



## BIRD, ISABELLA L

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**BIRD, ISABELLA L.**, also known under her married surname of Bishop (1831-1904), British traveler in western Iran and Kurdistan during the late Victorian period. Coming from a line of Warwickshire gentry with strong links with the East India Company and the Anglican Church, Isabella inherited a firm Evangelical Christian faith plus a strong humanitarian strain, doubtless strengthened by her family's links with the Wilberforce family, which had been active in the agitation against the slave trade in early 19th-century Britain. Her early years were spent in semi-invalidism, but from the 1860s, she acquired a new lease on life as a world-wide traveler, including to North America, Hawaii, Japan, and Malaya, marrying in 1881 the physician Dr. John Bishop.

In 1889 she traveled to India, where she had a special interest in medical missions, and returned via the Middle East, virtually the whole of 1890 being taken up by a trip from Basra to Baghdad and Tehran and thence to Isfahan. From there she resolved to traverse Luristan and then passed through Borūjerd and Hamadān northwards through Persian Kurdistan to Urmia, finally making her way through eastern Turkey to Trebizond and home. Her book *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan, Including a Summer in the Upper Karun Region and a Visit to the Nestorian Rayahs* was published in two volumes at London in 1891 (repr. 1988-89). It describes her dogged endurance of hardships, through mountainous and difficult terrain, with extremes of climate and tribal regions where the Baḳtīārī chiefs, at that time involved in much family strife and rivalry, were not always able to restrain the predatory



instincts of their followers, and where the writ of local Qajar governors barely ran. Her topographical observations regarding the orography of the high Baḳtiārī country are valuable, and she was the first to note that the Kārūn river rose, not from the foot of the Zardakūh, but further north in the Kūh-e Rang. The whole journey was a tour-de-force for a woman of nearly 60. It earned her membership of the Royal Geographical Society in London in 1893, the pioneer woman honorary member. Her last years were spent in further travels to the Far East and in the Atlas mountains of Morocco.

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