

light travelling at the rate of 186,000 miles a second, would take four years say, to go from the nearest star to the earth; now as we saw the fixed stars there must be some link of connection between us and them. There were two theories of light; according to one, light was a substance darted forth from the luminous body, according to the other it was a state of change taking place, propagated by a medium intervening between that body and the observer. Sir Isaac Newton held that there must be such a medium, either material or immaterial, but the question arose how far did it extend; was it infinite like space? Science could give no answer; if it were limited what was outside it? Was there another system subject to the same or different laws? if there be such then, according to phenomena open to our investigation there can be no communication therewith. But the properties of ether are no less remarkable than its extent, the question whether it gravitates towards ponderable matter, science cannot answer, but if it be connected with gravitation, it cannot be imponderable. Sir Gabriel then referred to the undulatory theory of sound, and to his own suggestion to Faraday, forty years ago, in regard to the possibility of the electricity having an undulatory motion somewhat similar to that of light. Since then Clark Maxwell had shown that the velocity of light agrees with that of electricity, and Hertz had shown that the one exhibits some phenomena of the other.

At the conclusion of the address, His Excellency the Hon. T. F. Bayard, the United States Ambassador to England, as a member of the Institute, moved, and Sir Henry Barkly, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., F.R.S., seconded a vote of thanks for the address. Canon Girdlestone and Admiral Grant, C.B., moved and seconded a vote of thanks to the Chair, and the summer list of home and colonial applicants for enrolment as supporters was begun, after which the members and associates held a conversazione in the Museum, where refreshments were served.

THE HISTORY OF THE GYPSIES.

Historians and philologists have settled it among themselves, to their own satisfaction, that the Gypsies came originally from India. The supposition is that this strange race belonged to the lowest orders of India, from which country they were gradually driven by their own wandering spirit and by conquest and oppression. But that Gypsy had no other history than the history of the slave, the renegade and the vagrant in the land of his nativity, I do not believe. His faithfulness to his race-instinct bespeaks a nobler and more ancient origin than is allowed by the theory that he is offspring of a mixed community recruited from the various ranks of Indian society. A few hundred years would not suffice to weld together such a heterogeneous mass into a people whose traditions and spirit should survive to live on for as many more. Only the remnant of a vastly ancient race would be able to scatter over the world, to separate into small groups, to live in every land and clime, to experience the sway of every form of government of which history has account, or which exists to-day, to know the influence of every form of religion and yet to be at the close of the nineteenth century what they were in the days of their expulsion from India, what they were in the Middle Ages, in no wise changed or changing, always the same, in all lands tellers of fortunes, traders of horses, dealers in mys-

tery. Though separated for hundreds of years and by leagues of space, they all speak the same language and live the same life, alike faithful by the sands of Sahara and by the shores of the Arctic Sea, by the flow of the Ganges and by our own Mississippi. That they passed through Persia and Greece their language testifies, as it also testifies to their vast antiquity, by being closely allied to Sanscrit. That immediately prior to their entrance into Europe a large body of them spent some time in Egypt, is matter of history. From this fact comes their name, Egyptians, 'Gyptians, Gypsies.

The first appeared in Europe before the twelfth century, and in the fourteenth century their numbers were largely augmented. The first notice of them in European literature occurs in the writings of an Austrian monk about 1122, who describes them as "Ishmaelites." In 1417 a band of 300 wanderers, black as Tartars and calling themselves Secani, appeared at the gates of the German cities. They bore letters of safe conduct from the Emperor Sigismund. In 1418 they appeared to the number of 1,000 at the gate of Zurich, led by "Duke Michael of Little Egypt." In 1422 according to the chronicle of Stumpf, the old Swiss historian, 14,000 of these "regues and vagabonds" presented themselves at Basel. On the 17th of August, 1427, a band of them coming from Bohemia approached the gates of Paris which they were not permitted to enter, the authorities appointing La Chapelle Saint Denis as their place of lodgment. So the Gypsies swept over Europe. Their favorite account of themselves was that they came originally from Egypt, and that their wanderings were a self-imposed penance for a temporary abandonment of the Christian faith. But persecution soon began against them, and once afoot it followed them swiftly and ruthlessly down the centuries. Francis I. ordered them to quit France on pain of being sent to the galleys without trial whenever caught. In 1560 they were condemned to perpetual banishment. Decrees were issued against them in England by Henry VIII. and by Elizabeth. Even as late as 1748 Frederick the Great renewed the law that every Gypsy beyond the age of eighteen found in his states should be hanged forthwith. In Scotland they were more kindly received. But in 1541 an Act was passed that the "Egyptians pass forth of the realm," under pain of death. More recently measures less brutal have been adopted by the Governments of Europe toward these nomads. Maria Theresa interested herself in the education of their children and in the gradual settlement of the race as tillers of the soil. No other countries have succeeded in winning them from their wandering habits, and it cannot be said that to compel them to inhabit one spot results in any benefit to the race itself. To be convinced that the Gypsy is worthy of attention, it is only necessary to give a few statistics, not very accurate, I fear, but as nearly exact as can be obtained at this time, to show how generally and in what numbers they are scattered over the world. In Hungary, where they are known as Czizanyok and Pharaonepek—Pharaoh's people—there are 140,000; in Transylvania and the Principalities 162,000; in Spain, where they are called Zingali and Gitonas, there are 40,000; in England and Scotland, 18,000; in Poland 2,000; in Russia, 10,000; in Germany, France and Italy combined, 40,000; in Norway, 1,500; and so on till the total number of Gypsies in the world is computed to be about 5,000,000.—Paul Kester in *Field's Washington*.

DOWN ON THE SUWANEE RIVER.

In that part of the long journey when we were passing through Georgia, and at the moment when the tedium was worst, the train approached a long hollow in the hills where one of those pleasant surprises occurred which go to prove how song may consecrate a locality. A river, not very broad or deep, but with a certain special grace and character of its own, lay in front of our track. We had a good view of it as we came near the wooden trestle bridge by which the line was carried across—structures which, until you become acclimatized to American travel, always make you wonder whether they will carry the train this time safely over. The river ran down from the Georgian hills in a lively current, broken sometimes into rapids and little cataracts where the red and black rocks lay across its channel, and then widening out into picturesque reaches bordered by thickets of dark green foliage and clumps of cypress and willow. In the clearings here and there between the woods which bordered it, stood isolated negro cottages, around which you could see little black children at play, and the invariable pig, which is the house guest of the nigger as well as of the Irishman. A punt was gliding along on the quiet part of the stream with a negro on board dragging a fishing-line, and the black buzzards circled over the maize fields. It was not a striking scene, but beautiful in its way, gilded as it was by the rays of a magnificent sunset. Yet I should have forgotten it in a few minutes, as I had forgotten the hundreds of other rivers which the train had traversed, had it not been that I happened to ask the conductor what was the name of this particular water.

Quite carelessly he answered: "That's the Suwanee river, mister!" The Suwanee river! In a moment the stream had for me a new and extraordinary interest. I had not even known there was such a river in geographical reality, or that it flowed through Georgia; and yet here it was—real, authentic, alive—leaping down through the Southern forests, past the maize fields and the cotton flats, to pour itself into the Gulf of Mexico. In an instant everything around appeared to be full of the song that all the world sings: "Way Down upon de Suwanee Riber." The live caks seemed to wave it in the evening air; the stream seemed to sing it as it bustled over the rocks; the birds in the thickets had it in the soft musical notes we caught, and the crickets and katydids beginning their sunset chirrup joined in the half-heard chorus. The journey was no longer monotonous. To be "way down upon de Suwanee riber" was to have come to a corner of America dedicated to that deep emotion of our common humanity—the love of home. Is there anybody who has not felt the charm of the simple nigger melody?

When I was playin' wid my brudder
Happy was I,
O, take me to my kind old mudder,
Dar let me lib and die.
All the world am sad and dreary
Eberywhere I roam;
O darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home.

There, indeed, were the old folks at home, a white-haired darky sitting on a log by the cottage door stripping maize-cobs, and, shambling about among the pigs and poultry, old Dinah, with a yellow bandanna on her silver locks, crooning some song, which might perhaps be the song of the river. So, after all, it was real! and there