

east, Central Asia is largely a country of deserts. It is politically divided into the countries of Persia, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, northern India, Tibet, China, and Asiatic Russia. It varies in elevation from the low depression of the Caspian Sea and the small basin of Turfan, lying three hundred feet below sea-level in the very heart of Asia, to the plateaus of Tian Shan, Tibet, and the Pamirs at an elevation of from 10,000 to 20,000 feet above the sea. Although usually the mountainous parts are comparatively rainy and are often well covered with vegetation, the lowlands, which comprise most of the country, are intensely dry and almost absolutely desert. The people are equally varied, the fierce Afghan being as different from the sycophant Persian, as is the truculent Mongol from the mild Chanto of Chinese Turkestan. Yet in spite of all this, not only the physical features of the country, but the habits and character of its inhabitants, possess a distinct unity; for all alike bear the impress of an arid climate.

Central Asia, more fully perhaps than any other part of the world, exemplifies the great geographic type in which the topography, vegetation, animal life, and human civilization have developed along the lines characteristic of prolonged aridity. We all know something of arid countries, empirically or from observation. We need, however, a more general concept, so that the term "arid" shall bring to mind the essential features of a definite geographic type, just as the term "bovine" brings to mind the spreading horns, large eyes, heavy body, cloven hoofs, cud, and other essential features of a definite zoölogic type. If once the geographic type is well understood in its highly developed