

THE  
**DIRECT HIGHWAY**  
**TO THE EAST,**

Considered as the perfection of  
GREAT BRITAIN'S DUTIES TOWARDS BRITISH  
INDIA ;

In a paper read in the Geographical Section

OF THE  
**BRITISH ASSOCIATION**  
AT BRIGHTON, ON

Thursday, 15th August, 1872.

BY  
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## DIRECT HIGHWAY TO THE EAST

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1. How best to get to India has doubtless been a "quæstio vexata" from the time that Vasco di Gama first doubled the Cape of Good Hope; and the subject at the present day, may well form a topic of enquiry in the Geographical Section of the British Association, considering that the passage there and to our Eastern Colonies by the Red Sea is, assuredly, not the most direct route from Europe. On the contrary, a single glance at the map must convince the veriest tyro in Geography that doubling the Arabian Peninsula, though a vast improvement upon the old course is, at best, but a crab-like mode of progression, and at the worst—during the period of the S. W. Monsoon,—scarcely admitting of that resemblance.

2. Even when Geography as a science was little known and less attended to, commercial intercourse between the Eastern and Western Worlds intuitively had place for the most part, through the pleasant regions of Mesopotamia;—and how that intercourse became gradually deflected is readily understood as a consequence of the decline of the Old World Empires and the growth of new ones farther to the West. These, as maritime nations "par excellence," preferred trusting their ventures to the Ocean and its Storms on a lengthened and round about course, rather than face the perils of the older tracts,—perils resulting in the anarchy succeeding to lost Governments and decayed military prestige.

3. History relates how that anarchy was prolonged, how all Asia and even portions of Europe and Africa were overrun by tribes who by sea and land, lived by conquest and piracy; and, therefore, there is nothing surprising in the fact of the Old World's highways being for the most part abandoned, or of the new being clung to pertinaciously to our own time. Had that giant agent Steam not initiated a new order of things, just in time for us to profit by events which happily have proved beneficial, though decried at the time, the Red Sea would moreover have remained a dead sea still, as far as we are concerned.

4. Those events were, the combined action of the European Powers at Navarino, Muscovite successes against Turkey, and the French conquest of Algiers; coupled with the praiseworthy activity of the Indian Government in the suppression of Arab piracies, both in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. These occurrences had place between 1820 and 1830, and certainly conduced to a more wholesome state of affairs in all tracts intermediate to the Atlantic and the Bay of Bengal. Mahomedan atrocities, long so much dreaded and so unaccountably tolerated there, especially by sea, were then finally put a stop to. Thus, free trade with India becoming the law a short time afterwards, a fair field for steam by the Red Sea was offered to the enterprising. Yet the route needed all the efforts of the British and Indian Governments to open it in the first instance; and to their credit be it said, they pushed those efforts, through good and evil report, every where with a will.

5. Surveys on an elaborate and extensive scale were commenced; coal was sent round the Cape to Bombay and then transhipped for Suez; and when the first Steamer built in India was ready for the work, her voyages began. Some sacrifice of life and great perils attended all these operations, at first, in an unknown sea, but they were surmounted; and the experiment—though very costly—promising success, the public interest was so much awakened as to bestir the country at large in 1834, into the consideration of other routes than the Red Sea, for, it must not be forgotten, that the direct route to India was even then

acknowledged to be in the direction of the Euphrates river. Indeed, for some years before, that is in 1829-30-31-32, the lamented CHESNEY, with the unflagging zeal which ever characterised him, had dared blows, robbery, plague, had risked death, in short, in every form in traversing alone all regions from Egypt to the Black Sea, with the object of facilitating intercourse between the Eastern and Western World. The journals of these preliminary proceedings, the surveys executed, and the narrative of the Government Expedition which he subsequently led, in 1835, from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, are records of men and events of which Great Britain may well be proud.

6. The Euphrates River Navigation scheme, however, proved a failure, owing to a want of water for speedy passage by it during six months of the year. But of the permanent good effected by the Euphrates expedition, there is happily incontestible proof. On CHESNEY's footsteps others followed, so that through the fostering care of the Indian Government, the British flag has waved on the classic streams of Mesopotamia ever since. European houses, founded by enterprising men, have gradually flourished there; and a line of steamers on the Tigris—both British and Turkish—has been established for some years. Slavery, if not wholly suppressed there, has materially diminished through British action. The Telegraph spans the entire tract; and profitable commercial intercourse with India and England, timourously began, is now constant by a weekly communication, via the Persian Gulf and Baghdad on the one hand, and by a Dromedary post thence to Beyrout—relaid in 1839—on the other. The latter had creation, indeed, in the last century, but had ceased to run after having done good service to India in the wars of the first Napoleon. When, too, Egypt failed us during the Syrian War in 1840-41, the Indian Mails passed safely through to England, in this odd manner, by the Euphrates Valley route which, in short, from remote ages had been a well beaten highway.

7. It may therefore be readily inferred that forty years of progressive intercourse, has not been without benefit in ameliorating the condition both of the desert nomads of

Mesopotamia and the fixed populations of the towns. Nor without national profit to ourselves and the Turkish Government, despite drawbacks which private energy has had to contend with in the tracts, from the want of efficient public support. Had a better spirit prevailed, Mesopotamia would have been bridged over with railways long before this; for when CHESNEY's river project was no longer tenable, it was foreseen that the Railway system, then beginning to develop itself in Europe and extending to India, was the one thing needed to furnish the broken link to his former chain of communication. To Mr W. P. ANDREW—the public spirited Chairman of the Sind, Punjab, and Delhi Railways—the credit of this foresight is indeed due; and accordingly in 1856, CHESNEY, whose co-operation had been invited with that of Sir John MACNEILL, is to be traced once more in Syria with a staff of engineers laboring sedulously as ever to forge that link, and to open the highway of his dreams and of his waking thoughts. But his efforts on this second occasion were again barren of any practical result, although they demonstrated that the country was in every way adapted for the construction of a railway. Influences, in short, were so dead against the combined action of these energetic men, that it was idle to persevere. Thus disappointed we hear CHESNEY exclaiming in 1868, when he published his last narrative, that the only reward he ever coveted in life was to learn, how such prodigious efforts, in a cause so palpably good, failed to command public attention.

8. For all that he was penetrating enough to comprehend the situation, though it could not be publicly avowed. French ascendancy had, indeed, mastered it, both in Syria and Egypt, from the rise of the Second Empire to the opening of the Suez Canal. The Crimean War, the occupation of Damascus, the prolonged works on the Isthmus of Suez, in all of which the French took so prominent a part, shook the wind politically out of the British canvas for a time; and just at the time when railways in the East and West seemed disposed to approximate under improved administration both at home and in India. This was unfortunate, but we must not complain. Our day had dawned.

ed before in Syria, and had set with but little profit in the direction of the Euphrates Valley. Yet the sketch of Mesopotamia just given indicates that a move in the right direction, a move equally beneficial and humanising to Turkey as to ourselves, has even there been made. So much so, indeed, that the names of **ANDREW** and **CHESENEY**, of **KEMBALL** and **BLOSSE LYNCH**, of **LAYARD**, of **RICH**, of **RAWLINSON**, and of **VISCOUNT STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE**, in their several fields of operation, must ever be honorably associated with the region. And if we turn to Egypt and recall to mind its hideous landscape and that of the Red Sea route generally, prior to the era of Steam and the Rail, there is reason for unbounded satisfaction. Though our star has since somewhat paled in that latitude under other influences, there is no cause for regret. On the contrary, few can contemplate the great local change without honest pride in those who initiated, and in those who perfected it, to whatever nation they belong.

9. Happily as matters now stand there is no ground for jealousy. Turkey even is conspicuous in a desire for peaceful reforms; and while Russia is sedulously pushing her railways through the mountain districts of the Caucasus and in the regions beyond the Oxus, under the civilising influences of her destiny, the Porte seems earnest and sincere in asking England's co-operation to the same end in Asia Minor. Here there is a third opportunity for gathering up the reins by the national charioteer. In other words, looking Eastwards, an opportunity for encouraging Turkish efforts on our left, as we have done those of Egypt on our right, for the good of the world at large, and of India and our Eastern Colonies in particular. State exigencies are the bases of sound enterprise. Our exigency is an alternative and direct line Eastward, apart from the passage through Egypt. Turkey's exigency is, railway extension and progress within her borders; both offer to the world renewed intercourse between all races of men. If peace and good will are approachable, here are conditions having high claims to regard.

10. During the last two Sessions of Parliament, a special Committee of the House of Commons has, indeed,

sat for enquiry into the subject, and the favorable report anticipated from its labors is now a published fact. Men of all professions, ranks, and calibre, with few exceptions, seem agreed as to a fusion of interests with Turkey. But considerable diversity of opinion prevails as to particulars. And while a very laudable spirit has been evinced as to plans for adoption, the fact of the serious difficulty, if not impossibility, in the way of raising capital even for the most limited of the projects, has been mostly overlooked. Section A, for instance, favors through lines of rail across Europe to Constantinople and onwards:—

I.—By traversing Northern Persia either through Herat and Cabul to Peshawar; or, through Candahar to Bukkur on the Indus, in the direction of Lahore.

II.—By traversing Asia Minor, via Diyarbeker, Southern Persia, and Mekran to Kurachee, the sea port of Sind, or elsewhere.

III.—The same, by Diyarbeker, Jezireh, Mosul, on by the left or Eastern shores of the Tigris, and Persian Gulf and onwards, as No 2.

Section B advocates a combined sea and land route by Brindisi to Iskenderun, or the Orontes:—

IV.—Passing by Aleppo, Birjek, Orfa, Mosul, on by the right bank of the Tigris to Baghdad, Hilleh, and right bank of the Euphrates to Kuweyt on the N. West shore of the Persian Gulf, and thence by sea to Kurachee or elsewhere.

Section C proposes as B, to Aleppo:—

V.—Thence following the direction of the right bank of the River Euphrates through Deyr, Anah, and Hit, to Baghdad, re-curving thence as in No. 4.

VI.—Same as B to Aleppo, Deyr, Anah, and Hit, and still onward by the right bank of the Euphrates, out of reach of marsh and flood, by Kerbela Najaf, Semaweh, Sukesh Sheyukh, Zobeyr, and Kuweyt; thence onward as in Nos 4 and 5.

11. Such is a brief summary. Now for comment in a few words as possible. The proposed routes of Section A are admirable enough as conceptions; but they must practically be abandoned; for it would require a Golconda a



command, with a never failing faith in shareholders, to enter upon either of the projects numbered 1 and 2. Barrier upon barrier of stupendous mountain ranges, snows, rivers, deserts, antagonistic tribes, and treaty complications otherwise preclude a speedy or safe transit in these directions; at least in our day. And though No. 3 of this Section presents less engineering difficulties after the descent of the Taurus is once accomplished, the loss by the detour necessary to cross the Kurdistan and Persian tributaries to the Tigris in their upper course, would in a great measure nullify the object of the Rail; or, if keeping to the track of the traffic, very expensive viaducts—over fractious and uncertain streams contiguous to the Tigris, and, indeed, everywhere near to, and S.E. of Baghdad—would double the cost of the work in construction and in repairs. Then come deserts sparsely populated, scarcity of water, no materials, in short, nothing of moment to look to for profit by the Gulf shores and Mekran; these indicate an equally hopeless prospect for a railway in the line of No. 3.

12. As sections B and C hold together in their plans as far as Aleppo, they may be considered so far identical. British Indian interests these sections regard as safer by a combined sea and land route to Brindisi and the Syrian coast, where, they recommend as parts for termini of a railway, either Alexandretta or the mouth of the Orontes in the Mediterranean, and Kuweyt in the N.W. corner of the Persian Gulf. The latter is naturally well adapted for the object, and the Persian Gulf is eminently navigable throughout; but there are conflicting opinions as to the former ports and the engineering difficulties connected with them, one having its advocates as well as the other. Space will not admit of detailing all the "pros" and "cons" advanced, but there is scarcely a dissentient as to the superior position of Aleppo contiguous to both places. Geographically indeed, here is the key to the entire system of railways in Turkey, and the spot in which our interests therein should certainly be centered. Thence a railway might be led as in No. 4, or 5, or 6; and as the B section prefers No. 4 route of these, let us consider it first. Its chief advantages are, that it leads on a beaten track of commerce to Mosul, where it

could absorb the traffic of all lines from Constantinople through Diyarbeker northwards, and could be prolonged by either the right or left bank of the Tigris into Persia, or on to Baghdad, the present capital of Turkish Arabia. Its disadvantages are that the Euphrates must be bridged twice before Kuweyt is reached and the Tigris once, if its left bank is held to, where it would be subject to the objections raised in No. 3. By the right bank of the Tigris too, trade would be lost, as with the exception of the insignificant village Tekrit, all is desert to Baghdad and beyond. Again, these routes add 300 miles at least to the distance, and, in a strict sense, are but bye-ways to India.

13. Let us take up Section C's scheme, No. 5 from Aleppo. It is tortuous, has little local trade, and necessitates bridging the Euphrates twice. Some marsh too, would have to be encountered east and west of the Euphrates around Baghdad and Hilleh; therefore, increased expenses for viaducts and annual repairs. But No. 6 of Section C—the *true Euphrates Valley line*—is exempted from these drawbacks; here a railway continued on from Aleppo to the port of Kuweyt by the west *primitive* boundary of the river would be safe from marsh and flood. So obvious, indeed, are these advantages, that little explanation is needed, and there are others equally telling which would recommend this line as *the first for adoption*. It is near the old path of commerce between the East and West; it is the shortest, the least hilly, and the most direct by far of all the proposed routes, therefore the most economical. On the whole too, the Arab populations on the Euphrates are more fixed, more numerous, and more disposed to trade, while the local traffic is greater than on the Tigris, Baghdad, and Mosul excepted. These exceptions, indeed, constitute the one drawback to No. 6. But with the sacred shrines of Kerbela and Najaf as centres of attraction on the Euphrates for the Shiah Mahomedans of Persia and of India, these towns and others south of them made into Railway Stations, would rise briskly into importance, for pilgrimages here, in reality, are but profitable trading voyages in two senses to Moslemeen. Here are the true keys to open railway communication, in the first instance, with Persia through

Shuster and Baghdad; but to touch upon Mahomerah—or any other places within the true delta of the rivers—at the outset, would be a fatal mistake. The fact, too, of all the towns enumerated in No. 6 route, Section C, being on the right boundary of the Euphrates is significant in itself. That great geographical mystery, Arabia, can be solved too, with comparative ease from these positions, and the wasted cities of Syria, the Haouran and Palmyra, might be restored to Turkey.

14. Of all the projects considered, this “par excellence,” the Euphrates Valley Railway, commands the best prospect of immediate success. Our own interests undoubtedly lie here commercially, strategically, and politically. Commercially, as before shown, we are far advanced already on the rivers of Mesopotamia and in the Persian Gulf; for our merchants stand forward, like pawns on a chess-board there, in need only of home government support. Strategically, as a maritime nation, we shall be well placed at Alexandria and at Kuweyt, to face in any way in aid of Turkey; and with England and India as a base, to make demonstration against mischief on either hand. Politically, our waning prestige will be strengthened and better upheld here than anywhere; for while infusing new life into the paralyzed extremities of our old ally, Turkey, a move here must have the effect of renovating her throughout, and giving more stability to our own rule in India. Practically, indeed, new influences for good will be felt operating in all Southern Asia Minor, Persia, and Afghanistan; influences that will keep pace there with Russian influences to the same end to the north of those countries. Thus, from the Indus to the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Nile, fresh energies will be at work to cement old alliances, and to subdue that predatory disposition which has been for so long a fungus growth of these dear old Bible lands.

15. The length to which this paper has already reached will not admit of any statements of distances, or of financial expositions in detail; nor, indeed, of any controversion of objections offered to this route by its opponents. They can, however, be modified generally, if not wholly refuted. But a study of all these points is recommended from the evid-

ence on the Euphrates Valley Railway, and from the Consular Reports in connection with it, presented to the House of Commons by Her Majesty's command. Taken "*cum grano salis*," there will be found in both much to enlighten the general reader and the geographical inquirer; more to command the attention of the merchant, the soldier; and the statesman connected with British India. At the present day there are few, indeed, not bound up in some way or other with the great question of an alternative way thereto; and if vested interests, party considerations, and official proclivities, would but allow to the Euphrates Valley Scheme a fair field and as much favor as was shown to the Red Sea project some forty years ago, we should be at once better prepared against contingencies in Egypt and for emergencies in India, or elsewhere. At any hour these may present themselves, when the temper of Turkey may not be so complaisant. Others, too, may outwit us on this soil.

16. And relative to Turkey, it has been argued, *designedly perhaps*, that the Porte would be found averse to any project for railways in her Asiatic territory, not emanating from Constantinople. There is high authority, however, for declaring that to be an error founded upon ignorance of the policy and sentiments prevailing at the capital. These are of the most liberal character; and, indeed, need be, when the most economical scheme for the combined interests of both countries requires ten millions of money! And here it may be said, "*par parenthesis*," let the public beware of cheaper offers for more extended lines. They should be mistrusted as they will fail. But, we contend, that the smallest scheme will in the end develop all that we may reasonably expect, and all that Turkey may reasonably desire, while contributing at the beginning to a prosperity not known within the history of her occupation of Asia Minor. Happily for her then, happily for us, that the question of money restricts enterprise to the Euphrates Valley, for there our joint interests will be best served. She wants invigoration there more than at the capital. Those who would counsel otherwise, *however eminent*, know not where her remedies are best applied.

17. But reforms at the capital for ameliorating the condition of the "ryots" on the soil, must keep pace with any operations in the Euphrates Valley. Otherwise, that contemptible "bogey," the Arab of these tracts, will still be the paramount ruler, and the colonisation which is necessary to security, will never be assured. That accomplished, the rail, backed by the noble river, will afford a barrier within which the Arab himself may be easily utilised, or banished beyond it to his original deserts. Under these new institutions the wasted waters and the forced barrenness of the land would soon be turned to good account; for history, affirmed to by experience, certifies to its being the most prolific region of the globe. And whether the rail territory is farmed from Turkey for working on our own account, or jointly administered for mutual benefit, the cardinal talisman to success in all our transactions must be, the hearty recognition everywhere of the sovereign authority of the Sultan.

18. Whilst, therefore, engineering skill could find a fitting field in the Euphrates Valley, diplomatic foresight should be directed there rather than exclusively to Constantinople; for in the direction of the Persian Gulf the Sultan's authority is not only very threadbare, but according to the latest telegrams, in some jeopardy of subversion. There, the abolition of the Indian Navy was more than an injudicious policy in 1862, it was a political blunder; there, we have, in 1872, a chance of amending it and of restoring our lost prestige with Turkey, with Persia, and with the Arab States. Then India indeed contributed much towards her own internal security, and to the trading interests of herself and her Mahomedan neighbours, by an exhibition of her power in alliance with the Sovereigns whose frontiers touch for good and evil in the Persian Gulf. The presence of our squadrons on this inland sea calmed and even controlled national animosities; we were a friendly and an effective police in fact, between anarchy and peaceful pursuits; and with a highway to India on the Euphrates valley, our influence again would be multiplied for all interests in a ten-fold degree.

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