A Journey across Asia from Leh to Peking: Discussion

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quantities, and the strings of donkeys, each laden with two enormous lumps of coal, are a feature on the abominable track over which most of the trade into Shan-si still runs. That this historic route will soon become a thing of the past is probable, for a small branch line has even now penetrated halfway to Tai-yuan Fu, which Belgian interest is responsible for. It is hoped that the capital of Shan-si will be reached in another eighteen months.

Finding the railhead at the small town of Ching Hsing, just inside the border of Chili province, we gladly exchanged our nine months of methodical daily tramp for the speedier and more modern method, and in forty-eight hours found ourselves in Peking.

Before the paper, the PRESIDENT: I have to introduce to you Major C. D. Bruce, who is addressing our Society for the first time to-night. I shall not, of course, say anything about his last interesting and, to a large extent, novel journey through Asia from Leh to Peking, because his paper will speak for itself, but I will say a few words as to his previous career in the Far East, which made preparation for that journey. Major Bruce went out originally to Wai-hei-wai as second in command under Colonel Bower—who is here to-night, and I hope will speak later of that Wai-hei-wai regiment of which we used to hear so much, but which no longer exists. In 1900 he went with the regiment on the Peking expedition, and was severely wounded in the attack on Tien-tsing. Since that time he has been travelling largely in Asia. I need not give you the details; but it will interest you to know you are not listening to a neophyte in the ways of the East. I now call upon Major Bruce to give us his paper.

After the paper—

Sir THOMAS HOLDICH: Major Bruce has taken us into a part of the Eastern world with which personally, I regret infinitely to say, I am unacquainted; consequently, I am able to offer but little criticism on the admirable paper he has just read to us. I have just a word or two about the loess formation to which he has alluded, which may be interesting. So far as I know, where I have travelled in Central Asian districts, loess formation is to be found on the northern slopes of all the principal ranges running east and west throughout the country, and I have long ago come to the conclusion that the formation is due partly to wind action (especially to the extraordinarily forcible north-western winds which obtain all through high Asia), and partly to detritus washed down from the hills during the season of flood. That undoubtedly is the condition of the loess which we find on the northern slopes of the Turkestan ranges, and although I am quite unacquainted with the part of Asia which Major Bruce has been describing, I cannot help thinking that the same great forces of Nature produce the same formations which he has encountered. There is, however, another point to which Major Bruce has made allusion to which I should like to call your attention. He has recognized, in a most generous way, the admirable assistance obtained from one of the native surveyors, who was attached to his party from the Survey of India. Now this, I am glad to say, is nothing new, for I think every explorer who has been assisted by these surveyors lately has invariably borne the same evidence to the excellence of their work. But at this time it is with new interest that we regard this matter, for we are approaching a new phase of geographical exploration. The old age of pioneer work has passed away, and we must now, when we set to work to wander through new countries (as Major Bruce has done), make use of more or less trained

agency to assist our observations as simple travellers. With the enormous field that still lies before us in various parts of the world, I conceive that we shall never arrive at the solution of the great problem of mapping the world successfully without some such agency as this. Well, it happens that the Colonial Committee have lately issued a Report on Surveys in another part of the world, *i.e.* in British Africa. It is a most admirable report, and will be, I am certain, of immense interest to all those of you who are interested in that country. In that report they have described the success which has, so far, attended efforts to train the natives of Africa as the natives of India have been trained in Survey duties. Taking it on the whole, I regret to say that the reports are not altogether favourable. With the single exception of Lagos, I do not think there is any one report which might lead one to hope that in future great success will attend these efforts; but I would like to warn those who are interested in the matter, that it is far too soon to arrive at any conclusion on the subject. If you will for an instant consider what the process is by which men, such as those to whom Major Bruce has alluded, arrive at the skill which they attain as surveyors, you will, I think, agree with me that it is a long process, and a laborious process, to attain such an amount of technical knowledge as they acquire. In the first place, in India, the men whom we get for this duty are drafted from all sources, both civil and military; and you must remember that from the very beginning they are well-educated men. We do not deal with quite such raw material as they find in Africa. The African schools have not yet arrived at the position of turning out men whose education you may consider as thoroughly sound when they are selected for survey training. In India, having got the men specially selected, in the first instance, they are again subjected to a process which we might call a process of natural selection, until finally, after some years' experience, they are drafted into the Survey Department for a further five or six years' severe training before they can take the field for such work as Major Bruce has described. All this, as you will easily recognize, is a matter of time and patience and infinite trouble; but I have every conviction myself that they will eventually find in Africa men quite equal in intelligence to any that we find in Asiatic fields; and I firmly believe that if they are to solve the gigantic problem of mapping the continent of Africa rapidly and cheaply, it will be through native agency; but only after the application of infinite toil and patience in training shall we succeed in getting the men we want.

Colonel BOWER: Major Bruce has modestly talked of himself as an unscientific explorer. I do not think it is possible for any man to visit Chinese Turkestan and leave it without certain feelings of lost opportunity. My own feelings, when I was there, were that one day I wished I had been a geologist; another day, a linguist; another day, a naturalist; another day, a botanist, and so on. No one man can come away able to do more than simply give a good general description of what he has seen, as Major Bruce has done this evening. I agree with Sir Thomas Holdich that it is now the time for specialists.

I have heard the theory advanced that the population of the world has not so much increased, but that centres of population have changed. If there is anything at all in that argument, the strongest point in its favour is the existence of Chinese Turkestan, where you have a country nearly all desert, with an oasis here and there, yet under that desert we know there are the remains of innumerable towns and villages; and then away to the north there are also cities under the ground; hills with tunnels, and in those tunnels rooms and houses. Obviously they were occupied by a different people from those who lived in houses in the plain now buried under the sand. We have every proof there were many races and many languages there—we find traces of them. It is a great field for scientific research.

Major Bruce alluded to the water-channels changing their course. Undoubtedly they do; and, what is more, I think there are subterranean channels there that also change their courses. On the north of the Tarim river, I was travelling through a forest of tagrak trees (poplar), when suddenly I stepped out from living into dead trees, and the whole day marched through dead trees with every twig perfect. It is a very difficult thing to account for; apparently they were all struck dead on the same day. The only thing I can think of is that they were nourished by some underground water that had suddenly changed its course. Major Bruce mentioned the lakes that had different levels, and were apparently shrinking. My experience in Tibet was that nearly every lake showed obvious signs of at one time having been very much larger.

Captain DEASY: The paper which has just been read to us by Major Bruce is of special interest to me, because I have made three expeditions into Tibet and into the adjoining country, and I would like to remind you of several problems which still remain unsolved. One of these is the course of the Khotan river from the source down through the Kuen Lun range, considerably to the west of where Major Bruce went. Another, of a different nature, and one to which Major Bruce has alluded, is the problem of the origin of the gold-supply of Central Asia. There is, undoubtedly, a good deal of gold to be found there. It has been of special interest to me to hear that Major Bruce has found another route from the south of the Kuen Lun range into Polu. It bears out, I think, the statement which has been made by a good many travellers, that there is no caravan route either from Rudok or Lhasa into Polu and Chinese Turkestan. I have been constantly told that in days gone by there was a regular trade route from Lhasa into Polu, and I made every endeavour to try and verify that statement, but without success. We cannot regard that route by which Major Bruce went to Polu as a trade route. He has alluded in a very brief manner to the difficulties of the journey, and glossed them over in the course of a few words. But I can assure you that the difficulties which he has had to encounter, especially in that part, have been exceedingly severe; indeed, far harder than you would think from listening to Major Bruce this evening. I am very glad to have heard the remarks which Sir Thomas Holdich has made concerning the assistance which I think nearly every British traveller in Central Asia has had from the Survey Department of India. Sub-surveyors, all of whom are highly trained, are always ready to volunteer to accompany any British officer, or any Britisher, into no matter what parts of Central Asia. When the history of the exploration of Central Asia comes to be written, I sincerely hope we shall find adequate credit given to the Indian Government, and more especially the Survey Department of India, for all the valuable help and assistance they have given to geographical research and science in Central Asia.

Captain NEILL MALCOLM: I am afraid I can add very little to what we have heard this evening, because the route which I took with the late Captain Wellby, whose name will be remembered by many Fellows of this Society, differed a great deal from that of Major Bruce, because, although we started from Leh and went to Peking, we only touched his route at the Lanak La and at Lan Chou, but I can corroborate what he has told you about the solitude of Tibet and the sense of the insignificance of man, since for four and a half months we did not come across a dwelling of any kind. You can thus see that I can add but little to your knowledge of the part of the world Major Bruce has described this evening. The only thing I should like to talk about is the question of native surveyors to whom Sir Thomas Holdich has alluded, and the possibility of our using them in Africa. I, like every other traveller in Central Asia, owe much to the native surveyors of

India; and if we are going to do anything of the kind in Africa, the people to whom we might turn for help are, I think, the Baganda. The ordinary native of Africa has a glorious indifference to detail at any time. He cannot understand that it matters whether you call a lake by the same name as a mountain, or a mountain by the same name as a lake. But with the Baganda it is rather different, for they are naturally intelligent, and appreciate anything in the nature of book learning. As far as I know, they are the only people of Africa who do so, and if there is going to be a survey department, they are the people with whom we might possibly begin.

After some remarks by Captain TURNER—

The PRESIDENT: I must for once depart from my usual reticence in the chair and criticize one part of the discussion—Captain Malcolm's statement about the Baganda. He used the phrase that they were the only African race who loved a book. Now, oddly enough, that was the very phrase that H. M. Stanley, who knew the Baganda well, used years ago in speaking of the Hausas. I cannot allow the credit of my beloved Hausas to be taken away as the only African people who, for many centuries, have produced books—history, romance, poetry. Now I have to ask you to give a hearty vote of thanks to Major Bruce for his very able paper.

Major BRUCE: I have to thank you very much indeed for the kind attention you have given to my paper to-night, also those gentlemen who have been good enough to offer the few but very interesting remarks they did—Sir Thomas Holdich, Colonel Bower, Captain Deasy, and Captain Malcolm. I do not wish to detain you any further. I have only to thank you once more for your very kind attention to me.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE RUSSIAN HYDROGRAPHICAL SURVEY.

By J. de SCHOKALSKY, Colonel of the I.R.N., Hon. Corr. Member of the R.G.S., President of the Section of Physical Geography of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, St. Petersburg.

THE beginning of the Hydrographical Survey in Russia was contemporaneous with the greatest change in the destiny of the Empire, the time of Peter the Great. This Tzar, the first who assumed the title of Emperor, ordered various hydrographical work to be done, necessary in connection with the navy, the foundation of which is also one of his glories.

At first the administration of the hydrographical survey depended solely on the Tzar. He himself chose from the officers men suitable to undertake this work, and indicated where the surveys should be made. In 1724 the Tzar ordered the Admiralty Board to give instructions, drawn up by this administrative body, to the officers charged with the survey of the Gulf of Finland. Later this practice became the rule, and the direction of the hydrographical survey was made the duty of this board.

The first chief hydrographer was A. Nagaef, captain in the navy, who, by the order of the board, had made a study of hydrographical