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learn for certain what had become of them, but negroes told us they had been drowned in crossing a river. I do not know if this be true."

The Papers read were—

1. *Report on the Countries in the neighbourhood of the Niger.*

By DR. W. B. BAIKIE, M.D., F.R.G.S.

DR. BAIKIE advocates the immediate formation of a trading station and a consular establishment on the banks of the Niger. He states that it would secure preponderance and priority for English commerce, and would form a basis for English influence in Central Africa. A permanent establishment would serve to keep rude tribes in check, while it would be far from unpopular with the more settled population. It would afford the missionary and the philanthropist a centre for their Christianizing and civilizing endeavours, and finally it would bring to a practical conclusion the various Niger expeditions. He considers the present to be a most favourable time for such an establishment; ground has been secured and occupied, the foundation of a market laid, the navigation of the river has been opened from the confluence upwards, and there is a general feeling among the natives that we are at length really going to take such a step. He considers the confluence to be decidedly the best position for an establishment. It is the most central, is easily reached from the sea, is the point of convergence of many roads from the interior, is already a recognised market-place, and has proved to be healthy during Dr. Baikie's residence of two years.

Extracts from numerous despatches by Dr. Baikie have been printed by the Foreign Office, and are ordered by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society to be placed in their library. Some of them refer to the country whence cotton may be obtained, in which respect Bonu and Nupe are preferable to Yoruba, because in the former three-fourths of the labouring population are free to raise and sell their own crops, while in Yoruba the chief production is in the hands of large traders, who would infallibly add to their slaves in the event of an enlarged demand. Most of the extracts are purely geographical, and extend or correct Dr. Barth's deductions from native hearsay, or his own observations. Baikie gives the following data on the anomalous rise and fall of the Niger, which was first observed by Barth and minutely discussed in vol. v., p. 5, of that traveller's work. The observation of four years at Bussa showed the maximum height to be attained at the end of September; early in October the river begins to fall; during November it falls rapidly; it slackens towards the end of December, and is stationary in January. Between the end of January and the end of

February there is a second rise of from 4 to 18 inches. The rains mostly fall at the end of September, and the reason of the delayed rise of the river lies in the length and sluggishness of its course. In these general ideas Baikie agrees with Barth, whom, however, he appears to have partially misunderstood (as explained in a letter recently received from Dr. Barth.—Ed.).

The Benue and Niger are called at their confluence the dark and the white river, and the appellation is just, at the season of low water, for the difference of hue between the two streams is strongly marked at that time, and their waters keep distinct for several miles.

[The latest news of Dr. Baikie, who had left the Niger for the interior, has been brought back by Lieut. Lefroy, R.N. That officer proceeded with H.M.S. *Investigator* up the Niger to Rabba, which he reached on September 12. Thence he made his way by a five days' journey to the camp of King Massaba, where he remained a week. After returning to his ship a messenger from the King reached him on October 9, stating that news had been received from Baikie, who was on his journey back. Unfortunately the rapid fall of the waters of the Niger made it impossible for Lieut. Lefroy to retain his vessel any longer in that portion of the river.—Ed.]

The President reminded the meeting that Dr. Baikie went out upon this African expedition nearly eight years ago, and that the *Pleiad* steamer, in which he and his party were embarked, was lost in going through some of the rapids, very nearly at the point from which he last wrote. In no way discouraged by the loss of the vessel, and saving what he could from the wreck, Dr. Baikie set himself down in the midst of these wild people; and ever since then he had been sending expeditions to the right and left, besides carrying out two expeditions himself to the north-west and the south-east. This perseverance on his part was highly creditable to him, and it showed that the Government had really selected a man capable of accomplishing their behest, and of doing justice to the British name in those regions.

Mr. CRAWFORD said great credit was due to Dr. Baikie for his perseverance, industry, and zeal; but, in his opinion, his judgment was not equal to his industry. The station he had recommended for a settlement on the Niger, in the seventh or eighth degree of latitude, where the temperature was at 80° or 90° on the average the whole year round, was not a place for Europeans to live in.

The President observed that Dr. Baikie had been there eight years. Mr. CRAWFORD thought he must be a very lucky man. At all events he understood Dr. Baikie was in delicate health, and exceedingly anxious to come back. With respect to the productions of the country that had been spoken of, he should be glad to know what they were. Palm-oil was certainly a valuable commodity, and we imported into this country as much as two millions' worth per annum. Of ivory, though England was one of the greatest consuming countries in the world, our import and export annually did not equal 100,000*l*. Cotton had also been mentioned. Did anybody expect that the negroes would ever grow cotton? The cultivation of cotton required capital, ingenuity, intelligence, protection to life and property; and could

these things be expected from a people in a state of barbarism and slavery? No country in the world was capable of producing cotton in any considerable amount, of a quality fit for our manufacturers, except the Southern States of North America; and, of all countries in the world, Africa was the last that he should expect would ever produce cotton for such a purpose. Then there remained gold-dust, of which but a trifling quantity was produced, merely the washings from the sand. For all these reasons he thought it would be impolitic to form a settlement, as proposed by Dr. Baikie.

Mr. GALTON said that, although the individual items might not be large, there was a considerable amount of trade of one kind or another on the West African coast. Various thriving *entrepots*, of which Lagos was commercially the most important, were dotted along the seaboard the whole way from the Gabon to the Senegal. The proposal was that an additional settlement should be established by this country upon the Niger, where the opportunities of trade appeared to be greater than were now enjoyed anywhere along the coast. Confessedly, the West African trade was not of first-class magnitude; but it was not a settlement of first-class importance that Dr. Baikie recommended, merely a small trading establishment. Such an establishment, bringing with it, as it would, all the advantages of European and Christian influence, was a project that he considered might be reasonably entertained on more grounds than one.

The PRESIDENT said, even allowing that all Mr. Crawford's objections were valid, we were still deeply indebted to Dr. Baikie for making us acquainted with the physical geography of this remote region.
