CHAPTER VII

HOW MORGAN THE BUCANEER SACKED OLD PANAMA

"THERE are three sundry places where this citie (Old Panama) may without difficulty be taken, and spoied by the Pirates. . . . And forasmuch as the most part of these people (the citizens) are marchants, they will not fight, but onely keepe their owne persons in safetie, and save their goods; as it hath bene sene heretofore in other places of these Indies. . . . Therefore it behooveth your majestie to fortifie these places very strongly."

So wrote Baptista Antonio, an Italian surveyor who had been sent by Philip II of Spain to report on his cities in the West Indies in 1587. Of the three ways he mentioned by which pirates could come to attack Old Panama, one was through the Darien country to the east, and nothing was done to prevent it. The second was by way of Nombre de Dios, but that town was already being abandoned for Porto Bello, healthier and strongly fortified with stone castles. The third route was up the Chagres, and the King did build a small wooden castle, called Fort San Lorenzo, to protect the mouth of the river. But nothing was done at Old Panama.

Yet with a little strengthening here and there, it could have been made a formidable place to attack. The sea
How Morgan Sacked Old Panama

protected it on the south with a broad belt of quicksands at low tide; on the west lay a marshy creek crossed by a narrow stone arch; and on the north or landward side was a swamp, drained by another stream (also crossed by a stone bridge, recently discovered) that flowed into the harbor on the east. The space so enclosed was fourteen hundred and twelve varas (yards) from east to west, by four hundred and eighty-seven from north to south, and the city had only seven streets running up from the sea, and four along the beach. There were three plazas, on the largest of which stood the Cabildo or city hall, court house, jail, hospital, and other public buildings, which were of stone, and the cathedral, which at first was made of wood, like all the private houses. Scattered about the city were three small monasteries and a convent, and on a rocky knoll by the harbor stood the barracks of the Genoese company that traded in negro slaves.

These slaves were very numerous. In 1575, fifty-six years after the foundation of the city, there were only four hundred houses and five hundred Spanish citizens in the place, but the blacks and mulattoes numbered over three thousand. They drove the mules on the Royal
Road, manned the flat-boats on the Chagres, cultivated the few fields and gardens; in short, did all the work while their masters made money in trade and speculation.

It was not so much the treasure-trade with Peru that brought wealth to the citizens of Old Panama, for that was a royal monopoly that profited only the king — and the officials that handled it. Neither was it the pearls from the Pearl Islands, nor the gold from the struggling placer-mines in Veragua. For a short time there was a profitable trade with the Philippines, soon stopped by a foolish royal decree. But what really profited the Isthmian merchants was the trade in smuggled goods.

Foreigners were strictly forbidden to trade with the Spanish colonies, and when the yearly plate-fleet came to Porto Bello, it was supposed to bring only homemade goods. But Spain has never been a great manufacturing country, and the company which had the monopoly of that trade usually sent only one small ship load. So when each of the other vessels sent ashore her sails to make a great booth for the busy weeks of the "Galleon Fair," there were more things sold than ever saw Spain or paid duty to the king. Every once in a while, the Spanish government would make an attempt to stop this free-trading by savagely attacking the foreign traders. So they had stirred up Sir Francis Drake against them, and now they were to rouse the buccaneers.

These were men of all nations, but principally English, French, and Dutch, who made a living hunting the wild cattle, descendants of stock introduced by the first Spanish discoverers, in the West Indian islands. They cured or dried the beef over a bed of live coals, after a fashion
taught them by the Indians, and called by the French *boucan*, and from this they became known as the "boucaniers" or "bucaneers." When the Spaniards tried to drive them away by killing off the wild cattle, these fierce cowboys of the sea began to hunt the Spaniards. Paddling up astern of a becalmed galleon in their dug-out canoes, the bucaniers would put an ounce ball from one of their long, heavy muskets into every head that showed at a port-hole or over the rail; then, wedging the rudder fast, they would swarm on board with knife and cutlass. Soon they were capturing Spanish ships of war and cities, and they helped the British government under Cromwell turn the island of Jamaica from a Spanish into an English colony. The city of Port Royal, in that island, became their headquarters, and it was from there that they followed Henry Morgan to Porto Bello and Old Panama.

Henry Morgan was the son of a Welsh farmer. He ran away to sea as a boy, joined the bucaniers, and by his great skill both as a sailor and a fighter, became their leader. Like Sir Francis Drake's, his exploits are too many to be told here, but unlike Drake, who was of a noble and generous nature and fought like an honorable soldier, Harry Morgan was a greedy, bloodthirsty pirate. His men hated him, but they followed him, for he always led them to victory.

Sailing quietly up to a spot near Porto Bello, one dark night in 1669, Morgan landed with four hundred and sixty bucaniers, and before the garrison could take alarm, the town and all the castles but one were in his hands. This last fort was defended valiantly, from
dawn till noon, when Morgan forced some captured priests and nuns to place scaling-ladders against the wall, knowing the Spaniards would not fire on them. So the bucanneers captured the fort and put all within it to the

sword, the brave commander having refused to accept quarter. After plundering the city and torturing the inhabitants, Morgan sailed away; but first he answered the governor of Panama, who sent a man under a flag of truce, to ask him with what sort of weapons his men had
captured so strong a city. Morgan gave the messenger a pistol and a few small bullets, as a sample or "slender pattern," with the word that he would himself come to Panama and take them back within a twelvemonth.

Next year the advance forces of the buccaneers, four hundred strong, under Captain Bradley, landed near the mouth of the Chagres and attacked Fort San Lorenzo. Here double walls of palisades, filled in with earth, ran round the top of a steep hill. Outside was a ditch, inside were heavy cannon and a picked garrison of Spanish regulars. They beat off the first assaults with great loss to the buccaneers, one of whom was shot through the body by an Indian Bowman in the fort. Pulling out the arrow, the plucky pirate wrapped a bit of cotton round it, rammed it into his musket and fired it back. Set on fire by the powder, the burning arrow fell on a palm-thatched roof, and before the Spaniards could put it out, the powder-magazine had exploded and the castle was all ablaze. As the palisades burned, the earthworks crumbled into the ditch, and the buccaneer marksmen easily picked off the soldiers from the darkness of the jungle. When Fort San Lorenzo was stormed next morning, not a single officer and only thirty soldiers, twenty of whom were badly wounded, were left alive out of a garrison of three hundred and fourteen men. No place was ever defended more gallantly.

Morgan came in with his fleet and after placing garrisons both here and at Porto Bello, he started up the Chagres River with a picked force of fourteen hundred men. Very foolishly, they took only enough provisions to last two days. The Spaniards retreated before them,
devastating the country, and for nine terrible days the bucaniers struggled on, eating their leather belts, grass, leaves, or anything that would fill their stomachs. Two hundred died of starvation or were shot by hostile Indians, but the rest won through to the hill, called ever since the "Hill of the Bucaneers," from which they caught their first glimpse of Old Panama.

The city had been steadily growing until 1640, when it contained seven hundred and fifty houses with eight thousand inhabitants, about a quarter of whom were white. Four years later, a great fire destroyed most of the town, including the cathedral, and if we make no allowance for this setback, the former rate of increase would give us, by the end of 1670, about ten thousand inhabitants, and a thousand houses of all sorts. Among these was a splendid new stone cathedral, dedicated only five years before Morgan came.

For the defense of the city, the governor, Don Juan Perez de Guzman, mustered a force of four hundred cavalry, and twenty-four infantry companies of one hundred men each. This must have called out virtually every able-bodied white man and free mulatto and negro
in Old Panama, for they could not have armed the slaves without turning them into Cimaroons. The best of the regular troops had been lost at Fort San Lorenzo, and the bulk of de Guzman's force was raw militia, many of the infantry being armed with fowling-pieces or shot-guns.

Opposed to them were twelve hundred veteran fighting-men, no longer weak with hunger, for the Spaniards stupidly let a herd of cattle stray in their enemies' path, and the bucanneers had a great feast and a good night's rest before the battle. An Indian guide led them away from the ambuscades and batteries placed on the Royal Road, forcing de Guzman to attack the English on the open plain before the city. The battle began at sunrise on the twenty-eighth of January, 1671.

The Spanish cavalry charged impetuously, but the bucaneeer marksmen coolly shot half the squadron out of their saddles at the first volley, and soon scattered the rest, though they rallied again and again. An attempt was made to drive a herd of two thousand wild bulls over the bucanneers, who easily stampeded them in every direction. Nothing was left but the huddled mass of Spanish foot soldiers, inferior both at long range and hand-to-hand fighting, but brave enough to stand their ground until six hundred of them were killed. Then they broke and fled into the city.

De Guzman, after vainly trying to rally his defeated troops, blew up the powder-magazines, which started fires all over the city. To make it worse, many houses were set on fire by revengeful negro and Indian slaves. By the time Morgan's men had stormed the batteries that de-
fended the bridges, a strong sea breeze was sweeping the flames through the town. Both the bucaneeers and the citizens tried to stop the fire, blowing up some of the houses in its path and tearing down others, but by the next morning, Old Panama was a heap of ashes.

Morgan camped in the ruins for a month, torturing prisoners and hunting for treasure. He found much less than he expected, for a galleon had escaped to sea with all that belonged to the church and the king. After plundering the islands and all the country round, and receiving ransom for their prisoners, the bucaneeers returned to Fort San Lorenzo. Here that old villain Morgan got the treasure on board his own ship and sailed away, leaving his comrades in the lurch. With this doubly stolen money, he not only bought a pardon from King Charles II, but became Sir Henry Morgan, lieutenent-governor of Jamaica, and a most merciless catcher and hanger of bucaneeers!

Among the men deserted by Morgan was Jan Esquemeling, a Dutchman, who wrote a most entertaining book on "The Bucaneers of America." In it he declares that Old Panama contained two thousand richly furnished mansions, besides five thousand smaller houses. Now Esquemeling never entered the city until it was already on fire, and to any one acquainted with the facts, this part of his narrative reads like a boasting pirate’s yarn, smacking strongly of Sindbad the Sailor. Yet on the strength of it, modern historians have credited Old Panama with a population of from thirty to fifty thousand and luxury

That far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind.
But the Spanish chroniclers make no mention of any such amazing growth after the fire of 1644; and the recent excavations made on the site by the Panamanian government show no ruins outside the quadrangle of fourteen hundred and twelve by four hundred and eighty-seven yards enclosed by the sea and the two creeks. Inside that space there is not room for seven thousand huts, let alone houses, after you allow for eleven streets, three plazas, and a sizable cathedral. To-day, the vine-clad shell of that cathedral’s tower, the stone arches of two bridges, and a few bits of jungle-smothered wall, are all that mark the spot where stood the proud city of Old Panama.
CHAPTER VIII

HOW THE ENGLISH FAILED TO TAKE NEW PANAMA

TWO years after the destruction of Old Panama, the city was rebuilt on a better site, six miles to the west. Here, on a rocky peninsula at the foot of Ancon Hill it received even better protection from shoals and coral reefs than at the former place, and was much nearer the islands of Naos and Taboga, that had always been the port for vessels of any size. These natural defenses were strengthened by stone walls so massive and well-armed with heavy cannon that they cost, even with slave labor, over eleven million dollars. "I am looking for those expensive walls of Panama," said the King of Spain, when asked why he stood gazing out of a palace window to the west. "They cost enough to be visible from here."

But those costly walls were to earn their keep, for they alone kept the bucanneers from overrunning Panama, and making it another Jamaica. Only seven years after Morgan left the Isthmus, the town of Porto Bello was plundered by a small gang of bucanneers, the garrison not daring to come out of the forts. Other raiders had already gone through the Straits of Magellan, but the favorite route of these later bucanneers was through the Darien region, by the same pass used by Balboa. The Darien Indians, glad to ally themselves with any enemies
SEA WALL, PANAMA CITY.
How the English Failed

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of their ancient foes, the Spaniards, guided across large parties both of English and French bucanneers, under many different captains, but all with the same purpose, of plundering the Spaniards in the South Seas. Between 1680 and 1688, these daring raiders had wiped out every settlement and mining-camp on the Pacific shore of Darien, plundered every island, defeated two Spanish fleets in the Bay of Panama, and fought a drawn battle with a third, and were only kept out of the city by its strong walls.

Among these later bucanneers were not a few well-educated men, like Captain Dampier, who carefully studied the natural history of the Isthmus, and made some excellent maps. Lionel Wafer, surgeon on one of the ships, lived for months among the Darien Indians, learned their language, and wrote a long book about them when he returned to England. Several of the captains were discussing the idea of forming a colony among these friendly Indians, and inviting all old bucanneers to come and settle there. This project was stopped, and the alliance between the English and French bucanneers broken off by England's becoming the ally of Spain against France, after the Revolution of 1688. At the same time a pardon was offered to all bucanneers who ceased making private war on Spain, and those that persisted were thereafter to be treated as pirates.

The idea of starting a colony in Darien, reopening the road between Acla and the Gulf of San Miguel, and establishing a transisthmian trade between Europe and Asia, appealed to James Patterson, a shrewd Scotch financier, who had already founded the Bank of England. His
scheme met with instant approval in Scotland, then a
distinct kingdom, though under the same monarch as
England. The royal approval having been given to an
act of the Scottish Parliament, incorporating a company
for the purpose of founding such a colony, the Scotch
enthusiastically declared,

King William did encourage us, against the English will;
His word is like a stately oak, will neither bend nor break,
We'll venture life and fortune both for Scotland and his sake.¹

But there was very little of the "stately oak" about
William III's behavior, when the powerful British East
India Company complained that its monopoly of trade
with the East might be injured. At once, the governors
of Jamaica and all other English colonies were forbidden
to help the Scotch colonists, a warship was sent to seize
the land if possible, before they disembarked, and, heavi-
est blow of all, the English subscribers were made to
return their shares. So though the Scotch went ahead
by themselves, reached Darien before the English war-
ship, and established their colony, they had not enough
money to maintain it properly.

The Indians were glad to welcome twelve hundred
white men, come, as they supposed, to wage war on the
Spaniards. A harbor near Balboa's old town of Acla
was now named Caledonia Bay, and on it was built the
town of New Edinburgh, guarded by Fort St. Andrew.
A treaty of alliance was made with the Indians, who were
eager to take the field, and great apprehension was felt
at Panama and Porto Bello.

¹ "The Darien Song, by a Lady of Quality."
But to the astonishment of every one else, the Scotch did nothing but sit still, until a quarter of them had died of starvation and fever. Then the rest took ship to New York, in June, 1699, eight months after the founding of the colony, and when reinforcements were already on the way. The second expedition only left a few men and sailed away, but the third brought thirteen hundred more. Ship loads of food came from several of the English colonies in North America, in spite of the King’s command, but there was no money in New Edinburgh to buy it. Neither was there enough sense among the wrangling ministers and whisky-soaked counselors to realize that if they did not attack the Spaniards while the Scotchmen were still healthy, the Spaniards would certainly attack them after they were sick. Presently a small Spanish force marched against New Edinburgh, but were routed out of their palisaded camp by half their number of Scots under Captain Campbell. But when a strong fleet from Cartagena attacked the town there were very few healthy men left in it, and the colonists were glad to accept the generous terms offered and leave the country. So weak were most of them that the Spaniards had to help them hoist their sails.

So ended the attempt to plant a colony in Darien. It failed for two reasons: the lack of a leader among the Scotch, and the short-sighted jealousy of the English. It was no love of Spain, who had ceased to be her ally, but selfish fear for her own trade, that set England’s face against the struggling Scotch colony. Had it been kept alive only a few years longer, until the War of the Spanish Succession, New Edinburgh and its Indian allies would
have made it easy for England to take not only Darien but the whole Isthmus of Panama. Later, England realized the truth of Patterson’s statement that, “These doors of the seas, and the keys of the universe, would be capable of enabling their possessors to give laws to both oceans, and to become the arbitrators of the commercial world.”

When England had her next war with Spain, “The War of Jenkins’s Ear,” Admiral Edward Vernon, after whom Washington’s home, Mt. Vernon, is named, was sent to attack Porto Bello. With six ships of the line he battered down its stone castles, captured the town, and sank some Spanish guarda-costas or revenue-cutters, including the one whose captain had cut off the ear of Captain Jenkins, an English trader, and so started the war. This was in 1739. Next year Vernon captured the present stone castle of San Lorenzo, that had replaced the wooden one destroyed by Morgan, and prepared to send a force across the Isthmus to attack New Panama, against which another fleet, under Admiral Anson, had been sent round the Horn. But Vernon’s men began to die of fevers, and he feared to advance without cannon, which could not be taken either up the Chagres or along the Royal Road; so he attacked Cartagena instead, failed there, and went home. Hearing this, Anson sailed away to attack Manila, and Panama was saved.

Only the shell of its former greatness was saved, however, for all these wars had driven trade away from the Isthmus to the Straits of Magellan. Moreover, the Peruvian mines were nearly exhausted, and after the middle of the eighteenth century, the plate fleets sailed
RENTED GRAVES, CEMETERY, PANAMA CITY.
How the English Failed

no more from Porto Bello. Both Spain and England turned their attention away from Panama to Nicaragua, and, in 1780, Horatio Nelson, then a post-captain, was sent to take that country for George III. But though he easily defeated the Spaniards, Nelson was driven away by yellow fever, that killed one hundred and ninety out of the two hundred men on his ship.

So, for one reason or another, from the time when the Isthmus lay helpless under the feet of Morgan until the last of the Spanish viceroys drove a band of English filibusters out of the oft-captured town of Porto Bello, in 1819, the English failed to take Panama from Spain. “These doors of the seas and keys of the universe” were not destined to be theirs.
CHAPTER IX

HOW THE AMERICANS BUILT THE PANAMA RAILROAD

PANAMA was the last stronghold, as it had been the first colony, of Spain in the three Americas, but when the Isthmus somewhat languidly declared its independence in 1821, the commander of the royal troops did not consider the former "Treasure-House of the World" worth the snap of a flint-lock. For since 1740, when trade had left it for the Cape Horn route, Panama had withered up into a place of almost no importance. Now that the old Spanish prohibition of foreign trade was removed, the Isthmus expected to share with the rest of Spanish America in a great commercial revival.

But though foreign ships now came to the village at the mouth of the Chagres, for which Porto Bello was presently abandoned, the difficulty of getting their cargo across the Isthmus was too great. Many schemes were advanced for building a horse-car line or digging a canal, but nothing ever came of them. Year after year, the torpid little community lay between its two oceans and "drowsed the long tides idle," till it woke to new life with the discovery of gold in California, and the coming of the Forty-niners.

Thousands of Americans were poled and paddled up the Chagres in overcrowded dugouts to Cruces, and rode over the old paved road, now no better than a worn-out
The Panama Railroad trail, to Panama City. So rough was the road that the mules could scarcely scramble over it, and many passengers preferred to be carried in chairs on the backs of negro or Indian porters. Four nights were usually spent on the journey across the Isthmus, nights of crowded discomfort in native huts, where hammocks were rented for two dollars, and eggs cost twenty-five cents apiece. Panama was crammed with red-shirted Americans, who often waited months for a ship to take them to San Francisco, where ships were rotting three-deep at the wharves, while their crews went gold-hunting. To pass the time, the Yankees scratched their names on the ramparts of the sea-wall, and started two
papers, the *Star* and the *Herald*, which, after a brief rivalry, combined in the present *Panama Star and Herald*, a daily, printed in both Spanish and English. Trade boomed, brigandage flourished, and there was more hiring of mules, renting of lodgings, raising of prices, and fleecing of strangers, than the Isthmus had seen since the roaring days of the Galleon Fair.

As soon as California and Oregon had been taken into the Union, Congress had authorized a line of steamers to be run down either coast to the Isthmus, and had appropriated money to pay them for carrying the United States mail. Mr. William H. Aspinwall, who had secured the line on the Pacific side, and Mr. George Law, who had that on the Atlantic, combined with a third New York capitalist, Mr. Henry Chauncey, to build a railroad across the Isthmus. Chauncey and John L. Stephens, an experienced Central American traveler, had already obtained from the government of the Republic of New Granada, of which Panama was now a state, the exclusive right to build such a road; and Stephens had explored the route with a skilled engineer, Mr. J. L. Baldwin, and reported that it could be built at a profitable cost.

The Panama Railroad Company was accordingly incorporated, with a New York charter and a capital of a million dollars, and the construction of the road entrusted to two experienced contractors, Colonel Totten and Mr. Trautwine. But no sooner had they reached the Isthmus than they found that the "gold-rush," now fairly begun, had so raised the local prices of labor and materials that they begged the company to release them
from the contract. This was done, and they were retained as engineers of the company, which proceeded to build the road itself.

A later survey by Baldwin and Colonel Hughes, who had been detailed from the United States Topographical Corps, had located the Pacific terminus at Panama City, and the Atlantic end at Navy or Limon Bay, between the mouth of the Chagres and Porto Bello. On Manzanillo Island in this bay, some time in the month of May, 1850, Trautwine and Baldwin struck the first blow.
“No imposing ceremony inaugurated the breaking ground. Two American citizens, leaping, ax in hand, from a native canoe upon a wild and desolate island, their retinue consisting of half a dozen Indians, who clear the path with rude knives, strike their glittering axes into the nearest tree; the rapid blows reverberate from shore to shore, and the stately cocoa crashes upon the beach. Thus unostentatiously was announced the commencement of a railway, which, from the interests and difficulties involved, might well be looked upon as one of the grandest and boldest enterprises ever attempted.”

Space was cleared for the erection of a storehouse, but so unhealthy was the low, swampy coral island, awash at high tide, and breeding swarms of malaria-spreading mosquitos, that the force were obliged to live on the two-hundred ton brig that had brought them and their supplies from New York. When Colonel Totten and Mr. Stephens, who had been made president of the company, arrived with more laborers from Cartagena, the little brig became uncomfortably overcrowded, and was replaced with the hull of a condemned steamer, the Telegraph, brought round from the mouth of the Chagres.

“Surveys of the island and adjacent country were now pushed vigorously forward. It was in the depth of the rainy season, and the working parties, in addition to being constantly drenched from above, were forced to wade in from two to four feet of mud and water, over the mangrove swamps and tangled vines of the imperfect openings cut by the natives, who, with their machetes, preceded them to clear the way. Then, at night, satu-

1 "Handbook of the Panama Railroad."
FRENCH LOCOMOTIVES AND MACHINERY.
Left to rust in the jungle, near Empire.
rated and exhausted, they dragged themselves back to their quarters on the Telegraph, to toss until morning among the pitiless insects. Numbers were daily taken down with fever; and, notwithstanding that the whole working party was changed weekly, large accessions were constantly needed to keep up the required force. The works were alternately in charge of Messrs. Totten and Baldwin, one attending to the duty while the other recuperated from his last attack of fever.”

So they drove the line, over a trestle to the mainland, through the marshy lowlands to firmer ground at Mount Hope or Monkey Hill, then half built, half floated it over the deep Black Swamp to the banks of the Chagres at Gatun. A couple of ship loads of materials had been brought up the river to this point (now buried under the great dam) and by the first of October, 1851, the rails had been laid and working trains were running as far as Gatun. Two large passenger steamers, unable to cross the bar of the Chagres in a storm, were forced to put into Limon Bay, and their passengers, over a thousand in number, were only too glad to ride on flat-cars to Gatun and begin their river journey there.

When news of this unexpected passenger traffic reached New York, it sent up the value of the company’s stock, which had fallen very low, for the original million dollars had been spent, and the road was far from completion. Now the steamers came regularly to Navy Bay, where docks had been built, and a settlement had grown up as the island was cleared. Mr. Stephens proposed that this town be given the name of one of the founders

1 “Handbook of the Panama Railroad.”
Panama Past and Present

of the railroad, and on the second of February, 1852, it became the city of Aspinwall. This name, however, was never recognized by the native authorities, who insisted on naming the place after Columbus, the discoverer of Limon Bay. Finally, after many years of trouble for the map-makers, the native government won the day by refusing to deliver any more mail addressed to “Aspinwall,” and the city is now called Colon, as the Spaniards called Columbus.

The road was pushed on along the bank of the Chagres to a place called Barbacoas, an Indian word meaning “bridge.” And here a bridge three hundred feet long had to be built over a river that sometimes rose forty feet
in a single night. About this time Mr. John L. Stephens died, and his successor tried the experiment of having the great bridge and the remainder of the line built by contract. But after a valuable year had been wasted, not a tenth had been completed, and the contractors were bankrupt. Releasing them, the company, under a third and stronger president, set out to finish the work itself.

Every effort was made to assemble a strong working force, and recruits were brought from the four corners of the earth. But northern whitemen are not made for pick and shovel labor in the tropics, and the hundreds of sturdy Irish and European peasants did little but die of heat and malaria. Much was expected from a thousand Chinese coolies, but they became so demoralized by the death of some of their number from fever, in this strange and terrible land, that they were seized with a passion for suicide, and scarcely two hundred left the Isthmus alive. Some work was done by coolies from India, but the best workmen were found to be negroes from Jamaica and other islands in the West Indies.

There is a popular fable, that will be told and believed as long as the Chagres runs to the sea, that the building of the Panama Railroad cost a life for every tie. But there were about a hundred and fifty thousand ties in the fifty miles of single track, and there have never been that many inhabitants on the Isthmus since Pedrarias the Cruel killed off the Indians. As a matter of fact and record, the total number employed, from the beginning of the work to the end, was about six thousand; and the number of deaths eight hundred and thirty-five. Doubtless many others sickened on the Isthmus, and died soon
after they left it, but even so, the health of the force was remarkably good, for men toiling in a tropical swamp at a time when no doctor knew how to fight malaria and yellow fever. There was besides no cold storage to preserve the food, almost every mouthful of which had to be brought two thousand miles from New York.

A bridge of massive timbers was thrown across the Chagres at Barbacoas, and the road pushed on to the crest of the divide, at Culebra. In the meanwhile, men and materials had been shipped round the Horn, and eleven miles of track were laid from Panama to Culebra. Here, "on the twenty-seventh day of January, 1855, at midnight, in darkness and rain, the last rail was laid, and on the following day a locomotive passed from ocean to ocean." ¹

¹ "Handbook of the Panama Railroad."
FRENCH DREDGES TIED UP TO THE BANK AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE DE LESSEPS COMPANY.
The Panama Railroad

But, though open, the railroad was far from being completed. Ravines were crossed on crazy trestles of green timber, the track was unballasted, and there was a great lack of both engines and cars. So the superintendent recommended that, until they were better able to handle traffic, most of it be kept away by charging the very high rates of fifty cents a mile for passengers, five cents a pound for baggage, and fifty cents a cubic foot for freight.

"To his surprise, these provisional rates were adopted; and, what is more, they remained in force for more than twenty years. It was found just as easy to get large rates as small; and thus, without looking very much to the future, this goose soon began to lay golden eggs with astonishing extravagance. The road was put in good order, with track foremen established in neat cottages four or five miles apart, along the whole line. New engines and cars were put on, commodious terminal wharves and other buildings provided, and all things were in excellent shape."¹ Trestles were made into solid embankments and wooden bridges replaced with iron; the great girder bridge at Barbacoas being the wonder of the time. Instead of pine, too quickly eaten up by ants, the ties were made of lignum-vitae, so hard that holes had to be bored before the spikes could be driven.² The telegraph poles were made of cement, molded round a pine scantling, a device that seems strangely modern.

Instead of one million dollars, the total cost of build-

¹ "Handbook of the Panama Railroad."
² These ties were still unrotted when taken up on account of the relocation of the line, in 1910. They were then made into souvenir canes.
ing this fifty-mile railroad was eight millions. But even before the first through track was laid, it had earned two million dollars' worth of fares, and during the first ten years of its existence, it took in $11,339,662.78. This was the Golden Age of the Panama Railroad, when it enjoyed the monopoly of the Atlantic trade, not only of California, but the entire west coast of the three Ameri-
cas. Its stock earned dividends of twenty-four per cent. a year, and was considered one of the safest investments in Wall Street.

But in the contract made between John L. Stephens and the government of New Granada, that government had been given the right to buy the Panama Railroad, twenty years after it was opened, for five million dollars — and it was now paying twenty-four per cent. on seven million dollars' worth of stock! At the end of the twelfth year, Colonel Totten went to Bogotá, the capital, and succeeded in obtaining a new franchise for ninety-nine years, but at the heavy cost of a million down and
two hundred and fifty thousand a year, with the additional obligation of extending the railroad to the islands in the Bay of Panama.

Two years later came the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, and the loss of the California trade. But far more important than this was the traffic with the west coast of South and Central America, carried almost entirely by the ships of a British corporation, the Pacific Steam Navigation Company. The incredible stupidity of the Panama Railroad's directors forced this company to abandon its shops and dockyards on the Island of Taboga, in the Bay of Panama, and send its ships direct to England through the Straits of Magellan. Too late they saw that most of the trade went with them.

So, like Spain, the Panama Railroad built a trade-route across the Isthmus, monopolized it, flourished, and decayed. Its once-prized stock became the football of Wall Street speculators, its tracks the traditional "two streaks of rust." But unlike Spain's, its star was to rise again.