

THE ISTHMUS OF SUEZ QUESTION

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The Isthmus of Suez Question by Ferdinand de Lesseps

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FERDINAND DE LESSEPS

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SUEZ QUESTION**

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QUESTION.

BY
M. FERDINAND DE LESSEPS,
MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY.

"APERIRE TERRAM GENTIBUS."



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1855.

246. G. 117.

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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part is a list of the names and addresses of the members of the committee.

3. The third part is a list of the names and addresses of the members of the committee.

4. The fourth part is a list of the names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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9. The ninth part is a list of the names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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*Explanation of the French Monies, Weights, and Measures
used in the following pages.*

1 Franc = about 9½d. or, 25 fr. = 1£.

81 Livres = 80 francs.

1 Quintal = about 220½ lbs.

1 Metre = 39½ inches nearly.

1 Kilometre = about 1093½ yards, or nearly 5 furlongs.

1 Hectare = 2 acres, 4712. or nearly 2½ acres.

1 Litre about 1½ pint.

The figures following the denomination are decimal parts;
thus: 7 fr. 25, 6 met. 50. represent respectively 7½ francs,
6½ metres.

THE ISTHMUS OF SUEZ QUESTION

SUBMITTED TO THE PUBLIC OPINION
OF ENGLAND.

“Aperire terram gentibus.”

IN the month of October, 1854, I left Europe for Egypt, in consequence of an invitation I had received from the new Viceroy, Mohammed Saïd, who for twenty years has honoured me with his friendship. I had no mission from my Government. It was in the course of a journey across the Libyan desert from Alexandria to Cairo which I made in company with the Prince, that the question of cutting through the Isthmus of Suez, was for the first time mooted between us. He requested me to draw up a memorial on the subject, (Appendix, No. 1) and, as my ideas met with his approbation, he issued to the Consuls General of foreign powers a firman (Appendix, No. 2), destined to receive the sanction of the Sultan, granting to a company composed of the capitalists of all nations without distinction, the right to construct a canal between the two Seas. Mr. Bruce, the agent of the British Government, was the

I ascertained that the Sultan and his ministers were favourable to the project, and I delivered

of the Governments that have brought it about, can alone, with time, ensure the blessings of progress and of peace to the human race. Thence the necessity of getting rid, beforehand, of all causes of rupture, or even of coolness, between the two peoples; thence, consequently, the paramount duty of anticipating amongst future contingencies, those circumstances calculated to awake ancient feelings of antagonism, and to raise, in the bosom of either nation, those emotions against the violence of which, the wisdom of Governments is powerless to struggle. The motives for hostile rivalry are tending successively to give place to that generous emulation which gives birth to great things.

Looking at the situation of affairs in a general way, it is scarcely to be perceived upon what ground and upon what occasion, those struggles, which so long desolated the world, could be renewed. Is it financial and commercial interests that could cause division between the two peoples? Why, British capital thrown into all the undertakings of France, and the immense development of international commerce, have established ties between them which become closer every day. Is it political interests and questions of principle? Why, the two nations have but one common aim, one same ambition: the triumph of right over might, of civilization over barbarism. Is it, finally, a sordid jealousy of territorial extension? Why, they acknowledge, at the present time, that the globe is vast enough to offer to the spirit of adventure that animates their respective populations, countries to make available, human beings to withdraw from the state of barbarism; and, moreover, from the moment that their flags wave together, the conquests of the one profit by the activity of the other.

At the first glance, then, nothing is perceived in the general state of affairs that could impair our cordial relations with England.

to the Viceroy a letter from the Grand Vizier, in which he aptly characterized the opening of

If, however, we look closer, an eventuality presents itself which, causing the most enlightened and most moderate cabinets to partake in popular prejudices and passions, is capable of reviving old antipathies, and of compromising, with the alliance, the benefits to be derived from it.

There is, in fact, a point of the globe with the free passage of which the political and commercial power of Great Britain is bound up, a point, the possession of which France had, on her part, aspired to in former times. This point is Egypt, the direct route from Europe to India, Egypt bathed once and again with French blood.

It is superfluous to define the motives which would not allow England to see Egypt in the possession of a rival nation without opposing it by the most energetic resistance; but what should also be taken into serious consideration, is, that with less positive interests, France under the dominion of her glorious traditions, under the impression of other feelings more instinctive than rational, and therefore more powerful over the impressionable spirit of her inhabitants, would not, in her turn, leave to England the peaceable sovereignty of Egypt. It is clear that, so long as the route to India is open and certain, that the state of the country ensures the facility and promptitude of the communications, England will not set about creating the most grave difficulties by appropriating a territory which, in her eyes, has no other value than as a means of transit. It is likewise evident that France—whose policy, for the last fifty years, has been to contribute to the prosperity of Egypt, both by her counsels and by the concourse of a great number of Frenchmen distinguished in the sciences, in administrative capacity, in all the arts of peace or war—will not seek to realize, in this direction, the projects of another epoch, so long as England does not interfere.

But let one of those crises occur which have so often