

OUR CHINESE AT PANAMA

UNCLE SAM'S TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED COOLIES AND HOW THEY WILL BE CHOSEN.

(Special Correspondence of the Desert News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

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WASHINGTON, D. C., Oct. 16. —Within a few months Uncle Sam will have 2,500 Chinese coolies working on the Panama canal.

They will be brought across the ocean by contract and will be subject to rigid medical inspection before leaving China for Panama. While at Panama their health will be carefully watched, their sanitary conditions will be better than at home, and the probability is that they will solve the labor problem there. Chinese coolies were imported during the building of the Panama railroad, but no regard was paid to their health, and in the malarious conditions which then prevailed they died by hundreds. At one time an epidemic of scurvy broke out among them, and so many killed themselves at one place along the road that the station there got the name of "Mat-sick," which means "dead Chinaman."

THE CHINESE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Rey. Taft is anxious to throw all safeguards about the Chinese and to protect them in every possible way not only as to their health, but as to impositions of any kind. The conditions of introduction will be about the same as those now employed in bringing coolies from China to South Africa to satisfy the labor famine which exists there. The gold mines of the Transvaal have been short of workmen. The East Indians who were imported are not a success, and the Kaffirs, who have done a great deal of work up to this time, are growing more and more unreliable from year to year. They will work only when they are hungry, and, as their wages are few, they can get enough to satisfy them by laboring from one-third to one-half the time. The result is they are idle from two to eight months every year, and the operators of the mines never know when a gang will leave in a body.

It was in 1904 that the Transvaal began to import Chinese coolies. It has not brought in 30 or more shiploads, containing altogether about 50,000 Chinese. Of these more than two-thirds have been taken from north China, of which less than one in 100 had died from sickness.

CHOOSING COOLIES FOR PANAMA.

Our coolies will be secured after the same method that the British used to get coolies for South Africa. The South African Chinese were gathered by the English mercantile firms in China, who received certain sums for every sound, healthy coolie delivered at the port of embarkation. We shall have to make arrangements with the government at Peking and our coolies will be carefully examined by doctors again and again before they are shipped. Their first examination will be made by the American medical missionary nearest home, and the others by the doctors at the ports. Barracks will probably be built at the place of embarkation to store the coolies until the ships are ready to take them, and the men will be gone over again and again by the doctors. Their eyesight and hearing will be inspected and a rigid physical examination made. Before the latter, each coolie will be thoroughly scrubbed with soap and warm water, and after the examination he will be vaccinated, photographed and tagged with a card corresponding to his letter of identification. Before he signs a contract he will be made to understand just what that contract is, and that he signs it only of his own volition. In this he will be protected by the Chinese government officials, who will ask him all sorts of questions to see that he knows just what he is doing. Here are some of the questions which will be put to him:

"Where are you going? How long will it take you to reach Panama? What will you do when you arrive there? What kind of work can you do? Can you leave money in China for your family? How much will you leave? How many hours a day will you work at Panama? How many days per week? Do you go of your own free will? etc., etc."

If the Chinese coolie answers these questions so that the government official knows that he understands his contract, he will be passed on into the gang and registered for embarkation, but before he will be allowed to go the official will say:

"Now if there is any coolie here who regrets having come, let him step to the front. Any man who does not wish to go to Panama is still at perfect liberty to go home, if he so chooses, and there will be no punishment for him and no money to pay for having changed his mind. The only requirement is that he leave this port within 24 hours."

TAGGED WITH LEAD DISKS.

At the final inspection each Chinese will receive a lead disk stamped with the number of his identification card and contract. This he will carry with him to Panama, and it will be probably used by him from day to day in collecting his wages. Before he goes on board ship, however, he will have to pass a final medical examination. For this several hundred coolies will be brought into a large hall at a time, and each must then be clad only in a piece of string and his paper tag. The men will be taken one by one into an adjoining room to be examined by the doctors and by Chinese clerks, who will see whether their physical appearance corresponds with their identification tags. If they are found correct the men will pass on into a third room, where there is a tank of warm water in which he must wash off the last dust of China from his body. He will then go on into a dressing room to put on new, clean clothes and perhaps a uniform furnished by the contractors of the Panama canal. It is here that the coolie changes his paper tag for a lead disk, and here he gets his first payment of a month's wages, perhaps in advance, so that he may settle his last bills in China before saying goodbye to his family and going on board.

THE WAGES OF THE CHINESE.

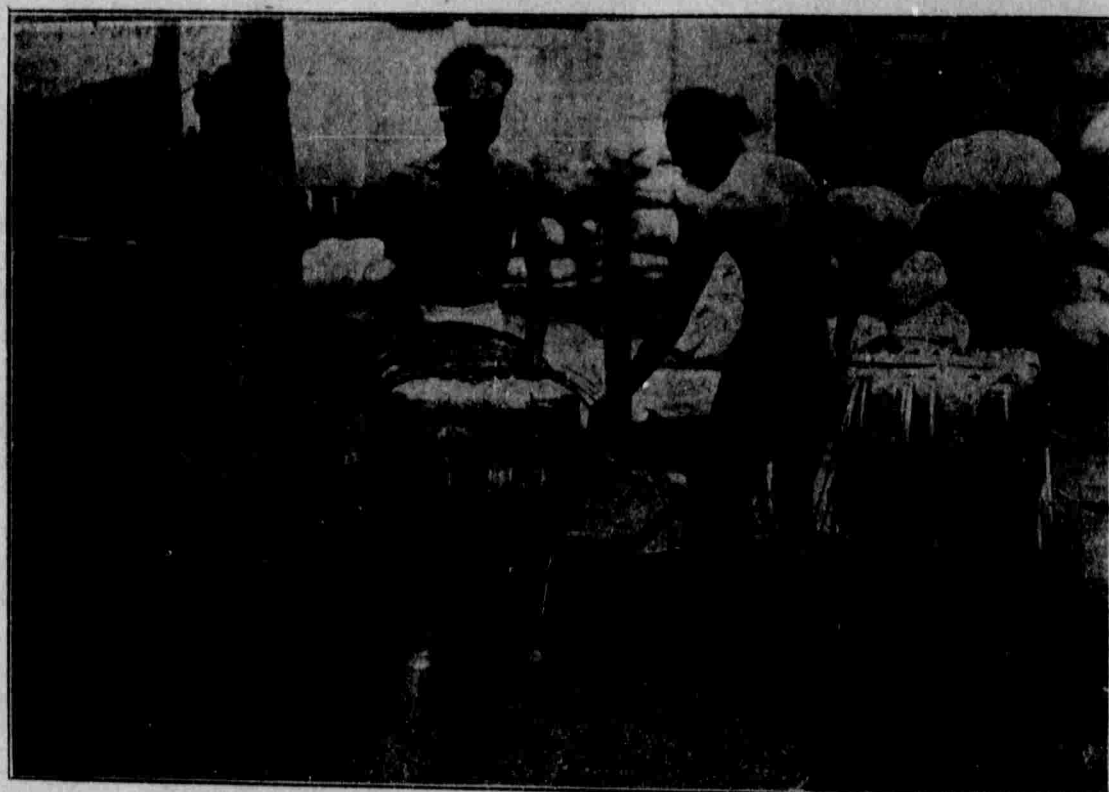
The Chinese coolies who have gone to Africa are getting from \$7 to \$12 a day and food; and it is hardly probable that those who come to Panama will be paid less than \$1 per day, although they will probably feed themselves. They will get more and more as the work goes on; for, as I shall show further on in this letter, they understand union methods and will be able to raise their wages to the highest notch.

A dollar a day, however, is a big thing for a coolie fresh from China. It is 10 times as much as he could make at home. If our common laborer, who is now receiving \$1.50 or \$2 a day, had a similar increase, he would be getting from \$15 to \$20 a day. While I was at the city of Fuchow, in China, some time ago, I was told that the daily wages of masons were 15 cents, and that the best carpenters received 20 cents. Skilled Chinese masons and carpenters on the Panama canal will eventually get from 10 to 15 times these sums, and then be not half as well paid for their 10 hours' work as our eight-hour men who do similar business here.

Women tea pickers in China get something like 2 cents a day, and those engaged in making grass cloth, a beautiful goods much like silk, receive about 3 cents from daylight to dark. An old missionary told me that he could get 10 men to work a whole day for him for \$1, and out of that sum 10 per cent would be given to the man who did the hiring. In some parts of China ordinary field hands get 3 or 4 cents a day with food, and skilled workmen less than 10 cents. This is, of course, in the interior, where wages have not been affected by the modern progress movements.

Professional men are paid similarly low wages. In almost any Chinese city you can get 50 theater actors to

The Wages Of The Celestials At Home And Abroad—They Will Multiply Their Salaries By Ten—Men And Women Who Work From 2 To 5 Cents A Day—Chinese Trade Unions And How They May Affect Our Canal Labor—Will The Coolies Bite The Contractors To Death—How The Chinese Have Monopolized Labor In The Philippines, Siam, Hawaii, Singapore And Other Far-away Lands—Their Future On The Isthmus



CHINESE TEA PICKERS WHO GET TEN CENTS A DAY WAGES.

play 48 hours for 30 simoleons, and in the backwoods of China a doctor will charge you 30 cents a visit and think himself well paid.

In the factories wages are very low. There are about 20,000 silk hands in the mills at Shanghai, and among them are children who work for 3 cents a day and women weavers who get 5 cents. I went through a large factory employing hundreds of females, and the highest paid woman in the whole establishment got 26 cents for a 12-hour day. I also went through the cotton mills which are now springing up in various parts of China and asked as to the wages. The factory girls at Shanghai were then receiving on the average about 14 cents of our money a day and the poorer hands did not get more than 5 cents. The hours were from 6 until 6, with 30 minutes at noon for lunch. These girls were about the best paid in that part of China, and they thought themselves lucky to get the job.

CHINESE UNIONS AT PANAMA.

The coolies will probably organize their own unions at Panama, and that soon after their arrival. There is no country of the world more honey-combed with trade unions than theirs, and when they go abroad they will carry their union rules with them. This is the case with the Chinese in the Philippines, at Singapore, in Hawaii and in almost every foreign settlement, and is bound to be so at Panama. The labor unions in China are almost as important as are our unions here. During my stay in Tien-

tain some years ago Li Hung Chang was the viceroy of Pechili, and as such he was interested in bringing the Shanghaiwan railroad into Tientsin. He was able to get it only to the banks of the Peiho river opposite that city. He started to build a bridge, when the boatmen's union objected, and he had to put his station on the other side. The boatmen are among the lowest of the Chinese coolies, and Li Hung Chang was the strongest official the celestial empire has ever had; but Li did not dare to antagonize the boatmen.

Another strong union is that of the wheelbarrow men. They do the freighting of the empire, carting goods and passengers on rude barrows, pushed by hand. There are 5,000 such men in Shanghai, and when they struck not long ago against an increase of license there was as much distress in that city as there was in Chicago at the time of the teamsters' strike.

Another strong union is that of the slop carriers, the men who bring the dish water and other offensive stuff out of the houses and carry it away to be saved for manure. There are no sewers or modern conveniences in most Chinese cities, and these men form one of the most important parts of the laboring element. Not long ago all those employed in the city of Nanking struck on account of the unjust arrest of one of their members. They refused to carry out the slops, and at the end of three days the city stunk to such a degree that the people rose and insisted that their demands be granted.

China has beggars' unions, barbers' unions, and unions of all sorts of factory men. The barbers' union once declared a strike which reached most parts of the empire, and for a time the 200,000,000 men and boys in China went about with their heads looking like black shoe brushes. It is not difficult to shave one's face, but to shave one's head is almost impossible, and the hair of the Chinese grows into bristles on the strike of the barbers. I believe the strike was for a demand that barbers' sons might be admitted to the official examinations, and I understand that it succeeded.

Our first 2,500 Chinese can probably be controlled without much trouble at Panama, but if their number is doubled and quadrupled, as may be the case when the canal is in full swing, a serious strike might cause considerable trouble and even danger of life. There was a strike at Shanghai some years ago against a magistrate there during which the strikers took possession of the unjust official and bit off his ears, and at Suchow there is a record of a strike against an employer who took on more apprentices in rushing an order of gold leaf for the emperor's palace, in which the employees killed the offending capitalist. In this case they bit him to death, each man being forced to take a chew and show that his lips and teeth were bloody before he was permitted to go home from the factory. There were so many men engaged in the biting that only the ringleaders were punished. The Chinese unions regulate the number of apprentices. In some cases they

fix the hours of work—as, for instance, silk weavers are not allowed to work after 9 o'clock in the evening. The ordinary hours, however, are long, and if the work of Panama is to be paid for by the hour there will be no trouble in getting the Chinese to put in at least 10 hours per day.

WHAT THE COOLIES WILL DO ON THE CANAL.

The general idea is that the coolies will be required only for the dirty work on the canal; that they will shovel dirt and be mere diggers of earth and hewers of wood or drawers of water. This will be so at the start; but they will rapidly make their way into all sorts of skilled labor. They can handle machinery almost as well as the American and they are quick to learn.

I have seen Chinese managing steam engines as intelligently as can be done by the best American engineer; and in the gun works near Shanghai they are making the finest of complicated weapons. They are now doing all sorts of work on the Chinese railroads and they can be trained for brakemen, firemen and engineers at Panama. Some of them may become steam shovel men, and among those imported will probably be masons, carpenters and other mechanics.

THE CHINESE ABROAD.

This importation will result in a considerable population of Chinese upon our canal zone. The contractors will provide that the coolies to be carried back home, but many of them will stay, and they will probably have the same positions at Panama that they now hold in the Philippines. They will be the better classes of mechanics among the permanent residents there, and they will do the retail business and petty restaurant business of the zone. They will probably crowd the Panama women out of the laundry work and will monopolize every little trade which pays good money. As it is now, the Chinese practically control the retail business of Panama, and they are to

a large extent the gardeners and chicken raisers of our isthmian possessions. They are intermarrying with the lower classes of the Panamanians and a hybrid race will be the result.

This is the condition all over the world where the Chinese have gone. There are about 100,000 of them in the Philippine islands, and they have steadily intermarried with the Filipinos. They are thirty and most of them have accumulated wealth. The Chinese in Hawaii many of the Chinese have married natives, and one of the richest of the Chinese foreigners lives in Honolulu.

Hongkong is practically made up of Chinese, and the trade of Singapore is controlled by them. There are about a million and a half Chinese abroad in Siam, and they have monopolized the retail business of that country. There are a quarter of a million of them in the Dutch East Indies, and the Dutch have found them such a factor that they have made special laws to prevent them oppressing the natives.

We had in 1900 about 100,000 Chinese in the United States, and the number is now said to be less than 50,000. There are 30,000 in Peru and a large number out the West Indies and also in Korea and Japan. Indeed, John Chinaman is to be found everywhere, and everywhere he is doing well.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

Shown at the battle of Austerlitz, he was the great leader in the world, but his great ambition was to show the world that it is the best of all in the world. A quick eye for Napoleon, Spaulding, Burns, etc., etc. He is now in the world in my family and find it associated for more cheer, headache, corns, etc., anything that can be reached by the most skillful of the world. NEW LACE AND NEW NET WAISTS, the richest effects found anywhere, are here.

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The Charlton Shop

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It Will Pay You to See **SAL SICKLE**

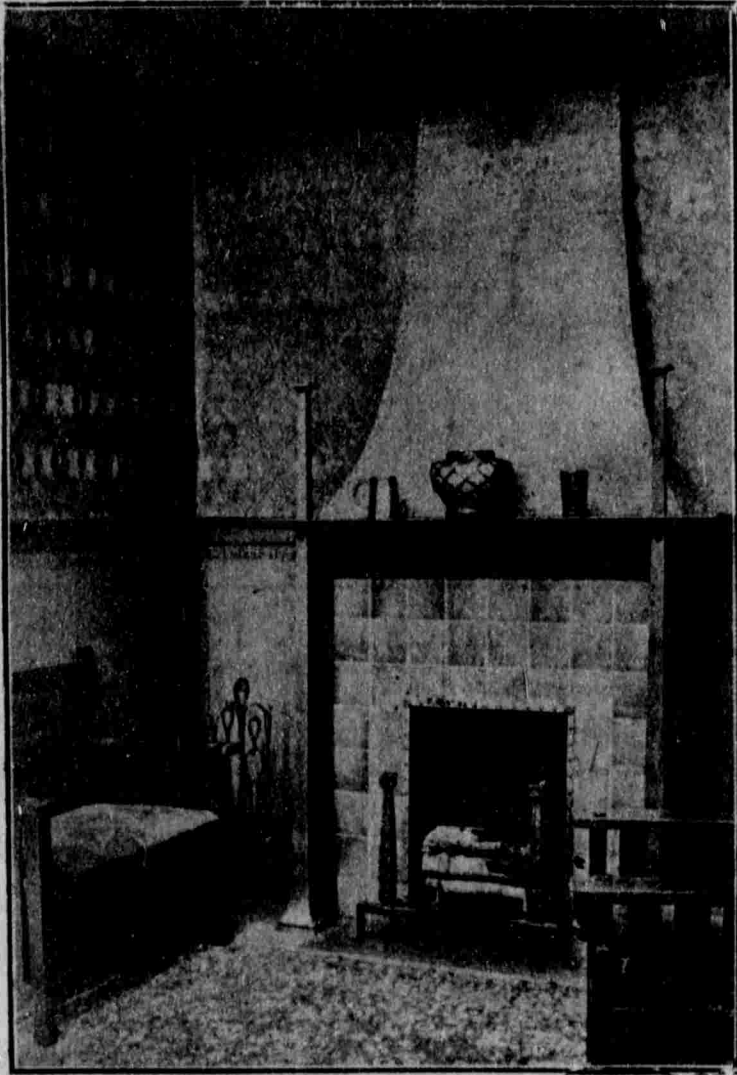
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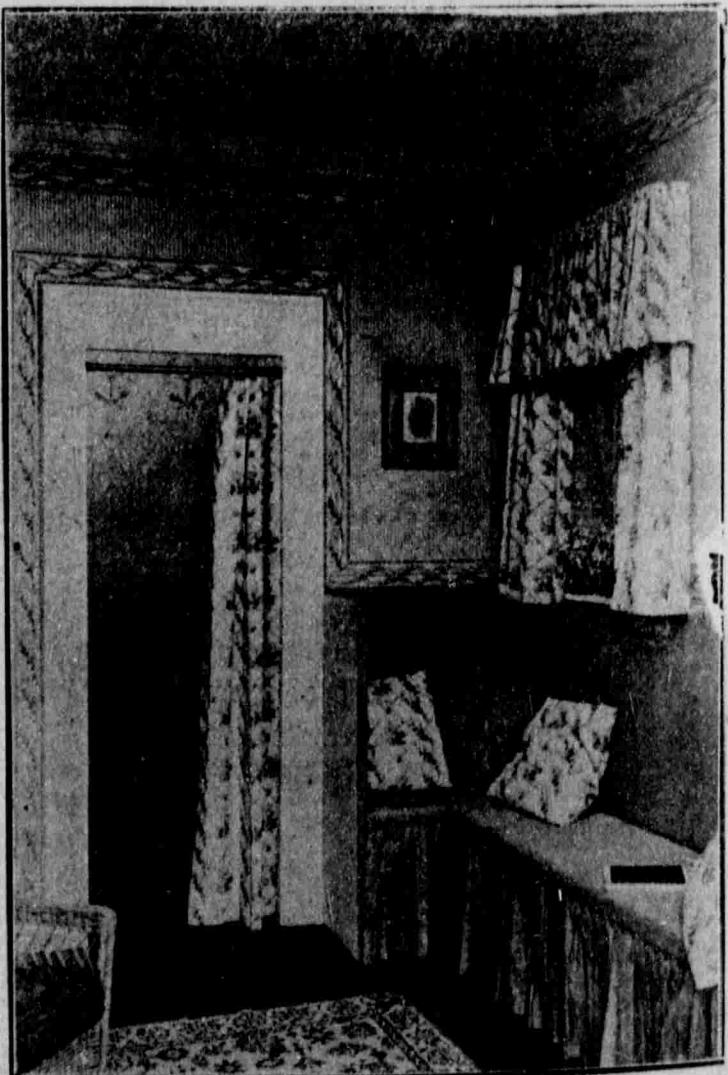
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