

**MEMOIR**

**RELATING TO**

**THE ISTHMUS CROSSING AT THE CHIRIQUI LAGOON.**

**ADDRESSED**

**TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.**

**JUNE 1, 1858.**

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**WASHINGTON:**  
**1858.**



WASHINGTON, *June 1, 1858.*

SIR: It may be fairly presumed that the necessity on the part of the United States of creating more intimate relations with some or all of those Spanish American states that lie between Mexico and the republics of South America is too apparent to be longer the subject of controversy or debate. To say nothing of other considerations, quite apparent to all who are in a condition to judge of our true policy in reference to that country, the importance of securing, without delay, a transit route from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, at points where the best and safest harbors can be obtained, is becoming more manifest every day. The governments of Great Britain and France have, within a few years, attempted, each of them, to secure this advantage, and thereby to compel the United States, in a great measure, to pay tribute to them. And the former of these governments has been so far successful in its policy as to induce the United States to enter into the stipulations of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, by which, as it cannot itself monopolize this privilege in the Central American states, it is content to arrest the progress of the United States by obtaining their consent to a joint exclusion from any occupancy within the limits of those states. This is manifestly injurious to the United States, and it is clearly the true policy of the government to get rid, by abrogation or otherwise, of the effect of these stipulations. As the necessary steps to that result are not likely to be taken during the present session of Congress, it is supposed that the administration will regard it as fortunate if a plan can be suggested by which an equivalent result may be obtained without the slightest violation of any of the provisions of that treaty. The object of this letter is to point out that plan, and the mode of its speedy accomplishment.

The "*Republic of Central America*," which is embraced within the provisions of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, is composed of the states of Guatemala, Honduras, San Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Consequently, whatever rights may be acquired by the United States in any part of the territory lying between the eastern boundary line of the state of Costa Rica and the Isthmus of Panama cannot, in any way, be affected by the provisions of that treaty. Such rights *can* be procured upon terms most advantageous to the United States, if done without delay.

The province of Chiriqui lies between Costa Rica and the Isthmus of Panama, about equidistant between Chagres and Greytown. It is a part of the South American Republic of New Granada, but possesses the independent right of legislation over its own local policy, to the extent of disposing of its lands, bays, islands, waters, &c., as it shall deem most conducive to its welfare. Exercising this right, the provincial legislature of that Province passed an ordinance on the 20th of February, 1854, whereby they granted to the undersigned, for the period of *sixty years*, the "exclusive privilege" of improving and using the provincial road which leads from the City of David, near the Pacific, to the Chiriqui lagoon, on the Atlantic; and which ordinance contains a stipulation, on the part of said province, that, during the said sixty years, the provincial legislature will not grant any rival privilege to construct a road from said City of David to the coast of the Atlantic. And said ordinance gives him the unlimited right of fixing the rates of toll for travelling over said road, and concedes many other important privileges. Amongst these, and of the highest importance to the government of the United States, is that which confers upon him the right to *maintain a corps of police* necessary to the preservation of order along the road, whereby ample security to all persons and property passing over it will be afforded.

By several ordinances to that effect, there was also granted to James Alfonso Morel and John Eugene Flandin the full and unre-served property in all the coal mines on "Pope's Island," in the district of Boca del Toro, which is part of said province of Chiriqui, besides like privileges in other islands lying in the Chiriqui lagoon, also in said province. And to give effect to said grant, there was also conceded to said parties 25,000 fanegadas of vacant land belonging to the canton of Boca del Toro, to enable them to put into successful operation the necessary measures to develop the resources and immense mineral and other wealth of that section of country. For these privileges they are to pay into the treasury of the district the nominal sum only of one dime for each ton of coal that may be taken from the mines for exportation, until the quantity exported shall reach ten thousand tons; after which they are to pay only half a dime per ton.

By another ordinance from the Camara of the province there has been also conceded to Señor Santiago Agnew the privilege of establishing a colony, with native and foreign emigrants, upon the lands lying between the river Las Esquinas and the river Clara, or Agua Clara, in the centre of Golfo Dulce, on the Pacific coast; the limits and extent of which grant were defined by a subsequent ordinance,

and so defined as to grant the right of way from some suitable point of divergence upon the provincial road leading from the Chiriqui lagoon to the City of David, as to construct said road to the bay of Golfo Dulce upon the Pacific ocean.

The legislature of Pennsylvania have granted a charter to the Chiriqui Improvement Company, with all the powers necessary to exercise the privileges conceded by the aforesaid grants and concessions from the province of Chiriqui. A company has been organized under that charter, composed, amongst others, of the said several grantees, and the undersigned has full power and authority to act for and on behalf of said company in managing the business and disposing of any of the interests and privileges derived by the aforesaid ordinances and concessions ; and he is prepared to make the necessary arrangements by which such portions of them as are important to the United States shall be transferred to the government.

By the terms of his compacts with the government of the province of Chiriqui, his important privileges will be forfeited in October next, if he shall not, by that time, comply with the conditions attached to his grant. He, therefore, suggests to the government the absolute necessity of prompt action, not only that he may be enabled by means of its aid to comply with the conditions of the grant, but that the United States may thus secure advantages which they will not be likely to acquire in any other way for many years to come.

Nobody will deny the importance to the government of securing a transit route from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, either to itself or its citizens, with power to protect the same, throughout its entire length, by the presence of the necessary police force. That right has been obtained by the undersigned, and if the government shall contract with him to carry the mail from New York to San Francisco, not only will it, but the lives and property of passengers will also be fully protected.

But the considerations of the greatest present importance to the government is the necessity of acquiring a naval station in that part of the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean sea ; that of obtaining there a sufficiency of good coal for steamers, and also good and secure harbors on both the Atlantic and Pacific side of the Isthmus. The undersigned does not hesitate to say that the government can in no other way, so successfully accomplish these objects as by securing to itself the advantages that are to be derived from the aforesaid grants and concessions to him. And this he will proceed to demonstrate.

Five lines of interoceanic road-way across the Isthmus and Central America have been proposed :

I. That between the Gulf of Mexico and Tehuantepec, commonly called the Tehuantepec route.

II. The Nicaragua route.

III. The Panama route.

IV. The Darien route..

V. The Honduras route.

VI. The Chiriqui route.

These several routes the undersigned proposes to examine, so as to explain the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The first, or Tehuantepec route, is liable to serious objections. It is without good ports both on the Atlantic and Pacific, and is not in the line of general intercourse between the oceans.

Humboldt, speaking of the Pacific terminus of this road, said :

“The port of Tehuantepec is not more favorable by nature [than the coast of Nicaragua.] It gives its name to the hurricanes which blow from the northwest, and which prevent vessels from landing at the small ports of Sabinas and *Ventosa*, [*Anglice*, ‘the windy.’”] (Humboldt’s *New Spain*, vol. 1, p. 26.)

Referring to this route, M. Michael Chevalier observes that—

“It would be necessary to remedy, if possible, the want of a moderately convenient port on the Pacific. Tehuantepec scarcely deserves the name of a roadstead ; the sea recedes day by day from its shores; the anchorage yearly becomes worse; the sand deposited by the Chimalapa increases the height and extent of the bars of sand at the entrance of the first lake, in the second, and thence into the sea, and already is Tehuantepec accessible to small vessels only.”—*L’Isthme de Panama*, p. 66.)

The fact is, that it is notorious amongst all mariners who have any knowledge of the Pacific ocean at that point, that this route is wholly without a port on that side of the Isthmus. The engineers of the Tehuantepec survey were so well satisfied of this that they proposed to remedy the difficulty by constructing a “breakwater of 2,000 feet long”—a thing altogether impracticable, if not impossible. A proposition has been made to enter the Coatzacoalcos river with vessels. But this does not avoid the difficulty, as it has no shelter at its mouth, and has a bar which, in bad weather, cannot be passed by a vessel of 100 tons. It is stated by *Major Barnard*, who has been identified with this route, that “at high water, on the full and change, the

depth of water on the bar is about thirteen feet, and falls as low as eleven feet." Commodore Perry found there but twelve feet. Captain Liot, superintendent of the British West India steamers, when considering the question of a communication between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, observes :

"The soundings given in the preceding remark, (even those most favorable to the Tehuantepec project) are evidently insufficient for large vessels with full cargoes ; for, although if the principal channel of the bar were always to maintain a depth of eighteen feet, (as Señor Orbegoso asserts it does, but afterwards admits that, 'under extraordinary circumstances, perhaps it does not,') how is a ship of 600 tons burden, for instance, drawing eighteen feet water at least, to pass it? If there were much swell on the bar, it would be perilous for vessels of even fifteen feet draught to attempt it. Thus, then, this projected ship canal would avail only for vessels of and under 300 tons burden, and in the season of 'norths' great risk would attend their approach to that part of the coast, where there is neither port nor shelter nearer than Vera Cruz, (120 miles upon a northwest bearing from the bar of the Coatzacoalcos;) and during 'norths' the land thereabouts is not only a 'dead lee shore,' but it forms a perfect '*cul de sac*,' out of which sailing vessels could not escape under canvas, except by risking the passage of the bar, (which shifts,) and that they would scarcely dare to do without a pilot ; during a hard 'north,' moreover, the surf on the coast is so heavy that pilots are unable to 'board' vessels, whatever their distress or danger may be."

Colonel Abert, of the United States Topographical Bureau, in a review of the transit route published by Congress, observes :

"The Gulf bar cannot be considered as affording more than twelve feet of water. *Upon the Pacific side there is no harbor.....* Tehuantepec bay is represented as shoal, and much exposed—dangerous, and subject to frequent tempests."

Commodore Shubrick, commanding the Pacific squadron, in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, dated October 7, 1847, says :

"There is, I understand, anchorage in the bay of Tehuantepec ; but all accounts agree with the letters of Mr. Forbes in describing it as exceedingly boisterous. Captain Hall says the hardest gales he ever experienced were in that bay, and the Spanish call it Ventosa."

J. H. Alexander, esq., in a communication on the subject to a special committee of Congress, says :

"What was said just now as to the defects of the harbor of San

Juan del Sur, in connexion with the Nicaragua route, applies also to the consideration of another, which has attracted much attention: I mean that over the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.....In regard to the approaches on either side, nature has been unkind; and Ventosa bay, on the Pacific, is in its very name ('the windy') an apt expression for the character of the roadstead; while on the Coatzacoalcos side there is nothing to protect the entrance of that river from the northers of the Gulf of Mexico."—(Report of Select Committee on Pacific railroad, No. 145, 1849, page 44.)

Lieutenant Colonel George W. Hughes, of the United States Topographical Engineers, in a letter to the Secretary of State on the subject of "Intermarine communications," sums up his account of Tehuantepec in the following words:

"One most serious objection to any communication across this Isthmus, for great commercial purposes, is to be found in the want of safe and capacious harbors at either terminus. At the mouth of the Coatzacoalcos there is but  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet at low tide, and it is exposed to the full force of the northers, which prevail from November till April. *I have seen thirty ships stranded in a single norther in the month of March.* It may be said that the bar may be removed, and an artificial harbor constructed at the mouth of the river. There is, probably, no more difficult problem in the science of engineering, than the execution of such works under the best of circumstances; but I am far from asserting that skill and *money* may not accomplish them. The mouth of the Coatzacoalcos is peculiarly ill adapted to such improvements, which would scarcely be inferior in magnitude to the harbor of Cherbourg, and would assuredly require the munificence and resources of Louis XIV for their execution. The bar, created by the action of a certain natural law, would, if removed, be immediately reformed by the same cause to which it owes its origin, unless that cause should be so modified as to direct elsewhere the deposition of earthy matter; and, in the present case, the question would be further complicated by the silting up of the artificial harbor, if one should be built. Supposing that such a harbor should be constructed, it would still be liable to the objection of the difficulty and danger of access, especially for sailing vessels, in the season of northers. The whole shore of Tehuantepec is subject to the visitation of terrific hurricanes, (which take their name from the Isthmus,) sweeping with resistless fury along the inhospitable coast, where the tempest-tossed mariner seeks in vain for a harbor of refuge, even for the smallest class of sea-going



vessels. For this there seems to be no remedy; the genius of man cannot control the storms, and nature is constantly interposing new physical difficulties in the way of navigation."

Mr. Pitman, in his work on the "Practicability of an Interoceanic Communication," p. 204, arrives at a precisely similar conclusion. He says :

"The prevailing weight of all extant authority shows that the mouth of the river Coatzacoalcos is not a sufficiently good port; that there is not a port at the mouth of the river Tehuantepec capable of receiving ships of considerable tonnage, and that there is no means of making the present port better. From all these considerations, in addition to the before-mentioned reasons, it seems to be an unavoidable conclusion that the proposed route is *unfit*, if not impracticable, for a ship navigation that would be adequate to extensive commerce."

It will be readily seen from the foregoing statements, that it will be impossible to secure good anchorage for vessels of ordinary size, either on the Atlantic or Pacific side of Tehuantepec. Commodore Perry has reported that at the entrance of the Rio Coatzacoalcos, there is but 12 feet of water on the bar, in a channel but 150 feet wide; while outside the channel the water shoals rapidly to 11, 10, and 9 feet. This cannot afford anchorage for the steamers engaged in the California transit. The smallest of those that have been engaged in that trade, carried 750 tons, and drew 15 feet of water; which is three feet more than the depth of water upon the Coatzacoalcos bar; consequently, no expenditure of money can ever supply these natural deficiencies; but if it could, the other obstacles are insurmountable. There is no more dangerous point on the whole coast of the Gulf of Mexico, or on the whole Atlantic side of America, than the proposed eastern terminus of this route. The northers which sweep down from the great valley of the Mississippi, are here concentrated in their greatest force, and all sailors familiar with the navigation of the gulf will agree that no steamer, or other vessel of ordinary draught, could cross the Coatzacoalcos bar during their prevalence, which is from September to March—six months.

And more than this: the climate of Tehuantepec is such that the lives of passengers and sailors would be in constant danger. Señor Moro says that he has frequently seen the thermometer at Tehuantepec stand at 92° Fahrenheit, at 7 o'clock in the morning. And it is notorious that the *vomito* prevails with great fatality along this coast.

As the Nicaragua and Honduras lines both pass over territory em-

braced within the provisions of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, and the United States cannot *now* obtain any exclusive rights over either of them, but by violating the provisions of that treaty; and as the Panama and Darien routes are both out of the question, it is unnecessary to say anything more of them here than simply to make a few brief extracts from a report made to the Earl of Clarendon, by Admiral Robert Fitzroy, on the "Honduras Interoceanic railway," and to remark, of the Honduras route, that it will be exclusively under *English* management and jurisdiction, notwithstanding its apparent association with American interests. After speaking of Tehuantepec as "wanting good ports, and not in the line of general intercourse between the oceans," he says:

"*The Nicaragua line.*—Equally deficient in harborage, and otherwise objectionable."

"*The Panama route.*—This is the shortest; crosses the lowest land, and is well situated; but has inferior harbor accommodation."

"*The Darien line.*—Between good ports, distant less than 40 miles from each other, but crossing a ridge about 900 feet above the sea."

And this brings the undersigned to speak of his own, or the Chiriqui route, and he will have no difficulty in showing that it is far preferable to either of the others. Admiral Fitzroy, in the report from which the above extracts were taken, in speaking of this route, says:

"*The Chiriqui and Dulce line, between good ports* and of promising character, but which has not yet been surveyed accurately."

At the time this report was written, there was so little known of this line that its general character was not understood; but subsequent examination has shown that both its Atlantic and Pacific ports are the best upon either coast, and that the road-way is of easy construction.

A work just issued from the press—"Geographical Dictionary of the World," by Thomas & Baldwin—speaking of Chiriqui lagoon, says:

"The Chiriqui lagoon is a spacious bay, with three entrances, and capable of containing ships of the largest class. It extends along the coast about ninety miles, and from forty to fifty miles inland."

The following is taken from the before-mentioned report of Captain Fitzroy, published in the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, London, vol. xx, p. 183.

"Between Chiriqui lagoon (Boca del Toro) and Golfo Dulce, a communication has recently been proposed by a company who have obtained a grant of land from the government. Their object is said

to be the establishment of a good road in the first instance, between the Lagoon of Chiriqui and the Golfo Dulce. Whatever may be the character of the intermediate district or the extent of country to traverse, *it is certain that the two points of departure are good ports*, a very material advantage with which to commence operations."

There was published in Edinburg, as early as 1827, a "Narrative of Voyages and Excursions on the East Coast and in the Interior of Central America, by Orlando W. Roberts, many years a Resident Trader." After speaking of the healthfulness of the climate and the docility of the inhabitants, he said :

"As I frequently made excursions to Chiriqui lagoon, I can with certainty assure any navigator who may visit it that he will find it a *safe and noble harbor*. It has three entrances: one from the eastward, around Valiente or Valencia Point; the other from the northwest, round Sapabilla cays, and a third by Boca del Toro lagoon. The first and second entrances command a *sufficient draught of water for ships of the largest class*, and the lagoon is capable of containing *the whole British navy secure from all winds*. There are several banks of soft white coral in the lagoon, but all distinctly visible when the sun shines; and the water being, in general, perfectly smooth, a vigilant look-out is all the pilotage requires. At the eastern entrance is a small cay, (Patterson's cay,) opposite to which, at the northern end of a small sandy beach and not far from the entrance of the harbor, is a cascade, falling from a rock of the height of about five feet from the ground, forming one of the most convenient watering places, as a seventy-four gun ship may lie close to it."

\* \* \* \* \* "The climate is considered healthy. The lagoons, notwithstanding the very heavy rains during the season, being at all times open to sea breezes.

"Between Provision island and a small island opposite to it, there is a small bight, called Nancy's cove, completely sheltered from all winds, and *in which the water is always as smooth as in a mill pond*. From this place to the northwest entrance of the port of Boca del Toro is about sixteen miles, and the whole length of both lagoons cannot be less than from ninety to a hundred miles."—(Pp. 79 to 81.)

James B. Cook, esq., chief engineer of the Chiriqui Company, has examined the harbors at each terminus of our road, and the following extracts are taken from his report :

"On the Pacific side, in the neighborhood of Golfo Dulce, there is a *magnificent harbor, with deep waters and well sheltered*, requiring but little engineering to render it applicable for the purposes of the road."

“ On the Atlantic terminal point of the road *there is no place to be found upon the isthmus so well adapted for a harbor*; it is well sheltered from the devastating northers and hurricanes of the tropics, and no harbor can be found excelling it in beauty; deep waters, of ready and well-defined entrance, and other natural advantages, not the least of which are streams of the finest and most delicious fresh water, poured down in never failing supply from the mountain slopes. This same advantage also exists *at the point selected on the Pacific*; and, indeed, throughout the whole extent of the road, there is a succession of mountain streams, none, however, presenting serious obstacles to its construction, but affording to the road a supply rarely to be found in elevated countries.”—(Pamphlet “Chiriqui Improvement Company,” p. 37.)

J. Eugene Flandin, esq., vice president of our society, says:

“Two of the finest harbors in the world exist at the extremities of the proposed route, on both of which the company own lands; namely, Boca del Toro, and Chiriqui lagoon on the Atlantic, and Golfo Dulce, on the Pacific; an advantage possessed by no other line of route that is open or can be made to connect the two oceans, whether at Darien, Tehuantepec, Panama, or Nicaragua.”—(Same pamphlet, p. 42.)

And he enters upon a description of both harbors, showing wherein their great superiority consists. He shows also that most accurate and careful surveys of the harbor on the Atlantic side have been made by the British and French governments, and charts published; that the bay of Golfo Dulce has also been surveyed and explored by the French, and that Admiral Pelion recommended its selection as a naval station and depot for the French fleet on the Pacific, expressing the opinion that it would make the finest naval and military station combined in the world. (Pp. 42, 43.)

Dr. McDowall, who resides at the City of David, says of the Chiriqui lagoon that it is “one of the finest harbors in the world,” and that the province possesses “secure roadsteads on the tranquil Pacific.”—(Pamphlet of Reports, p. 18.)

The United States need such a station and depot both on the Atlantic and Pacific side of Central America and the Isthmus, with full authority to guard and protect the property and lives of their citizens throughout the whole line of interoceanic communication. It is respectfully suggested that there is no other way of acquiring these advantages except in that now proposed. By obtaining possession of the Chiriqui lagoon on one side, and Golfo Dulce on the other, they

will command both seas throughout the whole extent of Central America, and mould the future destiny of that beautiful country as they please. If the right of transit were secured elsewhere, as it is at Panama—to conflicting companies acting independently of the United States—there will be not only the want of necessary and safe harbors, but it will be impossible, from the general insalubrity of climate, to escape disease and death. Mr. Cooke, in his report already referred to, explains this fully. He says:

“The crossings of Tehuantepec, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Darien, and Panama, are throughout nearly their whole extent subject to fevers and maladies of the most fatal character; the decaying matter of their swamps and marshes impregnate the air with their destroying miasma, and the adventurous stranger who seeks the alluring gold fields of California and Australia too often finds his grave upon the narrow strip which divides these great oceans. *Not a marsh, or swamp, or putrifying place exists from ocean to ocean on the Isthmus of Chiriqui.*”—(Pamphlet Chiriqui Improvement Company, p. 38.)

And Mr. Flandin says, that “epidemic fevers are unknown in this province, which it owes chiefly to its freedom from those sluggish waters and other deleterious elements that are the fruitful sources of sickness both on the Panama and Nicaragua routes. My own personal experience fully proves the healthiness of this region, and the testimony of hundreds of its inhabitants, residents for years, both foreign and native, corroborates the fact.”—(Same, p. 46.)

But besides the advantages of good harbors and a salubrious climate, (both indispensable,) there is another advantage offered by this route that the United States *cannot secure at any other point in the Gulf of Mexico or Carribbean sea*; that is, the inexhaustible beds of coal from which to supply their steamers with fuel.

Professor Mancross has made an examination of the Chiriqui lagoon, and reports that at Secretary, a place on the interior shore of Valiente promontory, three separate beds crop out upon the beach; one in the face of a cliff some forty feet high. This bed has a thickness of four feet, and is situated about 20 feet above the water, so that steamers could be loaded at a great saving of time, labor, and expense.

It is also met with on Pope's island, which is the principal one in the lagoon. Here the bed is five or six feet thick, and the quality is harder and better than at Secretary. It is said by Professor Mancross to be of “superior quality.” And, according to Mr. Richardson, the mining engineer of the Chiriqui company, it will give a yield of 20,740 tons to the acre. By this fact it is shown that this island alone

contains a quantity of coal sufficient to supply the United States navy for centuries to come.

On the promontory of Saddle hill several beds occur, varying from one to two feet in thickness. Further west in the lagoon, it is also found at Endeavor creek, and also at Cultivation creek, about one mile from the shore of Shepherds' lagoon. Here the vein is but about a foot in thickness, but the quality is superior even to that on Pope's island.—(Reports, &c., p. 6.) A particular and minute description of the coal at these several points will be found in the report of Charles J. Richardson, esq., which accompanies this.

The ownership of coal in this neighborhood is of the highest importance to the United States. In every respect the navigation of the Gulf of Mexico and the Carribbean sea is becoming more important every year. And by no nation in the world is this importance felt more directly than ours. There is fast growing up between us and the Spanish American States a feeling of respect and mutuality, and they are gradually beginning to see the necessity of cultivating relations of friendship with us, so much so that both England and France are applying all their arts of diplomacy to counteract the influences by which these feelings have been produced. None of them have exhibited this feeling in a greater degree than New Granada, where it is already the subject of discussion whether or no annexation to the United States would be the best policy. The liberal concessions made by the grants to the undersigned and his associates would seem to excite the impression that some such feeling as this had prompted them. At all events, whether induced by this or a feeling of liberality or interest, they are such as, if secured by the United States, cannot fail to advance the interests of this country most materially.\*

At every other point where it has been proposed to construct an interoceanic communication, conflicting and rival interests have grown up, except the route conceded to the undersigned in the Province of Chiriqui. Especially is this so in the case at Tehuantepec. It is claimed by Sloo & Co. that their grant to this route is protected by the 8th article of the Gadsden treaty, and that the recognition of any rival claim, on the part of the government, would be a breach of the public faith. Whereas it is insisted on the part of Hargous & Co. that their contract

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\* By the late arrival from Panama it is made known that the clause of the Cass-Herran treaty, which proposed that the United States should have the right to establish a coal depot on one of the islands in the bay of Panama, has been rejected by the government of New Granada. Hence it may be justly said that the necessity for securing this right in one of those of the Chiriqui lagoon is immediate and absolute.

with Mexico, during the Presidency of Comonfort, is of higher validity than any other that has been made. Each of these claims are pressed upon the government with equal pertinacity if not ability, and the extension of its protection to either would involve the government in difficulty. All this may be avoided by the selection of the Chiriqui route, as the one most suitable, in all respects, for the government patronage.

At this time, especially, the government cannot fail to see the importance of the consideration already presented, that this route is not embraced within the provisions of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty. The operation of that treaty, by the 1st article, is confined to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Musquito coast, "*or any part of Central America.*" It has already been shown that the States of Central America are Guatemala, Honduras, San Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. These States, in 1821, threw off their allegiance to Spain, and, assuming the rank of sovereign States, in imitation of the States of our Union, formed the "Republic of Central America." In 1839 this Union was dissolved, and since then each State has exercised distinct and separate sovereign powers.

New Granada commenced her revolt against the authority of Spain as early as 1810, and continued her struggle, with but short periods of intermission, until 1824; when, under Bolivar, the republicans were successful. Venezuela and New Granada united in 1818, and in 1819 Columbia was formed at the congress of Angostura. In 1829 Venezuela separated herself, and in 1831 the central part of Columbia erected itself into the republic of New Granada. In 1832 a democratic republican government was formed after the model of our own. There have been controversies between Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and New Granada about the precise boundary of the latter, she having once claimed that some of the territory of Costa Rica belonged to her. But these have all been settled, and were never of such a character as to raise any doubt about the State to which the province of Chiriqui belonged. It was always conceded to be a part of New Granada. Therefore it is, beyond all question, true, that it is not embraced by the provision of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, so as to exclude the United States from acquiring authority there.

It may, however, be insisted, with much reason, that the 8th article of that treaty imposes some obligation on the United States to "extend their protection" to this route, because it is the most "practicable;" for that section provides for this protection, "espe-

cially to the interoceanic communication." If, under this section, the United States should acquire any exclusive rights through the province of Chiriqui, from sea to sea, they are only obliged to guaranty to Great Britain that "no other charges or conditions of traffic" shall be imposed upon her subjects than those which are "just and equitable," or such, in other words, as may be agreed upon between them so long as that treaty shall continue in force.

As to the practicability of this route through Chiriqui, in regard to time and distance, there can be no doubt of its advantages over the Panama route. It will save 600 miles between New York and San Francisco. It has, in this respect too, the advantage of the Tehuantepec route, as will be seen by reference to the map. A steamer starting from New York for Tehuantepec must pass around the capes of Florida and west of Cuba in order to reach it. To say nothing of the storms which it meets in this route, it is subjected to loss of time by its circuitry. If it touches at Havana this loss is the greater. But if the destination of the steamer is the Chiriqui lagoon, it pursues its course almost due south from New York, down the passage between Cuba and Hayti, and by the Island of Jamaica, directly to Chiriqui. If the time should ever come when Cuba, Hayti and Jamaica shall belong to the United States, this must, of course, be the true route. Its adoption now may hasten the accomplishment of a result so important to our interests and so desirable to a great majority of our people.

The government and people of Great Britain have been, for some time, looking upon all our movements in that direction with great interest, and have not been insensible to the advantages which we would acquire from the possession of the Chiriqui lagoon. Herewith the undersigned furnishes a map, made in London, upon which this point is laid down as upon a proposed route from Liverpool to both Australia, Canton and the East Indies. Upon a visit to England, after this project was put on foot, he arrested it only through the means of having secured the grant of the road-way to himself, and it now remains for the United States to decide whether they will enjoy its advantages or let them pass into the hands of the government and people of Great Britain. This must be the case, if his grant shall be forfeited, in October next, by a failure to comply with its conditions. Hence he is the more urgent for immediate action on the part of the administration.

And such is the pressing urgency of these matters that the necessity



of such immediate action is still further demonstrated while the undersigned is preparing this letter. The steamship Moses Taylor has just arrived at New York from California, and brings news from Central America, that an agent of *France* was negotiating for the transit route across Nicaragua, for which he represents that 60,000,000 francs have been already subscribed in France, and that he had succeeded in rendering the ratification of the Cass-Yrisarri treaty at least doubtful. This is but an attempt to consummate a policy long pursued by France—now fast becoming the equal of Great Britain upon the ocean, and looking forward to the time when she upon one side, and Russia upon the other, may contest with England the palm of supremacy in the east. This great scheme enlists the *personal* feelings of the Emperor, he having, in 1846, made a contract, *in his own name*, with Nicaragua for building the Nicaraguan canal.—“*Canal Napoleon de Nicaragua.*”—(Squier’s Nic. vol. 2, p 261.)—Will the United States remain passive and indifferent to Central American affairs, while these things are transpiring there? Now is the time to decide.

The undersigned claims no credit for sagacity, but it will be remembered by some into whose hands this communication is placed, that the present condition of Central American affairs was foretold by him several months ago, when the Chiriqui route was first brought to the notice of the administration. As certainly as he foreknew that, he now foresees that they will become still more complicated if the United States delay their action. Our government alone can untie the knot.

The great advantages of the Chiriqui route may be thus summed up, to wit :

1. It has the finest harbors at its termini which are known in either Central or South America.
2. It has abundance of coal on the Atlantic side, and some evidences of coal upon the Pacific side ; thus fitting it for a naval station at either end for the uses of the government.
3. It is more healthful than any known or existing routes.
4. Its distance across is only 60 miles, and its saving of distance, as between New York and California, when compared with Panama, is over 600 miles.
5. It is controlled entirely by Americans. The grant belongs to citizens of the United States, and embraces valuable privileges both to them and the government, amongst which is the important right to establish a police force of such strength as “*to preserve order along*

*the line of the road,"* and to protect the lives and property of all who pass over it, as well as the rights of the company.

6. It is not embraced by the terms of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty.

For the purpose of aiding and facilitating the examination of this valuable enterprise, the accompanying papers are arranged in the following order, to wit :

No. 1. General summary and report of engineer.

No. 2. Translation of grants and right of way. (The whole grants now exceed 3,000,000 acres of land.)

No. 3. Charter from the Pennsylvania legislature of the Chiriqui Company.

No. 4. British admiralty survey of the lagoon, showing the harbor to have an average depth of 15 fathoms, and to be protected from all heavy winds.

No. 5. Chart of Golfo Dulce and Golfofito, on the Pacific side, from French hydrographic office.

No. 6. Map prepared in England for route by Chiriqui to Australia, China, and the East.

No. 7. Other papers, documents, letters, and charts, bearing upon the same points, and showing the general character of the route, coal banks, climate of Chiriqui, character of harbors at the termini of the road, &c., &c.

The proprietary rights of lands and minerals, the harbors, the route shorter, safer, and more healthful than the Panama, or any other now known or projected, stamp this beyond question as an enterprise worthy the fostering care of the administration; and it is because it is so that the undersigned proposes to enter into arrangements by which the United States can secure a naval depot on each side of the Isthmus, with a transit route, which will be protected by its fine harbors at either end, as well as by a sufficient "*corps of police*," and be constantly available and reliable to the commerce of the United States, and in case of need furnish the strongest positions for the naval uses of the government.

I propose then, on my own, and in behalf of those with whom I am associated, and for whom I have authority to act, as follows :

*First*, I will perform the mail service of the United States from any Atlantic port that the Postmaster General may designate, to San Francisco, in steamers of sufficient tonnage, at \$3 per statute mile, including the transit across the Isthmus from Chiriqui lagoon to Golfo Dulce.

*Second.* I will also perform the mail service of the United States from Golfo Dulce to Valparaiso, in Chili, and at all the intermediate points on the west coast of South America, at the same rate per statute mile.

*Third.* I will supply the United States with coal at both the Atlantic and Pacific terminus of the Chiriqui road, for twenty-five per cent. less than it will cost at those points when transported from either the United States or Great Britain ; or

*Fourth.* I will sell the United States the coal mines of "Pope's Island," in the Chiriqui lagoon, with land enough to establish all the necessary depots and grounds for mining operations, naval station, &c.

The importance of the *second* proposition—that is, the mail line along the west coast of South America, as far south as Valparaiso—is too striking to be overlooked. It will place our cities in direct communication with the republics of Ecuador, Peru, and Chili, and give to our merchants a fair chance to compete for that immense trade which is now enjoyed almost exclusively by those of Great Britain, to whom it has thus far been entirely secured by the aid of the English mail steamers plying to those ports. This line, connected and running promptly with the arrivals of the North Atlantic and North Pacific lines, will cause nearly the whole mail carriage to come by the American steamers, and will soon prove remunerative to the Post Office Department, while its returns to the treasury from increased customs duties will be four-fold the appropriations for the entire mail service.

I am prepared to begin the service here proposed within ninety days from the signing of the contracts, and would respectfully urge a speedy decision of my propositions.

If suitable arrangements shall be made, a lease will be given, upon liberal terms, to the United States of a naval station, both at Chiriqui lagoon and at Golfo Dulce ; and steps will be immediately taken to establish the transit route fit for stages or omnibuses, and the further improvement of the road, so as to make it available, in the highest possible degree, for commercial purposes. This latter will be easily accomplished, inasmuch as it has already been opened throughout the entire distance of 60 miles, and has been travelled, in a single day, upon horse-back.

The administration cannot fail to see how absolutely important decisive action, in reference to Central American affairs, has become.

Many of our people were disposed to think, not long ago, that Great Britain and France were inclined to look with great indifference upon the condition of things in that direction. And, in the case of the former, the London Times has, more than once, hinted at the possibility of the extension of our limits to the Isthmus of Panama. But this has all been done with the studied purpose to throw us off our guard, and thus make the success of European policy more secure. At a moment when we least expected it, we are startled with the intelligence that our flag has been insulted and our ships searched in the Gulf of Mexico, and this very morning we read that the British minister here has issued orders to the admiral of the British fleet, which is hovering about our coast, to repair to the Gulf, of course, to resist any effort we may make to avenge the national insult, and thus to plunge us into a war. This has ever been the policy of Great Britain. Her vigilance never sleeps. Her energies are never paralyzed by inaction. She has never failed, in the whole of her past history, to plant herself and unfurl her flag at every point where her commerce could be advanced or her ambition for dominion gratified. But a year ago she pretended to hold with France the joint occupancy of the Isthmus of Suez, and talked about the joint construction of a ship canal or railroad uniting the Mediterranean and Red seas. Now she asserts and will maintain her right to its *sole* and undisputed occupancy. She has taken Aden from the Arabs and fortified it, so that her guns can sweep over and control the Red sea, and she has taken Perim and fortified it, so that they can also control the Straits. Though the ships of other nations first doubled the Cape of Good Hope, she has built her fortifications there to protect her ships and her East India commerce. At every point between her possessions where she can find room to erect her fortifications, she has done so. And now, when we cannot fail to see that she unites with France in the sentiment of common hostility to us and our natural progress, we are suddenly aroused by the intelligence that a Central American independence has been established, "*founded upon an American-European equilibrium;*" or, in other words, that the future independence of the Central American States will be guaranteed by *European protection!*

To say nothing of that evident and necessary policy in the future which will compel us to resist this condition of affairs by whatever means we may or can, there is in the present quite enough to demand that there shall be no delay in our action in reference to affairs at the Isthmus and in the Central American states. If we shall be

forced into a war with Great Britain, or any other power, we must rely upon the gold of California to sustain it. It cannot be brought to us across the continent by land, nor by any other route than some one of those which cross the Isthmus. There is no other resting place for our ships. How absolutely necessary, then, it is, not only that such a route should be secured, but also the right of protecting it by a proper *police force* along the whole line, and the necessary fortifications and naval depots at either end. All of these essential objects are obtained by the grants and concessions which are now submitted to the consideration of the administration.

AMBROSE W. THOMPSON.

The PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.





