

voice of my sufferings, nothing will content thee but the return of my neck to the yoke—if thou fearest not that America may one day deny to Spain, what Spain now refuses to America—if thou wilt draw thy vengeful steel, and strive to enforce thy will at the point of the sword,—then be it so: my sons shall answer thee with their's; and thou wilt find engraved upon their blades, *My ULTIMATUM!* ”

ROUTE

TO

THE PACIFIC OCEAN.

CHAPTER XIII.

Examination of the different routes to the Pacific Ocean—Doubts respecting a passage to the north-west—The communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, at the province of Chocó, examined—Observations upon the routes by the Isthmus of Darien or Panamá; by the Isthmus of Costa Rica; and by that of Oaxaca—General observations on the importance of this passage to the civilized world.

HAVING thus far occupied the attention of our readers with an account of the civil wars of Mexico, we turn with satisfaction from those tragic scenes, to an object of the highest importance to the whole civilized world, and which we deem particularly interesting to the citizens of the United States, as well as to the present and future generations of the whole continent of America.

To shorten the navigation between the eastern and western parts of our globe, either by discovering a passage in the high northern latitudes, or by cutting canals and opening routes through some parts of the American continent, so as to afford either a navigable or rapid communication between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, is most certainly an object which all the nations of the earth ought to rejoice in seeing accomplished.

For the last two centuries large sums have been expended in attempting the discovery of a north-west passage to the Pacific Ocean; and even at the present day, expeditions for that purpose are annually fitted out, either by the European governments, or by enterprising private companies. To say that no such passage exists, and that for several degrees around the pole there is an impenetrable and eternal congelation, would be controverting the opinions of many enlightened men: but we believe they will all agree with us, that if ever such a passage should be discovered, it will be in latitudes encumbered with floating ice the greater part of the year, perpetually exposed to tempestuous weather, in a region where vegetation is scarcely visible, and where no supplies could be obtained by the unfortunate mariner, in the event

of detention or shipwreck. These dangers may be encountered, and in part surmounted, by human courage and enterprise; but the time that would be required to perform a voyage in that direction, would always be uncertain. It would, at least, occupy as many months as the present circuitous route to the western shores of the Pacific Ocean. It is, therefore, our opinion, that should such a north-west passage eventually be discovered, its utility to the commercial world would be very trivial. Waiving, then, any further consideration of this point, we will proceed to examine the different sections of the continent, where nature requires but little aid from art, in order to effect the great object of a communication between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

The Spanish and British governments have at various times received the most flattering statements respecting the feasibility of opening this communication, either entirely by water in some places, or by land and water in others.

Nine different routes have been proposed: but we shall confine our examination to those places where we think the project of cutting a canal may be successfully undertaken; and where a land and water communication appears to be perfectly within the compass of human exertion to accomplish.

More than two centuries ago, the Spanish government knew, that in the province of *Chocó*, in New Grenada the cutting of a canal of a few leagues would effect a navigable communication between the two oceans; and that, during the rainy season, when the valleys of *Chocó* were overflowed, *canoes passed with produce from one sea to the other*. But they prohibited, under pain of death to those concerned, all communication whatever by that route. A monk (the curate of Novilla), ignorant of the interdiction, or pretending to be so, assembled all the Indians of his parish, and in a short time cut a canal between the rivers *Atrato* and *San Juan*, since called the canal of the *Raspadura*. Large canoes (*bongos*), loaded with cocoa, actually passed through it. This communication was speedily stopped, by order of the government, and the unlucky curate with great difficulty obtained a pardon.

In the year 1813, the author of this work conversed with some intelligent Spaniards and Creoles, at Carthagena, respecting the *Raspadura* canal; and they stated, that although it was at present choked up with sand and bushes, yet it might soon be cleared. They also stated, that there were several places between the sources of the rivers *Atrato* and *San Juan*,

where a canal might be cut by a shorter route than the one which had been opened by the curate of Novilla. The distance between the navigable waters of *Atrato* and *San Juan* is only *thirteen leagues*; and from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean, following the course of the ravines, is only *eighty leagues*. No doubt, therefore, can exist, that a water communication between the two oceans might be accomplished, in the province of *Chocó*, by either opening the former canal of *Raspadura*, or by cutting a new one between the two rivers we have mentioned. This communication would certainly not admit the passage of vessels of large burthen, owing to impediments in the two rivers, and to the shallowness of the water on the bars, at their mouths; but as the ordinary purposes of commerce could be answered by the use of large flat-bottomed boats, this route merits great consideration; and it will, doubtless, at some future period, be the channel of an important commerce.

Besides this route, there is, in the same province, another, and, as we were informed, a preferable one, by the river *Naipi*, which empties itself into the *Atrato*, of which indeed it is only a branch. From the port of *Cupica*, on the Pacific Ocean, to the head of the navi-

gable waters of the Naipi, is only *twenty-four miles*, and the country between the two places is a dead level. A canal might, therefore, be cut there without difficulty. The course of the Naipi is stated to be very circuitous, and makes the distance of the navigation a few leagues longer than by the route of the Raspadura; but the circumstance of the waters of the Naipi being so near the port of Cupica, gives to this route an important advantage. The want of correct topographical knowledge prevents us from forming an opinion upon the merits of these two routes; but there cannot exist a doubt that by either of them a communication between the two oceans may be established *for the navigation of boats*; and it is possible, that at some future period, when population becomes dense, and a free trade shall be permitted between the inhabitants of the Atlantic and Pacific shores, that the province of Chocó may then afford a channel for the navigation of large vessels.

Secondly, The *Isthmus of Darien*, or, as it is usually called, of Panamá, is the section of the American continent most celebrated among geographers, authors, and projectors, as the point at which the two oceans may be united, by means of a canal, with greater facility than at any other place. The Spanish government

have, at different times, endeavoured to obtain accurate surveys of this Isthmus; and, for that purpose, engineers of eminence and capacity have been employed. Some of the reports that were officially made on this subject, contain the most extravagant statements—such as, that by cutting a canal of about *twelve leagues*, following the course of the ravines at the foot of the mountains, a passage may be opened as wide as the *Gut of Gibraltar*, from the bay of Panamá to the navigable waters of *Cruces* or *Chagre*. Other reporters have stated, that such water communication cannot be accomplished but by locks and tunnels, passing over an elevation of at least *four hundred feet*. In one point, however, all these statements accord, *viz.* that by a good road from Panamá to the place of embarkation on the river *Cruces*, property of any description or weight might be conveyed in carriages; and, as the distance is only about *twenty-three miles*, this place would, undoubtedly, afford a more rapid and shorter route between the two oceans than any yet pointed out.

During the administration of William Pitt, various projects were presented to him, tending to show the feasibility of cutting a canal through the Isthmus, sufficiently wide and deep to admit

vessels of the largest size; and it is well known that this statesman frequently, among his friends, spoke with rapture on the subject, and that it constituted one of the great considerations in his mind when forming his plans for the emancipation of Spanish America.

So late as the year 1810, the Edinburgh Reviewers appear to have entertained the same opinion; for we find, in the number for January of that year, the following observations:—
“In enumerating, however, the advantages of a commercial nature which would assuredly spring from the emancipation of South America, we have not yet noticed the greatest, perhaps, of all—the mightiest event, probably, in favour of the peaceful intercourse of nations, which the physical circumstances of the globe present to the enterprise of man,—I mean, the formation of a navigable passage across the Isthmus of Panamá—the junction of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It is remarkable, that this magnificent undertaking, pregnant with consequences so important to mankind, and about which so little is known in this country, is so far from being a romantic and chimerical project, that it is not only practicable but easy.” The writer proceeds to point out the means by which this great work can be effected; and then launches forth into a detail

of the advantages which would result to the commercial and civilized world, by thus bringing Asia nearer to Europe, &c.

It is with diffidence we venture to combat opinions emanating from such respectable sources; but all details, tending to disembarass this important and interesting question must be acceptable.

Our information on this subject has been obtained from respectable individuals at *Carthage* and *Jamaica*, who visited the Isthmus from commercial views, or for the express purpose of a personal examination of the facilities or difficulties of cutting the so-much-talked-of navigable canal. It is therefore presumable, that intelligence from such sources is correct. We have likewise carefully examined the observations of William Walton, Esq. of London, on this subject, published in the fifth and sixth numbers of the *Colonial Journal* for March and June, 1817; and as Mr. Walton's remarks have likewise been founded on personal investigation, during a visit made to Panamá, we think his opinions worthy of great attention, more especially as all his works on South America are characterized by liberality, and bear the impress of an ardent attachment to the cause of rational liberty, and a consequent desire to promote

and extend the commercial intercourse between the Old and New World.

The river Chagre empties itself into the Atlantic ocean about the latitude of $9^{\circ} 18'$ north, and $80^{\circ} 35'$ west longitude; it is navigable for boats (or large bongos) about twenty leagues, to the town of *Cruces*: the bar, at the entrance of the river, will not admit a vessel drawing more water than ten feet. The current in the river, at certain seasons, is extremely rapid, so that boats are sometimes fifteen or twenty days getting to *Cruces*; but this disadvantage could be remedied by *steam vessels*.

A chain of mountains, which Humboldt considers a prolongation of the Andes of New Grenada, runs through the Isthmus, following the curvature of the coast, and flanked by other lofty hills, rising on both sides. The road from *Cruces* to Panamá winds round the sides of those hills, or rather along their central base. Supposing a canal to be cut at the foot of these hills, pursuing the sinuosities of the ravines, it would nevertheless be necessary for the engineer to make use of arches in some places, and subterraneous passages at others, in order to obtain a level; and he would likewise have to carry the canal over an elevation of some hundred feet. But, even admitting that human

ingenuity and labour should surmount the physical obstacles, and that a canal should be completed from *Cruces* to Panamá, we nevertheless encounter at the latter an impediment that we firmly believe to be insuperable.

The water along the coast, in the bay of Panamá, is so shallow, that none but flat-bottomed boats, of one or two feet in draught, can approach the shore. The city of Panamá is situated at the head of the gulf of that name, on a peninsula washed by the waters of the Pacific ocean. A marine gate faces the port, which by the Spaniards is called "*El Puerto de las Piraguas*," from its being the place of resort of the boats so called. On the other side, facing the Isthmus, is another gate, called "*La Puerta de la Tierra*," or land gate. To the south, the town is surrounded and defended by a range of small islands. The anchorage place for all vessels of large size is at two small islands, called *Perico* and *Flaminco*, distant about seven miles from the city. The lading and unlading of vessels is therefore tedious and expensive; and in fact the bay of Panamá is nothing more than an open roadstead.

The extreme shallowness of the water near the beach, not only in the bay, but along the whole coast, opposite to those places where the

projectors of the canal have contemplated cutting a passage, seems, as we have before observed, to present a most serious obstacle to its execution. Supposing that, by locks and tunnels, and excavations, the Isthmus should be perforated from Cruces to the shores of the bay of Panamá, the canal must then be continued *seven miles into the ocean*, to admit the navigation of large vessels. We conceive it *possible* to make such a channel into the ocean, but it appears to us to be an Herculean task. Besides, a channel there would be liable to the operation of the same causes that have thrown up the sand along the shore of the bay, and would consequently be perpetually filling up. But even admitting that all these impediments could be overcome, and that a passage should be opened sufficient to allow vessels drawing eighteen or twenty feet of water to proceed as far as Cruces, they would not then find a sufficiency of water to descend the Chagre, and to pass the bar at its mouth: it would be necessary therefore to continue the canal by another route, through the entire Isthmus, before it could be used as a passage for the navigation of large vessels.

We shall rejoice if future surveys of the Isthmus prove that the obstacles we have suggested either do not exist, or that they may be

surmounted. For we readily confess, that there is not a point where it would be more desirable to carry this design into execution, than the Isthmus of Panamá, both on account of its central position, and of the short distance there between the two oceans.

Some writers have suggested, that the cutting of a canal at this Isthmus would produce a serious physical revolution in the adjacent country, arising from a supposed difference in the height of the waters on the Pacific and Atlantic shores. Some have gone so far as to say, that the whole Isthmus would be inundated, and the present course of the Gulf Stream be entirely changed. But we consider that Humboldt and other *scavans* of the age have completely refuted the theory of a difference in the elevation of the waters of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The only difficulty, in our estimation, is, to find out a *practicable* route for a canal capable of admitting large vessels to pass from one ocean to another; but although such a route cannot be discovered, and the obstacles we have suggested cannot be surmounted, yet the Isthmus of Panamá must be viewed as a place which from its geographical position and other advantages, appears destined to enjoy a considerable future trade, but never to become a great commercial emporium.