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Epoch-Making Canal

It was a bold project which De Lesseps launched when he organized a company for the building of the Panama canal. His success in constructing the Suez canal gave him prestige and he dreamed of still further increasing the reputation of his beloved France by adding to her victories in engineering a second oceanic canal.

His hopes were blasted and clouds darkened the last days of his life, but whether the final verdict is that he sinned, or was sinned against, or both, history will credit him with not only the inception of, but with a large contribution to, the building of the Panama canal.

He organized the company, raised the money, perfected the plans and made substantial progress with the work. While the American commission is building on a much larger plan, it is indebted to the French company for the initiative, and our country has profited much by the experience of the French.

It is pathetic to see abandoned machinery of French make scattered along the line of the canal, but it is partly due to later improvements.

I was surprised to find so much use made of the property purchased from the French. More than one hundred of their railroad engines are now in use, several of their dredges are at work, and the commission has been able to use some two thousand of the houses constructed by them. The plan of the French house has been very largely followed by the Americans, it being well suited to this climate.

We are using the hospital buildings erected by the French, and they certainly chose wisely in selecting Ancon Hill as the site.

The excavation work done by the two French companies—that is, the work of which we can take advantage—amounts to thirty million cubic yards and this at seventy-five cents a yard saves us twenty-two and a half million dollars. If the forty millions paid to the French company could have been distributed with exact equity among those who subscribed the money, it would have not been an exorbitant sum, for aside from the tangible assets turned over by them, we have the benefit of the stimulus which their effort gave.

The work here is organized on a gigantic scale and the pattern which it sets will be of value to the entire world.

Engineer Stevens, who was here nearly two years, deserves credit for developing the general plan of organization, but it must be almost as difficult to keep the machinery moving harmoniously as it was to start it successfully.

The provision made for employes is very complete. Comfortable houses supplied with water and light are furnished to all, and good food is provided at cost. The gold employes pay thirty cents a meal while the silver employes can secure meals at forty cents a day.

The terms "gold employes" and "silver employes" may need explanation. The American

employes are engaged as superintendents, engineers, conductors, overseers, etc., and are paid in gold; the manual labor is done almost entirely by Spaniards and people from the West Indies, largely blacks. These are paid in silver. The color line is drawn here on the pay; gold employes have their cars and waiting rooms, and silver employes have theirs.

A commissary supplies the employes with meat and groceries at cost. I went through the cold storage plant at Cristobal and was impressed with its magnitude; 350,000 pounds of beef, 28,500 pounds of veal, 24,000 pounds of mutton, 26,000 pounds of pork, nearly 25,000 pounds of fowls, 44,000 dozen eggs, 210 tons of potatoes, 35 tons of sweet potatoes, 24 tons of onions, 25 tons of cabbage, 16 tons of yams, 7 tons of tomatoes, 9 tons of grapes, and 15,000 grape fruit pass through the cold storage plant each month—not to speak of milk, butter, oranges, etc.

Schools have been opened in every town and eighteen hundred children are being instructed by fifty-six teachers. Nor have the morals of the various communities been neglected. Nine resident and four visiting chaplains of different denominations minister to the spiritual needs of the employes of the zone, and at the larger towns club rooms are conducted by representatives of the Young Men's Christian Association. These rooms are equipped with libraries, reading rooms, bath rooms, gymnasiums, amusement rooms, pool tables, bowling alleys, etc., and more than one-fourth of the American employes are regular members of these associations. There can be no doubt as to the great value of the service rendered by these club rooms.

I think it is safe to say that at no former time and under no other government have so many people—men, women and children—been transported from a temperate to the torrid zone for temporary residence, and surrounded with so many of the comforts and conveniences of home. And it is entirely proper that this should be so, for those who are making a success of this national enterprise deserve all the care they are receiving. An excellent government hotel at Ancon, the Levoll, accommodates transient guests.

Gambling and disorderly houses are not allowed on the zone, but these restrictions unfortunately are not observed in Colon and Panama, which are by treaty under the government of the republic of Panama. However, as there are no night trains excepting on Sunday, the visits to Panama and Colon are reduced to a minimum.

There are fifty-four saloons in the Canal Zone, each one paying a license of twelve hundred dollars per year. They are open from 6 a. m. to 11 p. m. on week days, and from 6 a. m. to 11 a. m. on Sundays.

When the history of the construction of the canal is written, Colonel William C. Gorgas, of the medical staff of the army and a member of the canal commission, will be credited with a very large share of the glory, for he is responsible for the system of sanitation in force on the zone, and without sanitation the canal could not have been completed—at least not without appalling loss of life. He came to the Isthmus in March, 1904, while the French were still here, and he has converted this district from a center of disease into a model of health. He spent four years in Cuba—1898 to 1902—and on coming to Panama applied with success the mosquito theory (developed by the Reed commission) for the prevention of yellow fever. In seven years—from 1882 to 1889—twelve hundred French employes died of yellow fever in one hospital, the one at Ancon. There has been but one case since 1905 and of the three hundred cases in 1895 but one hundred resulted fatally.

Dr. Gorgas attributes the present freedom from yellow fever to the extermination of the mosquito. Screens are used everywhere and the breeding places of the offending insect have been destroyed, by the introduction of concrete drains and the use of oil. Water is piped into all the houses and the sewage system is as perfect as in any city. The annual death rate

among the American employes is only eight in a thousand and among all employes about twelve. In comparing the death rate here with the rate in American cities, it must be remembered, as the commissioners cautioned me, that the employes here are subjected to a physical examination when they enter the service and that there are no old people employed. According to the treaty, our government has a right to take any measures necessary for the protection of public health in the cities of Panama and Colon—and in pursuance of that authority the commission has cleaned the two cities and paved the principal streets. The death rate in both these municipalities has been reduced seventy-five per cent, and the sanitary measures introduced by the Americans are doubtless responsible for the decrease.

It is difficult to over-estimate the influence which the American success in sanitation will have on the settlement of the tropical countries. I have been here nine days and have not seen or heard a mosquito. I sleep under a sheet and perspire less during the day than I do at home during the summer months. The temperature on the zone ranges from 72 degrees to 90 degrees, and the average does not change much from month to month. The rainy season extends from the first of May to the first of January, and during these months the precipitation is one hundred and fifty inches at Colon, and seventy-five inches at Panama. During the dry months, January to May, the trade winds blow day and night, much to the relief of those who find the showers depressing.

Since it has been demonstrated that yellow fever can be prevented and that malarial fever and other diseases can be lessened, we may expect more white settlements in the equatorial belt, and the Canal Zone may become an experimental farm.

And this reminds me that about the only radical difference of opinion I find among Americans here, relates to the government of the zone. Some think that a centralization of authority is essential to the success of the work; while others insist that all inhabitants of United States territory should enjoy all the constitutional rights guaranteed in the states. There is really no excuse for a clash on this subject. One man is quite sure to be the dominating force in construction, whether all power is legally conferred upon him or simply exercised by him with the consent of others.

But there is no reason why the executive head of the canal should be burdened with the details of civil government; there is, however, every reason why we should be careful to make the administration of justice a model for the surrounding nations.

There are almost as many non-employes on United States territory here as there are employes. These people, as well as the Americans, are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and these inalienable rights should be secured to them by those forms of law which are the basis of our system of jurisprudence.

Our appearance here will prove a calamity rather than a boon if by the establishment of an arbitrary government we set a harmful example to adjacent republics. We are engaged in engineering enterprises in the United States and do not find it necessary to interfere with the governments of the states and territories in which the work is being done—it is just as unnecessary here.

As one studies the Canal Zone and the countries which it brings under the influence of the United States, the physical features of the canal—interesting as they are from an engineering standpoint—dwindle in importance, and one finds himself contemplating the waterway as a factor in the development of Latin America, in the extension of American commerce, and in the spread of American ideas and ideals.

If the reader will examine a map of the western hemisphere he will probably be surprised to find that the southern half is really southeast of the United States. The canal is directly south of Pittsburg and the whole of South America is east of the canal. The Pacific ocean is a thousand miles nearer New York at the canal than at San Francisco—nearer at the

CONTENTS

EPOCH-MAKING CANAL
TAFT WILL SUPPORT CANNON
NOW THEY ARE DANCING TOGETHER
EDUCATIONAL SERIES—SENATOR ROOT
ANSWERS GOVERNOR HUGHES
ON THE INCOME TAX
A BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
WHERE THE OLD SHIP IS LEAKING
CURRENT TOPICS
HOME DEPARTMENT
WHETHER COMMON OR NOT
NEWS OF THE WEEK
WASHINGTON NEWS