

ESSAYS
ON
EASTERN QUESTIONS.

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BY

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London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1872.

OXFORD:

BY T. COMBE, M.A., E. B. GARDNER, E. PICKARD HALL, AND J. H. STACY,

PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

V4 x M26

A872

1523

INTRODUCTION.

To expect that the collection of a few Essays from the scattered periodicals in which they originally appeared, and their republication in a more condensed form, can have any material effect towards removing erroneous ideas, or substituting exacter ones, about the Mahometan East of our own times, would be presumptuous indeed. Yet even these writings may in a measure contribute to so desirable a result; for correct appreciations are, like incorrect ones, formed not at once but little by little: true knowledge is a construction, not a monolith.

These Essays, taken together, form a sketch, mostly outline, part filled in, of the living East, as included within the Asiatic limits of the Ottoman Empire. Now, as for centuries past, the central figure of that picture is Islam, based on the energies of Arabia and the institutions of Mahomet, propped up by the memories of Chaliphs, and the power of Sultans; and, though somewhat disguised by the later incrustations of Turanian superstition, still retaining the chief lineaments, and not little of the stability and strength, of its former days. Round it cluster the motley phantoms of Eastern Christianity, indigenous or adventitious; and by its

side rises the threatening Russian colossus, with its triple aspect of Byzantine bigotry, Western centralization, and Eastern despotism. This group, in its whole and in some of its details, I have at different times endeavoured to delineate; and if the pencil be an unskilful one, its tracings, so far as they go, have the recommendation, not perhaps of artistic gracefulness, but at least of realistic truth.

The first, second, and third of these Essays have for their object the portraiture of Mahometanism, as it now exists among its followers throughout the greater part of the East-Turkish Empire. A fourth assigns its special attitude at the present day; and a fifth gives the details of a local development of the same force in a remote corner of its demesnes.

In the sixth Essay the most prevalent forms of Eastern Christianity are passed in review; while its 'Greek' or Byzantine modification is more minutely illustrated in the seventh. The eighth describes one of the many struggles between the Christianity of Russia on one side, and the Islam of the Caucasus on the other.

The ninth and tenth supply the background of Arab life and vigour in the times which immediately preceded or followed the birth of Mahometanism.

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