

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IRAQ-MEDITERRANEAN PIPE-LINE

CHAPTER I

THE PIPE-LINE—A RETROSPECT

Bismillahi'l Rahmani'l Rahim! Not otherwise than by calling upon the name of the Compassionate, the Merciful, should a work in the lands of Islam be undertaken: not otherwise should a record of the task achieved be written down. And, for the enterprise to be described in these pages, this invocation of a Power beyond humanity may to some seem doubly suitable; for the work itself belongs to no man-made setting of books or laboratories or even cities, but to the great spaces—desert, river and mountain—where the ways and forces of Nature exercise their ancient sway, neither to be tamed nor questioned: and the mineral fluid for whose movement the whole system has been called into being is but a product of Nature's own devising, prepared by her ages before Man existed, and deposited, till he should need it, in its rocky store-house deep in earth.

(i) The Work Done.

It is the purpose of this Report to commemorate the completion of a great work of engineering. What, then, constitutes such "greatness"—and how high can the present achievement be justly ranked? To the second of these questions it would be difficult, perhaps invidious, exactly to reply; to the first, unscientific but intelligible materials for an answer will be suggested by glancing at the various criteria applicable (though with differing stress to each achievement judged) to this and other major works of men's hands. How considerable, one should ask, was the essential task in terms of man's best previous efforts of the kind? What vision or courage did its inception demand? How far truly adequate to its function stands the finished work? Of what

order were the technical problems, the need for advanced design and specialized equipment, the co-ordination of various contributing services—or the administrative difficulties or exigencies of terrain, climate, and society? How do the cost, the labour used, the time taken, compare with those of other enterprises? The pages here following will contain some evidence towards answering these questions in respect of the Pipe-Line of the Iraq Petroleum Company; and they will, it is believed, prove its claim to rank very high among such of the great works of man as are anyhow comparable.

The essential task was to transport by pipes, from one of the most remarkable Fields in the world across desert, river and mountain, four million tons of oil annually to two seaports—in two countries—on the Mediterranean Sea, the one more than five and the other more than six hundred miles from the source. Conceived on such a scale, the enterprise called for no common qualities of grasp and resolution in its initiation, with a courage and confidence not least remarkable in a time of deep and world-wide industrial depression. In passing, the enormous strength of the international and widely-separated interests grouped—grouped for the first time, on this scale, in Oil history—to effect the scheme, may be emphasised.

The finished Pipe-Line system performs, and will for many years perform with full efficiency and economy, the task for which it was designed; and will be capable of almost limitless expansion when the hour or successive hours for that may strike. Meanwhile, it is not only the greatest of all electrically-welded Lines, but, from the combined view-points of throughput capacity and of capital cost, it stands as the greatest Pipe-Line construction enterprise ever