

## CANAL ACROSS CENTRAL AMERICA TO THE PACIFIC.

The success of the Suez Canal insures the construction of another ship-canal most important to the United States—one which will form a new route for its coast-wise commerce, which now passes around Cape Horn to the Pacific. It will reduce a voyage of 18,000 miles to less than one-third of that distance, and diminish the time required on the way to one-fifth of the time now taken, replacing the vessel under sail with the steam-ship of steel. The Pacific railways are adapted to the transportation of mails, travellers, and express freight. They are important also for local traffic; but in no respect suited to our chief coasting trade—the conveyance of grain, provisions, timber, coal, fish, and metals between the Atlantic and Pacific. When a ship-canal is finished, it will cheapen all our routes to the Pacific, and it is safe to predict that it will reduce the rates of freight between the Atlantic and Pacific below six dollars per ton *vis* the canal, and we may easily foresee what will be the future course of commerce. The routes across the Isthmus and Central America have been explored and surveyed by both England and the United States, and the estimates for one of them are below the cost of the Suez Canal, while the prospects for business are far more encouraging. The Suez Canal commands the trade between India and Europe, but can not control the commerce of China and Japan with the United States, or more than half of that between the same countries and Europe, while a ship-canal between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific will eventually command twice the tonnage that now passes through the Suez Canal.

It will be a candidate for the vast export of wheat and other grain from our Pacific coast to Europe. The annual production of wheat on our Pacific coast exceeds a million of tons, and will soon require a million of tons of shipping to convey it to Europe. The ships would pass twice through the canal, and give it two millions of tonnage. The vast coasting trade of the United States between the Atlantic front and California, Oregon and Alaska would pass through this canal both going and returning, and the varied products of the Pacific coast, in shape of timber, fish, copper ore, and return cargoes, would, to-

gether, add another million to its tonnage. The commerce of the United States alone through this canal will supply a tonnage equal to that which pays six millions of dollars each year to the Suez Canal. It will be a candidate for ships on their voyages from Europe for tea to China and Japan, and on their return, and will take nearly the whole tonnage passing between the Atlantic States, China, Japan, and the Philippine Islands, and between Europe and the Russian Possessions, and best accommodate the ships engaged in the whale-fisheries of the Pacific. Tea, to the extent of two hundred millions of pounds, and occupying one hundred thousand tons of shipping, forms one item of this commerce, which will annually send through the canal nearly a quarter of a million tons of shipping. Then we have the trade between Australia and Europe, one item of which, wool, amounts yearly to three hundred millions of pounds. We may safely calculate that the Australian ships, out and back, will patronize this canal to the extent of three hundred thousand tons.

Peru, with its guano amounting to three or four hundred thousand tons sent annually to Europe, Chili, with its copper and nitrates and return cargoes, with Guatemala, Mexico, and Central America, must furnish at least another million of tons. Then we have the growth of this commerce while the work progresses, together with that due to new facilities, so that the aggregate must reach between five and six millions of tons—nearly twice the tonnage which passes yearly through the Suez Canal. This estimate is not a high one. Ten years since, before the grain trade of California had attained to any importance, the tonnage that would seek the canal was set at 3,300,000 tons by Admiral Davis, of our navy, and the annual saving in the cost of freight, interest, and insurance on the property to be transported by this canal was set by him at ninety-nine millions of dollars.

The estimate seems to be a high one, for it exceeds the computed cost of the canal itself; but the saving must be immense, as this trade is fast increasing, and the cost of transportation may be lessened two-thirds by a ship-canal. California has become the chief granary of Great Britain, which now requires annually from other nations two hundred millions of bushels of grain; she prefers the wheat