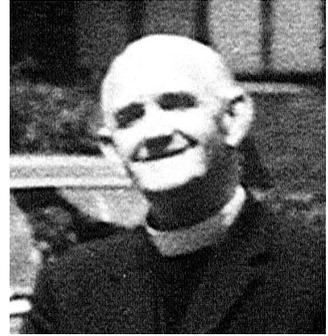


THE ASWAN DAM IN PROPHECY

by the late Rev. G.H. Thompson,
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Editor's note: though this article was written several decades ago it is thought that it makes a valuable contribution to the magazine because it shows the background to modern Egypt and its surrounding area, as well as indicating related prophecies, some of which still await fulfilment. The wording has been updated in places to make it more readable but important dates have been left in place.

This article is intended to be a mere introduction to a detailed and illustrated account of the high dam at Aswan. Our aim is to show that the river Nile, Egypt and Aswan are bound together in some of the most important prophecies of the Old Testament, those which have never yet been fulfilled as the text of Scripture will adequately prove.

On July 21st 1970 the Aswan Dam was finally completed when the 12th turbine was set in motion. This important event was scarcely mentioned in the world press at the time as it was considered secondary to local items of news. Even the *Soviet Weekly*, *The Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph* found this of little news value, and yet only a few years previously the Aswan Dam was considered to be one of the world's new wonders. We ourselves wonder why so little was said. Can it be that 'the upholders of Egypt' (Ezekiel ch.30 v.6) will be doomed to fail. Had they realised that the dangerous leak of the previous year, (1969) plus the serious technological setbacks suffered by the Soviet engineers, to which must be added the adverse effect on the Egyptian economy, were hardly matters to shout about, If the Aswan Dam was the great success they hoped it would be, the USSR* and the Egyptians would have bellowed loud in jubilation.

Whilst this introduction was written, news of President Nasser's death was announced. It is worth noting that the Aswan Dam was in a special way the brainwave of the late President. It was his insistence on the project continuing that resulted in Great Britain and the United States withdrawing financial assistance, whilst at the same time their withdrawal paved the way for the USSR* to take over, not only the building of the Dam but the erection of airfields and other military sites.

We awaited the complete take-over of Egypt by the USSR, and the death of the President made this more than a possibility.

[* note: USSR is presently the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]

Syene is Aswan

In relation to the passages we are about to quote the reader is asked to note that the prophet Isaiah prophesies concerning the northern part of Egypt, and, particularly, the Nile delta, whereas the prophet Ezekiel speaks about Syene, or Aswan, and gives us details which are not mentioned by Isaiah. Thus, in the mouth of two witnesses this truth is established. It is also of importance to note that well over a hundred years separated these two prophets.

As the name 'Aswan' is to be equated with the name 'Syene' we must give the evidence straight away because the whole case will depend upon this premise.

Ezekiel refers to Syene in two passages, namely,

'Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia'.

Ezekiel ch.29 v.10

'Thus saith the LORD; They also that uphold Egypt shall fall; and the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Syene shall they fall in it by the sword, saith the Lord GOD.'

ch.30 v.6

Reference to *Young's Concordance* shows that Syene is a city in the south of Egypt ... now called Asouan, or Aswan. Turning to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* under the heading of Syenite, we read,

'The name, SYENITE, was first used by Pliny for the rock occurring at Syene (Assuan) on the Nile in upper Egypt'.

A third reference has been found in a past Colour Supplement of *The Sunday Times*.

'At the end of ten days one reaches Aswan, the Syene of ancient days.'

The Nile Delta

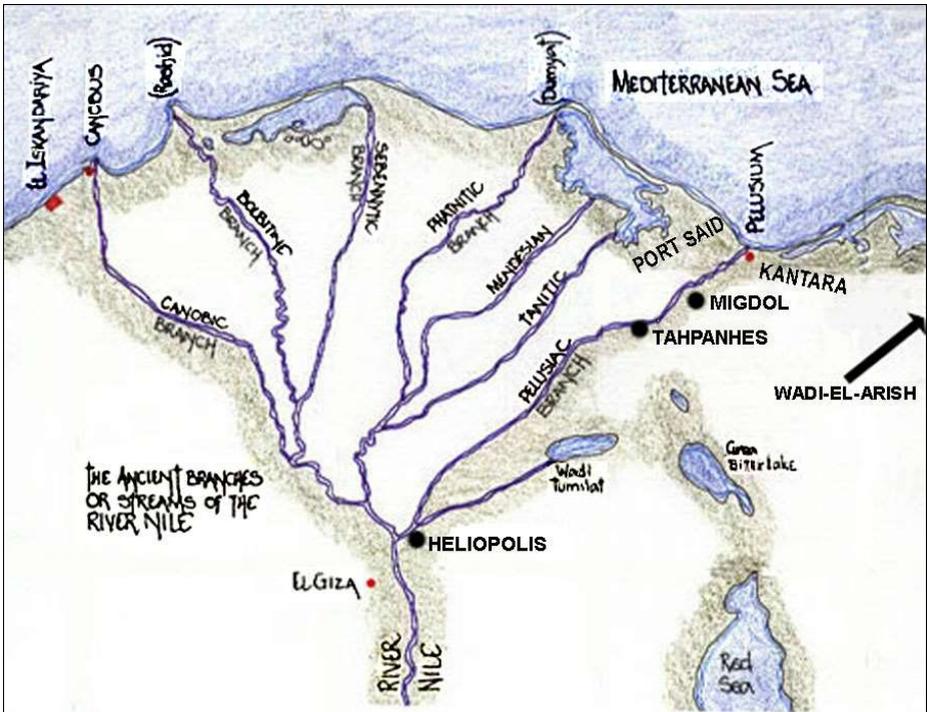
Biblical reference to the Nile delta is to be found as follows.

‘And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod.’

Isaiah ch.11 v.15

Under the heading, ‘Suez Canal’. the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states this.

‘At one time the river Nile entered the Mediterranean by seven separate channels instead of two only, as at present. The Pelusiatic, the most easterly of these branches, passed north of the site of the present Kantara, while the Tanitic branch entered the Mediterranean about 10 miles East of the present town of Port Said.’



Map of Nile Delta, with modern names added, and used with permission of cartographyunchained.com

These names are of significance when comparing the geography of Egypt, past and present, in the light of prophecy. The seven streams known to the Ancients were Canopus, Bolbitine (famous for the Rosetta Stone found there), Sebennytic, Phatnitic (Damietta branch), Mendesian, Tanitic, and Pelusiatic, ('Tahpanhes' of Jeremiah chs 44-46 was built on its bank).

The reader will be left in no doubt that the Nile delta had seven streams, and that this was the place indicated by the prophet Isaiah.

The Tongue of the Egyptian Sea

In Heinrich Kiepert's *Atlas Antiquus* (tab. 4) he refers to the Nile delta as 'Nili Septem Ostia' (seven rivers of the Nile) and to the Sea (Mediterranean) immediately north of the Delta as the 'Mare Aegyptium' (Egyptian Sea). If we are to accept this fact, the Nile delta - the seven streams - would be the tongue.

This would indeed simplify the prophecy of Isaiah and absorb the whole of ch.11 v.15. It would also imply the complete destruction of the Suez Canal which commences at Port Said, lying as it does between two of the seven streams. This tongue would be drinking the Nile: it has been estimated that 30% of the Nile waters are lost, and it is to this end that the Aswan High Dam is being built.

Another view has been accepted by students of prophecy regarding the tongue. They point out that the Gulf of Suez, or, as it was anciently known, the Gulf of Heliopolis, was linked to the ancient cities of Egypt by many canals, some of which were built as early as 2000 BC, but if we should accept this it would make the Red Sea the Egyptian Sea. Would we be justified in considering this view?

The Pillar of Egypt

The final prophecy is found in Isaiah, chapter 19, and the reader is recommended to read the whole chapter. For the sake of convenience we will quote a few of the more striking passages and leave our conclusions until a later date.

'And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; ...'
v. 4

'And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up.'
v. 5

'In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD.'
v. 19

‘And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they [the Egyptians] shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them.’

v. 20

‘Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.’

v. 25

From the above passages one fact emerges clearly. The coming calamity and confusion in the land of Egypt is to result in a turning from idolatry unto the Lord of hosts, and the Great Pyramid of Gizeh will play an important part in this great work of God. This is because when they have tried by means of the counsel of those who have familiar spirits and found them wanting, they will turn to the Message of the Great Pyramid - a message they have always known but refused to apply - and the result will be that they will recognise the Plan of God for His servant nation, Israel, in relation to themselves.

Tahpanhes and Migdol

These two places played a very important part in the lifetime of Jeremiah, and the King's daughters, for it was to Tahpanhes that Jeremiah was compelled to take refuge in one of Pharaoh's houses. We have already pointed out that Tahpanhes was on the most easterly stream of the Delta and west of the present Suez Canal.

Migdol, on the other hand, was a little to the east of the Canal, and we will here quote *Young's Concordance* because the name ‘Migdol’ is most significant.

‘Migdol means TOWER and is a city in N.E. Egypt from Palestine, as Syene (Aswan) was in the south.’

The passages in Jeremiah, chapters 43 to 46 make interesting reading as they recall historical events concerning the only children who could have been used of God to perpetuate the house of David. The year is 587 BC and the time is shortly after the sacking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah and his party were forced to reside in the land of Egypt at Tahpanhes when the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. See the following *Vaviorum Notes* re. ch.43 v.9.

‘Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the pavement of bricks which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house at Tahpanhes ... my servant Nebuchadnezzar will spread his royal pavilion over them ... he shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis that is in the land of Egypt ...’

In as much as Migdol means tower and is found within the compass of the seven streams of the Nile delta, being therefore within the 'drying up' area of prophecy, we must naturally consider it.

The obelisks of Heliopolis are even more interesting when we note the following extract from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

'Cleopatra's Needles, The name popularly given to the two Egyptian obelisks presented to the British and American people, respectively, and now standing on the Thames Embankment in London, and in the Central Park, New York City.

Originally set up by Thotines or Tothmesis at Heliopolis about 1500 BC. Both are made of rose-red Syene (Aswan) granite ...'

The reader will appreciate the necessity of this synopsis of the relevant prophecies and the amount of ground which has to be covered before we can draw any possible conclusions concerning the following.

- the River Nile,
- the Delta with its seven streams,
- the great High Dam at Aswan (Syene).

At this juncture we must point out that on ancient maps of Egypt approximately 80 miles east of Suez a water course known as, Wady-el-Arish (Nahar Mizraim) is four times in Scripture referred to as 'the river of Egypt' and 'the stream of Egypt' (Numbers ch.34 v.5, Joshua ch.15 v. 4, 1 Kings ch.8 v.65 and Isaiah ch.27 v.12), but it becomes plain that this torrent bed or watercourse cannot be identified with the seven-tongued river Nile itself.

Covenant with Abraham

The extent of the territory promised to Abraham and to his seed for ever is given as follows.

'In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:'

Genesis ch.15 v.18

This passage is important when considering the Isaiah prophecies and the ultimate blessing that comes upon Egypt (the Nile) and Assyria (the Euphrates).

'Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.'

Isaiah ch.19 v.25

The whole purpose of God's judgement upon Egypt as a result of the failure of the Aswan Dam is to bring her into blessing.

Blessing upon Egypt

‘ ... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.’

Isaiah ch.11 v.9

How all-embracing this promise really is, and see the effectiveness of the Aswan Dam as God's means to an end. Egypt, Israel's avowed enemy for thousands of years, is at last given an opportunity of turning to God.

The Importance of maps

The importance of the maps of Egypt cannot be over emphasised and it will be necessary to refer to them continually in order to consider the prophecies concerned.

Ezekiel's prophecies related to the southern parts of Egypt and Nubia (the old Ethiopia) or Upper Egypt, while Isaiah refers to Lower Egypt from the Nile delta to Aswan. For the benefit of some readers it will suffice to know that the estuary of the Nile is like the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet - an equilateral triangle. Hence the name Delta.

These maps are copied from Kiepert's Maps of Antiquity, and from Dean Stanley's Sinai & Palestine, the latter being of exceptional importance inasmuch as it suggests a literal fulfilment of Isaiah chapter 19 in the future.

We will now proceed to follow the Nile from its source in Lake Victoria Nyanza, one hundred and fifty miles south of the Equator.

The Sources of the Nile

The 'River of Egypt' consists of the Blue and White Niles, and several facts are quoted regarding Lake Victoria, the source of the White Nile. At the end of the last century Sir William Willcocks, the greatest authority concerning the Nile made this statement.

‘Lake Victoria is the key of the Nile and whoever holds it has the destiny of Egypt in the hollow of her hand.’

He suggests that the blocking of the outlet of Lake Victoria would raise the level of that lake only 20 inches a year and make it possible to deprive Egypt of its summer water. Sir William must have been familiar with the fact that the White Nile only supplies two-sevenths of the total volume of the Nile Water, whereas the Blue Nile from the

mountains of Ethiopia supplies not only four-sevenths but brings with it the valuable alluvium deposits which result in the great fertility of the agricultural parts of Egypt. The third river Atbara supplies the remaining seventh of the total Nile volume.

The countries served by the river Nile and to use their old names are Uganda, parts of Kenya, Tanganyika, Congo, most of the Sudan, part of Ethiopia and the cultivated parts of Egypt. So little of Egypt is cultivated, and the increase in the population is so great that the Great High Dam must of necessity be built in order to conserve the vast quantities of water which enter the sea at the Delta. It is estimated that between 30% and 40% of the Nile waters are wasted each year. The total length of the Nile is estimated to be 4,160 miles.

Human Diversions

The main point in giving the above facts and figures is to show that there are six other countries apart from Egypt vitally concerned with the waters of the Nile, and Sir William Willcocks has made it plain that the waters could by human means be diverted with disastrous results to Egypt.

The reader will recall the great victory of Cyrus against Babylon on the same night as the writing appeared upon the wall of the king's palace: at a given moment the River Euphrates was diverted and the armies of the Medes and Persians entered the city on the dried-up river-bed.

May this not be a pointer to the future? Egypt's fall as the result of a dried-up river bed? The question to consider is, will the diversion of the river of Egypt be by human means or by Divine phenomena, or both?

The Great Rift

The Russian and Egyptian engineers responsible for building the Aswan High Dam emphasise that the dam is outside the earthquake belt, but they have not stated that the Nile itself is at some places within the great rift as the following survey shows.

'To the east of the Belgian Congo near Tanganyika, the principle headstream of the lake Albert system of the Nile emerges. It is the Rochura river which runs along the Rift valley northwards to Lake Edward ... Lake Albert lies between the high escarpments of the Rift valley, which in places comes down abruptly to the water.'

So far we have seen two possibilities of Nile diversion,

1. Interference at its source as suggested by Sir William Willcocks,
2. An earthquake in the Rift Valley.

The Second Cataract

We now move down the Nile from Lake Victoria to the 2nd Cataract, to what must be the nerve-centre of the Aswan High Dam project. Wady Haifa, north of the 2nd Cataract or Waterfall is within the area affected by the heightening of the Aswan Dam some 360 miles to the north. We must look very carefully at our map in order to appreciate the full significance of the points to be raised, as they will also apply to the prophecies of Ezekiel (chapters 29 and 30).

The First Cataract

South of Aswan (the Syene of Scripture) is to be found the second waterfall or cataract and one of the most vivid accounts of the Nile between these two cataracts is given by the late Dean Stanley of Westminster Abbey. Dean Stanley visited Egypt on a fact-finding tour as far back as the years 1852-3, and his flair for detail has served us well. We are indebted to his research, which indicates a great depression on the east bank of the Nile opposite Abu Simbel.

The Country Explained

‘At Assoun - the old Syene - the Granite Range begins; the Syenite granite from which the Nile issues out of the mountains of Nubia.’ (the old Ethiopia).

cf. Sinai & Palestine, by Stanley

To the ancients this seemed to be the source of the Nile, but the Romans succeeded in advancing some hundreds of miles to the south,

‘...Immediately above the roar of these rapids you emerge into sight of an island lying in the windings of the river, fringed with palms, and crowned with a long line of temples and colonnades. This is PHILAE.

The name expresses its situation: it is said to be Pilek, the frontier between Egypt and Ethiopia; and the name seems to have been applied to all the larger islands in the archipelago ...

We are still on the Nile, but it is no longer the Nile of Egypt ... the high banks prevent the floods ... Already, we have passed as many temples in one day as we passed during the rest of our Egyptian voyage ... the majestic river flowing as calm and as broad as in the plain of Egypt.’

As they reach the last stage of the Nubian voyage the account continues,

‘The great peculiarity of this last stage of Nubia is that whereas in Egypt the Nile flowed through its limestone ranges, in lower Nubia through its wild mountain passes, so, here in upper Nubia it flows through an absolute desert.’

Upper Nubia

We have now reached a point where we must recapitulate. We have covered the crucial part of the river between the Aswan High Dam and Wady Haifa which was once to become the largest man-made lake in the world, — a reservoir holding back millions of tons of water, sufficient to supply the needs of Egypt for four years.

We have seen a depression shown on the opening Map which seems to indicate a definite weakness on the left bank of the Nile opposite Abu Simbel.

The Double Witness

There is additional evidence to show that Dean Stanley's account was absolutely accurate. The substance of his findings was delivered as a lecture before the British Association at Aberdeen by Major Philips R.E., in 1859.

When Britain and America withdrew from Egypt in July 1956 it was on the question of financing the dam and Russia immediately offered to finance the project. Immediately upon Egypt's acceptance of the offer the Russian engineers made a survey and gave the following report.

‘We find that no proper survey has been made of the terrain to be flooded. As regards the suitability of an area containing a vast man-made lake, the Egyptians appear to have overlooked a series of depressions east-north-east of Wady Haifa. These form a wide curving arc from the riverbed to the Red Sea some 200 miles away.’

The report warns of disaster. For when the water starts rising it would overflow into the depression, either seeping away into the desert sands, or, were it to turn eastwards, to flow into the Red Sea. This would leave Lower Egypt waterless.

If the Russian engineers - this was in 1959 - are persuaded to, carry on, indifferent to these possibilities ‘then it will only be because they are ordered to do so from Moscow’. President Nasser was under pressure from Egyptian engineers to ignore Soviet technical advice,

and the Egyptian engineers urged the Russians to carry on with the Dam and then see what happens.

History Repeats Itself

The complete absurdity of the situation is hard to accept until one looks back into history and finds similar parallels.

If the Dam is to cost £345,000,000 of Russian money why carry on with something that is doomed to failure? The answer to this question must be that Russia would willingly sacrifice Egypt and destroy her if it would help to prepare the stage for world dominion. Occupation of Egypt by Russia would be a stepping-stone in this direction and it would, no doubt, fulfil completely Isaiah ch.19 vv 4-5 which read as follows.

‘And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts. And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up.’

Aswan-Syene- May 15th, 1964

How the world headlines were crowded on this memorable date!

‘Khrushchev Moves Nile Course’

‘Mr K. Diverts Dam River’

‘Khrushchev and Nasser Cast Nile Stones’

‘The Nile is Harnessed’.

But only two lines on a back page informed us that 222 men lost their lives in the project. What the world did not know was that God was working His purpose out through the boastings of men.

On the Nile, 680 miles up from the sea is Aswan, the ancient Syene, where, in 1902, Britain built a Dam. This Dam was 150ft. high, and is referred to as ‘the low dam’ to distinguish it from ‘the new high dam’. It is rather ironic that the British Dam supplied both power and light to enable Russian and Egyptian engineers to build the present High Dam.

From an economic point of view the Dam project was a necessity, and it is hard to see why such a necessary thing should have to fail. Only when we consider prophecy do we find the reasons for the failure, namely, because Pharaoh [Egypt] hath said,

‘ ... My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself.’

Ezekiel ch.29 v.3

‘And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste; and they shall know that I am the LORD: because he hath said, The river is mine, and I have made it.’

Ezekiel ch. 29 v.9

There are those who question the right to apply Old Testament passages to present and future events, but when we consider that the land of Egypt has never been without the Nile, nor has the Nile been wasted and dried up, then we must do one of two things, reject the Old Testament prophecies altogether, or alternatively, take God at His Word.

The Final Strech

Six hundred and eighty miles from the sea! The stretch of the River of Egypt from Aswan to the Mediterranean, and every inch of the water to be dried up! Surely this is one of the most momentous prophecies of all time:

‘And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up’.

Isaiah ch.19 v.5



How could such a thing possibly take place, especially when every modern method and device are in operation? And yet, in as much as this phenomenon has never taken place we look into the possibilities of such an event. We must emphasise that in no passage of Scripture are we told how it will occur, but only that it will take place at some time in the future.

The High Dam is to be built up to 364 feet as against the 150 feet of the earlier one, and it is hard to convey exactly what this means in volume and weight of water. It would seem clear from the prophecies of Ezekiel that the whole stretch from Aswan through Egypt will dry up, so the Dam will become nothing more than an ornament, might it not become known as Nasser's Folly inasmuch as it will not function as intended?

Land Without Rain

Egypt may be truly termed 'a land without rain' and the prophet Zechariah speaks of this.

'And if the family of Egypt go not up, (to Jerusalem) and come not, that have no rain;

Zechariah ch.14 v.18

This fact is important when coupled with the following extract from the *Imperial Bible Dictionary* .



'Thus it [the Nile] diffuses fertility and life over vast districts, always expending its waters and never receiving any accession to them from the heaven above or the earth beneath; so that when it reaches Cairo the bulk and volume of its tide is scarcely one half of that which foams amidst the rocks and cataracts of Syene' [Aswan].

From this it is obvious that the supply of water at Aswan is the key to Egypt's future hopes, and if anything were to interfere with the flow from Lake Victoria to Aswan it would necessarily result in famine.

The Years of Joseph

The yearly flooding or inundation of the Nile means everything to Egypt, and it was the failure of the inundation that resulted in Joseph's rise to power that, in turn, meant Jacob's eventual settlement in the land of Goshen on the Delta.

From earliest times the rise and fall of the Nile has been carefully recorded, and it is of interest, to note that several Arabian authors mention Joseph as having been responsible for building the instrument known as the Nilometer. The measure of this instrument was sixteen cubits, that being the height of the increase of the Nile necessary to the fruitfulness of the whole country. One can understand when engineers maintain that the Aswan High Dam is intended to control and conserve at least a four year supply of water.

A Good Inundation

The rise of a good inundation at Aswan was estimated at 40ft but this had diminished to 4ft by the time it reached the Delta. From 40 to 4 in less than 650 miles! This proportion of 40:4 is the proportion we must consider. Little water at Aswan means no water at the Delta, and this would literally fulfil 'the waters shall fail from the sea', but there is another factor to be considered.

Nubia's Summer climate is 40°C that of Egypt reaches 30°C, so that if the supply of water from Aswan even diminished the proportionate loss of the Nile by evaporation would be greater than if a vast inundation took place: at Aswan, a little: at the Delta, nil. The effect would be that the Nile waters would dry up 'from the sea'. But one more additional fact remains to be considered, and it deeply impressed Dean Stanley whose description is here.

'One feature of the Nile I must here add to what I have already said. Everyone knows that the only mode of communications (1852) is the river: but the voyage up the Nile requires and possesses the consent of another power besides that of the stream, namely the wind. It is a remarkable provision that the north wind which blows for nine months of the year and especially during the floods when the stream is strongest, acts as a corrective to enable navigation upwards when else it would be impossible. **Yearly winds, so fixed, so regular a part of the economy do they form, that it was natural to imagine that they actually prevented the waters of the river from entering the sea**'.

Anyone who knows the drying power of north winds over a desert will easily follow the effects of this force alone on irrigation and agriculture, not to mention, fishing and so on. The full significance of Isaiah's prophecy is explained thus.

'And the LORD ... with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod.'

Isaiah ch.11 v.15

This article will be concluded in a future edition