

# PANAMA AS IT IS

THEODORE P. SHONTS GIVES FRANK G. CARPENTER SOME PLAIN FACTS AS TO THE WORK.

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

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WASHINGTON, D. C.—The people would like to know just what Uncle Sam is doing at Panama.

I made this remark to Mr. Theodore P. Shonts, the chairman of the isthmian canal commission as we chatted together in his office near the war department not long ago. In reply Mr. Shonts brought out a lot of maps and we traveled together across the canal zone inspecting the work. The war department receives weekly reports as to just what is going on and any changes of note are recorded by cable.

My first question was as to whether the dirt had really begun to fly.

"In one sense it has," replied Mr. Shonts, "and in another sense it has not. The work of the canal construction is properly divided into two parts. One is the getting ready to build and the other is actually doing the work. The getting ready is what we are doing now and we are rapidly advancing in that respect. We are making the isthmian healthy, housing our men, building terminals, railway tracks and yards and working out a large number of engineering problems. In this sense the dirt has begun to fly, as far as is possible in connection with that preparation. It will fly faster and faster as time goes on, and within a few weeks from now we shall be making a perceptible impression on parts of the excavation."

"The month before my last visit we had moved 540,000 cubic yards from the Culebra cut, and we had then at work an average of less than 11 steam shovels. Within a short time Engineer Stevens expects to have 40 steam shovels in operation and he will then be handling 1,000,000 cubic yards per month."

**UNCLE SAM REALLY AT WORK.**  
"Tell me in simple language what 1,000,000 cubic yards means?"  
"We generally estimate a cubic yard of earth or rock as a ton. It is a load for a two-horse team over a common country road. The product of one month will be enough to load a wagon train of 1,000,000 teams, and supposing that each team took 30 feet on a road-way the train would be 30,000,000 feet in length. Dividing by 5,000 feet to the mile for easy figuring, the team would be 6,000 miles long, or just about long enough to reach from New York to San Francisco and back again. We expect to be doing that long before the snow falls. When we are doing it we shall consider that we have begun work seriously as to the excavation part of the problem."

"Where will this excavation be first done?"

"The most of the work now is in the Culebra cut, and a great deal of it will be right there. This cut has in the past been considered the key to the time required for doing the work. It is not so. The work upon the locks, if a lock canal is built, will require more time than that in the cut. The locks will

be about 1,200 feet long and several hundred feet wide. They will be so small that it will be impossible to work a large number of men in them at one time, and this will limit our possibilities."

**WHEN IN FULL SWING.**  
"Is 40 steam shovels the maximum capacity of operation?"

"No, we shall install more and more as rapidly as we can. We have now 61 steam shovels on the isthmus and we shall work by night as well as by day, using electricity to give us the light."

"What are you doing with the old French machinery?"

"We are still using some of it, but are introducing modern appliances just as rapidly as they come. There is no economy in working over the French stuff. It is out of date, out of repair and will go to the scrap heap just as soon as new tools and tracks can take its place."

**UNCLE SAM'S NEW TOOLS.**  
"Have you some idea of what you have already bought?"

"I can hardly do that in detail," replied Mr. Shonts, "although we have it item by item. We have spent more than \$5,000,000, and this covers all kinds of materials from steamships to blasting powder. We have 61 steam shovels, 1,300 flat cars, and more than 3,000 dump cars. We have more than 5,000 tons of steel rails, much of which is already in place. We have laid tracks through the Culebra cut of steel rails which weigh 70 pounds to the yard, and we are double-tracking the road across the isthmus. We have a large number of tracks running from Culebra out to a distributing yard, where the cars will be made up into larger trains for heavier engines to take off to the dumping grounds. This will enable the engines on the tracks to the cut to be kept busy all the time bringing in loads and carrying back the empties."

"In addition to these," continued Mr. Shonts, "we have new and powerful locomotives, hundreds of box cars, a number of modern passenger coaches, hoisting plants of various kinds and 12 blasting engines. We have bought more than 1,000,000 pounds of dynamite and blasting powder and 152 rock drills. As to building material, our lumber purchases alone have been more than 30,000,000 feet, and we have also something like 10,000,000 bricks, and half a million square feet of roofing tile. The work of house construction is going on throughout the zone, and we are steadily improving our quarters for the men."

**25,000 MEN WORKING.**

"Just about how many men have you at work?"

"Something like 25,000," said Mr. Shonts. "By far the greater part of them are foreigners, and a considerable number are Spaniards."

"Tell me something about the Spanish labor?"

"This is made up of men whom we imported from the north of Spain. They are of the same character as those used by Sir William Van Horne in building the Cuban railroad, and we find them excellent workmen. We have tried a



THEODORE P. SHONTS, Chairman Isthmian Canal Commission, From a Recent Photograph.

few hundred as an experiment, and we hope to increase the force to some thousands. They are far superior to any labor we have so far secured, excepting the Americans."

"How many Americans have you at work?"

"About 3,000. They are chiefly mechanics, engineers, foremen, carpenters, masons, plumbers, etc. They are good men and are, to a large extent, in charge of the work."

"How does the Spanish labor compare with the native labor?"

"Engineer Stevens estimates it as two or three times as efficient," was the reply. "It is almost equal to the American labor. The ordinary native negro, including that of the Jamaican negroes, is equal to about one-third the working power of the American."

**THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY.**

"We use the eight-hour day. This is the law and we cannot do otherwise. That it is so is a mistake. I don't think the eight-hour law, the contract labor law, or the Chinese exclusion act, should obtain on the isthmus. Fourth-fifths of our employees are bound to be foreigners, who are accustomed to longer hours and who work so much less intelligently and

energetically than the Americans, that it is hardly fair to consider them on the same basis. However, that is a matter that Congress will have to determine. We pay our men by the hour, and we can by law give them only 48 hours a week. If we could work them for 10 hours a day, we could give them 60 hours a week; and in that case they would accept lower wages than they now receive. As a matter of fact the skilled laborers would rather have the 10-hour day, and some of them would be glad to work over time at extra pay. As it is now, they expect to get time and a half for all work done over eight hours."

**CHANCES FOR YOUNG MEN AT PANAMA.**

"What do you now think of the chances for young Americans at Panama?"

"They are good. The wages are higher than in the United States, and there is no more risk of health there than there is in railroad building in many parts of our southern states."

"Do you have many applications for places?"

"Plenty of them. Our mail is filled with letters from men of all classes who want to go to Panama; and we are sending down mechanics and oth-

ers by almost every steamer. We have no trouble in getting all the men we want; and those who are now applying are far better than those of the past. Among the first corps that went there to clerk and do other work were a lot of daisy boys, who expected to lead a luxurious life in the tropics with seizer and apollinaris on tap. The men, we have now, are earnest, hard-working fellows, who go down to 'Is there much dissatisfaction among the clerks?'"

"No, I heard no complaints during my stay on the isthmus. In fact, I attended a dinner there of the mechanics and engineers at Corozal where the men made speeches denouncing some recent newspaper criticisms of the work and eulogizing the officials in charge. I am safe in saying that there is no dissatisfaction in Panama."

**NEW HOMES AND NEW BLOOD.**

"Have you sufficient quarters for the men, Mr. Shonts?"

"Yes, we have done a great amount of building since we took charge, and we could give quarters to 3,000 more employees than we now have. We are building and improving right along. We have nine hotels on the canal zone and nearly every American has a room looking out on a veranda, sometimes alone and sometimes with a roommate. The Tivoli hotel at Ancon, which is intended more especially for the administration employees, has 160 sleeping apartments. We have a practical builder in charge of the new construction and more than 2,000 men are now putting up new buildings and repairing the old ones."

"How about food?"

"We have organized a good system of supplying the men with meals at low rates. The native workmen are charged 10 cents a meal and the Americans pay 20 cents a meal at the hotels. The native food is, of course, much cheaper than the American. A 10-cent meal consists of soup made of meat and some rice, sweet potatoes or yuca and bananas. That is a sample. Of course, there is considerable variety. I have eaten such meals and they are not bad."

"How about the 30-cent American meals?"

"They are to be found at the hotels and mess houses. They are just about equal to the 50-cent meal that one gets at a country hotel in the United States. The bill of fare usually includes several kinds of meat, some vegetables, fruit and perhaps ice cream or pie. We have established cold storage plants and put refrigerator cars on the railroads, and we are doing all we can to make the men comfortable."

**AMUSEMENTS.**

"How about amusements?"

"We have been very busy improving the sanitary conditions and have not done as much in that line as we should like to do. Nevertheless we have established reading rooms in the hotels at Corozal and Culebra and equipped a brass band which has been organized by the employees of Christobal. The Americans are adapting themselves to conditions there. They are forming clubs of various kinds, and, among other things, an International University club, which is composed of American and Panamanian college men. The Masonic and other orders already have branches there."

**ABOUT HEALTH.**

"Do you think you have stamped out the yellow fever, Mr. Shonts?" I asked.

"We have had no cases since last November, and the warfare on the mosquito seems to have largely abolished it from the isthmus. Many of the men are growing careless and fail to put down their mosquito nets at night; and the fear of yellow fever has for the time departed. Indeed, I was surprised to find so few mosquitoes. Take La Boca, where our wharves are, I had occasion to stay there over night, and slept on one of the Pacific mail steamers without mosquito netting or any other similar protection. During the evening I did not see a mosquito, and it was only after going to bed that I heard one buzzing. I got up, turned on my light, and killed it, and then went back to bed. The work done by the sanitary commission in that respect is wonderful. A year or so ago one stopping at La Boca would have been eaten up by mosquitoes. Now there are not, I venture, on the 10-mile zone one hundredth as many mosquitoes as on any similar strip along the New Jersey coast."

"Is the malaria also disappearing?"

"We are decreasing the malaria, said the chairman of the isthmian canal commission, "but there will always be more or less of it at Panama just as in many parts of the United States. I would say, however, that the health of our employees is extraordinarily good. We have a sick rate of only twenty per thousand, and that is a better showing than in New York City. Dr. Gorgas reports that there are 450 beds vacant in the hospitals, and he is sanguine that he can now control the health situation. Our quarantine arrangements are good and we shall do everything we can to keep our yellow fever and other diseases. Indeed, I doubt if there is any place in the world so carefully watched

from a health standpoint as are our stations at Panama. When we open a new labor camp, the sanitary engineers go ahead and lay it out. They attend to the cleaning and the men are not allowed to begin until the dangers of ill health are minimized."

"Have you a good water supply?"

"Yes, Panama has its own water-works with a reservoir in the mountains of something like 800,000,000 gallons. Empire has a big reservoir, and so also have Gorgona and Colon. Las Obispo is supplied by a running stream. The water has been analyzed at all these places, and it is good with the exception that it contains a slight percentage of vegetable matter. Notwithstanding this at some places they are boiling the water."

**CHIEF ENGINEER STEVENS.**

"Tell me something about the chief engineer, Mr. Stevens. Is he the right man for his place?"

"We think so," replied Mr. Shonts. "He is a man of extraordinary ability, great industry and indefatigable integrity. He is as straight as a string. He has

been dealing with big undertakings and is accustomed to handle large bodies of men. He understands how to organize his work and he has selected me that Uncle Sam could not have gotten a better man for the place."

**AN EIGHT-YEAR JOB.**  
"When are you going to finish the canal?"

The chairman of the canal commission smiled as he replied: "That is a question which depends much upon Congress, and also largely upon what kind of a canal is decided upon and how the work is carried out to a conclusion. If a lock canal, such as we have recommended, shall be permanently decided upon we can finish it within eight years. I think Engineer Stevens puts it at seven, seven and a half, but I will say eight. These figures are based upon present calculations and investigations, and we think them not far from right."

**FRANK G. CARPENTER.**

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### THE GULF STATE CYCLONE.

Details of the great hurricane which swept over the Gulf states on Sept. 26 and 27 show it to have been in point of territory affected, property damaged and lives lost one of the most disastrous the southern section of the country has ever experienced.

Isolated reports are expected to add to the loss of life, for communication has been only partially restored and though a fortnight has passed scores of outlying towns in the storm's path have not been heard from.

At Mobile one hundred lives were lost, and the property loss is placed at \$10,000,000. Damage to shipping cannot be estimated, but many ships are high and dry and may never reach water again.

Twenty-five persons were drowned at Pensacola, the property damaged is \$3,000,000 and scores of vessels were wrecked.

At the Pensacola Navy Yard many of the war ships berthed there were beached or sunk. The Santa Rosa Hospital was swept away. Ten patients went with the building and were lost.

Fort Morgan, in Mobile harbor, was reduced to wreck, the loss there reaching \$100,000.

Thirty-eight vessels were driven ashore in the Mississippi Delta. The damage in the lower Louisiana plantations amounts to \$1,000,000. Fort St. Philip sustained \$10,000 damage.

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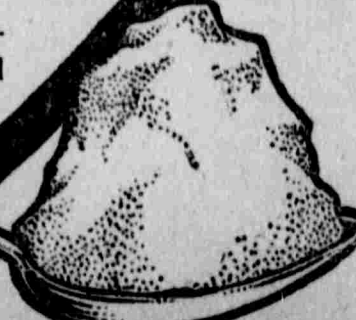
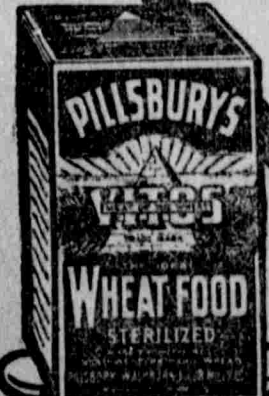
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### ABOUT CLERK'S HOURS IN GERMANY.

A discussion is going on in commercial circles in Germany regarding the respective merits of the English and German systems of arranging the hours of work in banks, company offices and big business houses.

It has always been customary in Germany for clerks and accountants to begin work considerably earlier than is the case in England, and to terminate work in the evening much later than is usual in London. Work begins in German offices, as a rule, at 8 o'clock in the morning, and is frequently not concluded before 8 o'clock in the evening. Partial compensation for the early beginning and late termination is obtained by taking a two-hours' pause at midday, but even with this break the total hours worked in German offices considerably exceed those in English ones, especially as a half holiday on Saturday is still an exceptional arrangement in Germany.

An agitation is now going on for the abolition of the long midday interval and of the introduction of the hours of work usual in English offices. Many German business men, however, resist the innovation and persist in maintaining the old-fashioned system.

Many German stock brokers, company directors, directors of banks and captains of industry adopt a curious arrangement by which they dine at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and afterward return to their offices from 6 to 8 in the evening.

Those Germans who have had practical experience of office work in England are unanimous in declaring that English clerks do just as much in six or seven hours as German clerks in nine or ten hours, and advance this as strong argument in favor of the general adoption of the English hours of work in offices.

A few of the big banks in Berlin have already got as far as working day of eight hours, from 9 in the morning till 5 in the afternoon, with two hours less on Saturday when they close at 3 o'clock—Berlin correspondence London Standard.

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