

the Russo-Siberian plain on the north-east ranges of less magnitude, but which in some places attain the limits of perpetual snow, such as the Altai or Tien-Shan.

A brief discussion followed the reading of this paper, and the meeting then adjourned.

*Meeting of August 19th 1878.*

Sir C. W. THOMPSON in the chair. Capt. R. BURTON read the following paper

*"On the Land of Midian."*

"To those who read their Bibles," he remarked, "the land of Midian is a household word. 'Vexing the Midianites,' and 'Midianitish women' are familiar sounds. But perhaps you do not know how hazy upon the subject of the grand old land before my trip to North-Western Arabia in the spring of 1877 were the literati, the Press, and the reviewers who lay claim to a few biblical points. For instance, Midianite merchantmen bought Joseph from his brethren and sold him in Egypt. Moses, flying from Pharaoh, dwelt in the land of Midian, or the East country, and there married the daughter of Jethro the priest. Despite this alliance, there was war between the kindred peoples, when, led by the great Lawgiver (B.C. 1452), the people burned 'the cities and the goodly castles' of Midian, and carried off a splendid spoil of gold, silver, brass (copper or zinc), tin, iron, and lead, with vessels of gold, chains and bracelets earrings and tablets. After a lapse of two centuries, B.C. 1249, the Midianites again grew powerful, and their revenge upon their terrible kinsmen ended in the second Midianite war. I need hardly tell you how the sword of the Lord and of Gideon slew two kings, with some 135,000 warriors, and won great quantities of gold. After this crushing blow the Midianites fade out of Holy Writ, and you hear of them only in the effusions of Hebrew prophets and poets. It is referred to by ancient historians; and coming down to our modern day, Voltaire, the noble Frenchman who created religious liberty, and who had, *de l'esprit comme tout le monde*, made Midian a 'sandy region which may have contained some villages.' His description of its geographical position was quite erroneous. Later still, some of our popular body changed Midian into Sinai, whilst others knew it not or projected it into impossible places. Even those who had visited the seaboard gave no certain sound. The modern Midianites on the one hand, and the Bedouins who now hold the soil, give a precise geographical definition of its limits, and, as some of them have held it during the days of the Byzantine Empire, I claim high authority for their catholic and constant tradition. The 'Arz Madyan' of the Arabs begins with the fort of Akhabah (N. lat. 29° 28') at the head of the dangerous gulf so named. It extends south to the fort of El Munnalah, and its great watercourse, the Wady Sim (N. lat. 27° 40'). These frontiers absolutely fixed would give the Egyptian province a latitudinal length of 213 miles, which the extensive sinuosities of the coast might prolong to 300, and the depth varies between 24 and 35 miles. The first glance which the voyager casts upon the land of Midian is a sight to be remembered in after years. That majestic scene, at once grand and simple, was right well suited to the heroic race of Bedouins who once held the soil. It reflects to a certain extent the Sinaitic peninsula that faces its shores. However, there is a sharper contrast of the flat and the high, the low and the tall, the horizontal and the perpendicular of the well-watered lowlands, with a luxuriant vegetation of emerald green, and of rolling uplands, sterile as a moon landscape; of the cloud shadows flecking the mountains, and of the serene sky, so remarkable in the regions of downs and plains." Captain Burton gave a glowing description of the first sight of the land of Midian as seen from the deck of the corvette, and described, as from a bird's-eye

view of the country, the physical characteristics of the interior and the appearances of the maritime line. He then gave an account of the two expeditions which he commanded to explore the land. Those expeditions were at the sole expense of his Highness the Khedive Ismail I., a prince to whom the future will be more just than the past had been. To the Viceroy alone were they indebted for their present knowledge of this neglected and almost mythical country. In the spring of 1874 his Highness forwarded, in his little steamer 'Erin,' Dr. Charles Beke, who, at the ripe age of 74, gallantly went forth to find "the true Mount Sinai." In the early part of 1877 the Khedive was pleased to place the two expeditions in his (Captain Burton's) charge. The first consisted of a single squad of Egyptian officers and men, with a French geologist, and an English gentleman who acted as commissariat officer and accountant. This preliminary visit lasted little more than a fortnight, but it gave him a fair general view of the country. The second expedition, which was more extensively organised, landed on December 19th 1877. They explored, first, the northern, then the middle, and afterwards the southern district. He described the disused gold and silver mines that were explored, and spoke highly of the wealth of the country as regards these and other metals. He also gave an interesting account of the natives, and of the scenic features of the country. They now knew as much of Midian as he did. Instead of being a mystery, it had become to them a thing of reality. They would join him in lamenting the contrast between what it had been and what it is. Pathetic, indeed, was the view of its desolation. Once the flower of Arabia Felix, it had now become a Petræan desert. The incubus of destruction had sat for centuries on its glorious mountains and luxurious water basins. The wild man, the father not the son, of the wilderness, had done, and was still doing its worst. When the Roman ruled Africa and Propria Numidia, the Regency of Tripolis numbered some 20,000,000 souls; the population, then thick as that of Belgium, was now reduced to 2,000,000. He believed that the Anglo-Turkish Convention placed England, in reference to Arabia, nearly in the same position as that occupied by Rome after the days of Augustus—that a full and perfect faith that Midian will presently awaken from her trance, from her sleep of ages. She offered to the world not a mine, but a mining region some 300 miles long, with an inner depth as yet unknown; and what the ancients worked so well the moderns could work still better. Let them look forward to the development of her mineral wealth under the fostering care of European—and especially English—companies, so they might expect to see the howling wilderness, like Algeria before 1830, become the rich and fruitful province of Algiers in 1878.

The PRESIDENT said they must all feel deeply indebted to Capt. Burton for his admirable paper. When speaking of all that Capt. Burton had done, they should not, however, forget how much he was indebted to Mrs. Burton.

Dr. LEARED then read a very exhaustive paper "*On a Journey to Fez and Mequinez*," which Sir WYVILLE THOMPSON followed by one

*"On the Progress in the Official Report of the 'Challenger' Expedition."*

He said as a period of about two years had now elapsed since the return of the 'Challenger' Expedition, he might reasonably be expected to give some account of the progress which had been made up to the present time in the reduction and classification of the observations which were made in the different departments. The voyage of the 'Challenger,' he observed, had been undertaken for a very definite purpose—the determination of the physical condition of the ocean. While the