

"East and West"

Elisée Reclus

The Contemporary Review Octobre 1894

I

ON the surface of this round earth the cardinal points have no precise meaning except in relation to particular places. The Greenwich observer may point to his north and his south, his east and his west ; but the astronomers of Paris, of Washington, of Santiago, and direction-seeking mankind generally, will look for theirs in other directions. The lines traced by the meridians and the equator are purely artificial. Nevertheless the attempt has been made to give to the geographical terms of orientation a common meaning that should be accepted by all. Thus Carl Ritter, taking into account the idea of heat and of blinding light which Europeans associate with the "South," reserved the name of "South" for the Sahara and the other deserts of the torrid zone which lie between the northern and the southern hemisphere. In the same way the expressions "East" and "West" have been used for thousands of years as synonymous with "Asia" and "Europe" ; and indeed the very names of the two continents, in their original tongues, meant precisely "the Rising Sun" and "the Setting Sun." To the Assyrians the land of Assú – i.e. Asia – was the region lit by the earliest morning rays, and the land of Ereb, or Europe, included all the countries lying west of them, towards the evening purple. The Arabs took up the word again, and applied it to the western extremity of their conquests in Mauritania and the Iberian peninsula---" El Gharb," "Maghreb," "the Algarves."

In current speech the expressions East and -West must necessarily apply to regions whose boundary shifts from age to age with the march of civilisation. Thus Asia Minor, the "West" *par excellence* to the Assyrian, became to the Byzantines the land of the sun-rising (Anatolia, Natolie, Anadoli) ; and later, along the shores of the Mediterranean, the word "Levant," applied by the mariners of the "Ponant" to all the ports of the seas that bathe the coasts of Asia, came to mean more particularly Smyrna and the other ports of the Asiatic peninsula. So, again, the "Eastern Empire," embracing fully half the Roman world, included in its vast domain the territory of the Ravennate, belonging to that Italian peninsula which was the ancient Hesperia, "the going down of the sun." Thus the phrases "East" and "West" were bound to change their meaning, even in the popular acceptance, and it became necessary to gain precision by introducing subdivisions -" Eastern Europe," "Eastern Asia," the "Far East," just as, in the United States, they distinguish between "East" "West," and "Far West."

From an historical point of view, however, it may be useful to try and determine approximately the normal line of separation between the two halves of the ancient world which best deserve the names of East and West. Just as every surface has its diagonal, and every body its axis, so the total mass of the continents has its median line, where the contrasts of soil, climate and history poise themselves over against each other. Taking as a whole the regions in which mankind has spent its life, and reached at last the consciousness of its collective personality, what is this median line, this watershed of human history? Africa may be left out, for its development appears to have taken place almost independently; and that massive continent four-fifths of whose surface lies within the southern temperate or the torrid zone - the "South" *par excellence* - belongs to our common world of early history only by its Mediterranean littoral - Egypt, Cyrenaica, Mauritania. But, on the other hand, we must restore to the ancient world the isles of the Indian Ocean which form the retinue of the Gangetic peninsulas, and all the island groups that people the immense stretch of sea eastward towards America, for, by the migrations and counter-migrations of their inhabitants, by their legends and traditions, and by the whole testimony of historic evolution, these ocean territories do indeed form part of the same circle as Farther Asia.

It might seem, at first sight, as if the true and natural partition between East and West must be indicated by the watershed which separates the eastward slope towards the Indian and

Chinese seas from the slope that drains into the Atlantic through the Mediterranean and other European waters. But this boundary, purely artificial after all, as it winds from the Taurus to the Caucasus, crosses populations subject to the same influences of soil and climate, participators in the same historical movements, and composed to a great extent of elements of the same ethnological origin. The true frontier between the Eastern and Western world must be so shifted as to throw off upon the Western side the whole watershed of the great twin streams, Tigris and Euphrates, as well as the chief summits of Iran. This whole region of Persia and Media, of Assyria and Chaldea, is intimately associated in its history with the countries of the Mediterranean, while its relations with the Eastern world were always less active and more frequently interrupted.

The line of separation, then, is to be found farther East, and it is well marked, not by the outlines of the continent of Asia, but by a space of territory distinguished at once by the high relief of the soil and the comparative sparseness of the population. Between Mesopotamia, where the swarming human race reared its tower of Babel, and the Western plains of Hindostan, with their teeming populations – in some parts two thousand or more to the square mile – a transverse zone, containing less than two inhabitants to the same surface, runs from north to south between the Gulf of Oman and the icy Arctic Sea. This almost uninhabited zone begins just west of the plains of the lower Indus and its frontier mountains, in the desert tracts of southern Beloochistan, scattered with rare oases. Between India and Afghanistan it stretches north and north-east along the rugged escarpments of the Suleiman Dagh and other ranges, whose hidden basins and narrow gorges give shelter to mountain tribes living far from the haunts of other men, except when the martial fury seizes them and brings them to blows with their neighbours of the lower tableland or the plains. To the north-west of Hindostan the folds of the soil become deeper and more numerous, sharply dividing the world with their countless walls. The high summits of the Hindoo-Koosh, inferior only to those of the Himalaya of Nepal, tower above these ridges and spread their glaciers to enormous distances. Beyond these, again, the immense mass of almost impassable highlands which have been called the "Roof of the World" continue the line of demarcation very effectually between Hindoo-Koosh and Thian-Shan, and the ill-watered adjacent plains broaden at many points the median zone of separation between East and West. Finally, farther north, in the great Siberian depression, the salt borders of Lake Balkash and the barren reaches of Semipalatinsk and the "Hungry Steppe" stretch between the Obi and the Yenisei along a band of thinly inhabited country which loses itself in the frozen tundras. The researches of Gmelin and other naturalists have established the fact that the true separation between Europe and Asia lies here, in these low and arid regions, and not along the green heights of the Ural mountains.

The ancient world, then, is clearly divided into two distinct halves, their continental masses being of nearly equal size. The broad zone of separation is formed, along half its length, of a chain of eminences which includes the central knot of the mountain system of Eurasia, and is broken only at rare intervals by passes which have served as roadways for war and merchandise. Narrow exceedingly, and difficult of access were these few highways, which afforded the only means of communication between the populations on either side, the only junction between the different civilisations of the eastern, and western slopes! Just as a fall of earth may suddenly choke the current of a stream, so an incursion of mountain tribes might suddenly close the transit between East and West, and the world be thus sharply cut in two again. This, as a matter of fact, has happened many times. To open the passage and to keep it open has needed from age to age the marshalling of enormous forces, such as those of the great conquerors, Alexander, Mahmoud the Ghaznavid, Akbar the Great. In our own day, the mountainous part of the dividing line still opposes serious obstacles to the march of man, in spite of roads and railways, caravanserais and forts of refuge; but how much more dangerous was the mountain barrier in historic times, when it rose before him bare and formidable, without roads or cities!

In that sense, the general meaning- of the expressions East and West is clearly determined for the rest of the earth's circuit. On the one side lies all that part of Asia which leans toward the

Indian Ocean and the Pacific – India, Ceylon, the Malay peninsula, and the great islands and island groups which stud the vast stretch of craters almost to the American coast. On the other hand lies the Asiatic peninsula which reaches out into the Mediterranean world – Egypt and Morocco, Europe, and, beyond the Atlantic, the whole American continent. For that double continent, facing eastward by its estuaries, by the valleys of its great rivers and the spread of its fertile plains, belongs incontestably, by its history no less than by its geographical orientation, to the European cosmos.

II

Thus delimited, the two halves of the world, East and West – including their inland seas and the oceans that bathe them – occupy a surface of such extent that, up to a few centuries ago, their boundaries were unknown to their own inhabitants. At the far ends of the earth, the isolation and unconsciousness of the populations which had been left outside the cycle of universal history prevented their concerning themselves with the great contrast between the separated halves of humanity ; but in the ancient world, from the very beginnings of national life in the historic nations, as they are preserved to us in legends and annals, the distinction between East and West already existed in full force. The evolution of humanity was worked out differently on the two sides of the line, and every century increased the original divergence of the separate civilisations. Which of these two evolutions –taking place, the one around the shores of the great ocean, the other chiefly on the Mediterranean seaboard – was destined to produce the mightier results, to contribute the larger share to the common education of humanity ? There can be no hesitation as to the answer. In the struggle for existence the championship remains with the West. It is the peoples of the West who have shown that they possess both the initiative to advance and the power of recovery.

And yet it seemed at first as if the East were the privileged half of the planet. History indeed proves to demonstration that, taken, as a whole, the nations of the East had their period of real superiority. Without entering on a problem which it would now be impossible to solve, that of assigning a priority of civilisation to one country or another, without inquiring whether the ground was first tilled on the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates or on those of the Indus and the Yang-tse-kiang, or whether ships were sailing the Mediterranean Sea before the Indian Ocean was known to the mariner, we may assuredly say that, 3000 years ago, the races sufficiently advanced to be aware of their own place in history occupied a far wider region east of the diaphragm of Asia than west of it. The ravines and tablelands occupied by the Medes and Persians, the plains of Assyria and Chaldaeia, the countries of the Hittites, of the children of Israel and the children of Ishmael, the coasts of the Phoenicians and the mountains of the Himyarites, the islands of Cyprus and Crete, and finally the frontier lands of Asia where germinated the civilisation which was to blossom in Greece, on the other side, of the AEgea Sea – all these countries form, but a small domain compared with the vast tract of south-eastern Asia, from the Indus to the Yellow River. And to this great Asiatic territory, together perhaps with Southern Siberia, so rich in inscriptions of a vanished age, we must add a great part of the Malay archipelago, whose civilisation is certainly of very ancient date. And finally, the lands of Oceania, scattered eastward over a liquid expanse not less in extent than the whole continental mass of the ancient world, appear to have formed part of an area whose historical development was superior to that of the European populations at the time of the Pelasgians.

As far back as history goes towards the origin of the Eastern world, we find traces of the very considerable share of influence exercised by the group of nations. which has been included under the general name of Malay, taken from a district of Sumatra, one of the large islands partly populated by them. No region in the world was better furnished than this with the facilities for transit and exchange ; if the word "predestined" could be applied to any part of the earth's surface, it might justly. be applied to those islands and peninsulas of Malaysia. They abound in products. of every sort and kind, minerals and precious gems, bark and gums, plants and fruits ; every island has its riches ; nowhere is there a greater diversity of living forms, vegetable or animal ; two fieras, two faunas, men of different nationality and race,

confront each other across a narrow arm of sea. Great trunks of floating trees supply the riverside populations with ready-made rafts, only needing to be disbranched and solidly lashed together with liana ropes ; while the forests of the seashore offer their choicest woods to the boat-builder. Wide roadsteads and sheltered havens break the outline of the islands ; innumerable ports of call present themselves on every side, directing the voyage of the navigator. Gradually, the Malays became the natural intermediaries between the various countries of Eastern Asia, from India to Japan ; and, favoured by the trade winds which carried them across the Indian Ocean from shore to shore, succeeded in turning the flank of the great barrier that separated the two worlds, and even gained the coast of Africa. Madagascar was included within their area of navigation and of conquest, and their civilisation radiated almost to the opposite extremity of the earth's surface, within a little distance of the American continent. The system of numeration which obtains in all the Polynesian languages is proof sufficient of the wide spread of this Malay civilisation. Even in our own day, notwithstanding the great superiority that science and industry have given to the European navigator, a great part of the carrying trade of the Far East is still conducted by the Malaya with their fleets of *praus*. No literature is richer than theirs in stories of the sea ; and it was the Malay seaman who gave to the Arab the Thousand and One Nights that still charm our children.

The Polynesians, again, like the Malaya-scattered over their hundred islands, their ocean rocks and coral banks -took to the sea by natural compulsion, and thus contributed to the spread of geographical knowledge in the ancient East. The great diversity of types to be met within a single group, or even on a single island, the innumerable legends of native migrations, and, finally, indisputable historical documents, prove that the Pacific Ocean was traversed from the earliest times, not only from East to West, in the direction of the trade winds, but also in the opposite direction, with the set of the counter-currents. All this was long ago understood. It is well known that the equatorial zone strictly so called, embracing a space of about five hundred miles north and south of the Equator, escapes the domination of the trade winds, and the west wind alternates with calms, during which the mariner may row his boat where he will, while the normal set of swells and currents is from west to east. [1] Moreover, even in the zone of the trade winds proper, there are storm winds that sometimes blow in a contrary direction to the prevailing atmospheric currents – as if, according to the Tongan legend, [2] a god had separated families of brothers by blowing an obstinate east wind between them, but now and then stopped blowing to let the relatives renew their acquaintance. The islanders were not slow to profit by the respite. Skillful in the management of their boats, they knew how to seize the opportunity afforded by the very slightest deviation of the regular winds to modify their course, reefing their sails as close as possible and pointing in the eye of the wind. When the Spaniards first visited the Marianne islands, of which they were afterwards almost to exterminate the inhabitants, they were astonished at the sight of the flying barques, far swifter than any boat of European construction. Most of the Polynesian vessels were, moreover, provided with outriggers, which made it almost impossible to upset them ; and many of them were large enough to convey the whole fighting strength of a tribe. Coppinger [3] saw a canoe built to carry 250 men.

Thus fortified by their nautical industry, the Polynesians were in a position to contribute largely, and did in fact contribute, to the discovery and exploration of the world. Some of their navigators, carried away by the storm and lost upon the waste of waters, would be guided in their search for a place of refuge by the indications afforded by the waves, by birds and fishes. Others might be driven from their native isle by force of war or civil dissension, and launched upon the sea at the mercy of wind and wave while others, again, young and adventurous, would set out of their own accord in search of some region more vast or more fortunate than their own. Myths and legends, the vague reminiscences, perhaps, of earlier migrations, would stimulate this exodus of islanders across the infinite expanse of sea. Thus the natives of Eastern Polynesia, looking towards the West as towards a region of divine repose, concealing somewhere in its bosom the Islands of the Blest, might seek again and again to discover the happy land. Who can tell ? The unconscious impulse may have been a true nostalgia, an hereditary instinct, a re-awakened yearning for the home of their ancestors.

Or perhaps it was the mirage of the clouds that lured them, as it reared fantastic mountains toward the zenith, or stretched away in golden plains under the purple light of evening. Perhaps they really imagined that they saw with their own eyes that land of desire rising out of the sea, its outline appearing dimly on the horizon, then lost again – a promise not yet fulfilled, but never to be forgotten. Polynesian history tells us that these island families had a natural tendency to multiply westward – just as our modern towns, encroaching constantly on the surrounding districts stretch out their suburbs towards the setting sun. Again and again, Polynesian voyagers, impelled by the thirst for the unknown, attempted the discovery of these lands of promise, like nomads of the steppes moving forward in search of fresh pastures. Even so lately as the beginning of this century, the people of Nouka Riva – now more than decimated by war, oppression, and disease – sent out, from time to time, -their surplus population of young men in the supposed direction of the traditional Isle of Utupu, whence the god Tao was said to have brought the cocoanut tree [4]. Happy couples, full of hope, would put out on the transparent evening tide, rowing towards the distant land ; they rowed away and never came back : no one knew whether the sea had sucked them in, or the grim Hunger had devoured them, or whether they had indeed made at last the shore of Perpetual Youth.

III

Doubtless the savage tribes of 'Europe in the Age of Stone had also their migrations and counter-migrations, overrunning, from this point or from that, countries widely remote from one another ; but the political and social condition of these tribes did not afford sufficient cohesion for the preservation of any record of their comings and goings. In a world itself unknown, their journeyings remained unknown, as if they had never been ; while the equally unrecorded migrations of the Pacific islanders were at any rate connected, by the network of Malay navigation, with the great world of insular and continental India thus enabling the Orientals to form some vague idea of that vast sea, studded with a milky way of islands, which spread outwards from the coast of Asia into the immeasurable distance. It was not on that side of the world that the ocean could have been conceived – as the Greeks did conceive it – as a winding stream, embracing in its narrow arms the countries of the continent. To the Indian and Malay it must rather have seemed a limitless expanse, losing ite1f in the immensity of heaven.

In those early times, the East was thus far in advance of the West, both in point of its known extent and the greater cohesion of its races. But for thirty centuries, and without any retrogression of its own – for, speaking generally, evolution has everywhere been in the direction of the better, or at any rate of the vaster and more comprehensive – the East has found itself strangely distanced by he West. It has often been suggested that the precocity of its civilisation was itself the cause of this arrest of development ; that the Asiatic and Polynesian races had attained a too early and therefore inferior civilisation [5]. Some writers, giving themselves up to mystical fancies, and arguing from a supposed Providential predestination, have tried to explain the contrast between West and East by an original and irreducible racial difference. In the beginning, according to them, the Eastern and Western races were created different, the Eastern mind cloudy and chimerical, its perceptions warped beforehand, its ideas subtle and twisted to selfcontradiction ; while the Western was gifted with the very genius of observation, a natural rectitude of thought, a true comprehension of life. The myth of the Serpent in the Garden, symbolising, as it were, the dangerous influence of the East, seems to dominate history. But such a conception evidently rests on no better basis than the recollection of conflicts which took place at a time when the populations thrown across each other's path by war or rivalry encountered one another at different stages of their political and social development. Between a decadent civilisation and a society in full process of growth the conditions are not equal ; to judge fairly between them, they must be viewed at the corresponding periods of their collective life ; it is no use making comparisons between the triumphant youth of Greece and the senility of Persia. Setting aside, therefore, this assumed essential difference of the races, we must turn to the geographical conditions of

the Eastern world, and there seek the causes of its retarded development as compared with the progress of the West.

In the first place, the great ocean, with its thousands and thousands of islands, has, for all its immense expanse of waters, but a very meagre allowance of dry land, over and above the arid Australian continent ; and the centres of civilisation, such as Samoa, Tahiti, and the Tongan and Fijian groups, separated by long distances from each other, and each inhabited by but a scanty population, could have no chance of exerting any considerable influence. There was no room within such narrow bounds for the creation of any nucleus radiating an active intellectual propaganda. New Zealand, with a superficies large enough to make the home of a powerful nation, lies altogether apart, in the solitary southern seas, far from the track of the Polynesian islands. It was colonised later ; and perhaps has not been inhabited at all for more than some thirty generations. As for the equatorial islands, from Papua to Borneo, they are large and very favourably situated at the south-eastern angle of the continent of Asia, in the very axis of the general movement of civilisation ; but the very richness of their forest vegetation, and the ease of living, enabled the aboriginal tribes to maintain themselves in their primitive isolation ; and thus the greater part of these magnificent archipelagoes was left outside the march of progress ; the Malay adventurers, as well as the colonists of other races, contented themselves with occupying the seashores. The interior was unexplored, and was, indeed, in some islands effectually closed to visitors by the "Head-hunters." Only two large islands, those lying nearest to the Asiatic continent, Sumatra and Java, were attached to the civilised world of Eastern Asia ; and even there the inland forests and plateaux of the former country were still occupied by barbarians averse to all commerce with the foreigner. Java, again, if she enjoys the privilege of being associated with the regions of Hindoo civilisation, undoubtedly owes it to her geographical conformation. Very long, very narrow, with no continuous mountain chain to serve as a backbone, cut through at intervals by passages which are practically so many straits, she has been, from the earliest days of colonisation, as easy of access as if she had been a row of islands strung together like a necklace. Come whence they would, from the northern or the southern coast, the immigrants penetrated with ease into the open country between the giant volcanoes, which themselves contributed – unlikely as it might seem – to render access to the island comparatively convenient, by burning down the once impenetrable forests of the intermediate valleys, and thus opening the way from coast to coast.

Nevertheless, Java, and some districts of Sumatra, and a few little neighbouring islands which participate in the same civilisation, do not together form a sufficient extent of territory, in comparison with the immensity of the ocean spaces, to afford a basis and centre of illumination for the whole island world of the extreme East. Nay, more ; the group of great islands, as a whole, has rather contributed to break the historic unity of the insular regions. Borneo, Celebes, the greater part of the Philippine Islands, New Guinea (itself almost continental), and the arid coast of the neighbouring continent of Australia, were so many countries in which the stranger, whether shipwrecked mariner or adventurous colonist, ran every chance of a hostile, if not a hungry, welcome. And, furthermore, the principal waterway between Polynesia and the islands of the Indian archipelago is almost barred by coral reefs.

Nor was it possible to find a common centre for the civilisation of the Eastern world on the shores of the continent. Remarkable as was the progress of thought in the communities which sprang up on the banks of the Indus and the Ganges, in Ceylon, on the coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, in the basins of the Thdo-Chinese rivers, among the plains watered by the Yang-tse-kiang, and in the Yellow Country of the Hundred Families, these different civilisations never grouped themselves into any sort of political union, and such union as they did form, lax as it was, lasted but for a short time under the influence of religions proselytism. The communication that took place between the various countries was always rare and uncertain. Tribes which no one had been able to reduce to subjection, inhabiting in independent groups nearly all the mountain regions, broke into separate fragments the territory of the civilised nations. Taken as a whole, that territory presents itself pretty much in the form of a spread fan. The axis of the basin of the Indus, where the first Vedas were first uttered, points toward

the south-west ; the united streams of the Ganges and the Brahmapootra bend their common delta directly toward the south ; the water-courses of Indo-China flow in a southeasterly direction ; while the rivers of China – and the progress of culture, which tends the sespe way – set due east. Thus the various civilisations of these countries have a natural centrifugal tendency ; they never meet in a common geographical centre ; and even the Indo-Chinese peninsula, situated at the very heart of the Eastern world, serves at many points rather as a barrier of separation, with its parallel mountain ranges inhabited by savage tribes. On the other hand, the table-land of Thibet, the region of the forced pass between China and India – which, from a geometrical point of view, is the true focus in the semicircle of the south-eastern countries of Asia – stretches its snowy ridges at such a height and under such a climate that its scanty populations live, as it were, for shelter, enclosed between the fissures of the soil.

To the north-west, the Oriental world is, as we have seen, sharply defined by mountain ranges, and, to some extent, by arid and almost uninhabitable wastes. Its mode of communication with the Western world, always precarious and often interrupted, was by way of dangerous mountain passes, or else by sea, either skirting the deserts of Gedrosia (south-east Beloochistan), towards the Persian Gulf, or doubling the Arabian peninsula to the narrow outlet of the Red Sea. It was thus by slender dribblets, almost drop by drop, that the quintessence of Oriental thought had to be distilled before it could join the flowing torrent of the culture of the West. But, by a striking contrast, the roads by which this transmission from world to world necessarily took place are disposed in a diametrically different manner from that which characterises the axes of civilisation at the opposite extremity of Asia, Instead of diverging at a very obtuse angle, they tend towards one another, converging uniformly, all of them, upon the basin of the Hellenic Mediterranean. The long fissure of the Red Sea, which united the land of the Himyarites and Ethiopia to Lower Egypt, points directly towards the Eastern Mediterranean, from which it is separated only by a narrow strip of shore ; the winding valley of the Nile opens out in the same direction ; the Persian Gulf, continued to the north-west by the course of the Euphrates, runs in a straight line towards that angle of the Mediterranean which is occupied by the Isle of Cyprus ; while, further north, all the rivers, all the highways of commerce which descend from Asia Minor, from the continent of Asia, and from the Sarmatian plains to the Black Sea, become tributaries of the Greek waters through the Bosphorus and the Hellespont. Even the Anatolian peninsula divides into a number of little secondary peninsulas, enclosing basins that face towards Greece. Thus the marvellous cosmos of the Greek islands and capes was indicated, by the convergence of the ways, as the necessary meeting-point of all the Asiatic civilisations, and the focus of elaboration of all these ancient elements into new forms.

It is needless here to describe in detail the march of culture in the West. The story has been told by innumerable writers, and the knowledge of it forms a part of the Ordinary classical education. Every one knows how the beacons of civilisation sprang up in succession from the south-east to the north-west, under a climate sharper and less equable than that of India or the Pacific, and consequently under conditions which imposed on man a sterner struggle of adaptation and efforts more vigorous and more sustained. Every one knows how Rome, situated in the midst of a semicircle of extinct volcanoes, enclosed in their turn by the grander semicircle of the Apennines, gradually consolidated herself within this double rampart, then made herself mistress of the whole of Italy on the hither side of the Alpine wall, and, firmly established in the centre of the Mediterranean and of the whole known world, ended by annexing all the countries which pour their waters into that inland sea, and many that border on the open sea besides. When the political power of Rome had passed away, her juridical power still remained ; and then the ancient Rome was replaced by a new and mightier religious Rome, which bound to itself by the subtler tie of spiritual influence the peoples which heretofore had been the mere conquest of the sword. After Italian Rome, other centres of intense vitality sprang up north of the Alps, on the outer slope of Europe ; but, even in shifting its centre of gravity towards the north and west, the world of western civilisation lost nothing, or at any rate it regained all it had lost, of the lands which had formed part of the world known to the Greeks.

The ever-increasing domain of European ascendancy has ended by embracing the whole world. Enlarged, to begin with by the addition of the two Americas, it is now assuming to itself the continent of Africa, while its perpetual encroachments are slowly sucking in the vast territories of the rival civilisation. Either directly, by force of conquest, or indirectly, under the continuous pressure of commerce and of moral influences, the whole world is being Europeanised. Of the two halves of the world struggling for existence, the Western half has won : the preponderance is hers for the future ; but she has won to a great extent by the use of weapons which the East had forged for her, since the religions of the West had been elaborated in India before they came to be remodelled and transformed in Persia, in Palestine, in Egypt, in Greece, in Rome. Besides, this very triumph of the West subserves the progress of the nations it has overcome. From Western Europe, as the centre of equilibrium between the forces of the human race, radiate not only all the roadways of commerce, but rise the ideas and influences of social life, in its collective solidarity.

Thanks to mutual interpenetration, the contrast between East and West is gradually diminishing. Nevertheless, it is still sharp enough ; and at many points – notably in China and India – it presents itself in such a form that reconciliation seems an almost impossible task. It is now at the two extremities of the earth that the opposing forces meet in all the intensity of their antagonism ; but, sometimes at one point, sometimes at another, the conflict has always been going on. The oldest historical legends – the expedition of the Argonauts, the Tale of Troy – recall the state of permanent tension in which the ancient populations lived and clashed against each other – representatives in miniature of the two worlds, and, like them, seeking, in spite of their very hostility, to find some way of union. The Greeks were well aware of the profound meaning of those hereditary instincts which drove them into conflict with the peoples of the East, and which, struggle after struggle, brought them at last, with Alexander, to the banks of the Hydaspes.

It is in this same region that we must look for the end – not now, perhaps, very far distant – of the conflict between the two worlds. Travel and commerce, passing to and fro on the sea highway, are slowly contributing to bring about a mutual understanding between the races of men which points towards their unification, intellectual and moral. England, now dominant in India, labours persistently, even against her will, to reduce the contrasts that divide the populations of the peninsula, and to give them a moral unity corresponding to that of their geographical position ; but the barrier of mountains and of solitudes which, to the north-west of India, marks the natural limit between East and West, is still almost as difficult to cross as it was two thousand years ago. The mountain passes are open only to the privileged – privileged by fortune or by political power ; there are no great highways, even yet, to facilitate freedom of movement to and fro. And indeed, before any such highways can be opened to the free ingress of the nations, a great question of political equilibrium – the greatest and most pressing of modern times – must be settled once for all, and settled at the foot of those very mountains of Hindostan which have stood through all times barring the corner passage between the two worlds. England and Russia are the two countries specialty involved in the dispute ; it is for them to solve – by peaceful means if possible – this problem of the levelling of the mountains of Central Asia. It was said once – but in a purely dynastic sense, and history has not yet ratified the saying – "The Pyrenees are no more !" It rests with the civilisation of the West to say, more truly, and from a human, not a dynastic point of view, "We have done away with the Himalaya !" **Elisée Reclus.**

[1] La Pérouse ; Kerhallet ; Dunmore Lang ; Ellis, &c.

[2] Mariner, "Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands." London. 1817.

[3] "Cruise of the *Alert*."

[4] Rienzi ; Fornander, "Account of the Polynesian Races."

[5] Gaétan Delaunay, "Mémoire sur l'Infériorité des Civilisations Précoces."