

Innermost Asia: its Geography as a Factor in History.

ON Tuesday, March 24, at a meeting of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Sir Aurel Stein read a paper on "Innermost Asia: its Geography as a Factor in History." It dealt with the part which the elevated drainageless basins between Tibet in the south and the great Tian Shan range in the north have played for two thousand years as a natural corridor for the interchange of the civilisations of China, India, and the West. This vast region, stretching for close on 1600 miles from east to west, is for the most part occupied by deserts of drifting sands, wind-eroded steppe, and bare gravel. By denying to this region adequate atmospheric moisture and grazing grounds, Nature has protected it from becoming the scene of great nomadic migrations and of the upheavals entailed by them. Cultivation all through historical times has there been entirely dependent on irrigation, and hence restricted to a thin string of oases along the foot of the encircling mountains.

The safe trade route passing through these oases was first opened when the Chinese in the last quarter of the second century B.C. forced the Huns to the north of the Tian Shan, and then pioneered a track into the Tarim basin through the Lop Desert. China's policy of Central-Asian expansion at first aimed at securing an open road westwards for its exports, and particularly for its silk fabrics, the most valuable of its industrial products, of which it long retained a monopoly. The necessity of safeguarding this road forced the Chinese empire into gradually extending political and then military control right across the Pamirs and even beyond.

Sir Aurel Stein, on the second and third Central-Asian expeditions undertaken under the orders of the Indian Government, traced this ancient Chinese route along its whole length. By systematically exploring the ruins of the watch stations once guarding the ancient Chinese border wall west of Tun-huang, and of ancient settlements in the Tarim basin, abandoned from the third century A.D. onwards, to the desert, on ground now wholly waterless, he brought to light abundance of interesting relics of the traffic and trade once passing along this road. Among the most noteworthy of these relics are remains of beautiful Chinese figured silks of the first centuries before and after Christ, and also of fine tapestries of unmistakably Hellenistic style. Hundreds of documents on wood in Indian script and language of the third century A.D. attest how the same route in the reverse direction served for that spread of Buddhist doctrine to the Far East which forms the most important of India's many notable contributions to the spiritual development of civilised mankind. Fine paintings on silk and stucco sculptures in plenty show how Græco-Buddhist art from the north-western marches of India simultaneously penetrated into China and influenced its native art.

The opening of the earliest route through the Lop Desert comprising the salt-encrusted dry bed of a prehistoric sea affords striking evidence of that remarkable power of intelligent organisation which enabled the Chinese through successive periods to overcome formidable natural obstacles. The same capacity, far more than force of arms, helped them to regain control of those distant regions more than once during successive ages after it had been lost through internal decay of imperial authority.

Plentiful archaeological finds, as illustrated by Sir Aurel Stein's slides, showed how the cultural influences of India, China, and the Near East intermingled in the Tarim basin during close on a thousand years.

The remarkable preservation of these remains proves the extreme aridity of the climate prevailing here since ancient times. The same atmospheric dryness has made it possible in the Lop Desert for bodies of inhabitants of ancient Lou-lan to survive in a remarkable state of preservation since the first centuries of our era. They suggest that the people in the Tarim basin, whom we know spoke various Indo-European languages, showed in their physique the same *Homo alpinus* type which Mr. Joyce's analysis of the anthropometrical material collected by Sir Aurel Stein proves to be the prevailing element in the racial constitution of the present population of the oases.

University and Educational Intelligence.

OXFORD.—A special course in zoology for teachers of science in secondary schools has been arranged for in the department of zoology and comparative anatomy from July 31 to August 11. Forms of application and all particulars can be obtained from the Rev. F. E. Hutchinson, Acland House, Broad Street, Oxford.

APPLICATIONS are invited by the trustees of the Manchester Royal Infirmary for the Dickinson Surgery Scholarship, value 75*l.* for one year. The scholarship is open to students who have received at the university and the infirmary, instruction in pathology, medicine, and surgery necessary for the taking of the M.B., Ch.B. (Manchester) degree. The latest date for the receipt of applications (in each case six in number) by the Secretary is April 30.

AN Educational Policy for Tropical Africa is outlined in a memorandum prepared by the committee appointed in November 1923 to advise the Secretary of State for the Colonies on such matters, and published as command paper 2374 of March 1925. Mr. Ormsby-Gore, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, is the chairman of the committee, which includes also the Bishop of Liverpool, Sir Frederick Lugard, Sir Michael Sadler, Major A. G. Church, and Mr. J. H. Oldham. Native education, which, until recently, has been largely left to the Mission Societies, will, if the committee's views are adopted, become the field of a great government missionary enterprise, the keynote of which would be adaptation to native life. The point of view is conservative in the best sense. The salvaging of the best of barbarism is recognised as a necessary condition of the growth of anything worth calling civilisation. A dual system is to be maintained, and, in provided and non-provided schools alike, as well as in training colleges, religious teaching and moral instruction are to be accorded an equal standing with secular subjects. Examinations are not to be given the position of cardinal importance they have usurped so often, for the conditions under which grants-in-aid are given are not to be dependent on examination results. Supervision is to be exercised through an adequate staff of government inspectors, whose reports are to be based on frequent and unhurried visits, a primary purpose of which will be to make the educational aims understood and to give friendly advice and help in carrying them out. Departmentalism, which has so greatly vitiated the working of government educational administration in the past, is to be kept in check by close co-operation, as in the United States, with every department of government concerned with the welfare of the people or vocational teaching, including especially the departments of Health, Public Works, Railways, and Agriculture. To be instrumental in carrying out such a policy is an ambition that should fire the enthusiasm of university men not less than did the Indian Civil Service in its palmy days.