

RUSSIA'S NEW GREAT RAILROAD IN ASIA

Orenburg-Tashkent Line Was Completed a Few Days Ago.

GREAT VALUE STRATEGICALLY

Prince Hilkoﬀ Pushed the Construction of the Road with Much Energy— The Cities Traversed.

Foreign Correspondence THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, Oct. 27.—A correspondent of The Times says:

"Only a few days ago a railway was completed which is destined to play a part in Asia second only to the Trans-Siberian, or the great lines that have transformed India. Although the line is finished so far as the rail laying is concerned, it will not be open for passenger traffic until July, 1905. Still it exists as an available means of communication. It is known as the Orenburg-Tashkent Railway.

"Orenburg, a town of some 60,000 inhabitants and chief town of the Government of Orenburg, is situated on the River Ural, at this point the boundary line between Europe and Asia. Its commerce is trifling; the town owes its importance to its strategic situation. It has been for 200 years the spot whence expeditions have been organized for 'research' in Asia. It is the terminus alike of the old postroad to Tashkent and of the European railway system in this direction. Although it produces nothing, it has for two centuries been the mart at which Asiatic goods were received and sorted for distribution in Europe.

"Every year caravans of Bactrian camels brought thither the silks of Samarkand and Khiva, the beautiful lambswool skins and carpets of Bokhara, which were exchanged in the Gostini Dvor, or bazaar, outside the town, for hardware, grain, and sugar. If Peter the Great built St. Petersburg as a peephole into Europe, he used Orenburg as a window to look into Asia.

THREE PLANS PROPOSED.

"When it was decided by passing north of the Caspian to extend the Russian Railway system into Turkestan, three different projects were submitted to the commission charged with the selection of the route. Of these the first was the line now completed—of which presently. The second idea was to take advantage of the Saratof-Uralsk Railway, to extend it across the desert to Kungrad, a little fisher village near where the Amu-Daria River falls into the Aral Sea. From Kungrad the track, passing east of Khiva town and over the Karakum, or Black Sand, would have joined the Central Asian Railway at Chardjui (Four Springs,) where a magnificent iron girder bridge resting on nineteen granite piers spans the Amu-Daria. A third project was to connect Tashkent by rail with Semipalatinsk, via Aoulie-ata, Vierni, and Kopal. This line was to pass between the two great, though little known, lakes, Issk-kul and Balkash.

"From Semipalatinsk, the head of the steamboat service on the great Irtysh, two alternative routes were proposed. One, following the river valley more or less, would have joined the Trans-Siberian at the station of Omsk; the other was designed to pass along the post road to Barnaul, and thence to Obi station, where the Trans-Siberian bridges the Old River. The partisans of this scheme desired to join the Central Asian and Siberian railway systems. Those who favored the Khivan route did so on the grounds that it would run almost in a straight line from Uralsk to Chardjui.

OLD POST ROAD CHOSEN.

"But both schools were destined to give way to the advocates of the old post road route from Orenburg. The whole of Tashkent desired to take advantage of this well-known roadway, which was called the "natural" connecting link between Europe and Asia. Of late years but few passengers or goods followed this way, which had been quite supplanted by the Tashkent-Samarkand-Merv-Askhabad railway line, the creation of Annenkoff.

"The direct Orenburg-Tashkent Railway, of which the two sections were joined in October, (September, O. S.) 1904, runs as follows: From Orenburg, the terminus of the railway from Samara over the Ural River to Ilensk, on the Ile, a left affluent of the Ural. From Ilensk to Aktiubinsk, Kazalinsk, up the Sir-Daria Valley to Petrovsk, Turkestan, and across the steppe direct to Tashkent.

"The new line does not exactly follow the old post road which led from Aktiubinsk to Irgiz in the steppes of the nomadic Khirgiz, and from Turkestan town, via Chimgent to Tashkent. But it so nearly adhered to it as to render new surveys necessary only here and there; it passed over a country offering no natural difficulties, and, further, it certainly was the route desired by the Russians established in Central Asia.

"Consecrated by almost two centuries' use, it appealed more to their sentiments than the desert route to the west of Aral, or the distant journey through Semirechia, the land of seven rivers. And this consideration is no mean one in Russia, for the Slav is essentially a creature of sentiment—dreamy, sedentary, averse to change, preferring to tread in the footsteps of his ancestors.

PRINCE HILKOFF'S ENERGY.

"When Michael Ivanovitch Hilkoﬀ has once decided, he allows no grass to grow under his feet. In America, imitating the example of his great Emperor Peter at Zaandam, the Minister of Ways and Communications of the Russian Empire worked himself as a plate layer. He also learned there the value of time and truth, so lightly estimated by the mass of his countrymen.

"In September, 1900, as the writer can state from observation on the spot, the embankment near Orenburg had only been laid for about ten miles. The bridge to span the Ural River had not yet left the workshop in Tula. It had been necessary to wait until the snows melted and the river had re-entered its bed before building the earth approaches. The work had been carried through many miles at the European end before that on the other section, 1,300 miles away at Tashkent, was even commenced. For at the Asiatic end the work was even easier than at the other extremity. Rumors of great difficulties to be encountered at Kazalinsk and thence to Karmakchi, (Fort No. 2.) along the bed of the Sir-Daria, turned out groundless.

"After having seen Orenburg I determined to visit Tashkent. Only four years ago there were still difficulties placed in the way of strangers passing over the Central Asian Railroad, and British subjects were not allowed to visit Bokhara or Khiva. In the Spring of 1901 these difficulties were removed. A journey from Moscow via Rostov on the Don and Baku, across the Caspian to Krasnovodsk, and thence by trail again some 1,500 miles on to Tashkent, became quite an easy matter. Full of interest as was every mile of the way, through desert and oasis, over the great rivers Oxus and Jaxartes, I will not dilate on it here, but will at once describe the Asiatic terminus of the new line.

TASHKENT A NATURAL CAPITAL.

"Tashkent lies as if destined by nature for a capital. The Shirt-schak, carrying the melted snows from the Ala-tau, a branch of the Tian Shan or 'Heavenly Mountain' chain, rushes foaming a mile or two south of the town to mingle with the Sir Daria. Local tradition attributes to Iskander the curious Persian bridge that spans its dry bed, or stands in flood-time useless amidst its waters.

"Quite near Tashkent, sheltering it from the icy east winds, are the Chatkail hills, where Chadshikent's peaks rise some 3,000 feet above the dust haze. From the railway station on a clear day can be seen Hasret-i-Sultan, rising white above the Zarafshan River bed eighty miles away to the south. The longitude of Tashkent is the same as that of Haidarabad in Sind. Its altitude of 1,200 feet tempers the excessive heat in Summer, while its Winter is cold and bracing. The Russian town is nearest the station. Embowered in poplar and other trees, lately planted but high in growth, it is laid out in the form of a sector of a circle.

"Three great boulevards radiate from the cathedral which shelters the remains of Kauffman. Each house stands separate in its own compound or garden, sometimes of great extent. Beyond the park which surrounds the cathedral is the residence of the Governor General, the great gardens of which bound the Russian town on the north.

"Two miles further, on the road to Akdjar, begins the native city. It is a vast assemblage of narrow streets, mud houses, mosques, madrassés, and bazaars. The

latter are all covered in with reed mats hung over frameworks of wood, to keep out the fierce rays of the sun. Although the native city contains some 150,000 inhabitants and the Russian town perhaps 10,000, yet the latter occupies as much space as the former. From the Governor's palace to the station is quite three miles. On the way one passes an elegant iron railing decorated with an imperial cipher. It incloses the residence of the Grand Duke Michael Constantinovitch, (not to be confounded with other Michaels of the same family,) who was exiled many years ago.

THE FIRST TRAIN NORTH.

"I arrived at Tashkent on Oct. 15, 1902, in time to see the first train steam north from the station. It did not go far, in truth, for the railhead ended eight miles off; but the ambankment was finished much further. Gen. Ivanoff, the Governor General, made the journey to the railhead. The boys of the cadet college near the station had erected a triumphal arch, and their treble cheers saluted the decorated train on its passage.

"Every one in Tashkent was full of joy at the prospect of being able to get to St. Petersburg in a week. For the distance of 1,300 miles to Orenburg, which took a tarantass nineteen days, would be traversed by the train in four days, and the capital was only seventy-two hours' journey from Orenburg. A great future is open to the cotton-growing industry of Merv, where the imperial cotton farm at Bairam-Ali, fertilized by the waters of the Murghab, serves as a model to the cultivators of Bokhara and Fergana. The Central Asian cotton hitherto has not been able to compete at Moscow with that grown in Egypt or America.

"But under the supervision of M. Tolstoy, with machinery purchased in the United States, the methods of cleaning have been much improved. New and better plants have been grown from imported seed. The Orenburg-Tashkent Railway will carry this cotton straight to the Moscow mills, and the bales will escape the rough usage entailed by shipment at Krasnovodsk and transfer from steamer to rail again at Baku.

"It is thought, also, that the wines of Samarkand and the fruit of this region may now be sold at a profit in Russia. The experience of the poor success of the Crimean and Caucasus wines in the metropolis leads me to doubt that this will be the case. In a St. Petersburg restaurant a bottle of indifferent French wine, sold at three times its value in Paris, will always be a more fashionable drink than the home-grown article.

ROAD'S STRATEGIC VALUE.

"But if the new railway is destined to achieve but small economical results, its value as a strategical factor must not be underrated. Hitherto Tashkent has been a comfortable garrison for 10,000 men. Henceforth it will become the storehouse and advance base of the Russians in Asia.

"I am not one of those who look with fear on the prospect of an advance of Russia upon India. I have always been of opinion that two British army corps in the front line in Afghanistan could receive reinforcements more quickly than those sent to the Russians in Central Asia. But the position will be very much changed by the opening of this new railway.

"The First and Second Turkestan Army Corps, quartered at Askhabad and Tashkent, were very much en l'air as regarded position and supply. Reinforcements could only be brought to them from the Caucasus across the rough Caspian Sea in twelve or fourteen steamers which took twenty hours to get from Baku to Krasnovodsk. The Central Asian line being without water was by no means an ideal method of transport across the desert. But this line of communication will now become merely an auxiliary one. Troops from the Caucasus even would be sent by rail, via Tzaritzin and the Volga, to entrain direct for Tashkent at Samara.

"Moreover, the great military centres of Odessa, Simpheropol, Kieff, Kharkoff, and Moscow, now being drawn upon to reinforce Kuropatkin, who is two months' journey away in Manchuria, will be brought within fourteen days of Tashkent. Room exists there for enormous additions in the way of barrack and storehouse accommodation. Close to the railway station (which now scarcely yields to that of Bombay in comfort and convenience) is a huge Maidan some fifty acres in extent. This can be utilized for buildings connected with the railway, the more easily as its raison d'être as a resting place for camel caravans has passed away. For where the shriek of the whistle is heard the 'ship of the desert' is no longer seen."

Polish Catholics' Church Open.

The new church of St. Stanislaus Kostka for Polish Catholics, at Humboldt Street and Driggs Avenue, Brooklyn, was dedicated yesterday by Bishop McDonnell. The Bishop was assisted by the pastor, the Rev. Leo Wyslecki, and other priests of the diocese. The new church is a handsome brick building, built in the form of a cross, the architecture being Gothic. It has a seating capacity of about 1,250.

Prof. Guy C. Lee to Lecture.

Prof. Guy Carleton Lee, who holds the chair of history at the Johns Hopkins University, will lecture on "The Expansion of the United States" at Public School No. 3, corner Hudson and Grove Streets, this evening. The lecture is the first of a series to be given by Prof. Lee on related subjects on successive Mondays during the month of November and the first two weeks of December.