

## THE NICARAGUA CANAL.

For seventy-five years the people of America have been agitating the question of an inter-oceanic canal, at frequent periods. Each successive Congress since 1825 has spent more or less time in preparing bills, arranging treaties or directing commissions for the investigation of the subject. A singular infatuation seems to have taken firm hold on the nation, demanding a shorter route for vessels between Atlantic and Pacific ports. Prior to the completion of the first railway across the continent there was good reason for desiring this canal, for by clipper ships around Cape Horn, or a horseback ride across the plains meant six months' loss of time, and neither route had much the advantage as a pleasure excursion.

Thirty-five years ago I was in the employ of the Central American Transit Company as a civil engineer, seeking a route for a railway first, and proposed canal for the future. The M. O. Roberts Steamship Line was at that time carrying many passengers between New York and San Francisco, connecting with the Isthmian Transit Route at Greyton on the Caribbean Sea and San Juan del Sur on the Pacific. Light-draft steamers which could ascend the several rapids of the San Juan river were employed on the eastern end of the route. A lake steamer carried passengers across Lake Nicaragua, landing them at Virgin Bay. From here over a dozen miles of very rough, muddy and steep mountainous trail the trip was made by mules, many of them without saddles. Rude ox-carts, the wheels cut from a log, transported the baggage. A week was required in the passage across the Isthmus, and often the steamers on the Pacific were delayed, lengthening the time materially.

## The Nicaraguan Route.

Running transit lines over this Western mountain region through dense jungles, thorny thickets and almost impenetrable forests with numerous reptiles, noxious insects, continuous rains in rainy season, left indelible impressions of the country during more than a third of a century. Lake Nicaragua is a beautiful sheet of water which has always attracted the attention of those seeking a canal route, but to east and to west lies a rocky and mountainous region of great extent, which will baffle the skill of the best engineers in connecting this placid lake with the two oceans.

On the Caribbean Sea coast is a large extent of swampy lands, miasmatic and very dangerous to the health of those who remain long in its influence. At Graytown the San Juan river has poured its tropic floods and carried silt forming bars which effectually preclude vessels from approaching the shore or entering the river. Only at enormous cost can a harbor be made and the same courses

which formed the bars must continue the filling of the channel, for the tropic rains will always bring down the earth from the highlands and a continuous expense of dredging will be required.

## A Life For Every Cross-Tie.

The death rate was terrific while the Panama Railway was under construction. The threadbare story of a human life sacrificed to each cross-tie laid in the road was emphatically true.

The river steamers, drawing only twelve inches when light for the purpose of passing over several rapids, transferred their freight by temporary railway at Castillo Rapids, thirty-eight miles east of Lake Nicaragua. Here the river falls thirty feet in a quarter of a mile. There are several rocky rapids in San Juan river, and it will require enormous outlays of money and great labor to construct a canal with locks and dams.

It was currently reported in the country that in 1849, during the rush to the gold fields of California, when heavily loaded steamers, with emigrants and their kits, reached these numerous cascades, where the water was only a foot or so in depth, the men would all jump overboard and walk up stream, alongside the boat, which, thus lightened, could pass over the shoals. On reaching deep water, they would again get on board and ride to the next shallow place. In the hot, tropical sun their clothes would soon dry, and no harm came of the frequent wettings. The difficulties on the Pacific side are only less formidable because the distance is not so great.

## The Question of Defense.

The race of the Oregon at the beginning of the Spanish war seemed to decide in the minds of the whole people that this canal must be speedily completed; but it is by no means likely that ever again will there be a similar combination of circumstances demanding the use of the canal. In case of war with any European nation, we would require a strong navy on each coast—a squadron on the Atlantic and another on the Pacific. The use of the canal would be the first controverted point, and its protection and defense become a drain on our resources greater than the entire defense of the Pacific coast. The maintenance of the canal after its construction must far outweigh any possible benefits.

Various schemes have been devised by capitalists for constructing this canal, but, invariably, the United States Government is asked practically to build it and give these men the proceeds. No private capital will ever develop this project without great aid from the Government, since it is well known that it will not be sufficiently remunerative.

## Estimates Vary.

The estimates made as to the cost of construction vary as greatly as the

number of engineers that have pronounced on the cost, saying from \$60,000,000, by Mr. Menocal, to \$140,000,000, by Gen. Hains. Admiral Walker's estimate was \$115,000,000.

There are so many problems which enter into the computations as to cost, a distant tropical locality, streams bearing vast quantity of silt, a country always in revolution, etc., that any estimation of expenditure must be largely guess work. This is seen by the numerous calculations made by eminent engineers, no two of whom agree within several millions of dollars. Before its completion there is no doubt that somebody or people will have parted with \$200,000,000, with a never-ending expense for maintenance. The Panama scheme has already sunk such incredible sums that those in charge would gladly unload on this people and yet scarce a beginning has been made.

## A Few Questions.

Of what possible benefit could the canal be to any citizen of Indiana or the interior Middle States? A few merchants in the Atlantic cities and some on the Pacific would reap a benefit at the expense of the entire Nation. It would not facilitate the movement of a single pound of freight to or from Indiana or the Middle States. It would not benefit a farmer, since his productions go in other directions, nor yet a manufacturer who must ship his goods to one seaboard before they would be benefited. Improvements constantly going on in railway equipments with better tracks, ere this canal could be completed, will decrease the freight rates on long hauls and enable them to compete with ocean traffic. In case of a war, our railways are entirely within our control, which could not be the case with the canal.

JOHN P. BROWN.

Connersville, Indiana.

## BOND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

NEBRASKA CITY, NEB., May 6th, 1886.

To the signers of the Guaranteed Bond given to J. Sterling Morton as Trustee for Donors to Trans-Missouri Packing & Provision Company.

DEAR SIR:—I herewith submit to you a statement of the amount subscribed to the Trans-Missouri Packing and Provision Company; the amount collected by the treasurer; the amount still unpaid and the balance due me as Trustee:

## AMOUNTS SUBSCRIBED.

J. Sterling Morton,	-	\$250
Neb. City National Bank,	-	"
D. W. Simpson,	-	"
H. H. Bartling,	-	"
F. W. Rottman,	-	"
H. F. Cady,	-	"
Merchants National Bank,	-	"
Thos. Morton,	-	"
C. B. Bickel & Son,	-	"
R. Lorton & Co.,	-	200
Schminke & Reiber,	-	"