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What Uncle Sam is Doing at Panama

The letter which follows was written to the Observer from the Canal Zone by Mr. Robert G. Love, formerly of Fort Mill, S. C., now employed in government work on the Panama canal. His description of the work and his conclusions are interesting.

Bas Obispo, Panama, May 26.—Canal, canal, dig, dig, dig! Mar the dirt! Get it out! Rush it out! Shovel it out! Haul it out! Throw it out. Any way to get it out! The Americans are doing it. Here where the valleys are being filled in, the hills removed, the courses of the rivers turned and the mountains made low there are always things which, as Shakespeare would say, "Glad the ear and please the eye"—and vice versa. And when one goes about and sees the great work that is still to be done, and the enormous piles of money that are still to be expended by Uncle Sam in order that a waterway be made from ocean to ocean for the ships of all the nations to pass peacefully through instead of making that long and often perilous and tempestuous voyage around Cape Horn, he is convinced that Uncle Sam is up against the biggest and most expensive job of the years. Even with the rapidly increasing efficiency of the great work is being carried on now, it will take time and toil and bags of money not a few, to make a waterway through these rock-ribbed hills that link the Andes to the Rockies.

Never before has there been so much done on the isthmus as at the present time. Any day it is worth more than dollars to one who has seen it not to come and see how Uncle Sam, who broke loose from England's claims in 1776, who thrashed England again in 1812; who scattered Mexico's armies back in the '40's, and drove Spain home in '98, is waging war against the hills and mountains on the line of the canal and against the deadly diseases common to tropical countries. A different sort of warfare to be sure, but it is being carried on with greatest success, and the canal—then a "thin American's dig, dig, dig till the diggin' aint no more." Simple words but true! "Indeed a mighty conflict is being waged between the defenses of the eternal hills and the stupendous resources of modern engineering."

In the canal prism at San Pablo are three big hills which, back in the '80's, defied the French, but now, even though they stand as grim and defiant as ever, Uncle Sam toucheth them and they smoke. Now and again a charge of dynamite consisting of from twelve to twenty tons is set off at a single blast, and the hills, when the great deep echoes die away, are shattered and crumbled—the strata of strata of rock is shaken and turned about. And thus the hills day by day dwindle slowly and surely away as those huge, hungry monsters called steam shovels gulp and swallow them down

in huge chunks and driven by the controlling hand of man, seem almost human in their way and fiercer than a demon in terrific wrath.

All day the hundreds and hundreds of engines are going; the drills whirring and pounding in such a way as to convince even the most skeptical that some time in the years yet to come the canal will be finished by Uncle Sam's forces—trained soldiers of the tropical. Great work this and with the greatest nation on earth to back it up it is sure to end in triumph.

The French did a great work here—they prepared in the wilderness a way for the canal—but here the defiant forces of the hills and the deadly archers of Yellow Jack brought the great eagle of France from the crags to the clouds and, wounded and suffering, he yielded himself to his enemies. Here the great silent old French dredges, all stained with the storms of the years and with their once powerful machinery gone to ruin tell, patently enough, as do the hundreds and hundreds of French engines and dump cars scattered here and there on every hill and in every jungle, of a great work whose end was failure and of the ruin of many homes and the loss of many lives. The French, for many, even to the poor peasant, put their all, so history tells us, into the canal enterprise and—lost. Everywhere are the grewsome sights of masses of machinery of all kinds cast aside, now worthless, calling to mind the waste of thousands of lives sacrificed in the first effort to dig the canal.

AH, FRANCE. Upon the railroad's byways. The worn-out engines lie. And round their leaning smoke-stacks the nesting swallows fly. All lame and blind and broken. With bearded and twisted steel. With lean and high-pitched boiler. Now quiet and spider wheel. Now shunted off the highways. The forsaken engines lie. Mid grass upon the byways. They watch the trains go by: And to their rusty smoke-stacks the nesting swallows fly.

Much of the old French machinery has been taken to the shop, and repaired and put into use. The little French engines are called "epicycles," as in derision, for all bearded with smoke and grime as they are, they seem almost ludicrous beside the modern engines with their paint and brass-work wonders. "All gay in gala dress." However, thousands of dollars have been saved by Uncle Sam's wisdom in putting into use as many of these little castoff engines and dump cars as possible.

One cannot know now what a great help the canal will be to the commercial world and especially to the lumber merchants of the West, who are now forced to send their cargoes of lumber all around the Horn. The great demand for lumber now made by the great European builders cannot be supplied by the lumber merchants of Washington and Oregon, and they never receive the price

for their lumber that they could demand were the canal finished. It is impossible to send all the lumber by freight across the whole United States to New York and from thence to European markets, so the voyage around the Horn is necessary. On this voyage the lumber is damaged to some extent by the sweating process it goes through with in the hold of the ships, because of the change in climate. Of course there would be the same change—the change from the land of snow-laden firs, to tropical palms—were the canal finished but the change would not last so long and the lumber would not reach European markets in the mouldy and stained condition it does now after the long voyage through southern seas.

One has said that here where Balboa practiced such cruelty among the natives; where Morgan, the fearless buccaneer, made his daring raids and pillaging, Uncle Sam is doing for humanity a work as great as did Livingston when he went into the heart of Africa. When the canal is finished, the trip from ocean to ocean will take only 12 hours, while now the voyage around the whole of South America takes at best from five to six weeks. And often on these voyages even as the yearly records show, fierce storms are encountered, valuable cargoes go down into the deep, and precious lives are lost. Such will not be when the canal is finished. The canal which is completed will be about fifty miles in length—that is the embouchures or mouths of the canal are that distance apart, measuring from the ends of the deep water jetties on the Atlantic, where the tide rises and falls only 18 inches at most, to the deep water entrance on the Pacific where the tide rises 20 feet.

At present there are in the canal zone about 5,000 laborers who have come from all parts of the world, even from far Denmark and the "land of the midnight sun"; from Arabia the land of fine horses, and Australia, the land of sheep and the boomerang! The greater number of colored laborers, however, are from Jamaica, Barbados, Fortunes Island and other of the West Indian islands. The greater number of white laborers are from Spain and they receive the highest wages. The laborers that have given the best satisfaction so far as work goes are the negroes from Fortunes Island. Great, tall, broad-shouldered fellows they are with smiling faces, amiable dispositions, and muscles like the "village smithy" under the spreading chestnut tree," and who, it seems, are seldom fatigued, no matter how hard the work may be.

Laborers receive anywhere from 20 cents Balboa to 40 cents an hour, which is worth just half as much as United States money. Among the laborers there is not so much sickness as in former days for the sanitary work has been of the very best and yellow fever has been driven from his lair. Under the tri-colors of France Yellow Jack wielded his scepter with great power and many were his victims, but under the Stars and Stripes he has been mercilessly driven from home and conquered. The sanitary department has done a wonderful work on the isthmus and many lives have been saved from the clutch of that merciless demon of the tropics. And now, under these conditions there are worse places to live than Panama. For married persons life is far more

pleasant than for bachelors, for married quarters are given free and furniture and all other things that go to make up successful house keeping are furnished, except food. Drinking water is delivered everyday, coal and wood needed for cooking is furnished and electric lights have been installed. Colon, which was once a pest hole of filth and disease, is now a far better and cleaner town than ever before, and the streets which once were places of mud and foul smells, are paved and kept in good condition all the time. When the canal is finished, has taken place in Colon and Panama is the marvel of the present time. Everywhere the corps of workers known as the mosquito brigade go about cutting out larvae—breeding places of the amplexile, or malarial mosquito. Every little pool of water, even if it is no larger than a tea cup and every little stream is covered with drops of crude petroleum oil which means death to the yellow fever mosquito. Everything likely to harbor the mosquito in Panama has been done away with even to collecting and destroying all old rain barrels or cast-away boxes or tin cans—in fact, everything that would hold rain water for rain water is the special breeding place of the yellow fever mosquito. This pest which has been the cause of death and suffering in past years has been banished from the canal zone; and some time ago the officials sent by the Peruvian government to study the extermination methods of this dangerous species of mosquito had to go to the head of the sanitary department and secure one from his laboratory.

But with all the waste places ridged by the sanitary department there are still places in Colon and Panama where foul are the smells of the street and where if one walks he walks in mud. Down in the streets of Panama City, where the fishing smacks come in, there are sights the gruesomeness of which and the filthiness of which the mind of man can hardly grasp. There on the shore, under those foul wharfs, one may see every day thousands of fish rotting in the sun among the wreckage brought in by the tides. Here hundreds of vultures gather and scramble and fight over the rotten fish—all the while gulping strenuously and keeping themselves out of the way of the feet of the fishermen. Where the fish are rotting in the sun there are the birds gathered together. And at times some of these vultures have been known to eat so much that they were unable to fly and as they sat all huddled up on the wreckage under the wharfs the tides came in and drowned them. The tongues of all the nations mingled with the gulping and the whirring of the wings of the vultures is to one who is unaccustomed to such a sickening sight. That human beings can live in such surroundings is almost incredible. In striking contrast with this is the Palace of President Amador, of the Republic of Panama, with the guards in brilliant uniforms and the music of the tinkling fountains, among the fragrant flowers. In the palace they walk on carpets—down on the fish wharfs men and women walk on filth.

But to see real beauty one must leave the city and go out into the jungle. Here are immense palms, the very personification of beauty and grace; charming and enormous ferns, dense thickets of graceful bamboo, the cane so useful to the natives;

insects with strange shapes, and noisy lizards; frigitened and intelligent quans—hundreds of them; birds with strange voices and plumage so gay that they seem like fragments of a disintegrated rainbow; big trees literally covered with beautiful orchids, which set orchid dealers wild with delight. Just recently a flagman on an I. C. C. dump train took three or four children to the States and received for them from some institute in New York \$250. He was fortunate, however, in finding a rare species, for on the isthmus there are more than a hundred kinds of this lovely flower. But most of the flowers on the isthmus have no perfume. Though beautiful in color they have no more fragrance than the flowers on a lady's hat. This perhaps is caused by the excessive rain fall here. The rainy season is on down here now and it is a land of yellow leggings, raincoats and umbrellas—and mud is everywhere. One fellow in a fit of bad temper caused by a thorough drenching said that in Panama it rains into the bung hole of a barrel faster than it can run out both open ends. We smile at his exaggeration, but when it is realized that fifteen feet of water falls in one season, it can be understood that there is certainly a rainy season in Panama, where the fall is not measured by inches, but by feet. In the four years that the Americans have been working on the canal there has fallen from the clouds sixty feet of water. It does rain in Panama!

'Tis no wonder that the Chagres river, which is such a quiet little stream during the dry season, rises to such heights after with merriment in its murmur, rushes along with destructive power in the rainy season. The Chagres river has cost the Panama Railroad more than a million dollars when, constructing this isthmian highway. And many of the many tourists who pass over the road now and view from the car windows the beautiful scenery do not know that in years that have passed thousands of men have looked out on these same green hills and died.

There is a double line now all the way across the isthmus and the tropic is far greater than ever before. The I. C. C. dirt trains, which are always heavily loaded, pass over these lines on their way to the dumps and so close do they run that the "block" operators are kept busy giving signals all day. But when the canal is finished all this old line of the P. R. E. will be under water; and work is now being done to complete a new

road from Colon to Panama to be used when the old line is done away with at the completion of the canal. In Panama one sees many quaint and picturesque, as well as amusing and pathetic, sights. In Panama City, where the streets are so narrow, the houses are so close together that from the upper balcony lovers could tell "the old sweet story" with only a street between. And here, also, where the children of 4 and 8 years, "who never have need of clothes" roll and run about in the dust of the streets one can hear the sweet songs of the Spanish senoritas and the beautiful tones of the Spanish guitars. Panama City is a secret Sodom and Gomorrah of the isthmus, and has 500 saloons, notwithstanding the fact that whiskey and other intoxicants can be bought at almost every store. Truly the battle of the bottle needs to be waged here as it was in Alabama, and in Charlotte. Panama is just about the size of Charlotte, N. C., and we do not wonder that one minister, seeing the awful vice in Panama, said that the only difference between Panama and hell was that Panama had a sea close by and hell did not. Here in the very shadow of the great churches are secret places where crime is committed, and often on Sundays as the beautiful church bells chime out men and women and children go out to the bull fights and witness that most brutal of all sports, so common to Spanish countries—the bloody bull fight where the babe in arms is carried and to conduct which the city authorities send 60 per cent. of its police force.

The present City of Panama is about six miles from old Panama that was pillaged and burned years ago by Morgan, the buccaneer. In old Panama are many beautiful ruins, among them the Santo Domingo church which is over 200 years old. Once there was the sound of joy and life in this old city, but now the spider spins his web in her palaces and the night owl sings his song from her towers. Very different from the ruins of these old palaces are the huts of the natives scattered far on every hill and always made of bamboo. In building such a hut a few posts are set in the ground establishing its size, and to these, by means of vines or twisted bark are attached many horizontal reeds or poles. Always the same style of steep roof is made, consisting of a thick thatch of well-secured palm leaves and for this purpose a species with a broad, fan-like leaf is used. Sometimes the entrance is closed by a hinged door, but a piece of loosely swinging cloth does just as well. No effort is made to bar out chickens or pigs, and in many of these palm-thatched huts or bamboo ones may see a mimicking monkey and one or two chattering parrots around the same table, a dog under the table, pig in the doorway and a cat on the rafters.

All along the line of the canal and scattered far on every hill these little huts are seen. To a newcomer these humble little homes are quite interesting and attractive. All through the week as one passes to and fro over the isthmus he sees scores of half-clad washerwomen sitting on the banks of the Chagres river, or standing waist deep in water, vigorously plying the paddle to piles of white clothes. They clean the clothes without the aid of hot water

and often without the use of soap; but the clothes suffer. They pound the clothes with wooden paddles made for that purpose; rub them with rocks and always use the large stones in the stream for washboards. They pound 'em, and turn 'em and fling 'em and sling and roll 'em and twist 'em till the clothes are worn thin and often ruined. Then, after it all, these washerwomen, with faces all smiling exact prices according to the amount of labor they used in cleaning the clothes and not according to the condition the clothes are in. If they spend three hours in ringing a 50-cent garment they wish 50 cents for the work. Such are the washerwomen of the canal zone—smiling, simple creatures that they are!

These things—all these things that I have mentioned in this sketch—and many more besides are interesting to all on the canal zone, but one could write for a far longer time than I have and not tell of all that is being done here. To those who would know more—to those who would get a better conception of how Uncle Sam is doing things in the "big ditch"—"just come and see." There's nothing like seeing for yourself, you know. ROBERT G. LEE.

Blackberry Pie. Monroe Enquirer. It holds a place in the estimation of all lovers of good things to eat that no other produce of land or sea occupies. Blackberry pie bridges the chasm between the millionaire and the pauper. It is found on the mahogany table of the haughty society leader and on the oil-cloth covered pine table of the lowly washer-woman. It is on the bill of fare of the grandest hotel and is fed to the inmates of the poor house. The rich man who rides in his gasoline buggy and the poor tramp who rides the yods under the freight cars or steps from cross-tie to cross-tie in the blistering sun meet on a common level at the lunch counter and both order blackberry pie. In a word blackberry pie is the one article of diet which makes the whole world kin. Blackberry time, good folks, is here.

ANONYMOUS. By the roadside on the hillside in Kentucky all is still. For the only damp refreshment must be dipped up from the rill. No 'th C'ina's stately oler gives his soul a shove. And discuss, local option with the South. It is useless at the fountain to be wretched of the eye. For the cocktail glass is dusty and the South is going dry.

All the nightcaps now have tassels and are worn upon the head. Not the nightcaps that were taken when nobody went to bed. And the breeches above the bluegrass is as solemn as is death. For it bears the possum's clove-tang on its odoriferous breast; And each man own walk a chalkline when the stars are in the sky. For the grassless law is broken and the South is going dry.

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