



From a photograph by Elliott & Fry, London.

FERDINAND DE LESSEPS.

"The Great Frenchman" and his place in the history of the nineteenth century—His epoch making success at Suez, his colossal failure at Panama.

By Theodore Schwartz.

A MAN died in France the other day whose years had almost covered the nineteenth century, and whose phenomenal rise and fall was one of its romances. Ten years ago he was known to the French as "le grand Français"; he had everything for which a Frenchman longs—wealth, notoriety, power in the world, and domestic happiness. He died stripped of his honors, disgraced; and the end was

the result of his temperament, exactly as the triumphs had been.

In 1803 Ferdinand de Lesseps' father was sent by Bonaparte to Egypt, as the French diplomatic agent, and was commissioned to select a Turkish chief capable of ruling at Cairo. He selected Mehemet Ali, who could hardly read or write, but upon whom he could depend to hate the English and be loyal to the French. The young Ferdinand, born



Ferdinand de Lesseps and his Family.

From a photograph by Nadar, Paris.

in 1805, was brought up as the friend of Mehemet Said, Mehemet Ali's son, and was educated as a diplomat, with his head full of plans of French dominion in the east, born of the dreams of Napoleon.

After several diplomatic appointments, Ferdinand de Lesseps became consul general at Cairo in 1838. Here he played a prominent part in the intrigues which ended in the bombardment of Acre by the British fleet, and the dismissal of Thiers by Louis Philippe. De Lesseps was removed from Cairo, but his diplomatic career did not come to an end until 1849, when he crossed swords with Louis Napoleon, who, he declared, had maliciously tricked him in a matter of statecraft.

For four years de Lesseps was in retirement. Then his old friend Mehemet Said was made Khedive of Egypt, and his old enemy Louis Napoleon married

Eugénie de Montijo, who was de Lesseps' cousin.

The French diplomat was never without a project. He carried them up his sleeve, as Fouché was said to carry conspiracies. He had heard much of Napoleon's plans in Egypt, and he had read the report of Lepère, the engineer who declared that a canal across the Suez was a possibility. De Lesseps made his way to Egypt, and broached the subject to Mehemet Said, who would have promised him support for almost anything. He went back to France, called together an international scientific committee, and transported its members to Egypt, to lay out the course of the canal—all at the expense of Mehemet Said. Lord Palmerston opposed the scheme in the name of England, and forbade the Porte to ratify it. Then de Lesseps put aside old grudges and went to Louis Napoleon. He carried the day

with French support. In 1869 the canal was opened, before the Khedive, the Empress Eugénie, the Emperor of Austria, the Crown Prince of Prussia, and a great assemblage of other notables.

De Lesseps is described by people who knew him in the heyday of his greatness, as having an almost hypnotic power. He was full of life, of vigor, of enthusiasm, of belief in his own plans. People loved him for his joy in life. He fascinated them because he promised them what they wanted, with the fullest conviction that he could give it. His manner to women charmed them, and at great entertainments he was always the center of the assembly.

At sixty he was left a widower with two sons. He had arranged a marriage for his nephew with a beautiful young girl, Mlle. de Bragard. As he walked with her one evening in the garden of her father's house, she told him that it was not his nephew she loved, but himself, the hero of the day. They were married, and had ten children, two of whom are soldiers in the French army. The eldest daughter is the Countess de

Gontant-Biron, the youngest is still almost a baby.

De Lesseps was very superstitious, and came to believe that the fates took care of him, that he was a son of destiny. The Panama Canal scheme seemed to him as simple as Suez had been, because he was in a measure ignorant of the real situation in both cases. The great engineers of the world pronounced against the project; but calm men listened to the flood of de Lesseps' talk, through which there was the everlasting clink of gold, with smiling faces. The peasants of France poured out the contents of their woolen stockings at his feet. He sat in his office telling gay and frivolous little tales, while crowds of businessmen waited in his anterooms. He lent his name, believing it would almost dig a canal of itself; and he was made the victim of the corrupt men who used it. Finally, in his extreme old age, his mind gave way at the downfall of his plans, and he spent the last years of his life daily expecting Queen Victoria to come and set matters right, believing that his destiny would care for him in the end.



VIA SACRA.

THE woodland path is deep in leaves
That mark a golden way
Wherein, last happy summertide,
We two were wont to stray.

All golden lies the way, to trace
Where happy love hath been,
That hearts unblest might see, and mark,
And learn to walk therein.

Florence Evelyn Pratt.