THE CANAL IS ASSURED

THE UNITED STATES WILL CONSTRUCT THE ISTHMIAN WATERWAY.

Nicaragua Route Will Undoubtedly Be Chosen—Report of the Walker Commission—Some Characteristics of Country Along the Line.

[Special Correspondence.]

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6.—That the United States government will build the Nicaragua canal is conceded by everybody in Washington excepting those interested in or directly connected with transcontinental railways, and it is probable that a majority of these are willing to concede it, but they are not reconciled to the fact. The report of the Walker commission has satisfied members of congress and the administration that the project is a fairly practicable one, and there isn't any doubt that the bill providing for construction of the canal will be passed by both branches of congress with practical unanimity and promptly receive the signature of the president. The amendment made to the Hepburn bill the other day, providing that $10,000,000 only of the $140,000,000 which will be finally needed should be at once appropriated, removes about the last objection in the house.

MAP SHOWING DISTANCE SAVED BY THE CANAL.

While it is true that another commission has gone to investigate the merits of the Panama route, it is generally believed that this is only a perfunctory performance, as the members of congress appear to be already convinced of the superiority of the Nicaragua route and have practically decided in its favor.

It is interesting at this time to review the history of the Nicaragua canal project. Briefly set out, it follows:

1805—Alexander von Humboldt, the famous scientist, declared the canal to be feasible.
1825—Congress of the United States of Central America decreed the digging of the canal.
1826—Henry Clay, secretary of state, ordered the route examined.
1835—Senate of the United States voted favorably for it. President Jackson appointed an agent to examine it.
1848—Nicaraguan government contracted for the canal's construction, but the concession lapsed.
1849—Cornelius Vanderbilt ran an overland route by wagon and boat.
1850—Neutrality of Nicaragua waterways guaranteed by Clayton-Bulwer treaty.
1851—Canal company organized by Cornelius Vanderbilt.
1867—Rear Admiral Davis advised the United States against the canal.
1876—Report made to the president by a Nicaragua canal commission.
1886—Association of capitalists formed to build the canal.
1888—New canal company organized and incorporated by United States congress.
1890—Work actually begun at Greytown.
1895—United States senate passed a bill appropriating $70,000,000 for the canal. Did not pass the house of representatives.
1895—Commission appointed by the president. It reported unfavorably.
1897—Commission appointed, headed by Rear Admiral Walker.
1899—Commission reports in the strongest terms in favor of the construction of the canal.

There are those who believe that what is known as the Bulwer-Clayton treaty of 1850 will stand in the way to some extent or interfere with the plans of the United States for the building and operation of the canal. By this treaty the governments of Great Britain and the United States mutually bound themselves neither to obtain nor maintain any exclusive control over the Nicaragua ship canal and to abstain from erecting any fortification in the vicinity thereof. They further undertook to exercise no dominion over Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Musquito Coast or any other part of Central America, to make use of no form of protection and to enter into no local alliance in any way tending to give one power an advantage over the other.

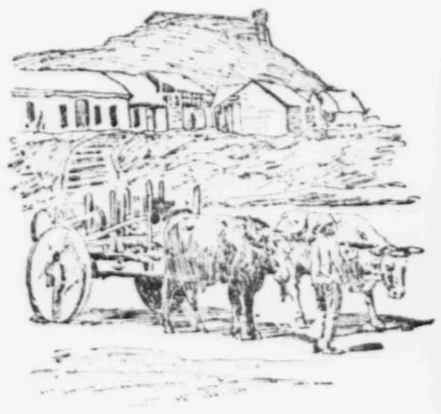
It is not likely that this treaty of 50 years' standing will cause us any great trouble, for under the influence of the present pleasant relations existing between this country and Great Britain it will not be difficult to secure such modifications as are necessary and desirable. That this is the way the matter is looked at by our government is attested by the fact that no overtures respecting the attitude of foreign governments have as yet been made by the administration. It is probable that the first move in this direction will be made to Costa Rica and Nicaragua and not to a European power.

So much relating to the route of the proposed canal has been printed as to leave nothing left to be said—that is, nothing that is new. But a condensed description may be of interest at this time. The distance along the line of the canal route proposed by the commission from the seven fathom curve of the Pacific ocean to the seven fathom curve of the Caribbean sea is 189.90 miles. The region within which the canal can be constructed is comprised within comparatively narrow limits. By the term "Nicaragua route" is understood a canal which uses Lake Nicaragua as a part of its system. For convenience this may be divided as follows: First, the division between the Pacific and the lake, called the western division; second, the lake itself; third, the division between the lake and the Caribbean sea, called the eastern division. At the easterly terminus of the canal there is no harbor. A harbor will have to be constructed at Greytown, where about 50 years ago there was a good harbor, which has been destroyed by sand deposited by the San Juan river. By the term harbor it is not intended to convey the idea of a large harbor to be constructed for commercial purposes. It is not expected that vessels will lie in such a harbor for any time, but will move through in one direction or the other. Various surveys of the harbor have been made with a view to determining the amount of material to be controlled. This amount is estimated to vary from 500,000 to 730,000 cubic yards annually and is chiefly of sand. The entrance to the harbor will be formed by two parallel jetties about 600 feet apart, the easterly one about 2,670 feet in length and the westerly one about 2,500 feet. As the sea strikes the shore line with considerable violence at times, these jetties will be constructed chiefly of heavy stones not easily moved by the force of the waves. Local stone will be used.

A harbor will have to also be constructed at the westerly end. This will be located at Brito. This, like the harbor at Greytown, will not need to be large. The conditions on this coast are not so forbidding as they are on the eastern. The sand movement is slight, and the winds are mostly offshore. The shore is bold, and deep soundings are found at no great distance from it.

On the route selected by the commission provision is made for the construction of six locks of 18 lift feet each on the eastern division and four locks of 29 feet lift each on the western division. The total lift of the locks on the eastern division is 110.46 feet, while on the western the total is 116 feet, a difference of 5.54 feet being due to the rise of tide in the two oceans. This route starting from the harbor at Greytown crosses the coastal plain, passes to the north of Lake Silico and up the left bank of the San Juan to the dam of the Boca San Carlos, thence follows the improved river channel, crosses the lake and traverses the valley of the Lagos and Rio Grande to Brito, on the Pacific.

Contrary to the general belief before the investigation by the commission, the climate of Nicaragua is equable and healthful. The average temperature of Nicaragua summer and winter varies but little from 80 degrees, seldom fluctuating 20 points one way or the other. The mildness of the temperature is due to the constant sweep of the cool trade winds from the Atlantic. These winds also carry away the germs of disease. It is said that no other Central American republic is so free from disease. The atmosphere, however, is very moist, and old General Humidity sometimes makes life a little uncomfortable. Exertion causes



MORRO CASTLE, ON SAN JUAN RIVER.

free perspiration, and there is some difficulty in drying the week's wash. The commission does not look for any special annoyance because of the humidity, for, as the report states, by the use of light clothing, cleanly habits and a vegetable diet there is but little danger from fevers and other serious sickness.

As has already been stated, the constant movement of the winds appears to remove the noxious exhalations which characterize some other portions of the isthmus. Admiral Walker and his colleagues are satisfied that abstemious habits and careful police of camps will insure as good health among the laborers on the construction work as will be found in many localities in this country. The climate would affect the labor question, therefore, chiefly by the lassitude resulting from the enervating influence. There is ample material available without cost for the protection of the men and materials from rain and sun.

The scenery is picturesque. Lake Nicaragua itself has a bold, mountainous coast line, mellowing down at intervals with green, rolling hills, but at no time assuming the characteristics of a plain. The existence of the lake at an altitude of 105 feet above contiguous sea level is, in fact, only made possible by the encircling wall of rock which holds the vast body of water as if it were in a gigantic cup. Myriads of small, rocky islets, verdure thatched and attractive in appearance, greet the eye on every hand as the steamboat forges its way through the pale green waters toward the open expanse in the center of the lake.

There is much that is grand and inspiring in the scenery also along the San Juan river, and there are many interesting evidences of the manner of life and habits of the people. Antiquarians have found this a fruitful field in past times, and many stone idols and relics of the Toltec age have had their passage paid to American and European museums. Morro castle, situated on a high promontory overlooking the San Juan river, is an interesting point with a more recent history. It was erected by the Spaniards in 1658 and is still in a good state of preservation. The antiquarians have not, so far, been able to carry it away, and from its proud position it will look down upon the starry banner floating over the first ship that passes through the great Nicaragua canal.

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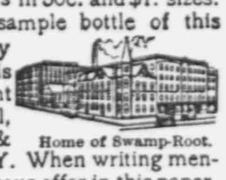

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