A PAGEANT OF ASIA
MANJUSRI
Attributed to Wu-Tao-Tse of T'ang
A PAGEANT
OF ASIA

A STUDY OF
THREE CIVILIZATIONS

BY
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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO
DEDICATED TO

J. E. S.

MOST FAITHFUL OF STEWARDS

C. R. C.

MOST DELIGHTFUL OF

TRAVEL-COMPANIONS
PREFACE

This book is in part a record of impressions and reflections during ten years spent in the countries with which it deals. In teaching the History of Religion during another decade I have found it necessary to study the ‘secular’ life of the three great peoples here discussed, and on three special journeys of more than two years’ extent I have had opportunities of leisurely talks with leading thinkers, artists, and social reformers. These I owe to the generous help of Dr. John Mott, the Guggenheim Foundation, and Mr. Charles Crane, who set me free from routine duties to make this study.

I gratefully acknowledge my debt to them, and this little tribute would have appeared more promptly—it was largely written between 1926 and 1928—but for the crisis in these years, when every one was too preoccupied to attend to such matters. I believe there is now a growing interest in them, and I am convinced that it is time to put Asia ‘on the map’ of Western Schools and Colleges. I am glad, too, to acknowledge help from my Asiatic students in California who have translated passages for me and given me much encouragement. I hope that there is enough material here to provide an introduction to cultures of profound interest and beauty. With all their failures India, China, and Japan have a proud place in the family of nations, and a certain cultural unity underlies their deep differences.

If India is mystical and metaphysical China is rationalist and humanist, and Japan is at once utilitarian and poetical. All have elements of mysticism and of a deep aesthetic and poetic genius, and all have produced men of action as well as men of vision. Yet it remains true that the Indian ideal is the Rishi—the Yogi—the Mahatma—men of transcendental vision: the Chinese ideal is the man of affairs who is also a scholar, and the Japanese ideal is the Samurai, or loyal servant of Emperor and overlord,
faithful to death, stoic in endurance, touched to finer issues by a sad sense of the transiency of the world and its joys and sorrows. And in all Buddhism has quickened the native aestheticism, and taught ideals of compassion and contemplation.

The modern revolt against its other-worldliness may be a passing fashion: yet it contains within it the strong sense that the masses must be helped in more practical ways to enter into their rich heritage.

It is clear that we who are heirs of Greece and Judaea are also debtors to Asia. We owe much in the past to its vision: we owe it in the present the duty of trying to understand it.

In choosing three great civilizations I have naturally had to reject much: but these three are the heart and brain of Asia, and other cultures, Muslim and Persian, are at any rate touched upon as they have influenced these.

With the domination of the Mongols I have had to leave them: with this and with Europe knocking at its doors Asia was to become a new Continent, and in another little book Whither Asia? I have discussed the effect of Western civilization upon its great modern leaders.

Though my manuscript was complete when Sansom's admirable Japan, A Cultural History, appeared I have made free use of it in revising some sections of Part III. To the author and publishers of this work and others quoted, and to museums and collectors acknowledged below, I am grateful for kind co-operation.

K. S.

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS,
April 1933.
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