

MF
A
THE ROMANES LECTURE

1907

H
Frontiers

BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD CURZON OF KEDLESTON

D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S.

ALL SOULS COLLEGE, CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

DELIVERED

IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE, OXFORD

NOVEMBER 2, 1907

OXFORD

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1907
A

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH
NEW YORK AND TORONTO

FRONTIERS

WHEN, at the end of December, 1905, the then Vice-Chancellor asked me to be the Romanes Lecturer in the following year, just after my return from India, I felt that the honour was one which it was impossible for me, as a devoted son of this ancient and illustrious University, to decline. But when he informed me that the entire field of Science, Literature, and Art was at my disposal for the choice of a subject, and that among my predecessors were to be found the great names of Gladstone, Huxley, and John Morley, I was more appalled at my temerity in venturing to tread in their footsteps than I was gratified at the almost illimitable range that was opened to my ambition. In these circumstances, I concluded that my best course would be to select some topic of which I had personal experience, and upon which I could, without presumption, address even this famous and learned University. I chose the subject of Frontiers. It happened that a large part of my younger days had been spent in travel upon the boundaries of the British Empire in Asia, which had always exercised upon me a peculiar fascination. A little later, at the India Office and at the Foreign Office, I had had official cognizance of a period of great anxiety, when the main sources of diplomatic preoccupation, and sometimes of international danger, had been the determination of the Frontiers of the Empire in Central Asia, in every

part of Africa, and in South America. Further, I had just returned from a continent where I had been responsible for the security and defence of a Land Frontier 5,700 miles in length, certainly the most diversified, the most important, and the most delicately poised in the world ; and I had there, as Viceroy, been called upon to organize, and to conduct the proceedings of, as many as five Boundary Commissions.

I was the more tempted to undertake this task because I had never been able to discover, much less to study, its literature. It is a remarkable fact that, although Frontiers are the chief anxiety of nearly every Foreign Office in the civilized world, and are the subject of four out of every five political treaties or conventions that are now concluded, though as a branch of the science of government Frontier policy is of the first practical importance, and has a more profound effect upon the peace or warfare of nations than any other factor, political or economic, there is yet no work or treatise in any language which, so far as I know, affects to treat of the subject as a whole. Modern works on geography realize with increasing seriousness the significance of political geography ; and here in this University, so responsive to the spirit of the age, where I rejoice to think that a School of Geography has recently been founded, it is not likely to escape attention. A few pages are sometimes devoted to Frontiers in compilations on International Law, and here and there a Frontier officer relates his experience before learned societies or in the pages of a magazine. But with these exceptions there is a practical void. You may ransack the catalogues of libraries, you may search the indexes of celebrated historical works, you may study the writings

of scholars, and you will find the subject almost wholly ignored. Its formulae are hidden in the arcana of diplomatic chancelleries ; its documents are embedded in vast and forbidding collections of treaties ; its incidents and what I may describe as its incomparable drama are the possession of a few silent men, who may be found in the clubs of London, or Paris, or Berlin, when they are not engaged in tracing lines upon the unknown areas of the earth.

Frontiers in History.

And yet I would invite you to pause and consider what Frontiers mean, and what part they play in the life of nations. I will not for the moment go further back than a century. It was the adoption of a mistaken Frontier policy that brought the colossal ambitions of the great Napoleon with a crash to the ground. The allied armies might never have entered Paris had the Emperor not held out for an impossible Frontier for France. The majority of the most important wars of the century have been Frontier wars. Wars of religion, of alliances, of rebellion, of aggrandisement, of dynastic intrigue or ambition—wars in which the personal element was often the predominant factor—tend to be replaced by Frontier wars, i. e. wars arising out of the expansion of states and kingdoms, carried to a point, as the habitable globe shrinks, at which the interests or ambitions of one state come into sharp and irreconcilable collision with those of another.

To take the experience of the past half-century alone. The Franco-German War was a war for a Frontier, and it was the inevitable sequel of the Austro-Prussian campaign of 1866, which, by destroying the belt of