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to colour maps in this way ("perche cosi han cominciato a farle i dipintori"), and it would seem that here, too, the influence of Glareanus may be traceable, for, though his maps were never printed, his methods were no doubt widely known through his pupils.*

NOTE.—A reproduction, in colours, of Glareanus' North Polar map has been prepared at Chatham under the supervision of Major C. F. Close, R.E., and will appear, with accompanying letterpress, in the June number of the *R. E. Journal*.

ALPINE RAILWAYS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE.

By A. J. SARGENT.

IN spite of the recent development of the American continent, the Mediterranean and the East, thanks to the Suez canal, still seem to dominate, as in the Middle Ages, the economic ideas of Europe. Political schemes, and the unknown economic possibilities of the Far East, may, perhaps, be responsible for a somewhat exaggerated estimate of the value to Europe of Eastern commerce; but this estimate, whether destined to be justified or not, has a profound influence on present policy. The political rivalries of the Powers, here as elsewhere, are reflected in the economic arena. So the attack on the Alpine barrier, in one aspect at any rate, may be criticized as a phase in the struggle for the control of the East. The St. Gothard tunnel pierced directly, instead of outflanking, the ancient barrier between the plain of north-western Europe and the Mediterranean. The substitution of the artificial route for the natural outlet by way of the Rhône and Marseilles was undoubtedly a blow to those interests which France had built up in the course of centuries on the basis of her physical position. The chief line of communication, north and south, was removed suddenly beyond her frontiers, inflicting a twofold loss, as it affected international traffic or local relations with the Italian markets. The gain was to Germany and the Italian seaports. The St. Gothard scheme may be regarded as the economic complement of the movement which resulted in the Triple Alliance. It placed Germany in a commanding position in the chief Italian markets, and at the same time, by providing a short cut for fast traffic to the East, it added to the German sphere a new port in Genoa. France was side-tracked from the main line of continental traffic to the Mediterranean, though she still retains the bulk of the fast traffic from London, the chief terminus of the Far Eastern route.

Hence it is no matter for surprise that, a generation ago, proposals were made in the French Chamber for a new tunnel through the Simplon,

* In some of the early printed editions of Ptolemy in which the maps have been coloured, we find red used for Europe, and yellow for Africa, while Asia is left white.

MAP TO ILLUSTRATE RAILWAY COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH THE ALPS.

2 x 2

to be financed by France. The project came to nothing; but now that it has been executed under other auspices, France is faced with the problem of its best utilization. Can it be so used as to compensate for some of the losses due to the St. Gothard, or is it destined to reinforce them by abstracting still more of the existing transit and other traffic from the French area? Geneva will have easy access to Italy, while Berne, isolated between the existing routes, has a project in hand for the piercing of the Bernese Alps, which would give *viâ* the Simplon an alternative through route from Italy to the Rhine valley and the Low Countries. The problem is mainly physical. The Jura plateau, less impressive on the map than the masses of the Alps, is an obstacle hardly less formidable to the railway engineer. It is sufficiently high to involve severe gradients and risk of snow-blocks for any line surmounting it, while its great breadth would require tunnels comparable in length to those under the Alps. The present route from Dijon by way of Pontarlier to Lausanne is unfitted for fast and heavy traffic; it must be improved greatly or an alternative discovered. In any case, the scheme would be costly, and various projects have their enthusiastic supporters in France. It is a matter for the engineer and the geologist. But, whatever be the ultimate plan adopted, the work must be done, and done quickly, if France is to obtain any advantage by the transference of her objective from Turin to Milan. The advantage would be considerable; it may be estimated, perhaps, at two hours in time between Paris and Milan. France would thus secure better access to the chief Italian markets, and at the same time establish more firmly her claim to the Indian mail route from London. But the gain of Paris and the Loire region would probably represent a further loss to the Rhône valley and Marseilles, and it is hard to see how this could be avoided. Prosperity which depends largely on position is somewhat unstable under modern conditions of transport, as various districts in England have good reason to know. This is a characteristic result of improved communications all the world over. The Italian route itself is threatened by the eastern extension of the German system. Salonika and the Piræus may one day become formidable rivals to Brindisi and Trieste, while they in turn, perhaps, may be affected adversely by the Euphrates valley line. It is possible, however, to over-estimate the value of such schemes for international traffic. There is no need yet for the shipowner to tremble greatly for his business. For general traffic the rail is but a poor substitute for the sea. Neither the Siberian nor any other railway is destined to destroy the value of the Suez. The experience of Manchester in the matter of railway rates, an experience largely responsible for the opening of the Ship Canal, is sufficient proof. Freights at 7s. per ton from Manchester to Liverpool by rail, and 14s. per ton from Liverpool to Bombay, convey their own lesson without need of comment.

By a curious irony of events, at the other end of the chain of far-eastern communications, France has been promoting a scheme which might provide for others the experience which she herself has suffered. The development of railways in the Red river basin is in part directed to the side-tracking of Canton and even Shanghai from the route to the unknown wealth of the Yunnan region. The Burma railway scheme is a similar project of still more drastic character. The relative cost of the rival lines is a mere question of engineering; but the extent to which they could compete with transport by road, river, and sea is far from easy to estimate. The advantage of the rail lies in the shortening of time and the possibility of avoiding transshipment; but there it ends. Even if the whole trade of the terminal region could be thus diverted, it is doubtful whether it could support a great trunk line. The move is a move in the dark. The prophets have experienced so many disappointments in the Chinese area, that there is good ground for caution, if not for pessimism, in dealing with any large project.

The railway projector is much to the fore at present, with plans for connecting and developing the newer regions of the world. The investor might be grateful sometimes for more definite estimates of the expected commercial profits. These are sometimes left to the imagination, and imagination is hardly a safe guide in such matters. Each continent has its own special schemes for great trunk routes, though in no two cases are the conditions the same. The bridge over the Zambezi is acclaimed as another link forged in the great African chain from the Cape to Cairo. A scheme so vast inevitably appeals to the imagination: but can it justify itself economically? Suppose the difficulties, financial and political, overcome, and the great trunk road completed; it is natural to ask, What definite object will it serve? The experience of South Africa may provide some illumination. If this region is to have any permanent value for the white races, it seems likely that the economic centre of gravity will be far removed from the Cape. The natural means of access to this centre will not be by a long and costly route from the extreme south, but by a short cut from the nearest port on the east or west coast. The transference of traffic has already been effected on a considerable scale, and is destined to continue. A freight-rate from Port Elizabeth to Johannesburg of £7 per ton as against 30s. for the same goods from Europe to South Africa, is sufficient proof of the need of shorter railway routes. At the other end of the chain, Lower Egypt is to be avoided by a direct line from the Nile to the Red sea. In fact, the two ends of the Cape to Cairo line are fast losing their character as integral parts of a through route. The African areas naturally seek the shortest way to the sea and to Europe; the Uganda line is a case in point. The great trunk lines of the world inevitably suffer from their permanence, as opposed to the flexibility of ocean trade routes. When, as in Canada, there is

a growing community at either end and an absence of alternative means of transport, when, too, there are evident possibilities of development in the intermediate regions, there may be a reasonable prospect of economic success. But few existing lines are in this happy position. If it still pays to send goods round the Horn from New York to San Francisco, what will be the position of the railways of the United States when easy communication by sea is established, *viâ* the Isthmus, between the industrial eastern States and the west coast of the Americas and the Far East? They may lose as the Suez will lose; the advantage will be to American industries. Indirectly, too, the West Indian islands, hitherto outside the main tracks of the world's commerce, may hope to gain somewhat in economic as well as political importance from their position on what will be the second great sea-route of the world. The problem is the same everywhere. On some of the American railways the utmost possible economy, and therefore the lowest possible cost in the carriage of goods under present conditions, has been reached; the great ocean lines, on the other hand, have established normal rates to various regions, which are probably somewhat above the level at which they could afford to work and still make a profit. Here is a basis for comparisons at the present moment. But the steamers are not tied to a costly permanent way, and can take immediate advantage of any shortening of routes; nor have they yet reached the limits of speed and carrying capacity: yet speed for passengers and mails, and the absence of transshipment for goods, are the chief weapons of the rail in its fight with the sea. The railway projector and the investor, in promoting schemes for a distant future, do not always make due allowance for the element of flexibility.

THE ALEXANDER-GOSLING EXPEDITION.*

WE have received a further budget of news from Lieut. Boyd Alexander, bringing down the record of progress to February 2 last, at which date the leader was at Maifone, whither he had returned to visit his brother's grave before finally starting from Lake Chad in the direction of the upper Nile. As already mentioned, it was his intention, if possible, to cross the lake by boat, sending the main caravan round by road, under Captain Gosling, to Kussuri, which was to be the next base of the expedition. The greater part of the letter is devoted to a description of the route followed last year between Loko on the lower Benue and Yo on the west side of Chad, and as this traversed, in part, districts not yet visited by white men, Lieut. Alexander has been able to collect some interesting information, both on the country and the people, especially the distribution of the native tribes, the number of which is, he says, truly remarkable.

The scenery, which was at first uninteresting, showed signs of improvement on leaving Nassarawa, the flat bush-covered country, with its tropical river-belts,

* See *Journal*, vol. 24, p. 589; vol. 25, pp. 176, 456.