

broad, and often encloses flat islands. Below Hit, where the river carries as much as 70,000 cubic feet of water per second, numerous irrigation canals run off on both sides, for here the Euphrates flows entirely through flat alluvial land, and only at Hilleh is there a last ridge. Its grey, turbid water, which is highest in May and lowest in November, forms along the banks extensive marshes and lagoons overgrown with reeds, which are a hindrance to navigation. But the natives carry on their traffic on rafts floated on inflated sheepskins. At Korna the Euphrates and Tigris meet to form the Shat-el-Arab, and when the river falls into the Persian Gulf beyond Basra and Mohammera, it has accomplished a course of 1700 miles.

The classical Babylonia—Chaldea, Mesopotamia, the Irak-arabi of the present day—lies desolate, dusty, yellow, and scorched by the burning sun, between its rivers; and this land, now fallow for two thousand years, was formerly, according to cuneiform inscriptions, intersected by a network of irrigation canals, which made it a mosaic of fields and gardens where wheat yielded a hundredfold, and juicy bunches of dates ripened among the crowns of the palms. Stones, dugged out of the dry earth in whole libraries by explorers of modern times, still speak of peoples and dominions of bygone centuries. In this land the learned lay the scene of the Flood, and according to the first book of Moses, chapter xi., Noah's sons proposed to build a tower—the tower of Babel—which should reach from earth to heaven; but in His wrath God confused their tongues and scattered them abroad over the world. Here sprang up the proud and splendid Babylon, and flourished in the time of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar till after the clash of the arms of the Assyrian conquerors had sunk into silence. New peoples and new monarchies succeeded one another on this ancient stage; the Persians took Babylon, and the victorious Alexander proposed to build up the town again, with its strong walls and broad, regular streets. Now, Birs Nimrud and Hilleh are all that is left of this focus of power and glory, artistic skill, learning, and civilization.

Not less rich in proud memories are the banks of the