

Topic Page: [Bird, Isabella L. \(Isabella Lucy\), 1831–1904](#)

Definition: **Bishop, Isabella** from *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*

née

Bird

1831-1904

English writer and traveller

She was born in Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, and from 1854 visited Canada and the USA, the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), the Rocky Mountains, Yezo, Persia (Iran) and Kurdistan, Tibet, and Korea. She wrote *Englishwoman in America* (1856) and many other travel books. In 1892 she was elected the first woman Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.



Image from: [CHINA AND MONGOLIA: GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE in World and Its Peoples: Eastern and Southern Asia](#)

Summary Article: **Bishop, Isabella Bird (1831 - 1904)**

From *The Bloomsbury Dictionary of English Literature*

She was born in Boroughbridge, one of two daughters of Edward Bird, curate, and Dora Lawson, Sunday-school teacher. She began travelling abroad in 1854 with a visit to the United States. *The Englishwoman in America* (1856) was an immediate success, launching her career as a writer. *Aspects of Religion in America* (1859) was written during her second trip to North America; this was followed by *The Hawaiian Archipelago: Six Months Among the Palm Groves, Coral Reefs and Volcanoes of the Sandwich Islands* (1874). In 1878 she left for Japan, returning in 1879 after travelling through Hong Kong, Saigon, Singapore and Malaysia. *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880) and *The Golden Cheronese* (1883) record these journeys. In 1889 she set out for the Middle East, continuing through India, Tibet, Central Asia and Persia. During this trip she organized the building of two hospitals in India, in memory of her father and sister. *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* was published in 1894, the year in which Bishop left Britain on a missionary trip to China. She sailed up the Yangtze River, rode 300 miles alone on a mule, and built three hospitals and an orphanage. Returning to London in 1897, she prepared *Korea and Her Neighbours* (1898), *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* (1899) and *Chinese Pictures* (1900). Her final missionary trip was to Morocco in 1900-01. She was now severely weakened by the ill-health that had plagued her for many years, and she died of a tumour in 1904. She appears as a character in Caryl Churchill's (b 1938) play, *Top Girls* (1982).

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