Journeys in Northern Nigeria
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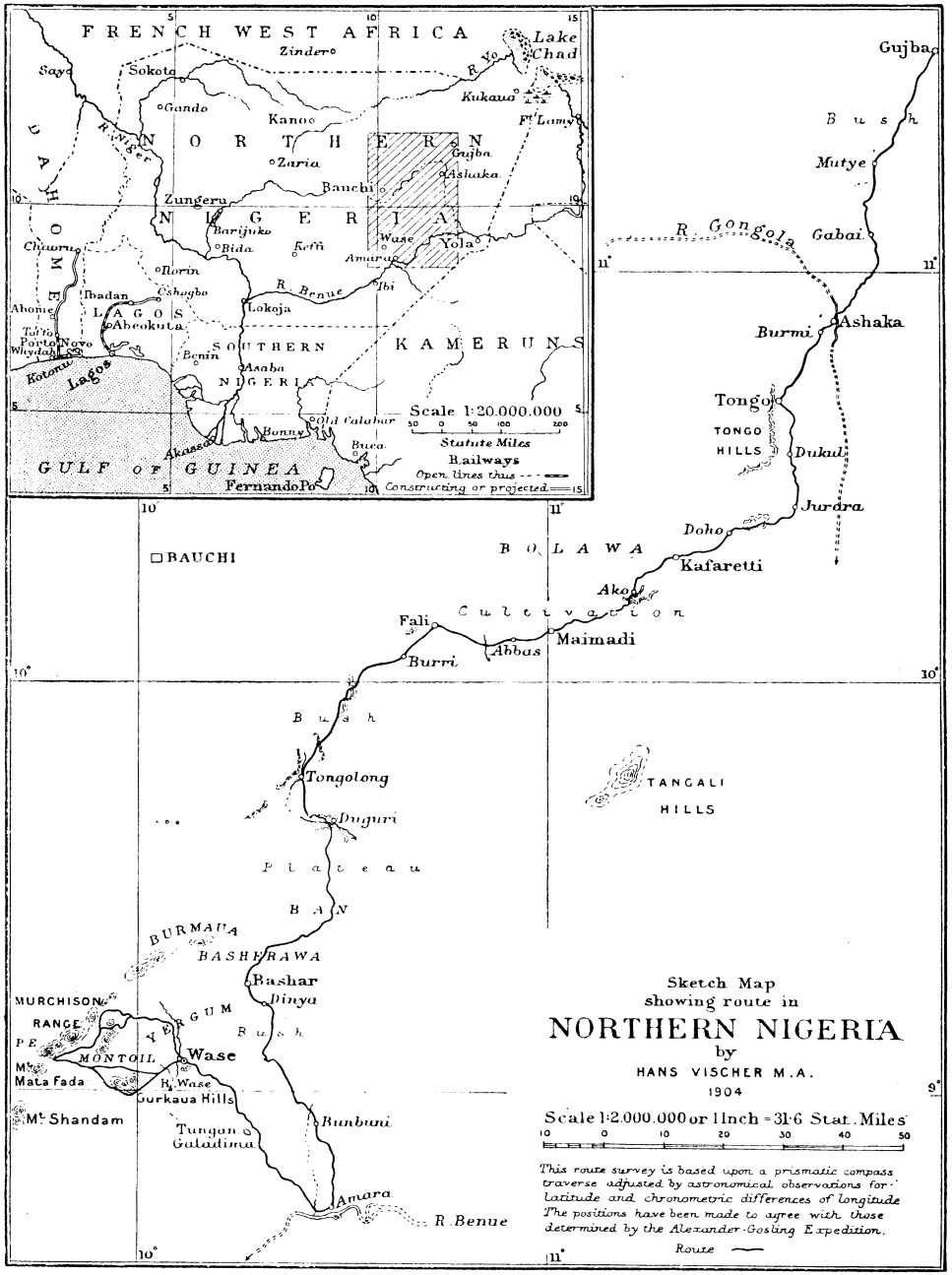
JOURNEYS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA.

By HANS VISCHER, M.A.

For a very long time the Niger and its tributaries successfully withstood all attempts at discovery at the hands of European geographers; individuals and whole expeditions alike were killed or turned back time after time by the climate or hostile native tribes, and many lives were paid for the ultimate discovery of that river system. The student of geography who travels along the Niger or the Benue, marking his day's journey on a fairly accurate map, cannot but feel that he is treading on sacred ground. The great struggle for the clearing up of the river-system, and the subsequent contest for possession of the country which led to the division on the map as we now know it, form an interesting chapter in the history of European enterprise in Africa.

The traveller in the Benue valley is struck with the enormous variety of the apparently wholly different tribes that he finds settled on both sides of the river. Fulanis, Beriberis, Hausas, Jikums, and endless pagan tribes, all are crowded together along the river valley. The great river, with the hill ranges running parallel on both sides, formed a natural barrier to the movement of nations, thrown from their original abode in the central Sudan by the incoming hosts from the north-east, or the tribes fleeing from some mighty neighbour or a raiding chief. Thus it is that we cannot trace local history of the tribes connected in the Benue valley to any extent. We know, however, that the mild-looking Jikums once warred successfully with Kano and Bornu, and received tribute from all the countries around in the old capital Kororofa, a little south of the river, and that the empires of Bornu and Sokoto in turn largely influenced the composition of tribes along the Benue. The sultans of Bornu periodically raided the countries to the west of Chad, driving down the tribes living along the borders of their empire. These would move down to the hills, driving off in their turn the people already there. So we have along the river nearly every tribe claiming to have come down from the north—such as the Ankwes, the Montoils, the Yergums, the Burmawas, the Jemuris, and the Bashamas. Besides these, the word Beriberi, joined on to a local name, denotes a settlement of Beriberis, or Kanuris, who have come down quite lately from Bornu, and whose fathers or grandfathers still spoke the Kanuri language.

Of the Fulanis on the river, we know that in the time of Bello Emir of Sokoto Modi Mohammad, a Fulani of the Kiri tribe came down into the valley with his fanatic horsemen to wage the Jehad against the pagans. He had a banner from the great Bello, the son of Othman dan Fodio, and was the brother of Bubaero, the chief of Gombe. He defeated the heathen Jemuri, and on the site of their ancient settlement built his own town, which he called Muri. Hammarua, who received the



Pleyad party in 1854, and Nya, the friend of Mizon, were both successors of this Modi Mohammad. After the conquest of Kona these Fulanis crossed the river and settled at Jalingo, where the present Emir Haman Mafendi now lives. Before this some of them had settled along the Tarabba river; but, broadly speaking, the Benue forms the southern limit of Mohammedan influence. These Fulanis had for a long time worried the Jikums, and at last, compelling them to abandon their capital Kororofa, had broken their power.

Quite different from these Fulanis are those cattle-breeding nomads, who are frequently met with along the Benue. They have never appeared as warriors, but as peaceful cowherds; coming from no one knows where, they passed in and out amongst the native tribes, going where they thought they would find good pasture for their cattle, inoffensive and unmolested. They did not mix with the people of the land as did their Mohammedan cousins, and thus they preserved their light skin and their Asiatic features. They never became Mohammedans. Since Andrée Brue, in 1697, encountered his Fulanis 100 miles from Timbuktu, the origin of this strange tribe has ever puzzled the European. Successively they were connected with Egypt, Carthage, Morocco, the Caucasus, and Persia.

There are several routes from the Benue to the northern territory. The more important of these are: the one leaving at Loko, and passing through Keffi to Zaria and Kano; another from Ibi to Bauchi; and a third from Yola to Bornu. It was by this middle one that I left the Benue valley for the north. The first important place that I arrived at in 1904 was Wase. This pretty walled town is situated on a ridge, and close behind it stands an enormous basalt rock, evidently the denuded stump of an ancient volcano. In shape and aspect that mighty block resembles the famous Bear Lodge in the Black Hills of Dakota. On its top thousands of birds find a resting-place, and their deposits in the dry season give it a look of a snow-covered mountain summit. Being almost inaccessible, it has given rise to many weird legends, which the Wase host retails with much relish to the new-comer. The natives call the rock Goran Dusan, *i.e.* the Kolanut-stone, measuring over 1000 feet from the base; it is visible for miles, and known to every traveller in the country, and from it the local chief takes its name of Sarlkin-dutsi, the Rock King. To the westward, at a distance of a little over 10 miles, the ragged hills of the Murchison range present a beautiful sight. The Wase river flows through the intervening plain; along its banks stretches of green pasture vary with cultivated fields, and great herds of cattle grazing everywhere give the whole an extremely pleasing aspect. The town, with its well-built houses now in ruins, its date palms and crenelated wall, has seen better days, and the local history is typical of the fitful political changes that kept the country in a perpetual state of unrest, making it a difficult field for peaceful administration.

With the advent of a Western government, a stop was put to all these local enterprises, but no power on earth could freeze this seething mass into even shape in a moment. The pagan for some time to come would look with hatred and suspicion at the Fulani chief, and the latter would find it difficult to see the native Kaffir anything else but his rightful prize. It cannot surprise any one when the savage amongst the hills, forgetting that all things have changed, lets fly an arrow at the passing caravan from sheer force of habit. The man who got the last knock not unnaturally longs to be able to hit back.

Originally there was a fairly large settlement of Jikums at the foot of Wase rock. Then when Yakoba had built Bauchi town to the north and had become powerful, his followers came south and conquered the country towards Muri and to the Benue, driving away the Jikums, and causing the native pagan tribes to take refuge in the hills. After the fashion of the Fulanis, Yakoba gave Wase to one of his chief slaves. This giving away of large newly conquered districts had its obvious advantages, for the province was ensured against falling back; the possession of large lands stimulated the servants of the chief, while it provided the necessary food and material for the upkeep of the army; moreover, the slave leaders were kept away at a safe distance from the court. Similar to our old feudal barons, they held the land from the king, to whom they paid an annual tribute, and had to keep up an army always ready to start at the command of the king.

In connection with the present dilapidated state of the town and the proverbially bad character of the Wase people, an old slave of the late Emir of Sokoto told me the following tale: "When the Emin-el-Musselmi sent his messengers round to all the various towns of the provinces, one of them arrived one evening at the town gate of Wase just as the sun went down beyond the blue hills of the west, and Salla was called from the mosques. In those days the town was crowded with people. The women wore beautiful silver bracelets and rich clothes, even the poorest of the men had his horse, and as to the horses and cattle of the chief and his slaves they could not be counted. There was no lack of grain and fruit of every kind. All was abundance and happiness. The drums and dances were kept going until the town woke up in the morning. Then the king and the chief men sent for the Sokoto messenger, and gave him one bowl full of corn; that was their contribution to the mosque at Sokoto. There on that small hill north of the town the man from Sokoto stood. He was a holy man, and he cursed the town, and he cursed the men in it. From that day the Wase men eat without ever stilling their hunger, the sun dries up their seed, and the rain beats down their houses, and where will you ever see a well-fed horse or a beautiful woman in Wase town to-day?"

When the horsemen from Bauchi originally came down, they found

living alongside of the Jikums the pagan tribe of the Yergums. These people now live in the mountains of the Murchison range just opposite Wase, and in the plain between the Wase river and the hills. The Yergums say that they did not take to the mountains till they were driven there, and that originally they also had come down from the north. As far as I can judge, after a stay with them of only a few months, I believe, from their features and their language, that they belong to the same stock as their neighbours the Montoil, the Ankwes, the Angoss, the Burmawa, and the Gatali, all found along the hills running parallel to the river. Most of these tribes are still cannibals, but nowhere did I find that this was connected with any religious ceremony. As an old Montoil chief informed me, man's flesh is eaten because "it is extremely tasty, far sweeter than goat or sheep." Fear of the various spirits and their propitiation seem to constitute their religion. Under "Nan," the Yergums understand what the Red Indians call the great spirit. The blazing of the sun, the downpouring of rain, are his manifestations; he speaks in the thunder and in the howling of the wind. The idea of transmigration of the soul is not unknown to them. Accidentally one day I overheard a Yergum boy who had joined my boys as a donkey driver, saying, while looking at his tired ass, "May Nan never turn me into a donkey. I would rather become a dog than a jackass." Any one who deals with these pagans, and sees them in a natural state and not frightened, will notice that as a rule they strictly adhere to the truth. This being very unusual amongst the natives which I had seen before, I asked a young Yergum, who told me that no men with any sense ever willingly told an untruth. Though this characteristic is not uncommon amongst primitive races, it shows how much these pagan tribes have kept to themselves, for no one who has visited the Benue will assert that the native there would easily forget himself so far as to give a straight answer to a straight question. As regards the dress, the Yergums have simple tastes. The men wear a skin round the loins; the women a few bunches of fresh leaves stuck into a narrow belt, carried in front by the married women, and behind by the girls.

Around and behind the Yergums on the various hilltops are scattered other tribes, such as the Talus, the Pés, and the Gazums. While visiting the latter, I found right up to the mountain crest regular terraces, skilfully built of large granite boulders, and in several places where the path led over the steep rocks, regular steps had been cut, similar to those an Alpine guide carves in the ice. It will require a good deal of careful study to find out who were the original inhabitants. There are a number of natural caves, but in none of these could I find any signs of previous occupation.

Leaving Wase I followed the route through Bashar, a prettily situated and well-kept place. The natives are good farmers, and form

a close community, allowing no strangers to settle in the town. They claim to have come from Bornu.

The road then leads on to the north over the hill range to the high plateaus of Bauchi. The country is more wild and rugged, showing volcanic action; the plateaus of iron sandstone are intersected by deep cañons. The road leads through several of these, first at Duguri, where we have a regular valley with a little river and fertile fields on both sides.

Further on the road at Tongolong, the village lies in a regular chasm. The sheer precipices of rock which enclose the little settlement have formed a natural and effective defence against all intruders. The natives like informing one that they were never worried by the all-feared Fulanis, who, indeed, must have turned back for their horses' sake at the sight of these rocks. It was also the natural and safe position of their settlement which made them independent from their chief at Fali. They say that originally they had come down with the Fali people from Bornu, and their features, as well as their tribal marks, certainly seem to bear that out. I willingly consented to the wish of the venerable old headman, who asked me if his people could have their dance in the evening.

The high cliffs of the valley showed clearly in the bright moonlight, when the strains of a native band were heard coming from an adjacent village. Through the long guinea-corn stalks men and women came out like so many shadows from the various clusters of huts. The sound of the fiddles and the rattling of a calabash filled with pebbles came ever nearer, till the band with many followers emerged from the dark fields to the open space, where a broad sandy river-bed formed a natural playground. A merry crowd had now gathered, chattering and laughing and thoroughly enjoying itself after the way of the African. The musicians, three stout men and a woman, played in that typical way common to all primitive people, one fiddle leading with a slightly varying wailing tune, when the second fiddle took up the air, repeating it in lower notes, and the woman accompanied with a rhythmic swinging of her calabash. It is a weird, melancholy noise, naturally in a minor key, but full of ever-growing excitement. All the young people had now formed into two rings, the men inside, and round them an equal number of girls. They started walking round slowly in opposite directions. Then, as the music became faster, they quickened into a kind of two-step, the men dancing in and out around the girls, who kept moving the other way. Each time the boy faced the girl, he turned round, gave a little jump, and, smacking her outstretched hand, moved off to the next beauty, where the performance began again. All was done in time to the music, and the movements of the laughing youngsters could not have been better measured. Without reserve all abandoned themselves to the most thorough enjoyment, dancing and yelling as if

we had been acquainted for years. A little way off sat the matrons and the old men, watching and talking over what they had done in their younger days. Behind was the black bush, with here and there a higher palm tree coming out and showing in clear silhouette against the white rocks; while the stars moved slowly over the sky, and the great silver moon made it all look wonderful and uncanny. Quite unconsciously I recalled old familiar scenes, other music, other costumes, and a smaller room, and these naked savages were after all not so very different from the wise Westerners.

Forty miles' march in a north-eastern direction brought me to the town of Fali, lying well outside the hilly country, in that great undulated plain stretching from the foot of the Tangali mountains towards Bauchi and Gombe. About halfway on that road some deep wells, cut straight through hard rock, point to the existence of some ancient settlement. Some overgrown rubbish heaps or a dilapidated well, all that is left over of an ancient town or village, is a very common sight to a traveller in those parts. Even up to this day an unpleasant neighbour or a succession of bad crops is sufficient to cause a whole community to migrate to another place.

The traveller is struck at Fali with the size of the ruined compounds and buildings, where many remains of well-built arches and prettily painted columns point to the former wealth of the inhabitants. Some of that wealth they got from the salt-pans at Jebjeb, over the hills to the south, in the Muri province. Once a year all the powerful men went out to Jebjeb with their slaves, and returned again with the salt when the first tornados announced the rainy season, and it was time to prepare the fields for cultivation, in the same way as the Manga salt-pans are worked to-day by the Kanuris. But since the Sarikin-Bornu, the chief of Missau, came down for an expedition to the Benue, and took with him the king's son and all that was proud and powerful in the town, the good days of Fali have gone, for only a few returned. So runs the native story, and, if nothing else, it certainly gives a good explanation for the small number of people that populate the ruins of a once powerful town. The salt-pans at Jebjeb are scarcely used now, and of the great bridge on the Jebjeb road crossing the river east of Fali only some piles remain.

Fali and all the country around it belong to Bauchi, the great town to the north-west. The first European to visit Bauchi had been Vogel, in 1855, who visited the chief Yakoba in his camp on his way down to the Benue. In 1862 von Beurmann stayed there for a fortnight, after which he returned to Kuka; and in 1867 Rohlfs passed through on his way from Bornu to Keffi and the Benue. The history of the town as described by this traveller is extremely interesting, showing the fairly isolated instance of a heathen state founding a tributary state under Sokoto. At the end of the eighteenth century Yakoba, the

younger son of the Chief of Trum, a small negro state off the Gere, in the Yoli mountains, went to the court of Sokoto, where he accepted Islam, and spent several years in study of the sacred books. Shortly after his return home his father died, and, aided by the Sultan of Sokoto, who by then had taken the title of Ruler of the Faithful, he was able to oust his elder brothers and take the throne to himself. At the same time his master gave him the country south of Kano to the Benue, inhabited entirely by pagans, Hausas, Bolawas, and Bauchis. Amongst the latter, to whom he and his family belonged, Yakoba built a town, and called it Garon-Bauchi. Soon the town, by reason of its favourable position between Kuka, Adamawa, Nupe, and Kano, became a renowned trading centre. A wise law, which he established at first, namely, that none of his subjects, Mohammedan or pagan, should be sold into slavery, helped to make him a popular ruler. But the Fulani from Sokoto soon became the dominating party at court, oppressing the pagans. This led to civil war, which was, however, successfully suppressed. An attack from the powerful Bornu was met victoriously, and the kingdom of Bauchi was officially recognized by El-Kanemi. After forty years' reign, Yagoba died in 1847, and was followed by Brahima.

From Fali the Bornu road turns in an easterly direction, and marching along the high plateau through pleasant and open country, I passed various large villages, with extensive and well-cultivated guinea-corn fields. Four days' journey brought me to Kafaretti, the first Bolawa village. These Bolo negroes are one of the most important native tribes in the Bauchi country. The men are tall and broad, and do not, as a rule, shave their heads after the fashion of the Hausas and Kanuris. From what I could collect of their language, the vocabulary seems extensive, and they pronounce their words with a curious nasal sound. There are a good many roots in the Bolowa language that occur, in a slightly altered form, in Hausa. If the Hausas are, as most of the old travellers held (*vide* Denham, Clapperton, Barth, and Nachtigal), the result of the mixing of different negro tribes and some northern elements, their language certainly seems to point that way, for there is hardly a race in the Sudan now which has not contributed some words to the Hausa vocabulary. The Bolawas that Rohlfs met in the sixties were still uncivilized pagans. Those I have seen showed in their dress and their manners that they had accepted much from the surrounding Mohammedans. At Kafaretti the men wore the Hausa tobe, and the women the ordinary black cloths. Most of the latter have their hair done in the Fulani fashion, with strings of beads woven into it. A curious dance was performed by the old chief himself, who was dressed up in the most fantastic way, and seemed considerably embarrassed by his large state robes. Four fiddlers and two men with large fans accompanied him. Slowly gliding backwards and forwards, he arrived in front of me, and then, going back again, repeated this several times.

Finally he was escorted home by all the elder men present. The great mass of villagers solemnly watched this performance.

To the west of this high plateau there are several small ranges of hills, which separate it from the Gongola valley. On entering these hills, I came to the picturesque heathen village of Doho. With its well-kept high walls, intersected by a number of tower-like structures, over which one catches a glimpse of the huts on the other side, the place looks like some mediæval town with wall and battlement. All is built of a light yellow clay, showing off prettily against the dark background of the wooded hills and the light blue contours of the mountain range to the south. The compounds inside the walls, remarkably clean and well kept, consist of a number of huts and high conical-shaped granaries, all connected by a wall enclosing a courtyard, in which the women of the house grind the corn. One of these granaries I measured 20 feet high. When the owner wants some of his grain, he sends up a boy, who climbs to the top with a wooden ladder, and, having removed the little grass cap from the aperture, lets himself down by a rope, and so brings out the required bundle of guinea-corn. A great deal of iron is found near Doho, and smelted by the natives in the place. I saw here, for the first time, some Tangali pagans, who, owing to a bad harvest, had been driven down from their mountains, which were showing in a faint outline on the southern horizon. What Vogel (*Zeitschrift für Erdkunde*, vol. 6, Heft 5) wrote from Bauchi is the most authentic information we possess of this wild tribe: "While at Bauchi I made the acquaintance of cannibals, with whom even the Mohammedan natives had scarcely any intercourse. They are all called by the country people Nyamnyams, a collective name, similar to our term of man-eater, as Nyam means in their language 'man.' The wisest and most important tribe amongst them are the Tangali, who inhabit the mountain range to the south, known by the wonderful peak towering high over the plain. These people have up to now kept themselves independent, and are only frightened from time to time by raids of the Gombe chief, who lives five days away from them. They rarely descend to the plain to buy iron implements for their farms, and it gave me some trouble to enter into communications with them, for at first they ran away at the sight of me, like the heathen on the Mandara hills. Some beads and other small presents at last quieted them, and I found the people good-natured, talkative, and extremely grateful for my presents. It is untrue that they eat their sick. By chance I saw two people sick in their village, and found that they were being nursed tenderly. When they died, their relations broke out in the usual wailing, which lasted all night. But they eat all their enemies fallen in fight. The breast was given to the chief, and the head, as the worst part, to the women, while the soft parts were dried in the sun and ground into powder, to be mixed with the cooked food." So far Vogel.

Richard Lander was informed that the mountains south of Kano, towards the sea, were all inhabited by the wild Nyamnyams, and again we meet that name in the descriptions of Schweinfurth's travels through the heart of Africa. The occurrence of this name of a like meaning in the different parts of Africa points to a language common to some primitive race, which must have been that of the original inhabitants of the country, or that in these hill pagans we have fairly sure descendants of the old Africans. The Tangalis that I saw were very black and ungainly built, with coarse negro features. They had no tribal marks, and wore absolutely no clothes.

Doho was the last heathen village that I saw before crossing the Gongola into Bornu. To the north of Doho the country is inhabited by the Gombe Fulanis. Passing through Dukul, Tongo, and over the ruins of Burmi, I came to Ashaka, and, bidding farewell to that country where such an interesting chapter of African history has been written, crossed over the Gongala river into the land of the merry Kanuri.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS' GEOGRAPHICAL PROGRESS.*

By the Right Hon. Sir GEORGE TAUBMAN GOLDIE, K.C.M.G.,
President R.G.S.

IT is just a quarter of a century since the British Association held its last meeting in this ancient city of York, and celebrated the jubilee of its foundation, so that from the moment of accepting the invitation to preside over this Section it was clear to my mind that the most appropriate subject for my address would be the progress of geography between that jubilee and what I believe would be called in other spheres our Diamond Jubilee. For although the immediate concern of geographers is with the Earth's surface, yet we cannot avoid sharing with the rest of our race the religious observance of astronomical periods and the tendency to regard certain numbers of such periods as having a peculiar value. Geographers, indeed, might be excused some tendency to this human weakness, as they are entirely dependent on astronomical methods and on an elaborate use of numbers for the primary necessity of ascertaining where they are on that surface which it is their business to examine and describe.

I do not propose in this address to deal only, or even chiefly, with the progress of exploration since our jubilee meeting in York, for although that progress has been remarkable, its effects are probably less far-reaching than the growth during the same period of the scientific treatment of geography; while both of these advances, taken together, are, to my mind, of less importance to our country—and we are, after all, a "British" Association—than the spread of the geographical spirit amongst our people, on the main cause of which I shall say a few words. Let me deal, then, with these matters in turn, bearing in mind, however, that the two latter subjects—the growth of scientific method and what I may term the democratization of geography—are so interwoven as to make it impossible to separate them altogether.

First, then, as to the advance of exploration since 1881. In that section of the

* Address to the Geological Section at the York meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, by the Right Hon. Sir George Taubman Goldie, K.C.M.G., LL.D., F.R.S., President of the Section.