On the Political, Military, and Commercial Importance of the Euphrates Route to India

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Friday, July 31st, 1857

COLONEL THE HONOURABLE JAMES LINDSAY in the Chair.

ON THE POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE OF THE EUPHRATES ROUTE TO INDIA.*

By MAJOR-GENERAL CHESNEY, R.A. D.C.L. and F.R.S.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I HOPE you will not be alarmed on looking at the formidable size of the sheet before you. An extensive line of country requires a good deal of paper, yet I fear that the fifteen feet by twelve Map before you will do but very imperfect justice to the illustration of the important, and, at this moment, the all-absorbing, subject of our communication with India.

The Diagram before you, as you will at once perceive, extends from London to Delhi and Calcutta.

The blue line shows the existing railroad through Germany, and also that proposed to be laid down along the Euphrates, as well as some of the Indian lines.

The red lines are those of powerful steamers, to run at each end of the termini of the railways.

The small yellow lines are those of the electric telegraph, one going across Asia Minor to the Persian Gulf, and on to the Indus; a second from the Orontes also to the Indus; and a third passing down the Red Sea, and rounding Arabia to Kurrachee.

When all these shall be completed, passengers and mails—even with our present class of steamers—may be conveyed from London to Kurrachee in thirteen days and a half; and if by laying down electric wires we can, within the short space of eighteen or twenty hours, be assured of the welfare of some dear friend or relative who is in a distant part of India, two great objects will have been accomplished, which only a few years back, even the wonders of Aladdin's lamp, aided by the boldest and highest flights of fancy, could hardly have enabled us to imagine.

However, the fullest and most complete realization of these

* On account of the importance of this subject at the present time, the above lecture has been printed out of its order of date.

palpable advantages—which realization is probably close at hand—will be but a small part of the changes which must result therefrom. In fact, the construction of the intended railway is but *a part* of the question before us. It is far beyond any human power to fore-shadow even faintly the changes which will follow the opening of a highway, and the annihilation of time and space, between the *East and the West*.

I cannot therefore expect or even hope to do anything like justice to the wide field which has fallen to my lot, of endeavouring to call your attention to the *political, military, commercial*, and, may I not add, the *social* importance of the Euphrates Valley route to India.

It is impossible to name this region of our globe without hosts of recollections of the past crowding upon our minds. To these, however, I shall but very briefly allude.

But we cannot name the Euphrates without remembering that we are there carried back to the earliest seat of mankind, to the *original spring* of *all* that has since flourished, and extended over our globe; in a word, to *Eden*, with its *rivers* which were “parted and became into four heads;” for the Hebrew equally bears the translation of a mass of waters. We see them now before us, and the very words of Moses describe them as truly now as they did when he wrote them.

The Halys, once the Pison, “compassing the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, and bdellium (ascertained to be the pearl), and the onyx stone.”

The Gihon, “that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia,” or Asiatic Cush, now the Arast, or Araxes, from Araxenes, son of Armenac.

The Hiddekel, or Tigris, so named from its well-known swiftness, and going as of old “towards the east of Assyria” and the Euphrates.

“And the fourth river is Euphrates,” as if this name, expressing everything, required no description from the inspired historian. Those who have seen it can well understand this; the great and noble river, destined to become the highway of nations, of commerce, and renewed civilization to the countries it traverses and fertilises.

To the Arab, the word *Frat* still *says* everything, and *is* everything.

The sources of these four rivers are not far distant from each other, nor from Mount Ararat. Two of them still bear their Mosaic

names; and the fourth river washes the remains of antediluvian Sippara as well as those of Babylon—the Babel of the Arabs.

Near its banks are also the remains of the other three primeval cities of Erech, Akkad, and Kalneh.

It may seem strange to speak of the remains of an antediluvian city. But we know that Berossus places Sippara in Babylonia; and Captain Lynch ascertained that the Arabs still preserve the name of this city in their Sifera, as they have also retained those of Babel, Akkad, and Kalneh. And these antediluvian remains will seem less strange if we recollect that the Deluge does not appear to have effected any great physical changes in the earth's surface. We know from Scripture that the olive-trees remained standing, and that the vine brought forth her fruit almost immediately after the subsidence of the waters.

In connection with the Euphrates and Babylonia we have the dispersion of mankind, and the peopling of Arabia and Assyria. We have the first empire of history—that of Nimrud the Assyrian. We have the earliest astronomical observations, so long preserved in Babylon—all this before coming to the departure of Abraham from Haran into Syria and Arabia, where he already found a numerous population—a proof, if any were wanting, of how rapidly population has spread and increased in a country so calculated by climate and natural advantages to foster its progress.

Later, we are reminded of the consolidation of Media, Assyria, Babylonia, Syria, and Phœnicia, under Cyrus the Great; and still later we find ourselves going over the conquests of Xerxes, following the younger Cyrus in his passage of the Euphrates at Thapsacus, and then retracing the battle of Cunaxa, and the retreat of the Ten Thousand.

With the reign of Alexander, however, we come to the first historical connection between Europe and India by this route.

He first *showed* us the feasibility of marching a large army by the line of the Euphrates to India.

From Egypt, Alexander advanced on the Euphrates, and crossed it at Thapsacus, where it is now proposed that one of the railway bridges should cross the river; marched and fought at Arbela; took Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis, and subjected the whole of Persia.

He saw and showed its importance in his great military operations. He overran Parthia, Media, Bactria, and advanced to the borders of the Caspian.

He crossed the Oxus and Jaxartes, and wintered in Bokhara. Thence he invaded India. What he did, others may now do also; unless indeed we fail to profit by the lesson to be learnt from the campaigns of this great warrior.

On the revolt of his troops he descended the Hydaspes and Indus, and commenced his homeward march.

We must not forget the voyage of Nearchus; we have had pilots by sea as well as our great pioneer by land in the proposed line. He marched on through Gedrosia to Susiana, where he was joined by Nearchus; and then his comprehensive mind saw the advantages of opening a trade with India, of planting colonies, and building cities in these fertile regions; and he did both. We must now follow him to the Lamlum marshes of the Euphrates, which remain unchanged to this day. The steamers of the expedition of 1835-36 navigated them with difficulty; and ague and fever, such as that which cost Alexander his life, still prevail in their neighbourhood. But a canal cut through these marshes would change this part of the country entirely; and I proposed to effect this by some such means.

While we in the present day march with such difficulty, and with such loss of men and horses, we are startled to find on a careful calculation that Alexander's army marched during these conquests 19,020 miles.

We must, however, bear in mind that Asiatics are capable of bearing much more fatigue in this way than ourselves, and I have myself had proof of this in the Persian army, which I have known to march 40 miles a-day for several consecutive days.

After the death of Alexander Seleucus became possessed of Western Asia, and we will pass over more than two centuries to come to the invasion of Arabia by Crassus—51 years before Christ. The Romans had discovered, as we have now done, that "Europe is no longer the world; and that the true key to the possession of the world is the Valley of the Euphrates and Tigris."

With a view to its conquest, Trajan proceeded to the East. He wintered in Antioch, took Nisibis, Edessa, and Ptesiphon, and,

descending the Euphrates, he cut a canal between the rivers, called the Nahr-Malcha, and took his ships along it, and then down the Tigris to the Persian Gulf.

Next in review we see Zenobia pass before us, defeated in the plains of Antioch, her cavalry struggling among thistles, which rose above their heads, as they still would do.

Palmyra falls; and an interval of ten years brings us to the invasion of Julian the Apostate, and his descent of the Euphrates. According to Gibbon, he constructed a fleet on the Khabour, consisting of fifty large vessels of war, and 600 boats of wood and 500 of osier, covered with leather.

These boats, described by Herodotus, are still in use on the Euphrates.

On the 7th of April, A.D. 363, Julian encountered a most terrific hurricane on the river, at a spot answering to the present El Kaim above Anah; and it is remarkable that it was apparently nearly at the same spot that the expedition which I had the honour of commanding was visited by a similar and equally fearful hurricane, in May, 1836.

After the siege of Perisabour, we must follow Julian's fleet through the Nahr-Malcha, which he had previously cleared out, down the Tigris to Seleucia. Here he burnt his fleet, and commenced his retreat. His death followed. Jovian succeeded to the command, and crossed the Euphrates with great difficulty at Dura or Tekrit.

From this period, A.D. 363, we have no record of any great military expedition in connection with Western Asia until Napoleon conceived the idea, in 1809, of transporting a force down the Euphrates, with a view to the invasion of India. All his calculations and arrangements were made for this end. His troops were to have been transported on rafts constructed of timber cut down in the vicinity of the sea coast, and on the banks of the river.

With a little of his daring we might do the same at this moment, and with much greater facility.

The garrisons in the Mediterranean might readily spare 7,400 men; of these 2,400 might go through Egypt, and 5,000 could be conveyed to the mouth of the Orontes in a few days. They

would then have before them a march of 110 miles, with ample means of transport to the river.* Pontoons, native rafts, and boats would carry the force down to the Persian Gulf in less than fifteen days. There, native vessels could be found to transport them to Kurrachée by a safe and rapid navigation at this season.

A few words will suffice to explain my first connection with the Euphrates.

In 1830 the late Consul-General Cartwright placed some queries in my hands respecting the relative advantages of the Red Sea and Euphrates lines of communication with India, and I set out as a volunteer, to obtain the desired information.

On my return from the Egyptian and Red Sea survey in 1830, I reported to Sir Robert Gordon on the practicability of a line from Bombay through Egypt, and on the last day of the year I commenced my descent of the Euphrates on a native craft constructed of timber and hurdles supported on inflated skins, only attended by an interpreter, an Arab guide, and two boatmen.

I was soon saluted by shots from the Arabs, who watched my progress from the banks, and I had to raise a parapet of sacks for shelter. The rest of my voyage was more quiet. I sketched the river by my eye, laying down its course, taking the bearings by the compass, and the soundings by means of a pole sunk through the raft to the depth of ten feet. As long as it passed clear, I knew we had that depth of water; and, whenever it met with any obstruction, I noted the depth on my chart. I was obliged to resort to this expedient to avoid awakening the suspicions of my crew.

At night the raft was secured to one of the numerous islands of the Euphrates, and with the first dawn we resumed our primitive voyage.

In this way we arrived at the singular fountains of bitumen at Hit. Here my raft was exchanged for one of those boats which make us practically acquainted with the construction of the ark, being "coated within and without with pitch."

The banks of the river presented a succession of water-wheels for

* Sir John Maeneill met 1,453 camels, horses, and mules in one day between Suedia and Antioch; and was assured that on an average 1,200 camels and horses pass the toll-bar of Jesr-Hadid on the Orontes daily, or 10,000 in a week.

the purpose of irrigation, aqueducts, and remains of dams, which only require to be repaired to renew the unexampled fertility of this country. We know from Herodotus that ancient Assyria surpassed all other countries in productiveness, and that this was owing to the admirable and complete system of irrigation practised by the people.

A flat country, abounding in date-trees—the fruit of which is so fine on the Euphrates as to form a very large article of commerce—continues as far as Fehjah Castle, opposite to Baghdad, and a bare country follows until you reach the neighbourhood of Babylon, where there are some very productive farms; but the ruins of the city itself are totally uninhabited, excepting by the lion and the bittern.

Here I exchanged my native boat for a more commodious one belonging to the residency, and continued my navigation through the Lamlum Marshes. I sailed among the singular inhabitants of this part of the river, who are, I believe, of Persian origin. They live in neat mat huts in the midst of rice-fields, and use extremely pretty and very swift canoes to go from spot to spot for labour or occupation. Some distance below Lamlum is the Arab capital, Sheikh-el-Shuyak; it is a considerable place, some of whose inhabitants live in mat and others in brick built houses. A flat country, with date-trees and cultivation, continues from thence to Kurnah, the proposed terminus of the line of Railway, for which it is admirably adapted on account of the deep water, which enables large and heavily-laden vessels to discharge their cargoes at once on the *natural quays* with which it is provided.

At the time of my voyage the dikes intended to keep this part of the river within bounds were in good repair, but lately they have been neglected, and the water has, consequently, been allowed to overflow its banks during the high season; a little labour, however, would restore these dilapidations, and lessen, if not prevent, inundations.

At Kurnah we entered the Shatt-el-Arab, a noble stream formed by the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates. Forty miles lower, Bussorah is seen on the right bank, and twenty-two miles lower down is Mohammerah, on the left bank.

There is an almost continuous belt of rich-bearing date-trees from Sheikh-el-Shuyak to the sea, a distance of 169 miles.

This ended my river navigation of 689 miles. I continued my voyage to Bushire; travelled through Persia to Trebizonde, thence through Asia Minor to Scanderoon and Aleppo; examined the Upper Euphrates, and returned through Asia Minor to Constantinople.

The river Euphrates offers such varieties of scenery that it is difficult to do more than give a brief and general description of its banks. Its two great branches, the Kara-Su, or black water, and the Murad-Su, or river of desire, rise near Ararat, and continue their course—the former for 450 miles, the latter for 586 miles—through a mountainous country until their junction. The banks are generally bold, high, and precipitous; the bed usually uneven and rocky.

The principal caravan passage is at Bir. The river is 140 miles from the Mediterranean, and is 628 feet above the level of that sea, and, as it rises 1,117 miles from the Persian Gulf, the fall scarcely exceeds six inches per mile.

As you proceed onward, its swelling hills resemble those which occasionally enclose the Rhine. Afterwards, for a time, it may be compared to the Lower Danube, and then again we are reminded of the Nile,—with its date-trees and Arab tents. Occasionally it also presents the remains of stone-walls, aqueducts, and water-wheels. The Euphrates, however, has features peculiarly its own, caused by a mixture of nomadic and settled-inhabitants with their tents and houses, and by its numerous islands, some wooded, others having small towns built with or amidst ancient remains, some of which in the time of Trajan must have been important places; such as Deir, Ana Tilbus, Hadisa, El Oos, &c. The riverain population is still, however, considerable, and there is consequently a disposition as well as an opening for trade.

From the moment that I embarked on this noble river, my whole mind was filled with the contemplation of its immense capabilities. It seemed to me to be intended by Providence to carry Christianity and civilization on its waters—to be once more, as of old, the fertiliser of the splendid country through which it flows—to be the restorer of that ancient commerce which once flowed so freely from the East to the West—and which the West might so easily, and with such

profit to herself, conduct back into its early channels. My chief fear was lest I should be forestalled in pointing out this line to India, and the capabilities of the Euphrates for steam navigation. I never shall forget my feelings on seeing, as I thought, one day *the smoke of a steamer* in the distance! It proved to be a flight of birds; but, until I had made this welcome discovery, I thought I had been forestalled; I little thought *then* that, after *proving* the perfect navigability of the river by expeditions under myself and others, I should, after a lapse of more than twenty years, be still urging that this great undertaking should be carried out.

The result of my descent of the river was given in a report to Sir Robert Gordon and his successor Sir Stratford Canning. It was printed for private circulation in 1833, with a comparison of this and the Red Sea route.

His late Majesty William the Fourth at once commanded my attendance at St. James's, and after personally examining the maps, and perceiving that the Euphrates route had so little of open sea, he took up the question warmly, and continued to assist the cause most strenuously up to the time of his death.

The first great move was the appointment of a Committee of the House of Commons to examine the respective claims to support of the Red Sea and Euphrates questions; and, with reference to having a second route to India, £20,000 were voted by Parliament for an expedition to the latter river. This, as you all know, it was my lot to command. On landing in Syria, we met with every possible opposition from Mehemet Ali, who refused us means of transport from the coast to the river, and threw every impediment in our way. We, however, succeeded in carrying a line of levels from the sea to the river, having reference to a canal or railway for this portion of the route, and succeeded, after ten months of exertion, in carrying our two iron steamers piecemeal across the country for 145 miles. We put them together at Port William, just below Bir, and accomplished the survey of the Mesopotamian rivers as had been intended.

When we had achieved about the half of the descent of the river, the terrific hurricane to which I have already alluded, carried the smaller steamer, the Tigris, to the bottom. But the river Euphrates

is not in any way more answerable for a calamity of this kind than are our own shores to occasional disastrous storms. Ammianus Marcellinus is our authority for the partial destruction of Julian's fleet during the descent of the river 1,473 years ago; but neither history nor Arab tradition record any other instance of the sort. It is obvious, therefore, that we have little to fear, whether for navigation or for railway transit.

Soon after the return of the expedition three other river steamers were sent out, and the Euphrates was ascended, as far as Beles the port of Aleppo, by Captain Lynch and Commander Campbell of the Indian Navy, who afterwards descended the stream with the vessels. The pressure of the Afghan war caused their removal to the Indus, and as no steps have been since taken to replace them, either by Government or the East India Company, the navigation of the river has remained in abeyance.

There have been various proposals at different times for opening a communication with India by the Euphrates Valley. That which took the most practical shape was elaborated by Lieut. Campbell, then of the Royal Engineers, in 1848. His proposal and map were in all essential points identical with those more recently proposed by the great engineer Sir R. Macdonald Stephenson. These and many other subsequent proposals, both French and English, have all now become merged in the Company, of which Mr. Andrew is chairman, and Sir John McNeill the engineer in chief.

I was strongly pressed last year to join in the promotion of my favourite object of nearly a quarter of a century, and urged to proceed to Constantinople to obtain the necessary firman from the Sultan, and make all preliminary arrangements. Feeling that, with the prospect of a railway, a more careful examination of the country to be traversed was desirable, I was accompanied by Sir John McNeill, civil engineer, and two assistant engineers. We reached Constantinople by the route of the Danube, opened negotiations, and made all preliminary arrangements with the Turkish government, and then proceeded to Syria, in H.M.S. Stromboli, which was placed at our disposition by Lord Lyons in the kindest manner possible. Nothing could have been more fortunate for us, since she was commanded by an officer, Commander Burgess, who proved himself to

be one of those men who *seek opportunities* of doing good service to their country; and most warmly was he seconded by Mr. Albert, the master, as well as the rest of his officers and men.

We examined carefully the coast of Asia Minor where the Taurus touches the sea, in the hope of finding a practicable valley for a future line through that country. The harbour of Alexandretta did not promise to answer, and the ancient harbour of Seleucia was also condemned as not having sufficient depth of water; but, on the southern side of the Bay of Antioch, a suitable spot was selected by Sir John McNeill, admirably adapted to form a safe and commodious harbour of refuge, which will be capable of receiving second-rate line-of-battle ships, and will be as good as, or superior to, the harbour of Kingstown. The Turkish Government is to bear the expense, and has engaged to construct this great work simultaneously with the railway.

The spot chosen is three miles south of the river Orontes. The harbour is proposed to be formed by running out a breakwater on the south side of a small natural harbour, at about three miles south of the estuary of the Orontes, and six miles south-east of the old port of Seleucia, which is now silted up by sand. A small out-lay would render the site chosen for the new harbour a perfectly safe and secure landing-place for boats, so that vessels taking out materials for the construction of the railway could, in the summer months, anchor in safety off this landing-place, where there is good holding-ground; and here the various materials and plant that would be required to enable a contractor to commence work on the railway, could be landed without the risk and inconvenience of sending the boats over the bar at the mouth of the Orontes, which at times has only three and a half feet of water, and often a heavy surf, even with light winds from the west or south-west.

The breakwater or pier is proposed to be formed by the stone which abounds close to the point where the pier or breakwater will abut on the land. The stone is of the finest quality, and can be quarried to any extent at a very moderate cost, and run by trucks on a tramway into the proper position. It is proposed to construct about 1,000 feet in length as speedily as possible in the first instance, which will give shelter to three or four vessels at a time to lie close along

shore at the proposed landing-wharf on the north-east side of the harbour, which will save the expense and inconvenience of landing from boats; this proposed shelter can be afforded in eighteen months or two years, and will enable vessels drawing twenty feet water to lie in safety during the winter months, if required to do so. The pier or breakwater should be subsequently carried out much further, and have a cant of 1,000 feet trending towards the north-east, so as to shelter the whole harbour from the westerly and north-westerly gales; in any other point it will be sheltered by the land.

The expense of this harbour, estimated at about £350,000, will be borne by the Turkish Government: they expressed themselves as most anxious to commence this work, and to carry it out under the direction of Sir J. McNeill.

The harbour when completed will be capable of giving shelter to thirty or thirty-five large vessels—the average depth of water will be from twenty to forty feet.

In six months from the commencement of the work, a landing-place can be formed, and perfect shelter for the boats, at an outlay of £20,000.

Our survey of the country and the subsequent trial sections of the engineers extended from the coast to within sight of the Euphrates, taking in the towns of Antioch and Aleppo. Beyond the latter *all* engineering difficulties cease—the country presenting a hard dry level surface, called in Arabic Ká-jaldé, or *flat and hard*, most admirably adapted for a railway; and even between the Mediterranean and Aleppo the difficulties are such as would be considered *small* in this country. There will not be a single tunnel, and only two cuttings of any consequence: two chain bridges over the Orontes will be necessary; but neither do these present any obstacles to engineering science of the present day. The average expense for the first part of this line, which will be the most expensive portion of the whole, is estimated at £13,484 per mile; and another portion, which also presents some difficulties, is £12,754 per mile; but as portions beyond Aleppo fall very considerably below this average, some of them being estimated at only £4,693 per mile, the average expense for the whole of this first section of the line from the

Harbour to the Euphrates has been calculated by Sir John McNeill at £8,858 per mile.

On my return to Constantinople the terms of the concessions were finally settled; but, owing to opposition from rival parties, they were less favourable than had been previously arranged. The Turkish Government gave a guarantee of 6 per cent. on the capital expended by the Company, requiring from them a deposit of £28,000 in exchange for the firman, with the condition that the works must be commenced within one year.

The expense of the whole line is estimated at £6,000,000; but assistance from our own Government is asked in some shape on the first section only, or on a sum of £1,400,000, since the railway, after reaching Aleppo, will require no assistance whatever.

I found the Porte thoroughly alive to the great advantages likely to result to Turkey from the establishment of this line. The consolidation of the Sultan's power in distant provinces of his empire, the great extension of commerce to be expected, the centralization of the system of Government—these and many other considerations were strongly felt by the Turks.

We found, indeed, the existing commercial returns in Syria most satisfactory. Without taking into account *any* increase, Aleppo alone and her commerce would suffice to support a railway thus far, and would yield a return of 8 per cent. to the shareholders. 1,800 shares were at once taken in Aleppo itself; and a petition was sent to the Sultan in favour of the railway. To the eastward of this city, however, a *large additional* trade may be expected; indeed, a very extensive trade *exists*, which would all flow into this railway. We shall have Syria and Mesopotamia on one line, India and Central Asia beyond, with Kurdistan and Persia on one side, and Arabia on the other. It is impossible to estimate the amount of traffic and commerce which will arise—it *must* be very large—it may be beyond what even England has ever seen or imagined, for there is no limit to the productive powers of these countries, provided capital and skill be employed to turn to account the vast provision for their fertilization contained in their noble rivers. The chief products at present are grain, which could be supplied to Europe to any extent. Cotton of a very superior quality—this

is already cultivated largely, but not yet well-cleaned, in the neighbourhood of Mossul, and would be grown much more extensively if any means of transport existed. My friend Mr. Rassam, Her Majesty's consul at Mossul, tells me that 100,000 camel-loads of cotton are now lying there for want of means of transport. Wool also, copper, sugar, indigo, saltpetre, dyes of various kinds, bitumen, and various other products, are the present ordinary exports of Mesopotamia.

Their demand for our goods would be proportionately large. At present the natives of Syria and Mesopotamia receive many of their supplies from Russia through Trebizonde; but their markets would be supplied by Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, &c., if the means of transport were but established.

It is, indeed, impossible to estimate the changes in European countries by throwing open to them these sources of commerce and openings for colonisation; and may we not humbly hope that it may be vouchsafed to us to carry back to our eastern brethren *those truths* and *that teaching* which came to us from thence, and to which we owe all the blessings and happiness which make England what she is?

This railroad, if carried out, will pass through a country hallowed by recollections too sacred to speak of here, but which every one present must *feel* and understand.

I have dwelt at some length on the commercial advantages to be expected from this line; although at this moment *even these* must yield in importance to the all-engrossing desire for more rapid communication with India. This, and telegraphic wires in operation, would be worth anything to England at this moment.

In speaking of the advantages of this line in its military, political, and commercial bearings, I would ask you to observe, that, with the same kind of vessels and equal means of speed in both cases, the entrance of the Persian Gulf will be reached in one or two days less time than the entrance of the Red Sea at Bab-el-Mandeb. But the difference of open sea *onward* is very great. From the Red Sea to Kurrachee we have 1,864 English miles—whilst we have only 718 from the head of the Persian Gulf to the same port, or less than one-half. In the one case we have the monsoon right ahead

towards Aden, in the other it is nearly abeam to Ormuz. I need scarcely add, a difficult and dangerous navigation in the one case, and a perfectly safe one in the other. It was this great difference in the open-sea distance of the two lines which made so great an impression on his late Majesty. When looking at the map, he at once said, "I am a sailor, and can appreciate this great advantage;" and up to his lamented death he warmly supported the Euphrates route.

The means of rapid and certain transmission of mails and passengers to India ought alone to decide the public and Government in favour of this line. For the transport of troops and stores it would be of inestimable importance.

Few political objects perhaps could be of more consequence to England than those which will be so thoroughly accomplished by this line; I allude chiefly to the consolidation and to the commercial and political resuscitation of Turkey. We have expended lavishly money and lives, ostensibly for this object, but without any benefit to ourselves, and without imparting any real *strength* to Turkey. By this line, however, we *secure* the defence of her frontier against Persia and Russia. You have already seen what a powerful influence has belonged at all times to the possession of the Valley of the Euphrates. A friend, who is intimately acquainted with the East, writes to me: "I was in those countries during the Russian war, and frequently thought how different the position of that power would then have been if their army had been moved in the direction of the Euphrates valley, instead of invading the Principalities and European Turkey. Europe would have remained in a state of apathy, and public opinion, *out of England at any rate*, would have been for them. Had they reached Mossul under these circumstances they would have been in a country whose resources surpass almost any other in the world."

This, or a very similar, plan was proposed to the Emperor Nicholas by one of his generals during the war of 1828-29. We may be thankful that it was not adopted.

Dr. Sprenger says: "If properly managed, the Valley of the Tigris would soon be sufficiently prosperous to form the basis of a campaign to the south-east, or the same route that was taken by the

Arabs when they conquered the Valley of the Indus in the seventh century of our era.

"The straits of Ormuz are so narrow that the Persian Gulf might at any time be converted into a lake belonging to the power which may be in possession of Bussorah. *Europe is no longer the world; and the true key to the possession of the world is the Valley of the Tigris*, and not Constantinople, as it was believed in ancient times."

These are a few, and still but a few, of the great results likely to arise from the establishment of this line of communication. The subject is one of too great magnitude to be embraced in a lecture; but I trust I have said enough to give you an interest in its progress and success, and I will only add a few words on the subject of the *Arabs*, whose very name seems to inspire dread in many minds, and who are constantly represented as being hostile to the proposed railway.

The Arabs are a very singular, a very peculiar people. I have lived among them for many years—I have experienced their extremes of good and bad—the greatest fidelity to their engagements—the greatest truthfulness—the greatest hospitality and kindness from them in some instances, while in others I have been robbed by them. I have twice been led out to be shot by them—I was saved almost by a miracle; and yet these very Arabs lent me money when they released me, to pursue my journey, on the faith of my English word and name.

At one time during the Euphrates expedition, Mehemet Ali had set a price on my head—still not an Arab took measures to secure this reward, although "*Chesney Beg*," as they called me, was more than once in their power.

Our chief difficulties with the Arabs would arise from their ignorance, the divided and sometimes hostile state of the tribes, their blood feuds, and their occasional breach of faith. Of this I myself experienced an instance, for, instead of performing their promise of taking me round the Dead Sea, they carried me and my party off into the Desert, robbed us, and kept us some time for a ransom. Notwithstanding this, the journey was in many respects a very interesting one, and we escaped at last by disarming one of them, when they were in reduced numbers, and recovered our money.

The story is too long to tell, but it was stated at Damascus that this *mistake* arose from there being no one at that time to keep the Beni Sakka tribe in order.

On the other hand, I must observe that such a breach of faith is the exception to what I have usually met with from this people. During the Euphrates expedition their caravans carried for us large stores of muskets, powder, and ammunition, as well as considerable sums of money, to the amount of £6,000 or £7,000, attended only by one individual of our party, and in no one instance was there *any* loss to us. These undertakings were usually paid in advance; and, when the Arabs were prevented from fulfilling their engagements, the money paid was scrupulously returned to us. It is a startling fact, that neither during the expedition I commanded, nor those which followed, which occupied several years, did we lose a single man by the Arabs.

They are, indeed, as much alive to their own interests as other nations, and will soon appreciate the advantages which they will derive from the railroad by regular employment of themselves and their camels, and increased trade. If, however, they should show hostility, contrary to all expectation, such arrangements have been made with the Sultan's Government as will meet even this difficulty. It must be remembered also that a body of workmen such as we must employ, amounting to 10,000 or 12,000, are already a considerable defensive element; and we should also recollect that Ibrahim Pasha kept the Arabs under perfect control.

In addition, however, to my own opinion, I will read to you that of a friend, Dr. Aloys Sprenger, the first Orientalist of the day, and who has resided for *many* years among them. His description of the Arabs is too good to be omitted.

"Some time back I received a letter from Mr. Porter, at Damascus, expressing great uneasiness on account of the Bedouin, but nothing can be more unfounded than this cause of alarm, for the Bedouin are the most manageable people in the world if judiciously treated. But, even if matters were to be mismanaged as they have been at Aden, and the Bedouin should offer every opposition in their power, it would be of little avail. It would soon be found that, notwithstanding their personal bravery and cunning, they are

very much like wild beasts; no one has ever heard of an army of tigers, and so it would be with the Bedouin, who have never been united. Like wild beasts they would show desperate courage when irritated; but such ferocity can do nothing against discipline and calm resistance. As a proof of this, I may mention that there are some Kurdish villages below Mardin, in the midst of the desert, which, small as they are, defy all the power of the Shammar tribe, and successfully refuse to be taxed. Whoever possesses the Euphrates has the Bedouin in his pocket, for this cuts them off, and they cannot do without its water and other resources. Those who really entertain fears of the Arabs forget that a railway running through a fertile country is a vein of life. In less than ten years we shall see towns and villages springing up on both sides of the line, and thousands of these nomades settled in them.

"N.B.—It has been arranged that the Sultan is to give the necessary protection if the Arabs do not further the railway of themselves."

In confirmation of the opinion here given of the manageableness of the Arabs, I may mention that by means of a marriage, and by giving, myself, a small portion to the bride, at the same time reminding them that the Koran inculcated peace, I settled a blood feud of long standing between two hostile tribes.

It is, however, on a gradual operation that I build for bringing all things right, and for this reason I took no part in the proposal for laying down the electric wires through Arabia at present. From the difficulties to which I have alluded in dealing with the Arabs, you will easily understand that I considered isolated wires passing through their country as very insecure. I however thought it right to open negotiations at Constantinople on this subject, and I also arranged with Mr. Barker, Her Majesty's Vice-Consul at Aleppo, who has passed his life in that country, that he should, if required, go among the Arabs to make preliminary arrangements for the establishment of the telegraph, by opening, in the first instance, the line of Tartar posts which were in use in Lord Wellesley's time.

The principal points of this question are now before you. Each individual will form his own opinion as to the desirability and practicability of carrying a railway and electric wires through

Arabia. I assume the affirmative in both cases, and if I were twenty, or even ten, years younger, I should be very happy to prove on the spot that I am right. But I feel that at my time of life I should be doing mischief to a great cause; and surely this ought not to be the case when my place can be supplied by an officer of great perseverance and singular uprightness (provided he would undertake the charge). I allude to Capt. Charlewood, R.N. This officer is in the prime of life, understands the management of railways, and not only has had great experience of the Arabs, but he knows the country, and also practically what is necessary to carry out the navigation of the river Euphrates.

I have now only to add, that I hope I have not trespassed at too great length on your time, and that you will henceforth feel some little interest in the progress and success of the Euphrates Valley Communication with India.