

ASIA

A SHORT HISTORY
FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES
TO THE PRESENT DAY

BY

HERBERT H. GOWEN, D.D., F. R. As. Soc.

Author of "An Outline History of China"



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ASIA
A SHORT HISTORY

To
MY WIFE

FOREWORD

IN Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" Asia is one of the Oceanides who minister to the great sufferer on the rocks of Caucasus. If we regard Prometheus as the symbol of civilization in the service of humanity, there is much propriety in thinking of the continent of Asia as an important figure in that immortal cause.

We do not know how the name "Asia" originated. The old Greek geographers reckoned only two continents, Europe and Asia. They included Africa — or Libya, as they called it — in the latter. But apart from this unnecessary addition, Asia contains one third of the land area of the globe and considerably over one half its population. It stands to reason, therefore, that we have here practically half a world, which should be interesting to the other half. Other reasons for this conviction will appear in the course of the following pages.

No apology need be made for the slight treatment which many important episodes of the history receive. There is in China a type of poem known as the "stop short." It is so called because designed to stop short of any full description, from the poet's desire to stimulate the imagination of the reader. In the case of the following narrative it is hoped that the stimulus will be sufficient to prompt further research, in volumes where the separate trees are of more concern than the entire plan of the forest.

One other word of explanation is perhaps due. It is obvious that this history is written frankly from the Western point of view, and that therefore there is considerable reference to those incidents of European and American history which connect themselves with Asiatic affairs. To attempt a history of

Asia from the Asiatic point of view would be to miss those interests which for the present furnish the bond between East and West. Here too it will be possible to draw upon separate volumes written from another angle. The aim of the present writer has been, from such points of departure as are reasonably familiar to the American student, to offer a story of the "great sister" (as Shelley calls his heroine) whose civilization is at once the source and complement of our own — a story as connected as is possible within the limits of our space.

H. H. G.

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