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ISTHMUS OF SUEZ CANAL.



REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE WORKS



IN A LETTER TO THE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF MALTA

BY

ALFRED CHRISTIAN

PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER.



MAY, 1865.

315004

To the

Vice President and Members

of the

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

MALTA.

Gentlemen,

In conformity with your wishes, that I should, as your representative, attend the meeting of Commercial Delegates, invited by the President of the Suez Canal Company to inspect the works, now in progress, in the Isthmus of Suez, I proceeded to Alexandria in the early part of last month, and had the honor of being received by Mr. Ferdinand de Lesseps on the 5th April.

I learnt from him that about eighty delegates, of all nations, had already assembled in Egypt, and that our departure for the Isthmus was fixed for the 7th April.

We accordingly took the rail for Cairo on the morning of that day, accompanied by Mr. de Lesseps, Count Sala, Dr. Aubert Roche, and other leading officers of the Company. We spent the following day at Cairo, and on the morning of the 9th proceeded, again by rail, to Zagazig, a populous town in the Delta, not far from the site of the ancient Bubastis.

We here embarked on the fresh water canal, which, taking its rise in the Nile, runs due east as far as Lake Timsah, and then, shaping its course southward, joins the Red Sea at Suez. The first portion of the canal, as far as Gasasine (29 miles), was constructed several years ago, by the late Vice Roy Mohammed Ali; all the rest is the work of the Suez Canal Company.

Six large flat bottomed boats received our party, and all being made ready, Mr. de Lesseps gave the signal for departure. We soon left behind us the rich and fertile plains of the Delta of Egypt, and began to wind our way eastward, through what is called, the "Waddy" (or valley) "Toumilat" which is, in fact, a narrow tongue of cultivated land projecting into the desert.

These lands have become the property of the Suez Canal Company by purchase, at a cost of about £80,000 Stg. The estate consists of about 28,000 acres, and returns to the Company a considerable annual revenue.

Our boats were towed by camels and horses at a speed of about 4 miles an hour, and towards evening we reached "Tell-el-Kebir," a small Arab village, now the head quarters of the Company's superintendent in the Waddy. Here we spent the night.

The next morning we resumed our places in the boats, and continued our journey along the canal. The belt of cultivated land on each side, narrowed gradually as we advanced eastward, and soon disappeared altogether, giving place to the arid sands of the desert. Our course lay through the heart of the once favored land of Goshen, now a dreary and desolate waste.

At midday, we landed to visit the supposed site of the ancient City of Rameses, of which nothing now remains but a granite monolith of the time of Remeses the second, some vestiges of walls of unburnt brick, and mounds of sand mixed with fragments of pottery.

Traces of the canal of the ancient Egyptians, formerly so famous, are clearly seen in this neighbourhood. Its course from the Nile to the Red Sea seems to have been very nearly the same as that taken by the modern fresh water canal, and through this watered way, the trading vessels of Arabia and India, and even the larger triremes of the Pharaohs and Ptolemies, navigated to and from the Mediterranean, more than 2000 years back. Thus, the necessities of commerce, even in those remote ages, seem to have forced the rulers of Egypt to unite the western and eastern seas. This ancient canal measuring, as it did, 120 to 150 feet across, was certainly a superb water way for the shipping of those days.

At 5 p.m. the little town of Ismaila, picturesquely situated on the shores of lake Timsah, came suddenly to view amidst the sands of the desert. The life, elegance, and comfort of an European settlement, so unexpectedly greeting us in regions entirely desolate, and the cordial welcome we here met with, could not but make a very pleasing impression on most of our party. Ismaila is the residence of Mr. Voisin, the able Director General of the works of the Isthmus, who joined our party at this point, and accompanied the delegates during the remainder of the journey. I am greatly indebted to this gentleman, and to his obliging assistants, for many of the details given in this nar-

native. Ismaila counts already about 3000 inhabitants, Europeans and Arabs. We found there, among other luxuries, a spacious and very comfortable hotel, where part of the delegates passed the night;—the remainder took up their quarters at Mr. de Lesseps' Swiss chalet, and at other private houses.

We devoted the whole of the next day (11th) to visiting the neighbourhood of Ismaila, extending our journey to the "Serapeum," the name given to the neck of land which separates lake Timsah from the Bitter Lakes.

At Ismaila, the chief work now in progress, is the construction of locks, intended to unite the fresh water canal with the maritime ship canal. At present, goods and passengers coming by the ship canal from the Mediterranean, bound either to the Nile or to the Red Sea, are compelled to tranship at Ismaila, and cross a narrow strip of land, before they can embark on the boats of the fresh water canal. This transshipment is a tedious operation, and also an expensive one in the case of bulky goods. When the locks, however, are completed, a few months hence, there will be a clear water communication for light craft, throughout the Isthmus, from Port Said to Suez.

To the south of Lake Timsah, the works thus far executed by the company, consist of about 4 miles of excavation of the maritime canal, to depths varying from 6 to 12 feet below the level of the sea. The distance between the southern shores of this lake and the northern extremity of the great basin of the Bitter Lakes, is about 9 English miles, consequently there are 5 miles of ground, as yet nearly untouched, for the contractors (Messrs. Borel

Lavalley and Co.) to whom are entrusted the remainder of the excavations, have not long commenced operations at this point. These lands rise to the height of about 30 feet above the level of the sea.

During our excursion to the Serapeum, an opportunity was given us of witnessing the wonderfully fertilizing power of the waters of the Nile over the sands of the desert. At "Bir Abou Balah," the "Well of the father of Dates," a few miles from Ismaila, near the spot where the fresh water canal turns its course to the southward, the Company have put under cultivation a few acres of land, surrounding a house they have built for the use of Abdel Kader, should that renowned chieftain ever feel disposed to take up his residence in their domains. A few seeds and shrubs, planted in the sands only three or four years ago, have, by the sole aid of water, periodically supplied from the canal, transformed this bit of desert into green fields, shaded by palms and other trees, and a pleasant little Oasis now stands, where but a short time ago, only barren sands met the eye.

The days of the 12th and 13th were occupied in inspecting the Maritime ship canal between Ismaila and the Mediterranean. We embarked in eighteen boats, towed as before, by camels and horses. In about an hour, our flotilla, led by Mr. de Lesseps, stopped at El-Guisr, one of the most difficult sections of the works of the canal, inasmuch as the mounds of loose sand, at this point, rise to the height of nearly 60 feet above the level of the sea. The removal of these sands, measuring nearly ten millions of cubic yards, has been undertaken

by Mr. Couvreur, a French contractor, at a cost of £560,000 Stg. Through these mounds the navigable channel is, as yet, somewhat narrow, nevertheless two boats, or barges, can pass each other without difficulty. The excavations are carried on by powerful steam dredgers, which lap up the sand with great rapidity, and throw it into trucks; these latter are then removed, with equal rapidity, along lines of rail branching off in various directions, and other empty trucks immediately replace those carried away. The laborers are conveyed every morning, in cars, from the little station of El-Guisr, to the spot where their services are required. At this station, the contractor has an establishment of blacksmiths' and carpenters' shops, which seemed in full activity; indeed, all his arrangements appeared to be organized in a very business like manner; but, for the rapid progress of the excavations, a greater number of dredges, than were at work during our visit, might be employed with advantage. The workmen were chiefly French, Dalmatians, Arabs and Greeks,

Issuing from between the elevated mounds of El-Guisr, the canal, shortly afterwards, attains its extreme width of $188\frac{1}{2}$ feet at the water line, and so continues for 39 miles, until it reaches the Mediterranean. I should mention that it is not yet navigable throughout that width, but a "rigole," or channel, exists from 2 to 3 feet in depth, sufficiently broad to allow the flat bottom boats and iron barges of the Company, with their cargoes, to pass freely between Ismaila and the Mediterranean.

We spent the night of the 12th at El-

Kantara, a village about 20 miles from Ismaila, built by the Company on the eastern bank of the canal, and occupying the site of an ancient city. El-Kantara is on the high way of the caravans journeying between Egypt and Syria, and a day seldom passes without the arrival of numerous herds of cattle, and long strings of camels bearing Egyptian and Syrian travellers. The place is amply supplied with excellent water, led thither in pipes from Ismaila, and the caravans are rejoiced at the opportunity afforded them of here replenishing their skins before proceeding on their journey. These water pipes follow the maritime canal to its junction with the Mediterranean, 48 miles from Ismaila, supplying all the stations along its course. This is the only good water to be had any where in the Isthmus, as the wells found, here and there, in the sands, altho' supplied by infiltrations from the Nile, are more or less brackish. As a precaution against accidents, such as might happen by the bursting of a pipe, or from any other cause, the Company have, very prudently, formed large reservoirs of water at Port Said, sufficient for 15 days consumption, but in order to render the supply along the canal more secure, and also more abundant, it has been lately decided to lay down a second line of pipes from Ismaila.

Leaving El-Kantara on the morning of the 13th, we soon passed from the sandy desert into Lake Mensaleh, which forms a wide and shallow lagoon, extending north to the Mediterranean and east to Damietta. From this point, as far as Port Said, the maritime canal is entirely excavated in the bed of the

lake, the mud from which is thrown up at each side, forming the banks. At about 10 miles from the Mediterranean, our boats were met by four small iron screw steamers, which conveyed our party rapidly to Port Said.

April 13th—Port Said may be called the maritime capital of the Isthmus. Like Ismaila it is entirely the creation of the Suez canal Company, for not a vestige of a dwelling existed, within miles of the spot, when Mr. de Lesseps and his few adventurous companions, first pitched their tents upon this barren coast. A narrow strip of sand, rising barely a few feet above the level of the sea, divides lake Mensaleh from the Mediterranean, and on that narrow strip has sprung up, within the last six years, the thriving little town of Port Said. It counts already about 5000 inhabitants, and who can say what may be the future reserved to it, should the Isthmus ever become the great high way to the East!

At Port Said are collected the various workshops, connected with the steam machinery, the sand dredges, the iron lighters, and all other "matériel," required for the excavations along the Isthmus. The machinery and iron-work, are brought in pieces from France, and are then put together at these shops. We found a number of dredges and lighters thus in course of construction. Their services, indeed, are everywhere much wanted, and until completed and in good working order, the excavations can hardly proceed with the desired activity.

Our attention was next drawn to a manufactory connected with the works of the harbour, where large blocks, made out of sand, lime, and water, are prepared by Messrs. Dussaud for the

construction of the two jetties, required for the protection of the harbour. After being dried in the sun, these massive blocks are dropped into the sea, and are found to resist the action of the waves as well as the hardest stone. The Company have contracted with Messrs. Dus-saud for 250,000 cubic metres of these blocks.

The two jetties will form the entrance to the canal from the Mediterranean;—they are to project parallel to each other from the beach, the western jetty about 2 miles into the sea, the eastern, about one third less. The former is in course of construction, and extends already about 600 yards from the shore,—the other is not yet commenced, but the contractors are bound to have them both completed by the 30th June 1868.

Some scientific men have predicted the formation, across the mouth of the canal, of considerable banks of sand, brought thither from the Nile and the African coast, by westerly currents. Time alone can shew to what extent these predictions may be well founded; meanwhile, the resident French engineers, who have watched these currents with great care for several years, assert, that the volume of sand carried to the eastward, along the Peluseum coast, has been much exaggerated, and they seem confident that a pier two miles in length, at the western entrance of the harbour, will prove an effectual barrier, for a long time to come, against the formation of any formidable banks at the mouth; nor do they anticipate any difficulty in removing gradually, by dredgers, whatever deposits may, at any period, be ~~formed~~. All vessels, at present, lie in the open roadstead, where the anchorage, however, is

good. A small artificial island, lately constructed by the Company at about a mile from the shore, affords fair shelter, in bad weather, to vessels discharging cargoes. As a proof of the safety of the anchorage, I may mention that, since the foundation of Port Said in April 1859, the total losses in the roadstead do not exceed 9 vessels out of 1600, being little more than half per cent in the course of six years. Twenty five vessels laden with machinery, blocks of stone, timber, coals, provisions, &c. were at anchor, off the town, at the period of our visit.

Leaving Port Said with a fair northerly wind on the morning of the 15th, our boats carried us back, under sail, by the ship canal, in 11 hours to Ismaila.

Next day we took final leave of Ismaila, and returning to our boats on the fresh water canal, we started for the Red Sea. This was a long day's journey, occupying 17 hours. The canal, after passing lake Timsah, follows the western edge of the basin of the Bitter Lakes, approaches the foot of the Geneffe mountains, and finally reaches Suez after a course of 56 miles from Ismaila. The depression in the lands, forming the two basins of the Bitter Lakes, is very marked, and there seems little doubt that all this hollow surface, now perfectly dry, formed part, at some remote period, of the bed of the Red Sea. Numerous marine shells, common to that sea, are everywhere found on the surface of both basins.

A little south of the lesser basin the modern fresh water canal enters, and follows for a short distance, the bed of the old canal of the Pharaohs, which is here about 120 feet wide.

Passing this point we soon reached the station of Chalouf-el-Terraba, where about 2 miles of the maritime canal have been excavated by the Company, to its full width of 260 feet, and to the depth of about 15 feet. These are the only excavations as yet commenced, between the Bitter Lakes and the Red Sea, and they are now at a stand still, but the works are to be resumed very shortly. A bed of calcareous rock has been found at this point, which may prove somewhat troublesome to remove, but the stone will be useful for casing the sides of the canal.

We passed the day of the 17th at Suez, where the works of the Company now in progress, are limited to the construction of locks intended to establish a communication between the fresh water canal and the Red Sea. These locks will be completed in a few months, when boats and barges, entering from the Red Sea, will be able to navigate, without interruption, to every part of the Isthmus. and also to the Nile.

I must not omit to mention that a regular daily postal service has been organized, throughout the Isthmus, and that telegraphic wires in good working order, are everywhere to be seen along the banks of the canal. These wires communicate with Europe, by means of the Egyptian telegraph at Suez and at Zagazig.

Lastly, I must not fail to record how much the delegates were indebted to Mr. de Lesseps and the officers of the Company generally, for their unvarying courtesy and attention during this interesting journey. And I would particularly wish to express to Count Sala and Dr. Aubert Roche, in whose boat I had the good

fortune to travel for several days, my sense of their extreme kindness in being ever ready to answer my numerous enquiries, which often, I fear, must have been a tax on their time and attention. From first to last, the delegates were the guests of the Company, and nothing was, at any time, wanting that could contribute to their comfort and well-being.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Having thus completed, under the guidance of Mr. de Lesseps, the interesting tour of which the above is but an imperfect sketch, it only remains for me to add a few remarks, and statistical details, for the better information of the Chamber.

MARITIME SHIP CANAL.

It will be seen, by the map annexed, that the ship canal cuts the Isthmus of Suez, almost in a straight line, from north to south, dividing the two great continents of Asia and Africa. Starting from the Mediterranean, the canal passes successively through the lakes Menzaleh and Ballah, the lofty mounds of El-Guisr, lake Timsah, the sandy district of the Serapeum, the greater and lesser basins of the Bitter Lakes, and finally reaches the Red Sea at Suez. Its total length from sea to sea is about 100 miles. Along this distance, only 38 miles of land rise above the sea level, the remaining 62 miles are either below it, or on the same level as the sea. The parts on the sea level, are Lakes Menzaleh and Ballah, and those below it, are Lake Timsah and the two

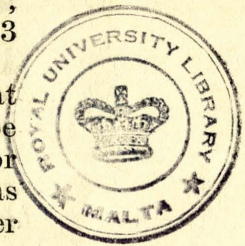
basins of the Bitter Lakes. Lake Timsah, which occupies the centre of the Isthmus, midway between the two seas, is about 9 miles in circumference, and it is proposed to convert that basin into a central harbour where vessels may, at all times, find a safe and convenient anchorage.

From the Mediterranean to the Bitter Lakes, the width of the canal, when completed, will be $188\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and from the Bitter Lakes to the Red Sea, 260 feet. Its depth, in every part, will be 26 feet.

At present, the only portion of the maritime canal navigable by boats, is between Port Said and Ismaila, a distance of about 48 miles; along this line, a channel exists, from 2 to 3 feet deep, on an average.

The excavations nowhere present any great engineering difficulties, as they have to be made, almost entirely, either in sandy soil or in mud; some rocky ground, however, has shewn itself at two places between the Bitter Lakes and the Red Sea, which it is not unlikely may give trouble, and might possibly occasion a slight deviation in the present tracing of the southern extremity of the canal, near its junction with the Red Sea.

Almost the whole of the excavations, thus far, are due to the forced labour of the Arabs, supplied by the late Vice Roy of Egypt, but paid by the Company. This forced labour having now ceased, the remainder of the works must necessarily, in great part, be executed by steam dredges, for no inducement seems sufficient to entice the Egyptian Fellah voluntarily to leave his native village, whilst European labour is scarce and expensive. Four to five



francs a day, are the current wages paid in the Isthmus to ordinary labourers.

Those excavations of the ship canal which yet remain to be completed, between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, have been undertaken by the eminent French firm, of Messrs. Borel Lavalley & Co. By their contract with the Company, the works are to be completed by the 30th June 1868, under a penalty of £20,000 per mensem for every month's delay; on the other hand, they are to receive a like sum, from the Company, for every month gained.

FRESH WATER CANAL.

Efficient arrangements for providing a plentiful supply of water in the desert, were a necessary preliminary to the works on the Isthmus.

When the excavations first commenced, water had to be carried long distances, on the backs of camels and horses, and then deposited at intervals on the line of works, in small iron tanks; provisions for the labourers, tools, and every description of article required for the works, had to be conveyed, in the same manner, at great expense. The Company therefore, saw the necessity of accelerating to the utmost, the excavations of the fresh water canal, from which, not only a plentiful supply of excellent water would be obtained from the Nile, but an easy means of communication would be established with the Delta of Egypt, for the carriage of everything required in the Isthmus. This canal is now completed to Suez, a distance, from the "Waddy Toumilat" of $93\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and it will, next year, be prolonged to Cairo

by a branch, now in course of construction by the Egyptian government, when its length will be increased to 137 miles. Its width varies from 50 to 65 feet at the water level. The depth, at the time of our visit, only averaged between 2 and 3 feet, but the waters, of course, increase in volume at the period of the rise of Nile in Egypt, reaching up to 7 or 8 feet when the waters are highest.

The Company had calculated on raising a very considerable revenue from this canal, as, by the original concession of the late Vice Roy, they were to become proprietors of all waste lands, which they might be able to bring into cultivation; they were also authorized to levy navigation dues along these waters. But they have now lost those valuable privileges, receiving as compensation from the Egyptian government, the sum of £1,440,000 Sterling, in accordance with the late arbitration of the Emperor of the French.

FINANCIAL.

The capital of the Suez Canal Company consists of £8,000,000 Stg., in 400,000 shares of £20 each, of which four fifths are paid up. Of these shares, 177,642 are held by the Egyptian Government, the remainder have been chiefly subscribed for in France. The Company receive, in addition, from the Egyptian Government, in virtue of the Emperor's arbitration above alluded to, a total of £3,360,000 Stg., payable by instalments, in 15 years. The disposable capital of the Company is therefore increased by that sum, making a total of £11,360,000. According to a report furnished to the delegates by Mr. de Lesseps, the amount

expended by the Company up to the time when the last balance sheet was laid before the shareholders, (6th August 1864) was £3,280,000, which includes the cost of the lands of the Waddy. It follows therefore, that £8,080,000 were in hand, at that date, to finish the works. Mr. de Lesseps, in the report above referred to, estimates the cost of the remaining works at £6,400,000, (*) and to that sum, has to be added the interest payable annually to the shareholders on their paid up capital. This item amounts, at present, to £320,000 per annum, and may be increased to £400,000 per annum in the event of the remaining fifth of the subscribed capital being called for. But until we have a later balance sheet from the board of directors, bringing down the expenditure to the present time, and detailing the receipts from the lands of the Waddy, and other sources, it is difficult to make out a perfectly clear statement of the financial position

(*) This expenditure is thus divided:

Cost of piers, quays, and other works at Port Said...	£	568,000
Excavations through the mounds of El-Guisr...	..	420,000
do: of ship canal ... ..	..	4,488,000
Casing of parts of the canal with stone ... ..	..	320,000
Cost of piers at Suez ... ..	..	88,000
Laying down a second line of fresh water pipes } between Ismaila and Port Said... ..	..	116,000
Unforeseen and general expenses ... ..	..	400,000
Total approximate expenditure... ..	£	<u>6,400,000</u>

Of this total, the sums for which contracts have been signed between the Company and various French firms, amount to... .. £ 5,452,000
The remaining expenditure, calculated upon estimates, is 948,000

Total... .. £ 6,400,000

of the Company. I may mention, however, that Mr. de Lesseps considers the balance available, as amply sufficient to meet all claims on the Company until the completion of the works. On this point, I will not venture to offer an opinion.

All the contractors are bound, under penalties, to complete their contracts by the end of June 1868. Whether these gentlemen are likely to be punctual to their time, is more than a passing traveller can pretend to say, but it certainly strikes one, that notwithstanding the stipulated penalties, more hands, more dredgers, and more activity generally, will be required, to obtain the desired result. No doubt, much time has been unavoidably lost in collecting together the necessary plant required for the works, every article of machinery having to be imported from Europe; probably, therefore, greater activity may reasonably be looked for hereafter, when all the steam engines, dredges, iron barges &c., have reached their destination, along the line of excavations. Be that as it may, the canal of the Isthmus of Suez, whenever completed, will be a lasting monument to the perseverance and indefatigable energy of its talented projector, and should the results, commercial and otherwise, prove commensurate to the expectations of its promoters and supporters, it will certainly have a claim to a high place among the most memorable works of modern times.

The expense of keeping the ship canal in good working order, after its construction, has been roughly estimated at about £70,000 per annum.

Exception has been taken to these figures;

for it is asserted that moveable sands, blown about the desert by high winds, will fill up the navigable channel as fast as it is made, whilst the sands from the Mediterranean and the Nile, will constantly choke up the entrance of the harbour at Port Said. It is thence inferred, that costly dredging will be required all along the Isthmus, and that the expense will very much exceed the above estimate.

I have already noticed what concerns Port Said, when speaking of the piers of that harbour. As regards the moveable sands, I should explain that whilst the canal is 100 miles in length, these sands are found only over a surface of about 23 miles, namely in the Serapeum (9 miles) and between lakes Timsah and Ballah (14 miles). All the rest of the canal passes either through lakes, or through compact sand mixed with fine gravel, from which little silting is to be apprehended.

No doubt, however, a certain degree of silting will inevitably take place, partly from fine sands blown by the winds, but chiefly, I think, from the action of the waves against the soft banks during the passage of shipping; also perhaps, to a less extent, by the currents in the southern portion of the canal, incident to the rise and fall of the tides in the Red Sea. To correct the effects arising from this action of the waves and currents, there seems no other remedy than to adopt the suggestion of that eminent engineer, Mr. Hawkshaw, who, three years ago, advised the casing of the canal with stone, and I believe his plan will, to a certain extent, be carried out. With respect to the moveable sands, the French engineers rely much on the protection that will be given to

the canal, by high embankments, and by plantations of shrubs and trees, and on the whole, they are confident that it will neither be difficult nor very costly, to keep a navigable channel at all times open for the passage of vessels.

If I might offer an unprofessional remark upon this subject, I would venture to point out the fact, that during a very long period, a navigable channel existed through a great part of this desert; and since the Pharaohs, the Ptolemies, the Romans and the Arab Caliphs, found the navigation quite practicable in past ages, it does not seem unreasonable to expect that a like result may be obtained by the engineering skill of the nineteenth century.

TRAFFIC.

From the 1st of January next, the Isthmus will be open, from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, for the transit of merchandise by boats and lighters. A tariff will be shortly published and communicated to all Chambers of Commerce, stating the rates at which the Company will undertake the carriage of goods between the two seas. According to information received from Mr. de Lesseps, that tariff will be fully 50 per cent. less than the rates at present charged, between Alexandria and Suez, by the Egyptian railway;—indeed on some goods, such as coals, for instance, the reduction will be considerably more. This latter article pays at present, by railway, 69 francs the ton,—it will probably be carried by water at about 20 francs the ton.

It would be premature, as yet, to consider the tariff of dues to be levied when the ship canal is opened to the commercial navies of the

world, but, I understand the charge to vessels passing through the Isthmus, will, in the first instance, be at the rate of about eight shillings per ton.

It would be equally premature, and altogether superfluous, at this moment, to hazard an opinion as to the probable amount of traffic that may hereafter pass along this line, in preference to the longer voyage round the Cape of Good Hope, but it is impossible to glance at the map of the world without feeling persuaded, that in these days of steam, some portion at least of the trade of India, will, as a matter of course, adopt this shorter route. Every consideration of economy, of time and money, leads to that conclusion, for a saving of 7,000 to 10,000 miles on the voyage from Europe to India, must surely tell very materially on the calculations of mercantile men. England, as possessing three fourths of the commerce of the Indian seas, and by far the largest mercantile marine of any of the nations of Europe, and counting also so many millions of her subjects in those distant lands, will necessarily be the first to profit by the canal, whilst all other nations, especially those bordering on the Mediterranean, will each, in a certain degree, participate in the commercial advantages of this new navigation.

Owing to the prevailing winds in the Red Sea, it may be a question whether our large sailing Indiamen will readily adopt the new route, especially on their return voyage to Europe, but it must not be overlooked that steam is gradually supplanting the use of sails, and experience every day shews, that to steamers, at least, the navigation of the Red Sea

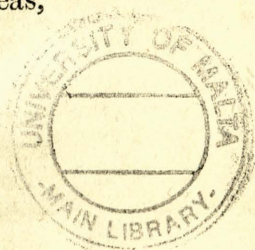
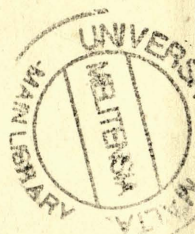
offers no exceptional difficulties whatever. The high cost of coal at Suez and Aden, has it is true, hitherto rendered steam navigation somewhat expensive in those parts, but the price of that bulky article will be much lower, when it is no longer sent by rail through Egypt, or on a four months' voyage round the Cape of Good Hope.

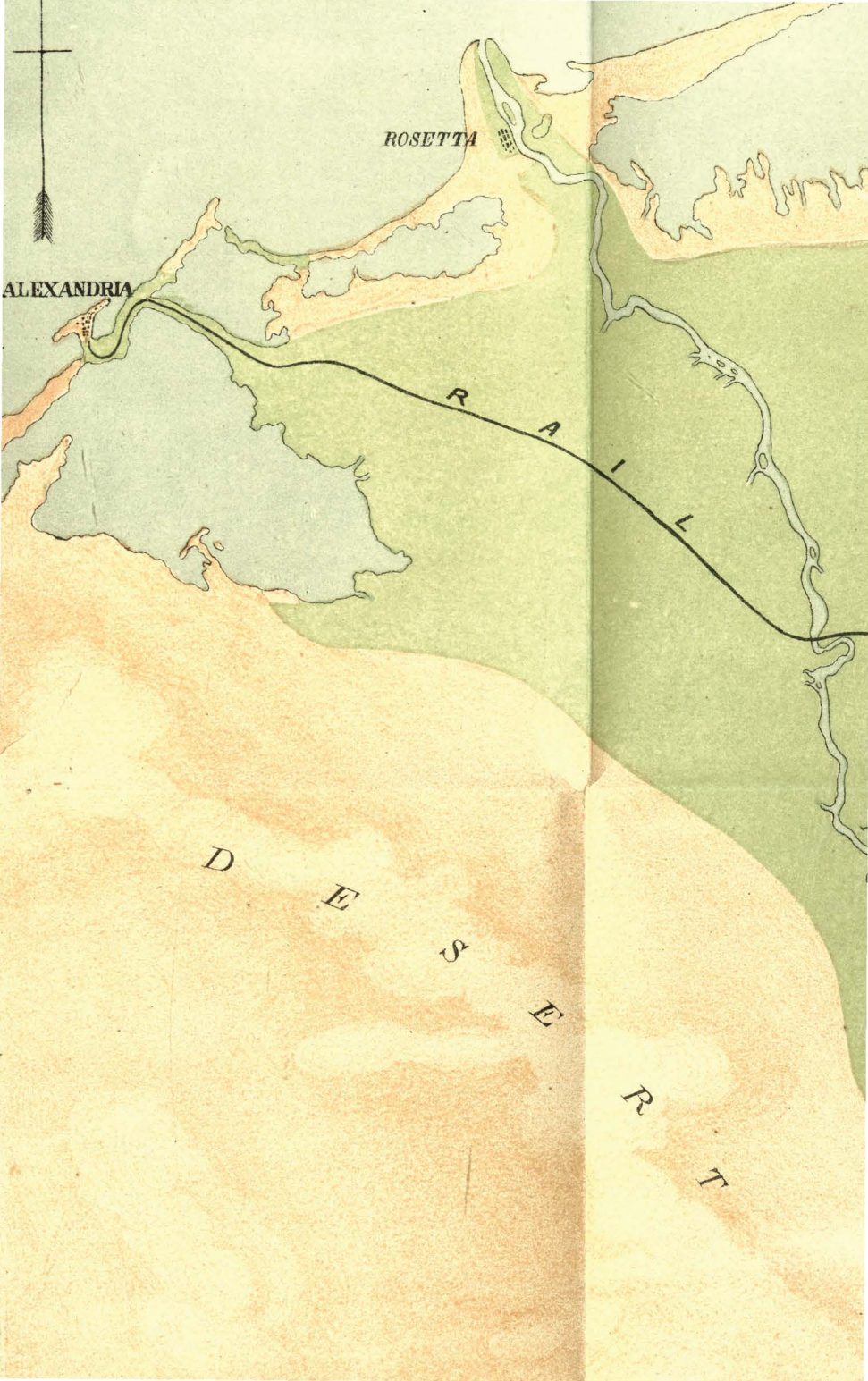
I have endeavoured in the foregoing pages, to explain to the Chamber, as concisely as the subject permitted, the present state of the works on the Isthmus of Suez, the means at the disposal of the Company, for the prosecution of this undertaking, and the probable results of the opening of the canal on the commerce of the East. I trust that Malta, by her central position on the projected new line of route, with her spacious harbours, easily accessible in all weathers, and the great facilities she affords for coaling, may become one of the ports of call for all the richly laden vessels passing from Europe to Asia, and that our little island may be among the first to benefit by the important changes, which this new phase in the navigation of the Eastern seas, will, sooner or later, surely bring about.

I have the honor, to be,
 Gentlemen,
 Your Obedient Servant
 ALFRED CHRISTIAN

President of the Chamber of Commerce.

Malta, May, 1865.



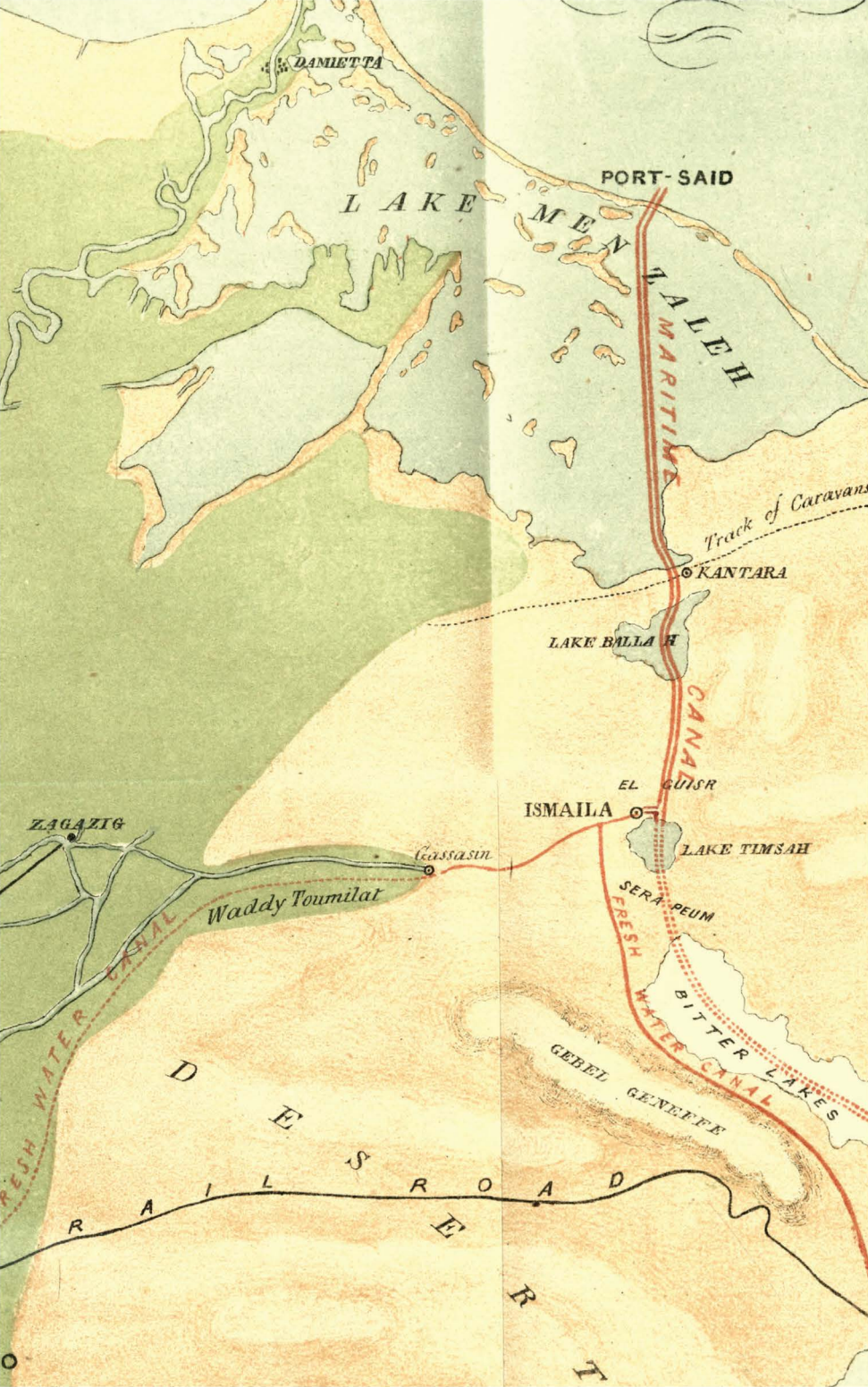


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SERAPEUM

BITTER LAKES

GEBEL GENEEFF

RAILROAD

RED SEA