

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Public DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No.

885

Press
Mis.

Dated

18-7-

1870

Not to be folded or roughly handled

*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Public Department,
18th July 1870.*

No. 61. Read the following Despatch from the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for India, to His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor in Council, Fort Saint George, dated India Office, London, 16th June 1870, No. 17, (Public):—

I forward, herewith, for the information of your Excellency in Council, copy of a report by the Surveyor of the Post Offices in the Mediterranean, on the subject of the effect which the opening of the Suez Canal may have on the Mail Services with the East.

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From E. CRESWELL, Esq., Surveyor of the Post Offices in the Mediterranean, to the Secretary, General Post Office, London, dated Alexandria, 3rd May 1870.

The opening of the Suez Canal since my last visit to Egypt, and the modifications to which it may eventually lead in our Eastern Mail Service, have led me to seek information on the subject of a work that has excited such general interest, and I beg to submit to you some of the results of my inquiries. The French Government, as you are aware, have viewed the canal as a completed work, and are already sending their mails through it. There are still, however, great difficulties opposed to the passage of steamers of the size and draught of water of the “Messageries” boats employed in the conveyance of their China Mails. The *Hooghly* on her homeward voyage was partially disabled, losing two of the fans of her screw in the canal. The *Imperatrice*, which followed, was still more unfortunate, damaging her screw to such an extent that she was completely disabled, and had to be towed to Alexandria. These successive disasters raised doubts whether the Messageries Company would continue to send their ships through the canal, and considerable interest was felt respecting the *Hooghly* which having undergone repairs left Marseilles with the China Mail on Sunday the 17th April. The result of the *Hooghly's* second passage through the canal was, it was reported, to determine whether the Company would continue their attempt to utilize the Canal, or resort to the old method of sending their mails through Egypt by the Railway. The *Hooghly* arrived at Port Said the evening of Friday the 22nd April. To avoid the danger of damage to her machinery, the propelling power of the steamer was not used on her entrance into the canal on Saturday morning, but she was towed by steam tugs. The steamer reached the entrance of Lake Tunsah on Saturday evening, but took the ground just at the entrance of the lake; she remained hard and fast till Monday morning, when after discharging great part of her coal, she was again got afloat, and arrived at the Suez terminus of the canal on Monday afternoon at half-past five. I was at Suez at the time and witnessed her exit from the canal. The steamer took in coal during Monday night, and left the roadstead for China early on Tuesday morning. An exact measure of the time lost by the *Hooghly's* mails from their passage through the canal is given by the circumstance that these mails left Marseilles at the same time with the London Mail for Bombay by the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steamer *Nyanza*. The *Nyanza* arrived at Alexandria at three on Friday afternoon, (22nd April). Her mails were sent across to Suez on Saturday night. The Behar with the above mails and passengers left Suez for Bombay on Sunday morning, or two days before the *Hooghly*.

2. Had the *Hooghly* passed through the canal without accident or detention she would have reached Suez on Sunday evening, and might have left that port about eight hours after the *Behar*; but it must be borne in mind that the *Behar's* mails were at Suez twenty-four hours before the steamer started having been forwarded from Alexandria on the night of the 22nd, the passengers and cargo following on the night of the 23rd. The *Hooghly* is a faster ship than the *Nyanza*, and gained some sixty or seventy miles upon her on the passage from Marseilles

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3. Port Said is about ninety miles further then Alexandria from either Brindisé or Marseilles. Supposing that mails left Marseilles in ships of equal size, power and speed going eleven knots an hour, those for Alexandria would reach that port about eight hours before the arrival at Port Said of those going through the canal. The landing at Alexandria and transit to Suez would occupy about fourteen hours.

4. The passage of the Mail Steamer through the canal would occupy about eighteen hours of daylight, viz., ten hours from Port Said to Ismalia, and eight from Ismalia to Suez, to this time must be added ten hours of night between the two days of the passage, for at present it is sufficiently difficult, with every care and precaution, for steamers of a large class to navigate the canal in the daytime without accident, and all movements at night might be considered an impossibility. The French Government allow the Messageries' boats thirty hours for the passage between Port Said and Suez. The transit from Port Said to Suez and *vice versa* will not, therefore, I believe be accomplished under the most favourable circumstances in less than twenty-eight hours. This leaves a gain of fourteen hours in favour of the Alexandria over the Port Said route, which, added to the eight hours gained at sea between Marseilles and Alexandria, gives a total of twenty-two hours in favour of the Alexandria line. If we deduct two hours for shipping, the mails at Suez there will still remain twenty hours gained by the Alexandria route. In the present state of the canal it seems that ships not drawing more than 19½ feet of water can pass through it, but to do so without getting aground or damaging their machinery, a low speed and very expert handling of the ship are necessary. The middle section of the canal or deep channel ought according to plan to leave a uniform breadth of 22 inches, (between 23 and 24 yards,) but in places it was not more than half that breadth. At the point where the *Imperatrice* damaged her screw the breadth was only 11 inches according to the statement of the Port Said journal, which gave an account of the accident. Big steamers are, therefore, obliged to steer on a perfectly straight line in the very centre of the canal from which they cannot diverge on either side without danger of either running aground or striking the bank with their screw, and so perhaps become disabled. The danger of damage to machinery can be avoided by the steamer being towed instead of using her own propeller, but this again increases the danger of running aground, since a steamer steers much better when using her own screw than when towed. Thus the *Houghly*, as I was informed, was towed as far as Lake Timsah where she grounded, but the Commander, after his ship was got afloat, preferred to use his own machinery for the rest of the passage to Suez. There are some curves in the course of the canal which present difficulties to long ships, and which, it is said, they can pass with perfect safety only by the slow process of towing.

5. It has been supposed that a strong wind blowing across the canal might drive a passing vessel upon the bank, but I am told that in practice no difficulty arises from this cause, so long as a speed of four or five knots an hour is maintained which enables the ship to reef always in mid channel. Should, however, the way be blocked and the progress of a vessel be thereby arrested, she would be drifted aground on the lee bank unless the danger were averted by her being promptly moored.

Mooring posts placed at short intervals along the banks, and a good line of buoys to mark distinctly the deep channel, are the means by which it is proposed to render the navigation of the canal less difficult. The obstruction likely to arise from said drifts falling into the canal is made light of by the Company. The extent to which this cause impeded the construction of the canal is known, and the amount of the sand deposit accurately measured by the contractors for the work, who were paid for the removal of this deposit in addition to the original excavation of the canal. Opinions vary very much as to the amount of the deposit in the canal from the wash on the banks of the wave caused by every passing ship. Powerful dredges will, no doubt, be required to counteract the obstruction that might arise from this cause and from sand drift, and dredging will be a very heavy item of expense in the maintenance of the canal. It would, of course, greatly facilitate the navigation of the canal if it

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could be made wider throughout its course, but the financial position of the Company offers very little prospect of this being done. It is said that before any dividend can be made to the original shareholders, the preferential claims of the debenture holders, amounting to £400,000 per annum, must be first paid besides the working expenses and cost of maintenance estimated at some £300,000 a-year. The gross receipts for March were £25,000, the traffic through the canal must, therefore, be more than double its present amount before the original shareholders can hope to receive any dividend. It does not seem likely that the Suez Canal can ever provide so quick a means of conveyance through Egypt as the Railway, so long as the mails are carried through the canal by the large class steamers which convey them to India and China, and which cannot pass through the canal at a greater speed than four or five knots an hour. It might be for the interest of the Peninsular and Oriental Company to send their ships through the canal and thereby avoid the trans-shipment of cargo, but the necessary despatch of the Mail Service would still require that their vessels should receive the mails from the Railway at Suez and Alexandria. The requirements of the service and the interest of the Company might perhaps be equally satisfied—for example, if each Southampton boat after landing her mails at Alexandria proceeded through the canal and waited at Suez in readiness to depart the moment the mails of the succeeding week were placed on board. A similar arrangement might be made for the homeward mails, the steamer from India after landing her mails at Suez passing through the canal and waiting at Alexandria for the succeeding mails. But in view of the accidents that have happened to the French Mail Steamers, it would hardly be prudent to consent to an arrangement of this kind at present, unless a spare steamer were stationed at Alexandria and Suez to carry on the Mail Service in case of any accident happening to the steamer passing the canal. It is possible, I think, that the canal, at some future time, will beat the Railway in the performance of the quick Mail Service. High pressure steamers of very small draught of water, like the American river boats, might convey the mails between Port Said and Suez to the packets at either end in five or six hours. I am told that the damage to the banks caused by the wave of a passing vessel depends upon her size and draught, and that no injury would be caused by a shallow boat going at a high velocity of fifteen or sixteen miles per hour.

No. 62. ORDER THEREON, 18th July 1870, No. 885.
Communicated to the Postmaster-General.
(True Extract.)

Under Secy. to Govt.

To the Postmaster-General.

Exd. J. Wright.

India Office London
16th June 1870

Public
No. 17.

My Lord

I forward herewith,
for the information of your
Excellency in Council, copy of
a Report by the Surgeon of
the Post Office in the
Mediterranean, on the subject
of the effect which the opening
of the Suez Canal may have
on the Mail Services with
the East.

16th June 1870

I have the honour to be
My Lord

Your Lordship's most obedient
humble servant

Edw. M.

His Excellency
The Right Honourable
The Governor in Council
Fort St George

Bank

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PUBLIC.

To
THE POSTMASTER GENERAL.

Dated July, 1870.

Recd.

And

G. O. 1304 July 1870, No. 885.

JULY.
Nos. 61-62.

Communicating a report by the Surgeon of
the Post Office in the Mediterranean, relative to
the effect which the opening of the Suez Canal may
have on the Mail Services in the East.

No. 2
Public 1070 Dept.

Public
16. June 1870

1870 July 1870

The
Letter to the
No 17.

Order. Recommended
18 July 1870. No. 885-

Communicated
to the Postmaster General.

Received 15. July /70

No 1139

Forwarding for informa-
tion copy of a report by the
Surveyor of the Post Office in
the Mediterranean on the
subject of the effect which the
opening of the Suez Canal
may have on the Mail
Services with the East.

To the Postmaster General
date 20/1

With an article