

and in its turn affects so potently the course of economic and political history, that I shall be content with one illustration—that drawn from the Suez Canal, which has just been referred to in its legal aspect. The line of the Red Sea, and the passage from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, through Egyptian territory, was a very important trade route in ancient times, and it was with a view to the trade coming from the East that Alexander the Great did one of the most considerable acts of his life when he founded Alexandria. That continued to be an important route during the later Roman Empire and through the Dark Ages, so far as those troublous times permitted, and the products of India and Equatorial Africa came up the Red Sea and across the Isthmus, and were shipped at Alexandria to the Western World. There was also an important trade route through Central Asia, which, coming down through Persia and Mesopotamia to the Levant, reached the sea in Northern Syria, and another through Northern Persia and Armenia to the easternmost ports of the Black Sea. These trade routes assumed enormous importance in the earlier Middle Ages, and upon them great political issues turned. Venice, Genoa, Pisa and the other commercial cities of Italy, depended on this Eastern trade. The Genoese had for a time a monopoly of that in the Black Sea, and founded settlements and built forts of which the ruins may still be seen on the north coast of Asia Minor. So things went on till the Portuguese discoveries of the fifteenth century. After the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope, these trade routes into the Mediterranean fell into disuse. Thus withered the commercial greatness of Venice. She ceased to be a great trading power, and had to live on her Italian territories and such fragments of dominion as she was able to pick up out of the wreck of the Eastern Roman

Empire. Venice was in most intimate relations with the other States of Italy—with Germany, with the Pope and with France—and all these political relations were affected by the discovery of the route round the Cape. In the course of the last century the sea traffic with the East, which had been divided between Portugal, England, and Holland, for the share of Spain had become small, passed chiefly into the hands of English merchants. England has become the great maritime power, for the purposes of commerce as well as of war, and it is her commercial interests that led her to acquire dominions on the Asiatic continent, and made her at last the imperial power of the East. Then comes M. Ferdinand De Lesseps. When the Suez Canal is opened the trade route round the Cape suddenly stops, as the passenger route had ceased some time previously, and trade again begins to flow through the Red Sea and by the new canal into the Mediterranean, and the products which came round the Cape now come to Southern Europe direct, and the Russians get their tea straight from Canton or Shanghai by steamers which run from those ports to Odessa, and Southern France gets her cotton and silk through the Suez Canal to Marseilles; whereas formerly the great bulk of Eastern imports was shipped to England and the other ports of North-Western Europe, and were thence distributed over the Continent. Thus the result of the making of the Suez Canal is that we are no longer the great centre of European distribution. We are still a financial centre, where the financial part of the business is mainly transacted; but we are no longer a country which receives and distributes the products, as we were before the Suez Canal was opened. This change is obviously fraught with results which may be of great importance in the future. We know what a large part the Suez Canal