

Thirdly—We now come to treat of a section of the American continent, where the magnificent scheme of cutting a navigable canal, between the two oceans, appears unincumbered with any natural obstacles.

The province of *Costa Rica*, or, as it is named by some geographers, *Nicaragua*, has occupied but the very cursory notice of either Spanish or other writers; they have all, however, stated, that a communication could be opened by the lake of Nicaragua, between the two seas, but no accurate description of the country has ever been published; and indeed so completely has the mind of the public been turned towards the Isthmus of Panamá, as the favoured spot where the canal should be cut, that *Costa Rica* has been disregarded.

In looking over the excellent maps of Melish and Doctor Robinson, recently published, we perceive that the river called *San Juan* discharges its waters into the *Atlantic Ocean*, in the province of *Costa Rica*, about the latitude of $10^{\circ} 45'$ north. This noble river has its source in the lake of *Nicaragua*. The bar at its mouth has been generally described as not having more than *twelve feet* water on it. About sixteen years ago, an enterprising Englishman, who casually visited the river, examined the

different passages over the bar, and discovered one, which although narrow, would admit a vessel drawing *twenty-five feet*. It is said that some of the traders to that coast from Honduras, are likewise acquainted with the passage just mentioned, but it has never been laid down on any map; and if the Spanish government had been informed of it, they would, conformably to their usual policy, have studiously concealed it. After the bar of the *San Juan* is crossed, there is excellent and safe anchorage in four and six fathoms of water. It is stated that there are no obstructions to the navigation of the river, but what may be easily removed; and at present large brigs and schooners sail up the river into the lake. This important fact has been communicated to us by several traders. The waters of the lake, throughout its whole extent, are from three to eight fathoms in depth.

In the lake are some beautiful islands, which, with the country around its borders, form a romantic and most enchanting scenery. At its western extremity is a small river, which communicates with the lake of *Leon*, distant about eight leagues. From the latter, as well as from *Nicaragua*, there are some small rivers which flow into the Pacific ocean. The distance from the lake of *Leon* to the ocean is about *thirteen miles*; and from *Nicaragua* to the gulf of *Papagayo*, in the

Pacific ocean, is *twenty-one miles*. The ground between the two lakes and the sea is a dead level. The only inequalities seen are some isolated conical hills, of volcanic origin. There are two places where a canal could be cut with the greatest facility: the one, from the coast of *Nicoya* (or, as it is called in some of the maps, *Caldera*) to the lake of Leon, a distance of *thirteen or fifteen miles*; the other, from the gulf of Papagayo to the lake of Nicaragua, a distance of about *twenty-one or twenty-five miles*. The coast of *Nicoya* and the gulf of Papagayo are free from rocks and shoals, particularly in the gulf, the shore of which is so bold that a frigate may anchor within a few yards of the beach. Some navigators have represented the coasts of Costa Rica, as well on the Pacific as on the Atlantic side, as being subject to severe tempests; and hence these storms have been called *Papagayos*: but we have conversed with several mariners who have experienced them, and have been assured that they are trifling, when compared with the dreadful hurricanes experienced among the Antilles, in the months of August, September, and October. The *Papagayos* are merely strong north-east gales, which last about the same time, during the winter season, as the northern gales in the gulf of Mexico. For more than half the year, the seasons are perfectly

tranquil, and more especially on the coast of the Pacific ocean. We have conversed with persons, residents of the city of Leon, who assured us, that for twenty years past they had not experienced any thing deserving the name of a hurricane.

The climate of Costa Rica has none of the deleterious qualities of the province of Chocó and the Isthmus of Panamá. The sea breezes from the Pacific as well as Atlantic set in steadily every morning, and diffuse over the whole Isthmus of Costa Rica a perpetual freshness. We think it is not hazarding too much to say, that this part of the American continent is the most salubrious of all the tropical regions. The most finely formed and robust race of Indians of the American continent, are found here. The soil is peculiarly fertile, particularly in the vicinity of the river San Juan, and around the borders of the lakes Nicaragua and Leon.

From the preceding outline it will be perceived, that nature has already provided a water conveyance through this Isthmus, to within a few leagues of the Pacific Ocean; but, supposing that the route we have mentioned, up the river San Juan, and through the lake of Nicaragua, should, when accurately surveyed,

discover obstructions (which we do not anticipate) to the navigation of large vessels, where would exist the difficulty, in such case, of cutting a canal through the entire Isthmus? The whole distance is only *one hundred and ninety*, or at most *two hundred miles* from the Atlantic Ocean to the gulf of Papagayo. There is scarcely ten miles of the distance but what passes over a plain; and, by digging the canal near the banks of the river San Juan, and the margin of the lake of Nicaragua, an abundant supply of water could be procured for a canal of any depth or width. Surely the magnitude of such an undertaking would not be a material objection, in the present age of enterprise and improvement, especially when we look at what has been accomplished in Europe, and at the splendid canal now cutting in our own country, in the state of New York. It may be said, that the present poverty of the country, and its thin population, are powerful obstacles to the execution of the project. If Costa Rica were in the possession of a liberal government, willing to lend its encouragement to this important object, capital in abundance would speedily be forthcoming, either from Great Britain or from the United States. Enterprising companies would soon be formed; and we hazard little in

predicting, that the *canal stock* of such an association would yield a profit far greater than that of any other company in the world. With regard to the difficulty of procuring labourers in the present state of the population of the country, it could soon be obviated. The Indians of *Guatemala* and *Yucatan* would flock to the Isthmus of Costa Rica in thousands, provided the banners of freedom were hoisted there, under any government capable of affording them protection, and rewarding them for their labour. The present condition of those unfortunate people is wretched beyond conception, particularly of those in the interior of Yucatan. We have seen them attending mass, and accompanying religious processions, in hundreds and thousands, almost in a state of nudity. Adults had a covering over their loins, and sometimes a shirt and a pair of drawers; but children of both sexes, under ten and twelve years of age, were literally naked. The fruits of their labour are absorbed by the exactions of their civil, military, and ecclesiastical despots: they feel no stimulus to industry, who are debarred from enjoying or inheriting its fruits: they pass a life of ignorance and apathy, and die in misery. Unfold to these unfortunate beings a new and rational mode of existence,

offer them moderate wages and comfortable clothing, give them personal protection, and allow them the advantages of a free external and internal commerce, and they would soon display a different character. Offer to the view of the Indians these blessings, and multitudes would repair to the proposed point, from all the adjacent countries. Under such circumstances, we do not entertain any doubt that *twenty, thirty, or even fifty thousand* Indians could be procured for the work in question, who would give their labour with gratitude for a moderate compensation. Every Indian among the natives of Costa Rica would rejoice at the prospect of being employed and paid for his labour,—and more especially in the execution of an undertaking, which even to his untutored mind, would present such obvious advantages to his country and to his posterity.

We feel great pleasure in stating, that many of these ideas are derived from an interesting and able Memoir, written by the late Bryan Edwards, the celebrated historian of the West Indies. We perused it, several years since, at Jamaica; and, although we have not seen it among any of the published works of that distinguished writer, we believe the Memoir to have been laid before the British government. Bryan

Edwards was perfectly aware of the importance of Costa Rica to the British nation, and of the practicability of forming a communication between the two seas in the manner we have suggested; and he made use of the most cogent and eloquent reasoning, to induce his government to *seize the Isthmus of Costa Rica by conquest in war, or to obtain it by negotiation in peace.* We presume the British government have not lost sight of those representations, nor of other interesting communications on the same subject which have been made to them by several intelligent individuals who had resided in the bay of Honduras. The Isthmus of Costa Rica may, hereafter, become to the New, what the Isthmus of Suez was to the Old World, prior to the discovery of the route to Asia by the Cape of Good Hope.

Should a canal be cut through Costa Rica, of sufficient dimensions to admit the passage of the largest vessels, and ports of free commerce to all nations be established at the mouths of this canal on the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, there cannot be a doubt that, in less than a century, this Isthmus would become the greatest commercial thoroughfare in the world. Let the reader cast his eye upon the map, and behold its important geographical position. Nearly

central, as respects the distance between Cape Horn and the north-west coast of America,—in the vicinity of the two great oceans, superseding the necessity of the circuitous and perilous navigation round Cape Horn; it appears to be the favoured spot, destined by nature to be the heart of the commerce of the world.

The most ardent imagination would fail in an attempt to pourtray all the important and beneficial consequences that would result from the execution of this work, the magnitude and grandeur of which are worthy the profound attention of every commercial nation. It is, indeed, a subject so deeply and generally interesting, that the powerful nations of the Old and those of the New World should discard from its examination all selfish or ambitious considerations. Should the work be undertaken, let it be executed on a magnificent scale; and, when completed, let it become, like the Ocean, a highway of nations, the enjoyment of which shall be guaranteed by them all, and which shall be exempt from the caprice or regulations of any one kingdom or state. This idea may, at first view, appear as extravagant as it is novel; but we cannot perceive any thing in it that is not in unison with the liberal and enterprising spirit of the present age; and we

feel perfectly assured, that if it receives the encouragement and support of the nations of the Old World, those who will hereafter govern in the New, will not hesitate to relinquish a few leagues of territory on the American continent, for the general benefit of mankind; and more especially when America herself must derive permanent and incalculable advantages from being the great channel of communication between the Oriental and Western World.

Fourthly—Having thus attempted to elucidate the extraordinary and peculiar advantages which Costa Rica possesses for the establishment of a navigable intercourse between the two seas, we will now proceed to examine another position, which, although it is deficient in some of the natural advantages of Costa Rica, still possesses others of so important a character as to render it almost doubtful with us at which of the two places the desired communication ought first to be opened. Were we to consult the present and future interests of *Mexico*, and of the republic of the *United States*, we should say that the Mexican Isthmus (or, as it is more properly designated, the *Isthmus of Tehuantepec*) is the section before all others on the American continent, where the communication between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans should be made.

But, as we are desirous of seeing the blessings of commerce extensively diffused, for the benefit of the human race generally, and not of any nation in particular, we should rejoice to see the communication between the two seas simultaneously opened at every place where it is practicable, whether by land or water, or by the latter solely, thereby exciting emulation, and widening the range of commercial enterprise. We do not advocate a system of commercial aggrandizement, which seeks to raise itself by the oppression and ruin of other nations, nor a system of restrictions at variance with the laws of nature, and the happiness of mankind. We wish to see the two great oceans of our globe brought nearer to each other by canals and high roads, at such places as the God of nature has evidently destined for channels of communication; and that they should no longer remain dark and dreary deserts, such as they have been for ages, under the anti-social principles of the Spanish government.

The *Isthmus of Tehuantepec* is comprised in a tract of territory embracing the intendency of Oaxaca and part of that of Vera Cruz. On the coast of the Pacific ocean, it extends from a place called *Tonala*, on the borders of Guatemala, to the province of La Puebla. On the Atlantic

coast, or rather in the great bend of the Mexican Gulf, it extends from the bay of Alvarado to Yucatan, including the province of Tabasco. The greatest breadth of the Isthmus, within those limits, is about one hundred and twenty-five miles. The narrowest part is between the port of Guasacualco in the Gulf, and the bay of Tehuantepec on the Pacific ocean. The latitude of the former is about $18^{\circ} 30'$, and of the latter about $16^{\circ} 30'$. From the summit of a mountain called Chillilo, or La Gineta, on a clear day, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans can be distinctly seen. We have conversed with many persons in the city of Oaxaca, who had visited the mountain for the sole purpose of enjoying this interesting spectacle; and they speak in the most rapturous strains of the sublimity of the surrounding scenery, as well as of the beauty and grandeur which the view of the two oceans presents. A chain of mountains, which may be termed a continuation of the Andes, runs through the centre of this Isthmus, the elevation of which above the ocean varies from five or six thousand to three or four hundred feet. From some extraordinary convulsion of nature, vast chasms or ravines have been formed among these mountains, which we shall hereafter speak of; as it is by means of those

fissures that nature appears to point out to man the practicability of forming a water communication between the two seas. During the rainy season, these chasms contain a vast body of water, which seeks its discharge by rivers flowing into the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The Indians of the Isthmus, particularly those of Tabasco and Tehuantepec, assert that they pass with their canoes entirely through the Isthmus. We endeavoured, while at Oaxaca, to ascertain this fact; and we are convinced that when the waters are at their height during the rainy season, a canoe may pass, by the sinuosities of the ravines, from the river *Guasacualco* to the rivers *Chimalapa* and *Tehuantepec*. There is no part of the Mexican kingdom watered by such noble rivers as this Isthmus. We shall merely notice a few of the most considerable. *Guaspala*, *Tustepec*, *Cañas*, and several others with whose names we are unacquainted, discharge their waters in the bay of Alvarado, a few leagues to the south-east of the city of Vera Cruz. The *St. Pierre* and *Tabasco* disembogue near each other on the coast of Tabasco. Those rivers have their sources in the mountains of Oaxaca, Vera Cruz, and Chiapa. They flow through a country as fertile as any in New Spain, abounding in forests

of the most valuable timber; and are navigable at all seasons for large boats (*bongos*), and during the floods have water sufficient for the largest vessels. On these rivers, at some future time, *steam navigation* may be made to afford similar benefits to those it now yields on the Mississippi and Ohio. On the western side of the mountains, there are several important streams descending into the Pacific Ocean. *Chimalapa* and *Tehuantepec* discharge into the bay bearing the name of the latter. The majestic river *Guasacualco* empties into the bay of the same name, in the Mexican Gulf. The sources of the three last-named rivers are within five leagues of each other; but, as we have before mentioned, when the ravines of the mountains are filled with water, canoes may pass from the rivers *Chimalapa* and *Tehuantepec* to *Guasacualco*. We will not positively assert that a navigable canal may be formed, so as to unite the waters of these three rivers, but we believe it practicable. The point will be decided, when the Isthmus shall hereafter be properly surveyed; in the mean time, we will examine the importance of the Isthmus, as a means of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, even should a canal never be formed.