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But the indomitable De Lesseps did not despair, although he saw his encampment of twenty thousand laborers broken up and dispersed in a day, leaving only a quantity of tools and tents behind them as evidences of their having been at work in tracing out his canal.

He summoned laborers from Europe, and they came after months of delay; but no sooner had they been organized into a working force than, through English persuasion, the imbecile Sultan issued a firman denying the right of the Viceroy to cede the lands through which the canal was to be dug.

This was apparently a fatal obstacle, for Said dared not disobey, and a stoppage of two years in the work took place, while M. de Lesseps vainly sought to enlist influences powerful enough to resist those brought against him.

His patience and energy were crowned with success at last. The French consul who had opposed the enterprise was recalled from Egypt, and instructions given to his successor to favor the project, which was, for the first time, thus taken under French protection.

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The plan adopted by M. de Lesseps to frustrate the difficulties raised by the two firmans forbidding the compulsory labors of the Fellahs under the corvée system, and refusing also the cession of the lands on each bank of the canal sufficient for the purpose of the enterprise, was as ingenious as it was successful.

Let the reader imagine a vast ditch one hundred miles in length, three hundred feet wide at the top, one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet wide at the bottom, with an average depth of twenty-four feet, connecting four natural lakes, bisecting a sandy isthmus at its narrowest point, and discharging at either end into a large inland sea.

These lakes are situated at distances ranging from ten to fifteen miles from each other, and form the natural boundaries, so to speak, of the several divisions of the work. The largest and deepest of these, called Laas Aners, or Bitter Lakes, extend to within fourteen miles of Suez.

The northern entrance of the canal, is situated on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, 134 miles north of Alexandria and twenty miles north of Damietta. Externally its appearance is not unlike that of the majority of mushroom American towns similarly situated.

It is an anomalous sort of place. Bounded northward by the ocean and southward by the desert, it is equally the product of both. Viewed geologically it is the practical result of a struggle between salt water and sand; commercially, possibly it is a compound of modern commerce and aboriginal Arab ignorance and filth.

The labor of twenty thousand Arab Fellahs was required for two years in cutting a channel deep enough to float the steam dredges from the Mediterranean to this point, and in filling the shallow basin of Timsah, formerly fed by the overflows of the Nile only.

At El-Guisr Mr. Hall found excavators hard at work widening the canal, with construction trains and locomotives drawn up on the bank for removing the earth more rapidly than it could be done by lighters in the canal.

At Ismailia, southward, we enter upon the third grand division of the canal. This extends through Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes to Kilometer One Hundred and Fifteen. The northern end of the Bitter Lakes is sixty miles from Port Said.

The Timsah cutting extends for perhaps half a mile, and then the desert is scarcely above the level of the water, and, in fact, in many places it is below it, so that the water covers many hundreds of acres, and the course of the canal is broken up by low ridges and sand-bars.

The Bitter Lakes constitute the most interesting feature of this division. They are estimated to contain nine hundred million tons of water, and it is expected, from their size and situation, that they will obviate the necessity of locks to break the current, which would otherwise exist in the canal between the two seas.

The number of dredges at work on this division is small compared with that engaged upon the preceding sections, the nature of the work requiring a preponderance of hand-labor. Upwards of thirteen thousand men and one thousand donkeys are engaged upon this division.

The works at Suez are not, so large a scale as on the Mediterranean side, as no low Venice had to be made there on mud or sand instead of piles, Suez having long been used as the Red Sea port of the "P. and O." steamers.

It is twenty-eight miles from Port Said, and is usually reached by the mail boats in about five hours. In this and in each other division of the work, a basin has been formed in the lake, where the surplus sand and earth are dumped by lighters.

Eight miles south of Kantara, the canal enters Lake Ballah, and, soon after passing the little Arab village El-Ferdan, we reach El-Guisr. The plateau upon which this village (El-Guisr) stands is the most elevated point, and the cuttings the deepest upon the whole canal.

Ismailia, next to Port Said, is the most important point on the canal. It is not only the official headquarters of the company, but the residence of the principal officials. Until within a recent period, the offices of the contractors, MM. Borli and Lavalley, were also located here, but these have been removed to Port Said.

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At the feet of the gazier lie stretched out the town of Suez, the port, and the roadstead. On their right hand tower up the lofty mountains of Attaka, which crown the Red Sea. To the left, high in the heavens, rises the hoary head of Mount Sinai, between sea and desert. In front, far as the eye can reach, toss and sparkle the bright blue waves of the sea—more azure in hue than those of the Mediterranean.

It must be remembered that all the cuttings have been from the Mediterranean towards Suez, and that the main body of the men employed, numbering eighty-five hundred, are working at the head of the canal, which is now advanced as far as Serapeum. Here it is necessary to cut through a number of sand-hills to the Bitter Lakes, which are a series of depressions in the desert, in the lowest parts of which are marshy ponds.

The roadstead of Suez and its port are very large and very secure. More than five hundred vessels can find place there at a time. Much of M. de Lesseps' work had already been done here for him by his rivals the "P. and O." Company. A magnificent dry-dock has been constructed and the most extensive dredging and jetty-making operations are in progress.

During 1868 2088 vessels, aggregating 674,048 tons burden, arrived at Port Said, and 370,000 tickets were issued by the Transit Service. According to the estimates of M. de Lesseps this amount will be increased to 3,000,000 tons per annum the first year after the completion of the canal, and that, during succeeding years, this amount will be doubled. But these estimates are based upon the successful completion of the canal and the navigation of it by steamers drawing from sixteen to twenty-two feet of water.

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The crown heads of Europe will either attend in person or be represented by some royal relative, in order to give fitting éclat to the ceremonies. The Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, the Emperor Eugénie, the Sultan Abdal Aziz, the King of Greece, the Prince of Wales, and Prince Humbert, the Italian Crown Prince, will all be present.

The Emperor's decision was given in July, 1864, for this last intervention of his in the affair was five years later than his first, which settled the preliminary points, and was given after the death of Said, who died in January, 1863. And this aid of the Emperor's came in good time, firstly, to save the scheme in infancy from being swamped by England; and secondly, to save it, at a maturer period, from the hostility or indifference of Said's successor, Ismail Pacha, who did not wish to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor in anything.

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