

LORD PALMERSTON'S  
POLICY OF OPPOSITION TO  
THE SUEZ CANAL



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LORD PALMERSTON'S POLICY OF OPPOSITION TO THE PROJECT  
AND TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUEZ CANAL.

Presented to the Dean and the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
and Research in part fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## Chapter I.

### The Project in its Early Stages.

Evidences of an ancient canal were discovered by Napoleon during his Campaign in Egypt, and he, desiring to facilitate communication with the East for purposes of conquest, had a survey made by the French engineer Lapere. The report which was given to Napoleon, at the conclusion of the work, showed that there existed a difference between the levels of the two seas, the Mediterranean Sea being 30 ft below the level of the Red Sea. The work of digging a canal was never carried out for Napoleon returned to Europe after the disastrous end to his expedition and he was never able to turn his attention again to the question of conquest in the East, which would have made a canal through the Isthmus of Suez a work of the greatest importance to him.

The question became a matter of interest in the days of Mehemet Ali, and in 1841 a company was formed by Lenant Bey, to begin the work of constructing a ship canal through the Isthmus of Suez. This attempt was a failure, however, and once more the matter passed out of the public interest. During the years 1846 and 1847 a survey was carried out by a French scientific Society, founded by Prosper Enfantin, which was known as La Société d'Etudes pour le canal de Suez. A commission, the members of which were to represent the nations most deeply interested in the project, was appointed in 1847. Austria was represented by Monsieur Negrelli, France by Monsieur Talabat and England by Mr. Robert Stephenson; a new survey of the Isthmus was made, and the result was the discovery

that the levels of the two seas were the same, but the report also showed that there was a tide of 6 feet and 6 inches in the Red Sea, and a tide of only 18 inches in the Mediterranean Sea. The personal opinions of the three leading men of the commission could hardly be said to show any great optimism as to the success of the project. Monsieur Negrelli believed the idea to be a good one but offered no plan whereby the work could be carried out successfully. Mr. Stephenson was decidedly opposed to the project and never changed the opinion which he formed at this time. Monsieur Talabat was in favour of the project and was the only one who proposed any plan which could be adopted for the work.<sup>1.</sup>

Thus far the project had made little or no progress towards a beginning even, but in 1854 Monsieur Ferdinand de Lesseps received word of the death of the Viceroy of Egypt, Abbas Pasha, and the accession of Mohammed Said. The new Viceroy and Monsieur de Lesseps were friends and the latter felt that the opportunity had come to make an attempt to carry out a long cherished plan; for twenty-two years de Lesseps had been interested in the question of a canal through the Isthmus of Suez, ever since he had read the report of Napoleon's engineer, Lapere. Monsieur de Lesseps at once decided to set out for Egypt and lay his plans before Said Pasha. He wrote to the new Viceroy asking permission to visit him as soon as he had returned from the ceremony of investiture at Constantinople.<sup>2.</sup>

On his arrival at Alexandria, de Lesseps found that elaborate preparations had been made for his entertainment and his reception by the Viceroy was most friendly. Monsieur de Lesseps allowed

1. The Edinburgh Review 1856, Vol. 103, P.237.

2. Recollections of Forty Years by Ferdinand de Lesseps.  
Vol.1, Chap.IV. P 154

some time to elapse before he introduced the real object of his visit. By this delay he hoped to find out, by conversations with Said Pasha, whether he would be inclined to favour a work such as the construction of the Suez Canal. On November 15th, 1854 de Lesseps introduced the subject and his plans were listened to with the greatest attention by the Viceroy. "Mohammed Said listened with evident interest to what I had to say and I begged him, if there were any points which did not seem clear to him, to mention them to me. He, with considerable intelligence, raised a few objections with respect to which I was able to satisfy him, as he at last said to me "I am convinced, I accept your plan; we will concern ourselves during the rest of the expedition,<sup>3.</sup> as to the means of carrying it out.<sup>4.</sup> You may regard the matter as settled and trust to me."

When he arrived at Cairo, Monsieur de Lesseps went to see Mr. Bruce, the Agent and Consul General for England, and laid before him the proposed project. He replied by saying "He could not speak for his Government, to whom he would report my visit. He did not hesitate to give me his personal opinion, which was that, so long as there was no intervention on behalf of any foreign power in the affair, and that the work was carried out by means of capital freely subscribed to an enterprise sanctioned by the Governor of the country, he could not foresee that any difficulty would be raised by England."<sup>5.</sup> Despite this statement by Mr. Bruce, de Lesseps noted that at the meeting of the dignitaries of Cairo to welcome the new Viceroy to the Capital, when Said Pasha announced the proposed project, the

3. M. de Lesseps had accompanied the Viceroy on an expedition with the troops.

4. Recollections of Forty Years - de Lesseps. Vol 1, Ch. IV. P169

5. Recollections of Forty Years - de Lesseps. Vol. 1, Chp IV. P187



Consul General of England seemed ill at ease; at this meeting de Lesseps was given a firman granting him the right to form a company, composed of capitalists of all nations, to carry out the work. The Company was to be known as La Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez.<sup>6.</sup>

The next step to be taken was to obtain the consent of the Sultan at Constantinople, and for this purpose de Lesseps left Egypt, arriving at Constantinople early in the year 1855. He took several days to attempt to discover any opinions which might be held upon the subject; after this delay he came to the conclusion that there was no prejudice either in favour of the project or against it. Some of the Ministers gave their approval to the plan, but the question of English influence had to be considered. De Lesseps wrote to the Viceroy "But there could be no doubt that they were all here under the pressure of, not to say dependent upon, the English ambassador whom the public call Sultan Stratford or Abd-ul-Canning". "I heard that Lord Stratford de Redcliffe was personally very much opposed to the scheme, that he had received no official instructions from his Government, but, that when the occasion arose, he would act as if he had, in accordance with his arrogance and deep-rooted jealousy of all that is French, and his incorrigible and antiquated British egotism".<sup>7.</sup>

Monsieur de Lesseps was about to return to Egypt, believing that he would have the support of the Sultan, when he heard that the influence of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe had been strong enough to

6. The Times, December 18th, 1854.  
Recollections of Forty Years. Vol.1. Chap.IV. Page 189.
7. Recollections of Forty Years - de Lesseps.  
Vol.1.Chap.IV. Page 230.

deter the Sultan from giving his sanction to the project. On his return to Egypt, de Lesseps wrote to the Viceroy, expressing the opinion that he should be allowed to use the firman granted to him by Saïd Pasha, without waiting for the consent of the Porte. As a precedent for this he quoted the case of the firman granted to England by Abbas Pasha, for the construction of a railway, without the confirmation of the Sultan.

Monsieur de Lesseps returned to France and prepared for a visit to England, by which he hoped to overcome English official opposition and to interest the public, generally, in the project. He wrote to Walewski, Minister of Foreign Affairs, insisting that it should be made very clear that he was in no way the representative of the French Government, and that the Viceroy had not granted the concession to him as a Frenchman, but that he might form a universal company.

## Chapter II.

### Asking for English Support.

Monsieur de Lesseps set out for England with letters of introduction to some of the financial houses in London, commending his project to the serious consideration of the London firms; he was given a note by the Baron James de Rothschilds, in which the Baron wrote, "We have the pleasure to introduce to you Monsieur Ferdinand de Lesseps, who has just arrived from Egypt where he has, as you know, been busily engaged in studying the question of making a canal through the Isthmus of Suez. We do not doubt that you will be very pleased to see Monsieur de Lesseps who proposes to discuss this subject with you. We beg to commend him to you most favourably and request you to give the utmost attention to his interesting communications, the importance of which will be apparent to you as it is to us."<sup>1.</sup> Monsieur de Lesseps also had the satisfaction of knowing that Lord Ashburton, a member of Baring Brothers, a London banking firm, who was then in Paris, had written to the firm commending Monsieur de Lesseps and his project to them, and speaking so favourably of the Canal that his reception by them would be a cordial one.

On his arrival in London in the month of June, 1855 de Lesseps had two long interviews with the editor of "The Times", feeling that the support of such an influential newspaper would be of the greatest advantage in advancing the project. Mr. Delane, the editor

1. Recollections of Forty Years by F. de Lesseps.  
Vol.1. Chap.IV. Page 268-269.



believed that England could have no serious objection to the proposed plan for a canal, and he told M. de Lesseps that he would take no stand against the project and promised that he would ask an English Correspondent at Alexandria who had sent reports to The Times, of a nature hostile to the scheme, to examine the question in an unprejudiced spirit.<sup>2.</sup>

This interview de Lesseps regarded as satisfactory and he was further encouraged by a meeting with Mr. Reeve, one of the Secretaries of the Queen's Privy Council, who was a contributor to The Times; Monsieur de Lesseps had been given a letter of introduction to this gentleman by Monsieur Barthélemy St. Hilaire, who was keenly interested in the project, and the result of the discussion was that Mr. Reeve assured Monsieur de Lesseps that he would meet with no serious opposition, saying "It would be degrading that England should have an interest in rejecting a scheme which would be beneficial to the whole world. Upon the contrary, we shall derive more benefit from it than anyone else."<sup>3.</sup>

The next step towards gaining English support was to seek an interview with Lord Palmerston. It was readily granted and Palmerston gave Monsieur de Lesseps liberally of his time; the result, however, was unsatisfactory for Palmerston refused his support to the project of a canal through the Isthmus of Suez, and de Lesseps received the first decided opposition that he had met with in England. An interview with Lord Clarendon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, proved a little more satisfactory, for Clarendon was not prepared to oppose the scheme before he had heard the plans

2. Recollections of Forty Years by F. de Lesseps. Vol.1. Chap. IV. Page 269  
 3. Recollections of Forty Years by F. de Lesseps. Vol.1. Chap. IV. page 270.

which Monsieur de Lesseps had to propose. He expressed the fear, however, that the opinion of the Government in general was not favourable to the project, but he promised to examine the question fairly and deliberately.

By the wish of the Viceroy, an International Commission was appointed to examine the project from every point of view and to report as to the possibility of the plan, the means by which the work could be carried out, and the approximate cost of the enterprise. The members of the International Commission left Marseilles on November 8th, 1855 and spent six weeks in the Isthmus; at the end of that time a report was presented to Said Pasha, which laid down the route the canal should take, the position of the ports at either end, and the cost, which it was estimated, would be 8,000,000.<sup>4.</sup>

Despite the report of the Commission, which had been favourable to the project, there was still opposition from England, and Monsieur de Lesseps therefore decided to visit that country again and to attempt to bring about an attitude more favourable to the plan for the Canal. De Lesseps wrote to Richard Cobden, to interest him in the project and to ask for his support when the question came up in Parliament. He said in his letter "Only one difficulty has presented itself: this is the opposition of your Government which, through the influence of its Ambassador at Constantinople, has succeeded in delaying the formality of the ratification required by the Viceroy from the Porte, with respect to a grant legally made by

4. The Times, December 14th, 1855. This article stated that the Viceroy, Said Pasha, had spared nothing to aid the Commission in its work.  
The Times, January 16th, 1856. An article in The Times records the presentation of the report to the Viceroy, and it was admitted that the results arrived at in the report were favourable to the project.

him--My opinion is that all this is likely to rekindle a bad feeling between France and England, and at the very time when it is important that a sincere union between the two nations should take the place of the uncertain and already wavering alliance between the two Governments. If, on the one hand, France comes to the conclusion that her old allies have two modes of weighing and measuring for her, it is evident that all the efforts of reasonable men will fail, sooner or later, before a fresh outbreak of the old prejudices which, for so long a time, separated the two nations. Indeed, how can we on the Continent believe in the sincerity of England, in her law of universal improvement, of civilization, and of the general welfare, when it is declared that England, where public opinion is supreme, permits her Government to maintain its incredible opposition to the Suez Canal, a private undertaking, which cannot, either by its origin, its plan of formation, or its aim, justify any dread of a rival policy." The letter concluded with this appeal "It is now for you (armed with the experience of the last ten years of prosperity and progress, secured to the British Empire by the triumph of your system) to maintain the principle of free competition--The strength of your own convictions and of public opinion will not fail to insure you a success in which the honour and interests of England are certainly concerned."

It is natural to suppose that such an enterprise as the construction of the Suez Canal would have been a matter of the greatest interest to Cobden who, at all times, tried to promote trade and commercial relations between the nations, yet, in the standard biography of his life by John Morley, there is no reference to the letter of de Less-eps on the subject. The publications of the Cobden Club, which in-

5. The Suez Canal, letters and documents descriptive of its rise and progress in 1854-56. Translated from the French by N. d'Anvers. pp.307, 308, 310.



clude pamphlets by Cobden and works which refer to his opinions on various subjects, do not give anything which would show what Cobden's views on the Suez Canal question were. He did not comply with the request of de Lesseps that he should support the question in the House of Commons, for he was defeated at the general election of 1857, following the dissolution of Parliament after the defeat of Lord Palmerston on Chinese affairs. Cobden spent part of the next two years travelling in America.

In letters to Monsieur Negrelli and to Monsieur St. Hilaire, dated at London, April 1856, Monsieur de Lesseps recorded the continued opposition of Lord Palmerston, but he received the encouragement of a meeting in his honour by the Royal Geographical Society, at which Mr. Gladstone said, "Monsieur de Lesseps, if in this country we have not been so prompt as other nations to welcome your enterprise, it is because of our character and habits. But, once we are convinced, we go further and sometimes show more perseverance than any of our neighbours. For my own part, I entertained at first considerable doubts, which are not yet entirely dissipated, but I am only too anxious to be persuaded and I heartily wish you success."<sup>6</sup>

The months of May and June of the Year 1857 were given up to a tour of the chief commercial cities of the British Isles by Monsieur de Lesseps and Mr. Daniel Lange, who had been appointed as the English representative of the Universal Company; the object of these visits was to arouse the interest of the merchants and shipowners and to gain their support for the project. By this de Lesseps hoped to persuade Parliament to give up their opposition to the plan for a canal through the Isthmus of Suez. After his return from this campaign, de Lesseps gathered the resolutions of the various meetings

together into a pamphlet which he dedicated to the Members of the British Parliament.

De Lesseps had obtained from the Court of East India Directors, in 1855, their opinion as to the use and importance of the proposed canal. He had been told in the letter replying to the information which he had supplied, that "the Court must always feel a deep interest in the success of any undertaking that would facilitate means of communication between this country and India"<sup>7</sup>. The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company was asked to express the views which it held upon the subject; in the reply which was sent to de Lesseps, the Secretary of the Company wrote that the Directors were not quite confident of the success of the scheme. The letter, however, contained some encouragement for it concluded with this statement "The importance of the results that would attend the junction of the Mediterranean and the Red Seas by a navigable canal is, however, so patent that no second opinion can exist in the matter; and should the project be carried to a successful issue, this company must, of necessity, participate in the effect it will produce,<sup>8</sup> not only upon the commerce of this country, but of the whole world." The doubts of the Peninsular and Oriental Company, Monsieur de Lesseps hoped had been removed by the favourable report of the International Commission, which had visited Egypt and the Isthmus, in the latter part of the year 1855.

With the opinions of these two very important commercial and mercantile bodies of as favourable a nature as they were, de Lesseps began his tour of the British Isles. The first meeting was held at

7. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal, F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 2.
8. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal, F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 3.

Liverpool, where, owing to Monsieur de Lesseps' inability to speak English fluently, Mr. Lange explained the project to a meeting of merchants and shipowners; at the conclusion of the address a resolution was passed "That we, the Bankers, Merchants and Manufacturers of Liverpool, consider that the execution of this great enterprise would be productive of the greatest advantage to the commercial and shipping interests of England, as of all other nations, and earnestly desire that the enterprise may attain, without any impediment, a speedy and successful realization." In addition to this meeting, two others were held, one of the East India and China Association, the other of the Chamber of Commerce of Liverpool; both these bodies passed resolutions in favour of the project. At Manchester, a meeting of the directors of the Manchester Commercial Association was held, at which Mr. Lange spoke. After the address the board decided to deliberate upon the question. The following resolution was sent to Monsieur de Lesseps, "That this association, being desirous of encouraging every movement having for its object the **promotion** of commerce throughout the world, has heard with much interest the statements with which the Board has been favoured by Monsieur de Lesseps, relative to a ship canal to connect the Mediterranean and the Red Seas; and, provided that effectual means be taken to secure the neutrality of such a canal, as well as a moderate rate of charge, such as shall give every possible encouragement to the transit of merchant vessels, will view with much satisfaction the realization of so important an undertaking." The Chamber of Commerce of Manchester also passed a resolution in favour of the project for the canal.

9. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal, F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 13
10. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal, F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 19.



The meeting of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce varied from the previous ones in that the explanation of the project was followed by a discussion; the question was asked whether the project was to be financed by private enterprise or by the Governments of the countries concerned. In his reply to this question, Mr. Lange distinctly stated that it was simply a commercial undertaking, and that the various Governments would only be concerned in it in so far as to protect the interests of their own people. One of those present at the meeting asked whether the canal would interfere in any way with the construction of a railway through the Euphrates Valley, which had been proposed. The answer to this was that the railway was intended as a route for the despatches. The Council forwarded a Resolution stating that "The Council are deeply sensible of the important advantages to the interests of commerce and civilization which that project presents; and they consider that, provided means can be adopted to secure the perfect neutrality of the canal, and to insure a moderate rate of charge on vessels passing through, and perfect impartiality in its management, it will be eminently entitled to<sup>11.</sup> commercial support." A public meeting in Cork resulted in a resolution in favour of the scheme, after a prolonged discussion which was concerned with the engineering aspect of the question.

The visits to the Irish cities concluded with a meeting of the Council of the Chamber of Commerce of Belfast. Mr. Lange, in his address, said that, at a meeting of the London Society of Art, a resolution was passed in favour of the project for a ship canal through the Isthmus of Suez. At that meeting it had been stated by the Member of Parliament for Stockport, that the province of Candia

11. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal,  
F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 29.

alone, in India, was capable of producing more cotton than was grown in the United States. Mr. Lange believed that such a statement would show how very important the Suez Canal would be in the case of the production of cotton in India being carried on to such an extent that it would be exported to England for manufacture. The Council, in discussing the matter, felt that they would not want to pledge themselves to any definite support, but, in the resolution which was passed, the Council recorded that they considered the plan to be important, and one which should be of interest to all countries provided that the charges were moderate and that the control of the canal should be free from the influence of any one country in particular. The Harbour Commissioners passed a similar resolution, after hearing the project explained to them.

The deputation, consisting of Monsieur de Lesseps, Mr. Lange, and Mr. Kenney, began then a tour of the chief commercial and mercantile cities of Scotland. A public meeting was held at Glasgow, at which there was very little discussion. The most important question was to ask why the British Government had not given its support to the project. Monsieur de Lesseps replied to this by saying that the Government did not wish to support such a project until they knew the feeling of the chief mercantile and commercial companies of the country, upon the subject. The meeting passed a resolution in favour of the project. The next meeting was held for the merchants and shipowners of Edinburgh and Leith. After the discussion which followed the address, Mr. M'Laren moved a resolution in favour of the proposed canal, in which he remarked that it had been said that England was jealous of the benefits which France might gain from the canal. This seemed unnecessary, for he felt that Britain would profit far more than her neighbour.

The public meeting at Aberdeen brought an objection from the Dean of Guild; he thought that the canal would be of the greatest benefit to the countries near it, but its usefulness to England, for communication with India and China, was not so apparent. But, despite this opinion, the meeting moved a resolution in favour of the project.

Monsieur de Lesseps visited next, Newcastle-on-Tyne, where a public meeting was held in the Guildhall. There was a prolonged discussion, during which the objection was raised to the same charges being levied on coal as on more valuable cargoes. This meeting went farther in its support of the project than any of the previous ones, for, not only was a resolution passed in favour of the proposed canal, but also one which stated that the meeting considered that the canal would be of greater advantage than the railway. To this was added a resolution in favour of the project, which was to be sent to the Government. One question was asked which showed that a feeling of suspicion existed towards France with regard to the plan; Mr. Rogers asked whether the plan which had been presented there was a neutral one, or the one promoted by the French Government, which was so strongly opposed by Lord Stratford de Redcliffe. It was explained that there was only one project, that which had been presented to the meeting, and that the proposed canal would be open to the vessels of all nations on the same terms, Monsieur de Lesseps having no intention to advance the interests of France before those of the other countries.

Meetings were held at Hull, Birmingham and Bristol, at which resolutions were passed in favour of the proposed canal, and at the latter two cities, resolutions were sent to the Government.

The last meeting was held at "The London Tavern", by the per-



mission of the Lord Mayor, whose consent had been obtained by Lord John Russel. "The Daily News" gave a leading article to the meeting: "The city of London is this day invited to pass judgment on a project whose realization will make an era in the history of the world. The greatest mercantile emporium of modern times is asked to consider the greatest mercantile problem of all times, the practicability of making a ship canal through the Isthmus of Suez, of forming an artificial Bosphorus between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. It is not often that a matter of this moment is submitted to the arbitrament of municipal councils and national legislatures. The scheme involves nothing less than the construction of a new highway for the nations between the east and the west, of diverting into a new channel, the most lucrative streams of modern commerce and abridging by some thousands of miles, the sea distance that now separates Europe from the ancient opulence of India and China and the young enterprise of Australia."<sup>12.</sup>

After the explanations of the proposed scheme, the gentlemen present were invited to discuss the matter; Mr. Fowler said that he had lived for many years in Alexandria and, therefore, knew the country and he felt that one question which must be considered very carefully, was that of labour. If the labour was to be supplied by the Viceroy it would not be voluntary labour and, he said, "The commercial prosperity of this great country has been the wonder of the world,<sup>13.</sup> but it has not been achieved by means of slave labour". Another objection which he raised was the time the work of construction would

12. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal, F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 105
13. British Opinions on the Isthmus of Suez Ship Canal, F. de Lesseps (Redpath Tracts, 1857, Vol. CXII). Page 115

take. It would probably take from twenty to thirty years to complete the canal and, if the Viceroy died during that time, his successor might not allow the work to be carried on. In reply to these remarks, Mr. Lange said that the Viceroy was known to hold humanit-  
<sup>14</sup>arian views and that the labourers were glad to work on the canal because they were given a franc a day, as wages, which was three times as much as they were accustomed to receive. The meeting passed a resolution in favour of the project, as it had been proved feasible, and the assurance had been given that the management of the canal would be free from interference by any particular nation.

Monsieur de Lesseps was satisfied with the result of his campaign, although there had been no very definite support given to the project by any of the meetings, the general attitude was one which suggested that, if the canal was completed and proved to be a success, the merchants and shipowners of the British Isles would be glad to make use of it. The reports of the meetings were edited in a pamphlet and presented to the Government, in the belief that the weight of public opinion therein, in favour of the project, would lead the members to adopt a more friendly attitude. The Government, however, did not change its policy, nor did the mercantile and commercial interests of the country compel it to do so.

The work on the canal was begun in 1858 without the support of the British Government or the ratification of the Viceroy's firman by the Porte. It was not until the canal was nearing completion and its success was practically assured, that England began to take any interest of a sympathetic nature.

14. The Times, May 31st, 1851. An article in The Times records the improvements under the Viceroy, Said Pasha; fewer taxes and more liberties.

## Chapter III.

## The Question before the House of Commons.

On July 7th, 1857, a question of the proposed project of a Ship Canal through the Isthmus of Suez was introduced into the House of Commons. Mr. H. Berkeley asked the First Lord of the Treasury (Lord Palmerston) whether Her Majesty's Government intended to support the request of the Viceroy to the Sublime Porte, for the ratification of a firman granted to M. Ferdinand de Lesseps, for the construction of a ship canal from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea; he pointed out the fact that the project had been favourably received by the principal commercial cities of the Kingdom, and he wished to know if the Government had any objections to the project.

In his reply to these questions, Lord Palmerston said that it would be impossible for Her Majesty's Government to support the request of the Viceroy to the Sublime Porte, because, for the last fifteen years, the Government had used all the influence it possessed at Constantinople and in Egypt, to prevent that scheme from being carried out. "It is an undertaking which, I believe, in point of commercial character may be deemed to rank among the many bubble schemes that, from time to time, have been palmed upon gullible Capitalists. I have been informed, on what I believe to be reliable authority, that it is physically impracticable except at an expense which would be far too great to warrant any expectation of any returns."<sup>1</sup> Lord Palmerston continued by adding arguments, both political and financial, against the project, and concluded by advising the honourable member for Bristol and his friends to have nothing to do with the scheme.

On July 17th the attention of the House was directed again to the project for the canal by Mr. Griffiths, who said that he wished

to ask the question of the House, "Whether, in their deliberate opinion, it be conducive to the honour or the interests of this country, that we should manifest and avow the existence of a calous hostility on our part to the project of a Ship Canal through the Isthmus of Suez; or whether, on the contrary, it would not be more in accordance with the character for disinterested impartiality, which we seek to maintain, if we were to leave that subject without prejudice, to be dealt with by the natural, physical, and engineering difficulties which surround its execution? Though he could understand the difficulties from an engineering point of view, which had been suggested, he could not understand why or how the opening of the canal, if accomplished, should be adverse to the interests of this country, or why not extremely conducive to our national advantage." <sup>2.</sup> Lord Palmerston replied to the question but his answer was not more favourable to the project than it had been a few days earlier, "It is a plan which, in my opinion, is founded on views inconsistent with the interests of this country, and at variance with its settled policy."

Mr. Stephenson gave his opinions as to the practicability of the scheme, putting aside all political considerations. He gave an account of the different surveys which had been made and the opinions which the engineers had expressed; his own opinion had always been that the scheme was almost impossible, and his speech concluded with the statement that "He might, however, say, without entering into professional details, that he had arrived at the conclusion that it was - he would not say absurd, because engineers whose opinions he respected, had been to the spot since and had declared the thing to be possible, at all events, if feasible (and, as the first Lord of

the Treasury had said, money would overcome every difficulty), yet, commercially speaking, he frankly declared it to be an impracticable scheme. What its political import might be, he could not say, but, as an engineer, he would pronounce it to be an undesirable scheme, in a commercial point of view, and that the railway ( now nearly completed) would, as far as concerned India and postal arrangements, be more expeditious, more certain, and more economical than even if there were this new Bosphorus between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.<sup>3.</sup> M. de Lesseps wrote to Mr. Stephenson asking for an explanation of his speech, particularly that part in which he had said that he agreed with Lord Palmerston's views that the scheme was one of those which persuaded capitalists to invest money in an enterprise which made them poorer, though others might be the richer by it. Mr. Stephenson replied that he had no intention of making any personal allusions but, that he meant that he agreed with Lord Palmerston's views that, given a sufficient amount of money, most difficulties could be overcome. The concluding sentence of the letter reasserted the views which he had always held on the subject, that the project would never be a success commercially. "The first study which I made of the subject, in 1847, led me to this opinion, and nothing which has come to my knowledge since that period has tended to alter my view."<sup>4.</sup>

The question was brought before the House again by Mr. Darby Griffithson, March 26th, 1858, when he asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer "Whether, in consideration of the possible facilities of communication with our possessions in the East, and also of the desire manifested for the execution of that scheme by many continental

3. Hansard, July 17th, 1857. Vol.CXLVI. Page 1707.

4. Recollections of Forty Years.  
Vol.2, P. 68.



nations, it be expedient, in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, to offer opposition to the project of a ship canal across the Isthmus of Suez? In proposing this question, he might perhaps relieve the mind of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he stated at once that he had no idea of asking for the slightest pecuniary assistance from the Government, on behalf of this project; the only assistance that he asked was of a negative character - that it should be exempted from opposition on account of merely political speculations. It was not his intention to defend the practicability of the undertaking on engineering or commercial grounds; and he should be sorry to guarantee to any capitalist a return upon the capital which he might choose to invest, seeing that he did not think it probable that the work would be executed for anything like the estimate which had been put forward. The only point which he wished to press upon the consideration of the Government was whether such a scheme as a canal in any part of the world was to be objected to on account of recondite political speculations of so finely drawn a character, as to be not at all obvious to the comprehension of ordinary mortals? The project was intended to facilitate our communication with India, and, although the scheme might not, in ordinary parlance, be very practicable, yet he contended that, if it were capable of being carried out, instead of being prejudicial to British interests, it would tend materially to assist in the government of our Eastern possessions. We should get to India in less than half the time that it **requires at present** and it appeared to him that that was an object which was worthy of the utmost attention. The question he had to put was, whether it was to be understood that in the dealings of the British Government with other countries, important and valuable commercial projects, as canals, railways, and other enterprises, were to be opposed on

5.  
account of any political considerations whatever?"

In reply, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Disraeli) admitted that the question was one of importance and must be considered both from its political and its scientific aspect; he felt that the scientific aspect of the question should be left for explanation to the honourable member for Whitby, who, unfortunately, was not present at the House, but "his own opinion was, that the project for executing a canal across the Isthmus of Suez was a most futile idea - totally impossible to be carried out. It would be attended with a lavish expenditure of money, for which there would be no return; and that, even if successfully carried out, in the first instance, the operation of nature would, in a short time, defeat the ingenuity of man. That being his opinion, so far as the scientific question was concerned, he certainly should not act in furtherance of such a scheme, without advice of men like the honourable member for Whitby, and other scientific authorities. Then, as to the political aspect of the question, whether the Government intended to interfere with commercial operations in which political motives might be involved, as a general rule, he hoped never on that ground to have to oppose works in any part of the world, that might tend to facilitate commercial intercourse. But, as regarded the political considerations that might be involved in this particular case, that was an inquiry of so grave a character that he could not, at present, give an answer to it.---When he had placed before him evidence that this attempt

to cut a canal across the Isthmus of Suez was practicable, which convinced him that it was a practicable object, and that, in commercial considerations it was desirable to carry it out, he should then be prepared to consider the political part of the question; but, as at present advised, believing it to be an operation that could only end in failure, he had not arrived at the consideration of that ultimate and ulterior point to which his honourable Friend referred, namely, the political bearing of the question.<sup>6.</sup>"

On June 1st, 1858, Mr. Roebuck introduced the question again, saying "that the motion he had to put upon the paper apparently concerned only a canal, but, in reality, there was bound up with it the honour and interest of England." In order that he might make out these assertions, he would, with the permission of the House, introduce a short description of the state of things connected with the canal. At the time when this matter was first broached the Turkish Empire was in the process of dissolution. It was in that state that the great feudatories of that Empire were one by one becoming independent, and among them one of the most formidable was the Viceroy of Egypt. This great feudatory of the Turkish Empire very nearly united Turkey to Egypt, by destroying the independence of Turkey, and becoming himself the Sultan of Turkey. This country prevented that result and the name of Suzerain remained to the Sultan, the Viceroy of Egypt continuing to be called his feudatory. While the relations between Turkey and Egypt were in this satisfactory condition, there arose the question of making a canal across the Isthmus of Suez, and one of the conditions required to enable parties to carry that project into execution, was the assent of the Sublime Porte. Thereupon came the

interference that he deprecated. The power and influence of England were employed to induce the Sultan to withhold his assent to the project, and it was on the fact of our influence having been so employed that he asked the House to pronounce an opinion. He would begin by laying down two or three general propositions which he trusted would be distinctly answered by those who opposed him. The first was that facility of transport from one part of the earth's surface to another was for the benefit of mankind at large. His second proposition was that a canal across the Isthmus of Suez would facilitate the intercourse between Asia and Europe. If his premises were correct, his conclusion could not be denied, and it was that the formation of a canal across the Isthmus of Suez was for the happiness of mankind. Now, the proposition he deprecated was, that what was for the interest of mankind was not for the interest of England. He contended that the House of Commons had nothing to do with the physical difficulties lying in the way of this project, or with the commercial circumstances connected with it.---All that they had to consider was whether the formation of such a canal would be for the interest of England. He was prepared to maintain that the interest of England, herein, was entirely identical with the interest of mankind.---The people of England had a greater traffic to India than all the rest of the world put together. If anyone were to be benefited, they would be benefited; but, at the time when, by the improvements of Art and Science, they were able to conceive the project of cutting through the Isthmus of Suez, there came a Minister who told the people of England that it was not for their interest that the project should be carried out.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Roebuck said that Lord Palmerston was opposed to the scheme, be-

7. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. pp. 1360, 1361, 1362.

believing that it would affect the political interests of England. The member for Tiverton had not opposed it on the grounds of impossibility, but because of the political interests of the country. Mr. Roebuck then began his defence of the project from the point of view of its effect on British interests in the Mediterranean and in India. "Our dominion in India depended upon our maritime superiority. The moment we ceased to be the ruling Maritime Power, that instant we lost our dominion in India. Did we, by making a canal across the Isthmus of Suez, lose our maritime superiority? No; but it was said that there were times when the Mediterranean was in the possession of a French fleet. So it was, and one of the most remarkable instances of the result of that state of circumstances was the expedition of Napoleon Bonaparte to Egypt. The consequence was that our naval superiority was vindicated and we shut up Napoleon and his army like rats in a trap. If, for a moment the French were superior in the Mediterranean, no doubt they could, if they pleased, go through the canal. But so could they round the Cape of Good Hope, if they were superior in maritime force. But let the House consider the consequence of a French fleet going through the Isthmus of Suez canal and a superior English fleet pursuing them. They would be caught in the Red Sea like rats in a trap, and our maritime superiority would be vindicated. The danger arising from the expectation that, at some moment, France or some other power might be superior in the Mediterranean, was altogether illusory, and, in fact, we were sacrificing the interests of England and of mankind, to a wholly imaginary danger.---He could not help thinking that a great part of the opposition, which had been raised to the canal, had risen from the fact that it originated with Frenchmen."

8.

Mr. Roebuck spoke of the feeling which existed in France, with regard to the attitude of England towards the project for the canal.. He felt, he said, that France was justified in her feelings of resentment, when she saw that England was prepared to oppose the scheme for better communications between the nations of the East and West. He went on to say that the people of England were inclined to regard the Egyptians as barbarians, but one could hardly apply that term to such a man as the Viceroy, who was willing to aid in every way, the promotion of a scheme which, if accomplished, would be of such benefit to mankind. The speech concluded with the invitation to the House to support his motion; the motion was seconded by Mr. Milner Gibson.

Mr. Griffith said that he agreed with Lord Palmerston, that it seemed unlikely that the proposed canal could ever be built, as the difficulties which must be overcome before its construction would be complete, appeared almost insurmountable. The objection which Lord Palmerston had as to its political importance, Mr. Griffith said he failed to understand. In his speech he referred to the Indian Mutiny and the useful purpose which the canal would have served at the time of that crisis. "He need scarcely remind the House how, during the past year, great numbers of people in this country had trembled for those who were near and dear to them in India, and, on the arrival of the news of the Mutiny, when it was determined to send an army out to the relief of the English troops there, how great was the public anxiety throughout the Kingdom, to have those gallant men conveyed as speedily as possible to the scene of action. If, at that time, we could have embarked the troops in our large steamers, and conveyed them right on to India by the Red Sea, without any break in the transit at the Isthmus of Suez, how much anxiety would the count-



ry have been spared, while the Mutiny might have been divested of many of its horrors. It would be in the recollection of the House that at an early period after the arrival of the intelligence of the Mutiny, it was suggested that we should send our troops by the overland route, and that the noble Lord, the member for Tiverton, on that occasion, dwelt on the extreme difficulty of establishing adequate means of transit for the troops on the other side of the Isthmus. No doubt that was a subject for grave consideration; but, eventually, the noble Lord, when at the head of the Government, did adopt that very mode of carrying the troops on to India which he had deprecated in that House as being impracticable. If, therefore, the opinion of the noble Lord had not been found infallible in that case, why should it be held to be so in respect to another manner of crossing the Isthmus? The difficulties had vanished in practice, and in point of fact, we were now regularly sending troops in that direction to India. It was unquestionable that, if we could have done that from the very beginning of the struggle, the people of this country would have been relieved from much of the deep anxiety with which they have regarded it, and incalculable advantages, in point of time especially would have been gained. Indeed, whether for the purposes of war or commerce, there could scarcely be a more valuable boon to England than the construction of a canal across the Isthmus. The noble Lord (Viscount Palmerston) on some recondite and far-fetched political ground, thought that such a project would be injurious to the interests of our communications with India; but the objections of the noble Lord were so wholly opposed to the liberal and commercial spirit of the age, that he (Mr. Griffith) could only consider them as the remnant of an obsolete and exploded policy."

Mr. Griffith thought that the House ought to consider the possibility of the use of forced labour in the construction of the canal, and the effect which it might have upon the support England should give to the scheme. In the closing paragraphs of his speech, he said "From the remotest ages down to the present all the public works in Egypt had been executed by forced labour, and in dealing with this question, it was essential that the House should be careful not to sanction the employment of the power of a despotic Government to procure labour for the execution of a work of this kind, at inadequate remuneration. The pay proposed by the promoters to be given to the labourer was that of about ten pence a day, to induce them to go out to labour in the burning desert, finding their own sustenance. He put it to the House, whether such pay was likely to obtain that labour on voluntary terms. He hoped that the House would take care that they did not inadvertently sanction the system of slavery under the guise of labour. He begged, therefore, to move as an Amendment, that in any course that this House may sanction in furtherance of the construction of such a canal, it is expedient that care be taken that the despotic powers of the Egyptian be not allowed to be made use of by the promoters of such a project, to obtain the required labour from the "fellah", at an inadequate remuneration, by those compulsory means familiar to the practice of that Government, so as to produce the effects of slavery under the guise of paid labour."

To the remarks which Mr. Griffith had made, concerning the danger of forced labour for the work of the canal, Lord Haddo took exception, and, in a short speech, defended the Viceroy. "The thought that, whatever opinion might be entertained with regard to the Suez

Canal, the words of the Amendment were hardly consistent with that courtesy which was due to the Egyptian Government from that House. There could be no doubt that the Viceroy had acted in a very liberal, enlightened, and public-spirited manner, and that he had shown a noble ambition of employing the resources of his country; not upon objects of a personal nature, as had too often been the case with his predecessors, but in a work which claimed the merit of great permanent advantage, and of extensive public utility.<sup>11.</sup> The present ruler of Egypt had undoubtedly done more to abolish slavery in his dominions and to improve the condition of his subjects than<sup>any</sup> Mahomedan, and probably any European prince, during an equal space of time; and, though we often heard of French influence in Egypt, he ventured to say that to no country had a more friendly disposition been shown, or more frequent proofs of goodwill been given, on the part of the Egyptian Government, than to England."<sup>12.</sup> He gave examples of the courtesy and kindness extended to English travellers in Egypt, by the Viceroy.

Mr. Stephenson followed Lord Haddo with a speech in which he presented again the scientific aspect of the project, saying that he could not feel that it was right for him to give consent to the motion by his silence, when he was convinced that the scheme was not feasible.

Mr. Seymour Fitz-Gerald, in his speech, offered his objections to Mr. Roebuck's Motion; he said "The honourable and learned Gentleman said the opposition to the canal had been based upon considerations which were base and selfish. He differed from the hon-

11. An article in The Times on May 31st, 1851, stated that improvements in Egypt were noted under the new Viceroy. There were fewer taxes and more liberties.

12. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL.P.1370.

ourable and learned Gentleman, for it appeared to him that the opposition to the scheme had been conceived in a far different spirit, on reasons and arguments which could only be called selfish and base, inasmuch as they related to the maintenance and prosperity of this country, but in no other sense.---He believed the position of the Turkish Government, in reference to this question, to be as follows:- The Turkish Government might perfectly rely upon the loyalty of the present Pasha of Egypt, but it could not but regard with feelings of jealousy, if not distrust, a project that must, if carried out, lead to a material, if not a political, separation of Egypt from the Turkish Empire. And, moreover, the Turkish Government, regarding the scheme as expensive, and, if not impracticable, at least unprofitable, and thus likely to withdraw that capital which they were so desirous of attracting for the completion of public works, naturally were not favourable to it.----To give increased facilities to commerce and intercourse might greatly augment the happiness of mankind by developing prosperity, but there were other not less important considerations. In that House, at least, it might be asked whether the result of such a project as this might not lead to enterprises on the part of other nations, to war and such events as might be the very reverse of benefits to mankind. What, in fact, was this scheme? He believed the honourable and learned Gentleman knew that, at the present moment, the coast of Egypt was fortified in such a manner that it would be almost impossible to land upon it. At present it was proposed to make a canal, but the making of that canal involved the concession of a strip of land from sea to sea. If that strip were conceded, it was proposed to make a canal 300 ft wide and 30 ft deep. The bank on either side would be in the possession of the proprietors of this canal. Now, could anything be a greater obstacle than such

an artificially raised impediment as that between the Turkish territory and Egypt?----It was a matter worthy of some remark that that which had been represented by the honourable and learned Gentleman as a most important commercial enterprise, had been undertaken for years without having received the support of the most commercial nation. Was it not then surprising that it had not been undertaken by the most commercial nation, but had received its support from the principal military power in Europe?"<sup>13.</sup>

Mr. Milner Gibson, who had seconded the Motion of Mr. Roebuck, wished to have the correspondence between the Foreign Office and the British Ambassador at Constantinople laid before the House, so that the members would be able to judge to what extent British influence had influenced the attitude of the Sultan to the project. He objected to the remark of Mr. Fitz-Gerald that the commercial bodies of England had taken no interest in the scheme, and he gave as an example of the interest in the subject, the meetings held by M. de Lesseps in 1857. Lord Palmerston answered this speech at length.

Mr. Ewart said that a meeting had been held in Liverpool, which was not very largely attended "although the merchants of that port were always anxious to hear of any project for the advancement of trade. Resolutions had been passed in favour of the scheme, it was true, but at a public meeting the Resolutions were sure to be passed out of courtesy, and that had, he believed, been the case as regarded the present scheme. The general feeling in Liverpool was that the whole affair was nothing more than a bubble, and he did not think that many persons in that town would be willing to take shares in the undertaking."<sup>14.</sup>

13. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. pp.1373 to 1376.

14. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. p. 1384.

Mr. Gladstone, in his speech, objected to the statement of Mr. Ewart that it was easy to get up a meeting and pass resolutions out of courtesy. He gave as an example of the scheme which had not received the support of a public meeting in Liverpool, the Russian railway project. "Was there any movement in Liverpool to support those schemes? If it is so easy to get up public meetings in Liverpool, why did not the promoters of the Russian railways go down there, and in this way endeavour to excite public feeling in favour of those schemes? I think my honourable friend (Mr. Ewart) has very considerably exaggerated his case when he says that it is so easy to induce gentlemen in a place like Liverpool to come forward and pass Resolutions in favour of any scheme whatever. As a Liverpool man, myself, I don't think this is so.---That is a matter entirely secondary and irrelevant to the question we are to-night discussing. Nor has the point now before us been justly stated by the noble Viscount. That point is not whether we are to give our sanction either to a bubble scheme or any scheme at all; it is simply whether we are to protest against the use of the political influence of this country for the purpose of preventing the making of the canal across the Isthmus of Suez. The resolution of the honourable and learned Member does not ask the House to take any part, whatever, direct or indirect, small or great, in giving favour, countenance, or approval to the scheme of this canal. What is asked is that you should put an end to the vicious system, of which I am afraid my noble Friend (Lord Palmerston) has been the main author - the system of arbitrary and gratuitous interference for the purpose of preventing the execution of this canal, on grounds which are either null or valueless, but which are, in reality, much worse, because they go to place us at issue with the world, and to commit us to a contest in which we must necessarily fail. That is the question; and that is the allegation which I make



in answer to my noble Friend. If he says that the effect of the Resolution will be to give encouragement to the scheme, I really must answer that it gives no other encouragement than naturally ensues from the withdrawal of an improper, an undue, an illegitimate opposition by illegitimate means, to this project. The honourable and learned Gentleman does not intend that the House of Commons should, in any form or degree, make itself responsible for supporting the scheme. The question is whether the House of Commons, being now challenged on the point, shall make itself responsible for that which it has never yet done - namely, for countenancing the opposition to this project, which has been conducted from time to time by the executive Government, without the sanction and without the approval of the House. One word as to the nature of the opposition by the executive Government. That opposition was not originally founded upon the absurd pleas and pretexts which are now alleged for its justification. It was originally a question, not of obstructing the means of communication between Europe and India - not of denying that there was an advantage in bringing them together, if you could - but it was a question of competition between the railway and the canal. The canal was in the main a French, the railway was in the main an English scheme. For the moment there was a competition between these two projects, and naturally enough the English Government - having greater confidence, as it was bound to have, or as it was natural it should have, in the engineers of its own country - recommended the railway in preference to the canal."

15.

Mr. Gladstone then answered the arguments which Lord Palmerston had urged against the project; he tried to prove that the idea

that the canal would tend to separate Turkey from her province of Egypt was false. He stated that, in his opinion, the policy of meddling with the relations which existed between Turkey and her provinces was fatal, and in no way helped to uphold the integrity of Turkey. "In my mind no method could be more unwise or more suicidal of attempting to uphold either the independence or the integrity of the Turkish Empire, than the making of the connection with that Empire irksome and burdensome to the provinces of Turkey. And, if you really want to strengthen the connection between Turkey and Egypt, or between Turkey and the Principalities - for the principal is just the same - pursue that object by the methods of prudence and conciliation, endeavour to unite those countries in the bonds of affection; but don't go to Egypt and say, "Here is a scheme which we admit, if it can be executed, would tend powerfully to the development of your natural resources, but we shall prevent you from reaping its advantages because we think they would weaken your connection with Turkey!" So that you lead the Pasha and the people of Egypt immediately to the conclusion that their connection with Turkey involves comparative poverty and degradation to them, because it interferes with their pursuit of the means which are calculated to promote their own strength and prosperity." <sup>16.</sup> Mr. Gladstone dealt next with the argument which objected to the construction of the canal as a danger to British interests in India. He felt that England had no right to set her Indian Empire in opposition to the interests of mankind, and, moreover, he believed that the dangers which were cited were non-existent; he said "But, I deny altogether the existence of these dangers. I say that, if this canal had been open last year, had it

been practicable, a question now before us, we should have had the deepest reason for gratitude to those who might have executed it. What would the difference have been with reference to the great struggle which you have been carrying on in India if, twelve months ago, instead of the dilatory route by the Cape of Good Hope, you had been able to send your troops direct to India? Why, the benefit of this canal, if practicable, great as it would be to the rest of the world, would be greatest by far to England. Who would have the control of the Red Sea? Who has now got control of that Sea at its southern issue? Who has occupied Aden on the one side and Perim on the other?---What is the Power that would really possess this canal, if it were opened? Is it not a canal which would necessarily fall within the control of the first maritime Power in Europe? It is Eng-  
land and no foreign country that would obtain the command of it." 17.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Disraeli) and leader of the Government in the House of Commons, read the Motion of Mr. Roebuck, saying that, as the question was an important one, it ought to be considered calmly. He gave his own opinions, that if the Government of Lord Palmerston had urged the Sultan to adopt a certain policy, it was only the same policy which the Sultan had already professed. He believed that many of the previous speakers assumed that Turkey would have favoured the scheme but for the influence of England; they had assumed also that all the other countries favoured  
the project, but he knew of no evidence to prove these assumptions." 18

The Chancellor of the Exchequer thought that the House would be lack-

17. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. P. 1390, 1391.

18. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. Pp.1392 to 1396.

ing in wisdom to bind themselves to any definite policy by the Resolution, a policy from which they might find it difficult to depart in the future, when events might prove it desirable to do so. He concluded his speech with this appeal, "I think this Resolution has been brought forward without authority. I think the honourable and learned member for Sheffield (Mr. Roebuck) has no right to assume that the power and influence of this country have been, or are now, used to constrain the Porte to oppose this project. I think, also, that, if this House is induced to adopt the Resolution, it will fetter itself in its future course, and hastily and rashly quit the path which it has been hitherto pursuing, which it has pursued in some degree under the influence of grave political considerations, but which, at the same time, may be departed from at some future period, if time and experience should show that such a course may be taken without injury to the public interests."<sup>19.</sup>

Lord John Russell spoke in favour of the project; he believed that the question must be considered as to the effect it would have in peace and war. In peace the canal might affect English trade with India, but England had been the advocate of free trade for some years, so why should the authorities in England attempt to prevent the people of India from buying merchandise from other countries of Europe, if these countries could give better and cheaper goods than England? In time of war troops would doubtless be sent through Egypt for an attack on India, but there was the railway, which would be used if there were no canal.

19. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol. CL. Page 1396.

The standard biography of Disraeli does not give an account of his personal views upon the subject at this time, but only deals with the Suez Canal at the time when Disraeli bought the shares for England.

Mr. Bright thought that before the House came to any decision, any correspondence which had taken place upon the subject ought to be placed before the members. Sir James Elphinstone said that if papers relating to the proposed canal were produced, those relating to the railway ought to be presented also, for inspection, for it was impossible to separate the two questions.

Mr. Roebuck presented his Motion again; he had been asked for evidence of the opposition of the British Government and he offered as proof of that opposition the statement of Lord Palmerston on July 17th, 1857, "that for the last fifteen years Her Majesty's Government had used all the influence they possessed at Constantinople to prevent the scheme from being carried into effect." In the closing paragraph of his address he said "He did not ask the House for any opinion with respect to the canal; but did anyone pretend that England had not coerced the Sultan? The power of England exercised through one of the most imperious ambassadors could not be properly designated otherwise than as coercion, and all he asked was, that the Sultan should be left to himself. If the honourable and learned Gentleman believed that the Turk was against the project, he would not oppose the Motion; but he knew that the Turk was under coercion. If the Motion should be rejected, France and Europe would, for the first time, learn through the representatives of the people of England, that this country had given its sanction to a policy which, in France and on the continent of Europe, was considered to be selfish, narrow-minded, and thoroughly unjust."

The question was put and the House divided - Ayes 62; Noes 290; Majority 228. The Motion defeated, the question was dropped,

and Monsieur de Lesseps failed in his attempt to gain the support of the British Government. Lord Palmerston was one of the most important political figures of the time and the speeches of the members referred to his addresses which he made before the House on the subject of the proposed canal, not only these must be considered but the opinions which he expressed in his private capacity, which doubtless influenced many in their decision as to the wisdom of sanctioning the construction of a ship canal across the Isthmus of Suez, if that project proved to be feasible.



## Chapter IV.

The people of England regarded Lord Palmerston with affection and pride; he represented to them the embodiment of their national spirit, a kindly man with a genial manner, who had a proper conception of the position which England should occupy in relation to the continental nations. He took advantage of England's position as the foremost power of Europe in the years following the Congress of Vienna, and to him this position meant the privilege of interfering in the affairs of other countries. The ministers of many a foreign country disliked Palmerston and with reason, for it was irritating to be informed by the resident British Minister that he had received a despatch suggesting the line of conduct which the Government should follow.

At home Palmerston made a difficult colleague in the Cabinet, for he was impatient of control from the leader of the Government and he paid little attention to the acknowledged practice of submitting despatches to the Queen, which created a feeling of distrust on the part of the Court towards the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The methods which the Foreign Secretary used caused great anxiety, at times, to the Queen and to the members of the Government, but his system appealed to the people; their sense of their own superiority over the people of the Continent was satisfied by the way in which Palmerston tried to force English constitutional measures on foreign governments. He has been described as "a stout believer in the British System"<sup>1</sup>, and it was this quality above others which se-

1. Palmerston - Philip Guadella. Chap.VII. page 313,  
Putnam edition.

cured for him such a firm place in the affections of the English public.

Although it was excellent and worthy, a very great part of the political thought of the country was dull and uninteresting. From the beginning of the agitation by the Anti-Corn Law League for the repeal of the Corn Laws until the question of protection ceased to be a matter of vital interest to the Tory party, politics were influenced very greatly by the spirit and doctrine of the Manchester School, nor did this influence cease after protection was dropped from the Tory programme, for the same spirit is evident in the Commercial Treaty with France which Cobden brought about in 1860, and it continued to exercise an influence to a large extent in the last half of the century.

The Liberalism which repealed the Corn Laws in 1846 tried to educate the people to accept the estimable but rather colourless doctrine of commercial reform, as a solution of the existing difficulties. The advocates of these ideas wanted to bring the people to understand the excellence of binding nations together by Treaties of Commerce, which would promote feelings of such an amicable nature that, in the future, war would be impossible between nations.

A great many people were prepared to accept this teaching and to find complete satisfaction in it, but there was a large body of the public which wanted a measure of excitement in the affairs of the country and in Palmerston and his methods this desire was gratified. There was a certain pleasure to be gained from watching the way in which he dealt with foreign countries, so often his plans seemed about to meet with disastrous failure, when by some ingenious stroke he would save the situation for England. Many men who regarded events on the Continent would solace themselves with the knowledge

that Lord Palmerston would find some way out of the difficulty.

The public was not aware of the way in which they were blinded to the defects of his policy of interference and aggression in 1850, the time of the Don Pacifico Affair. When his policy was under discussion with regard to this question and it was receiving severe criticism in the House, Lord Palmerston rose to defend himself, and in his most famous speech he threw a patriotic glow over the whole incident. With the Latin quotation "Civis Romanus sum" as the keynote of his address, he aroused all the patriotic pride of his country and expressed the doctrine dear to the British public, that, in whatever country a British subject found himself, he had a right to appeal to England to protect him in time of trouble. This speech re-established him in a safe position in the Government and gave him a still firmer hold upon the affection of the public and he was the most popular man in the country. People felt thankful that a man with Palmerston's proper patriotic feeling was in a position of such importance as the Foreign Secretaryship. The fact that the real issue had been evaded to a large extent, and that the case of the Portugese Jew was not worthy of the pass to which Lord Palmerston had brought English relations with the Continent, was not realized, and Palmerston emerged triumphant.

The Crimean War in its early stages was a story of mismanagement and disaster, and when Lord Palmerston was called upon to form a ministry, people began to hope for improvement. There was improvement in organization and management and when the war was over and successful to a point, a share of the credit was given - and justly so - to Lord Palmerston.

Thus, when M. de Lesseps came to England to obtain the support of the Government and of the people of that country, he felt

that to gain the approval of Lord Palmerston for the project would be a very great advance toward success, for, as the head of the Government, he would have great influence and his position in the country at that time was such that public opinion on the project for the Suez Canal would be swayed greatly by his attitude to the question.

Unfortunately Lord Palmerston had entertained a feeling of suspicion towards France for many years, ever since the reign of King Louis Philippe, and that feeling might have proved serious to the two countries but for the change of Government, which brought in Lord Aberdeen as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The French Minister Guizot was an equally pacific minister and the relationship between England and France became more friendly.

There was a sense of uneasiness in England at all times, as to the intentions of France in Egypt, which was a legacy from the expedition of Napoleon; this feeling had been augmented by the attitude which France had taken at the time when Mehemet Ali attempted to make Egypt independent of Turkey with himself as ruler. Britain had supported Turkish rights, while France had given her support to Mehemet Ali. It must be admitted that England was justified in her feeling of alarm, for it has been stated that the purpose of this policy was "to establish a secondrate Maritime Power in the Mediterranean, whose fleet might unite with that of France for the purpose of serving as a counterpoise to that of England"<sup>2</sup>. Palmerston was not prepared to regard any Power which professed such a policy with a feeling of friendship; the situation has been described by one of his biographers "There is, in fact, a policy dating far back in the traditions of

2. Life of Lord Palmerston - Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, vol.II, page 367.

of the French Foreign Office, which would assign to France the possession of, or the patronage over, Egypt. Napoleon's expedition indented this policy deeper into the French mind. It was a policy natural for France, if France was the enemy of England; but it was a policy impossible for France, if there was to be a sincere alliance and friendship between the two countries, because the mistress of India cannot permit France to be mistress, directly or indirectly, of the road to her Indian dominions.<sup>3.</sup> This feeling with regard to French influence in Egypt was strengthened by the opinions of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, on the subject of the proposed Suez Canal, and the British Ambassador to the Porte received equal support from the Prime Minister for "He found a sympathizing supporter in the old-fashioned<sup>4.</sup> anti-Gallican prejudices of Lord Palmerston".

in the first interview M. de Lesseps had with Lord Palmerston the latter gave several arguments against the project for the canal, but M. de Lesseps felt that there were other reasons still, so he begged for a frank discussion of the subject and Palmerston said "I do not hesitate to tell you what my apprehensions are. They consist, in the first place, of the fear of seeing the commercial and maritime relations of Great Britain upset by the opening of a new route, which in being open to the navigation of all nations, will deprive us of the advantages which we at present possess. I will confess to you also that I look with apprehension to the uncertainty of the future as regards France - a future which any statesman is bound to consider from the darkest side, unbounded as is our confidence in the loyalty

3. Life of Lord Palmerston - Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, vol.II, page 293.

4. The Suez Canal - Fitz-Gerald. Book 1, Chap.1.

and sincerity of the Emperor, but after he has gone things may alter<sup>5</sup>

On his visit to England in 1856 Monsieur de Lesseps sought another interview with Lord Palmerston; it proved to be no more encouraging, however, and de Lesseps gave an account of the meeting in a letter to his friend and supporter M. Barthelemy St Hilaire "I found Lord Palmerston just what he was in 1840, full of mistrust and prejudices with regard to France and Egypt. He was very polite, and was in some respects very frank, but after hearing me read the resumé of my conversation with Lord Clarendon, he spoke to me, with regard to the Suez Canal, in the most contradictory, the most incoherent and, I will even add, the most senseless fashion imaginable. He is firmly convinced that France has long pursued a most Machiavellian policy in Egypt against England, and that the fortifications of Alexandria were paid for by Louis Philippe or his Government. He sees in the Suez Canal the consequences of this policy. Upon the other hand he persists in maintaining that the execution of the canal is materially impossible, and that he knows more about it than all the engineers in Europe, whose opinions will not alter his. Then, regardless of the fact that he had just proved the scheme to be impracticable, he indulged in a long tirade upon the drawbacks which would result for Turkey, and for Egypt herself, from the Viceroy's concession and the realization of the enterprise. Finally he declared that he should continue to be my adversary without any sort of reticence. I could not help asking myself now and again whether I was in the presence of a maniac or a statesman. There was not one of his arguments which would hold water for five minutes in a serious discussion."<sup>6</sup> Owing to his natural interest in the project, M. de Lesseps may have judged

5. Recollections of Forty Years - Ferdinand de Lesseps, Vol I. Chap 4, Page 271.

6. Recollections of Forty Years - Ferdinand de Lesseps, Vol. I, Chap 4, Page 290.

Lord Palmerston somewhat hardly, but there is no doubt that the refusal which was given was of the most decided character.

When the project for the Suez Canal was brought before the House by the question of the Member for Bristol, as to the attitude which the Government intended to take, Palmerston replied saying that "private individuals are left to take care of their own interests, and, if they embark in impracticable undertakings, they must pay the penalty of so doing. But the scheme is founded in hostility to the interests of this country - opposed to the standing policy of England in regard to the late war, and issue of that war - the Treaty of Paris. The obvious political tendency of the undertaking is to render more easy the separation of Egypt from Turkey. It is founded also, on remote speculations with regard to easier access to our Indian possessions, which I need not more distinctly shadow forth, because they will be obvious to anybody who pays any attention to the subject. I can only express my surprise that M. Ferdinand de Lesseps should have reckoned so much on the credulity of English capitalists, as to think that by his progress through the different commercial towns in this country, he should succeed in obtaining English money for the promotion of a scheme which is every way so adverse and hostile to British interests. That scheme was launched, I believe, about fifteen years ago, as a rival to the railway from Alexandria by Cairo to Suez, which being infinitely more practicable and likely to be more useful, obtained the pre-eminence. M. de Lesseps is a very persevering gentleman, and may have great engineering skill at his command. At all events he pursues his scheme very steadily, though I am disposed to think that, probably, the object which he and some others of the promoters have in view, will be accomplished even if the whole of the undertaking should not be carried into



7. execution." Thus from the very first appearance of the subject of the Suez Canal in the House, Lord Palmerston opposed it.

The debate on the subject was resumed on July 17th, when Mr. Griffith asked a question regarding the attitude of the Government to the project. Lord Palmerston answered him stating his opinions very definitely, "My honourable and learned Friend has had the courtesy to give me notice of this matter, and I collect from my honourable Friend's letter that he wishes to know whether, in the answer which I gave on a former occasion as to the project to cut a canal of 300 ft wide and 30 ft deep between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, I expressed a hasty opinion, or whether I did not display more jealousy of foreign powers than it was expedient to express, whatever foundation there might be for it. Sir, in reply, I can only say that whatever objections I may have expressed at any time with regard to that project, I endeavoured rather to understate than to

8. overstate." He then discussed the two points which seemed to him the most important, the effect which the canal would have upon England's position in India, and the probable loosening of the bond between Turkey and her province, Egypt; of the first two points there appears to be no evidence that Palmerston foresaw the possibility of English influence in the Company, so that England might control the position. There was the feeling, perhaps, of annoyance that a new scheme for communication with the East was due to the initiative of a foreign power, and the canal, if successful, must prove a keen competitor with the railway across the Isthmus, which was British in

7. Hansard, July 7th, 1857. Vol. CXLVI. pp. 1044 to 1045

8. Hansard, July 17th, 1857. Vol. CXLVI. p. 1705.

its origin. He concluded his speech by saying "Politically, therefore, I look upon the scheme as highly objectionable, and one which no Englishman with his eyes open would think it desirable, as regards national interests, to encourage. As regards the engineering difficulties, I am aware there is nothing which money and skill cannot overcome, except to stop the tides of the ocean and to make rivers run up to their sources. But I take leave to affirm, upon pretty good authority, that this plan cannot be accomplished, except at an expense which would preclude its being a remunerative undertaking."<sup>9.</sup>

When Mr. Roebuck moved his resolution in favour of the Suez Canal, Lord Palmerston was not the leader of the Government, but Mr. Milner Gibson feared that he continued to exert an influence over the foreign policy of the country, and in his speech Mr. Gibson said that "he hoped the spirit of the policy of the noble Lord, the Member for Tiverton, would not continue to influence the Foreign Office; that he would be held to have permanently retired from that quarter; and that Her Majesty's present advisors would consider themselves free to act on their own judgement, and be induced to take a policy more conducive to the advantage of the country."<sup>10.</sup> To this Lord Palmerston replied by stating that he believed success to be an impossibility in such a vast enterprise unless a very great sum of money was expended. Then he explained the position which the British Government had taken on this question in its relationship to Turkey, "We are told now that for fifteen years we have been exercising a moral constraint upon the Sultan of Turkey, to prevent him giving

9. Hansard, July 17th, 1857. Vol. CXLVI. pp. 1705 & 1706  
 10. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol. CL. p. 1379.

his sanction to this scheme. Now, I can assure those who hold that opinion that they are entirely mistaken. No doubt the British Government did at the outset express its opinion that the project was one which ought not to receive the sanction of the Sultan; but the right honourable Gentleman, the Member for Ashton, is mistaken if he supposes that His Imperial Majesty has not since then been perfectly at liberty to act and judge for himself in this matter. It is a mistake to suppose that the Turkish Government are not quite as much opposed to that scheme as any English Government could be, for it is a matter which concerns them much more nearly and much more deeply than it concerns us. We felt it our duty to explain to the Turkish Government, when we knew that other influence was at work in favour of the scheme, what dangers it involved. The right honourable Gentleman says that he is as much prepared as any man in England to maintain the independence of the Turkish Empire, but he forgot to say anything about its integrity. Now, to maintain the integrity of the Turkish Empire is of as much importance as to maintain its independence, and to maintain the connection between Egypt and Turkey is of at least as great importance as regards English interests as it is of importance to some other powers to maintain the connection between Turkey and the Principalities." <sup>11.</sup> The speaker then passed on to a discussion of the evidences of foreign intervention in Egypt, "Every year which passes, every communication which we receive through Egypt, must show us the importance and the advantage of maintaining a connection between Egypt and the Neutral State, and of preventing her falling under the influence of any preponderating Power which might at some time be hostile to us. I believe that---people in general are ignorant of what has been taking place in the Mediterranean frontier

of Egypt in late years. At the time of the Battle of Alexandria great difficulty was felt in effecting a landing in that country, but that exploit, and a great military exploit it was, was accomplished. Since then every place where a landing could be effected has been scientifically fortified, not according to Egyptian plans but by plans laid down by scientific men of other countries, carried out by engineers of another country and, I believe, although I cannot positively assert it as a fact, expedited by means of funds supplied by another country. I am afraid to say how many guns these fortifications mount, but, I believe, three or four thousand, and these fortifications, manned by an army of 20,000 men, would in all probability render Egypt incapable of being overcome by any Turkish forces, or by the forces of any other country. Then, again, under the specious pretence of a work for agricultural purposes, the barrage of the Nile has been completed, which while it pretends to be for the purpose of controlling the inundations of the Nile would in reality be found to be a work available in no slight degree for military and defensive purposes. There is one quarter, however, by which an army might march - nay, has repeatedly marched - on Egypt, and that is along the coast of the Mediterranean, and this project has for its obvious purpose the barring of that passage to any Turkish army which might be employed to restore the Empire to the Sultan, by opening a great military canal 300 ft broad and 30 ft deep, laid with batteries. The right honourable Gentleman says that waters join countries. Well, so they do, countries which are in harmony with each other, and also districts of the same country; but should this canal be constructed, and should the Pasha of Egypt at any time wish to sever the connection between Turkey and Egypt, and to erect Egypt into an independent state the possession of a barrier such as I have described, defended by for-

eigners who might side with the Pasha, would render any attempt upon Egypt most precarious for the Sultan of Turkey, and would render much more probable that event which I think it is the interest of England to prevent - I mean the detachment of Egypt from Turkey. That was the argument which we urged upon the Sultan and, he himself seeing the force of it, has acted upon it." Lord Palmerston urged the necessity of preventing any Power obtaining the control of a passageway to India, which might prove disastrous to England in time of war. "I do not think that we ought, to the danger of the interests of the country, to indulge in philanthropic reveries, or to be led away by a too generous wish to promote the prosperity of the human race." The speech ended with a reference to the meetings held by M. de Lesseps "We are told that all we are asked to do is to abstain from interference, but can any man shut his eyes to the fact that this scheme has practically been scouted by the wiser commercial men of this country? (No! No!) I beg pardon! It has been damned with faint praise. That is, it has met with words of favour from those who are most unwilling to put their money in it. The object of the Resolution appears to me to be to obtain a Parliamentary title for a scheme the shares of which are not marketable, and I trust that the House will not lend itself to a speculation of that kind, and agree to a Resolution which I maintain is at variance with the interests of England." This ended the opposition which Palmerston gave to the project in the House, but his influence extended in other directions.

The Earl of Clarendon, who was Foreign Secretary during the administration of Lord Palmerston in 1855, was asked by the French

- 12. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. P. 1382, 1383.
- 13. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. P. 1383.
- 14. Hansard, June 1st, 1858. Vol.CL. P. 1384.

Government to consider the project of cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Suez; he discussed the question with the Prime Minister, who opposed it so strongly that Clarendon came to share the same views, and together they refused to sanction the project in the Cabinet. The other members were not opposed to it at that time and the Duke of Argyll recorded the impression which the discussion of this matter created, "Palmerston surprised me and others by the most vehement opposition. It would, he said, cut off Egypt from Turkey, stop the advance of the troops of the Suzerain Power, and place British interests in Egypt and in India at the mercy of France. Clarendon was at that time completely under the sway of Palmerston, and took the same line. I don't think they were supported in it by one single member of the Cabinet."<sup>15.</sup>

In a despatch to Lord Cowley at Paris, dated May 8th, 1857, Lord Clarendon showed that he had been converted to the Palmerstonian view of the project, "As to the Suez Canal, I think our language must always be that the scheme has manifestly for its object, and inevitably for its effect, to enable the Pasha of Egypt to cut the painter and declare himself independent whenever it may suit him to do so, and that, when an attempt is made, we shall all fall back into the relative positions we occupied in 1840-41. France, in spite of her treaty engagements to maintain the integrity of the Turkish Empire, will take part with Egypt; England must side with the Sultan, and it is needless to point out what the consequences of such a state of things must be."<sup>16.</sup> In 1858 Clarendon was impressed with the project and tried to persuade Palmerston to consider it more favourably, but

15. The Earl of Clarendon, by Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. II.<sup>P. 88</sup>

16. The Earl of Clarendon, by Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. II.

it was of no avail and the only result was a letter from Palmerston, in which he said "What you say about the various interests which have been artfully made favourable to the scheme, is quite true; but the scheme is physically impossible as a paying plan, it would be injurious to Turkey, not really beneficial to Egypt, hurtful to England, and ruinous to the persons who might be gulled into becoming subscribers." 17.

M. de Lesseps had hoped after his interview with the Editor of "The Times", that he would not be opposed in his plans by that journal, and that, perhaps, he might gain some measure of support. On December 16th, 1859, an article was published favouring the project, "It will be so far a British canal that it will be traversed by British ships, devoted to British traffic, and maintained by British tolls. We are justified, as a nation, in looking out for the best and safest highway to the East, for the finest realm pertains to the British Crown. If the Suez Canal should ever become a reality it would be for our benefit and not for our disadvantage."<sup>18</sup>. This article led Palmerston to write to Delane the longest letter he ever sent the editor, in which he said "I am sorry to read the Times article to-day in favour of the Lesseps scheme of the Suez Canal, which has been truly described by Gerardin as founded in political hostility to England. The attack on our interests is two-fold,-first as regards Egypt, next as regards India. It has been deemed by all English statesmen that the possession of Egypt by France would be injurious to England, and the like opinion has always been entertained by French rulers from the First Napoleon to the Third. The French, therefore, have always tried to separate Egypt from Turkey, as a first step towards making it French. We, on the contrary, have al-

17. The Earl of Clarendon- Sir Herbert Maxwell, Vol. II, Page 89.

18, John Thaddeus Delane, -A.I. Däsent, Vol. I., page 325.  
The Times, December 16, 1859.



ways endeavoured to maintain the connection of Egypt with Turkey, in order to prevent Egypt from becoming French. The French have long laboured to place Egypt in a position of independence of Turkey. The Mediterranean coast of Egypt has been industriously fortified according to plans framed in the new War Department at Paris, executed by General Gallois (Gallois Bey) and partly paid for by French money in Louis Philippe's time. These works would mount from three to four hundred guns and would make a landing very difficult. The road to Alexandria by Cairo from the Red Sea, by which some of our troops came from India in 1801, has been closed by a military work erected under the modest name of "a barrage for agricultural purposes". The road from Syria by the coast remains open and one object of the Suez Canal which would be accomplished even if the canal was as a passage impracticable, is to cut a deep and wide trench from the Mediterranean into the desert, to stop the march of an army from Syria. A canal three hundred feet wide and thirty feet deep, with batteries on the Egyptian side would be an impassable barrier to a Turkish force coming to re-establish Turkish authority in Egypt, and if this cut were only carried far enough into the country to cut off all practicable routes for an army, the Pasha of Egypt for the time being would only have to choose his own time for throwing off all connection with the Sultan. Then comes French influence. Part of the scheme is an extensive grant of land in Egypt for Mr. Lesseps company, a wide district at right angles to the canal from the canal to the Nile - a French colony in the heart of Egypt. It requires no great sagacity to see how, in many ways, this would lead to constant interference by the French Government; and this consideration has opened the eyes of the Pasha and made him adverse to the scheme. All these evils to us would be completed even though the canal should prove physically im-

practicable.

But if the canal could be made, it would open to the French, in the event of war, a short cut to India, while we should be obliged to go round the Cape. The first thing the French would do would be to send a force from Toulon or Algeria to seize the canal. An expedition, naval or military, would steam away through the canal to India, sweep our commerce, take our colonies, and perhaps seize and materially injure some of our Indian seaports, long before our reinforcements, naval and military, could arrive by a long sea voyage; and we might suffer in this way immense loss and damage, as the commercial advantage of the canal, if made, would be next to nothing. The railway suffices for all purposes or would do so if better managed. The Red Sea would not answer for sailing ships and for steamers. The navigation would be quite as expensive as round the Cape. The wind blows down the Red Sea halfway to Bab-el-Mandeb during a great part of the year; the sea is narrow for ships to beat up against a wind, and full of coral reefs.

Then again, Egypt would lose the profit made from passengers overland; and this also the Pasha sees and feels.

On the whole the scheme is, as Emile Girardin declares, conceived in hostility to the interests and policy of England. If the canal cannot be made to carry sea-going ships, the scheme will lay the foundation for the severance of Egypt from Turkey, and for its being converted into a dependency of France, in furtherance of the scheme of making the Mediterranean a French lake. If the canal can be made, it will pay no remunerative interest on the capital invested, but it will open to the French whenever they want it, a short cut to the Indian Seas, to the Mauritius, to Ceylon, to Australia, to New Zealand, and possibly to Bombay, or even to Calcutta. For a long

time the French Government promised not to interfere in the matter; their schemes of advance policy may now be more ripe, and they depart from their former assurances and give Mr Lesseps open support. For a long time he was paid by the Pasha. Charles Murray opened the eyes of the Pasha, and his money supplies ceased. The French Government thereupon seem to have thought that it was necessary for them to step in, and to take up a scheme which both the Ports and the Pasha opposed<sup>19</sup>.

This letter must have had an effect for the attitude of The Times was one of criticism as well as of praise, throughout the years of construction.

The general attitude of the public to the scheme seemed to be one of indifference and the opposition on the part of their hero rendered any hope of obtaining English support very unlikely. In an essay John Stuart Mill said that "the opposition to the Suez Canal has never been a national opposition."<sup>20</sup> He blamed one man for the lack of English support, saying "Whatever has been done in the name of England in the Suez affair has been the acts of individuals, mainly, it is probable, of one individual, scarcely any of his countrymen prompting or sharing his purpose and most of those who paid any attention to the subject (unfortunately a very small number) being to all appearances opposed to him."<sup>21</sup> It seemed to the writer that "the belief in France that English influence at Constantinople strenuously exerted to defeat this project, is the real and only invincible obstacle to its being carried into effect and unhappily the public

19. John Thaddeus Delane -A.I.Dasent, Vol.I, pages 326 to 328.

20. A Few Words on Non-Intervention- John Stuart Mill, Dissertations and Discussions, Vol.III, Page 249.

21. A Few Words on Non-Intervention- John Stuart Mill, Dissertations and Discussions, Vol.III, Page 250.

declarations of our present Prime Minister not only bear out this persuasion, but warrant the assertion that we oppose the work because, in the opinion of our Government, it would be injurious to the interests of England."<sup>22.</sup>

Unfortunately, Lord Palmerston died before the completion of the canal and it is impossible to judge whether his attitude would have changed. Throughout the remaining years of his life he retained his feelings of opposition to the project, and it was said that there were only two subjects of conversation which Lord Palmerston could not discuss with calmness, one was the Empire of Brazil, the other<sup>23.</sup> was the Suez Canal.

22. A Few Words on Non-Intervention - John Stuart Mill.  
Dissertations & Discussions, Vol.III, Page 247.

23. John Arthur Roebuck, Life and Letters, R.E. Leader,  
Chap. 22, Page 259.

## Chapter V.

## Journalistic Opinion on the Project.

In the issue of the Edinburgh Review for January, 1856, there is an article reviewing three pamphlets, "The Isthmus of Suez Question" by Ferdinand de Lesseps, "Essais par M. M. Baude et Talabot sur le Canal de Suez", "Revue des Deux Mondes", and "The Dead Sea, a New Road to India." The article in its opening paragraphs refers to Napoleon's expedition and the dreams which he had of dominions in the east, but the writer admits that France has given up any idea of great power in the far east and that her only reason for proposing the canal was for commercial purposes. Any policy of resistance to the plan from political motives is denounced, "As far as political motives are concerned, we can conceive no policy more absurdly illiberal than that which would seek to close one of the great avenues of trade of mankind to suit some fanciful theory of rival influence; and we entirely repudiate any such sentiment in these observations, as utterly unworthy of ourselves and of this country."<sup>1.</sup> The article continued to set forth the engineering difficulties and means which were to be taken to overcome these difficulties.

The scheme which Captain W. Allen of the Royal Navy proposed for a passage between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, was discussed, "There is still a third scheme for forming a water communication between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, which must be briefly described before we leave this part of our subject. It is that, proposed by Captain W. Allen of the Royal Navy, and though it goes far to redeem the English nation from the reproach of not being able to conceive designs as gigantic as the harbour at Pelusium, or the aqueduct over the Nile, this suggestion seems to be so utterly impracticable that it is fortunate that neither Captain Allen's well-

1. The Edinburgh Review, 1856, vol. 103. Page 236.

earned reputation, nor the success of his clever and entertaining volumes, depend on the feasibility of the project.

His proposal is based on the knowledge we now possess that the level of the Dead Sea is at least 1,300 ft below that of the Mediterranean or Red Seas, and that the Sea of Galilee is in like manner depressed to the extent of about 650 ft, so that the mean level of the valley of the Jordan, with its two lakes may be taken at a 1,000 feet below the neighbouring seas and its extent as covering about 2,000 sq. miles. This vast area Captain Allen proposed to convert into a great inland sea by cutting a canal from Acre across the plain of Esdraïlon to the Jordan, a distance of about 40 miles on the map, and another from Akabah, on the Red Sea, to the southern limit of the Dead Sea, a distance of about 120 miles.<sup>2.</sup>

While the writer of the article admitted the impossibility of such a scheme, he felt annoyed, apparently, that the better plan had been the idea of a Frenchman rather than an Englishman. The history of the ancient canals was given, and there was also a discussion as to the reduction of the cost of transportation, owing to the saving of time by coming through the canal. It was believed that the canal would be used chiefly by steamships, for navigation for a sailing ship through the Red Sea was difficult and, as steamships would not be used for goods traffic, the canal would be of little use for commercial purposes. The argument was concluded thus, "With these facts before us it seems almost a work of supererogation to argue to any great extent either the probable commercial or political results of the undertaking. These data will no doubt be thoroughly investigated before English shareholders, at least, will embark their money in it; and as they will inevitably find that the route round the

Cape is infinitely preferable for commercial purposes, we may rest assured that the canal will never be executed; or, if it were opened, it would, as in ancient times, soon be closed again, as it could never pay its working expenses."<sup>3.</sup>

To this decisive settlement of the question was added an argument to prove that even if it was possible to construct the canal it could not be done without British assistance. "One of the forms that diplomatic fears on this subject seem to have taken, is that the execution of the canal would immensely increase French influence in Egypt. It has been proposed and advocated by Frenchmen. A Frenchman has obtained the concession; and it may be executed by French engineers and French workmen. All this might in some degree be true, if a body of French capitalists could be found who would of themselves subscribe the eight millions sterling needed, in the first instance, for the project, with the tolerable certainty of twice that sum being called for before it is completed.

The probability is, however, that it could not be undertaken without the assistance of English capital, and that would not be given unless English interests were fairly represented in the undertaking. But even if this were not the case, the French company would very soon find out that they were wholly dependent on British commerce for their returns - three-fourths, if not nine-tenths, of all the shipping that would pass through the canal would belong to this country; and it is only by conciliating English interests that success could be hoped for."<sup>4.</sup>

On December 18th, 1854, the Egyptian correspondent to The

3. The Edinburgh Review, 1856, vol. 103. Page 256  
 4. The Edinburgh Review, 1856, vol. 103. " 264.

Times wrote that the Viceroy had granted a firman to M. de Lesseps to construct a ship canal through the Isthmus of Suez; the details of the enterprise were given but the writer feared that, owing to the fact that the Crimean War was engaging the attention of Europe, M. de Lesseps would receive little encouragement for his plan from the Governments of the various countries. "It is not unlikely that Said Pasha gave his consent so readily because His Highness saw no probability of the work being ever commenced, and it must also be considered that Said Pasha's consent requires confirmation by the Sultan at Constantinople, where political interests may induce the European<sup>5.</sup> ministers to advise the Porte to withhold it." At the close of the article there is a paragraph which shows the annoyance which was felt when it was considered that the canal would offer competition of a serious nature to the railway, an English scheme, "The propounders of the canal scheme are fully alive to the necessity of the railway being completed to Suez, before they can begin their work and therefore instead of opposing it, as was their wont, they now urge the Pasha to take steps to finish it at once."<sup>6.</sup>

The correspondent wrote again on January 17th, 1855, "The original report presented by M. de Lesseps to Said Pasha is superficial and crude and he does not condescend to enter into any particulars about the cost nor the direction the canal will take. On the other hand, it abounds in terms of honour and glory to Said Pasha. It says that the names of the builders of the Pyramids have been forgotten, but the name of the Prince who shall open this canal will be

5. The Times, December 8th, 1854.

6. The Times, December 8th, 1854.



blessed from century to century.-----Said Pasha has acted unwisely in so readily countenancing the scheme and in his firman he has granted Monsieur de Lesseps and his company all the land they can bring under cultivation by means of a subsidiary fresh water canal, while this land is virtually the Sultan's, not the Pasha's, to give away.<sup>7.</sup>

In February, 1855 the railway across the Isthmus was completed. This enterprise, as an English undertaking, had been favoured, rather than the canal, and attempts had been made to prove that the railway would make the journey shorter than the canal could. The same article said that "The scheme of the canal across the Isthmus of Suez is no longer talked of and it is believed that Said Pasha has received from Constantinople a very unfavourable answer to his communication about it."<sup>8.</sup>

The Times published an extract in December, 1858, from the Leeds Mercury, which said that "Lesseps should have been a rich man or a despot, tortured with a magnificent conception, and neither rich enough to realize it himself nor strong enough to compel others to realize it, nor even persuasive enough to make people attempt it even"<sup>9.</sup> The article referred to the impracticability of the plan and the hopelessness of expecting any financial returns "However base and sordid Britons may be, they certainly would not be deterred from promoting a scheme which might be favourable to the interests of a friendly power, if they could only satisfy themselves that base and sordid gain was to be made out of it. We think our English engineers not easily discouraged by difficulties; we believe when they declare<sup>10.</sup> a thing impracticable it is impracticable."

- 7. The Times, January 17th, 1855.
- 8. The Times, January 17th, 1855.
- 9. The Times, December 2nd, 1858.
- 10. The Times, December 2nd, 1858.

In the issue of The Times for December 3rd, 1858, Mr. Lange stated that the subscription list had closed on November 30th, and that the sum subscribed had exceeded the required amount. The work did not begin at once, however, for in March, 1859 the paper reported that "The Progreso announces that the Viceroy has rejected the written application of Monsieur de Lesseps for permission to commence the work of the Suez Canal, and that the Engineer-in-Chief has tendered his resignation."<sup>11.</sup> A despatch from the Egyptian correspondent to The Times, later in the year, said that de Lesseps had announced that the work had begun; the Viceroy had not received the consent of the Sultan, and he had sent a letter to the consuls requesting them to prevent the subjects of the countries which they represented from taking part in the work. The despatch ended by saying that the correspondent feared that the French consul was beginning to use his influence. The name of the correspondent to The Times in Egypt is not given, but his attitude seemed to be one of opposition and distrust.

Monsieur de Lesseps said that the Viceroy should not have granted the firman unless he was prepared to let the work proceed. It was begun, and by September 9th, 1859 an article appeared in The Times, criticizing a pamphlet by Mr. Lange, in which he said that the work had begun and that it would go on "although the illegitimate interference of the British representatives in Turkey and Egypt has, for the time being, obstructed the work, an appeal to the protection of the Governments of those countries financially interested in the undertaking is to be the remedy against this abuse of political influence. Mr. Lange said in his pamphlet that, at the meeting of the shareholders in Paris, the question would be asked why the work had

11. The Times, March 28th, 1859.

been interrupted. The answer would be "that this circumstance is owing to the interference of the British Government in Turkey and Egypt, an interference, moreover, respecting the legitimacy of which there exists a great diversity of opinion in the British Cabinet itself and which, besides, has been denounced by several of its members in Parliament as unconstitutional."<sup>12.</sup> The Times, in criticizing this statement, said, "We are able to make the case our own; the Euphrates Railway and Indian Junction Telegraph have both been crushed in deference, as it is believed, to the determined opposition of France. The shareholders of these two did not suggest that nations be thrown into conflict."<sup>13.</sup> The article ended by saying that, "Setting aside all hostile predictions of engineering authorities, Monsieur de Less-eps would deceive himself if he expected to get a single important subscription from this country. Modern preferences are for railways rather than canals, and those conversant with the Eastern question are satisfied that the Euphrates route will prove the true channel of future commerce, and that it would ultimately starve the Suez work, even if the latter had any prospect of financial success."<sup>14.</sup>

On December 16th, 1859, there appeared in The Times the article which caused Lord Palmerston to write to Mr. Delane, deploring the favourable opinions of the editor upon the subject of the Suez Canal. Mr. Delane wrote "Future ages will be strangely perplexed at the history of the Suez Canal scheme in the 19th century. The conception of uniting the East and the West by cleaving through the Egyptian Isthmus is one of the oldest and most famous of such ideas

12. The Times, September 9th, 1859.

13. The Times, September 9th, 1859.

14. The Times, September 9th, 1859.

on record, and the works of Monsieur de Lesseps' Canal, whether perfect or otherwise, would only contribute one more monument of industry or delusion to the many similar memorials discoverable on that celebrated soil. But the scheme of our times will differ in this from all previous schemes - that it is made the subject of high political contest. The historian of after days will read that a simple engineering problem, instead of being regarded in its natural light, or at least as a commercial speculation, was brought within the purview of high and mighty Administrations; that one great nation was said to push it forward with incredible vigour, and another to oppose it with equally incredible tenacity; that Cabinets were all but quarreling over the question; and that it was actually now and then considered as a possible cause for war. Finally, and by way of completing his bewilderment, he will ascertain that on a particular day the Ambassadors of five European Powers made common cause in requesting the Government of the Sultan to authorize the project, and thus place the work in train for actual commencement. Now, how could such a scheme have acquired such a character? What interest could any state have, excepting Turkey itself, in treating this enterprise as a national undertaking? What could induce one great nation to promote it with such inexplicable energy, and above all, what could have persuaded another nation - the Mistress of India and the most commercial state on the face of the globe - to oppose a work by which it would be the greatest gainer?

We may well expect this mystery to prove inscrutable some centuries hence, when we find it beyond reach of elucidation even at the present moment. Perhaps there has been misconception on both sides. Perhaps France has been ascribing an imaginary policy to England, and England to France, though it is certainly not unreasonable

to impute a political character to a scheme where a commercial character is so utterly unsustainable, not to mention that Monsieur de Girardin, in the very latest exposition of French policy, has openly described the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez as "the defect in the British cuirass". Now, certainly, if as our opponents thus tell us the object of the scheme is to deal us a deadly blow through our shattered defences, we need no further justification for our opposition.----But we must decline to accept this hypothesis. We do not think the Canal, if it could ever be completed, would do us any damage, but rather the contrary.<sup>15.</sup>"

The attitude of The Times to the question for the next nine years was a curious mixture of praise and blame; the correspondent in Egypt was frankly hostile, and it was not till the canal was nearing completion that the reports from Egypt were of a nature more favourable to the enterprise, but whether this change was due to the fact that the representative of the English paper had become convinced of the success of the project or whether a new appointment had been made to that position, it seems impossible to tell. There appeared articles at intervals which gave some encouragement to the scheme, but most were skeptical of success. Mr. Lange was very faithful in supplying The Times with information as to the progress of the work, nor did he fail to correct any statement which he believed to be unfair to the project.

A meeting of the shareholders of the company was held at Paris in June, 1860, at which Monsieur de Lesseps complimented those who had invested money in Canal shares on their intelligence in discerning the material advantages of the scheme; the despatch of the

correspondent in Egypt, following the meeting, said that the Canal company was in financial difficulties, despite the report of its president, and he felt that the shareholders were to be complimented, assuredly, on their intelligence in appreciating the advantages to be gained from their investments, for it was an intelligence possessed by none of the capitalists of the other nations.

By the end of that year another leading article was devoted to the subject of the canal which was sarcastic in its tone as to the slow progress of the work, and ended by saying that it was not necessary to take shares and that the British merchants were prepared to pay toll when the canal was open for traffic. The month of December brought gloomy reports of the progress from Egypt, and it was reported that people were losing interest in the project there. The correspondent wrote of "the singular contrast afforded between the intense eagerness with which the subject and everything connected with it was at one time discussed, and the cold indifference with which it is now treated."<sup>16.</sup>

The question of forced labour was never explained very satisfactorily, and a report was sent to England saying that, although the labour was to be voluntary, an eye-witness supplied the correspondent with the information that the men were handed over to the Company in gangs, and those who had escaped from the train were brought back to their taskmasters. The writer thought that very likely the labour was supplied by the Viceroy, as payment for his shares in the company. The subject was revived in July, 1862, when an article in The Times said, "It is suggested that, looking at the circumstances which have usually attended Egyptian labour on the public

works, it would be satisfactory if some precise information could be furnished as to the conditions, whether perfectly voluntary or otherwise, on which these persons are employed. Just at this time the labour of 25,000 men would in that country probably prove singularly remunerative, if devoted to an extension of the cultivation of cotton and grain."

<sup>17.</sup> This criticism caused de Lesseps to obtain a document from the heads of the native labour in which they said that the labourers were working voluntarily, that they had plenty of fresh water and that provisions were provided at a fixed price.

A letter appeared in the columns of The Times from Frankland Hood which said that the writer had seen labourers taken to work in crowded boats, while the women of the family were left on the banks, wailing, and he had had constant applications asking that a son, husband, or brother might be excused from work on the Canal. The letter ended with the remark, "I am only sorry that so much valuable labour should be thrown away on such a scheme as that of the Suez Canal." The uncertain position of the labourer and the suggestion of slavery must have had an influence upon English support of the project, and a later article said, "There is no disguising, hardly any denying, that it is by slavery that this canal is to be made. On that account <sup>18.</sup> alone England should not take any part in the work."

In the summer of 1863 the Porte objected to the land bordering on the canal being given over to the company, and it was agreed that the company should retain only the land which was necessary for the working of the canal. The Emperor Napoleon acted as arbitrator and the Viceroy consented to compensate the Company by a money payment

17. The Times, July 25th, 1862

18. The Times, August 2nd, 1862.

The Times assumed a more favourable attitude to the project from that time although the articles dealing with the subject of the canal were not devoid of a spirit of opposition. As an example of the more favourable light in which the project was regarded, when the members of the Chamber of Commerce were invited to view the progress of the work on the canal, The Times said "The event is in all respects one of the most interesting and important of those which include the whole world in the range of their benefits and their influence----Strange to say the British public, who have thrown away countless millions and are still throwing them away on schemes hardly more promising at home, have never betrayed any similar enthusiasm for a spot of such singular importance to ourselves as merchants, and such interest as Christians and scholars."<sup>19</sup> These sentences seemed more encouraging, yet the same article contained a reference to slavery, and also a paragraph on the position of France in Egypt, "Whatever happens to the canal, whether it ever be completed or not, whether fleets, or not a single keel pass through, the French acquire a footing there upon the most central and commanding point of the Old World."<sup>20</sup> This mingling of commendation and condemnation was characteristic of a great deal which the paper published regarding the Suez Canal.

The magazines contributed very little to the subject of the Canal, but in 1860 an article appeared in Fraser's Magazine. It did not discuss the political considerations of the question, but gave an account of the ancient canals, the engineering difficulties which

19. The Times, April 7th, 1865.

20. The Times, April 7th, 1865.



confronted Monsieur de Lesseps, and the possibility of the canal serving a useful purpose. In 1864 Chamber's Journal published an article on the Suez Canal which was very much like the contribution in Fraser's Magazine. There occurred one sentence which the author of the article believed described the French attitude. "The French were not satisfied with Mr. Stephenson's decision, nor, truth to tell, did they very much relish the introduction of English influence into that region."<sup>21.</sup> The writer did not realize, probably, that by changing three words, substituting English for French, Monsieur de Lesseps for Mr. Stephenson, and French for English, he would have stated very accurately the English attitude to the enterprise.

An appeal from Monsieur de Lesseps for a new loan in 1867 drew forth a pessimistic leading article from The Times which said, "In the same breath as the project of the Suez Canal was proposed as a profitable investment to English capitalists, it was also described on the Continent as an achievement fraught with signal advantages to the countries bordering on the Mediterranean and consequently with detriment to the nations inhabiting the north-eastern coast of the Atlantic, especially to England.----That the Suez Canal may be finished is what we all hope, but it is what few, if any, of us even now can confidently assert. But whether it will pay is a question which this fresh application for English funds ought to solve to every man's satisfaction."<sup>22.</sup>

The opinions of English visitors to Egypt who had visited the canal in course of construction were published, and were favourable to the project. Lord Clarence Paget visited the canal and expressed his appreciation of the greatness and utility of the enterprise. The Duke of St. Albans believed that people were not informed properly

21. Chamber's Journal, 1864, vol.41. Page 61.

22. The Times, October 10th, 1867.

concerning the project. As for himself, he said "I came as a skeptic<sup>23.</sup> and leave as a true believer in the completion within a short time." An objection was raised in The Times to the inadequate reports concerning the Suez Canal which seemed to confirm the Duke of St. Albans' opinion that the British public were in ignorance as to the facts concerning the enterprise.

The French people and especially those interested in the canal scheme were disappointed at the lack of interest, even of hostility which England displayed. The Times published the reports of the company at Paris, and the comments upon the British policy. At the meeting held in July 1863 de Lesseps said that the note from the Porte concerning the question of forced labour and the canal lands which had been given to the company, might have been countersigned by Sir Henry Bulwer. The account in the English paper said that "He, (Monsieur de Lesseps) compared what he called the jealous and meddling policy of the British Cabinet with the support given to the<sup>24.</sup> undertaking by the French Government." A further report gave part of the president's speech, in which he said, "Our adversaries, influenced by purely egotistical motives and excluded by their insular position from the march of continental ideas, never imagined that for the men at your head and for all of you, without exception, the grand<sup>25.</sup> motive of our enterprise is the good to be done." This statement The Times criticized by saying that they thought the project was a trading company, not a benevolent society. At a banquet in Paris in 1864

23. The Times, March 27th, 1863.

24. The Times, July 20th, 1863.

25. The Times, August 14th, 1863.

Monsieur de Lesseps, in the course of his speech, spoke of the position of England; he said that one must not confound the nation with the Government. The English people were interested in great things and loved liberty, "but the people had not a Government worthy of them."<sup>26.</sup> Despite this charitable opinion as to the cause for the lack of English support, it is difficult to see why de Lesseps felt that he had the English nation with him in his project, as he said on another occasion, for there is little if any evidence of a desire on the part of the British public to support the plan either by subscribing capital or agitating for the Government to change its attitude.

By the year 1868 it seemed certain that the canal would be completed and opened for traffic in a very short time, and opinion in England on the project began to change. The generally accepted excuse for the change of attitude was the theory that, owing to the changes which had been made in the concession for the construction of the canal, removing most of the political complications, Britain was able to regard the project with favour and part of the blame for English hostility was laid at the door of France for suggesting that France had any intention of striking at British power. Mr. John Fowler in an article said, "Few works of private enterprise have caused so much political discussion and excitement. Since the time when Lord Palmerston, in the true interests of Egypt and England, and indeed, of all other countries, drew attention to the terms of the concession originally proposed for this work, many changes have been made, both in their political and territorial character."<sup>27.</sup> One sentence in an article in The Times---"When it is remembered that Lord

26. The Times, February 15th, 1864.

27. The Times, February 18th, 1869.

Palmerston was almost vehement in his opposition to the project, it may be supposed there were valid reasons against it"<sup>28.</sup>---was the true reason, perhaps, for the British attitude; the public which reposed its confidence in Palmerston would believe that if he opposed the scheme he must have had good reason for so doing, and with that they were content. A scheme which appeared to be an impossible one from a physical point of view was not likely to find support from the English nation, when, in addition, it had opposed to it the weight of Lord Palmerston's displeasure.

In the leading article of The Times for June 22nd, 1868, it was admitted that the canal would be completed, and that the old fears could be forgotten, but the question which was of interest was, whether the returns would justify the enormous outlay. "We have outlived the controversies originally attending this great scheme, and can afford to laugh at some of the perils prophesied. At the same time, it must be remembered that the alarm was none of our raising. The promoters of the project were themselves the first to declare that it portended in some dark and mysterious manner, the ruin of England. How that could be it seemed profitless to inquire. To all appearance, any scheme which facilitated the communication between Europe and the East must be of advantage chiefly to the people most engaged in the traffic - that is, to ourselves; and yet, however incredible the argument may now seem, it is perfectly certain that the Suez Canal was not only represented but regarded in France as a political instrument available against this country. Appeal was made in its behalf not only to the interest but to the patriotism of Frenchmen, who were invited to extend French influence, and consoli-

28. The Times, August 4th, 1863.

date French power at the expense of England, by cutting a ship canal through the sands of the desert.---The Suez Canal may, or may not, be a monument to French enterprise, a wonder of the world, and a legacy of our world to remote posterity - all this is nothing. The only question is will it ever pay?---Will it pay its way as a "going concern", defray its own charges, and leave a profit besides? Is it safe against all future competition? When the Red Sea has been really united with the Mediterranean will nobody object to the roundabout route by way of Suez and Aden, and call for a direct route by the Euphrates valley, instead of the tedious circuit of the loop-line?<sup>29.</sup> Those are the questions which will be discussed nowadays."

## Chapter VI.

## France and England at the Opening of the Canal.

The Emperor Napoleon III had enjoyed a measure of popularity in England as the ally of that country during the Crimean War. He had won the friendship of the Queen, and he derived a sense of satisfaction from the knowledge of his amicable relations with England. His position as Emperor in the opening years of his reign was a difficult one, for it was uncertain how he would be received by the Courts of Europe, and the friendly feelings which existed between the monarchs of England and France, after the Queen's early prejudices against the successor of the Orleans family had been overcome, gave Napoleon a feeling of security. This pleasant relation was not destined to last.

Two years after the Crimean War, in which France and England had been allies, was concluded by the Peace of Paris, 1856, France was shocked by the attempted assassination of the Emperor by an Italian, Orsini. Unfortunately Orsini had lived in England for a time, where he planned the outrage and bought the bombs to be used. The French people, and especially officers of the army, were aroused by this incident to a fever pitch of excitement and indignation, and demanded that England, which had sheltered the assassin, should take prompt measures to prevent any similar occurrence. The letters of congratulations which the army sent to the Emperor were very extreme in their demands against England. The demands of France irritated the English people and the old feeling of distrust which had disappeared during the Crimean War, revived.

As a result of the uneasiness which was felt with regard to French ambitions, there were plans for strengthening the defences of England against a possible invasion. In addition to the other causes

for this precaution, there was the knowledge that France had been building a great naval dockyard at Cherbourg, which far surpassed any of the English fortifications. The Prince Consort, in a letter to Baron Stockmar, after a visit to France, expressed the general opinion when he wrote "Cherbourg is a gigantic work that gives one grave cause for reflection. The works at Alderney, by way of counter-defence, look childish."<sup>1</sup>.

The Emperor was very friendly and tried to show his sincerity by his offers of assistance during the Indian Mutiny, when Lord Clarendon wrote to the Queen, "That the Emperor would cause the Sultan and the Pasha to be informed of the pleasure with which he would hear of facilities being afforded to your Majesty's troops, in passing through Egypt, and that he was quite willing that they should pass through France, if it would be any convenience, or likely to accelerate their arrival in India."<sup>2</sup>.

When the Emperor undertook the work of helping Italy in her struggle for liberation, the English fears were not quieted, for there came to the minds of many, no doubt, the thought of the policy of the first Napoleon in Italy. As a result of this action on the part of France, a movement for a volunteer force was begun, which might be an added defence in case of France displaying any warlike tendency towards England. When Savoy and Nice became part of France there was still greater dismay, but the Emperor did not wish to sever friendly relations with England. England remained neutral during the war for Italian liberation, but in a letter to Lord Derby, Disraeli says that he had received news from Paris that the Emperor desired England to enter into a treaty for the settlement of Italian affairs. This, Mr Disraeli felt, was very unwise, but he showed

1. The Life of the Prince Consort - Sir Theodore Martin,  
Vol.IV, Chap LXXX page 122
2. The Life of the Prince Consort - Sir Theodore Martin,  
Vol.IV, Chap.LXXX. page 131.

how anxious the Emperor was that it should be arranged; he wrote "Such a treaty will, I think, be looked upon by this country with very great suspicion, to use the mildest term; and I should think the Cabinet will hesitate before they enter into it. But the Emperor is positive and peremptory. It is the only way by which he can extricate himself, with dash and lustre, from his difficulties, and he offers everything - Suez Canal to be opposed; peace between Spain and Morocco, etc, etc, and government by us to be always impossible. It will be rather ludicrous, after the volunteers and the 10 million loan, should the new session be inaugurated with not only une entente cordiale, but an absolute alliance."<sup>3.</sup>

Despite the efforts of Napoleon to strengthen friendly relations between England and France, there existed a sense of suspicion and distrust towards France, which was not removed, and it is not surprising that when the Canal was opened in 1869, England was not enthusiastic.

Elaborate preparations were made for the opening ceremonies on November 16th, 1869. The Empress Eugénie, with members of the royal families of many of the countries of Europe, was to proceed through the Canal to the Red Sea on November 17th. It had been suggested in June, 1869, that the Prince of Wales and Prince Arthur should represent England at the opening of the Suez Canal; this plan was never carried out and the only official representative of England present was Sir Henry Elliot, British Ambassador to Turkey. The position which England occupied in the ceremonies was not an exalted one but it could hardly be expected that it should be otherwise after her persistent opposition to the project. There was an attempt made to

3. Life of Benjamin Disraeli - Monypenny and Buckle, vol.IV, page 316.



praise Monsieur de Lesseps for his work, and although The Times described him as "the man to whom so much was due, whose genius, fortitude, and almost superhuman energy contending against innumerable odds, had carried him through years of toil and difficulty to such a glorious end,"<sup>4.</sup> it was a belated recognition which could not have been very acceptable. "The Illustrated London News" gave several sketches of the most important events of the opening, the religious ceremony which was twofold, providing for a service by the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church and one by the Mohammedan priests, the illumination of the ships at night, and the procession of the ships through the Canal.

A letter appeared in The Times which commented on the subdued and insignificant position of Britain at the opening ceremonies; the writer felt that it was worse than being left out of the pageant altogether. He said, "It is impossible to say we have not deserved all this,"<sup>5.</sup> and the article pointed out that England should learn to refrain from opposing an enterprise which she did not want to undertake herself. The canal had been proved a feasible plan and British merchants prepared to make use of the new highway to the East. An article in the same journal said "We may state that one of the principal steamship companies in Liverpool is having several vessels built expressly for the Suez Canal traffic."<sup>6.</sup>

Sir Henry Elliot who represented Britain at the opening of the Suez Canal described the lavish and extravagant entertainments which Ismail Pasha provided for the visitors. The British Ambassador

4. The Times, November 30th, 1869.

5. The Times, December 17th, 1869. The writer of the letter felt that if England was to reassert her position she ought to urge the construction of the railway to India (The Euphrates Valley Line)

6. The Times, November 15th, 1869.

believed that the vast sums of money spent helped to bring the Pasha to the state of bankruptcy which enabled Disraeli to buy the shares in the Company for England. In an account of his experiences published in 1900, Sir Henry gave his opinions on the project of the Suez Canal; he seemed convinced of the desire on the part of France to strike a blow at England's power, and he believed that the Pasha had assisted in the scheme, relying upon the help of France against the authority of the Porte. He wrote, "The canal which has proved of so vast a benefit to England had been conceived by Lesseps under the conviction that it would deal a fatal blow to our carrying trade with India and China, and that Marseilles would replace London, as the entrepôt of the world for all Eastern produce. He went about France enlarging upon this theme, and the subscriptions he got from his countrymen were given under the impression of the injury the canal would do to a rival whom many of them hated, and of whom all of them were jealous.

Lord Palmerston's ill-judged opposition to the scheme only stimulated the anxiety of the French to carry it out. When it was completed, they, and Lesseps in particular, had a right to exult in the triumph over what was universally considered the selfish policy of England in opposing a magnificent work for advancing the commerce of the world.

The Khedive Ismail Pasha had always relied upon the French in his efforts to shake off the authority of the Porte-----He knew that he could not achieve the independence of the Sultan, at which he was aiming, without the countenance of France, and he expended fabulous sums in order to secure it. There was hardly a newspaper in Paris that was not largely subsidised, and all the men such as De Morny, Fleury, and others who were supposed to possess the ear of the Emper-

or received enormous and regularly paid stipends, of which after the fall of the Empire, I obtained the details from the Khedive's own Ministers; but, large as the sums were, they sank into insignificance when compared with what he was induced to give for the furtherance of the pet French scheme of the Suez Canal.<sup>7.</sup> Sir Henry believed that Ismail Pasha was aware of the loss of revenue which the Canal would mean, for by the old system Egypt had benefited by the passengers who crossed the Isthmus by railway, but the Canal meant that passengers and cargoes would pass through without landing in Egypt, and employing the services of Egyptian workmen. He wrote "Ismail Pasha must have foreseen all this, but he was ready to pay anything to realize his dream of independence, which he could not hope for without the support of France; and this he endeavoured to purchase by lavish contributions to the canal scheme."<sup>8.</sup>

A despatch from Cairo said that "Lord Clarendon has addressed to Monsieur de Lesseps the congratulations of the British Government on the completion of the Suez Canal, adding that in so doing he expresses the sentiments both of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, and the English public."<sup>9.</sup> This official message was sent as a matter of courtesy, but the feeling of the public in general must have been disturbed, for the plan which had been opposed and cried down had proved successful, and England's share in the ceremonies was so insignificant that, in a delicate and subtle manner, it placed her in the background in the rejoicings. No one could have imagined how great was to be England's triumph ultimately in the question of control of that high-

7. Some Revolutions and other Experiences - Sir Henry Elliot, Chapter VIII. pages 188 & 189
8. Some Revolutions and other Experiences - Sir Henry Elliot, Chapter VIII. page 190.
9. The Times, December 18th, 1869.

way to the East. In 1869 she occupied the unenviable position of one who has been proved to be decisively in the wrong, in so far as the possibility of accomplishing the project was concerned.

In his account of the Suez Canal, Sir Henry Stanley in speaking of the attitude of Englishmen to the scheme said, "According to them the Suez Canal was a failure and would forever remain one unless English engineers took hold of it and English gold carried it through!"<sup>10</sup> This sentence expresses that sense of superiority which was prevalent among the British people and made them believe that no project could be successful which was not British in its origin.

There was the feeling still that, even if the Canal should prove to be a great benefit to English commerce, it was a menace to England's position in the East, nevertheless, for the French naval policy could not fail to create a feeling of uneasiness in England. In a cartoon which had appeared in "Punch" for November 27th, 1869, the general feeling was expressed; the picture showed France and Britannia watching the ships passing through the Canal. France said to her companion "See what it unites", but Britannia's reply was "Think what it may divide."

The project from its beginning had received no support from England. The visits to the commercial cities had brought no results, the resolution in favour of the project had been defeated in the House of Commons, the journals had given no support during the first years of the work, and when success seemed assured, there had been only meagre encouragement. Lord Palmerston had opposed it, which

10. My Early Travels and Adventures - Sir Henry Stanley, vol.II. Chap.2, page 27.

influenced members of Parliament, no doubt, and still more his influence spread to the British public whose hero he was. Whether the suspicion towards France would have been sufficient to prevent them from favouring the project, it is difficult to say, but there can be little doubt that his opinions created a feeling of opposition in the public mind which increased their sense of distrust towards a scheme which they believed to be the result of French influence. The fears that were entertained as to the effect the canal would have upon English power, proved to be groundless and the judgement which was given, considering the matter in the light of after events, could be expressed in the words of Sir Henry Stanley's essay, "The most specious arguments have been urged against this canal by Englishmen, special engineers, officials of all classes, special correspondents and others, all of whom appear to have absorbed the prejudice of Palmerston. This is loyalty to their old premier, but it is not good sense." <sup>11.</sup> It would seem more just, however, to judge the British public from the point of view of the time in which the controversy was carried on. The British people did not preserve their loyalty despite a consciousness of the error of Lord Palmerston's views, but their confidence in his foreign policy for England assured them that, in following his opinions, they were acting in the best interests of their country.

11. My Early Travels and Adventures - Sir Henry Stanley, vol.II, Chap. 2, Page 27.

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