

## THE SPIRITUALLY HISTORIC HOUR IN THE EAST

ONE decisive factor in the domain of post-War politics is the simple fact that world politics and European politics are no longer one and the same thing.

The peoples whom our opponents in the War of 1914-18 called in as allies have not remained, as they were before, willing and easily governed auxiliary troops ; they are, in fact, on the way to becoming rivals in Europe increasingly to be reckoned with in the play of political forces, although it seems grotesque to hear an Indian express his heartfelt conviction that it was the Indian troops alone that gave the victory to the entente, and that therefore they were really the conquerors of Germany.

Nor does it seem, in China or in the colonial spheres of the East, that the possibility of European states deciding, sooner or later, on forcible intervention, are altogether exhausted. But the changes in administration in the Dutch and the Indian colonial realms since the War, the concessions which an enfeebled China has been able to wrest from the Western Powers and, not least, Japan's determined and apparently irresistible increase of power in the Far East, which even those Western Powers whose own interests are assailed seem unable to withstand, show clearly the displacement of influence in the political situation.

Though it would be fascinating to inquire into the causes of this, and to show how, under the pressure of the West and the counter action which, since the war of 1914-18, has been proceeding from Moscow, the nations of the East have awakened, old political forms have been given new life and new forms have begun to take shape, one thing is at least clear to the Germans of to-day—that a fresh mobilization of force is not only a matter of military, technical and economic resources, but will be influenced at least as much, if not decisively, by the spiritual strength of the opponent.

We have experienced personally that the rise, the self-assertion and the fall of peoples and nations are not determined

only by the armaments which may be at their disposal, but also by the spirit which governs them. If we recognize this fact, then we must realize that the ideas that hold sway in the East, moulding its spiritual aspect, are decisive for the future shaping of the world. This thought gives to the question of spiritual events there a seriousness which lifts it above the sphere of contemplative and æsthetic observation, for the spiritual events in the East will ultimately be important contributory factors in the whole world situation, and may even decide the fate of the West.

The spiritual life of the East is not a great static self-contained quantity. At present a vast upheaval is taking place in it, caused by the invasion of the East by the West. The contact between East and West is the problem of the hour. All the leading intellects there are aware of this. If one talks long and seriously with a leading Javanese, a prominent Chinese or Indian about their impressions regarding the future of their people, they all say the same thing—‘ I believe that Indonesia will be the bridge which will join East and West ’ ; ‘ I believe that India is chosen to be the mediator that will weld the differences between East and West into a higher unity ’ ; ‘ The greatness of China lies in this, that she can assimilate the true values of the West and still remain China.’

The more urgently one inquires into confident statements of this nature, the more one feels that the person one is speaking to is really more concerned with the question than with the answer he gives to it, and that a deep uncertainty lies behind his assertions. It is not yet certain what will be the upshot of this impact of East and West, this tremendous spiritual struggle which is taking place.

What is the struggle about? One sees at the first glance out there that it is not concerned with the question as to how far the East can or should be protected from contact with the West. The spirit which comes from the West is forcing an entrance, and can no longer be withstood. The ‘ new flood of thought ’ permeates irresistibly all departments of life ; not even the innermost region of the religious life remains untouched. It affects man’s whole being. The question is whether in the end the man of the East will have lost himself, whether he will be hopelessly subservient to the spirit of the

West or whether he will emerge from the encounter a new man, who has found the way to a peculiar, creative, reshaping of his life, as a nation and as a person. In this sense it is a question of life or death. Only as a new man can the man of the East dominate the tremendous crisis which has come on him and which in breadth and depth is unparalleled in the history of mankind.

The end of the struggle cannot yet be foretold. We can only try to get a glimpse of how it is working out, where the decisive bulwarks which are being fought over lie, which are the enduring forces that decide its result, and how far the struggle has penetrated to-day.

Nobody can survey the whole battlefield. We must limit our field of observation if we do not mean to content ourselves with conjecture and more or less casual impressions. At least, however, let us limit ourselves to that part of the field where the battle is raging most fiercely, that is to the domain of missions. Both the friends and the foes of mission work agree that it is on this field that the decision will first be reached whether the man of the East will be conquered by or will master the West. Here, says the opponent of missions, will the deathblow be given to the man of the East; here his faith, his very soul is taken from him, and an alien sovereignty set up in the innermost sphere of his life. Here, hopes the friend of missions, the man of the East receives the Gospel message which will make him a new man who, as himself yet different, will find the way to a new, but still an Eastern shaping of his life.

Whichever of these conceptions may be right, one thing is certain, that our study of the men under mission influence, of native Christians and Christianity, must yield important data which will help us to recognize the determining basic lines of the spiritual crisis in the East. Here the Eastern man is assailed in the innermost sphere of his life by those who have learned to know him by living with him, and who speak his own language. Often restricted in his attempts at political reshaping, here, thanks to the principle of religious liberty recognized by colonial administrations and states, he has largely a free hand. He has been able to form his church life free of political influence, going even as far as to found indepen-

dent churches. Here, more than in any other part of the battle which is in progress, we should be able to find a more comprehensive answer to the problem of the how and the why of the new man of the East.

So far we have spoken of the man of the East and have thus emphasized the great unity which strikes us as we look across from the West. But the farther we leave the West behind us and really come near to this Eastern man, the more this unity breaks up and great variety is apparent. We see Indians and Chinese, natives of Java, Batavia, Papua and other places, each of them different in kind and in history. The contact, too, with the West has varied in different countries and has led the natives and the various brands of Christianity among them into different situations. We would inevitably reach false conclusions if we were to fail to notice these peculiarities, and there is no alternative except to explore them step by step, even if we only pick out a few big groups of countries which in themselves are diverse enough—New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies, China and British India.<sup>1</sup>

The more seriously we inquire into the nature, into the problems and the resolutions taken by each group of countries and into their Christianity, the more shall we find that all these different varieties of the Eastern man of to-day are confronted by the same great fundamental problems, are trying to solve them by the same methods, and are challenged to the same decisions. Only when we keep both factors before our eyes, the variety and the unity of the modern man of the East, do we see him as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid unnecessary length and repetition we are not dealing as fully with China and India as with New Guinea and the Dutch East Indies, especially as much less has been written in Germany about the latter.