CHAPTER X

HOW THE FRENCH TRIED TO DIG THE CANAL

THERE is a large, iron steam-launch, used by our government to carry sick canal-workers to the sanatorium on Taboga Island, that was brought to the Isthmus by the French, but for a very different purpose. With two oceans to float it in, they stuck this launch high and dry at the bottom of the unfinished Gaillard Cut, to the great astonishment of the Americans who found it there in 1904. It had been placed there, explained an old employee of the French company, and a trench dug round it, so that when the floods of the rainy season filled the trench, a clever photographer could take a picture showing "navigation through the Cut." Such a picture, when exhibited in Paris, would make people think the work was nearly finished, and that the money they had invested in it was well spent. It is a good illustration of how the French tried to dig the Canal.

From the beginning, the French Canal Company (known in full as "La Société International du Canal Interoceanique") sailed a great many boats on dry land and made people believe they were afloat. They sent Lieutenant Lucien Napoleon Bonaparte Wyse of the French Navy, to make a survey of the Isthmus in 1877, and, though he never went more than two-thirds of the distance from Panama to Colon, he brought back com-
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plete plans, with the cost of construction figured out to within ten per cent. for a sea-level canal between the two cities. After a little more work on the Isthmus, next year, Wyse obtained a concession from the government at Bogotá, granting the exclusive right to build an interoceanic canal, not only at Panama, but anywhere else through the territory of the United States of Colombia, as New Granada was then called. When we remember the thorough preliminary surveys made for the Panama Railroad by Stephens and Hughes and Baldwin, it seems incredible that the French people should have taken Wyse seriously, and invested hundreds of millions of dollars in an enterprise of which they knew so little. What blinded them was the name of the man who now came forward as the head of that enterprise, Ferdinand de Lesseps.

He was "the great Frenchman," the most popular and honored man in France, because of the glory he had won her by the construction of the Suez Canal. Sent on a diplomatic mission to Egypt, de Lesseps, though not a trained engineer, had recognized the ease with which a ship canal could be cut through the hundred miles of level sand that separated the Mediterranean from the Red Sea. It took both imagination and courage to conceive a ship canal of that length, and the greatest difficulty, as with every new thing, lay in persuading people that it would not necessarily be a failure, because there had never been anything just like it before. The actual digging was as simple as making the moat round a sand
castle at the seashore. A company was formed in France, the Khedive of Egypt took a majority of the stock, and forced thousands of his subjects to work as laborers for virtually nothing. The Suez Canal was completed in ten years, at a cost of a million dollars a mile, and ever since its opening in 1869 it has paid its owners handsome profits. But the bankrupt successor of the Khedive sold his stock to the British government, which has a very great interest in Suez because its ships must pass through there on the way to India, and to-day the English are the real rulers both of Egypt and the Suez Canal.

De Lesseps first appeared in connection with Panama as chairman of the International Canal Congress held in Paris in May, 1879. The experienced naval officers and trained engineers who were invited from many different countries, found themselves in a helpless minority. Their advice was not asked, and their presence had been sought merely to lend dignity and a show of authority to M. de Lesseps's decision, already made, to build a sea-level canal across the Isthmus of Panama according to the plans of Lieutenant Wyse. The chairman allowed no discussion of the advantages either of a lock canal at Panama, or of any kind of a canal at Nicaragua, but forced the adoption of the type and route he favored, by the vote of a small majority of French admirers, very few of whom were practical engineers. Then, adjourn- ing his dummy congress, de Lesseps came forward as head of the French Canal Company, which had already paid Lieutenant Wyse $2,000,000 for his worthless surveys and valuable concessions. Finally, after everything
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had been decided on, de Lesseps went to the Isthmus with an imposing "Technical Commission" of distinguished engineers.

When President Roosevelt made his first inspection of the Panama Canal, nearly twenty-seven years afterwards, he went there in November, at the climax of the rainy season, because he wanted to see things at their worst. For exactly the opposite reason, de Lesseps chose December and January, when the rains have virtually ceased, and the country looks its prettiest. After one trip across the Panama Railroad, many speeches, and no end of feasting and drinking of healths, he hurried away to the United States, where he spent a great deal more time trying to induce the Americans to invest money in his enterprise, but without much success. De Lesseps made another trip to the Isthmus in 1886.

Except for these two short visits, which together covered barely two months, de Lesseps never set foot in Panama, but attempted to dig the canal from his office in Paris. Few people realize that to-day, or that de Lesseps was born as long ago as 1805. He was more than seventy years old, and though he knew very little about technical engineering, his success at Suez and the praise of flatterers made him believe that he was the greatest engineer in the world. As he had dominated the Congress, so he ruled the Canal Company, absolutely and blindly. Ignoring the great differences between the level, rainless sands of one isthmus, and the rocky hills and flooded jungles of the other, de Lesseps declared that "the Panama Canal will be more easily begun, finished, and maintained than the Suez Canal."
The proposed canal was to be a ditch dug down to twenty-seven and a half feet below sea-level, seventy-two feet wide at the bottom, and ninety at the water-line. In general, it was to follow the line of the Panama Railroad, from ocean to ocean. To keep the canal from being flooded by the Chagres, a great dam was to be built across that river at a place not far below Cruces, called Gamboa. Because of the difference between the tides of the two oceans, a large tidal basin was to be dug out of the swamps on the Pacific side, where the rise and fall is ten times that on the Atlantic.

The Paris Congress thought that such a canal might be built for $214,-000,000. The Technical Commission, after a few weeks on the Isthmus, said that it could be done for $168,-600,000. Ferdinand de Lesseps, on his own responsibility, reduced these figures to $120,000,000, and declared that the Canal would be open in six years, and that enough ships would pass through in the first year after that to pay $18,000,-000 worth of tolls. Allured by these figures, and trust-
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ing in the word of the "great Frenchman," hundreds of thousands of his countrymen invested their savings in the worthless stock of the Canal Company. But the only persons who made any money out of the enterprise were the swindlers and speculators who used the deluded old man's honored name as a bait for other people's money. De Lesseps himself was honest, but so blinded by the memory of his past success that he could see nothing in Panama but another Suez.

Thousands of laborers and millions of dollars' worth of machinery were sent to the Isthmus, before the slightest preparation had been made to receive them. The Panama Railroad refused to carry these men and materials except as ordinary passengers and freight, at its own high rates. This soon forced the French Canal Company to buy the railroad, paying for it, including termini, $25,-000,000, or more than three times what it cost to build it. The organization and management of the road, however, still remained American.

This lack of foresight was the first great cause of the French failure, and the second was disease. From the beginning, yellow fever and malaria broke out in every labor camp, and attacked almost every engineer and workman, killing hundreds, and demoralizing the rest. At that time, no one knew how to prevent these diseases, but the French tried their best to cure those that fell sick. They built two splendid hospitals, one on terraces laid out on the side of Ancon Hill, overlooking the city of Panama, and the other on piles out over the water of Limon Bay at Colon. In these hospitals, the feet of the cots were placed in little pans of water to keep ants
and other insects from crawling up, and no one noticed the mosquito "wrigglers" swarming in the stagnant water of these pans, or in the many ornamental bowls of flowers. But when a fever patient was brought into the hospital, the mosquitos bred there would suck the poison from his blood, and quickly spread it through the unscreened wards. Malaria means "bad air," and the French in Panama thought it was caused by the thick white mist that crept at night over the surface of the marshes, and men spoke with terror of this harmless fog and called it "Creeping Johnny." Every evening the Sisters of Charity who acted as nurses — good, pious women, but ignorant and untrained — would close all the doors and windows tight to keep out the terrible Creeping Johnny, and then leave their patients to spend the night without either attendance or fresh air. Too often there was more than one corpse to carry out in the morning.

No proper attention was paid to feeding the force, and there was altogether too little good food, and too much bad liquor. Such a combination is harmful enough anywhere, but in the tropics it is deadly. And there was no lack of other evils to make it deadlier.

"From the time that operations were well under way until the end, the state of things was like the life at 'Red Hoss Mountain,' described by Eugene Field,

When the money flowed like likker...
With the joints all throwed wide open 'nd no sheriff to demur!

"Vice flourished. Gambling of every kind, and every other form of wickedness were common day and night.
The blush of shame became virtually unknown. That violence was not more frequent will forever remain a wonder; but strange to say, in the midst of this carnival of depravity, life and property were comparatively safe. These were facts of which I was a constant witness."

This state of affairs naturally caused a great loss of life; exactly how great it is difficult to determine. As in the case of the building of the Panama Railroad, there has been much exaggeration and wild guessing. After careful research, the Secretary of the Isthmian Canal Commission estimated the number of deaths among the French and their employees at from fifteen to twenty thousand.

The third great cause of the failure of the French Canal Company was graft. Every one connected with it was extravagant, and very few except M. de Lesseps were honest. More money was spent in Paris than ever reached the Isthmus, and what did come was wasted on almost everything but excavation. The pay roll was full of the names of employees whose hardest work was to draw their salaries. "There is enough bureaucratic work and there are enough officers on the Isthmus to furnish at least one dozen first-class republics with officials for all their departments. The expenditure has been simply colossal. One director-general lived in a mansion that cost over $100,000; his pay was $50,000 a year, and every time he went out on the line he had fifty dollars a day additional. He traveled in a handsome Pullman car, specially constructed, which was reported to have cost some $42,000. Later, wishing a summer residence,

1 Tracy Robinson, "Fifty Years in Panama."
a most expensive building was put up near La Boca (now Balboa). The preparation of the grounds, the building, and the roads thereto, cost upwards of $150,000." 

When the Americans came to the Isthmus, they found three of these private Pullmans, on a railroad scarcely fifty miles long; a stableful of carriages, and acres of ornamental grounds, with avenues shaded by beautiful royal palms from Cuba. There was one warehouse full of what looked like wooden snow-shovels, but were probably designed for shoveling sand, which is not found on the canal line, and in another were several thousand oil torches for the parade at the opening of the Canal.

When we consider these things, the wonder is, not that the French failed to dig the Canal, but that they dug as much as they did. Our army engineers speak very highly of their predecessors' plans and surveys. The French suffered, like the Scotch in Darien, from the lack of a leader, for there was usually a new chief engineer every six months, and the work was split up among six large contractors and many small ones. Though the engineers who directed the work were French, the two contractors who did most of the digging were not. It was a Dutch firm (Artigue, Sonderegger & Co.) that took a surprisingly large quantity of dirt out of the Gaillard Cut, with clumsy excavators that could only work in soft ground, and little Belgian locomotives and cars that look as if they came out of a toy-shop. The dredges and other floating equipment were much better, and many of them are still in use. Most of these dredges were built in Scotland. But it was an American firm (the

1 Dr. Wolfred Nelson, "Five Years in Panama."
FRENCH METHOD OF EXCAVATION IN THE GAILLARD CUT.
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American Dredging and Contracting Co.) that dredged the opening of the Canal from Colon to beyond Gatun. This company was the only contractor that made an honest profit out of the enterprise, and its big homemade, wooden dredges had cut fourteen miles inland, when the smash came in 1889.

Instead of the $120,000,000 originally asked for by M. de Lesseps, he had received and spent over $260,000,000. Instead of completing the Canal in six years, his company had dug less than a quarter of it in nine. Not a stone had been laid on the proposed great dam at Gamboa. Nothing had been done on the tidal basin except to discover that a few feet under what the Technical Commission had supposed to be an easily dredged swamp lay a solid ledge of hard rock. Year after year M. de Lesseps had kept explaining, and putting off the opening of the Canal, and asking for more money, until more had been spent than any possible traffic through the Canal could pay a profit on. Instead of finding Panama an easier task than Suez, the French had already dug 80,000,000 cubic yards, several million more than they did at Suez, and spent more than twice as much money. It was plain that the end had come.

The French fled from the Isthmus, leaving it strewn as with the wreckage of a retreating army. Trains of dump cars stood rusting on sidings, or lay tumbled in heaps at the bottom of embankments. In one place, over fifty vine-covered locomotives can be counted at the edge of the jungle, from which the Americans dug out miles of narrow-gage track, cars, engines, and even a whole lost town. A lagoon near Colon was crammed
with sunken barges and dredges. Others were abandoned at the Pacific entrance, or tied up to the banks of the Chagres, where the shifting of the river left some of them far inland. Thousands of Jamaican negroes who had worked on the Canal had no money with which to return home, and either went back to the West Indies at the expense of the British Government, or else built huts and settled down in the jungle.

A receiver was appointed for the French Canal Company, and a careful investigation made of its affairs. Criminal charges were brought against de Lesseps, who was convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. But the sentence was never enforced against the old and broken-hearted man, and in a few months he died. Thousands of poor people were ruined. As for the real culprits, several committed suicide, and others were fined and imprisoned. Among those found guilty were so many senators, deputies, and other members of the French Government that for a short time there seemed danger of a revolution and the overthrowing of the Republic.

As most of the assets in the hands of the receiver consisted of the equipment and the work already done on the Isthmus, it was his duty to see that the enterprise was continued. So the French Government permitted the formation of the New Panama Canal Company out of the wreckage of the old one. This company took over all the machinery and buildings on the Isthmus, and in 1894 secured a concession from Colombia to finish the Canal in ten years.

The New Panama Canal Company went to work in the right way, and made most of the excellent surveys for
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which our engineers, who have found them extremely valuable, have given so much credit to their French predecessors. But the new company had so little money that it could keep only a few hundred men and two or three excavators busy in the Cut. It became plainer every year that the Canal could never be finished by 1904, and that the company's only hope was to find a purchaser. And every one knew that the only possible purchaser was the United States Government.
CHAPTER XI

HOW PANAMA BECAME A REPUBLIC

"But I should wonder," said Goethe, as the great German poet was discussing with his friends, in 1827, the possibility of a Panama Canal, "if the United States were to let an opportunity escape of getting such a work into their own hands. It may be foreseen that this young state, with its decided predilection to the West, will, in thirty or forty years, have occupied and peopled the large tract of land beyond the Rocky Mountains. It may, furthermore, be foreseen that along the whole coast of the Pacific Ocean, where nature has already formed the most capacious and secure harbors, important commercial towns will gradually arise, for the furtherance of a great intercourse between China and the East Indies and the United States. In such a case it would be not only desirable but almost necessary that a more rapid communication should be maintained between the eastern and western shores of North America, both by merchant vessels and men-of-war, than has hitherto been possible with the tedious, disagreeable and expensive voyage round Cape Horn. I, therefore, repeat that it is absolutely indispensable for the United States to effect a passage from the Mexican Gulf to the Pacific Ocean, and I am certain that they will do it."

Less than twenty years after this prophecy, the United
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States, by the treaty of 1846, obtained from New Granada the perpetual right of transit for its citizens across the Isthmus of Panama, promising in return both to maintain the neutrality of any trade-routes that might be built there, and to guard the local government against attack by any foreign power. And ever since the making of this treaty and the building of the Panama Railroad, the Isthmus has been kept alive by American business and kept more or less peaceful by American ships and guns.

Left to itself, the Isthmus would have been anything but peaceful. In the fifty-seven years between the treaty of 1846 and the final revolution in 1903, there were at least fifty-three disturbances and outbreaks, beginning with a riot in which two Americans were killed, and ending with a civil war nearly three years long. Six times our warships had to clear for action and land sailors and marines to protect life and property, and at four other times the government at Bogotá begged that United States troops be sent to Panama. This may surprise many people who believe that nothing of the kind ever happened in that country before 1903, but there were revolutions in Panama not only before then, and before 1846, but even before Nathaniel Bacon, our own first “revolutionist,” rose against the royal governor of Virginia, and burned Jamestown in 1676. To understand this properly we must go back to the time of Balboa.

Balboa, Pizarro, Cortez, and all the other conquistadores, were men of the Middle Ages, living by the sword and despising honest labor. They were robber-barons, forcing the conquered Indians to pay them tribute in
food and gold, and when there were no native warriors left to fight, they turned their swords against one another. And when, in 1543, the Emperor Charles V, urged by the good bishop Las Casas, decreed in his "New Laws for the Indies" that no more Indians must be enslaved or cruelly treated, Spain nearly lost America at that time, instead of two centuries and a half later. A fleet from Peru captured and plundered Old Panama, and, when reinforced and joined by the Panamanians, the Peruvians seized the whole Isthmus and held it in the name of Pizarro. In stead of an army, Charles V sent Pedro de la Gasca, a clever, smooth-tongued priest, who won back the leaders at Panama to allegiance to the emperor, and with their aid put down the rebellion in Peru. As Pedro de la Gasca was about to take ship for Spain at Nombre de Dios, after his triumphal return from Peru, the Contreras brothers, turbulent grandsons of old Pedrarias, came down the Pacific coast after raising a successful rebellion in Nicaragua, suddenly captured Old Panama and started to march across the Isthmus. But the citizens rose behind them, and the Contreras "revolution" came to a sudden and bloody end.

These old, half-forgotten fights among the early Spanish colonists in America were the children of all the feudal wars of Spain, and the fathers of all the nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutions of Spanish America. Fear of Drake and the bucaniers made the once-turbulent colonists glad to submit to the royal will for as much protection as the King could give them. He ruled like a feudal overlord,—a big bully over a crowd of little ones,

1 Gonzalo Pizarro, brother and successor of the conqueror of Peru.
COLOMBIAN BARRACKS AND GARRISON IN PANAMA CITY

Shortly before the revolution of 1903.
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—and when his power was ended, they all started up again. The Spanish Americans had nothing like the training in self-government and respect for law and order that our ancestors received both in England and here, for centuries before they won independence. The Spanish Americans have had to work it all out for themselves in the last hundred years or so, and a wonderfully good job they have made of it in that time; particularly in the big, stable republics of the south temperate zone. But in too many of the little countries along the shore of the Caribbean,—the region which a great American statesman has called "the land of the fantastic and the unexpected," men still prefer to vote as their forefathers did, with swords and cannon. Of all these backward countries, the one that has changed least since the days of the conquistadores is Colombia.

Panama was too small a state to stand alone, after it became independent of Spain, and accepted an invitation from Bogotá to put itself under the government there, but quickly found that it had exchanged King Log for King Stork. Almost immediately there were attempted revolts, and twice, in 1830 and again ten years later, the Isthmus won complete independence, and only returned to New Granada on promises of better treatment, solemnly made, but never realized. It was furthermore recognized, and set forth in the Constitution of that country, that Panama was a sovereign state, and that it or any one of the others had as much right to withdraw and set up an independent government as Virginia or New York or Massachusetts had under the old Articles of Confederation.
But constitutions and written laws have never been worth much in those parts, except for musket-wadding. The local idea of government was to put yourself in power and then squeeze all the taxes you could out of everybody else. Nobody ever became president of New Granada or Colombia except by violence, and no president was strong enough to keep peace in Panama.

Revolutions, like every other industry, were revived on the Isthmus by the coming of the forty-niners and the building of the railroad. The Spaniards there have always been predatory by choice, and as they had lived off the Indians in the old days, they now lived off the Americans and other travelers. It is the old story of the robber-barons of a trade-route, fighting each other and their equally greedy overlord for the privilege of extorting toll from the traders passing through their territory. Panama in the nineteenth century was still in the Middle Ages. The landward walls of the city were torn down less than fifty years ago, and underground passages still connect the fortress-like, town houses of the haciendados, the rich landowners who used to make revolutions and fight them with armies of peons from their great estates, led by bands of foreign mercenaries or soldiers of fortune. These were the barons, and the overlord was the federal government at Bogotá, which exercised absentee tyranny of the worst kind.

As the Panamanians were not strong enough to win independence, nor the Bogotá government to keep good order, every revolution either degenerated into brigandage, or was stopped by American intervention. For the burden of this disorder fell not so heavily on the in-
habitants of a region where there are no industries, and a poor man can gather a week's food in half an hour's walk through the jungle, as on the foreign merchants and traders, particularly the American-owned Panama Railroad. This company organized a police force of its own, called the Isthmus Guard, in 1855, and these fifty or so men, led by Ran Runnels, a Texas ranger, cleared the country of outlaws so thoroughly that in a few months they had abolished their own jobs. But only two years later, a dispute over the price of a slice of watermelon started a riot in which several American travelers were killed and hundreds of others, including many women, terrorized and plundered by the mob, the police and troops making no effort to stop the looting, but, instead, preventing the Americans from defending themselves.

Again and again our intervention was called for, and not always to defend our own people. Ferdinand de Lesseps brought fresh millions for the hungry, and his company was robbed by the local authorities almost as enthusiastically as by its own employees. During the scramble, revolutionists seized and burned Colon, with a great quantity of French canal stores. American marines were landed, restored order, and set the Colombian Humpty Dumpty up on his wall again. This was in 1885, and the successful general who made himself president that year proclaimed a new constitution which deprived Panama of all its rights as a sovereign state, and made it a mere province under the direct control of the federal government at Bogotá. Naturally there was great indignation on the Isthmus, and from
then until the end there was an almost constant series of attempts to gain freedom.

The enforced dash of the battle-ship *Oregon* around South America in the Spanish-American War woke up the United States to its need of a quicker naval route between the two coasts. Congress authorized the purchase of the rights and property of the New French Canal Company for $40,000,000,¹ an offer which that company was only too glad to accept, for, in 1903, its ten-year concession had nearly expired, and in another twelve months it might have no rights left to sell. We then offered the government of Colombia $10,000,000 for its permission to the Canal Company to make the sale, and for a new concession to the United States, allowing us to build and maintain the Canal.

The government of the so-called Republic of Colombia consisted, at this time, of one man, who had been elected vice-president but had kidnapped the president with a troop of cavalry and shut him up in an unsanitary dungeon, where he soon died. This interesting brigand had ruled ever since as president, without bothering about a congress, until he called one for the sole purpose of considering this offer of the United States. Hoping to get a higher price, and making no secret of their intention to wait until the French concession should run out and then demand some or all of the forty millions for themselves, the Colombian congress rejected our offer. They forgot what it meant to Panama.

Every inhabitant of the Isthmus knew that if the United States were not allowed to build the Canal there,

¹ See Appendix, valuation of this purchase.
CONCRETE BRIDGE ON ZONE HIGHWAY.
it would build one across Nicaragua, where an American company already had a concession. If that were done, not only would Panama lose all its hoped-for prosperity, but even the railroad would cease to be operated, and the Isthmus would have as little trade or importance as in the eighteenth century. Naturally the Panamanians watched the Colombian congress anxiously, and, as soon as they saw the American treaty was doomed, began to prepare for a revolution.

Everything was in their favor. The garrison had been left unpaid so long and had so many friends and sweethearts among the citizens that it was easily won over. Companies of men were organized, ostensibly as a fire-department, and rifles for them were smuggled in from New York. (There is as much romance and wickedness in the secret gun-trade of that city to-day as there ever was in bucaneeering). Soon every prominent man on the Isthmus was in the plot, except the governor, who shut his eyes to it. Instead of the usual carpet-bagger from Bogotá, the newly appointed governor was Señor José Domingo de Obaldia, a man whose family have lived on the Isthmus for centuries, and he frankly told the Colombians that if the treaty were rejected, Panama would revolt, and he would do nothing to prevent it.

The treaty was rejected, and a date was at once set for the uprising. But the day before, a Colombian gunboat steamed into the harbor of Colon, with four hundred and seventy-four conscripts and a few generals, who landed and demanded a train to take them to Panama City. The Bogotá government had at last become aware of the unsettled state of affairs on the Isthmus, which the
American newspapers had been discussing openly for a month, and had sent this force to put an end to it—which it did, but not in the way they expected.

The Panama Railroad officials, whose sympathies were all with the revolutionists, sternly refused to let the army ride without paying cash fare. So the generals and their staff went on alone to Panama, to take command of the troops there. The revolutionists, warned by telegraph, hastened their preparations and when the generals entered the barrack square, the soldiers, instead of presenting arms, seized them and locked them up. At once the flag of the new Republic of Panama was run up over the city, and on two of the three gunboats in the harbor. The third fired a few shells, killing one Chinaman, and then sailed back to Colombia.

Colonel Torres, who had been left in command of the Colombian troops at Colon, angrily declared that if the generals were not released and the new flags hauled down within an hour, he would kill every American in Colon. The women and children at once took refuge on two steamers, and the men gathered in the stone freight-house of the Panama Railroad, which had been strongly built for just such emergencies. But there was a small American gunboat, the Nashville, at Colon, and her captain landed forty-two sailors and marines. Torres then declared his great love for Americans, and a few days later he and his conscripts were bought up by the Panamanians for about twenty dollars apiece, and shipped back to where they came from.
QUARANTINE STATION ON CULEBRA ISLAND IN THE BAY OF PANAMA.
The Isthmus was now entirely in the hands of its own people, as it had been three times before; and three lines of action were open to the United States. The first was to intervene and force the Panamanians back under the rule of Bogotá, the second was to let the two sides fight it out to a finish. But we had tried both of these remedies again and again for over fifty years, and neither had availed to stop the endless bloodshed and destruction of property. The third course was to recognize the independence of the Republic of Panama, and forbid Colombia, now a foreign power, to land troops on the Isthmus. That was what President Roosevelt did, and the judgment of the American people was summed up in a remark made by a western congressman: "When that jack-rabbit jumped, I'm glad we didn't have a bow-legged man for President."

To any one acquainted with the history of the Isthmus, the Revolution of 1903, though almost equally sudden, appears no less natural than the jump of a startled jackrabbit; and indeed there was fifty times as much reason for it as for any of the fifty or more revolts that preceded it. Much as we wanted Panama, the Panamanians wanted us more, and if there was one thing experience had taught them it was how to organize a revolution. The charge that our government had "conspired" to bring it about was brought by persons utterly ignorant of
the facts, flatly denied by President Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, J ohy Hay; and the most rigid investigations by Congress have failed to reveal the slightest evidence either of the existence of such a conspiracy, or of the need of any external incentive for the Isthmus to revolt.

The same orders were given the commanders of our war-ships as in several previous revolutions: to allow neither belligerent to land men or arms within fifty miles of either Panama or Colon. Colombia talked much of marching an army overland to the Isthmus, but that trail runs through the land of the San Blas Indians, and it would take a very strong army of white men to fight their way through that region, either then or to-day. Certain San Blas chiefs who had been made colonels in the Colombian army refused to fight the Panamanians; and the country of these Indians, though nominally in one or the other of the two republics, has been really an independent buffer state between them ever since 1903.

The Republic of Panama was quickly organized, with a constitution modeled on that of the United States, and a treaty was made between the two countries, by which the United States received the perpetual right to build and maintain a canal across the Isthmus, in return for the payment of $10,000,000. It also acquired possession of the Canal Zone, a strip of land five miles wide on either side of the Canal, and this bit of Central America is now as much United States territory as the parade-ground at West Point. The two cities of Panama and Colon, however, were scalloped out of either end of the Zone and left part of the republic; but their ports, Balboa
How Panama Became a Republic

and Cristobal, became American, and the United States Government obtained the right to keep Panama and Colon clean, and to interfere whenever it thinks the native authorities cannot keep good order. For Uncle Sam was determined to make an end of filth and fever and petty warfare on the Isthmus, and get to work.