

1902-1-9 Fairplay, new Canal du Midi

THE CANAL OF THE TWO SEAS.

The great Scheme for cutting a ship canal through French territory to connect the Mediterranean with the Atlantic, which has been under consideration for the last twenty years, and which was considered some time ago to have been definitely shelved, has again been brought within the (sphere of practical projects, M. Honoré Leygues having rendered his report to the Maritime Commission of the Chamber of Deputies on a Bill brought in for authorising the construction of the canal, and upon which he had been requested to draw up a report. M. Leygues recommends that the Bill should pass.

It is proposed that the canal shall be of such dimensions as to permit of the passage through it at all times not only of modern merchant steamers but also of the largest warm vessels. The western entrance into the canal will be from the River Garonne a few miles below Bordeaux, and the cutting will then in general follow the course of the river up to Castelsarrasin on the left bank. From there it will proceed along the right bank of the river, cross the river twice (first to the north and then to the south of Toulouse), then take an easterly direction towards the Mediterranean. It will connect with that sea a little to the south of Narbonne, and here, as well as at the western end below Bordeaux, powerful defensive works will be erected. The whole length of the canal will be 605 kilometres (close upon 376 miles), the depth of water will be 8.5 metres (27 ft. 3 in.), and the width on the surface 45.3 metres (40¼ yards). There are to be several passing-places, and at these spots the width for a certain distance will be increased to 65 metres (71 yards). Important harbour works will be constructed at Toulouse in connection with the canal, making it possible for a large number of vessels to find accommodation there at one and the same time. The minor details of the plan—as, for instance, the number and dimensions of the locks—have, not yet been made public, but these will probably be the same, or nearly the same, as were provided for in the earlier plan, namely, 22 chamber-locks, each 188 metres long and 25 metres wide.

It is quite clear that this "Canal des Deux Mers" (as it is to be called) will be of even greater utility to France—and primarily to the French Navy—than the North Sea and Baltic Canal is to Germany and the German Navy. The French Northern and Atlantic squadrons will be able to take a short cut into the Mediterranean without the risk and loss of time involved in passing Gibraltar, and in this way the strength of France's position in the Mediterranean will be considerably increased. As regards the usefulness of such a waterway from a commercial point of view, that is not so clear, as a great deal would depend upon the tariff of charges. But the commercial aspect is evidently a secondary consideration.

It is well-known, of course, that there is already water communication through France between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This is furnished by the Canal du Midi, which, starting from the River Garonne near Toulouse, proceeds via Castelnaudary, Carcassonne, and Béziers, to the small lake by the sea known as the Etang de Thau, and from there past the harbour of Cette to the Mediterranean. This cutting was made between the years 1667 and 1681. It is 242 kilometres long and 20 metres wide; the depth of its water is from 2 to 2½ metres, and it has no less than 97 locks. It is of no importance whatever in the present day.

1902-2-20 Journal of Commerce

TO AVOID GIBRALTAR.

A GREAT FRENCH SCHEME.

The Paris correspondent of the "Financial Times" thus writes:—For many years past one of the pet schemes of French statesmen has been the construction of a great maritime canal connecting the Bay of Biscay with the Mediterranean. The scheme is undoubtedly one of prime importance, but though it has been talked about for years both in and out of the French Chamber, and though plans for its completion have been drawn up and details of working are all cut and dried, there is, apparently, little probability of effect being given to the scheme for a long time to come. Private

enterprise is too uncertain as to the commercial profits to be derived from the working of such a canal to venture capital in its construction, while the State has its hands so full and its pecuniary needs are so many and so pressing that the maritime canal papers have been pigeonholed for an indefinite period. A German writer, surprised, no doubt, that so little interest should have been aroused in France itself in a scheme of such real importance to the welfare of the country, has been reviewing the whole scheme in a long and interesting article appearing in a Hamburg paper. The writer says that a consideration which ought to militate powerfully in favour of the construction of this maritime canal in the geographical position of France. The proposed canal would practically increase France's naval strength by 100 per cent. by neutralising the military importance of Gibraltar. The chief advantage of the canal from a military standpoint would be to enable France to transfer a fleet from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, or vice versa, without the necessity of steaming round the Iberian Peninsula and the difficulty of getting past Gibraltar. Leaving the military aspect of the canal on one side, the German writer is of opinion that, from a commercial standpoint, the existence of such a canal would revolutionise the present trade route between the Baltic, the North Sea and Mediterranean ports. The long route around the Iberian Peninsula would be avoided, and all vessels would take the quickest and shortest route, which would be through the canal. The access to the Mediterranean at the western end would no longer depend upon the goodwill of England, seeing there would be an alternate route through the French canal. England would thus be at a commercial and strategic disadvantage as regards the Mediterranean, and the French dream of the Mediterranean Sea as a French lake would be much nearer reality than it now is.

The tracing of the proposed canal is from Bordeaux, through Toulouse, Castelnau and Carcassonne to the Gulf of Lyons. Canals, however, whether strategic or otherwise, are at a discount just now with the French, for the Panama Canal is still unsold.

1902-2-26 Shipping World

A voyage of 13,400 miles on the inland navigation system of England and Wales seems an almost incredible journey but nevertheless it was accomplished between 1887 and 1901 by Mr. H. R. de Salis, A.M.Inst.C.E. This voyage demonstrates not only that we have a canal system, but also the great extent of that system, and the fact that it is of even greater importance than we have yet recognised. A brief glance at the course of Mr. de Salis's journey will show that our inland waterways are favourably placed for the purposes of our commerce. The greater part of the trip was covered in the voyager's own steam yacht, over 2,000 miles in other vessels, and no less than 1,011 miles on foot on the towing path. The longest "voyage" occupied 61 days, and followed a devious route, including Oxford, Atherstone, Rugeley, Market Drayton, Welshpool, Ellesmere Port, Wigan, Liverpool, Leeds, Wakefield,