

**COMMUNICATIONS WITH INDIA, CHINA,
&C., OBSERVATIONS ON THE
PRACTICABILITY AND
UTILITY OF OPENING AND
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE RED SEA
AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

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Communications with India, China, &c., Observations on the practicability and utility of opening and communication between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean by Arthur Anderson

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ARTHUR ANDERSON

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OBSERVATIONS, ETC.

THE interest which has recently been manifested in the improvement of our means of communication with India, China, &c. *via* Egypt and the Red Sea, seems to have revived the speculations, first broached during the occupation of Egypt by the French forces under Napoleon, as to the feasibility of opening a communication between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean by a Canal through the Isthmus of Suez.

Various statements upon this subject have lately appeared in the newspapers and periodicals, both of this country and the continent, and a kind of prospectus proposing the formation of a company to execute the undertaking has just been put in circulation in London.

These statements and speculations, in so far as they have come under the cognizance of the writer of the following pages, are, in a great measure, superficial, crude, or erroneous,* and, therefore, calculated to mislead rather

* Since writing this, an article on the "Suez canal" has appeared in the *Foreign and Colonial Quarterly Review*, which, although containing some inaccuracies of minor importance, and professing only to take a general view of the subject, the writer would exempt from the above description.

than inform the public in regard to the practicability and utility of an enterprize, whose importance it is scarcely possible to over-rate, considering the nature and magnitude of the interests which would be involved in its successful accomplishment.

The writer has had the means of obtaining information relative to this matter, which he considers may be relied on, and having devoted much of his attention to this canal question, he deems the present time opportune for submitting to the public some facts and observations tending, he ventures to believe, to lead to more correct conclusions on this very interesting subject than any which have as yet been published.

These facts and observations will be found arranged under the following heads—

- 1.—*The physical practicability of the enterprise.*
 - 2.—*The preliminary political arrangements requisite for effecting it.*
 - 3.—*The advantages or disadvantages of navigating by the proposed canal route, as compared with the route by the Cape of Good Hope.*
 - 4.—*Financial considerations.*
 - 5.—*General observations as to the political, commercial, and moral benefits which would be derived from the accomplishment of the undertaking.*
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That facility of intercourse creates commerce, and commerce carries with it civilisation, is an axiom founded on universal experience.

Where seeming exceptions to it are found, they may be traced to the blind selfishness of human legislation, counteracting the natural laws established by the all-wise and beneficent governor of the universe.

A project, therefore, which, by severing two continents, proposes to change the whole course of commerce and communication between the eastern and western worlds, and approximate by many thousand miles the knowledge and industry of the west to the ignorance and barbarism of the east, presents considerations of a nature to excite the imagination, and to awaken some of our best feelings in its favor.

In dealing with it, the writer, however, purposes to limit himself to a strictly practical view of the subject. He will state his facts with accuracy—place every circumstance, whether for or against the undertaking, as far as his information enables him to judge, impartially before the reader—and thus leave him to form his own opinion as to the practicability of accomplishing the contemplated enterprise, and of its utility should it be accomplished.

The writer deems it proper to add, that the matter was some time since submitted by him to the consideration of Her Majesty's government, and that the extract from M. Linant's survey of the Isthmus, herein given, appears in the "*Commercial Tariffs, Regulations, &c., of Foreign*

Countries, part 10, presented to both Houses of Parliament, by command of Her Majesty, 14th July, 1843," being part of those valuable compilations, for which it is well known the country is indebted to the talents and industry of Mr. Macgregor, of the Board of Trade.

PHYSICAL PRACTICABILITY OF THE ENTERPRISE.

The improvement of our communication with the East has been, for some time past, an object of much public solicitude, and in proportion to the progress made in its development its importance becomes more and more manifest. The establishment of a steam communication with India, &c, *vid* the Mediterranean and the Red Sea; although as yet only in its infancy, has already been productive of considerable benefit, both to Great Britain and her Oriental dependencies.

But, although the steam communication presents a greatly improved means of transit by this route for passengers and letters, it cannot, except in a comparatively very limited degree, be made available for the general purposes of commerce. The transport of all articles of merchandise of moderate value, compared to their bulk or weight, must, from the small stowage-room afforded by steam vessels, and the expense of the transit across Egypt, continue to be effected by means of sailing vessels navigating by the long and circuitous route round the Cape of Good Hope.

The principal object, therefore, of the contemplated canal, would be to open a shorter route between Europe and the East, which could be availed of by sailing, as well as by steam vessels, and thus serve the general purposes of commercial intercourse.

Previously to proceeding to treat of the practicability of

opening such a canal, it may be proper to explain how it has fallen to my lot to deal with this subject:—

In the year 1841, I visited Egypt. While there, my attention was, among other matters, directed to the question which has so frequently been mooted, although never hitherto, I think, satisfactorily treated, viz. : the practicability of re-opening the ancient Canal through the Isthmus of Suez, said to have once joined the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

In following up this object, I became acquainted with M. Adolphe Linant, of Cairo, a French Civil Engineer, of considerable reputation, and who has been in the employ of the Pacha of Egypt, for I believe, upwards of twenty years.

I found that M. Linant had devoted a great deal of time and labor to the practical investigation of this subject,—had recently completed an elaborate survey of the Isthmus, and was in possession of much detailed information derived from a personal examination of the localities through which the proposed canal would have to be cut. Under certain conditions I induced him to furnish me with a memoir on the subject, accompanied by a manuscript map of his survey of the Isthmus of Suez, and of Lower Egypt, in which the site of the ancient and track of the proposed canal are laid down with great minuteness. In short, the map, now in my possession, which is on a large scale, contains a far more complete view of Lower Egypt than any hitherto executed.

The following extract, translated from M. Linant's memoir or report of survey, together with some remarks of my own, which I shall append to it, will put the reader in possession of all the information which I can supply, in regard to the physical practicability of the object in question.

Translation of an Extract from M. Linant's Report.

(In reading the following a reference to the map is recommended.)

"It is well known by the levellings, which were taken with great care during the occupation of Egypt by the French army, and confirmed by the engineers who have worked at the embankments of the Nile, and also by many repeated observations made during my numerous journeys through the Isthmus of Suez, that the level of the Red Sea is higher than that of the Mediterranean, and that it has, at one time, covered the Isthmus.

"This difference of height is during high water at Suez, 9.907 metres (32 feet) above the low tides (which are scarcely perceptible) of the Mediterranean.

"The topographical position of the place shows, that from the Red Sea to a distance of about 22,000 metres (about 71,500 feet), the spot where the ancient canal was re-dug by Amrou, or where the Canal of the Prince of the Faithful still exists, it is only necessary to dig this canal to a depth of 2.90 metres (8 feet 10 inches), when there would be at once established a current of water towards the Mediterranean; because at the end of this distance you enter the bed of the Bitter Lakes, now dry, which are there about 5 metres (16 feet 4 inches) lower than the Red Sea. From thence the ground becomes lower and lower, as far as the point which separates the Bitter Lakes from the lake *Timsah*, where the ground for a distance of about 6000 metres (about 19,500 feet) is at its greatest elevation, 0.50 (19½ inches) above the level of the sea; the soil is here sandy. Next come the basin of the lakes *Timsah*, much lower than the Red Sea, and which is covered by the waters of the Nile during the inundations.

"The distance between this lake and the low marshy swamps of *El-Karesh* is, at the most, only 3,000 metres (about 9750 feet), and the land is not more than one metre (3 feet 3 inches) higher than the Red Sea; this ground is also sandy.

"Leaving the basins of the lake *Timsah*, and passing behind the hill of *Chak Amedek*, near which the Canal of the Pharaohs, above mentioned, must have passed, we find the ground is nearly every where on a level with the Red Sea as far as *El-Karesh*.

"From thence to near *Das-el-Cassah*, and afterwards in a direction towards *Bir-el-Divietar*, we follow the traces of the ancient canal, in a direct line from one sea to the other, the ground being all sandy and much lower than the Red Sea. From thence to the ground which is inundated during the floods of the Nile, by the waters of the Lake of Manzaleh, there is again found a bed, or sort of excavation, or sandy valley, which may probably have been the ancient canal. From thence to the entrance of *Tineh*, passing between *Faramah* and the