THE STORY OF PANAMA

GAUSE & CARR

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PANAMA CANAL ZONE
SCALE OF MILES
0 1 2 3 4 5 10
REPUBLIC
OF PANAMA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
COLON
Cristobal
Colon Harbor
Margarita
Monkey Hill
Mindi
Gatun
Gatun Lake
Fort Lorenzo
Chagres R.
Marajal
La Soledad
Monte Lirio
Gold Hill
Las Cruces
Paraiso
Pedro Miguel
Miraflores
Alto Grande
Corozal
PANAMA
Balboa
Culebra
Empire
Juan Grande
Mamei
Taboguilla
Sosa Pablo
Pina R.
Agua Clara
Lagarto R.
Limit of Canal Zone

ATLANTIC OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
COSTA RICA
COLOMBIA
Bocas del Toro
BOCAS DEL TORO
Mosquito Gulf
Colon
Porto Bello
COLON
Chepo
PANAMA
Panama
Bay of Panama
CHIRIQUI
David
Gulf of Dulce
VERAGUA
Penonomé
COCLE
PERLAS ISLANDS
San Miguel Bay
Gulf of Darien
Parita Bay
GULF OF PANAMA
Santiago
Los Santos
LOS SANTOS
QUIBO I.
REPUBLIC OF PANAMA
SCALE OF MILES
0 10 20 30 40 50 60
83°
82°
81°
80°
79°
78°
77°
10°
9°
8°
7°
81° Longitude West
80° from Greenwich

THE STORY OF PANAMA

THE NEW ROUTE TO INDIA

BY

FRANK A. GAUSE

SUPERINTENDENT CANAL ZONE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

AND

CHARLES CARL CARR

PRINCIPAL CANAL ZONE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

SILVER, BURDETT AND COMPANY

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PREFACE

THE attention of the world is now turned upon Panama. For Panama that is no new experience. American history had its beginnings in this part of the world. From the day when Columbus found his path to the Indies obstructed by the low-lying Isthmus, a shorter route to India has been the dream of men and of nations.

So the story of Panama involves an account of great exploits and of great achievements. There were the daring explorers and the hardy buccaneers; then the stirring days of canal making, with Panama as the scene of the greatest engineering feat of modern times; and already there are evidences of coming expansion in new directions, following the operation of the canal.

Yet this great canal only represents improved facilities for handling a long-established transisthmian traffic. There were trade routes and trade centers on the Isthmus of Panama half a century before the foundations of St. Augustine were laid, and a century before the first permanent English colony in North America was established at Jamestown. If present plans materialize, the Isthmian

canal will be dedicated to the world's commerce on the four hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the old Royal Road, the first commercial highway across the two Americas.

The story of the canal as an engineering project has already been written in engineering terms, for engineers. Its picturesque features have also been displayed in many forms by writers whose acquaintance with the work and with the country was necessarily limited to the observations of a few days. But there still seems to be place for an account of the principal features of the construction as witnessed during several years' residence in the Canal Zone. Because of the authors' long acquaintance with the country and association with the actual work THE STORY OF PANAMA tells at first hand of life and conditions in Panama; and it is hoped that it will do something toward correcting misapprehensions and arousing new interest.

The authors owe much to the Canal Zone officials and to the officials of the Republic of Panama, who have accorded them every courtesy in the preparation of this book and have given them access to many unusual illustrations.

ANCON, CANAL ZONE,
October 31, 1912.

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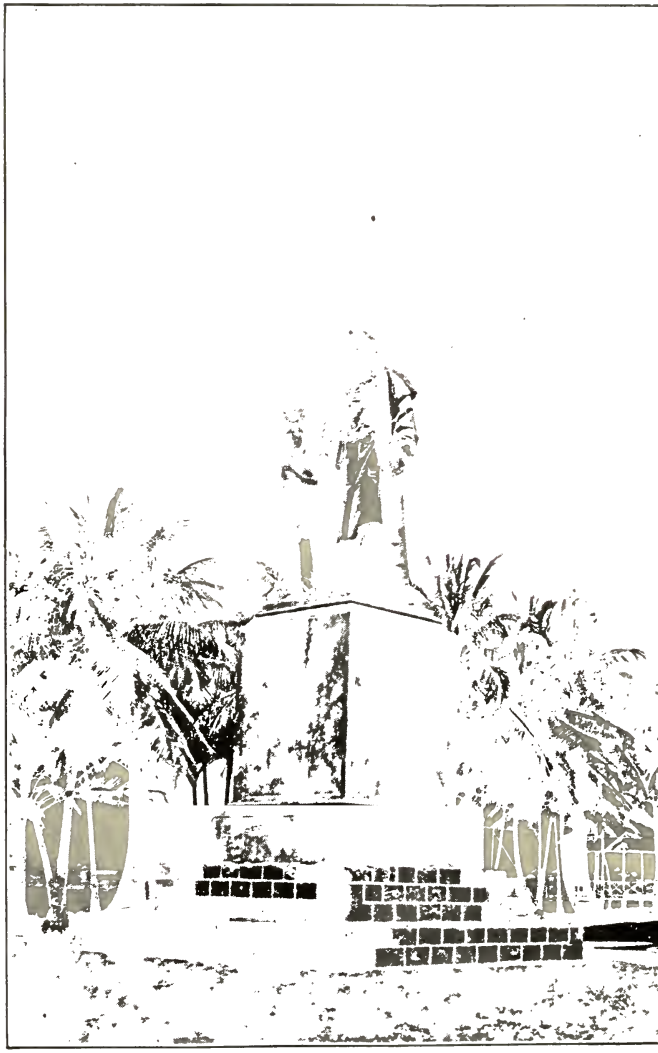
PART ONE

NAVAL WARING



THE COLUMBUS MONUMENT AT CRISTOBAL

just as Columbus had believed the legend told him by other Indian tribes.

Geographers and explorers accepted the existence of this unseen strait, and the discovery of the elusive and mysterious stream became the chief incentive to most of the exploration up and down the coast. The explorers never found the strait, but out of their failure grew the idea of digging a waterway to connect the two oceans.

And so the Panama Canal is not a project of the twentieth century; nor yet of the nineteenth. The conception dates back to 1523. The project was first proposed to Charles V of Spain fully two hundred and fifty years before the birth of the nation destined to construct the canal.

It was Hernando Cortez, the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, who first proposed making the great waterway. Cortez was sent by his monarch, Charles V, to find the strait which was said to connect the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. He searched diligently along the Spanish Main, with an expenditure of much time, energy and money.

Failing to find this mythical stream, the stern old *conquistador* determined upon the brilliant expedient of making a strait. His plans were cut short by the treachery of his followers, but he deserves mention as the pioneer in a movement which men were destined to exploit for four centuries. He en-

couraged his cousin, Alvaro de Saavedra Ceron, to follow up his work; and Saavedra finally drew plans for four transisthmian water routes, intending to submit these plans to the king of Spain.

The routes which Saavedra had in mind were the four that have received most attention in later years — Darien, Nicaragua, Tehuantepec and Panama; but he did not live long enough to develop any one of these plans. Then Charles V encouraged other explorers to continue the search for a natural water route. It was not until the abdication of Charles V and the accession of Philip II that the Spanish ceased the attempt either to find an all-water passage or to pierce the Isthmus.

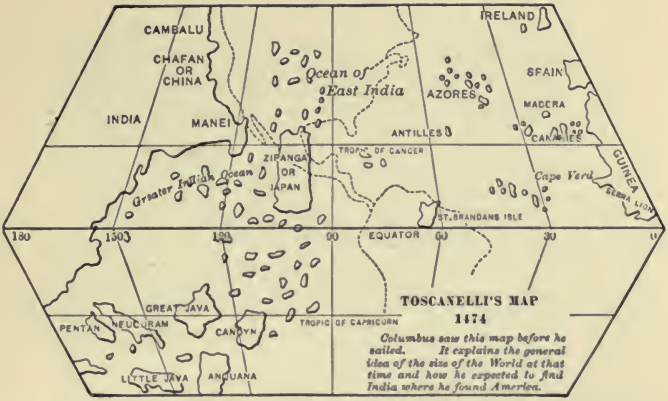
Philip II introduced a reactionary policy which put an end to Spanish enterprise along that line for almost a hundred years. After an unfavorable report from Antonelli, who had been sent out by the king to survey the Nicaraguan route, Philip laid the matter before his Dominican friars, who in reply quoted from the Bible, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Deciding that this passage referred directly to Panama, the Spanish king forbade any further attempts at canal making as sacrilegious.

From the time that Cortez conceived the idea of *making* a strait to the first attempt at its actual accomplishment, three and a half centuries later, the

Isthmus of Panama was the center of stirring events. The conquest of Peru, the pirate raids of Drake and of Morgan, the diplomatic skirmishes of England and Spain, all contributed to keep Panama in the eye of the world.

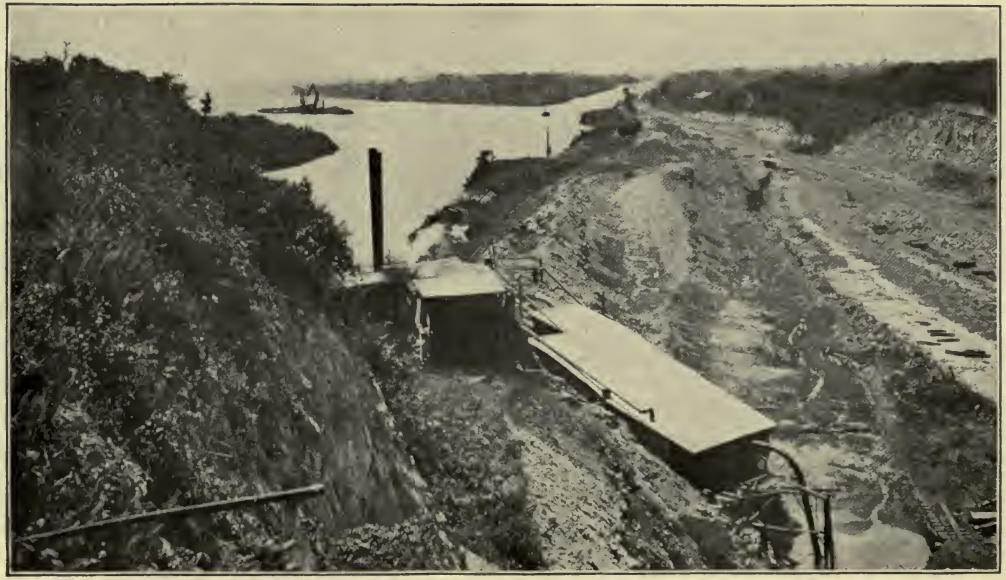
The United States had been slow to recognize the commercial necessity for a transisthmian canal, but the subject was frequently considered in Congress during the first half of the nineteenth century. One commissioner after another was sent to investigate possible routes and to approach the states of Central America whose coöperation was essential to any such project. Various plans were made, and at several different times a canal under American control seemed to be assured; but always some insuperable difficulty was encountered.

While canal building was still under discussion, three enterprising Americans built the Panama railroad, which for a time served to relieve the imperative demand for transcontinental transportation. During the late fifties and early sixties the United States was too deeply engrossed with the vital issues of the Civil War to consider canal construction; and before the country was prepared to take the matter up in all earnestness the French were ready to engineer and to finance a canal. This was not, however, their first Isthmian Canal project, for they had previously made several attempts.



FOUR MOST FAVORABLE CANAL ROUTES

LANDS WHICH COLUMBUS DISCOVERED



INTERSECTION OF AMERICAN AND FRENCH CANALS (6)

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH ATTEMPT

In March, 1876, at the suggestion of Count Ferdinand de Lesseps, the Society of Commercial Geography at Paris organized a committee to go into the subject of the projected Isthmian Canal. De Lesseps, whose success in engineering the operations at Suez commended him to the Society, was chosen to preside at the deliberations of this body.

The Committee held its first meeting at Paris in May, 1879. It at once took upon itself an international character, as the name under which it worked implied—"The International Scientific Congress." Representatives from nearly all the civilized nations of the world were present. The discussion lasted for several months, but the conclusions of the Committee may be summed up in these words: "The Congress thinks that the construction of an interoceanic waterway on a constant level is possible; that in the interests of commerce and navigation a sea level canal is desirable; that the most practicable route lies between the Gulf of Limon and the Bay of Panama." The Committee believed the cost would approximate $240,000,000.

Here, then, were the three paramount questions: (1) What kind of canal was to be built? (2) What was to be its location? (3) What would it cost? The wisdom of the conclusions of the Committee has been confirmed on only one point, that of location. A sea level canal is now believed to be out of the question, even with present-day machinery and methods. It is estimated that the lock canal will cost $375,000,000, and it is certain that a sea level canal would cost several times that amount, if indeed it could be built at all.

As the plans of De Lesseps had been incorporated in the Committee's report (against the vote of a majority of the engineers on the Committee) and as the Count had demonstrated his ability to build canals, he was given the direction of the project.

On the 17th of August, 1879, a company was organized under the significant title, *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interoceanique* (The Universal Interoceanic Canal Company). M. de Lesseps' confidence in the success of the project is indicated in an address he made at the time. He said, "If a general who has won his first battle is asked whether he desires the chance to win another, he cannot refuse." While De Lesseps appears to have had no doubt about the successful issue of the undertaking, the project was viewed with misgiving by more deliberate men, many

of whom looked upon it at that time as altogether impracticable.

But the romantic nature of the undertaking appealed to the French people, and the eighty million dollars' worth of stock offered for sale was taken within a short time. The enthusiastic De Lesseps, encouraged by the readiness with which this stock was purchased, believed that all was over except a little work and much shouting. However, it is not strange that a man who had just built the Suez Canal — a man endowed with the optimistic temperament of the best blood of France — should declare, "Those who have counted only on a lock canal have committed a serious blunder; a sea level canal is not only the most desirable, but is easily possible."

Prior to the organization of the Interoceanic Canal Company, a French syndicate had secured from Colombia a concession for the construction of a canal. This concession was transferred to the De Lesseps company. The surveys authorized made it necessary that the canal company invade the territory that had previously been ceded to the Panama Railroad Company. This, and the fact that the control of the railroad facilities would be valuable during the construction of the canal, rendered it advisable to take over the stock of the railroad company, which was purchased at a high figure, $18,000,000.

The actual work of digging the canal began in May, 1882. Tracy Robinson thus describes the occasion: "The company was assembled to witness the formal opening of the great work. The Bishop of Panama was to give it his blessing. A tremendous charge of dynamite was to be exploded. . . . An eyewitness has described the scene for us: 'The blessing had been pronounced. There the crowd stood, breathless, ears stopped, eyes blinking, half in terror lest this artificial earthquake might involve general destruction. But there was no explosion! It wouldn't go!'" This is a beginning typical of the long, sad attempt of the French. It simply would not go.

The canal was to be of the sea level type, thirty feet deep and seventy-two feet minimum width at the bottom. The continental divide was to be pierced by a tunnel. This last scheme, however, was soon abandoned and the present open cut substituted for the tunnel.

De Lesseps pushed the work vigorously, but very early in the course of operations there began to arise those serious obstacles foreseen by the trained engineers, who had voted against the great director almost to a man. The floods of the Chagres, disease, distrust — a thousand obstacles unforeseen by the brave Frenchman, crowded upon him to discourage, thwart and finally to overwhelm him.

I. IDLE SINCE THE FRENCH DAYS (11)

II. CULEBRA CUT AS THE FRENCH LEFT IT

The early confidence in De Lesseps' ability to accomplish this great task soon began to wane. Subscriptions for stock dwindled to such an extent that by the middle of the year 1887 it became evident that if the work was to continue there must be a change both in the organization of the company and in the original plan of the canal. De Lesseps relinquished the directorship of the enterprise and returned home to be tried and disgraced in the courts of his native land. Though exonerated of the charge of misappropriation of the funds intrusted to him, he became insane as a result of his failure, and died in 1894, not knowing that his countrymen, grateful for the services he had rendered the world by his achievement at Suez, would one day erect an appropriate monument to his memory on the site of his successes.

In 1887, the sea level type of canal was abandoned for the lock type. But the change came too late, and in 1889 the company went into the hands of a receiver. The story of the French attempt may be summed up in one statement: Eighty million cubic yards of earth had been excavated at a cost of $260,000,000.

When this story is impartially written, it will tell how brave men suffered, despaired, died in an unsuccessful though none the less heroic effort to advance the world's interests. Everywhere along the canal

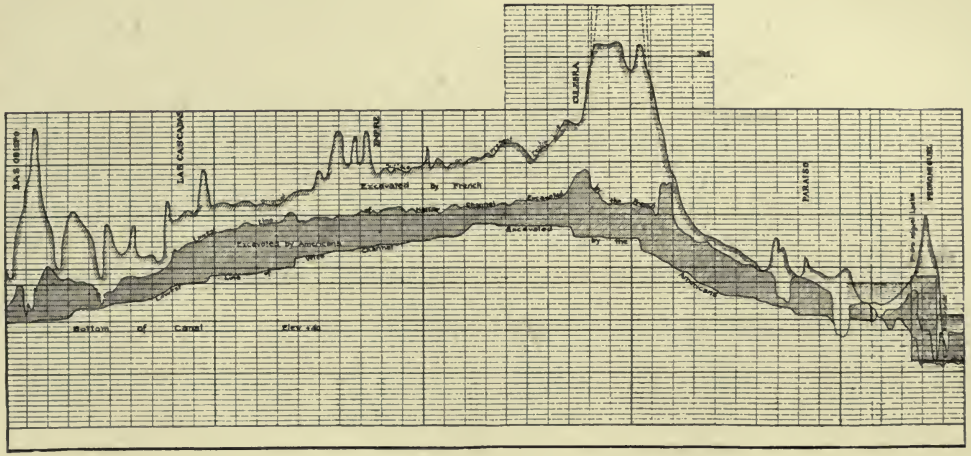
line in the early days of American operations were sad evidences of the French failure. Rusty, broken-down, jungle-covered locomotives, cars, cranes, excavators; stacks of bent, twisted steel rails; sunken dredges, tugs and anchors, marked the path of the French failure from Panama to Colon, and testified to the eyes of the traveler in no unmistakable terms of the serious mindedness of those men who were bold in conception but erring in their estimate of the magnitude of the undertaking.

The diagram on page 16 shows the comparative amounts of excavation accomplished by the French in their seven years' trial and by the Americans in the years up to July, 1909. It gives convincing proof of the seriousness with which the French company attacked the Herculean task. Says Mr. Rousseau, "When we consider the handicaps in the way of unsanitary conditions under which the French worked, we have increased admiration for what they accomplished."

In 1894 Brunet, the receiver of the French company, transferred its rights and property to "The New Panama Canal Company," which prosecuted the work in a desultory sort of way until 1904, when the canal properties were purchased by the American government for $40,000,000.

AN OLD ANCHOR FOUND NEAR CRUCES

(15)



CULEBRA CUT EXCAVATIONS UP TO JUNE 30, 1909

This diagram shows the depth to which the French excavated for a narrow channel; the depth to which the American excavation for the wide channel had been carried to June 30, 1909; and the proposed bottom of the canal.