduism, dates back to 500 years before our era. Islam first came to Upper India in the eighth century, but did not play an important part in India till the eleventh century, when Delhi first became a Moslem capital.

Recent discoveries in North-West India have revealed to us a civilisation going back at least five thousand years, and although archæologists have not arrived at any conclusion who these dwellers on the Indus were, it is quite evident that there was about

3000 B.C. an exchange of commodities and ideas between these Indus people and the people of Babylonia and Egypt.

The vast literature of the Hindus and Buddhists was not made known to the West till the end of the eighteenth century, but the monuments and the arts of India had to wait even longer for recognition and serious study. During the present century great strides have been made both in excavations and in archæological research, thanks to the untiring industry and scholarly methods of Sir John Marshall. We know that before the invasion of India by Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C., both architecture and the painting of frescoes had been carried to a high degree of perfection. It is by a curious chance that a few examples of ancient temples and of frescoes have been preserved to us, for there exist in one or two places temples hewn out of the solid rock in the hillside. These temples were in every detail copies of temples standing free to the air, and though nothing but the actual stone was employed, the wooden beams and rafters of their prototypes were imitated with minute accuracy. Within two of these rock-hewn temples, which were first begun about 300 B.C., frescoes, both Hindu and Buddhist, have been found which challenge comparison with the finest frescoes in European art in colour, design, and rhythm of movement.

ARCHITECTURE.—It is impossible for me here to enter into any detail regarding Indian architecture. India abounds in lovely temples, mosques, forts, and palaces. A special feature of Southern India are the Hindu temples, which take the form of very high

conical towers, of which every available inch of space on the outside is elaborately carved.

Of Buddhist monuments only ruins remain, but Buddhist sculptures have been found in large quantities on the north-west frontier which bear striking testimony to the influence of the Greek artists imported by Alexander the Great and his successors.

When we remember the Greeks ruled in Upper India for nearly two hundred years, it is strange indeed to learn that no Greek inscription or specimen of Greek art has ever been found there, and that beyond the all-important influence of Greek sculpture on early Buddhist statuary, hardly any influence can be traced either of Greece on India or of India on Greece.

It is, perhaps, the Moslem buildings of India that are the best known and the most highly appreciated, more especially the monuments of the Great Mughals in Delhi and Agra, dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They have the advantage of being for the most part in a perfect state of preservation; among them the beautiful Taj Mahal ranks as one of the world's masterpieces.

LITERATURE.—In speaking of the literature of India I shall confine myself to that of the Hindus.

The oldest specimen of Indian literature which has come down to us—namely, the *Rig-Veda*—consists of religious lyrics, mainly addressed to the various gods of the old Indian Pantheon, praising their mighty deeds, their greatness, and their beneficence, or beseeching them for wealth in cattle, numerous offspring, prosperity, long life and victory. It is a col-

lection of hymns intended to be sung during the performance of the sacrifices, notably the fire sacrifice of melted butter and the oblation of the beverage called *Soma*.

The *Rig-Veda* is full of difficulties and obscurities (and the Indians say that the gods love the recondite), nevertheless, it contains many passages, especially those describing natural phenomena, which are full of simple charm and of true poetry as we understand it to-day. The following stanzas from a hymn addressed to the Goddess of Night will serve as an example:

Night coming on, the goddess shines
In many places with her eyes;
All glorious she has decked herself.

Immortal goddess, far and wide
She fills the valleys and the heights:
Darkness with light she overcomes.

And now the goddess coming on
Has driven away her sister Dawn:
Far off the darkness hastes away.

Thus Goddess, come to us to-day,
At whose approach we seek our homes
As birds upon the tree their nest.

The villagers have gone to rest,
Beasts, too, with feet and birds with wings:
The hungry hawk himself is still.

Ward off the she-wolf and the wolf,
Ward off the robber, Goddess Night,
And take us safe across the gloom.

Turning to epic poetry, we have to deal with two great works, the *Mahabharata* and the *Rāmāyana*. Both these works centre round the ancient mythology of the Hindus. The former comprises no less than 100,000 verses in a compendium of legends, and has been so overcharged with moral teachings that in its final shape it is not an epic at all, but an encyclopædia of ethics. The *Rāmāyana* is supposed to be the work of a single poet, and is a real romantic epic.

It would carry me too far afield if I were to attempt to describe the heroes or heroines of these national epics, but I must allude quite briefly to the story of Rāmā, the hero of the *Rāmāyana* and the most familiar figure in Hindu mythology. A certain King of Oudh, having no son, held a great horse-sacrifice, as a result of which he obtained four sons: one was named Rāmā and another Bharata. Rāmā, the eldest, was pre-eminent for his strength and his nobility of character. Visiting a neighbouring king, he was able to bend a bow which no other man could bend, and for his reward received as wife the Princess Sītā. The mother of the four sons, however, preferred Bharata, and persuaded her husband to banish Rāmā to the forests in order that Bharata might succeed to the throne. The epic next describes how, while Rāmā and Sītā were dwelling in the forest, the demon King Rāvana of Ceylon, by means of a trick, carried off Sītā to his city. Rāmā set out in pursuit of Rāvana, and on his way was joined by the King of the Apes, with his army of apes, who facilitated the crossing over the straits between the mainland and the island by making themselves into a living bridge. Rāvana was defeated, and Sītā was restored to her

husband, who on his return home became king in the place of his father, who had died of grief during his son's exile. The people now began to cast aspersions on the virtue of Sītā during her imprisonment in the palace of Rāvana. Rāmā, in a fit of jealousy, banished Sītā to the hermitage of Valmiki, the supposed author of the *Rāmāyana,* where she gave birth to twin sons. When these boys grew up, Valmiki sent them to sing their story at the court of Rāmā, who, on hearing it, sent for Sītā. She came to him accompanied by Valmiki, who assured him of her purity. Sītā then called on the Earth goddess to bear witness, and was received back into the goddess's bosom, leaving Rāmā bereaved, and after many days he was translated to heaven.

It is difficult to find suitable extracts for quotation from the narrative of the *Rāmāyana;* I shall, therefore, confine myself to quoting one or two passages from the *Bhagavadgīta,* which belongs to the larger work.

"In the man whose thoughts dwell on the ranges of sense arises attachment to them; from attachment is born love; and from love springs wrath. From wrath confusion is born; from confusion wandering of memory; from breaking of memory wreck of understanding; from wreck of understanding a man is lost.

"But he who walks through the ranges of sense with sense-instruments severed from passion and hatred, and obedient to the Self, and possesses his Self, in due order comes to clearness. The man who casts off all desires and walks without desire, with no thought of a Mine and of an I, comes to peace."

The Hindus, from the earliest times, were addicted

to philosophy, mostly of a pessimistic kind. It is mainly occupied with speculations on the origin of the world, and the eternal principle by which it is created and maintained. The belief in the transmigration of souls—the theory that every individual passes after death into a series of new existences in the bodies of men, animals, or even plants—has prevailed among the Hindus from pre-Buddhist times down to the present day. There is no more important branch of Hindu literature than that which deals with philosophy. The works dealing with this subject, and representing a number of different schools of thought, form a very large portion of the vast storehouse of Sanskrit learning. From a very early period grammar was made a special science, to which the most learned pundits to this day devote the whole of their lives. Phonetics was also the subject of many learned treatises.

Outside scientific treatises practically the whole literature of Ancient India revolves round the gods and heroes of their mythology and legends. All their great epics, lyrics, and dramas are confined to these topics; it is not till we come to the fables, many of them based on the Buddhist birth stories, that we leave behind Rāmā, Sītā, Krishna, and the rest.

Fables.—How much of Æsop is of Indian origin or how much Indian stories owe to Greece can never be finally decided. It is, however, clear that the Hindus had countless fables of their own at an early period, and that a great many of them were imported into Europe by intermediaries that are quite well known to us to-day. That these stories were originally Indian is not at all certain, for many of them have

been traced into Indo-China and Camboogia, but it is to Sanskrit writers that we owe the most famous collections.

The distinguishing feature of these Sanskrit collections is the habit of setting the stories within a general frame story, and subsidiary stories within these stories *ad infinitum*. This system has been adopted in the *Arabian Nights*, with Bluebeard and his princess as the frame story. This motif was borrowed from India. The most famous of these collections is known as the *Panchatantra*, or the Five Ruses. In the Introduction a wise Brahman undertakes to enlighten three ignorant princes, and he does so by narrating to them one after the other the five books of this work, each of which contains a general frame story enclosing the secondary stories. Most of these are beast-fables, in which the principal actors are animals endowed with human characters, and even human properties. Many of the stories exemplify the triumph of strategy over simplicity, and are consequently immoral in the political lessons they teach. This book was, we are told, translated into old Persian in the sixth century and from Persian into Arabic in the eighth, and it is from an Arabic translation, which exists to-day, that the various versions introduced into Europe were made. Gradually these fables began to fling off their outer setting and to appear by themselves, and it is curious to consider that these stories, which were artificially welded together by Sanskrit writers, have ended in Europe, as they began in India or Indo-China, as separate entities.

In the case of stories or fables which we are able to trace back beyond the *Panchatantra* we often find

them as stories current about the Buddha in his previous existences. As a whole, it must be recognised that our fables, as we have them to-day, are inferior to their Oriental setting, and in many cases the main point of the story seems to have dropped out *en route*. A very striking example of this is furnished by the fable of the Ass in the Lion's Skin. In its earliest Buddhist form it is the story of a hawker who was wont to go from place to place selling his wares which were carried by his ass. On arrival at each new place he would remove the pack and, covering the ass with a lion's skin, turn him out to graze. The ass was then fed for nothing, for watchmen in the fields never dared approach what they presumed to be a lion. One day, however, the inhabitants of a certain village, seeing this lion, came out with weapons and drums in order to drive him off, whereupon the terrified ass began to bray, and the villagers at once attacked him. The hawker, seeing what had happened, recited the following verse:

Long might this ass have fed on grass,
Clad in a lion's skin,
But when he brayed like any ass,
The people did him in!

Now this is obviously a better story than our Æsop fable, which offers no reason at all for the ass putting on a lion's skin—makes the ass reveal himself not by his voice, but by his ears.

In many cases, while the story and the moral to be drawn remain the same, there is a change in the scene and the actors. The well-known story of the dog who saw the reflection of the bone he was carry-

ing in the water, and out of greed dropped it, in its Indian form is either a duck who mistakes the reflection of the moon for a fish or a swan who mistakes the reflected stars for lotus shoots.

Before leaving the subject of India I must mention the name of Rabindra Nath Tagore, the great Bengali poet, who through his translation of his own poems into English has gained worldwide fame. His poetry represents something quite new in Indian literature.

The following poem has been translated from the Bengali original of Rabindra Nath Tagore by Mr. W. Sutton Page:

THE FERRYMAN

You who ply from shore to shore, who are you,
Ferryman, O ferryman?
Sitting here beside my lonely doorway,
Wondering I watch you,
Ferryman, O ferryman!

When at night the market closes,
And the folk troop to the river,
Then I fain would follow with them,
Fain would run and join you,
Ferryman, O ferryman!

When I see you steer your bark at twilight
Out across the river,
Then my heart breaks forth in singing
To a mystic music,
Ferryman, O ferryman!

With the lapping of the waters
Happy tears my eyes are brimming,
And a golden breeze enfolds me
From across the river,
Ferryman, O ferryman!

Silent are you, not a word you utter,
Ferryman, O ferryman!
But your eyes speak: what may be their message?
Wondering I watch you,
Ferryman, O ferryman!

When, though only for a moment,
These deep piercing eyes fall on me,
Then I fain the folk would follow,
Fain would run and join you,
Ferryman, O ferryman!

CHAPTER IV

ARABIAN CULTURE

In speaking of the Arabs I shall confine myself almost exclusively to poetry. I shall, first of all, try to give some idea of the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula, of their national characteristics, and their one national art—their poetry. Afterwards I shall take you outside their original home, into Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt, and refer to some of the various characteristics which are totally strange to the Bedouins and the comparatively rare town-dwellers of Arabia.

Many of my readers must be very familiar with the life and manners of the Arabs, thanks to the popularity which has been enjoyed by certain recent publications dealing with their country. Those who have read these books or others of the same type will have realised that the life of the Bedouin, from the time of the Prophet (*i.e.*, the beginning of the seventh century) down to the Great War, remained practically unchanged, as did the conditions of the great pilgrimage to Mekka. What may be the result of the introduction and adoption of the motor-car, which laughs at deserts, no one can say; but it is likely to bring about a very rapid change first of all in the neighbourhood of Mekka and its seaport, Jedda, and the thousands of pilgrims who land there annually may in the near future be conveyed in charabancs to the gates of Mekka, whereby an immense amount of hardship will

be avoided—and some of the merit of the pilgrimage discounted.

The life of the Arab has always centred round the camel, which plays a great variety of rôles. He is, during his life, the great means of transport and the pride and joy of his owner; when dead, he provides food and clothing. Among the Arabs the highest virtue is Hospitality—and the great prototype of generosity in the legends is a certain Hatim Tayy, who on one occasion, finding he had no provisions for some unexpected visitors to his camp, went out and slaughtered his finest camel for their consumption. The only cultural element among the Arabs was their love of poetry. Arab writers in later times have pronounced this early poetry of the desert to be "the Public Register of the Arab people": by its means genealogies are remembered and glorious deeds handed down to posterity: with it they began their affairs and with it they ended them. We do not know at what date they first began to practise the art of poetry, but fragments have been preserved which date back to the early part of the sixth century—over one hundred years before the beginning of Muhammad's mission. These examples already conform to the strict conventions of the Bedouin ode which they call a *Kasida*. The only other form known to the early Arabs was the *Fragment*, which is often no more than a passage detached from a Kasida.

The Kasida differ from one another in metre and in rhyme, but in other respects are bound by the strictest conventions of matter and sequence. The rhyme at the end of each couplet must be the same throughout, even if the Kasida extends to one hundred lines—

from this practice the wealth of the Arabic vocabulary may be imagined.

It begins with the mention of women and the constantly shifting habitations of nomad tribesmen seeking pasture in winter and spring; an opportunity is here offered to the poet of describing the beauties of his mistress or the troubles to which his love affairs have given rise. He next passes to the main topic of his ode, which may be a panegyric on his tribe, himself or some other person, the description of some scene of travel, war, hunting, or merrymaking, a satire or a warning to the foolish. The ode often includes a description of the poet's horse or camel.

I will now quote some examples of the admirable translations of old Bedouin poetry made by the late Sir Charles Lyall, who was one of the greatest Arabic scholars England has produced.

The following verses form the introductory portion of a famous Kasida. What follows after this is a wild tale of foray, plunder, and revenge, having nothing in common with this beautiful opening:

Alas! Ummu 'Amr set firm her face to depart, and went:
gone is she, and when she sped, she left with us no farewell.
Her purpose was quickly shaped—no warning she gave her friends,
though there she had dwelt hard by, her camels all day with ours.
Yea, thus in our eyes she dwelt, from morning to noon and eve—
she brought to an end her tale, and fleeted, and left us lone.

So gone is Umaimah, gone, and leaves here a heart in pain:
my life was to yearn for her, and now its delight is fled.
She won me when as, shamefaced—no maid to let fall her veil,
no wanton to glance behind—she walked forth with steady tread;
Her eyes seek the ground, as though they looked for a thing lost there:
she turns not to left or right—her answer is brief and low.
She rises before day dawns to carry her supper forth
to wives who have need—dear alms, when such gifts are few enow!
Afar from the voice of blame her tent stands for all to see,
when many a women's tent is pitched in the place of scorn.
No gossip to bring him shame from her does her husband dread
—when mention is made of women, pure and unstained as she.
The day done, at eve glad comes he home to his eyes' delight:
he needs not to ask of her—'Say, where didst thou pass the day?'
And slender is she where meet, and full where it so beseems,
and tall, straight, a fairy shape, if such upon earth there be.
And nightlong as we sat there, methought that the tent was roofed
above us with basil sprays, all fragrant in dewy eve—
Sweet basil from Halyah dale, its branches abloom and fresh,
that fills all the place with balm, no starveling of desert sands.

The following lines were written by the poet on the death of his friend Umaimah:

Gone is Umaimah to dwell where tall stones tell of the dead
—poor waif at rest in the grave, laid safe at last in the dust.
O thou—one half of my soul! how mourns the half that is left,
athirst for thee, though the tears stream fast and full from mine eyes.
Ah me! for her did I fear, lest I should go to my grave
the first, and leave her alone, unveiled, to battle with Want:
But now I sleep, and no Care comes nigh to trouble my rest:
at last finds Jealousy peace, when all it guarded are dead!
This is the kindness of Death—shall I deny him his due?
Peace has he brought me, if Pain be still the chief of his gifts.

The following is from a pre-Muhammadan poem:

Come, friend and fellow, come—for sometimes is Folly sweet!
so come, let us greet our band of drinkers aglow with wine,
And wash from our hearts sour speech of wisdom with cups abrim,
and cut short the ills of Life with laughter and jest and joy!
Yea, when once a moment comes of rest from the whirl, be quick
and grasp it: for Time's tooth bites and quits not, and mischief waits;

And sure, if a bright hour lifts thy soul to a little peace,
enough in thy path there lies of shadow and grief and pain!

Nay, ask on the sandy hill the ben-tree with spreading boughs
that stand mid her sisters, if I greeted thy dwelling-place;

And whether their shade looked down upon me at eventide
as there in my grief I stood, and that for my portion chose:

And whether, at dawn still there, mine eyelids a burthen bore
of tears falling one by one, as pearls from a broken string.

Yea, men long and yearn for Spring, the gladsome: but as for me—
my longing and Spring art thou, my yearning to gain thy grace;

And men dread the deadly Drought that slays them: but as for me—
my Drought is to know thee gone, my life but a barren land!

And sooth, if I suffer when thou greet'st me with words unkind,
yet somewhat of joy it brings thou thinkest on me at all.

So take thy delight that I stand serving with aching heart
and eyes bathed in tears lest thou shouldst sunder thyself from me.

In conclusion I venture to quote a rendering by myself of a characteristic verse:

Nor did I forget thee while spears fell around where I stood

And the points of their white Indian blades were all
wet with my blood:
And fain had I kissed the bright swords of my enemies
vile,
For they flashed like thy teeth when thy lips go apart
in a smile.

When the Arabs emerged from the Arabian Peninsula and set out on that amazing career of conquest eastwards and westwards, they fell at once under foreign influences, and by the end of the eighth century the one manifestation of their native genius—the poetry of the Bedouin—entirely died out, and was only continued by imitators whose lack of true inspiration is everywhere evident. But their love of poetry continued and the courts of the Caliphs both of Damascus and later of Baghdad were full of poets who sang in a very different strain from that of their Bedouin ancestors. Contact with the culture of Byzantium and Persia led the Arabs into new realms of literature, and in many branches they showed themselves apt pupils of the Greeks. We must, however, always bear in mind that a great many of the most notable authors of Arabic prose and verse were Persians by birth, who had learnt Arabic partly because they were ruled by Arabs and partly because they had become Moslems, and this implied the reading of the Koran in the Arabic language. It was mainly works on philosophy, science, and natural history that the Arabs translated from the Greek. Greek poetry, drama, and history seemed to hold no interest for them—and it was the Arabs, notably in the Moorish Universities of Spain—which were wholly, or in part, ruled over by the Arabs from the begin-

ning of the eighth to the end of the fifteenth century —who kept burning the torch of Greek culture during the Middle Ages when Europe was shrouded in intellectual darkness, and who handed on this learning to the pioneers of the Renaissance.

ART.—One of the strictest and best observed of the injunctions of the Prophet of Islam was that it was a sin to make representations of the human or animal form either in sculpture or in painting, and in this Muhammad was prompted by two main considerations, one, that when a man copies the creatures of the animal world he is emulating the Creator, which is a form of blasphemy: the other, the danger that sculptures or paintings might lead to a revival of idolatry, which it had been one of the chief objects of his mission to stamp out among the Arabs. The result was that when the simple Arabs emerged from their homes in the desert, and spread east and west among the highly cultured Byzantines and Persians, they were unable to interest themselves in any of the fine arts other than architecture and design: and these they developed to a very high degree of perfection and beauty. The type of decoration which we call Arabesque owes its origin to these circumstances and to the wonderful decorative possibilities of the Arabic alphabet. The art of calligraphy and the making of beautiful copies of the Koran occupied the time of artists who won renown for their handwriting equal to that earned by painters and sculptors among the Christians. But the influence of those Christians was in the end too much for them to resist, and although neither the Arabs nor any other Moslem peoples have ever indulged in statuary, they began to

illustrate their non-theological books, taking as their first models the illuminations in Christian manuscripts: they also made pictures of men, beasts, and plants to illustrate their translations of Greek works on science and natural history. It was, however, the Persians who first developed the art of miniature painting on original lines. As for the architecture of the Arabs, we are familiar with pictures of beautiful mosques with their high archways, their noble domes, and their graceful minarets towering above the main building, and having near the summit a gallery from which the muezzin, when he called to prayer, might be heard for a great distance round about.

The Arabic language is one of the noblest products of the human brain. It belongs to that large family of Semitic languages which includes Hebrew, Syriac, and Assyrian of the cuneiform inscriptions. The chief characteristic of these languages is the manner in which words are traceable to a root of three or two consonants which never undergo any change. Parts of speech such as verbs, adjectives, and nouns are made by the addition of certain letters to the end, middle or beginning of the root letters. Thus the three root letters *k, t, b,* convey the notion of writing, but until vowels are supplied they have no meaning; if, however, we read *k, a, t, i, b,* we have the word *kátib,* which means a writer, and if we read *k, i, t, á, b,* we get *kitáb,* which means a book. The process of word formation is thus quite contrary to that of the Indo-European languages, in which derivates are formed by the addition or prefixing of syllables accompanied by considerable modifications in the root word.

Arabic is one of the richest languages in the world

—Hebrew, by the way, is one of the smallest in vocabulary—and its grammar has been brought by grammarians to such a pitch of refinement and nicety that the classical language is decidedly difficult to master. The spoken dialects, which differ considerably from one another, are far less difficult to acquire. Of the alphabet I have already spoken. The great importance of Arabic lies in its being the unalterable language of the Koran; and since the Koran must be read in Arabic by all true believers, the Arabic alphabet and a large number of Arabic words have been adopted by the great Moslem languages like Persian, Turkish, and Hindustani, though all belong to different language groups. Though highly picturesque, it is not a very practical alphabet, as it is written without vowels! For such a language as Turkish, with its highly developed system of vowel harmony, it is especially deficient and ill-suited; and recently, it would seem, the Turks have decided to discard it and take the Latin alphabet in its place.

CHAPTER V

PERSIAN CULTURE

It is rather of modern Persia that I intend to speak than of Persia throughout the ages. For no country has its history more clearly divided into two periods than Persia, with its pre-Muhammadan and its post-Muhammadan cultures. In both periods it has developed strong national characteristics, but there is little resemblance between the two. Early Persia, under her great kings like Darius, had her own religion—Zoroastrianism—and was famous for her noble buildings and her skill in warfare. She became a serious rival to Greece when the latter country was in her prime. The ruins of Persepolis and Behistun, to mention only two of her great royal residences, even in their present ruined state, bear witness to the high quality of her artificers in architecture and in the plastic arts. During the pre-Islamic period—that is, down to the Arab conquest in the beginning of the seventh century—Persia had not produced much in the nature of secular literature, and hardly anything has been preserved to us that is not purely religious—that is, the sacred books of the Zoroastrians—except a few anecdotal histories of the late Persian kings.

The period subsequent to the conquest of the Arabs, on the other hand, is chiefly noticeable for the large output of literature in almost every branch, but more especially in the field of poetry, an art which was

hardly at all practised by the Persians of the first period. They learnt the art of poetry from the Arabs, and many of the finest writers of Arabic poetry in the days of the Caliphs were Persians by birth. It was not, however, till after they had been three centuries under Arab domination that they began to compose poetry in the language of Persia; the earliest specimens of Persian poetry that have come down to us date from the tenth century, but from that time down to the sixteenth century there was a continuous stream of first-class poets, whose works in certain types of verse will bear comparison with the poetic creations of any other nation. The main beauty of Persian poetry lies in the language itself, in the richness of its metres and the sweetness of its sounds. Its resources in rhymes seem inexhaustible, for, in addition to its own native vocabulary, it has the whole Arabic dictionary to choose from. For the modern Persian language, while retaining its native grammar, was built on a mixed foundation of Persian and Arabic words, just as modern English, while preserving its own grammar, took over a vast quantity of words from the French of the Normans. Having once established itself in the tenth century, Persian poetry continued to flourish, at any rate, for six centuries, and is, of course, still alive to-day; but only one poet of really outstanding merit has appeared in the last three centuries. A very strange thing about the modern Persian language is that, for purposes of literary expression either in prose or in verse, it has remained practically unchanged from the tenth century to the present day. One might date an unknown poem by recognising the style of a well-known poet, but it would be very difficult to date it

by the form of its language; and a passage from the great poet Sa'di, who lived in the thirteenth century, is perfectly intelligible to a muleteer in Persia to-day. I do not think the same thing can be said of any other literature in the world.

ART.—In speaking of the Arabs, I had occasion to point out that the Prophet of Arabia had absolutely prohibited the representation of human or animal forms either in sculpture or in painting, as he feared such representation might lead to a revival of idol-worship. This injunction was never infringed as far as sculpture is concerned, but was soon ignored as regards painting, which began to be practised for illustrating secular books soon after the Arabs came in contact with Christian art. Once this prohibition had been disregarded, the Persians began to cultivate the art of miniature painting, and to give it an individual character which distinguishes it from all that had gone before. This art reached its highest perfection during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Persia and in Turkestan. The subjects they took were, for the most part, in illustration either of histories or of narrative epic poems; and similar subjects were also taken for designs on pottery and in textiles. Persian carpets, excepting only prayer carpets, which generally have a feature in their design which indicates how they are to be laid in the direction of Mecca, often bear pictures illustrating famous legends. One of the most popular themes, one which goes back to pre-Islamic times, is often met with on carpets, on pottery, and in metal. This is the story of the Persian King, Bahram Gur, who had a favourite slave girl named Fitna, who used to accompany him on his hunting expeditions. In

some pictures Fitna rides pillion behind the king, and in others she rides alone, but in all she plays a harp. One day the king, in order to win the admiration of his favourite, performed the remarkable feat of pinning the hind leg of a deer to its ear. He first shot a clay pellet at its head, and, when the deer put up its leg to scratch the place, the king fired an arrow, which transfixed both its hoof and its ear. Fitna, instead of expressing her admiration of the king's prowess, merely observed that, seeing how much practise he had had with the bow, there was nothing very remarkable in what he had done. The king, infuriated by her indifference, handed her over to an officer of his suite to be put to death. Fitna managed to persuade the officer to spare her life, and to hide her in his hunting-box in the country which the king was wont to visit from time to time. There Fitna determined, should opportunity arise, to prove to the king that skill is only a matter of practice. To this end she obtained a newly born calf, which every day she would carry up and down the sixty stairs which led to the hunting-box, and her strength increased as the calf grew larger. Shortly afterwards Fitna found an opportunity of showing her skill in the presence of the king, who, being filled with admiration, demanded that the lady, who was veiled, should reveal her face. Recognising Fitna, whom he supposed to be dead, he at once forgave her and restored her to favour. This second episode is also a favourite theme with Persian artists, who represent Fitna carrying the calf on her shoulders up the stairs.

The Persians never painted pictures except as illustrations of books, and hence they always represented

scenes of action; but great stress was laid on the architectural or landscape background. Like the Chinese, they totally ignored shadows; but they never painted landscapes for their own sakes, as did the Chinese.

THE PERSIAN LANGUAGE may be called the English of the East. In both these languages the complexities of grammar have been reduced to a minimum, and both owe a very large portion of their stock of words to a foreign language: Persian contains even a larger proportion of Arabic words than English does of French and Latin. It is a very strange circumstance that the modern Persian language, which was first employed for literary purposes in the tenth century, has remained practically unaltered ever since; nor has there been any marked change in the matter or manner of its poetry. It is as if English poets were writing to-day in the language and manner of Chaucer. The basis of Persian poetry, as of Persian art, is convention; and the task the artist and the poet set themselves was not so much originality of themes as perfection of treatment. The poets, like the artists, confined themselves to telling anew oft-told tales. It is as if the *Canterbury Tales* had been rewritten with only slight variations in metre and style by a dozen different poets since Chaucer.

Persian poetry is all purely conventional, and is governed by the strictest rules of metre, rhyme, and form.

A famous Arabic author of the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldún, thus defines poetry: "Poetry is an effective discourse, based on metaphor and descriptions, divided into parts [*i.e.*, verses] agreeing with

one another in metre and rhyme, each one of such parts being independent in scope and aim of what proceeds and follows it." This is not merely an accurate definition of the classic poetry of the Moslems, but also indicates the fundamental difference between that poetry and the poetry of the West.

The charm of Persian poetry, apart from the beauty of the language in which it is written, is apt to lie in its form rather than in its meaning. It may be fittingly compared to the Persian carpet. In some carpets the figures and scenes are so vividly depicted that an intellectual enjoyment is superadded to the æsthetic, while in others much that once had a meaning has become purely conventional and unconvincing, but the fact that the original figure has become unrecognisable does not in any way detract from the beauty of the general pattern. In the same way the tropes and metaphors of Persian poetry are merely so many patterns on which the poet works. It is for him not to invent new figures, but to give fresh colour and fresh grouping to the patterns sanctioned by convention.

Persian poetry is always rhymed. Long poems are written in rhyming couplets; shorter poems have a single rhyme at the end of each verse, rhyming throughout the whole poem, in imitation of the Arabic Kasida.

When the Persians took to making rhymes, they had at their disposal not only the whole of their own indigenous vocabulary, but any Arabic word they chose to import. There is no class of versifying which lends itself so readily to *ingenuity* as a long poem on one rhyme, though this fatal facility often leads the Persian

poet to run on long after Thought is winded. In any European language such a performance would be bound to lose in dignity, whereas in Islamic poetry the wonder only grows, and dignity is always preserved. The same applies to the making of puns, which the Persians are fond of introducing even into their most serious poetry, not in order to raise a smile, but only to command admiration for their skill. The Persian equivalents of such play on words as we find in the *Ingoldsby Legends* or in Thomas Hood would be readily admitted into the great mystic poem, the *Masnavi* of Jalal ud-Din Rumi (thirteenth century), the Bible of the Sufis. The far-fetched similes and exaggerated hyperboles are likewise intended quite seriously, though they sometimes have for us almost a childish *naïveté*. Another peculiar device is that of writing half-verses alternately in Persian and Arabic. The ode with which the collection of the great Hafiz begins offers specimens of this Macaronic versifying. I may recall to the reader an excellent example of this device in English, which is to be found in the *Ingoldsby Legends:*

> I've always considered Sir Christopher Wren
> As an architect one of the greatest of men.
> And talking of epitaphs, much I admire his
> *Circumspice, si monumentum requiris.*

Although the Persians had no model but the Arabic Kasida to follow, they very quickly asserted their independence and devised a great number of different verse forms. It is most remarkable that a people, who before their conversion to Islam in the seventh century had never shown any taste or talent for poetry, should

after three hundred years of Arabic influence have suddenly taken to writing poetry in their own language and have produced a wealth of poetic literature which ranks second to none in Asia.

For English readers the two best renderings of Persian poetry are undoubtedly the famous translation of the quatrains of Omar Khayyam by Edward Fitzgerald, and the translations of the odes of Hafiz, the greatest of the lyric poets of Persia, by Gertrude Bell.

In order to give some idea of the matter and form of Persian poetry, I shall quote a few versions made by myself. The greatest Persian poet of the nineteenth century was a certain Qa'ani, who was distinguished for the richness of his language and for the melodiousness of his verse. This makes him especially difficult to translate, but the following attempt to render a few lines quite literally, while preserving the metre, may perhaps give some slight idea of the original. It may be of interest to see how the original looks in transcription:

⏑ — ⏑ — | ⏑ — ⏑ — | ⏑ — ⏑ — | ⏑ — ⏑ — ||
Nasīm-i-khuld mīvazad magar zi jūibarhā
Ki būī mushk mīdahad hawāī murghzārhā
Farāz-i-khāk u khishthā, damīda sabza kishthā
Chi kishthā, bihishthā, na deh, na sad, hazārhā.

The breeze of Heaven itself meseems
Is wafted from the cooling streams,
Odour of musk pervades the air
And fills with scent the meadows fair.
From under bricks and dust there springs
The fresh perfume which Nature brings;
The larks and herons all around,
The pheasants and sweet philomel

Have taken each in beak or claw
The dulcet harp or tuneful bell.
The dove upon his gentle pipe
Has cooed two hundred wood-notes deep,
And gives forth sweetest melodies
Which with the concert rhythm keep.

It is only rarely that Persian poets write odes on passing events or matters of topical interest, but it was on the death of his son that Hafiz wrote one of his most beautiful poems, to which belong the following four verses:

Bulbul went through travail sore,
And forth there came a lovely rose.
Now alas! an envious wind
Has struck it down with cruel blows.

Light of my eye and joy of heart,
For ever dear to me,
'Twas not hard for him to go,
How hard for me, God only knows!

Camel-man, my load has fallen;
Help me for the love of God,
It was in the hope of mercy
That this caravan I chose.

Woe is me now for the Moon of Heaven
From envy of his face
Caused the Moon of my delight to find
Within the grave repose.

The following is a poem by the great mystic poet of the thirteenth century, Jalal ud-Din Rumi:

From all the world 'twas thee alone I chose,
Wilt thou from grieving give me no repose?

My heart is as a pen within thy hand,
Thou canst of both my grief and joy dispose.
Save what thou willest, what desire have I?
Thou mak'st to grow from me, now thorn, now rose.
If thou wouldst have me thus, lo! thus I am,
If otherwise, thy will I'll not oppose.
And in the vat where souls their colour take,
Who am I, what shall Love or Hate disclose?

The following ode from the pen of Iraki, who also lived in the thirteenth century, may serve to exemplify the manner in which the real rhyme is sometimes thrown back into the body of the verse. I quote two verses in the original Persian:

⏑ — — — | ⏑ — — — | ⏑ — — — | ⏑ — — — ||
Bijuz 'ishq-i-tu, jānānī, namībīnam, namībīnam
Dilam-rā juz tu, jānānī namībīnam namībīnam.
Zi khūd sabri ve ārāmī, namīyābam, namīyābam,
Zi tū lutfī ve ahsānī, namībīnam, namībīnam.

Beloved, aught but love of thee, I cannot see, I cannot see,
And in my heart all else but thee, I cannot see, I cannot see.

Within myself or peace or rest, I cannot find, I cannot find,
Pity or kindness meant for me, I cannot see, I cannot see.

Out of thy mercy let me see thy face to heal my malady,
For any other cure for me I cannot see, I cannot see.

Beloved, take my hand in thine, for I have fallen in a sea,
Of which the shore, if shore there be, I cannot see, I cannot see.

By way of pity and of love, come then and settle my affairs,
For means of succour without thee, I cannot see, I cannot see.

To poor Iraki show the road that leads to thee, for in this world
A mortal more distressed than he, I cannot see, I cannot see.

The following is another attempt I have made to reproduce metre and rhyme:

— — ∪ — | — — ∪ — | — — ∪ — | — — ∪ — ||
Ay āshiqan, ay āshiqan, mārā biyānī digarast
Ay ārifān, ay ārifān, mara nishānī digarast.

Oh! lovers all, oh! lovers all, I sing a
different lay to this.
Oh! ye who know, oh! ye who know, I know a
different way to this.
Oh! nightingales, oh! nightingales, I used to
sing a melody
Which took its sweetness from a garden lying
far away from this.
Oh! Shirin of the honeyed lips, oh! Joseph of
the coloured coat,
Oh! parrot of the sugar tongue, I have a song
more gay than this.
The drunkard and his tavern door, the Sufi and
his hermit's cell,
Are well enough, in my abode I hold a mightier
sway than this.
My true love is my lord and sire, my pain and
eke my remedy,
My soul I sacrifice to her, for she's of other
clay than this.

In conclusion, I give a few renderings of shorter poems, which exemplify the wit and wisdom of the Persian.

The world, my brother, doth abide with none,
Upon its Maker set thy heart alone!
Put not thy trust in kingdoms of this world
Which many like thyself have nursed and killed;
What matter when with thy soul's flight thou diest
Whether on throne, or on bare ground thou liest?

The wonders of the vasty deep
Are numerous and rare;
But if it's safety that you seek
You will not find it there.

Until a man has spoken who can say
Whether he's full of virtue or of sin?
Do not imagine every thicket safe,
Perchance a sleeping tiger hides within.

The harpist is like a nurse who bears
A child in her arms asleep.
She wakes the child with the touch of her hands,
And the child begins to weep.

If you should ask me where resides
The maiden fair whom I adore,
I'll tell you; she lives in my heart,
But where my heart is, I ignore.

To-day my boon companions all have gone,
And for this loss there's naught that can atone,
I'm sober, not because I have no wine,
For wine I have; but can I drink alone?

I had said I would tell thee the grief of my heart
If thou camest to me once again,
But what shall I say, for with thee at my side
I am free from all grief and all pain.

A rich man's lust for gold will last
Till his day of reckoning be,
As a thirsty man will awake athirst
Though he dream he has swallowed the sea.

CHAPTER VI

HOW EASTERN LITERATURE WAS BROUGHT TO THE WEST

It is interesting to imagine what mental picture of Asia a well-read man in the fifteenth century might have had, and what could have been his knowledge of China and India. His notions of geography would have been only vaguely correct: but his information regarding the people of these countries would have been practically nil. He would have known nothing of Hinduism or of Buddhism: he would never have heard of Confucius or of the *Rāmāyana*. As an illustration of the ignorance of the East which then prevailed, I may mention that when the Portuguese, having rounded the Cape of Good Hope, eventually landed in India in 1498, they were under the impression that the only non-Christian religion they would there find would be Islam; so that when they disembarked, they entered a Hindu temple and there gave thanks to God for their safe arrival, under the impression that they were in a Christian church whose ministers had somewhat strayed from orthodoxy. That they were acquainted with Islam is quite natural, seeing that the last Moors had only been driven out of Spain eight years previously. Nevertheless, in spite of Western ignorance, the East had already given a priceless gift to the West in the shape of her fables, which were imported from India in two main groups

—those repeated by Æsop before the Christian Era, and those introduced by translations from the Arabic into Hebrew, Greek and Spanish in the Middle Ages. I have already shown how these fables, which can be traced even further back than to their Indian originals, were apt to change in detail on their passage to Europe. I need not, therefore, make further reference to the fables themselves. I would like to mention, however, that it was probably not realised that so many of these universal fables were of Indian origin until La Fontaine, in the edition of 1678, pointed out that many of his new poems were based on the fables of the Indian sage Bidpai.

However, when we talk of the cultural influences of the East upon Western literature, there is nothing that can be compared to the part played by the Jewish Scriptures, which are purely Oriental in spirit and language. The Bible is the most widely read book in Europe. It is a remarkable circumstance that the English have practically no mythology of their own, nothing which associates them with heathen gods—our nearest approach is the legend of King Arthur and his Round Table, into which there enters, of course, a certain amount of supernatural action: whereas the other northern peoples, like the Scandinavians and the Germans, have an elaborate mythology of their own, as the Greeks and Romans had before them. This mythology has as its stage the mountains, valleys, and rivers with which these people are familiar. The stories on which English children are brought up are those of the Old Testament, which deal mainly with conditions, social and climatic, totally different from those with which we are acquainted in our own land.

Every story has to be explained as something exotic: and pictures have to be shown of people dressed in unfamiliar Oriental costume. It is, therefore, only natural that the Bible should have played an especially great part in shaping the literature and language of these islands.

It should be realised that the East was very slow to reveal itself to the West, both in its art and its letters. It is, indeed, strange that the trade in Oriental goods should for so many centuries have brought nothing of Oriental culture in its train. Nor did the personal intercourse of the East with the West—whether diplomatic, military, or commercial—seem to have roused any mutual curiosity between these two halves of the civilised world. China, from the earliest times, exported her silk along the trade routes to Persia, whence the silk was re-exported into Europe, but practically nothing was known of China till the middle of the thirteenth century, except that it was the country from which silk came.

The invasion of Europe by the conquering Arabs in the seventh century led to an amazing phenomenon in the shape of the subjugation of a number of European peoples to Moslem rule; a phenomenon which we are very apt to forget when considering East and West in general, and the rôle played by the Turks in European politics to-day.

The first siege of Constantinople by the Arabs took place in A.D. 668, only forty-six years after the flight of Muhammad from Mekka. Before the middle of the eighth century the Arabs conquered the whole of Spain and Portugal, and had only been arrested in their progress by Charles Martel between Tours and

Poitiers in the very heart of France. We cannot overestimate the importance of the presence of the Arabs, who were at the zenith of their material and intellectual powers, in the European continent at a period when the culture of Greece and Rome had been almost swept away, and new races were taking their place in Southern Europe. Before the conclusion of the fifth century the mighty fabric of empire founded upon the seven hills of Rome was finally overthrown in all the west of Europe by the barbarous nations from the north, whose marvellous energy and whose numbers were irresistible. These invaders brought nothing with them but man power, and it was unlikely that they should show any appreciation for what they found in the invaded countries in the way of literature, art, or institutions. Not until A.D. 800 do we meet with a great genius capable of realising the value of what had gone before. The spread of Christianity among the northern races, which began towards the close of the fifth century, did not seem to effect any refining influence on these conquering races beyond the ranks of the clergy, and it was Charlemagne who first attempted to combine the brutal habits and violence natural to his people with the ideals of national improvement.

The first direct influence of the East on England was no doubt the participation of Englishmen in the Crusades, which certainly opened the eyes of Europe to the existence of a civilisation of which they had no conception. The picture which the average man in the twelfth century had in his mind of the Near and Middle East was probably a totally false one. From the Classics he was familiar with the names of such

countries as Egypt, Persia, and India, and from the Bible he had ideas about Palestine and Mesopotamia. Of what had happened in those countries since the fall of the Roman Empire he probably knew nothing, beyond the fact that there had arisen in the seventh century a false prophet called Muhammad, who was now in possession of the Holy Places of the Christians and the Jews. He possibly imagined that these followers of Muhammad were wild Arabs with little or no culture. He certainly did not dream of such a thing as a court presided over by a chivalrous and cultivated sovereign, and frequented by men of letters and artists from many countries. It is difficult to conceive the utter astonishment which must have seized the first Crusaders when they discovered what manner of people these paynims were. Those who passed through Greece and Italy realised that the well-known ancient glories of these countries had departed, but when they landed in Syria, they found at its zenith a power of which they had never dreamt.

The Crusades were, of course, the means of bringing some knowledge of the East to Europe, but only a limited knowledge, confined geographically to Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, and culturally of little or no significance. The Crusaders had no desire to learn from the Saracens, but only to drive them out of Jerusalem and, whenever possible, to destroy them.

The immediate influence of the Arabs on the rest of Europe after they had become established in Spain was relatively slight, and during the ninth and tenth centuries we hear of very few cases of learned men whose studies included that of Arabic. One of the most notable early examples is that of Pope Sylvester

II. (Gerbert, Archbishop of Rheims), who, at the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh, attained great fame as a scholar, and is said to have been deeply versed in Hebrew and Arabic literature. Next after him we come to Frederick II. (d. 1250), the grandson of the great Barbarossa, who was closely connected with England by his marriage with Isabella, the daughter of King John. He did much to encourage the study and translation of Arabic works, and was the patron of Michael Scott, who made a translation of Avicenna's *Natural History*. It does not appear that many of the great scholars of the Cordova University travelled in the rest of Europe, but we know that many European scholars, especially Italians like Dante's tutor Brunetto Latini, went to study under the Jews and Arabs of Moorish Spain; but it was the Crusades which brought Europe first into real contact with Islam. When Peter the Hermit preached the first Crusade in 1096, the culture which might be attributed directly to Christianity was still confined to the Church, and Christian Europe might still be regarded as in its first infancy, whereas Islam, which had been founded 600 years later, had already reached its apogee of political strength and had passed its classical period of literature. It is interesting to compare the rapidity with which the Arabian Caliphate rose, and the slowness with which Christianity progressed in the first ten centuries of our era, for this explains how it came about that the knighthood representing ten-century-old Christendom found the knighthood of Islam surrounded by a magnificence and a civilisation the like of which they had never seen in their homes.

Now, we may ask what kind of influence those of

the Crusaders who returned to England brought with them. In the first place, we may take it that their mental horizon had been very considerably widened, and that they realised that the Saracens, though infidels, were in other respects as good men as themselves, equally brave, equally well armed, and far more luxurious. It is strange that the Crusades, which lasted over a period of 150 years, did not lead to greater enterprises of conquest for its own sake, for we must wait till the middle of the eighteenth century for anything in the shape of military adventure in the East on the part of the English. By that time the ideals of religion have given place to those of commerce. Besides, until the discovery of the Cape route to the East, there was no object in attempting trade beyond the Mediterranean; and enterprise for the command of this trade is recorded in the history of the Barbary Corsairs. We may, therefore, claim that the foremost result of the contact of Medieval England with the East was luxury, pomp, and baronial display. There is no trace at this stage of any cultural influence on England, for apart from a few early translations from the Arabic such as Michael Scott's *Natural History of Avicenna,* it was only after the revival of learning, closely connected with the discovery in the middle of the twelfth century of the Digests of Justinian, that the science and philosophy of the Arabs became known to the Schoolmen through the medium of Latin. It is, however, natural that the cultural side of the Moslems should have made no impression on the Crusaders, for there was no other ideal among them—apart from religious fervour—than the profession of arms.

In the middle of the twelfth century a rumour gained currency in Europe that somewhere beyond the Empire of the Saracens there lived a powerful Christian potentate named Prester John, who had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Saracens. Hopes were raised by this rumour that the Crusaders had formed an ally, who would attack the paynim from the other side. But these hopes were never realised: for the rumour was based on a misunderstanding. It is true that in 1141 the Seljuk Sultan had been defeated in battle by a Turkish Prince who had many Christian Turks in his army: but these Turks took no interest in the Crusades, of which quite possibly they had never heard.

It was the invasion of Eastern Europe by the Mongols and their sudden withdrawal to their homes in Central Asia in the middle of the thirteenth century that really first led to the discovery of Asia beyond the Near East, and opened the land route to China. Missionary priests and merchants now began to set out to discover where these mysterious and invincible Mongols came from, and they were still hoping to find Prester John. The accounts they brought back with them were read with intense avidity. The most famous, though perhaps not the most informative of these narratives, was that of Marco Polo.

Marco Polo was a citizen of Venice, who arrived in Peking during the reign of Kubilai Khan (Coleridge's Kubla Khan), and remained in China for many years, during which he actually held high offices under the Mongol Emperor, finally returning to his native country via Persia, which he reached by sea from China in 1299. On reaching Venice the inhabitants

failed to recognise in this stranger in Mongolian garb their fellow-citizen, and he had difficulty in obtaining admission to his own house. The *Travels* of Marco Polo have always enjoyed great popularity, and to his narrative more than to any other book may be attributed the beginning of European curiosity in regard to China.

But no work on Eastern travel has rivalled in popularity the story told by Sir John Mandeville, which appeared about fifty years after Marco Polo. This book, it is true, only dealt with the Near East, but, on account of its gross exaggerations, it was especially enjoyed by the reading public, and for centuries was held to be a true relation. In the light of modern research it is doubtful whether Mandeville ever got beyond Palestine, if he reached Asia at all. It was books like this which led the old map-makers to fill in the maps of unexplored countries with fabulous men—men with two heads or three legs, and so forth, or monstrous beasts like unicorns and dragons. The success which usually attends fictitious narratives is notorious. The electric hares of false rumour are very rarely overtaken by the greyhounds of Truth, and, if caught, hare and hound both come to grief. From this time on, books of Eastern travel began to multiply, and the early adventures of the Portuguese in India and in Abyssinia were productive of many fine narratives. The first book published by Dr. Johnson was his translation of Father Lopo's travels in Abyssinia, on which the story of Rasselas was afterwards based.

But the real romance of the East was revealed to Europe by the translation of the *Arabian Nights*. The

appearance of this translation, first in French and almost immediately afterwards in English, was, in some respects, the most important event in the history of the popular literature of Europe. It is difficult for us, who, from our earliest childhood, have been familiar with the tales of *Bluebeard* and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,* to realise the avidity with which the reading public seized on these delightful stories which introduced them to a new world of Caliphs, Sheykhs, Jinns, and Ifreets, and palaces and banquets such as they had never dreamt of, making Baghdad and Egypt alive with love and hatred and romance.

It was a Frenchman in the Diplomatic Service named Galland who first discovered the Arabic original of these tales in Damascus, and published a translation which appeared in several volumes between 1704 and 1717. Very shortly after an anonymous English translation was printed in London. The success was immediate: and a story is told of Sir James Stewart, Lord Advocate of Scotland, who, finding his daughters reading the *Arabian Nights* on a Saturday evening, took the book away from them, only to be found asleep in his library the next morning with the book in his lap, having sat up far into the Sabbath reading it himself.

It was not, however, till Warren Hastings became Governor-General of India that the study of the ancient language and literature of India received the serious attention of Western scholars. Warren Hastings rightly believed that in order to rule the Indians with justice and sympathy it was essential to gain a knowledge and understanding of their own laws and customs. The two outstanding names in connection

with the pioneer work of interpreting Sanskrit literature are those of Sir William Jones, who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal; and Colebrook, who published many Sanskrit texts. The work begun by these English scholars was eagerly taken up by others in France and Germany; and the foundations were now laid of the science of comparative philology. It was, however, F. W. Max Muller, the editor of the *Sacred Books of the East,* who did more than anyone in this country during the Victorian age to encourage the study of Sanskrit literature and of comparative philology.

As soon as men began to collect and study the literature written in the Sanskrit language, vast new fields of investigation were opened up, and a revolution was produced in the science of religion and philosophy. It is difficult for us to appreciate the effect which was produced on the scholars of Europe by the discovery of an old culture, whose existence they had not suspected, containing countless works of the highest literary and philosophical quality, embracing exhaustive treatises on mental and moral science and on the arts and on law, in addition to poetry and drama of the finest order. In some branches the attainment was, indeed, far in advance of what the Greeks had accomplished.

The scientific study of comparative philology, which was rendered possible by the discovery of Sanskrit, led at once to a complete readjustment of all existing views on the origin of mankind—views hitherto mainly based on the story of the confusion of tongues at Babel. Thus, the East, which had revealed herself so reluctantly to the West, yielded up the greatest of her secrets—the secret of India—last of all.

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