

## BRITAIN'S POSITION IN EGYPT.

To the Editor of the Victoria Home Journal:

SIR:—Having read with much interest an article in your paper, headed as above, I venture to send you extracts from Sir Samuel Baker's work, "Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia," (1867), and think that a grand monument to British enterprise would be raised by carrying out the idea there sketched:

"Having visited every tributary of the Nile, I have been struck with the extraordinary fact, that enormous wealth is conveyed to Egypt by the annual inundations of the river Nile—the force of the stream is entirely uncontrolled. No attempt has been made to insure a supply of water to Egypt during all seasons. The inundations are caused by the sudden rush of waters from the torrents of Abyssinia in July, August and September; and the soil washed down by the floods of the Atbara is at the present moment silting up the mouth of the Nile and forming a delta below the waters of the Mediterranean. An immense proportion of the fertilizing mud is not only wasted, but navigation is impeded by the silt. Great reservoirs should be formed throughout the extent of Egypt from Khartoum to the Mediterranean comprising 16° of latitude, with a fall of fifteen hundred feet. This would afford any quantity of irrigation by the establishment of a series of weirs across the Nile at certain points, from which the water would be led by canals into natural depressions; these would form reservoirs from which the water could be led on a vast scale. As stone is plentiful throughout the Nile district, the engineering difficulties would be trifling.

"Mehemet Ali erected a barrage between Cairo and Alexandria, which by simply raising the level of the river, enabled the people to extend their channels for irrigation. But this was the crude idea which has not been carried out on a commensurate scale with the requirements of Egypt. The ancient Egyptians made use of the lake Marœtis as a reservoir for the Nile waters for the irrigation of a large extent of Lower Egypt by taking advantage of a high Nile to secure a supply for the remainder of the year; but they appeared to have ignored the first principle of irrigation, by neglecting to raise the level of the river.

"Egypt remains in the same position

that Nature originally allotted to her; the life-giving stream that flows through a thousand miles of burning sands suddenly rises in July and floods the Delta, which it has formed by a deposit, and it wastes a superabundance of fertilizing mud in the waters of the Mediterranean. Why should not the mud of the Nile which now silts up the Sea, be directed to the barren but vast area of deserts that by such a deposit would become a fertile portion of Egypt? The enormous volume of water heavily charged with soil that now rushes uselessly into the sea might be led through the deserts of Nubia and Lybia to transform them into cotton-fields that could render England independent of America. It is merely a simple and common-place fact that with a fall of 1,500 feet in 1,000 miles with a river that supplies an unlimited quantity of water and mud at a particular season, a supply could be afforded to a prodigious area by an annual deposit of soil from the water allowed to waste. This suggestion might be carried out by gradations.

"A single dam could be put above the first cataract at Assouan, at a spot where the river is walled in by granite hills. The water could here be raised to an exceedingly high level that would facilitate also the navigating of the river now frequently closed by the cataracts. By raising the level of the Nile sixty feet at every dam, the cataracts would no longer exist. Sluice gates and canals would conduct the shipping either up or down the stream. Were this principle carried out as far as the last cataract, near Khartoum, the Soudan would no longer remain a desert; the Nile would not only cultivate these immense tracts now utterly worthless; but it would be the navigable channel of Egypt for the extraordinary distance of 27° of latitude from the Mediterranean to Gondokoro. More remote countries in the interior of Africa are so difficult of access that it will be simply impossible to alter the condition of the inhabitants unless we change the natural conditions under which they exist. Their geographical position desert-locked excludes them from the civilized world. Nevertheless through that desert and neglected wilderness the Nile has flowed for ages, and the people on its banks are as wild and as uncivilized as they were when the Pyramids were raised in

Lower Egypt. Hereafter men will look in amazement on a mighty Egypt upon a network of canals and reservoirs spreading throughout a land teeming with fertility.

"In Ceylon water was conducted by artificial channels throughout the land. It was the most fertile country in the East; her power equalled her prosperity. The dams were destroyed in civil warfare; the country dried up; famine swallowed up the population; the grandeur and prosperity of the country collapsed; 10,000 square miles now lie desolate in thorny jungles, where formerly a sea of rice-crops floated on the surface. In Egypt there is an industrious population crowded upon a limited surface of fertile soil and yearning for an increase of surface. We saw the Egyptians boating the earth from crumbling ruins and transporting it with arduous labor to spread it on the barren sandbanks of the Nile left by the retreating tide. By the works above mentioned the water would have been filtered to the sea.

"In growing cotton before, the Egyptians suffered miserably as an unusual surface was devoted to its culture; grain had to be imported, not exported. As a conclusion the taxes on the increased produce would not only cover the first outlay on the irrigation works, but permanently increase the revenue. A dam across the Atbara would irrigate the entire country from Gozeragup to Berber, a distance of upwards of 200 miles, and the system on the Nile would carry the water throughout the deserts between Khartoum and Dongola and thence to Lower Egypt. The great Sahara is a desert simply because it gets no rainfall.

"England would become a desert if it were deprived of rain for three or four years. The deserts of Egypt have never known rain except in an unexpected shower. This is the way to civilize a country. The engineer will alter the hard conditions of Nature that have rendered man as barren of good works as the sterile soil of fruits. Then you may hope for usual progress."

*Verbum sap.*

Yours,

EDWD. MALLANDAINE.

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