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## P R E F A C E.

THE journey across Asia described in this volume was made over thirty years ago. In the spring of 1906 I received orders from the Russian General Staff to undertake a journey from Russian Turkestan through Chinese Turkestan and Western China and the provinces of Kan Su, Shensi and Shansi to Peiping as the final goal. The object of this expedition was to study conditions in the interior of Northern China, collect statistical materials and perform various tasks of a military nature. As, however, it seemed evident that in the course of my long journey and in connection with my principal duties I should also have an opportunity of collecting materials of scientific interest, I got into touch before starting with Senator OTTO DONNER and through him with the Fenno-Ugrian Society and the Trustees of the collections in the National Museum in Helsinki, who displayed great interest in my journey and requested me to collect archaeological and ethnographic materials and secure manuscripts or fragments of them. The wish was also expressed that I should study little-known peoples and tribes resident in Northern China. I endeavoured to carry out these instructions to the best of my ability in the course of the journey, so that my original plans were considerably extended.

The remarkable awakening of the »Central realm» from its centuries of slumber, the political re-birth of China characterised by the policy of intensive reforms of the central government, was of very special interest at the time of my journey.

The humiliation China had experienced round about the turn of the century, the apprehension of danger from without, the ferment in the southern parts of China, the spread of education in conjunction with the growth of progressive ideas through the newspapers of the south and students returning from Japan, appeared at that time to be impelling the country along the path of reform and paving the way, though slowly, for the victory of European ideas and culture over China's antiquated past, while the decentralisation of administration, the material interests of the all-powerful Mandarins and the hard struggle for existence among the uneducated masses constituted a constant threat to the ripest and best devised reforms of the central government, sometimes, perhaps, a healthy brake on too impetuous action.

It was, of course, also of interest to ascertain, to what extent the outlying provinces of the empire had actually been affected by the reforms of the central government and