

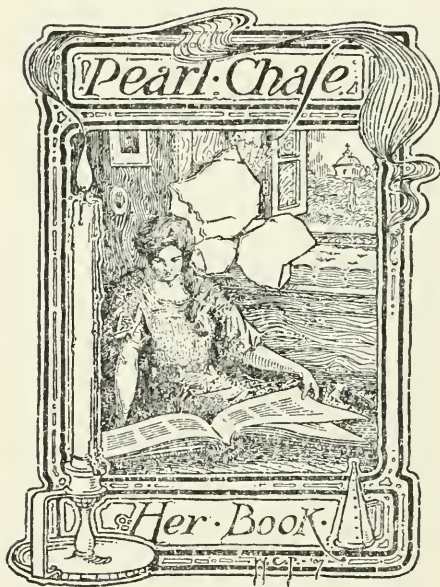
# PANAMA

## AND WHAT IT MEANS



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COLONEL GOETHALS,  
THE CZAR OF THE CANAL ZONE.

*Photograph by Underwood & Underwood, High Holborn, W.C.*



# PANAMA

## AND WHAT IT MEANS

BY  
JOHN FOSTER FRASER

WITH A MAP AND FORTY-EIGHT PLATES  
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

TWELFTH THOUSAND

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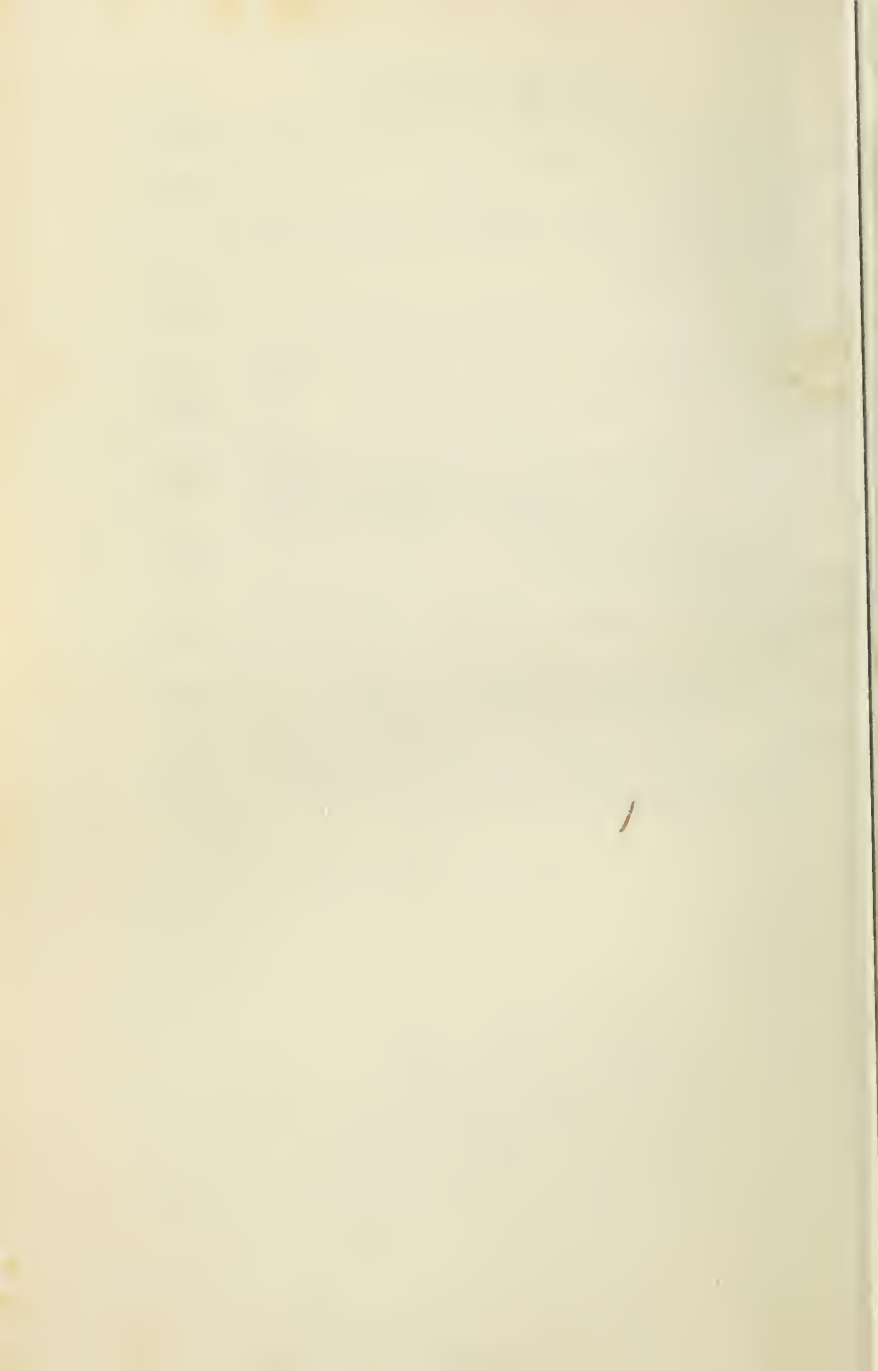
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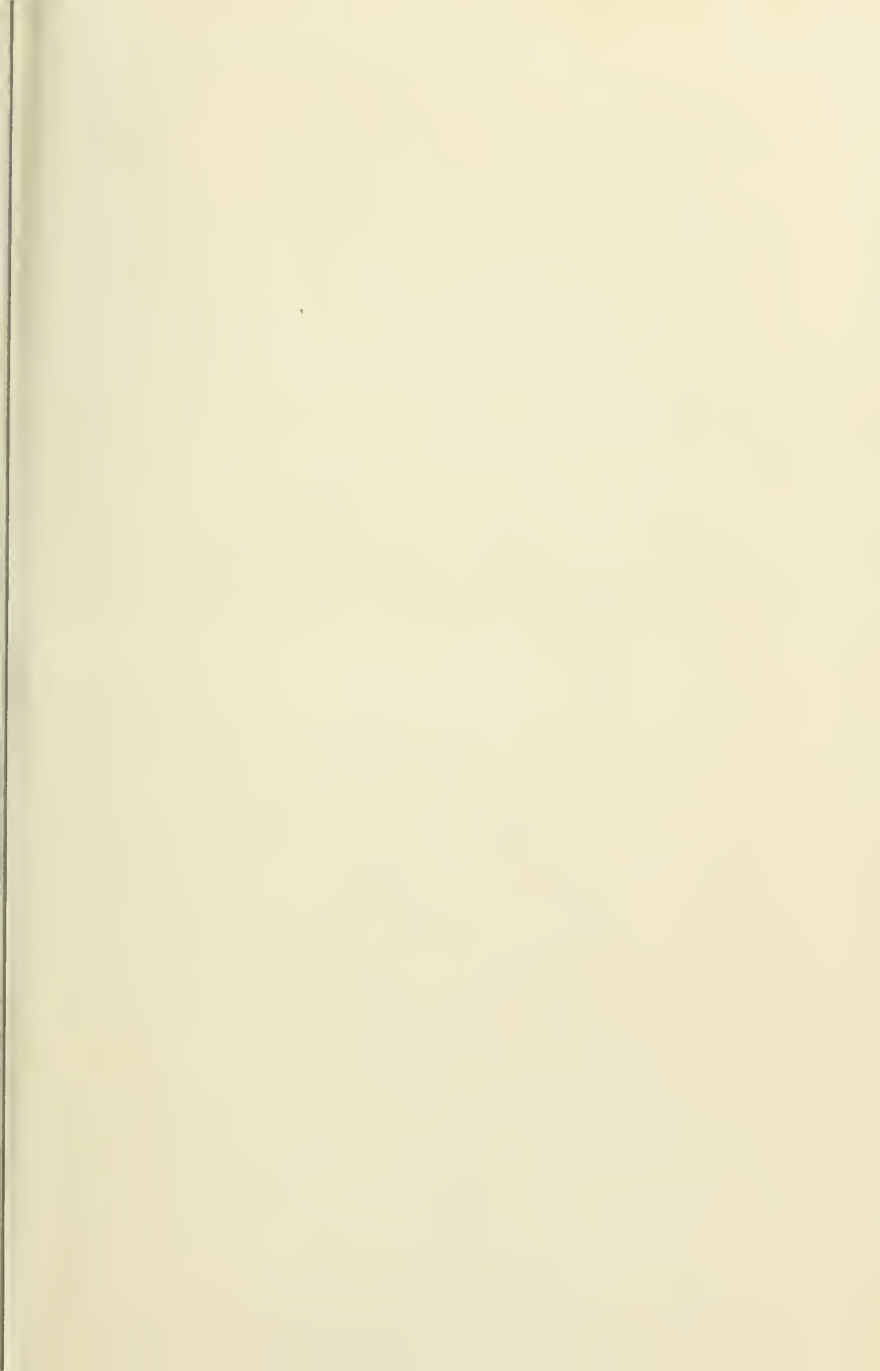
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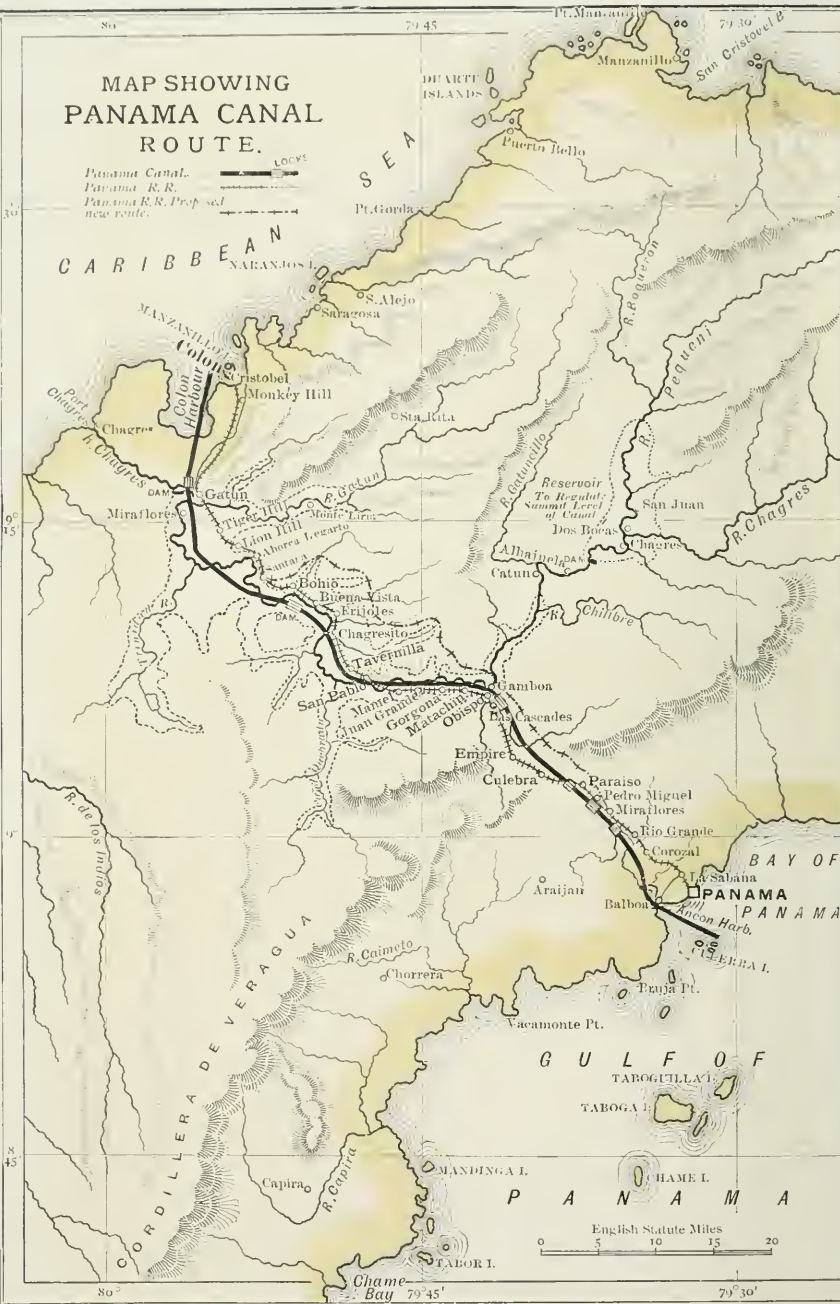




# MAP SHOWING PANAMA CANAL ROUTE.

Panama Canal. ————  
 Panama R.R. ————  
 Panama R.R. Proposed new route. - - - - -

LOCKE



English Statute Miles  
0 5 10 15 20

80°

79°45'

79°30'

# PANAMA AND WHAT IT MEANS

## CHAPTER I

### A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

“YES,” observed the American enthusiast, “it is a great ditch. You see those flat cars piled with dirt? Well, by the time the Atlantic joins the Pacific we shall have removed as much dirt as would fill a train of such cars 96,000 miles long, which is getting pretty near four times round the earth. Yes, it is a great ditch.”

This is the spirit of the 35,000 men who, between Colon and Panama, are digging and blasting, damming rivers, fighting landslips, building locks, so the great Canal will be finished long before the official opening day, which is in 1915.

It is a big thing. The world is looking on. It is an enterprise which fits the American temperament. It is a dramatic as well as a colossal undertaking. Others have tried to build canals across the Isthmus. The French came to failure. The

Americans came to succeed. Everybody is working at top speed, and the end is within sight.

Yet at the first glance there is nothing which excites the ordinary man. Indeed, the ordinary man, if dumped down on the Isthmus and not informed he was looking upon the excavations for the Panama Canal, would probably be no more impressed than if he were looking at some big railway cutting through a hilly country. It is only when he hears of the difficulties encountered and overcome, and sees the armies of men at work in the cuts—sweating and grimy the whole day through—hears the drills eating into the rocks, is startled when the earth reverberates with violent explosions, sees giant engines delve the hillside, piling cars with debris, and the railway line is shifted nearer to the work by great arms in front of an engine, done in a sixth of the time it would take men to do, that he begins to realise the immensity of the undertaking.

Exactly how the Americans got from the Republic of Panama complete control of a stretch of country ten miles wide, and reaching forty miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the agency whereby the Republic of Panama came into being at all—declaring independence from the Republic of Colombia, which was a necessary preliminary to the deal between the Americans and the Panamanians—is a complicated story with different versions.

Anyway, after spoking the wheels of other enterprises for a good many years, the United States did the right thing and determined to build the Canal as a national enterprise. Taking it that the end justifies the means, the American people are now putting their shoulders back and breathing proudly.

Before the Americans came the Isthmus was one of the earth's pestiferous spots: swampy, miasmatic, with mosquitoes carrying yellow fever and malaria. Colon was "the white man's grave." Panama reeked with uncleanness and disease. The interlying jungle country bred continuous sickness.

The Isthmus is not yet a health resort; but in the immediate Canal regions it is no longer a country dangerous to health. The Americans have there laid by the heels the mosquitoes which carried the disease. All likely breeding grounds of swamp are saturated with kerosene. You go for miles, and the air stinks with the black, slimy stuff. Nearly every ditch is smeared with it. Where pools accumulate in the vicinity of the workings, niggers with copper cans on their backs saunter round and spray freely.

All this has got to do with the Panama Canal, because when the French were trying their hands men died like flies. The first thing, therefore, the Americans set about was to make it possible for men to come and work on the Isthmus without feeling they were having a gamble with death.

#### 4 PANAMA AND WHAT IT MEANS

Now five miles on each side of the Canal is called the Canal Zone. Within that area the Americans are supreme. They own about three-quarters of the territory, and they can acquire the rest whenever they like. The two towns of Panama and Colon, though really within, are technically regarded as outside the Zone.

As these are the only towns worth thirty cents in the Isthmus, the Republic of Panama must be left a few people within the boundaries. So the Americans allow the Panamanians to have a Government; but America keeps control of the sanitation in both towns: no foul Spanish-negro-Indian camps of disease at either end of the Canal!

The residences of the officials at Colon are all like gigantic meat safes. The houses are enclosed in cases of copper screening, and folk sit on the balcony and gaze at you through the mesh. It is the same at the little towns along the route, particularly Culebra, the capital of the Zone. Likewise at Panama. The white man is guarded from the malaria-carrying mosquito. The tawny, chocolate, dusky, ebony labourers, to the number of twenty-five thousand, are left to look after themselves. Mosquitoes do not like nigger flesh.

Once the idea was to have a sea-level canal between ocean and ocean—a sort of Straits of Panama. But that would have taken too long

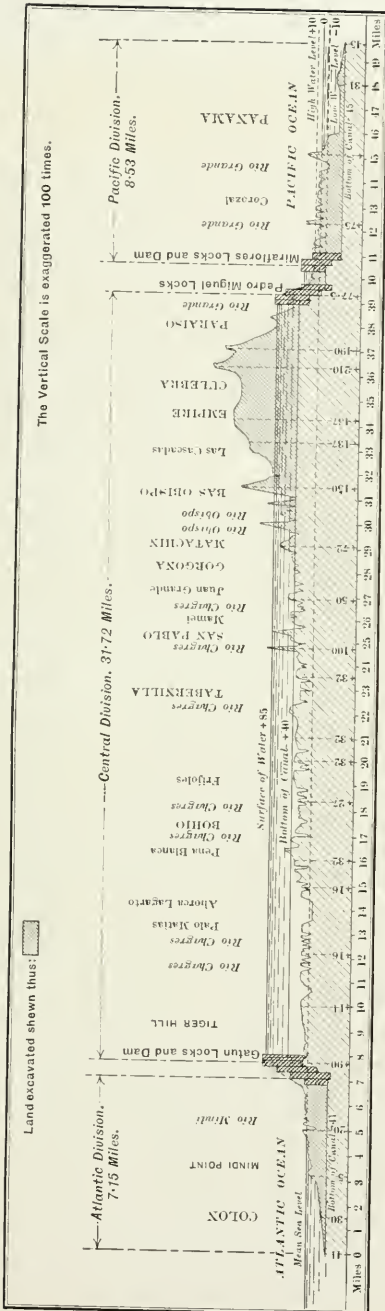


DIAGRAM OF ELEVATIONS WHEN THE CANAL IS FINISHED.





and was likely to cost too much. So the hoist over the hills is done by locks, large enough to carry any vessel now afloat.

Do not, however, imagine a pyramid of locks raising warships and liners up mountain-sides into the clouds. Dull fact must record that the highest point any vessel will be lifted above sea level will be 85 feet—up by three steps, across a great dam, along an artificial river, and then gently down three steps, and so to the sea.

You probably arrive in the Isthmus with the belief that as Panama is on the Pacific side it is west of Colon. If so, you have speedily to improve your knowledge of geography. Colon really lies west of Panama, and instead of the Canal running east to west it runs from north to south-east.

From shore to shore the Canal is about forty miles, but five miles have had to be cut through shallow shores on both sides. Accordingly the real length of the Canal from deep water to deep water is fifty miles.

In the future, when you journey that way to New Zealand, you will travel from the Atlantic through a straight seven miles of 500 feet wide canal. Then you come to Gatun, and three locks will lift you 85 feet till you reach the level of Gatun Lake. It is not a natural lake, but artificial, 164 square miles in area, created by damming the River

## 6 PANAMA AND WHAT IT MEANS

Chagres. Across this lake you can go at full steam for 24 miles along a buoyed route. Then you reach the Culebra Cut, the thing of which the Americans are proudest, because it has caused them most trouble. This cut is nine miles long, hills on each side, and the cubic yards of earth-rock cut away run into dozens of meaningless millions. When the Americans have cut away what they consider enough millions there is generally a "slide," and down comes, or out bulges, a few more millions of cubic yards, burying implements, rousing "langwidge," and costing much money to remove. These "slides" are turning the heads of many men grey; but they are going to stop if a whole mountain-side has to be removed.

This cut will get its water from the Gatun Lake. So to Pedro Miguel, where you will begin going downstairs. A lock will lower you  $30\frac{1}{2}$  feet to Miraflores Lake. You will steam across a mile and a half of lake. Then two locks will lower you  $54\frac{2}{3}$  feet, and you will be on the level of the Pacific. Away you go for over eight miles, and you glide upon the waters on the west of the American continent.

Such is the Panama Canal in rough outline. It seems rather a simple affair in engineering; yet the more one sees the more one wonders and admires.

For several weeks I jogged up and down the



A STEAM SHOVEL AT WORK.



drunken construction line, now along the bed of the finished way—outside the locked region it is 40 feet below sea level—now scrambling over “slides,” now wandering through the huge white casements of concrete locks.

The noise is tremendous. Bell-clanging and shrieking engines, with cars piled with excavated earth, are rumbling off to aid in the construction of a dam, or a great “spit” on the Pacific side. All the rock and soil is volcanic and grey and red and irregular. *Boom, boom, go* the dynamite explosions, and a chunk of a hillside is disintegrated.

A monster of an engine shovel, almost uncanny in its movements, comes reeling forward over the uneven way. It bends its head, and then sticks its snout into the debris. There is a clatter, and it jerks back its head, and in its maw are four tons of broken rock. It heaves on one side, and from a door under its chin, as it were, dumps its load on one of the long cars. Then it plunges for another mouthful.

The cars are ugly and battered. They have a fence only on the side away from the shovel. Between each car is a steel plate, so that it is just like a long ribbon of a car. When the shovel has deposited its mouthful a bronzed and sweating American, with his blue shirt open at the throat, gives the wobble of a yellow flag, and the engine-

driver hauls along a few yards so the next mouthful may have room. Thus it goes on, with clang and clamour, till the train is loaded.

Away it rolls. The "dirt" is wanted for a dam in a declivity between the hills.

It is not necessary to have hundreds of men to unload. At one end of the cars is a steel shield standing at an angle. To it is attached a steel rope, and the other end of the rope is attached to an engine. The engine pulls, and as the shield travels over cars and protecting plates the debris is sliced to one side overboard. There it lies in a long heap. The cars grunt and groan on to other work. Up snorts a "spreader," an engine with an arm stuck on one side. The arm, as it passes along, knocks all the debris flat.

That is one of the features of the Canal making, the thousands of men employed, and yet only a few men engaged in one place on one particular job.

When the shovel has eaten away its section, and it has then to start over again eating further into the hill, but its neck is not long enough to reach the cars on the former track, along comes a track-lifting machine, and with its long, steel hands it raises the track up and places it near the shovel, just as though it had intelligence and were straightening a rope.

Like the song of tropical crickets, the hydraulic



A TRACK-SHIFTING MACHINE.





drills are champing into the rocky face. You are down near the bottom of the "ditch," and you look up the hillside where the French started cutting thirty years ago. There has been a "slide," and a stream has got into the cut, and there is the pant of the pumps as it is sucked up and carried away.

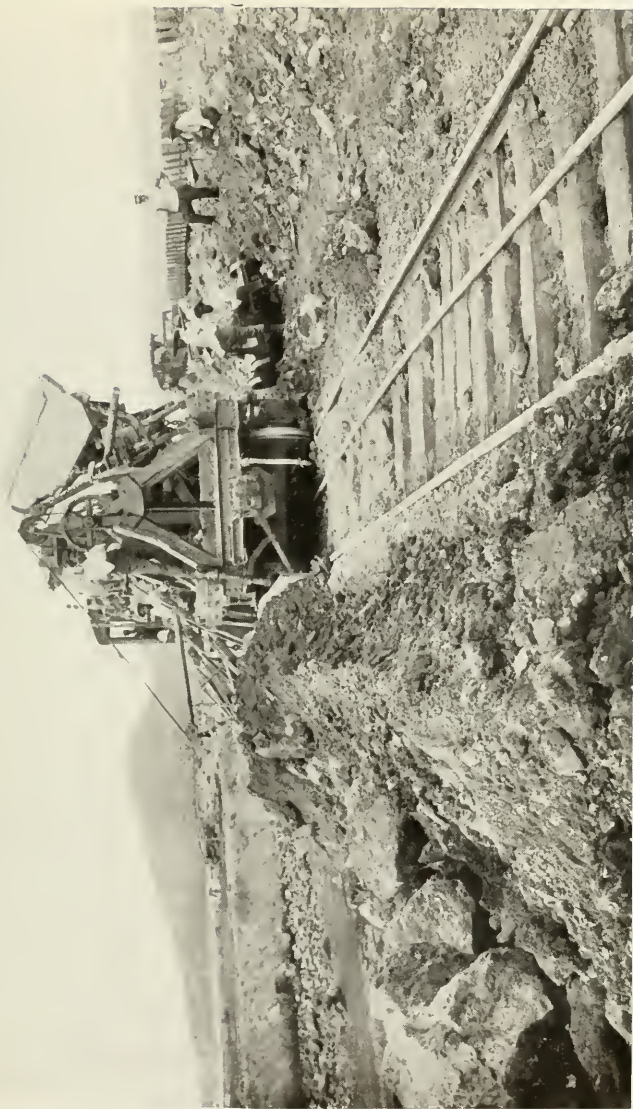
Here comes a train of cement, another of broken rock ripped from the cheek of Ancon Hill, near Panama, another of white sand from the Pacific coast. All are put near where the 1,000 feet long double locks are being constructed. A skinny, steel skeleton is standing in the middle of the Canal, and it has a long steel lever which stretches to the Canal side. Beneath that lever you see what is like a cab, and, sitting in it you may discern a man, pulling and pushing levers. The little cab runs out to the end of the arm, drops a big gobble spoon amongst the cement or the broken stone or the sand, and pulls it up and carries it to where the mixing is going on and the concrete slabs are being made to provide the casing for the lock walls, or the mush of concrete rubble with which the middle is filled. The steel lock gates are being adjusted, and the air is rent with the fury of riveting.

Nothing is finished. Everything seems confusion. The air is hot and clammy, and sickly odours come from the jungle. Men are all in their muck, pushing on, working to schedule, knowing what

they have to do and how long it will take them to do it.

There are the lithe, chewing Americans, clean-skinned, clean-eyed, really feeling joy in what they are helping to do. There are the sluggish Spaniards, the more sluggish mixture of Spaniard and native, but kept at it under the stimulating tongue of the gang boss. There are the niggers, easygoing, and all of them from the British island of Barbados. There are Italians and Scandinavians; there are Chinese; there are even slim-limbed, gentle-featured East Indians with heads voluminously swathed in dirty turbans. The labour of the world has been placed under contribution to build the Panama Canal.

Yet not of all the world. I found no Frenchmen. It would be too sad for a Frenchman to work here. What ruin came to thousands of French families in the Lesseps Panama fiasco! But only a fiasco financially. The French did splendid work, and much of the present excavation is a continuation of what the French began.



A "SPREADER" AT WORK.



## CHAPTER II

### MANAGEMENT AND MEN

IN its way the administration of the strip of land ten miles wide and running from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with the Canal threading the centre, is as remarkable as the engineering feat which is being accomplished.

Remember, the region is unhealthy jungle. The population, a breed of Spanish-Indian, is sparse, and with none of the strenuousness necessary to remove mountains. The Panamanians of the capital city are lazy and conceited.

When the Americans, some nine years ago, took the construction of the Canal in hand, they had to bring government, people, food, clothing, mechanical equipment. True, some of the machinery abandoned by the French was found efficient, and a few of the houses, though neglected for years, were habitable. Good use was made of the old hospital buildings which the French had left at Ancon, a slight elevation just outside Panama.

To-day there is a long straggling camp of 65,000 persons in the Isthmus, 2,000 miles from the base

of supply. There are 10,000 white workers, 25,000 coloured workers, and the rest are their women and children.

Houses had to be erected for these folk, provision made for feeding and clothing them, sanitary conditions attended to, arrangements made for their succour when sick or maimed, arrangements for policing them, educating them, seeing to their spiritual welfare.

Everything is now working as efficiently as though the inhabited trail across the jungle were a model town in the middle of civilisation.

But when the Canal is finished the United States is going to clear out all these people, and most of the houses will be destroyed. Except that for actual employees on the Canal, the Government land will return to jungle. Settlers are not wanted. The climate is not good enough, and the soil is too poor to attract United States farmers. No doubt West Indian negroes would be willing to squat and scratch a living. The United States Government has already quite sufficient coloured people to look after, and wants no more. Therefore, when the work is finished the Canal Zone will be rigorously depopulated.

Of course, the Americans are a democratic people, but they are having no democratic nonsense in Panama. Government is autocratic; generous, but autocratic, and even despotic nevertheless. The Czar

of the Isthmus is Colonel G. W. Goethals, and there is no court of appeal. He is chairman of the Canal Commission and chief engineer.

At first the chairman was a civilian, and the executive of seven, appointed by the President of the United States, were strong men who got in each other's way. There were too many ideas for progress. Contrary orders caused trouble. Discontented employees appealed from one member of the executive to another.

All that was stopped by the appointment of a military man as chairman. Colonel Goethals was recognised as the foremost engineer in the United States Army. He was an organiser, and he had discipline. Since he set foot in the Isthmus five years ago he has been careful never to wear military garb.

Ostensibly the Zone is under civil administration. Actually it is under military rule. The Americans like it. It has stopped bickerings between the higher officials. The Colonel is supreme. He gives his orders, and they have got to be obeyed. He never argues. He will listen to a criticism quietly, almost deferentially. Then he will say, "Now go and do the work as I ordered. That is what you have to do. I take the responsibility."

He is a big man, straight-shouldered, inclined to put on flesh, has grey hair parted in the middle, is grey moustached, is fresh complexioned for a man

who lives so much in the open, and he has grey eyes curiously like Kitchener's.

There is nothing of the American snap about him. He never hurries. He does not "blow" about the Canal. Notoriety is obnoxious to him. I was lunching with him one day, and a hustling, aggressive New York photographer turned up and wanted to take "two studies of the Colonel standing on the porch." No; Colonel Goethals would not have his photograph taken. In that respect he is as elusive as Miss Corelli.

Confidence, decision, inflexibility—those are the characteristics behind the calm demeanour of the man who is making the Panama Canal.

Constructing the Canal, therefore, was not just a case of bringing shiploads of labourers and setting them to work. A colony had to be established in what was one of the unhealthiest regions in the world. The necessities of communities evolve with the years; here the necessities had to be provided first.

The Americans have been in the Isthmus for eight years; but most of the first three years were spent in bickering, quarrelling, and in making preparations for the work which has been done in the last five years.

First the Zone, infamous for its yellow fever and malaria, had to be made habitable. That work was done by Colonel Gorgas, "the man who cleaned up



Havana," a gentle-mannered American, but rough toward disease. He cleaned up Panama. He provided for wire-encased houses wherever settlements of workers were to be. He sent forth men to douse rank, swampy regions with kerosene and stay the peregrinations of the malaria-carrying mosquito. Sanitary inspectors were amongst the first officials appointed.

In the meantime, while the route was being surveyed and the Americans could not make up their minds whether to have a sea level canal or a lock canal, steamers were coming from the United States and the West Indies with labourers, white and coloured. Other steamers were bringing frame houses, to be erected by the thousand, and all the furniture. Other steamers were bringing railway metal. The great engineering works in the States were constructing engines, and special trucks, and all the mammoth machinery requisite for cutting through hills. Everything was brought in bits and adjusted on the Isthmus. For instance, there are 100 steam shovels, including fourteen of 105 tons, thirty-two of 95 tons, thirty-five of 70 tons, and so on. There are 158 American locomotives all over 100 tons. There are 560 drills, over 4,000 cars, 10 track shifters, 30 unloaders, 26 speeders, 20 dredgers, 57 cranes, 12 tugs, 70 barges, 14 launches. All that was wanted, or likely to be wanted, was brought.

The army of workers is divided into two sections, "gold employees" and "silver employees." All through the Isthmus you see these two legends on adjoining doors in official buildings. They make a sharp division in the supply stores. There is a gold and silver currency in the Isthmus—gold is United States and silver is Panamanian—and the stranger is much confused in finding out whether he is paying 50 cents gold (2s. 1d.) or 50 cents silver (1s. 0½d.). The "gold employees" are the officials, clerical force, construction men, and skilled artizans, and are practically all Americans. The "silver employees" are others—Spaniards, Italians, West Indians.

The Panamanian silver dollar is the same size as the United States silver dollar, but just half its value. Spaniards and their fellow-workers know the Panamanian dollar. If they were paid in United States currency, though the purchasing power would be the same, it would amount to just half. So they prefer 50 cents silver to 25 cents gold. Uncle Sam, cute business man, is willing to oblige. He mints fat, weighty Panamanian dollars, which make the coloured gentlemen think they are earning a lot of money.

The American employee gets better pay than he would in the States. He has house-rent free for his family—a heavy charge at home—and he is able to get food at practically cost price, whilst doctoring



STEAM SHOVELS AT WORK, SEPTEMBER 9, 1912.



costs him nothing. The highest paid "silver employees" are the Spaniards, most of whom earn 10d. an hour. The minimum pay to the West Indian negro is 5d. an hour. Though sleeping quarters are provided, the nigger does not care for barrack life. Thousands have taken to the "bush."

Amidst the wild tropical vegetation are clusters of huts, sometimes made of planks, but more often of old boards and old sheets of corrugated iron. They are crude and insanitary, but the nigger likes to have a "home." Several years ago the authorities endeavoured to stop this "bush" life. It was concluded that the men who lived at "home" were not so strong physically as those who fed in the Commission kitchens and messes. Then the attendances of men at mess meals fell below the number of workers, and it was felt that niggers were saving money by missing meals and not working with the strength expected. An order that no West Indian should be provided with sleeping accommodation till he showed his meal check only sent thousands into the "bush." Most of the coloured workers now live in the "bush" and fend for themselves. Any attempt to drive them into Commission quarters would lead to labour trouble. So things are left alone.

Twice a month an armoured train, laden with bullion for wages, crosses the Isthmus.

The commissariat department is in the hands of the Government. With the exception of a few vegetables and some fruits, Panama produces nothing. All foodstuffs have to be brought 2,000 miles. It means the arrival of one steamer each day to feed the population. The Commission spends £2,500,000 on supplies in a year. It has established over twenty general stores in the villages and camps in the Canal Zone, and eighteen hotels for white "gold employees." At Cristobel, adjoining Colon, the "Commissary" has enormous plant for cold storage, ice-making, bakery, coffee-roasting, and laundry. I will write of that later on.

Each morning, at four o'clock, a supply train of twenty-one cars leaves Cristobel; ten of them are refrigerator cars with meats, ice, and perishable articles. These are delivered at Gatun, Gorgona, Empire, Culebra, Pedro Miguel, Balboa, Panama, and all the little camps on the way.

No endeavour is made by the Commission to make a profit out of the stores. Everything is "cold storage." The people feed well, and the Government takes special pains to see that its workers are well nourished. The average daily meat ration of the American engaged in making the Canal is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lb., vegetables 1 lb., and bread 12 oz. I doubt if there are any working men anywhere who eat so much meat a day as do the American workers in the tro-

pics. At the hotels three meals can be got for 1s. 8d. a day. There are kitchens where the coloured men can get three meals for 1s. 1½d. a day. Thousands of the niggers, however—those who are unmarried—do not use the kitchens, but buy something at the stores and eat in the “bush.” More money is spent on the Isthmus in ice than in bread.

A law court and a criminal court have, by order of the President of the United States, been set up in the Zone. There is a police force. Schools have been established, twelve for white children and seventeen for coloured children, and the youngsters in the “bush,” or living away from camps, are picked up by trains and taken free to the nearest school-house, and afterwards brought back again. Water-works and sewage plants have been installed, and fair roads have been constructed, mainly by prison labour. Post offices are numerous. Two banks have offices in the Zone. At Ancon is the great hospital with sixteen hundred beds. All employees have free treatment.

I have purposely dwelt in this chapter on the appurtenances to the Canal. The outer world knows of the Canal, but has paid small heed to what has had to be done to make the cutting of the way possible.

In Panama the United States is the most paternal Government in the world. The community is the

result of organisation. And when ships begin to use the Canal, the Americans, by deliberate intent, will destroy most of the Zone buildings, send the people away, and let the jungle triumph where now are thriving towns.