

has played in the politics of Europe during the last ten or fifteen years, and herein we see how much may be due to one single change in the relations of land and sea.

So, also, it would be easy to show how the opening of the Panama Canal (if it ever is opened, and its prospects are for the moment not encouraging) will affect trade, and through trade, political history. It would powerfully tell upon the commerce of Europe with Australasia, a great part of which would be diverted from the Suez to the Panama route. A great development would be given to Oregon, British Columbia and the western coast of South America. The Californians would be able to defy that great transcontinental railroad company which now controls them in so many ways. Chili, Peru and Ecuador would be brought within the closer touch of the great European Powers and of the United States. In fact, the history of all the countries bordering on the Pacific would be absolutely changed if this cut were made between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific.

Perhaps no two illustrations could be more to the point than these of the two inter-oceanic canals. But a simple method of endeavouring to apply such general considerations as have been put forward is to run through some of the leading countries of the world, and show how we can bring the light of geography to bear on their political, social and economical history. Such illustrations will explain how the possession of geographical knowledge and a full grasp of the geographical conditions under which nations and States grow up will enable a person studying their history to comprehend it more adequately and realize it more vividly.

Let us begin with the largest of the continents and the one where the curtain first rises on civilized man. What light on the historical growth and

progress of Asia will be thrown by a knowledge of her natural conditions? We perceive that the whole centre of Asia is a mass of high land, of dry land, and of land not pierced by any inlet from the sea. This is the dominant fact of Asiatic geography. Consequently, we shall not expect to find in this central area wealth, or the commerce which grows out of wealth, or any large population, because the conditions for the growth of wealth and population do not exist in a lofty and arid table-land. We shall rather be led to look for such growth of population in the river valleys which fall in different directions from the great central plateau of Asia: but we shall find it in the east and south, not in the north, because the rigorous climate of the north will not permit the production of wealth by agriculture, or of the existence of a large population. The north of Asia is cold, not only in respect of its latitude, which is, after all, a secondary condition in these matters, but because it is cut off by the great intervening mass of high land from the kindly influence of the south and exposed to blasts from the Frozen Ocean. We shall find, therefore, that the inhabitants of the centre of Asia will not be in very close commercial or political relation with the north, because the north is poor and thinly peopled; nor in active relation with the west, because the west is mainly desert down to the Sea of Aral and the Caspian. Neither will there be a great deal of intercourse with the south, because Tibet and Eastern Turkestan are cut off by the great snowy barrier of the Himalaya from the plains of India. This barrier is indeed pierced by passes, but owing to the very heavy rainfall on its southern face, forms a belt of country which the masses of snow and glacier above, the deep and densely wooded valleys below, make more difficult to traverse