CHAPTER VII.

ORIGIN OF THE PANAMA CANAL AND WORDS OF M. DE LESSEPS AT THE FIRST STROKE OF THE PICK.

"How did the Panama Canal originate?" I asked an experienced engineer on the Isthmus.

"Well," he replied, "history informs us that in 1878 Lieutenant Lucien Wyse and his companions secured the right and privilege from the Colombians to construct and operate a canal. In 1879 an international congress, consisted mostly of engineers, gathered to discuss plans. There were 135 delegates present, eleven of whom came from the United States of America.

"M. Ferdinand de Lesseps, the celebrated French engineer, who was at the zenith of his fame, was also present. His recent achievements at the Suez Canal at that time made him the popular and leading spirit at the convention.

"This distinguished body of men decided that a sea level canal could be built between Colon or Aspinwall, on the Atlantic, and Panama, on the Pacific Oceans, in eight years, at the cost of $217,000,000. Soon afterwards a French company—The Compagnie Universelle de Canal Inter-Oceanique de Panama—was formed, under M. Ferdinand de Lesseps as president.

"This company, it is said, paid Lieut. L. Wyse and his associates $2,000,000 for their rights, and took charge of the canal in 1880. In January of the same year, at the Pacific entrance of the projected ship canal, M. Ferdinand de Lesseps, who was the chief orator on the occasion, spoke as follows:

"‘By the authority of the Republic of the United States of Colombia, with the blessing of Monsignor, the Bishop of Panama, in the presence of representatives of all governments and of those of the United States of Colombia, with the assistance of the members of the technical commission charged with the investigation of the Universal Interoceanic Canal, M. F. de Lesseps, on this first day of January, 1880, made the first
stroke with a pick, at the point determined upon for the begin-
ning of the maritime canal on the coast of the Pacific. All as-
sistance in order, please turn some earth with the pick, as a
sign of alliance of all peoples in the work of uniting the two
oceans, for the good of mankind.'"

Turning over some old canal records from the time of the
French, my informant said, "There it is. The Bulletin de
Canal Interoceanique of February 1, 1880, says:—

"At the grand banquet which closed the fetes given by the
Colombian Government in honor of M. Ferdinand de Lesseps,
and, after the toast by the representative of the United States
of Colombia, M. de Lesseps responded as follows:

"The orator who has preceded me told you of the scientific reasons that have influenced us in deciding that the line of
the interoceanic canal shall run from Colon-Aspinwall to Pan-
amia. The investigations of the technical committee between
the Bay of Limon and the Bay of Panama confirm this de-
cision and at the same time constitute the base of an appeal
to all the nations to contribute to the capital for doing this
great work, whose benefits will be enjoyed by all peoples.

"But what will be the powerful motive that will give the
final impulse towards forming the Universal Company for the
construction and maintenance of a Panama Canal? It will be
public opinion, the dominating power of our epoch, represented
by the press of all countries. I propose a toast, therefore, to
the reporters of the press of North America, Central America
and South America, and to their honorable brothers of Europe,
Asia and Africa.'"

To that toast, a representative of the American press from
the New York Herald responded thus:

"I am honored in being allowed to say some words as repre-
sentative of the American press, to which M. de Lesseps has
been so courteous. It is a pleasure to see assembled here so
many of the intelligent citizens of Colombia, to be in
the company of these men of science, of capitalists and
of others who are distinguished by their talents and
their deeds. But, above all, it is a satisfaction to
stand in the presence of that man who has made his
name immortal by his incomparable work of joining two
great seas by means of the Suez Canal—a satisfaction that is
increased by the idea that we are assembled here on a mission of
as great importance. The canal that already proclaims the
genius of M. de Lesseps is a work which will procure the im-
mense benefits of commerce to humanity throughout the gen-
erations which have not yet seen the light of day. And here
I wish to say that the magnificent steamer which has brought
to this shore M. de Lesseps, his interesting family, and the
corpse of able engineers which accompanied him, bore a name
of good augury, the name of La Fayette, the faithful friend
of George Washington, lover of liberty, and staunch apostle
of American Independence.

"Faithful to his promise that the beginning of 1880 would
witness the inauguration of work on the Panama Canal, we
have seen M. de Lesseps begin the year with the event that
will always have a bright place in the pages of history. I refer
to the commencement of a survey for a route of a canal across
the Isthmus, which was begun on the first day of January at
the mouth of the Rio Grande.

"This seems to me the most formidable enterprise, but as I
am only a journalist, whose duty it is to write the facts as
they are presented, and not an engineer, it would not be proper
for me to speak words of criticism touching the nature and
immensity of the obstacles to be surmounted. But I may say
that this is a work of immense importance to humanity, not
alone in our age, but also for the good of others who will
follow us.

"Do not undertake this herculean task for our epoch alone,
but also for posterity. That the canal is to be an international
waterway constitutes in itself a sure guarantee to the world
that it will not be employed by any one power to the detriment
of any other; and the fact that all nationalities are united in
this banquet table proves the desire of the great man who is
here with us this evening to build a canal for the world.
Therefore, these old friends, the United States of America
and fair France, join hands with the Republic of Colombia in
undertaking the task so worthy of their greatest efforts.
“Let the good work go on! M. de Lesseps is, indeed, the man who can carry it on with energy. In doing this he will add another laurel to the crown which he has already won, and, at the same time, he will show to the world the grand spectacle of the joining of two great oceans.

“In this manner will be joined commercially the turbulent Atlantic and the calm waters of the great Pacific. Finally, it is right to recall that the progress and welfare of our age demand a canal, whether it be here, or follow some other route.”

**VAST SUM SPENT.**

For ten years the work went on. In 1892 it was found that the French company had expended the enormous amount of $260,000,000, though only a small portion of the work was completed in comparison with what was left to be done. In 1894 the company reorganized with a capital of about $13,-000,000, and also had its concession extended to 1910. In 1899 about $8,000,000 of the capital stock of the reorganized company was expended and not much work done.

**ELOQUENT MUTE EVIDENCES.**

Mute but eloquent evidences of the work and failure of the French can be seen all along the line from Colon to Panama. As the observant eye gazes here and there upon rust-covered cars and engines, stretching at times to the distance of half a mile in length, a peculiar tinge of sadness fills the mind. Look there at those decayed machinery embedded in the earth with tropical vines and trees growing upon and around them! What unwritten truth do they tell? Even by the swift current of the Chagres River, rust-covered dredges are to be seen in its banks. Are not these mute memories of the past, the shattered hopes of the French? What was the cause of the failure of the New French Canal Company? The answer is, “bad management!”

**SOURCE OF FRENCH COMPANY’S MEANS.**

It is estimated that about $400,000,000 was raised to construct the French Panama Canal; that the money came from
the pockets of the humble French peasant as well as from the wealthy. Gold flowed like a stream into the coffers of the French Company from all classes.

BAD MANAGEMENT AND RECKLESS EXPENDITURE.

The author has talked with men on the Isthmus who said they had friends and acquaintances, during the time of the French, whose names were on half a dozen payrolls at the same time. It was a secret understanding between certain men and the time-keepers. Those men with their names on various payrolls would slip from gang to gang each day, or as often as it was possible to do so, and the foreman would mark them "present." On pay days they would again slip from gang to gang and draw their pay, then divide the spoil with the time-keepers and foremen.

Never was money more recklessly spent! When the French Company asked for six million dollars, they received almost twice as much. But the vast sums at their disposal led to graft and extravagance. It is said that Ferdinand M. de Lesseps erected a mansion at the cost of $100,000 at one place, and at La Boca he built a summer home at a cost of $150,000. He received $50,000 per year salary, and $50 per day extra for traveling expenses. At that time he traveled in his own private car which was built at the cost of $34,000.

Stables at his disposal cost upward of $500,000; hospital facilities under M. de Lesseps' management cost between six and seven millions. There was nothing done to prevent the spread of disease, but ample accommodation was made to take care of those who were sick. As an evidence of the reckless way money was spent, it is said, 15,000 torchlights were bought and stored away which were intended to be used for illumination at the completion of the Panama Canal. Necessary and unneeded implements of all description were purchased for the work. So numerous and variegated are the machineries left on the Isthmus by the French that no American engineer has been able to tell for what use some of them were intended.
SALE AND TRANSFER OF THE FRENCH CANAL COMPANY.

The Government of the United States purchased the rights and properties of the French Canal Company for $40,000,000. This sale was finally authorized by the stockholders of that company on April 23, 1904, and the following instrument of conveyance was ratified at the said meeting on that date:

"Now, therefore, we, the New Panama Canal Company, represented by Messrs. Marius Bo and Albert Rischmann, in consideration of the payment of the sum of forty million dollars in gold coin of the United States of America to said company on its order or demand, contemporaneously with the delivery of this present conveyance to the two representatives of the United States of America first above mentioned, and the delivery to them of its property in Paris, and the certificates of said Panama Railroad shares (the property of the company not being understood to include the treasury assets of the company, including deposits of money, outstanding credits and investments in bonds), and the delivery upon the Isthmus of Panama, to an agent of the United States of America, designated by them, or by the Attorney-General of the United States of America, of the remainder of its rights and properties, do hereby acknowledge and confirm the said sale, and do grant, sell and assign, transfer and set over to the United States of America absolutely, in full ownership, the totality, without exception, of the company's property and rights on the Isthmus of Panama and its maps and archives at Paris."

When the United States bought the right and property from the French, it is said there were 115 store-houses filled with all kinds of earth-digging machines, 15 large warehouses, 57 barges, 38 yawls, 21 steam launches, 273 dron cranes, 800 pumps, 149 rock drills and dredges and numerous carts, steam engines and other unnamed implements.

HOW THE DIGGING IS CONDUCTED NOW.

The work of digging the canal under the Americans is conducted on a scientific plan. The entire force of workers is divided into three parts, namely, the Atlantic Division, the
Central Division and the Pacific Division. The work is being done in sections. The Culebra Cut and the Gatun Dam are the two points where the greatest engineering skill has been confined.
Cock-fight to the Finish—Colon, Isthmus of Panama.

Grand Central Hotel and Park—Panama.
CHAPTER VIII.

SAD AND DEPLORABLE CONDITION OF LABORERS ON THE Isthmus.

"Are you laborers well paid for your work?" I asked an intelligent Barbadian with whom I talked at Gatun.

"No sir," he said emphatically, "most of us were told at home that we would get on the Isthmus 'plenty work and good pay,' but we have been sadly disappointed. An Isthmian Canal agent told us at home that able-bodied men as I am could get from two to five dollars per day working at the canal. But I have not received a dollar per day yet since I came to this Isthmus, nearly eighteen months ago.

"But while the wages is small a fellow might try to get along, if these bosses would treat a man as if he were a living being. But instead you are 'cursed' at and treated like beasts all the time. We poor West Indians have got it to the very limit of endurance. In that haughty and domineering way, you are ordered, sometimes knocked down, kicked, and if your manhood resents the inhuman treatment given to you, then you are up against it like a ship tossed by an angry sea.

"I have known friends of mine who were beaten on the train and pushed off after paying his fare. But what can one do in such instances? You have practically no redress. Is it that way the white people treat colored people in America? Heavens! I don't know how they could have endured it. Certainly, I am trying to bear it for the time being, but God knows that as soon as I can save enough to pay my way home, this place will never see my face, no sir, never! never!"

"No! in America the colored people are treated first-class. Have you not read that in America we have more wealthy and great negroes than in any other country in the world? Why, to be sure. But they have the Constitution to back them up. Certainly, I have heard that the colored people in the far Southern States have a hard time sometimes, but that spirit of hate and bitterness is yearly dying out. I guess you
colored people from the West Indies do not understand the Americans, but they are fine people—the most liberal in the world," I replied.

“Well, I won’t contradict you, sir, but from what I have seen of those with whom we have to contend here on the Isthmus, I—I—I, well—well. Probably they pick these out and send them down here purposely. There are a few fine men among them, but that class can be counted upon the fingers of one hand. And with all the bad treatment, they don’t expect you to say a word; if you do, then you run a big risk of being reported and then arrested for something. And then, heaven smile on you, for when a complaint is lodged against a colored man here, nothing saves him from jail, and jail sentence here! ah! ah! when a poor negro serves three months here in jail, I believe he should be immuned from any future punishment, either now or after death, however black his sins might be.

“Well, I know each month millions are spent for canal work, and a big payroll is audited, but the money does not come our way, because we get only 20 cents balboa an hour for labor or ten cents American money. And we work only eight hours per day, which makes the earnings of a laborer only 80 cents per day. Out of that amount the Commission takes 30 cents per day for mess, as they compel us to eat at the mess kitchen, and whether you eat or do not, the 30 cents are deducted just the same.

“If the laborer is a married man, then he gets his full pay and nothing is deducted from his wages. You can see that at ten cents an hour of eight hours daily that’s 80 cents, and six working days will give a laborer $4.80 per week. At 30 cents per day for seven eating days that’s $2.10 for mess per week. Hence, after deducting our mess bill we have coming to us only $2.70 per week, and at the end of a month of four weeks we get $10.80. But that is when we work all along. And many times we are laid off for several days, no work at all, so that you can’t always depend on the $10.80 per month. Out of this amount we have to pay for clothes washing, buy shoes, clothing, and meet our other incidentals. So
you see, it is so arranged that we cannot make much. It is a
fact that sometimes we make extras, but that does not amount
to very much, and it is not often that extras come our way.”
“But has not the Commission just cause for compelling
laborers to eat at the mess kitchen?” I asked.
“Perhaps it is just from their point of view. They claim
that the laborers will not feed themselves well enough to do
the canal work unless fed with American proteids; but every
reasonable mind knows that each question has two sides. The
Commissioners have printed their side of it in the Canal
Record and other papers. But has anybody heard the poor
laborers’ side of it? Has anything been allowed to go in print
from the second party in this unjust transaction? No! no! Not
a single word!
“Every one knows or ought to know that West Indians have
not been accustomed to feed on American food; their food is
not our food; their manner of making bread is not our man-
ner; taste is not our taste; yet, they have undertaken to regu-
late our palate and forcibly compel us to accept whatever they
feel like giving us to eat. It is true that they give us a West
Indian to cook the food for us, but what is that? I tell you,
sir, it is a pretty serious thing when a man is placed in the
position where somebody else has the say-so for what you
shall eat without any alternative. But we have no voice pro
or con in the matter of what we eat. The Commissioners sim-
ply decide and order that circulars be issued that all might
read their mandate. Hence from time to time there were cir-
culars 1, 2, 3, etc.
“But wait a minute!” said the Barbadian, as he took a Canal
Record and said, “here is one of those orders. Read it!” It
was circular No. 45, in the Canal Record of July 29, 1908.
It reads as follows:

Office of the Disbursing Officer,
Empire, C. Z., July 21, 1908.

Circular No. 45:—

To All Concerned: Effective at once.—Mess kits will be
issued by the stewards at the various kitchens only upon pre-
sentation of a meal ticket with the words "mess kit" written or printed across the face of it, which will be good for a mess kit only. The value of such ticket to be deducted from the laborer's pay in the same manner as meal tickets."

Thirty-four kitchens for West Indian laborers. There were 8,578 unmarried West Indian laborers employed by the Commission May 1, 1908.

"Sir," he continued, "when the order was first issued that all unmarried laborers will be compelled to eat at the mess kitchen, I was at Cristobal and saw men fall in line with their dinner pails, and pass up in order to the cook, with the police standing there to see that discipline was maintained. As the crowd marched up the cook laded out the food and each passed on. Presently the cook says all the food prepared is served and he hadn't anything more. There were men in the line who did not receive a morsel of anything to eat. Well, those poor fellows had either to remain hungry or try to get a mouthful from the more fortunate ones who had something to eat.

"When the food is served, as there is no table provided for West Indians as is done for European laborers, then they scatter about and sit on the grass or on a log or lean against a fence, or crouch under a shed. But whether you get the food or the cook 'runs short,' when pay day comes around, your 30 cents a day is deducted like anyone else. Well, as is natural to expect, many of the laborers refused to accept such treatment. That class has no alternative but to 'quit.' Because if you do not eat at the mess kitchen, you are not allowed to sleep in the camp. Yes, if you refuse to eat what they give you, then you must take bag and baggage. 'No eat, no sleep.' Then, remember, every house belongs to the I. C. Commission. Small private houses cost a fortune. Small rooms in which a person can scarcely stretch himself cost from 20 to 30 dollars per month. Ah! my dear sir, you don't know.

"Well, you talk about Americans being such fine people, what do you have to say about this fact? There now you can see a colored police in helmet and leggins, but he didn't dare to arrest a white man whom he sees breaking the law of
the Zone. If a white man commits an offense and a white police is near, the offender is arrested, but if a colored police alone is present, the white man walks away, as no negro police is allowed to arrest white people."

"Do you mean that?" I asked.

"You can ask any one on the Zone, sir, and you will find what I said on that point to be true. I have never heard nor seen anything like what I have seen here anywhere. Certainly, European laborers are very much better provided for than West Indians. They get from 30 to 40 cents per hour for their labor, doing the same work as we do. They also have tables on which to place their food and benches or chairs on which to sit while eating.

"Then again, if a West Indian laborer gets hurt during the performance of his duty, and his injury is sufficiently serious, he is sent to the hospital, where he remains until he is better. During his stay in the hospital he is not paid a single cent. When he is well again he is made to sign a release or exemption paper. It does not matter how many children the injured laborer has, whether his wife is able to take care of the children or not. This paper of release is to exonerate the Commission or Panama Railroad Company from all blame for the injury the West Indian received during the performance of his duty. If the unfortunate victim loses his hand or foot in the accident, when he signs the release, he is paid one dollar gold, and that's all he gets. But by signing the release, he becomes eligible to get his job again, or some other job under the I. C. C. or P. R. R. If, however, he refuses to sign the paper of release when presented to him, then he gets neither the dollar nor his job. There would be no work for him again.

"I know several persons who got injured at their working places or on the train, and passed through the ordeal of signing release papers before they could get their job again. But what could the poor fellows do? Some people might say, 'I would not sign it, but ah! when starvation stares you in the face, and sometimes you have old mothers and fathers depending upon what you send them occasionally, I tell you, sir, one
is apt to do anything in order to get along. A mouse can't fight a lion. These laborers and that class of colored people that work here are poor. They have no money, and that's the cause which prompted most of them to remain. Then the Americans know that West Indians have no union or organization of any kind among themselves, hence they make good use of this knowledge, and take advantage of the situation. But there is an old adage which says, 'What you save in the barrel is apt to leak through the cock,' and God isn't asleep. They are treating us as if we were not human beings, but they might have to pay double and triple for all these unjust acts before this very Panama Canal gets through."

“Well,” I replied, “am indeed sorry that things are not what they should be, but I can assure you, my good fellow, everything will work out all right by and by. You see, Canal digging is a new attempt for the Americans, and those who are entrusted with the work down here are trying to conduct it on the most economic basis possible. Then, again, they are subjected to a great deal of criticism and blame at home for too extravagant an expenditure of the money. It is quite natural that they would try to save all the money they can. But can you give me the name of anyone who was injured and sent to the hospital and had to sign a release before he could get his job again?”

“Yes, indeed,” he answered, “plenty of them. And I know several instances where people were killed by the train, and the Panama Railroad gave the coffins in which they were buried; in other instances they would give not a single thing, neither coffin nor any money, and friends of the unfortunate victim have to go around and take up collection to bury the dead if he was not a member of some secret society.” He then told me the names and addresses of three victims of accidents who lost limbs and had to sign a release before they could be re-employed.

“I saw some time ago that a Liability Act was passed in Congress to compensate employes who were injured in the performance of their duties. I think special reference is made in it for employes of the Panama Canal,” I said.
"Well, sir, that might be so, but it might be intended for Americans only."

He then gave me the names of three men and I went away. Some time afterward, as I desired to find the truth, I called at the number given me, but did not find my man. At another time, being in that neighborhood, I visited the house where another of the men lived. He was in. "Is this Enos M——?"

"Yes, sir, I am," he answered.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-five years."

"Were you employed by the Isthmian Canal Commission, and were you ever hurt?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I was employed in the machine shop, and an accident happened to me. This hand (holding out his right hand) was caught in the machine. There was great excitement, but the machine was stopped and I was instantly sent to the hospital. There I remained for many weeks and the doctors amputated three of my fingers. There they are! When I was better and ready to leave a white man brought me a paper and said, 'Enos, sign just on this line here. When you do that there is some money for you.' I told him that I did not wish to sign any paper. That as it was not my fault I was injured, I intend to have them to do something for me, as I was maimed and limbless for the rest of my life."

"'Well,' the white American said to me, 'if you do not sign this, you cannot get the job any more, and not only that job, but no other on the Isthmus. I would advise you to sign it, because you have been out of work for quite a while and you need to go out now and start right into working again.'

"Well, as I knew I had no money, I signed the paper and he pulled out two dollars balboa and gave me, which is one dollar gold. I have even tried to get from them a sort of glove for my hand, so that it would look natural, like the other hand, but all my effort has been a failure. However, I am getting along very well, and as I got my job back, I don't mind it too much, for I could have been killed that day like many others who lost their lives trying to earn their bread. So I don't fret and pine over it, as I think that's my luck."
“Did you receive your wages while you were sick in the hospital?”

“No, sir! no! I did not get a red cent,” he said, laughing, “but am glad all the same that I am living.”

“Yes, you are pretty lucky,” I said.

“No, sir,” he said; “I only wish I was. We poor laborers down here dare not have a meeting to discuss our sad condition—at least we cannot hold it anywhere on the Zone. We would be regarded as inciting discontent, and the participants would be ‘fired’ or discharged at once if not arrested.”

“Well,” I replied, “in the States, union is the only thing that prevents the wolf of capital devouring the lamb of labor. You colored people down here have no unions, hence you are compelled to take just what your employer feels like paying you. In Judge Taft’s speech of acceptance as candidate of the Republican party he said: ‘The advantage of union is to give to employes their proper position in a controversy, to enable them to maintain themselves against employers having great capital; they may well unite, because in union there is strength, and without it each individual laborer and employe would be helpless. There is a large body of laborers, however, skilled and unskilled, who are not organized into unions. Their rights before the law are exactly the same as those of the union men, and are to be protected with the same care and watchfulness.’

“Poor colored laborers can’t form any union here. Most of the laborers are here on contract, and they have to do what they are told and accept just what they can get. But it is not the colored laborer alone who feels the sting of American prejudice on the Zone. At a public celebration—I think it was the Fourth of July—Mr. H—, one of the clerks of the Panama Railroad, and his wife, who is white or looks like a white woman, started to see the fireworks. At any such public holidays a rope is stretched on the American side, between Cristobal and Colon, and the Zone policemen stationed at the rope to prevent any colored person from passing in. When this couple arrived at the rope, one of the policemen said, ‘She can pass in, but you can’t pass.’ ‘But she is my wife!’ said the disturbed husband. ‘Wife or no wife!’ replied the police, ‘we
don't allow colored people in there!" Mrs. —— then refused to go in and turned away with her husband, while the police brandished his staff triumphantly. The husband's crushed feeling can better be imagined than described.

The above described incident has been confirmed, as I made it my business to ask the gentleman referred to about it. But the half will never be told! Just think! A day which is celebrated to commemorate "Liberty and Independence" is used on the public highway, on a public occasion, to crush and belittle manhood on account of color, under the flutter of the Stars and Stripes, during the regime of Republican Administration!

In the editorial page of the Baltimore American of May 15, 1909, under the caption "A Canal Zone Clash," the paper contained the following: "The clash of authority which recently occurred between the police force of the Panamanian government seems to indicate that either the respective functions and spheres of operation of the two forces are not properly apprehended, or else there is an antagonistic spirit existing which should be investigated and corrected.

"The Panama police seem to have crossed into the Zone in pursuit of an escaped prisoner, who was probably a canal employee. The invading officers, who were roughly treated and driven out by West Indians, returned later, reinforced and armed with rifles. An open engagement between the Panama police and the canal workers followed, in which two were killed—both belonging to the Zone and both Americans.

"The Zone government is a conjoint arrangement, agreed upon between the government of Panama and that of the United States. The police representing outside authority should probably, in the first instance, have handed over the matter to the Zone authorities. Certainly the two governmental systems, placed as they are in close contiguity at more than a score of different points, should enter into a standing arrangement whereby just such riotous breaches of order would be avoided. There ought not to be a constant danger of clashing authority. The unpleasant occurrence is under investigation, and it is to be anticipated that responsibility for
the affair and punishment for those found to be responsible will be properly placed.”

The tenor of these chapters will assist the intelligent reading public to conclude for themselves. The author, who spent nearly a year studying the conditions on the Canal Zone and adjoining cities, will say: there is a deep-seated and widespread “dislike” if not “hate” in the bosom of the natives for Americans, due principally to color prejudice. That is the pivotal point. Nearly all the Panamanian policemen are colored, and probably ninety per cent. of the population. And such “clashes” are sure to occur until race hate subsides.
Steam Shovel at work in Culebra Cut, showing large rock in mouth of shovel, which takes up two tons at mouthful, and a new mouthful every 16 seconds.
CHAPTER IX.

EFFORTS TO UPLIFT THE LABORERS AND AMELIORATE THEIR CONDITION.

Letters to that effect sent to and received from Miss Gertrude Beeks, Secretary of the National Civic Federation of New York; Mr. Charles R. Towson, International Secretary of the Young Men’s Christian Association; Mr. A. Bruce Minear, Secretary of the Y. M. C. A. on the Canal Zone; Col. George W. Goethals, Chief Engineer and Chairman of the Isthmian Canal Commission.

After visiting several Negro camps along the line, and noticing their environments, I decided to make an effort to do something, if possible, to ameliorate their condition. By this time I had received a letter from Miss Gertrude Beeks, secretary of the National Civic Federation of New York, in which, among other things, she admitted that the condition of the colored laborers on the Isthmus was pitiable. Part of her letter says:

“We have no work upon the Isthmus beyond that of investigating the conditions, which was done by me, and the recommendation of our Miss Boswell to the War Department for the purpose of organizing women’s clubs. I am sending you a copy of my report. You are perfectly correct in thinking that the majority of the laborers belong to the colored race, and they could be assisted and uplifted. They are very desolate now, and something should be done for them.”

Miss Beeks, be it remembered, visited the Isthmus and saw the condition she admits in the above communication. I returned to my stopping place after I had visited the secretary of the Y. M. C. A. at Cristobal, to call his attention to the pitiable condition of the colored laborers very near him, but unfortunately I did not find him at home. I then replied to Miss Beeks’ letter as follows:
Miss Gertrude Beeks,
Secretary National Civic Federation,
281 Fourth Avenue, New York.

DEAR MADAM:

Your letter directed to my Baltimore address has been forwarded to me today, and from its contents I hasten to reply. I arrived on the Isthmus February 5th, and visited many negro camps and inquired into the race affairs. I am sorry to say that the status and condition of the negro people employed in digging the canal, to say the least, is pitiable and deplorable in many instances. I am perfectly aware that these colored people are aliens to the United States Government, yet the greater number of them came to the Zone through the inducements of the agents of the Isthmian Canal Commission, who were sent expressly to the West Indian Islands for the purpose of inducing laborers to come to the Isthmus and work. Since they comply to these inducements and come, should they not be treated, then, with some consideration? Yet, in many instances, they are treated as brutes, with all the benefits of the doubt in favor of the dumb animals.

Of course, I am not criticising the Isthmian Canal Commission. I believe they are honest men and doing the best they can to make for themselves a record. But it should be remembered that the American people are making history for future generations to read in the construction of this Panama Canal, and anything like fair treatment for those who, through poor circumstances, must do the real hard work of digging, would be looked upon approvingly by the gazing world.

Through the National Civic Federation thousands of dollars of the Nation's money have been used for Y. M. C. A., yet there is not a single Y. M. C. A. for the thousands of colored and needy men. There is no Epworth League or Christian Endeavor where Christian influences might be received even on Sundays.

While the good laws of the Canal Zone forbid gambling, concubinage and other flagrant evils, yet adjacent to Cristobal is Colon, where profanity in its worst and most shameful form is indulged in. Sunday desecration, gambling, vulgar and vile language are the only recreation for Sundays. At such a place, I think, some light house of Christian influence should be erected to induce the negroes to live right, as has been done for the white people all along the line.

Copies of letters I am sending to the secretary of the Y. M. C. A. at Cristobal and the officers of the I. C. C., asking that something be done for the needy colored people, are herewith enclosed for your examination.

I have also written to Mr. Moorland, international secretary of the Colored Y. M. C. A. at Washington, D. C., asking him to use his influence in bringing about the establishment of a colored Y. M. C. A. at
Cristobal, where the thousands of immigrants are dumped and dispersed for work on the Zone.

As the laborers will be the sinews for digging the canal, I trust you will use your influence, as secretary of The National Civic Federation, for their uplift and betterment in this important and essential direction. Thanking you in advance for your kindness, I am,

Yours very truly,

D. N. E. C.

I again visited the white Y. M. C. A. at Cristobal and spoke with the local secretary on the necessity of helping and uplifting the colored canal workers in the establishment of a Y. M. C. A. at Cristobal for needy men. He intimated that the Salvation Army had charge of the colored people's work, as the Negroes preferred the drum and the Salvation Army uniform.

"Is that so?" I asked in wonder. "But when did the Salvation Army and the Y. M. C. A. organizations consolidate? Are they working as one here?"

"Well, not exactly, but——"
"Did the Isthmian Canal Commission build that house for the Salvation Army?" I asked.
"I think they did, but am not exactly sure about that. Probably the captain could tell you."

"Well," said I, "if they did it, then the money must be taken from the government appropriations, and that's the same old church and state coming together again. And that Salvation Army building is considered the Negroes' clubhouse, or Y. M. C. A., for I understand they work exclusively among the colored people, and the house is built in the Negro section."

"Well, I don't know exactly, but the chief secretary of the Y. M. C. A. at Culebra could tell better."

"What is his name?"

"Mr. A. Bruce Minear," he replied. "He will be here in Cristobal a few days hence, and I shall speak to him on the subject."

After a few days, I received a letter from the colored Y. M. C. A. secretary at Washington, D. C., and he urged me to get in touch with Mr. Minear and ask him to use his influence for the establishment of the Association among the needy colored men on the Isthmus. I then wrote the following letter:
Mr. A. Bruce Minear,
Secretary Y. M. C. A., Culebra, C. Z.

Dear Sir:

I received a letter from Mr. J. E. Moorland, international secretary of the Colored Branch of the Y. M. C. A., who resides in Washington, D. C. He advised me to get in touch with you relative to establishing colored Y. M. C. A. among the needy men on the Zone.

Circumstances might alter the scale of individuals, rich or poor, white or colored, but, as you know, man is a social being, irrespective of his position, wealth, color or nationality; hence, from whatever viewpoint of the compass we look at it, God’s wisdom will be seen in His distribution to the rich and poor, and also of the variety of the races of men. The Christianity which emanated from Christ, however, cannot and should not be circumscribed.

If a heathen servant be employed as domestic by a Christian, that Christian should shed the light of salvation to the alien servant. Poor circumstances brought thousands of laborers to work, practically as domestics, on American territory on the Zone, under American rule and supervision. The transition is like an alien servant advertised for and hired in a home. Should not such help be treated kindly and with humane and Christian consideration?

But Mr. Secretary please remember that the treaty between Panama and the United States of America grants the latter “perpetual retention” of the Canal Zone, and I venture to say that seven-tenths of the colored influx, if treated with consideration, will remain on the Zone and become future American citizens.

The Y. M C. A. organization was intended to save and uplift men. Why give additional food to a person who is already filled and well supplied? Why not give some of the food to the hungry and needy ones dying for hunger before your eyes? Don’t you think a little of the food given to the latter class would be better relished and appreciated?

On one hand, ample provisions are made on the Zone for the few thousand whites residing there. They have Y. M. C. A., women’s clubs, places of amusement and recreation and other essential facilities. Yes, it is eminently fitting to provide for those who left home in the States to do this giant and stupendous task of canal digging. I have not a word of criticism to offer for the splendid way in which provision is made for the whites.

But, Mr. Secretary, on the other hand, look at the thousands of colored people who are the hewers of wood and the drawers of water in the same execution of digging the canal! View how they are crowded into camps, packed into huts and quarters like sardines in a tin, practically homeless, desolate and seemingly friendless! They have no association of any kind, no chaplain as you have, no Christian influence, no woman’s club, no places of recreation, no Y. M. C. A., no Epworth League!
To God only they must look and on your charity depend for what they receive beside their small wages as "Silver Employees." They are wholly dependent upon their employers as the alien servant is upon his master. Why not offer them some crumbs, as you see and know they are hungry? Left alone, as they are, to paddle their own canoe, do we wonder that the ballrooms and gambling dens in the adjacent towns are overcrowded with them? Is it not for that same human love of association why they crowd these dens of sin?

Can we blame youths to drift away in dens of vice to find a "little society," even though their mothers' prayers and tears are fresh in their minds, and whose advice they still recall? It is only a few weeks ago since they left home, but for lack of pastime and recreation they are drifting already! Why is it? Is it not because there is not a single place where these unfortunate colored youths can spend a few moments of social and Christian uplift? Hence, with the poet we ask:

"Can we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high,  
Can we to those who need it the lamp of light deny?"

Such a denial will be a reproach to the One we profess; a blot on American Christianity, hospitality and generosity; a mockery of our theory of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. But, beside the alien colored man, there are some colored Americans here, and others will come. Will they be accorded the privileges their white fellow-citizens enjoy, or must they also be left to the tender mercy of Satan to roam without the restraint afforded by the Y. M. C. A.?

Mr. Secretary, the colored race is never hard to satisfy. They will be contented to creep before walking. Help them to get one building for Y. M. C. A., and let it be situated at or near the port where the ingress and egress of the laborers occur. The immigrants land and embark at Colon, hence the Fox River district territory, in the vicinity of the negro schoolhouse, would be a proper place. Let it be situated where the most good can be accomplished, that some friendless colored man might receive therefrom glimmers of light to brighten his pathway and encourage his heart in this unfriendly Zone.

Very respectfully yours,

D. N. E. C.

After a few days Mr. Minear called at my stopping place to see me. I found him to be a refined and very courteous gentleman. "What do you think of the prospect of the colored people getting a building for Y. M. C. A.?” I asked.

"Well,” he replied, "to be frank, I am doubtful about it. We have four large buildings for white Y. M. C. A. purposes along the Line, and hope to have another soon, if the application be favorably considered.”
"About how much does one of the Y. M. C. A. buildings cost?" I asked, "and from where is the money obtained for such buildings' maintenance?"

"The Isthmian Canal Commission erects the buildings and turns them over to the Association," he replied, "and the principal source of their maintenance comes from membership fees and dues, or whatever gratuitous donation or benevolent offers we might receive from time to time. If you have any rich or wealthy person in the States interested in the colored people here, probably the Commission would give a building. However, I will speak to the chief men on the subject and find out if anything can be done along that line, as it is very needful."

After Mr. Minear left I decided to bring the matter directly to Col. George W. Goethals' attention. He was then chairman of the Isthmian Canal Commission and chief of the corps of engineers. I then sent him the following letter:

Cristobal, C. Z., April 7, 1908.

Col. George W. Goethals,
Culebra, Canal Zone.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed please find the copy of a letter which I sent to Mr. A. B. Minear, relative to the establishment of a colored Y. M. C. A. on the Zone. Mr. Minear called to see me a few days ago, but he was not certain what the Isthmian Canal Commission would do in the matter, hence I take this step of bringing the subject before you directly. Permit me to thank you in advance for your kindness.

Very truly yours,

D. N. E. C.

After a few days I received the following reply:

April 10, 1908.

D. N. E. Campbell, M. D.,
Cristobal, C. Z.

Sir:

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of April 7th, enclosing copy of a letter from you to Mr. A. Bruce Minear, relative to the establishment of a colored Young Men's Christian Association on the Zone. In reply I beg to say that the clubhouses on the Isthmus were constructed by the Commission for the benefit of white American employees, and are operating under the direction of the Y. M. C. A. secretaries. It was not the intention to construct clubhouses for all em-
ployes on the Isthmus, and, as the colored Americans connected with
the work are so few and scattered, the Commission would not be jus-
tified in expending money on clubhouses for their use. Respectfully,

George W. Goethals,
Chairman and Chief Engineer.

Dep. — O. Copy to Mr. A. Bruce Minear.

I also sent the following letter to the Secretary of the Inter-
national Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association:

Mr. Charles R. Towson,
3 West 29th Street, New York City.

My Dear Sir:

I received a letter yesterday from Miss Gertrude Beeks, secretary of the
National Civic Federation, which was sent to my address at Baltimore, Md., and forwarded here to me. In it she states that she had spoken
to you relative to my letter, and that Mr. Hicks was sent here to as-
certain what could be done. I inquired at the Association at Cristobal
concerning Mr. Hicks, but was informed that he returned to New York
after remaining about a week on the Zone. You will pardon me, there-
fore, for writing to you.

In the States the very best results are obtained where professors,
preachers, teachers and others labor among their own race. It will be
so in every community. Prejudice and racial difference are too pro-
nounced for the white man to get into the depth of the colored man's
soul, or vice versa. Schools, churches, comfortable residences, Y. M. C. A., which afford avenues for recreation and amusement, have been es-
established along the Zone for the white people. From all these places
the colored race is excluded with the exception of public school facili-
ties. * * * I am only a private volunteer, but I have found the
situation an unpleasant one for colored people. They are not citizens
of the United States, and hence they can make no claim for comforts.
To God they must look and on charity depend for what they receive.
But they are furnishing the labor for the stupendous task of digging
the canal, and from the climatic peculiarities of this place these very
West Indians will be the mainstay for digging this canal. They are
Silver Employes, and get very little wages. They, therefore, should be
encouraged, for, to say the least, it is fierce for colored laborers here.

Yours truly,

D. N. E. C.

My effort thus far was unsuccessful, and I decided to desist
from writing on the subject. But hope was not entirely gone,
as I knew something should and would be done for the uplift
and help of so many thousands of laborers. After some days
I received the following reply:
REV. N. E. CAMPBELL, Cristobal, C. Z.

My Dear Sir: After receiving your letter of February 29th, I conferred with Mr. C. J. Hicks, and learned through him that you are in touch with the secretaries of the Association on the Canal Zone, who are giving some thought to the question of work among the colored men, and we are expecting a tentative report from them shortly; meanwhile, we have taken up the question with the Canal Commissioners, and found that they are not disposed to immediately make any appropriation for the promotion of the work which the Association might desire to inaugurate in behalf of the "silver" employes on the Zone.

I find myself in entire agreement with your proposition that these employes should be encouraged in every possible way, and if a practical plan can be formulated, and the support secured, it would be a privilege for the Association to extend its efforts in this direction. While we can take no definite step at this time, you may be assured that the representatives of the Association will keep the matter in mind, and meanwhile will be glad to have any further information which you can submit.

Cordially yours,

CHAS R. TOWSON.

Up to the time I left the Isthmus no step was taken in the direction to treat the men who are doing the hard work of digging the canal with any reasonable consideration as has been asked to be done. Can anyone wonder then that the Canal Record of January 13, 1909, says:

Subsistence Department.—"The matters pertaining to the Subsistence Department are presented by a letter from the Subsistence Officer under date of November 16, 1908, who states: The attendance in the messes has been falling off from about 4,000 per day the first of August to 3,400 the first of November; the kitchens have been falling off from 6,000 the first day of July to 4,000 the first day of November.

"Under date of September 2, 1908, the Chairman issued instructions that previous instructions from this office requiring that all West Indians show a meal check before they were provided with sleeping quarters, should be rigidly enforced—this with a view of compelling the laborers to eat at the kitchens. It was thought at the time that the enforcement of this order would have the effect of increasing the patronage of the kitchens by about one thousand. The result showed that it had the opposite effect.

"As soon as it was enforced about 1,600 of the laborers went
into the 'bush' altogether, neither eating nor sleeping in Commission houses. It is believed from the report of the Subsistence Officer that a method of feeding West Indians by sale from the commissaries instead of by messes can be met, if it is definitely understood that such action is sanctioned. It is my belief that the only real difficulty presented is that pertaining to the Sanitary Department. The Quartermaster's Department and the Subsistence Department can arrange the quarters and food to fit the circumstances. I am also of the opinion that the time to prevent the West Indians living in the 'bush' has passed. The situation is not theoretical, but an accomplished fact, and it must be dealt with as such. It is not believed that some 16,000 laborers could be driven from their homes into Commission quarters without labor trouble serious enough to interfere with the construction of the Canal.

"In his report for November, the chief Quartermaster states that 345 additional West Indians left Commission quarters during the month, and presumably have moved to native villages or the 'bush.'"

"Notwithstanding this continued movement the number of cases of malaria among the employees admitted to the hospitals has decreased and was lower in November than in any month since August, although the total force has remained practically stationary."

The above is the Commission's Report, but as the laborers cannot speak in the matter, let me say, after talking with hundreds of them, that the "falling off" is due to the treatment the laborers received. And those remaining to endure what they cannot change or cure have accepted the condition simply because they have not the funds with which to pay their way back to their respective homes.

"Our manhood is trampled upon; our speech relative to our rights is forbidden; our just complaints are disregarded; the fact is, we are treated as a herd of goats. It is ten thousand times better to die at our homes in the islands of the seas, without any money at all, than to come to the Isthmus and work under these Americans down here as laborers," said one of a number of West Indians on the eve of sailing home before the Christmas holidays.
President Roosevelt’s visit to Chief Engineer John F. Stevens, November, 1906, at Culebra, Canal Zone.