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LECTURE.

Friday, May 8th, 1868.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR H. C. RAWLINSON, K.C.B., M.P., in the
Chair.

THE MILITARY ADVANTAGES OF A DAILY MAIL-ROUTE TO INDIA THROUGH TURKEY AND THE PERSIAN GULF.

By HYDE CLARKE, Esq.

IN the year 1859 I had the honour to read before the members of The Royal United Service Institution, a memoir* on the adoption of the hills of India as strategic bases, instead of the plains. The object of the system of hill occupation and settlement I advocated, was to increase and strengthen the European element in healthy positions, not only as a means of repressing insurrection, but as a barrier against invasion from the north. The necessity for protective measures on that side has not become less in ten years. I now take advantage of this opportunity to bring before the members of the Institution another subject closely allied in ideas and principles.

The means of communication with our armies in India by any route, is of value to us, but the simple transport of troops may not be the sole consideration. This, quick steam transports can accomplish by sea route around the Cape. Still, the speediest means of conveying intelligence and Officers charged with special duties, is a matter of military necessity under emergencies; thus we are led to consider the land routes. That by Egypt accomplishes our objects to a considerable extent; but such are the contingencies to be regarded, that we cannot, in prudence, restrict ourselves to one route, were the Egyptian route even the shortest attainable. Thus all routes that can be opened are of value, even including the far northern route by Russia and Persia. This, from various circumstances, is being fully and rapidly developed, and

* "The Organization of the Army of India, with especial reference to the Hill regions," see Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, vol. iii, page 18.—Ed.

we may before long find, that the routes which are really intended for attacking us are more advanced than those which ought to be available for our assistance and defence. We have at the present moment only one overland route, and that of a precarious character—the Egyptian one—one considered by some persons to be essentially English, and yet it is one liable at any time to be interrupted by the efforts of the Viceroy of Egypt to accomplish independence, or by the preponderance in that country of some foreign power.

There is another route—the middle route—which has only been partially explored, and never put in practice. I mean that route by the railways of Europe, Constantinople, Asia Minor, the Valley of the Euphrates, Bagdad, Bussorah, and the Persian Gulf, with which, for nearly fifty years, the name of General Chesney has been inseparably connected,* and in the promotion of which so many distinguished members of this Institution have taken part. The time is now fast approaching when, if we do our duty, we shall complete this great undertaking, and if we do so, we shall effect very much more than the construction of a railway route, for we shall, at the same time, and without separate or further outlay, accomplish great political operations, which will not only strengthen our military resources, but tend thereby to protect ourselves and Europe and Asia at large, from the danger of attack.

In considering a subject of this kind, it is fortunate that it can be brought before an audience which is not commercial, and which can therefore properly appreciate its moral elements, for although, after all, military administration must ultimately rest upon material resources, and, therefore, really and truly enter into the domain of political economy in the operations of capital; yet capital is not the only element of such and other transactions in the world, nor the sole aspect under which they are to be regarded. It is the misfortune of political economy, because it is its essential condition that capital shall be chiefly regarded, and as political science is in this country less studied and developed than the science of political economy, it does happen, not only in commercial circles, but also in the Legislature, that technical considerations of political economy often acquire too much preponderance. Thus when our political existence may be the question really at stake, the discussion may be made to turn on theoretical considerations of Government interference, and, therefore, operations of capital. While we have been arguing these principles, and leaving the middle and Euphrates' route to the action of the speculators of Europe, the French Government has devoted its energies to the Suez Canal, and the Russian Government to the execution of its land road to Persia. Therefore, under these circumstances, it is fortunate that the matter has to be discussed by a profession so far untrammelled by the primary prejudices of theoretical science, and accustomed to deal with questions under their moral and political aspects, those, in fact, by which this and many others must really be decided; because the

* See Paper read at the United Service Institution, by General Chesney, in 1857.—Ed.



welfare of commerce depends on the maintenance of peace, and for this the exact percentage of returns cannot be regarded. So far as the railway before us is a matter of reproductive enterprise, it is to be left to the volition of capitalists, but so far as it is a matter of political necessity, it must be urgently provided for, and not left to the chance of a Brazilian railway presenting more profit, or of a Portuguese railway affording a larger margin of shares to be appropriated by the promoters. The result may be, nay, has been, that in leaving this undertaking to the free-will election of capitalists and speculators, their preference has been shown for railway and other works, of no material benefit to our political interests.

This, therefore, is the issue on the present occasion; and it is the true issue before the Governments of England and India, and before the Legislature, to determine whether the route is really practicable, justifiable, and of essential necessity; if so, it then lies with the authorities interested, to find the best means of accomplishing the task, with the least disbursement of the national resources. It is idle to ask whether the undertaking will pay such and such a dividend, if it be in reality a necessary portion of our political machinery. It will then be fortunate if, instead of being like much of our military material—utterly unproductive—it should afford the means of ultimately repaying the requisite outlay. This is the true mode of regarding the subject, not beginning at the wrong end, and seeing whether it is, in the first instance, captivating to capitalists, but whether, in the first instance, it is necessary and beneficial to us as a nation.

The general course of the route has been already sketched. It is a short and direct route to India, and with which, only modifications of itself, can compete. The European railway system reaching to Basiash on the Danube, is the first and existing portion. The second is that lying between Basiash and Constantinople in Turkey in Europe. The concession for this has been granted to a combination of Belgians, English, and Hungarians, under the name of the Vander Elst and Company. At present the company is weak, and Turkish finance is weak, so that no very brilliant career can be augured for it, but this may safely be predicted, that the enterprise will be accomplished. There are portions of the line valuable for local purposes, for which the Ottoman Porte will obtain its resources, and the new political ambition of Hungary will encourage the extension and development of its railway system to the East.

The third portion is that concession granted to Mr. Greig, Messrs. Sharpe, Stewart, and Co., and Baron Winspeare, being the line of railway from Constantinople or Scutari, across Asia Minor to Aleppo, and thence by what has been called the Euphrates Valley Railway to Bagdad and Bussorah. The short concession from the Ottoman Government to the Euphrates Valley Railway Company having lapsed, this route forms an integral part of the new concession, and not, as has been lately described in some papers, a separate and distinct route. The third or Asiatic portion may be divided into two sections, the Northern and Asia Minor section, and the Southern and Euphrates Valley section.

The fourth portion is now in activity by the running of steamers between Bagdad, Bussorah, and Bombay. It will ultimately be replaced by a line of railway connecting Bussorah and Kurrachee, and joining the European to the Indian systems.

There are thus two portions of the route in activity, one in progress, and the remainder, the Scutari and Bussorah Railway, only in embryo, but without the execution of which we cannot obtain the advantages of the entire route. The topographical features are those which would interest many members of this Institution, and the discussion of which would be of great benefit, from the local knowledge they can bring to bear on the subject. This would, however, require time. It will be sufficient to say, that on the northern portion, the chief difficulties are in the northern mountains and in the passage of the chain of the Taurus.* The latter are the most considerable. On the southern section, the chief portion is easy, but the branch from Aleppo to Skanderoon or Alexandretta passes over a mountain range. The portions surveyed are from Scutari to Ismid and Eski Sheher, and from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Much of the line would be remunerative from local traffic, but in the present state of Turkish finance, its construction on such grounds cannot be expected.

The Turkish guarantee is 5 per cent. on £20,000 per mile, but this guarantee must be dismissed from the mind. It is of no immediate value, and only ultimately available as a collateral security. No one has, therefore, proposed to raise capital on this guarantee, and many newspapers have been led in error to discuss the project as dependent on this guarantee. The consideration of such guarantee must be abandoned, and the undertaking must be established on a different basis. What are of value, are the several sources of revenue appropriated by the Ottoman Government to the undertaking. Such are the Indo-European telegraph revenue, the Indo-European postal revenue, and subsidies from the several governments, the transit duties of 1 per cent. on merchandize, and the revenue of the passenger and goods traffic. Thus the Ottoman Government has, so far as it can, transferred to the new undertaking all its own available rights and revenues, and there can be no doubt that it would be further disposed to assist. The cost of the line is estimated at twenty millions, a sum which is considerable, but not beyond the resources of the enterprise.

If the railway could be economically constructed, and worked for a few years, no competent authority doubts but that it would yield a fair return, but no one who has experience believes it can be at once remunerative. What, therefore, is wanted is such assistance in credit as will raise the money on the lowest terms, and cause the least outlay for interest, and also such temporary accommodation as may be required during the early stages, to be repaid from the ultimate resources of the undertaking and the collateral guarantee of the Ottoman Porte. The burden of the whole of this temporary accommodation to the home and Indian governments would not be

* See a paper by me, "On the Daily Mail Route to India," in the *Society of Arts Journal*, vol. xvi, p. 275, Feb. 28th, 1868.—H. C.

heavy, while the revenue and political advantages would be great; but there are other governments which have political and commercial grounds for sharing in the operation. The pecuniary assistance would take the shape of postal subsidies, and in the end there would not even be pecuniary loss.

The military aspect of the question may be regarded under three heads.

1st. The conveyance of intelligence.

2nd. The conveyance of Officers, soldiers, and small stores.

3rd. Defensive and offensive resources, resulting from political consequences.

Rapid intelligence is at all times an essential military necessity, and the first element in effective movements. If this is the case in the field, or in a campaign, it is of the greater moment when the army of operation is so far removed from its real base, as India is from England. This was most sensibly demonstrated during the mutiny. Our Governments have since then devoted much attention to the improvement of the telegraphic and postal communications. An essential part of the telegraphic communication has been established by the middle route now under consideration, and it requires little argument to show that its maintenance is imperative, even if a cable route should be laid south, and particularly in consequence of the Russo-Prussian route being made effective.

Postal communication has its absolute military value apart from commercial value. In neither case is this value determinable by the pecuniary return in postal revenue. It includes the transmission of orders, reports, requisitions and returns, and the quicker the transmission, the more effective will be the condition of discipline and administration. As by the southern route, railway transit can at the utmost be extended to Brindisi, while through Russia it must be circuitous, so by the middle route is it direct, and the quickest mode available.

This brings us to the point of what is the period within which, mails can be conveyed by the middle route. Taking 25 miles per hour in the first instance by railway, and 10 miles by sea, this will give us—

London to Bussorah	..	..	144 hours	6 days
Bussorah to Bombay	..	..	160 "	$6\frac{2}{3}$ "
Total	..	..	..	$12\frac{2}{3}$ "

By acceleration of railway trains at a more advanced period, and assuming a rate of 30 hours, we get—

London to Bussorah	..	..	130 hours	5 days
Bussorah to Bombay	..	..	160 "	$6\frac{2}{3}$ "
Total	..	..	..	$11\frac{2}{3}$ "

From Bussorah to Kurrachee the voyage would be about 5 days,

giving a total transit to Kurrachee of 11 days in the earlier periods, and 10 days on greater acceleration, thus realising Lieut. Waghorn's prophecy.*

With a railway along the coast, at a speed of 25 miles per hour, the distance from London to Kurrachee will be ultimately accomplished in 8 days, to Bombay in 10, and to Calcutta and Madras in 10 or 11 days.

Some persons will make a very small account of the saving of one day between London and an Indian station, but the saving is more, for there is the saving of the day on the return mail, and on the future correspondence. In this instance, so soon as the railway is extended to Bussorah, instead of a weekly mail to India, we should get more frequent communication, and with a complete railway transit we should obtain to all India what we now have to most parts of Europe—a daily through mail.

Thus at present the course of post to Bombay is 51 days; this will be progressively reduced to 25 days and to 20 days, giving us 18 courses of post in a year, instead of 7, and materially increasing and improving the communication of Departments, and of course rendering still greater facilities in connexion with the telegraph. In 10 days a document could be obtained from most parts of India, or a written or detailed order transmitted there on application by telegraph. The private advantages must be correspondent to the public benefits.

The second head for consideration is the conveyance of Officers, men, and small stores. For Officers despatched in cases of emergency, there would be the same acceleration as for mails, and in case of need, an Officer could pass from London to India in 8 or 10 days. This would not be the ordinary course, though on emergency an Officer could visit England or India and return in a month. In the more usual way some portions of time would be spent in repose, or in seeing the more remarkable cities on the way, and thus the journey would be prolonged. In case of need, sleeping accommodation would be provided in the trains, and the mode of travelling which is now adopted as far as Basiash would be extended to Bussorah, and ultimately to Kurrachee.

There are many obvious reasons why the main body of troops going to and returning from India should not be sent through Europe by railway; but still the route may be materially shortened and facilitated as compared with that through Egypt. The route for troops will be by steam transport from England to Scanderoon instead of to Alexandria, from Scanderoon by the Aleppo branch and so to Bussorah, and thence again by steam transport, with the advantage of passing by the Persian Gulf instead of by the Red Sea.

It will be seen that the Euphrates Valley section becomes, in case of need, an independent means of communication reaching from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and available as an alternative communication with the northern line, and more particularly available if the northern section be stopped. In its early stages, and as an alternative, it affords a route from Brindisi, Trieste, or Salonika to Scanderoon, and thence by railway to Bussorah.

* See Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, vol. x, p. 287.—H. C.

The undertaking has consequently to be considered under a double aspect, as a through line connected with the European system, and as an Euphrates Valley line.*

In the conveyance of Officers, troops, and stores, these routes would give us very great advantages, and the Euphrates Valley route would be accessible to us so long as we maintain naval communication by the Mediterranean or on the Indian Seas.

In these respects, the undertaking has a strong claim on our Governments for contribution and support.

We now come to the third head for consideration, viz., the political relations of the middle route; and here it may be useful to pass briefly over any questions affecting Western, and more particularly regard Eastern Europe, where exist the chief elements of difficulty and danger to the peace of the world.

Austria and Hungary will, by the extension of their railway system to the east, accomplish an ardent desire, and obtain another channel for commercial development as well as for the advancement of their eastern provinces. In a political point of view, this double empire has the greatest interest in effecting these objects, because it would be strengthened on the frontier most threatened and assaulted, the eastern and north-eastern. Austria would thus be enabled to take an effective part on the Lower Danube, and give military assistance to her chief eastern ally, the Sultan.

The nature of the route throughout, is such that it affords a secure military base, well within the frontiers and districts exposed to attack, and, indeed, were the line from Basiash to Bussorah laid down by military men for purely military purposes, it could scarcely be better devised. What it wants to complete it, is, sets of lines from this base to the scenes of attack, and these will in due course result from its execution.

The nature of the main line is this. From the Austrian junction, it admits of Austrian troops being thrown in along the whole line at the back of the Danube for the protection of that frontier, and, in case of need, of operating on the south against Servia. The European line provides for the movement of Turkish troops from Constantinople or the reserves in Asia for all purposes of defence, and for the protection of Bulgaria, as the Varna and Ruschuk Railway assists in the east.

At Constantinople contingents from the western powers can be landed and conveyed into the interior of European Turkey either for active purposes, or as a reserve, or as an army of observation in support of Turkish or Austrian troops.

From the moment that the Basiash or Belgrade and Constantinople line is in operation, the political situation of the Principalities will be changed. Now, not only the Servian Slaves lean to the threatening power of Russia, but the Rouman-speaking Wallachians are compelled to truckle to a hostile state. There is nothing on the spot able to coerce or to protect Roumania or Servia except Russia. On the other

* See Captain Tyler's paper "On Routes of Communication with India," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. x, p. 276, 1866.—H. C.

hand, an allied army of English, French, Austrians, and Turks would be able to defend Roumania against its natural enemies, and compel Servia to obey its engagements with the European powers. Our resources could be made available because the route touches the sea at several points. At Constantinople there is access to European and to Asiatic Turkey. By the Gulf of Scanderoon our fleet could land supplies for Asia Minor or the Euphrates Valley route, and at Bussorah we should have the facility of landing Indian auxiliaries, and of forwarding them throughout Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.

It is this power of co-operation, which would render active proceedings unnecessary, for the knowledge that the forces of England and France could be brought to bear on regions hitherto inaccessible, would alter the whole of the eastern political relationships.

Turkey, it will be seen, would be decidedly strengthened in Europe, but none the less in her great reserve of Asia. It is on the Asiatic side of the Scutari and Bussorah Railway, that the turbulent and little controlled tribes of Koords, Turkomans, Arabs, and others, are chiefly placed; these furnish little in money or in men, while they cause expense to the treasury, harrass the military forces, and prevent the settlement and cultivation of the country. By bringing strong bodies of troops to bear on insurgent or disobedient tribes, order has in all ages been alone maintained, and it is in this way that of late, the rebels of Koordistan and of Little Armenia have been reduced. The Turkish empire would be relieved from sources of expense and weakness, while the produce of the east, now unavailable, would fertilize the commerce of the west.

In the course of time, other branch lines would approach the frontiers and produce equivalent effects. Indeed, prosperity, the efficient promoter of order and civilization would be propagated throughout Asiatic Turkey, brigandage would become an ill-paying trade yielding more certain disaster than profit, and the empire would possess greater revenues, more troops, and better means of disposing of them.

We now come to a great and populous state, which, notwithstanding all our interest in it, has during this century been isolated and abandoned to the invasions of Russia, I mean—Persia. It would be worth while to make her strong, while she is yet disposed and able to maintain her independence. This will be the result of bringing her within the European system, the railway network of which, will be continued to her borders, bringing them within five days' reach of London and Paris. Within a comparatively short time, Teheran will be brought as near these capitals, as Constantinople lately was. This is no mean thing. It is, it is true, the conveyance of a letter in five or six days, but in the case of a country like Persia, it means everything which can result from admission into the sphere of western civilization. Persia is now busy with her short trial railway, and has granted concessions for a whole railway system, but bring her within a week of the capitalists of London and Paris, and it becomes possible for their trusted agents to examine, to negotiate, to receive instructions and authority, and to act effectively. Thus capital is made contributory; but, also, what is more than capital, knowledge and intelligence in the

application of European processes to native materials. To make Persia rich, to enable her to turn her own riches to her own benefit, is to make her strong at home and abroad. There are commercial interests which will induce France more readily perhaps than ourselves, to devote energy and influence to Persia; from any such operations we shall benefit.

To France, a new career of commercial and political ambition is opened more direct in its advantages than the Suez Canal, and one which binds her more strongly to her western ally. In the restoration and revival to political power of Turkey and of Persia, she must share, and she thus obtains an opportunity of asserting her position as a great power where Prussia cannot rival her; for in Turkey and in Persia, Prussia cannot as yet directly act.

The Suez Canal, interesting as that project is to France, cannot materially affect Persia, and it is only by the middle route that France can touch this newly awakened country. By the north, by the Russian railways she cannot touch it, and all that Russia does, is threatening to the political and commercial influence of France.

We see, therefore, in these various operations greater reasons for the maintenance and cementing of the western alliance, and thereby a stronger pledge for the preservation of peace; the greatest security is to be gained, however, by obtaining the means of placing the forces of the allied powers so as to protect those countries most exposed to attack.

Under such circumstances, for Russia to endeavour to coerce Turkey or Persia, would no longer be a safe proceeding, and she would have to concentrate her attention on Central Asia. At the present moment, the whole available force on 3,000 miles of exposed country, is 300,000 weak troops, to encounter the whole disposable power of Russia, assisted by naval operations on the Black and Caspian Seas, and having railway communication with the reserves on the rear. Under the combinations here described, the whole conditions may be changed by throwing into the exposed countries, 100,000 English and native troops, 100,000 French, and 200,000 Austrians; Roumania and Servia being neutralized, and the Greeks being compelled to desist from aiding the Russians or embarrassing the allies; whilst the fleets of England and France could convey to their own troops, and the contingents acting with them, the resources of their arsenals and the improved appliances of modern warfare.

Referring to some lesser results, Muskat, or Oman on the Persian Gulf, with which we have been long in alliance, and which exercises considerable influence on the coast of Mekran and the east coast of Africa, would also be brought within seven or eight days of England; and the growing trade between India and the countries of the Persian Gulf and the ports of Arabia would be promoted.

In a commercial point of view, this daily mail route, if carried out, will affect the postal correspondence of Western Europe with one quarter of the human race, will quicken the rapid development of India, and promote the revival of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Persia. Politically and militarily, it will confer vigour and independence on the Empires of

Turkey and Persia, and will protect our own Indian empire by a chain of alliances and strategic combinations reaching from the Upper Danube to the Burhampooter. While these arrangements afford no means of attacking us, they allow military aid to be brought from Europe to contend with a common enemy in the eastern empires, and so defend by direct or by joint action, our own territory.

Such are the objects to be accomplished, and it may be desirable to consider the means of accomplishment. They consist in the hearty co-operation of our own authorities in the promotion of the requisite arrangements, and that more by moral action than by pecuniary contribution. One of the first steps is to secure, by negotiation, the concurrence and co-operation of France and Austria, for the advancement of their own interests. Another is to promote the adoption of postal treaties, not only with those states, but with Holland, and other powers having relations in the East. If our own great interests in India are materially promoted, so, to a greater or less degree, are those of other nations in Siam, the Archipelago, Manilla, China and Japan; the acceleration in transit affecting the whole of these.

A judicious measure, recommended by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, is that our Government should take charge of the surveys, as it did in the case of General Chesney's operations; but it would be far better, should our Government propose to the other Governments to take part in such a work.

In its results the undertaking would be truly international, as it would more closely unite the nations of the east and the west; it is therefore desirable that in its beginning, the states of Europe should act in concert and co-operation.

For carrying out the works and raising the capital, it is requisite that the money should be raised, not at the rates of eastern credit, 15, 20, or 25 per cent., but at European rates; to accomplish this, European state credit must be employed. This likewise would ensure the supervision of the several states for the economic administration of the enterprise, and for preventing jobbery and extravagance. If the capital be raised at 10 per cent., high tolls and high passenger fares will be expected; and as the English Government will be directly or indirectly the chief customer of the railway for its own purposes, or in the persons of its Officers, its interest is to secure moderate charges. The less the rate of interest, the sooner will any early advance of interest be re-couped and re-im-bursed, and the sooner will a sinking fund be brought into operation for the extinction of loans. If the form of postal subsidy be adopted, and our portion of the subsidy be taken at $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. gross, and that of the Indian Government at $1\frac{1}{4}$ per cent., then the net liability will be less, as the several sources of revenue become available. The disbursement of the Governments will never be large, while it can be recovered from the Ottoman Government, and it may be so provided that the postal subsidy shall diminish in proportion to the earnings of the railway, so that in the end the governments will obtain not only a saving but a profit.

By combined action the operation will be easy, and the advantages be early realized, but this must be promoted by the formation of a sound public opinion, maintained by those most deeply interested, and

best calculated to exercise a judgment. If the commercial body possesses these qualities, so do the Military and Naval Members of this Institution, and particularly the main portion of them connected with our Eastern Empire. War, when honourably directed, being but the legitimate means of securing peace, so the maintenance of peace is the most honourable distinction of the soldier; but to achieve that, he must be able to support the prestige of his own reputation by the possession of real and absolute force. It is to the demonstration of these principles, and the accomplishment of results in accordance therewith, that this memoir is devoted, and it appeals to the members on two subjects of deep and vital importance—the safeguard of our Indian Empire, and the maintenance of European peace.
