

TO DIG THE PANAMA CANAL

Lessons to Be Learned from the Calamitous Attempt of the French.

CAUTIONARY SIGNALS FOR UNITED STATES

Mistakes to Be Avoided If We Would Profit by Experience—Obstacles to Be Met and Overcome.

If the completion of the Panama canal is accomplished by the United States, says the Philadelphia Ledger, many very important lessons can be learned by this country from the experiences of the French during their temporary invasion of the isthmus. They failed to complete their undertaking, but common sense, if used by their successors in the work, will greatly simplify the obstacles to be encountered.

Colon, as the Panama port on the Atlantic side of the isthmus is generally known, is really divided into three separate places, and, though they bear but one postmark, these three towns are distinct from each other, not only in various characteristics, but a decided distance lies between them. The original old Spanish town of Colon is situated midway between Christopher Colon, toward the westward, and Washington Colon, at the Atlantic end. This latter named section is devoted entirely to the buildings and clubs of the Panama Railway company, the little villas of the officers of the railroad and a few pretty consulates. About half mile further inward on the isthmus stands Colon, usually spoken of as "Old Town," given up entirely to the native population, and utterly deficient in modern sanitary ambitions or modern cleanliness of any description. In many places there are holes and excavations where one would naturally expect to see sidewalks and where platforms have been laid, the pedestrian walks upon elevated rickety structures, which are apt to terminate abruptly in a muddy ditch.

Unsanitary Conditions.

The almost constant rains turn the bottoms of these ditches into veritable seas of mud, and the centers of the blocks and streets receive every morning the refuse from the balconies and windows of the houses. With such conditions predominating, instead of any attempt at sanitation, the nightly fog from the Chagres river and almost hourly downpours of rain serve continually to molest and disturb the surface of a malodorous earth.

Representatives of far eastern empires, Chinese and Japanese, together with native merchants of Central America, who have quite a large amount of trade with small villages and large plantations on the coast of Central America, are largely engaged in carrying on what little business is now left in the place. To say nothing of the climate, which has been notoriously dangerous, it is a wonder that living is even possible on account of the utter neglect of all sanitary methods.

Christopher Colon is the name given to the locality formerly occupied by the officials of the old canal company, and, indeed, suggests at the present time a "deserted village." It is situated at the extreme end of the town of Colon, toward the interior of the Isthmus, and at quite a distance from the section occupied by the railroad people. It is radically different in almost every way from either of the other portions of Colon and suggests to the traveled visitor one of the villages along the Mediterranean coast near the border of France and Italy. One is impressed more while gazing upon it by its past traces of beauty and grandeur than by its modern solitude and decay. A visit to it instantly causes the stranger to exclaim: "How magnificent this must have been!" Thoughts of its palmy days are at once forced forward by the traces of past magnificence which greet one on every side.

A Deserted Town.

Christopher Colon occupies an extensive park and consists of densely shaded avenues of tropical trees, on both sides of which are the tasteful villas once occupied by the French officers. Only the solitary footfall of an occasional visitor now breaks the oppressive silence which reigns in the scene of former gayety. Gayly plumed birds of many tropical varieties sun themselves on the slanting roofs of the wooden cottages or, amply from the thick branches of the trees to secluded nooks in the decaying framework of verandas and balconies. Huge vultures and variegated reptiles crawl sluggishly about the nearly ruined works of man and serpents of deadly kind sun themselves lastly where once the feet of the Frenchmen trod their gay march of death.

It is a scene of rare desolation, which nature is rapidly converting back into her own dominion. The eternal dampness of the climate is destroying the vestiges of handwork, and effectually claiming this spot in the wilderness for its own. A few of the families of the native population of the Isthmus have moved into some of the less pretentious houses, and their groups of scantily clothed children play in the gardens, once so well kept and picturesquely laid out. It is, indeed, hard for one to realize that, in this naturally beautiful spot, the gayest and maddest of the French nation strove to kill time and themselves, while supposed to be at work in linking the Atlantic with the Pacific. The ditch they dug proved to be their own burial place.

Lessons from a Failure.

From two sources the real lesson taught us by the French in their failure to complete the Panama canal may be obtained. One source is the tradition of the few survivors of old canal days, who still form a very small part of the community of Colon, and the other fountain of information is an interesting copy of the poems of John Gilbert, who achieved eminence and popularity among the Anglo-Americans through his powerful lines on scenes and episodes of canal days. Mr. Gilbert was for a long time one of the officials of the Panama railway, and while away many weary tropical hours in ransacking old Indian legends and turning them into verse. He was compelled by his labors to spend many years on the scene of the famous canal fiasco, and his poems often evince a decided attack of homesickness. One of them, "I Think of These," opens as follows:

"The sun has set; the stars are in the sky; The hills above the valleys deep, and mountaintops high; And as I watch, full many a form and face Appear and vanish on the azure waste,

But the spirit of homesickness did not at all times cause Mr. Gilbert to emulate "Owen Meredith." The majority of his verses deal with episodes having to do with old canal days, and mirror the life

of the student of manners, especially if he be an optimist, there are gratifying evidences of progress in the fact that large numbers of manners are constantly coming into their own, which is to say, in the vernacular, "getting theirs." Judging from the armory of hats, parasols, fans, umbrellas, gloved fists and other accoutrements directly brought into contact with the befitting physiognomy, the ancient though doubtfully honorable practice of ogling has fallen into disfavor, received a black eye, as it were. The masher seems to be gradually giving in to general will not grieve at the passing of the scarred veteran; and yet there is something to be said for the going out of one of our oldest institutions. We shall feel in his loss the loss of an old landmark—it never served a very beneficial purpose, perhaps, but we always knew where to look for it and it was a part of the scenery. Even though the masher is doomed he will be preserved in future monuments, for we are not told that "men's evil manners live in brass." And in the rarefied and refined atmosphere of the future we may hope to see him mounted in bronze, on the street corner as of old, in effective pose, with the same old cane, the same old cigar and the same old eye.—*St. Louis Republic.*

ORGANIZED LABOR PROBLEM

Should Unions Be Required to Become Corporate Bodies?

VIEWS OF GRAND CHIEF CONDUCTOR CLARK

No Consistency in Requiring Them to Be Incorporated Under Laws Formed Especially for Corporations of Capital.

In all important conflicts between capital and labor which result in stopping production or transportation, three great interests are involved. Capital and labor are involved as the principals in a contest in which each strives to gain conditions most favorable to itself, writes Edgar E. Clark, grand chief conductor of the Order of Railways Conductors, in Collier's Weekly. The third interest involved is the public, and upon this interest inconvenience and loss necessarily fall.

The few survivors of the gay time relate many stories of the old life at Colon. They tell with satisfaction how "easy" money came and went, and wonder if "the good days" will ever come again. A very small number of them still sit each night in their gambling houses behind idle piles of sovereigns, and resolutely wait for "things to open up," as in the time of the canal regime. Occasionally a traveler, enroute from the Panama to the Pacific mail steamers, drops a few of his golden sovereigns in these abandoned haunts, but the wealthy throng of good customers no longer hasten to the old town from the villas of Christopher Colon. The days of "easy come, easy go," are dead.

Causes of Big Death Rate.

Absolute absence of precaution in a markedly dangerous climate was the reason of the tremendous death rate on the isthmus during the building of the Panama canal. Members of the railway company, both officers and various employees in humbler positions, have lived in Washington Colon for many years, and have not only preserved their lives, but are still in possession of perfect health. An unwritten law of common sense rigidly prohibits them from visiting the old town when the vapors of night descend upon it. Their manner of living is free from dissipation, and as a consequence they avoid the most dangerous features of a climate of deadly peril.

The Monkey Hill funeral train is no longer considered a daily necessity.

Evils of Mergers.

It is urged that a labor union should be held responsible for losses which might occur to others, as a result of a strike which the members of the union might inaugurate. Let us see. An industry is established at a point which necessitates building up a settlement or town around the works. In the course of years many of the employees purchase homes there with their savings. Others come in and establish themselves in trades, dependent, of course, upon the patronage of the employees of the industry which has made the town. Now comes the merger, or trust, which has gained control of the industry of that nature, and buys this particular factory or mill and decides that it is better to control the commodity demands that the establishment should be closed indefinitely. The employee's income is cut off entirely. His home is of doubtful value, because he can neither sell nor rent it unless the factory is operated. He must go elsewhere for employment. The tradesman's business is gone and, too often, must sacrifice much, or all. No one thinks of holding the corporation legally liable for these losses. It has simply exercised its right to operate its property or close it down as it chooses.

On the other hand: The employee of that same industry believes that there are questions affecting their wages and terms of employment which need adjusting. The employer refuses to adjust them, and, perhaps, refuses to even talk with them about adjustment. The employees agree among themselves that they will retire from the service in concert. They do so, and the industry of necessity stops. The employer may not be able to get other employees and the revenues from operation are cut off for both employer and employee. Others who depend upon the output of that industry are inconvenienced and suffer loss. Will anyone say that an incorporated labor union to which those men belonged would be legally liable for those losses? Would the employees have exercised their simple right to work or refrain from working as they chose?

Individual Responsibility.

It is contended that violations of law are committed in connection with strikes. Unfortunately, this is true; but if a labor union were incorporated could it really reasonably hold responsible for other than corporate acts; that is, acts of, or authorized by, the officers or directors of the corporation?

If any man, member of a labor union or capitalist or vandal, commits a criminal act, he alone should be held responsible for it unless he is in conspiracy with others to perform unlawful acts, when, of course, all participants should be held responsible. An incorporated labor union could be and should be held responsible for the acts of its chosen officers and agents and the members of the union would have to look to their officers and agents to see that no unlawful act was authorized.

There is no inconsistency in demanding that labor unions shall incorporate under laws specifically constructed and intended for corporations of capital.

Perhaps I had better carry this. It is desired that labor unions shall incorporate so that the founders may by enacting healthful, reasonable and fair laws under which such corporations can be formed, with full knowledge and clear understanding of the liabilities assumed and the exemptions enjoyed thereunder. The liabilities of an incorporated labor union, and of its members, as such, should be substantially the same relatively as those imposed for pecuniary profit upon the corporation and its stockholders.

Finally she admitted that she did some time ago, when she was a girl, with a friend, to remain standing at the gate of a farm house, waiting for the master to come home.

"Look here, my boy, suppose you take a ride on my shoulder," and, suiting the action to the word he heard, the delighted little fellow up to his perch.

"Now Miss—if you would kindly hand me that small implement of war we will soon be on our way."

"My name is Bernice Cameron," answered the girl simply, as she picked up the gun with a firm and motionless hand.

"Perhaps I had better carry this. You probably have your hands full with that mischievous boy."

"You do not seem to have any great fancy for the toy, Miss Cameron, so lately," answered Bernice.

"Cecil, half apologetically, but without the embarrassment usually found in rustic maidens. The voice was pure and sweet despite the utter weariness betrayed in the soft tones.

"I should think he is," said Captain Ralph glancing from the chubby youngster to the slender figure at his side as he leaned his small rifle against the fence.

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