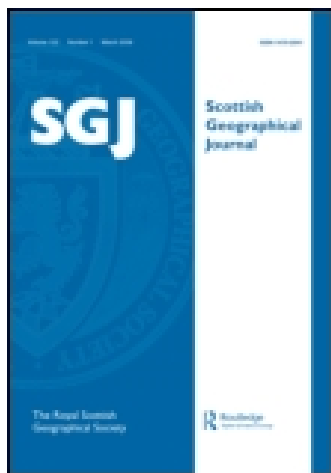


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Notes of papers read before the society

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on the 8th February, when Prof. George Pirie occupied the Chair. On the 15th February, at Aberdeen, Mr. Arthur Gulston, Superintendent Engineer to Sir W. G. Armstrong, Whitworth, & Co., read a paper on "The Baltic and Arctic Voyages of the *Ermack*." George Davidson, Esq., of Wellwood, was in the Chair. Mr. Gulston also delivered an address before our Dundee Branch, on the 16th February, on "Ice-breakers and their Services," when Charles G. Gourlay, Esq., was in the Chair. At the Synod Hall, Edinburgh, on the 25th February, Lieut. E. H. Shackleton delivered an address entitled "'Furthest South' with the *Discovery*," when Prof. James Geikie was in the Chair.

NOTES OF PAPERS READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY.

"THREE WEEKS IN THE TIGRIS VALLEY." By Miss VICTORIA
A. BUXTON.

MISS BUXTON introduced her address by reminding her audience of the unique interest which attached to the Tigris Valley. From a historical point of view it is the traditional cradle of the human race. The earliest records of a civilised society which we possess come from Nineveh, from Ur of the Chaldees, from Haran, and from Babylon, which lies near by on the bank of the Euphrates. Memories of Abraham, Jonah, Sennacherib, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Alexander cluster round this ancient river, and on its banks are still to be seen the same life, occupations, and society that we see depicted on the monuments of Nineveh and Nimrod.

Politically the Tigris Valley and its adjacent lands are fraught with limitless possibilities. Their fate is of vital importance to Russia, and for Great Britain they are the road to India.

For the student of religion scarcely any region presents the aspect of so many conflicting creeds. In one day's float on the Tigris you may see the orthodox Mohammedan Turk; the Kurd and the Arab, with traces of a more primitive creed mingling with their nominal submission to Islam; the warring Christian Churches of the East, unorthodox but strangely unconquerable, Nestorians, Chaldeans, Jacobites, Syrians; the semi-pagan faiths of the Yezidis, the Sabceans, the Kizil-bashes; and the unorthodox branch of Islam represented by the Shiahs of the Lower Tigris. The Valley seems to unite in itself all the interests and problems, historical, archæological, religious, and political that are scattered broadcast over the rest of the Turkish empire. Miss Buxton described at some length her approach to the city of Diarbekr, where she first saw the famous river. Three weeks before she had crossed the Euphrates, and had travelled since through the worst of the winter weather. Snow and bogs had driven her to take shelter for the nights in the native villages, chiefly Kurd, which she passed on the way; and in the underground huts, of which they were mostly composed, she had had exceptional opportunities, on long winter evenings, of observing the

people with whom she came into contact. Diarbekr, a city of Kurds and Armenians, is gloomy and depressing in appearance, being built of black stones and basalt, surrounded by battlemented black walls, and standing alone in a vast tract of unspeakably barren and cheerless country. It boasts a famous mosque, built among the ruins of a very fine Sassanian palace, the two elaborately carved façades of which form the court.

At Diarbekr Miss Buxton's raft was made, on which she floated during three weeks down the river to Baghdad. Like the rafts to be seen on the Assyrian bas-relief monuments in the British Museum, it was built of a light framework of poplar poles, under which about 250 inflated sheep and pig skins were attached. The raft was weighted by sacks of heavy merchandise and by two small huts composed of thick Kurdish felt stretched over a light scaffolding of branches, in which sleeping and cooking accommodation was provided. The steering is done by means of two huge poplar trunks, with which in fast and difficult currents the *keleki* (raftsman) rows.

These rafts float as long as light allows, and at sunset they are tied up for the night by heaping some stones on the rope. If possible the night is passed near some village. The villagers light a fire alongside the raft, and spend the whole evening feasting, singing, and dancing, for the travellers' entertainment. The Kurdish dances, elaborate and complicated, are in strange contrast to those of the Arabs, whose efforts are of a much simpler character.

The most notable feature of the upper portion of the river is the rock or cave village. Many of these were seen, the whole population living entirely in the huge natural caves which in some places riddle the banks of the river. Hassan-Keif, the most striking of these villages, is inhabited by Nestorians. The rock-dwellings are in some cases ancient tombs artificially cut in the cliff. The Nestorians are still a bold and courageous race. Until 1846 they upheld their independence of both Turks and Kurds. In that year the celebrated Kurdish chief, Bedr Khân of Bohtân, with the connivance of the Turkish Vali of Mossul, plotted their extermination, and in a few days 10,000 were massacred in the mountains. Layard was witness of the havoc wrought amongst them. Since that date the Roman Catholic missions have won over great numbers of them, and those who are now in communion with Rome form the Chaldean Church. The Chaldeans are chiefly found in the Tigris Valley and towns, the Nestorians still preferring the mountains. At the town of Yezireh Miss Buxton saw something of the Hamidiyeh, the famous irregular Kurdish cavalry, formed by the Sultan in 1893. Their principal barracks are here, and here two years ago their renowned and ferocious chief, Mustafa Pasha, was slain. Miss Buxton described with indignation the lawless and declining state of the country owing to Turkish rule. Law and order are nil, and Christian, pagan, and unorthodox Mohammedan suffer almost equally at the hands of the Sultan. Trade is paralysed, and few rafts now navigate the river for fear of being plundered. Miss Buxton's raft was at one time surrounded on both banks by armed Kurds ready to fire and break it up,

in order to seize the goods on board, but her Turkish escorts shouted threats of vengeance, and assertions of the high political position of the travellers induced the brigand band to lower their rifles and disperse. Opposite the large town of Mossul stands the ancient *tell* of Nineveh, the modern Koyundjik. The whole Assyrian plain is covered with such *tells*, the sites of old Assyrian cities. Of these Khorsabad, Nimrud, and Kala at Sherghat were visited. The treasures they once possessed now, however, adorn the galleries of London and Paris. South of Mossul the Kurd gives place to the Arab, and the country daily assumes a more desert aspect. The gorges and mountains of Kurdistan and the Upper Tigris give way to mud flats, sand-deserts, and palm-groves. Arabic is almost universally spoken. The people of this region belong mostly to the Shiah sect of Mohammedanism, to which all the Persians also belong. At Samarra, one of the sacred cities of the Shiahs, the golden dome of the tomb of one of the twelve Imams was seen, but an attempted visit to the mosque was sternly and even roughly refused by the people. The fanaticism of the Shiahs was still more visible when the party visited Kerbela, a day's journey from Baghdad. Here is the tomb of Hussein, the most holy of all the Imams.

Miss Buxton saw something of the Yezidis in the Assyrian Plain, and heard from her Turkish escort how they, in common with so many other "infidels" in the Turkish empire, had been offered the "Koran or the sword," and then massacred for their refusal to embrace another faith. The pagan customs of the Yezidis were touched upon, and analogies in the superstitions and beliefs of the other races, Moslem and Christian alike, were pointed out.

Baghdad, the city, even in its Turkish decay, of white palaces, bazaars of gorgeous colouring, and shady palm-groves, was reached at last. The voyage had been accomplished in three weeks, but without stops and with a high river and experienced *kelekjis* it can be done in ten or twelve days.

Babylon was visited from Baghdad, and the excavations of the German Archæological Expedition inspected. On the return journey the desert route was taken, and Damascus was reached in thirty days.

"THE FIJIANS AND THEIR FIRE-WALKING." By W. L. ALLARDYCE, C.M.G.,
Colonial Secretary for Fiji.

The author introduced his paper with a short account of Fijian history, which may be said to date back to 1643, when the great Dutch navigator, Abel Jansen Tasman, discovered the islands. In 1769 Captain Cook lay-to off Vatoa, one of the southern islands, and in 1789 Captain Bligh in the *Bounty's* launch passed close to Viwa, which is one of the most westerly islands of the group. In 1796 Captain Wilson in the mission ship *Duff*, while following Tasman's course, was nearly wrecked on the reef off the island of Taveuni. The straits which bear Tasman's name lie between this island and the larger island of Vanua Levu. The first European to reside in the islands was one Charles Savage, a runaway convict from Australia, who arrived about 1806, and

in 1813 met with a violent death on Vanna Levu. A map of Viti Levu, the largest island in the archipelago, was then shown, and it was pointed out that with the single exception of Hawaii it is the largest island in that vast expanse of ocean lying between the New Hebrides and the American continent. Geographically Fiji is of great interest, because the 180th parallel of longitude runs through the archipelago, and as the colonial authorities have decided to adopt eastern time, Fiji is about twelve hours ahead of London.

As regards the inhabitants of Fiji, the two great races of Polynesians and Melanesians meet there, and the author gave some interesting examples of native traditions and folklore in support of the thesis that the inhabitants of Viti Levu come from some far-away land to the westward. The Polynesian element seems to have come from the adjacent archipelago of Tonga (Friendly Islands) and Samoa (Navigation Islands). The beautiful harbour of Suva was then shown. It is landlocked on three sides and protected by reefs on the fourth side, and as it is on the direct route between Sydney and Panama its strategic importance is likely to increase hereafter. About twenty-five miles from Suva is the native capital of Mbau, a small island about a mile in circumference, inserted into the coast of Viti Levu. Some account of the history of this small island was given, and it was pointed out that its position, surrounded as it is by shoals and reefs lying to the south, east, and north, contributes much to its supremacy, and renders it a curious example of a sea power on a small scale. A number of slides illustrating different types of natives was then shown, including both Melanesians and Polynesians. Access to the interior of Viti Levu can be obtained by means of canoes paddled and polled up the river Rewa, and slides illustrating the scenes of such a journey were shown, including pictures of native dances. By means of slides a visit was then paid to the hill-station of Nandarivatu ("the stone dish"), which stands at a height of 2700 feet, and is backed by still more lofty hills. Mr. Allardyce then described an ascent of Mt. Victoria (4600 feet) from this station. This mountain has previously been ascended only by very few natives and still fewer Europeans. Pictures were then shown of native sea-going canoes with their large lateen sails, also of the whole process of manufacturing native cloth from the paper mulberry, and of native burying-places and burial customs. Finally slides were shown of native fire-walking.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

EUROPE.

River Erosion.—By the courtesy of M. Charles Rabot, Secretary of *La Société de Géographie*, we are enabled to reproduce this month a very interesting illustration of river erosion by the Valserine, a tributary of the Rhone. The illustration is taken from an article by M. Émile Chaix-Du Bois, which appeared in *La Géographie* for December 15, and is one of several contained in the article. The Valserine joins the Rhone at Bellegarde, and about two kilometres to the north of this town the river traverses an exposed surface of hard limestone, which affords