CHAPTER VI

WAGES AND LIVING

It is an interesting fact that about half the labour employed in the Canal Zone is made up of British subjects. The male population consists of 22,000 subjects of Great Britain; the United States make an indifferent second with 8,000; Panama and Spain run about level with 3,900 and 3,800 respectively; other countries tail off, completing the 45,000 which is the male population.

The British subjects are practically all West Indians, from Jamaica and Barbados. The Americans, when they started to build the Canal, made a point of not bringing any negroes or cheaper class white labour from their own States. The reason given was that they did not want to disturb the home labour market. The chiefs of the Canal, the directors, the superintendents, the clerical and medical staffs, the skilled artisans, everyone in fact above an unskilled labourer, must be American. Now and then I came across a stray Englishman, Scotsman, or Canadian holding an important post. Persistent though quiet pressure is brought to bear

upon them that they become citizens of the United States.

At first it looked as though the importation of coloured British labour from the West Indies was destined to be a failure. The Americans did not get as much work out of the immigrants as they expected; the Jamaicans and Barbadians did not show the same energy as at home. There was a time when it was seriously contemplated to ship the lot of them back and import special labour from Italy and Spain. Then the secret of the slackness of the West Indians was discovered. Their American bosses were treating them contemptuously, as they were used to treat the niggers in their own States. The West Indian has self-respect, is proud of being British, and he sulked under the frank, crude speeches of his white masters. Colonel Goethals, when he realised the source of the trouble, had notices posted all over the works that American foremen who used offensive language toward their gangs would be instantly discharged—and some of them were. There was chaff from the United States about Colonel Goethals trying to run the Zone as though it were a Sunday-school. Anyhow, there is little swearing in the Zone to-day. I know the American workman in the Northern States, and the picturesqueness of his oaths. I never heard any abusive language in the Zone.

The point is that the West Indians, when decently treated, increased their output of work by a third. Indeed, one of the things I noticed amongst the chiefs of the Canal was satisfaction that more work was being done at proportionately less cost than ever before. Whilst much of it is due to improved organisation, they mainly ascribe it to the good feeling existing amongst all classes and all colours of workers. Though there is a good deal of petty larceny within the Zone, chiefly amongst the blacks, there is a remarkable absence of serious crime. All the coloured policemen are British subjects, Jamaicans. Their training as soldiers in Jamaica is of excellent service.

In a former chapter I described how the coloured labourer got a minimum of fivepence an hour, and could purchase cheap meals and be provided with sleeping accommodation, though he preferred to get a few planks, knock together a shack, and live in the "bush." The American white workers—the "gold employees"—have mosquito-proof houses provided free for themselves and families. The higher posts are rather worse paid than they would be in Great Britain if men were engaged in a similar task. Colonel Goethals, upon whose shoulders rests the whole responsibility for the making of the Canal, receives £3,000 a year, absurdly inadequate remuneration for the work he is doing. All his heads of

MEAL-TIME AMONGST THE COLOURED WORKERS.

departments are badly paid by the United States Government, judged by British standards.

When, however, we get to skilled artisans the American employees on the Isthmus are the best paid workmen in the world. Remember they live house free; there is no winter clothing to buy; there are no heavy coal bills so that the house may be kept warm. Good shipyard artisans, machinists, iron-workers, earn from 2s. to 3s. an hour. Boiler-makers get from 2s. 8d. to 1s. 10d. an hour, according as they are graded. Carpenters are paid 2s. 8d. an hour. Men who work the steam shovels—on duty eight hours but actual work about six hours a day —receive £37 a month. All first-class skilled artisans get from £30 to £35 a month. Plasterers and plumbers get 2s. 8d. an hour. And so on.

The contrasts in some of the remunerations are striking. For instance, a physician gets only £30 a month to begin, and for that he has to provide subsistence. A cook, however, gets £25, including subsistence. Policemen and school-teachers are paid about the same. What is curious is that a doctor, who must have had at least one year of hospital experience, and can only be appointed subject to Civil Service examination, gets exactly the same pay as a veterinary surgeon, £30 a month.

It is natural that the reader at home, noting the high wages paid to the artisan, should remark

"Yes, but what is the cost of living?" It is much cheaper than in the States. As I have explained, the 60,000 people in the Zone are fed like an army in the field two thousand miles from the base of supply, with the difference that the soldiers of labour have to purchase what they require. The "Commissary" Department, with head-quarters at Cristobel, adjoining Colon, is a fine organisation. One of the most instructive mornings I had was visiting the stores, inspecting the cold storage section, and watching the handling of food for a population stretched along a forty-mile line of country.

The "Commissary" Department does business with wholesale firms, eliminates the middleman and, allowing for management expenses, sells at practically cost price. In perishable goods there is an occasional fluctuation, but every week an official price list is issued. The latest issued lies before me. Stewing beef or mutton can be got at 3d. a lb. You can buy shoulder of mutton at 4½d. a lb., steak at 6¼d. a lb., and sirloin at 9½d. a lb. Chickens cost about 4s. 6d. each, and breakfast bacon is 1s. a lb. Eggs are 1s. 1½d. a dozen, and fresh salmon and halibut are 8d. and 5d. a lb. Why, you can get a quarter-pound jar of Russian caviare for 3s. 9d. If, however, your taste runs to pigs' feet, you can obtain them at 4½d. a lb. Ducks are 2s. the pair; butter varies from 1s. 7d. to 1s. 11d. a lb., and ice cream

—they make 350 gallons of it a day at Cristobel—is 1s. 0½d. a quart. Vegetables and fruits are cheap; potatoes, turnips, cabbages are 1½d. or 2d. a lb. Apples are 5d. a lb., but Jamaica oranges are 6d. the dozen, pineapples 6d. each, and peaches 4d. a lb.

Food is, therefore, cheaper than in the States. Making allowance for rent and other advantages, and recognising the increased pay, the American workman in the Zone, if passably careful, can easily save half his wages.

After all, good wages, cheap food, free houses, free doctoring, improved sanitation, are not everything. The temporary towns on the Canal route are just camps. There are none of the excitements of town life. Most of the folk round about are coloured. There are no theatres.

The men look healthy enough, but it is impossible to miss noticing how pale the women are. There is plenty of cheerfulness; but behind the smiling faces one soon learns there is sad weariness, the gnawing consequence of living in this humid, enervating, jungle-girthed region.

To help to make things easy the Government has established fine club-houses in the settlements, with plenty of newspapers, games and teetotal drinks. The Y.M.C.A. manage these club-houses, which are "open house" to any white person who

cares to enter. Also the Government maintains a brass band. It would not take a prize at a brass band contest, but when it plays on Sundays at one or other of the towns it provides a lot of pleasure. There are clubs innumerable. The women folk have lots of societies. Of this side of the life I will deal later on.

Trade union leaders have attempted to start organisations, and once or twice the ripple of industrial trouble has disturbed the waters. When a strike has been threatened Colonel Goethals has broken it with the order "All men who fail to come to work because they are dissatisfied will be provided with free transportation to the United States." The pay is too good and the management too excellent for the agitator to sow discontent.

There is no Saturday afternoon half-holiday. The Sabbath is the one day when the scream of the drills and the thunder of blasting are not heard. In the afternoon baseball matches are played—and the American is as mad over baseball as the Briton is over football. Several religious societies raised loud protests against the countenancing of games on the Sunday. But they were overruled. As the Canal workings are fenced in by jungle, there is little scope for walking, and it is thought better to let the workmen have the distraction of a stirring game than sitting round criticising their bosses.

SLEEPING QUARTERS FOR THE LABOURERS.

Each Sunday morning, at Culebra, Colonel Goethals holds a court. It is not a court for investigating crime, but for the chief of the Canal to investigate complaints. Anybody who has a grievance, white man, black man, yellow man, nondescript, is free to see Colonel Goethals, and tell of his trouble.

As, frequently, more than one family live in a mosquito-proof house, there occasionally flame disputes as to rights. Colonel Goethals acts Solomon to the disputants. Personal quarrels are often referred to the arbitration of Colonel Goethals. He sits in his office on blazing Sunday mornings, and round about hang those who seek his advice or decision. He is the quietest mannered of big men; he produces confidence and his judgment is accepted. This friendly Sunday morning court in the tropics, to which men go voluntarily for the settlement of their differences, contributes much to the efficiency of work during the other six days of the week.

CHAPTER VII

COLON-CUM-CRISTOBEL

Colon belongs to the Panamanians, but Cristobel is within the Canal Zone. They make one town, and when you have passed from one to the other you do not know it unless you are told. Colon has been since early days; Cristobel is a kind of annex, but will become the more important of the two.

The land is but a straggling stretch of sea-tossed sand, and at the back are dark salt marshes, which under the tropical heat fume and steam. The climate is humid and you are in a constant state of perspiring enervation. Malaria is everywhere. Colon used to be known as "the white man's grave." More whites have gone to their death on that fetid, reeking coast than the Gold Coast of Africa can cruelly boast.

It is an odd mixture of a repulsively fascinating town. It is partly American, partly Spanish, partly negro, partly rapscallion drawn from the ends of the earth. It is built on the American plan—long dusty streets, mostly single-story houses made of planks and tin-roofed. The sidewalks are of planks,

and in the main, single-sided street of shops is a balcony which does something to provide shade.

The place swelters. The shops, which are mostly shadowy inside, and where the prices are high, are kept by many races, from French to Japanese, from Chinese to Spanish. Americans on a round trip on one of the United Fruit Company's boats, and who drop off for a day, buy faked Eastern curios from Hindus—brothers of the gentlemen we encounter at Port Said and Colombo.

The places which are in the undisputed possession of free-born Americans are the saloons. The entrance is as gaudy as a barber's pole. Very likely you will hear the rusty throat of a gramophone screeching a Sousa march. Inside you find a barn-like hall with atrocious landscapes and figures on the walls. Along one side is the bar, and the barman is neat, spruce, white jacketed. His background is whisky-laden shelves, with advertisements of famous Scotch products which you will never hear of if you search Scotland from Gretna Green to John o'Groat's. At the tables sit groups of healthy, perspiring, youngish Americans, with their coats off, with waistcoats non-existent, and shirts which in decoration make you blink. Their bashed-in soft felt hats are stuck at the back of their heads. Their sleeves are tucked up, and they chew cigars, and they play cards and they throw dice to decide who shall pay

for the drinks. They are drummers (commercial travellers) and adventurers and men who are looking out for any job going—a polyglot crowd, but strong-chinned and clear-skinned, and they treat life as a joke.

In the streets you meet folk from fair Saxon to black Ethiopian. Between these are people who are tawny, and meerschaum brown, and chocolate and lemon faced, telling the story of much mixed breeding. There are Spaniards with a cross of Indian blood, and half breeds who had an American as father and a negress as mother. Among these tinted folk there is a slithering gait and weariness of eye, indicating that the world has not treated them generously. The men slouch, but the white-frocked women—they all wear white—have a kind of sad refinement about them. All day it is terrifically hot, and distant objects are seen through a shimmering haze.

Ships are lying by the wharves; huge ugly sheds receive and disgorge wares. Hanging round the wharves are noisy, persistent, ragged and barefooted, dun-fleshed porters. They fight you to get your baggage, and then they proceed to fight each other as to who shall carry it. They are explosive and good natured. Beyond the wharves are buggies, drawn by the quaintest caricatures of ponies, and driven by Jamaica boys. I had a Jamaica "boy" of

THE FRONT STREET IN COLON.

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

about forty years of age. He was always rather drunk, but merry and a songster, though the lyrics he warbled whilst lolling back in his seat, and interspersed with comments on the moral character of the pony's mother, were not the sort of thing we have in the drawing-room on a Sunday evening. He was very proud of being a Jamaica boy, for that meant he was different from other niggers. He was a British subject, and I was a British subject —he was sure I was an important person in London, which he assumed was a bigger place than Colon or even Panama—and he told me all about his family life, which was sad and alcoholic.

There were the ever-crashing waves resounding in one's ears. A wind was blowing, and the rows of tall palm trees all bowed together as though they had been trained to do it. Wire-covered bungalows were shipping offices, and the weak coffee-faced clerks, white-ducked, seemed to spend most of their time in smoking cigarettes and drinking iced water.

There is a railway track which had probably been laid down before the town was; so the town had to accommodate itself to the track. There is a railway station, the most solid railway station in the world. It must have been built for all time. It is not very large, but the stone blocks of which it is made are great, and, given a fair

chance, will probably be standing when the Pyramids have crumbled to dust.

Being a democratic country, there is a sharp distinction drawn between where the white and the coloured people sit in the station. You will find the same you-mustn't-contaminate-each-other arrangement in the seating accommodation at Gatun and Panama. In the old back-number countries of Europe there is no such caste distinction; that is because we are not so democratic as America, no doubt. The railway tracks spread like a tangled piece of twine, and clanging bells tell you to get out of the way if you do not want to be run over. I met a dusky coon sitting on a wagon in the middle of a street, and singing "Everybody's doin' it, doin' it."

In Cristobel are gaunt, red-brick, iron-balconied residences for the coloured workers on the line and their families. The women were in gay chintzes, and they were all fat, and there were many "sans-culottish" children. They did not bother about wire netting to keep out the mosquitoes. The rooms would not take many prizes for cleanliness; but how happy everybody was! There were lodgings for coloured people, with nice names attached to the houses, just like they are in suburban London. There was one lodging-house called "Buckingham Palace."

An interesting place is the "Commissary," which is easier and shorter than Commissariat Department. It is the real up-to-date example of providing food for over 50,000 people two thousand miles away from the base of supply. A monument should be erected to the man who invented cold storage. It has made life possible in the tropics, and has brought fortune to beef, mutton, and butter countries, which otherwise would have been only semi-prosperous. I went out of the torrid, panting, eye-aching sunshine into the "Commissary," stuffed with good things from the States. I had consciousness of the marrow within my bones freezing. It was the place of the chill dead, thousands of carcases of bullocks and sheep, very still, very silent, and the refrigerator pipes encrusted with ice—and, twenty yards away, outside, the thermometer was near bubbling point. The flesh was as hard as wood. In other long chambers were butter and eggs, and vegetables and fruit and fowls. All these are brought from the States; the supply is regulated. As I have stated, a train starts every morning, and each camp on the way to Panama gets its share. I went to the big stores in Cristobel—a sort of Army and Navy Stores for variety. Of course there was a door for "gold employees" and another for "silver employees," and there were counters where only "gold employees" were served, and others where only "silver employees"

were served. The prices were the same, but this was the subtle plan to carry out the great democratic principle that white and coloured folk should not rub shoulders.

As a piece of elaborate, but smooth working, organisation machinery the "Commissary," feeding the multitude in the Isthmus, is one of the best things to be seen anywhere. There is never any scarcity. There is no running up of prices because Panama is so far from New York. The goods are bought in bulk; there is no middleman's profit to be made; deducting expenses, the retail price is about the same as cost price. Not only is food cheaper than in the United States, but it is cheaper than in England.

Also, there is a great "Commissary" laundry. You put your soiled linen into a bag at Panama and it is sent over to Cristobel to be washed by the latest hygienic methods, and you can be sure that it runs no risk of picking up disease, which it might do if handed over to a native washerwoman. Perhaps I was unfortunate, but my personal experience was that I have never known washing done quite so badly. And the spiked metal tags attached to every garment, for identification purposes, were the cause of innumerable rents.

The great hospital is at Ancon. But there is a hospital, screen-encased, erected on the sea-front

at Colon, where the fever-stricken and maimed are cared for—a haven of airy quiet rest to the sick and wounded. Cool grass and flowers bring gladness to the heart. There is a little church, which at first glance looks as though it was an old edifice lifted out of an English village. But its time-worn appearance is a triumph of imitative art. The residences of the " gold employees " are all elevated bungalows, the whole place completely screened, and on the stoep behind the screen some American woman, loosely clad, is usually to be seen in the heat of the day reclining in a rocking chair. The heat is too energy-sapping when the sun is up to do anything but lounge about.

I don't know a worse place than Colon, though I have been in warmer spots—Aden, for instance. It is just a piece of sand-covered coral about a mile long and less than half a mile wide; but the railroad company has made an embankment through the swamps at the back to join it with the mainland.

Cristobel is not so bad. The houses are prettier; there is more foliage; there is a statue of Columbus —reminiscences of the days when the French tried to make the dreary place more attractive. Most of the land is held by the railroad company—that is, by the United States—and though it is Panamanian territory the Panamanians have nothing to do with it.

At sundown coolness comes. Then the Americans who have kept within the shade most of the day come forth. It is the hour of promenade, and the people, a little pale-faced and washed out, take a stroll. There are lots of young fellows and their young wives making a start in the big adventure in this blighted spot, because the pay in Government service is comparatively good and living is comparatively cheap. They are courageous, and in the heyday of life; but their gaiety is just a little forced.

I have read in many American publications that so successful is the United States administration, so splendidly has malaria been wiped off the map, that the Isthmus is now one of the healthiest places in the world; statistics are given to show that the death rate in Colon is lower than in Chicago. All perfectly true; but the comparison is ingenuous. Only it is to be remembered that in the Isthmus you have picked lives; none but the strong and healthy go there. If you picked your men you could prove the most fever-soaked swamp in the world was the healthiest spot on earth.

Then there is a constant ebb and flow of people. The American, with all his dash and skill and adaptiveness, is not, as a rule, made of the sort of stuff for quiet doggedness under difficulty. In the first year of the American occupation, before Colonel

THE STATUE TO COLUMBUS AT CRISTOBEL.

From photograph by Underwood & Underwood, High Holborn, W.C.

Gorgas did his great work in sanitation, most Americans suffered from what they themselves call "cold feet"—that is, they became shy of the monotonous life, and 90 per cent. of them cleared out. During the last year or two, improved though the conditions are, the life is still hard and lonely—it is a big change to come from a bright American city to an Isthmian camp, with little social life and the jungle all around—and 50 per cent. of the Americans have cleared out each year. Others come in, but the ebb is constant. Many go because of "cold feet," but I must say that many others return to the United States because they have made a little pile. I recall a high-placed official telling me that amongst the hundreds of young fellows the time of their departure was generally when they had saved £400. That was a good sum to have put by in two or three years, and they could not hold out any longer, but must return home to have "a good time."

There is a hotel at Colon—"The Washington," of course. It is the usual timber erection, with the usual long veranda, and the usual tinted waiters, and with a big, grey-haired, rosy-faced manager who always looks like Colonel Goethals will look when the first boat glides through the Canal. The hotel used to be in private hands; then it was bought by the Panama Railroad; then

the United States bought the Panama Railroad, which bought the hotel which feeds the human flotsam cast up on these shores. So the United States is also hotel proprietor. But this comfortable little shack of a place will be of little use in the future. So another hotel is being constructed—still "The Washington." It is getting on. Seen through the palms on an exquisite moon-bathed night the growing hotel looks like a ruin on the banks of the Nile. It is intended to be a fine hotel. I was told it will be the finest hotel in the American continent; but I've been told that about so many hotels in America. Americans do things well in the matter of hotels when they set about it, and the luxuries in apartments and baths and verandas and gardens by the sea will be astonishing. I think it is to accommodate 1,200 people.

"Now, what on earth do you want a hotel like that for, in a place like this?" I ventured one night, when I was with a party of Americans on the stoop of the old "Washington," and we all had our feet upon the rail, and were all puffing Jamaica cigars, and all comfortable after dinner—supper they call it out there—and we were revelling in the hush and the cool of that beautiful moonlight.

It was just the question which showed my friends how Britishers are lacking in foresight, in imagination. What was such a big hotel for? Why to put

people in. For when the Canal was open there would be a rush. The seas would be torn with vessels bringing holiday-seekers here in the dry and pleasant winter months. Americans would no longer go to played out old countries like Egypt for the winter. They would come to Colon. Colon would reduce Cairo to the level of a side show.

The dull Britisher was able to appreciate that during the first few years thousands of good Americans would desire to see the Canal, the jewel in their crown of achievement, and in the season the new "Washington" would be packed to the garret. But after the novelty had worn off, what then?

Oh, then Colon would have become established as a health resort, and folk would come for itself; and, besides, with the tremendous string of steamships bumping each other through the Canal, people would get off, see the sights of Colon, race across the Isthmus by train, and pick up the boat at Panama.

The man from England thought not. It was his idea that people would like to journey through the Canal and would miss it by journeying across the Isthmus by so commonplace a means as a train; they would enjoy the experience of being hoisted up in locks and lowered in other locks. If they had any time to spare they would spend it at Panama and get a peep of Spanish life. He was entirely wrong. Four good men of Colon told him so.

Americans were too sensible to want to poke about a dirty, smelly town of dagos like Panama, where they ran the chance of catching heaven knows what disease; they could see all that was necessary of the Canal from a railway carriage window, and, anyway, it could be arranged for them to have a ten minutes' stop off at Gatun so that they might obtain a thorough grasp of the complex working of the locks and inspect the giant dam and the amazing spillway and the gigantic electric power station. No, sir—ee; Colon would be the place; Colon with its hotel, the pride of the tropics, its sands, its constantly tumbling surf, its palm trees, its cool evenings, its delicious moonlight.

The visitor smoked his cigar and thought of other places on the world's surface which happened to possess most of these attractions, and with some other things thrown in. But he did not mention them. That would have looked like making an effort to depreciate Colon, and the hearts of the four good Americans were just full of Colon.

CHAPTER VIII

SCENES ALONG THE ROUTE

I HAVE forgotten how many times I see-sawed between Colon and Panama. But I do remember the different sensations which laid hold of me on my first trip and on my last trip.

Somehow the first journey left the impression of keen disappointment. I had imagined to see so much and the reality was not impressive. But the evening of my final jaunt from Panama to Colon brought real appreciation into my heart. In the drooping afternoon, the swift twilight and dark hours I rattled through country which I had studied in detail. I understood how the face of the earth had been altered; I saw the never-ending dirt trains jogging over the crazy temporary lines; I saw the white walls of the locks, heard the cry of machinery; I saw the flaming fires at night, and the dark figures of the workers. There was the twinkle of lights in the camps; there was the run alongside a deep cut which made eyes to close tight in sudden dread that a lurch would send us over the side; there was the long run through

the black jungle with millions of glow-flies scintillating.

There was the coming into the railway car and the going out at every wayside station of the men who were doing the big job, living so much with it that they were inclined to forget its bigness, but talking about a multitude of things—baseball, the comic pictures in an American journal—and a considerable number of the younger fellows busy with the national pastime of chewing gum.

I was glad I had come to the Isthmus when the work was in full swing, and not when most of the workers had laid down their tools and gone back to the United States, and the finished Canal had become like a series of silver lakes and gently winding rivers.

It was on a Sunday afternoon I made the first trip. Colon had been a gasping experience. But that was nothing to the three-quarters of an hour fight in the baggage-room getting my luggage "checked" through to Panama. The checking-of-baggage system, American plan, is all right when it works well; and the stay-at-home Briton is only told about it when it works well. When it works wrong its wrongness is American in its magnificence. There are no porters. You hire a coloured gentleman to do the work for you. But what is he, endeavouring to manœuvre three sturdy English big leather trunks

and two minor ditto through a herd of two hundred other coloured people who are carrying their own baggage, all their belongings, and also want to get it " checked " ? In England an official would have arranged a queue and everybody would have taken his turn. Under the American plan you fight.

One gum-chewing American saw to the weighing, and another, in return for cash, gave out checks which were fastened to the goods, and you kept the counterpart so a rightful claim could be made when you reached your destination.

Pushing, tugging, being compelled to be rude when I really had no intention, I got my stuff forward, and the weighman, who did not care whether I caught my train or missed it, wanted to know what the hurry was, and the other chewing gentleman said " Two dollars," and when I asked him if he meant Panamanian or United States dollars, just replied " Two dollars." I could tell by the withering look he gave me that he knew I had been reared in some rural area. By handing him a five-dollar United States bill I discovered it was two dollars in American money. He did not say " Thank you," and I instantly fell in with the custom of the country, and did not do so either. As I was pocketing the counterfoils and perspiring thankfulness, I murmured to the weighman : " I suppose I'll get my things all right at Panama ? " " Sure," said he. But when I

got to Panama, some three hours later, it was still Sunday. And although I could have got a coloured man to carry my things, I would first have to get them out of the custody of the railroad. And the white gentlemen were not working that Sunday night, and neither I nor the President of the United States could get at the checked baggage till Monday morning. I don't know whether that was quite true; anyway I didn't. We do things differently in England.

There was a second class by which coloured people travelled and a first class by which white people travelled, and an observation car with reserved seats by which superior people, like myself, travelled —it all depended on the price paid. Everybody seemed to be in terror of the conductor, a hatchet-faced individual, in a blue and metal cap, who went through the cars as though he were looking for a mongrel dog that was travelling without a ticket. So that it would not be necessary to search for the little bit of pasteboard constantly and have it punched at every other station, English style, the wild-eyed dog hunter went through the car and snatched the tickets out of our hands and then stuck different coloured paper tags in our hats. It made some of us quite gay and festive and improved our appearance. So in his rush he knew whether we had the right to go to Panama or only to Gorgona.

When the train left a station he scoured the coaches looking for hats without tags, and whenever he found one he just stood and stared at the poor passenger. He was not paid to request "Tickets, please!" If the passenger fumbled or tried two pockets, the dog chaser remarked, sarcastic-like, "Your memory getting a bit slack, eh?" He swopped a ticket for a tag. Then, before the train got to a station you might have thought he had got on the track of that wretched dog at last, for he went along, hurricane fashion, snatching at the tags which indicated the wearers should go to that station and no farther. When a hat was knocked off there was no regret, but a snappy wonder what was wrong with the head. He interested me. Once he caught me smiling, and carefully examining the tag:

"Anything wrong?" he asked, and I knew there was acid on his tongue.

"I'm looking for your autograph."

"My what?"

"Your signature," said I. "I collect the signatures of remarkable men."

Close to Cristobel is Monkey Hill, where there are no monkeys but an extensive cemetery. Whatever may be the lot of a coloured worker when alive, there is no question about the gorgeousness of his funeral when he dies. No doubt there are sorrowing

hearts, but the trappings of woe suggest a fête. The hearse and coffin are of wedding-cake decoration, and the horse is caparisoned, and the mourners put on their best clothes, which are bright.

Then there is the black swamp which lies between the reef of Colon and the mainland, and weird vegetation is rampant. A track is now made through it. When the railroad was being built it was like a bottomless pit. The bog gobbled everything thrown in, and was hungry for more. Bottom was plumbed for, and it was touched at some two hundred feet below the surface. Extraordinary figures are given of the tons of rock which had to be pitched into the swamp for months, for years, before anything like a foundation could be made. Now there is a railway track. But you must not hazard your spare cash that it will be there in the morning. A year or two ago about a hundred and fifty feet of track, with a number of wagons on it, began to sink, and the whole thing sank right out of sight.

Into the jungle you plunge. The colouring is vivid. The air stinks of kerosene, and in the gutterways by the railroad side are black, shiny, smudged patches where the kerosene-sprinkler has been to limit the travels of the mosquito. On elevations in the " bush " are stray, rough built huts of the negro workers. The nigger prefers this home-made shanty

IN THE JUNGLE.

of old boards, no windows—except in the towns a window with glass is a rarity in the Isthmus—no bath, no sanitary accommodation, to any mosquito-proof structure that can be put up by the United States Government. It is primitive and somewhat barbaric, and you are right in being surprised that the fat negro wife and the flock of half-clad negro children are not soon slacking to sickness. The fare is coarse. Sometimes a mile separates them from their neighbour. Their outlook is from a jungle hut to other jungle on the farther side of the single-track railroad. They have no newspapers; they are not concerned with what happens in the outer world. The horizon is limited but satisfying, for Jake, the father, earns good money, and sometimes brings things from Colon, and there is plenty to eat. Ambitions do not soar much beyond that.

A thin path wanders from the railway into the dark jungle, and at the end of it, completely hidden and in constant shadow, is often to be found a bamboo hut. The place is damp; the air heavy and obnoxious; evil seems to hang round the place. The nigger sits on the stump of a felled tree, and he watches his missis cooking and his children playing with coco-nuts. He likes this jungle life, though he could not tell you why—indeed, as I have already mentioned, the "bush" is full of attraction for the niggers, and the administration has ceased

trying to get them to live elsewhere. It is the call of the wild, atavism, harking back to the ways of their ancestors when they lived in the mangrove swamps of Nigeria.

In the towns which dot the way are negro settlements a little apart from the neat American bungalows which dot the hillsides of the clearings. There are always smiling faces, and the strum of a banjo, and children, children innumerable. Some of these settlements appear to have slid down into the area of the Canal. Nothing is said against their doing so; the Americans get along in a very friendly spirit with the Barbadians so long as there is no attempt to boss them too much. But when the water begins to be let in those settlements must move.

All over the region of the Gatun Lake, the dammed Chagres River, spreading to an area of 160 miles, had been Spanish settlers, scraping an indifferent existence out of the jungle. They could not speak English, and they were suspicious of the designs of the American invaders who had made a deal with the Government at Panama, but about which the jungle dwellers know little. The Americans invited the jungle dwellers to shift more into the hills. Many of them refused. The Americans saw that talk was useless; but when the Gatun dam was finished, and the Chagres was stayed, and the waters began to

spread up the valleys and over the land, the natives had to pack their traps and go.

The native villages are small and straggling. Some of them have disappeared beneath the rising flood. But I liked the names along the way, which were given long ago by folk who came from the old world: Carmen Messias, Aborea Lagarto, Santana, Bohio Soldado, Corozal, La Boca, Paraiso, and so on. I had some pleasant times at Culebra, though a good deal of it has tumbled into the Cut. Colonel Goethals lives there, and many of the chief workers on the Canal, and, because it is high and there is always a breeze blowing, it is to be the head-quarters of the United States military force to defend the Canal.

When a slice of hill has been cut it is possible to understand the volcanic formation of the land. Every schoolboy knows that from Alaska to Patagonia runs a rocky range called "the backbone of the American continent." That backbone weakens in the Isthmus. No snow-swathed Rockies, or Andes, or Cordilleras, dominate the Isthmus. I doubt if in the whole of the Isthmus you will find a hill as high as 1,500 feet above sea level; some you can find as high as 500 feet; but the Canal passes no spot where it is higher than 300 feet—not more than a good golf bunker.

At the narrowest neck of the continent the