DO YOU KNOW WHAT UNCLE SAM IS DOING?

Here's the First of Frederic J. Haskin's Letters Describing Conditions in the Canal Zone—Every American Should Read the Series.

The following is the first of a series of articles written during Mr. Haskin's trip to Panama, in which he will tell the readers of The Journal of the progress of the work on the Panama Canal, and of the actual conditions on the Canal Zone. The whole series will form a striking story of American victory over what seemed insuperable obstacles, and will cause the reader to feel renewed pride in the pluck and ingenuity of his countrymen. These articles will appear daily. The remaining subjects will be: Isthmian Politics, Sanitation, The Force, The Gatun Dam, Labor Situation, Living Conditions, Amusements, Paying Off, Transportation, Government, The Builders, The Completion, French Days, The Panama Lottery.

By FREDERIC J. HASKIN.

(Copyright 1908 by Frederic J. Haskin.)

Culebra, Canal Zone, May 12.—The construction of the Panama canal is the biggest enterprise ever undertaken by man, and the United States is rapidly bringing it to a successful consummation. When it is done it will be the greatest material accomplishment of this greatest of nations. As an engineering feat it stands first. As to cost in money, no one yet knows how much it will take, but it will be between $350,000,000 and $500,000,000—much more than any other single work ever undertaken. It will be the most remarkable artificial change in geography ever accomplished. The American canal diggers of Panama, working at the rate they are going now, could dig the Suez canal in one year. The Panama canal will have a greater effect on world commerce and world politics than any other one work of man. And above and beyond all these great things, it will give and assure to the United States of America the first place among nations.

An army of 25,000 men is constantly at work constructing this giant waterway that will lift the biggest battleship over an 85-foot stairway and drop it again on the other side. Another army keeps the zone healthy. In one year alone they cleaned 1,000,000 linear feet of ditches in Panama, digging 13,000 feet more, and fumigating 6,000,000 cubic feet of house space as a precaution against disease. To care for the mighty army of workers Uncle Sam is spending $2,000,000 a month for supplies.

With "four millions a month" for their slogan, the workers are making nearly that many cubic yards of dirt fly. But the problem of digging the canal is not so much one of getting the dirt out as it is of making away with the dirt after they have gotten it out. In the United States when a contractor encounters a piece of construction work with a haul of more than 500 yards, he figures it on the basis of that distance hauled free, and the remainder he charges for at whatever the cost is found to be. On the canal the average haul of the excavated material is more than 10 miles. And as the work nears completion the problem of getting the debris out of the way will grow more serious, the hauls becoming longer as the days go by.

Setting New Standard.

But notwithstanding the increasing difficulties that are besetting the canal builders, they are continually setting a new standard. At the Y. M. C. A. and elsewhere on public occasions you hear the cry, or see projected upon a screen, "Four millions a month." A cheer greets it every time. And therein one sees the spirit of the men who are digging the canal. There was rejoicing on the canal a year ago last March when it was announced that more than 1,000,000 cubic yards of dirt had been excavated. At home it was said that it was just a spurt at making the dirt fly. On the zone, however, they did not view it that way. Steam shovel men, dredge men, dirt train men—everybody began to set their pegs at the 2,000,000 mark.

Through the difficulties of the rainy season they kept crowding the notch closer and closer, until in December of last year they were able to offer Uncle Sam a Christmas gift of a 2,000,000-yard record. But even then they did not rest on the oars of achievement. "Three million a month" became the rallying cry, and after two efforts, in both of which they made new advances toward their 3,000,000 mark, in March of the present year they wrote down the highest excavating record ever made anywhere—nearly 3,500,000 cubic yards in a single month. In April they almost duplicated the record. Then the dry season ended, and during the summer they will worry along with something over 2,000,000 cubic yards a month. But everybody is squaring himself for a dash at the 4,000,000 mark next December. Those who know the temper of the men believe they will touch it.

Greatest Known Task.

Culebra cut has long been recognized as the great task of the undertaking. It was here that the French made their first assaults on the great barrier between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. It is the only place along the canal where work has never been suspended from the time the first French operations began. It was thought until recently that the length of time it would take to dig the Culebra cut would be the length of time it would take to complete the canal. But recent developments point to the Gatun dam as the determining factor in the completion of the undertaking. Culebra finds herself being eaten away by the greedy mouths of a half hundred steam shovels at the rate of more than 1,000,000 cubic yards a month. At that rate Culebra will yield up her last yard of material in less than three and a half years. But as the cut grows deeper it will of necessity grow narrower, and the fewer steam shovels they can operate and the fewer dirt train tracks they can lay, the smaller the amount of excavated material there will be per month as the years come and go.

The most interesting feature of the work is that under the present management each month they manage to make a higher record than they made during the corresponding month of the previous year. For instance, during the month of May, in the Culebra cut the amount of material removed was 39 per cent greater than the amount removed during the corresponding month of 1907, although the rainfall in May, 1907, was less than seven inches, as compared with nearly 12 inches during May of the current year.

Things on Big Scale.

They do things on a big scale on this Culebra cut. Go through it and you will see some two dozen steam shovels in sight at a time, and as many dirt trains attending them. You will see some 20 or more big well drills operated by compressed air from an air compressor plant, perhaps the largest in the world. Each of them is boring a well of fair diameter. In the course of a year these wells, end on end, would make a hole in the ground about 140 miles deep. Into these wells they sink tons of dynamite. At noon, or after the force has stopped work, one hears a roar from these blasts that makes him think of a great artillery duel. A few months ago they set off a blast of 19½ tons of dynamite, distributed in 25 holes whose depth varied from 35 to 90 feet. It broke up over 70,000 cubic yards of earth.

It costs something to keep things going in the big cut. It takes about 80,000 tons of coal a year, which costs over a half million dollars. The wages paid are said to average from 40 to 70 per cent higher than in the states, and the coal costs about $6.50 per ton as compared with $3 and $3.50 per ton in the states. It takes about 200 locomotives, and other rolling stock in proportion, to haul the excavated material from Culebra cut. The most of it is hauled away in 20-ton Lidgerwood dump cars. Sixteen of these are made up into a train. Five shovelfuls of the large type of shovel load a car, 80 shovelfuls making a train load. The train is pushed to the dumps and in 10 minutes the entire load of 320 cubic yards of dirt is removed by a mechanical unloader.

Available Figures.

When the latest available figures were made out, it was costing the government about 82½ cents a cubic yard for excavation in Culebra cut. But as the output of material has been increased by nearly a half, with only a comparatively small increase of force it is probable that they have been able to reduce these figures to the neighborhood of 50 cents per cubic yard.

The work that is being done by the dredges is costing very much less. For instance, there are the big sea-going dredges "Ancon" and "Culebra," the former working on the Atlantic side and the latter at the Pacific end. The cost per cubic yard of dredged material is about four cents. They operate in a section of the entrance channel about 500 feet in width and a mile and a quarter in length. Starting at the inner end and moving slowly, with their big 20-inch centrifugal pumps in operation and their drags sucking up the mud as they go, by the time they get to deep water their bins are full and they carry the mud out to sea and dump it. This is done by opening the gates in the bottom of the vessels. They then steam back to the channel, having closed the gates of the bins, and repeat the operation. When the gates are closed, water is shut into the bins up to sea level. As the mud is pumped in the water flows out, thus enabling them to always fill the bins with dredged material. They work day and night, requiring a crew of 60 men.

Besides the two big sea-going dredges, they have in operation on the canal three 20-inch suction dredges, three dipper dredges, five French ladder dredges, and several others. They are also fitting up several more of the old French dredges, and when they are all in commission the dredging plant will have a capacity of not far from 2,000,000 cubic yards of earth a month. As the rainy season makes very little difference with the dredges that part of the work will proceed without much interruption from now henceforth.

There are a little more than 50,000,000 cubic yards of material to be moved, so that counting only a million yards a month for all the dredging equipment, it would take but a little more than four years to complete the dredging end of the work. There is now one part of the canal where they see the finish. That is the big spillway at the Gatun dam. They have gotten down to the final level on this, and by the first of October it will have been completed, and the concrete work there can begin.

Immensity of Work.

A few studies in figures will serve to show the immensity of the work they are doing. The excavations of a single month in the dry season would make a pile of dirt 300 feet high, 300 feet across, and over 1,000 feet long. The pyramid of Cheops is 750 feet square at the base and 451 feet high. It is said to have taken 100,000 men 10 years to build the road from the quarry to the pyramids, and the same number of men 20 years to build the pyramid itself. During the month of March, the canal force removed a pile of dirt larger by a tenth than the pyramid, and if they realize their ambition of 4,000,000 yards a month, they will be hauling dirt equivalent in bulk to five pyramids every four months. The Suez canal required 20 years to build. At the rate of excavation for March the Isthmian canal force could dig the Suez canal in just about one year. The Manchester ship canal, one of the largest in the world, connecting Liverpool and Manchester, is over 35 miles long, and required many years to build. The commission moved enough earth in March to make a rate which, maintained from month to month, would enable them to dig a Manchester canal in less than 15 months.

PRESIDENT FALLIERES.

The Plain, Safe Man Who Helps to Govern France.

From the Paris Daily Mail.

Armand Fallieres, president of the French republic, is a robust and large-bodied old gentleman of 66. He is from the Midi, the south that provides France with office holders as inevitably as Ireland provides New York with policemen. Like all men from the south, he possesses the gift of oratory, but combines with it a love for brevity—in fact, it is said that the longest speech he ever made only occupied half a column of a newspaper and that since he has become president he seldom needs more than 20 lines.

When M. Fallieres took over the Elysee palace after his election his first act was to reduce the military and naval staff attached to the presidency. The 15 or 20 officers of high rank on M. Loubet's personal staff were cut down to three, the highest in rank being a colonel. Fourteen officials attached to the protocol or etiquette department were dismissed.

"It is out of place for the chief magistrate of a democratic republic to be surrounded with so much ceremony," was the new chief of state's remark.

Madame Fallieres ran her side of the official residence on the same lines. An army of cooks, scullions, chambermaids and valets had to go, and Mariette, the family cook, who has been in the Fallieres service from time immemorial, was installed in the presidential kitchen.

These changes and others, such as not keeping up the state stables but hiring horses when they are needed for state occasions, are ascribed by Parisian satirical newspapers less to a dislike for ostentation to a love of thrift.

Winter and summer M. Fallieres rises at 6 and immediately takes a cold shower bath. Then, weather permitting, he starts off for his morning constitutional walk, never less than five miles. He begins with a four-mile-an-hour gait, which dwindles down to a stroll if, as is usually the case, the walk finishes along the quays of the Seine, for he is a great book lover and cannot pass the old book stalls along the embankment.

Luncheon is always a frugal meal, washed down with a mild claret, the product of the Loupillon vines, M. Fallieres' native place. He dines promptly at 7, and if there is nothing to prevent him doing so spends the evening quietly in the family circle, retiring to bed at 10:30. He rarely goes to the theatre or the opera except when obliged to do so on state occasions.

A man of simple tastes and straightforward character, M. Fallieres was elected to the presidency first of all on account of his personal merit and moderate views, and, second, because the French Republican leaders have laid down as an axiom that the president should never be what is commonly called a man of action, who might be inclined to interfere with the decisions of his ministers and even at times try to lead them. They selected Armand Fallieres in opposition to Paul Doumer because they knew he was a safe man who would confine himself strictly to his constitutional prerogatives, whereas M. Doumer was tainted with a suspicion of self-assertiveness.

MONGOOSE A PLAGUE.

Killed Off Quail and Merely Drove Rats From Fields to Buildings.

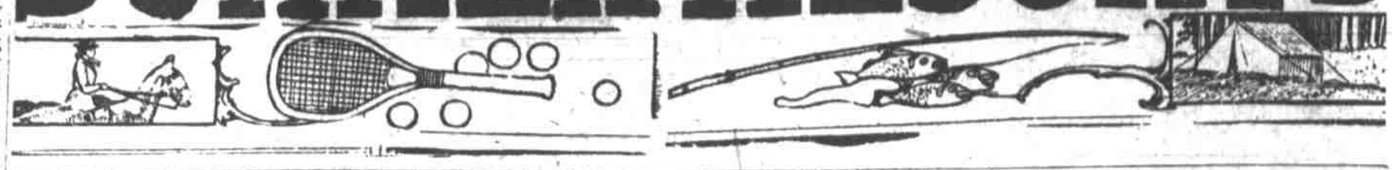
From Forest and Stream.

The island of Ste. Croix, the largest of the Danish West Indies, besides presenting to the artistic eye the most enchanting scenery affords to the sportsman opportunities for indulging his predilections little known to the outside world.

A few years ago, previous to the introduction into this terrestrial hunter's paradise of that demon, the mongoose, there existed large flocks of quail (Ortyx virginianus) in the level lands of the center and southern parts, affording fine shooting, but these birds are now scarce. In those days an afternoon's stroll over one of the large guinea grass pastures belonging to the various sugar estates, with the ringing whistle of Bob White sounding on every side, and the sudden whirr of their wings as a covey started up from among the grass at your feet and sped away with great velocity, was an experience to be remembered.

The mongoose was introduced into this island by some well meaning but mistaken planters, with a view to the extermination of rats in the canefields and though these vermin were thinned out of those localities they have become more plentiful in the buildings, where the mongoose can not follow them, and so this beast has turned his attention to the quail and other ground frequenting birds. The consequent increase of grasshoppers and caterpillars has reached formidable dimensions.

SUMMER RESORTS



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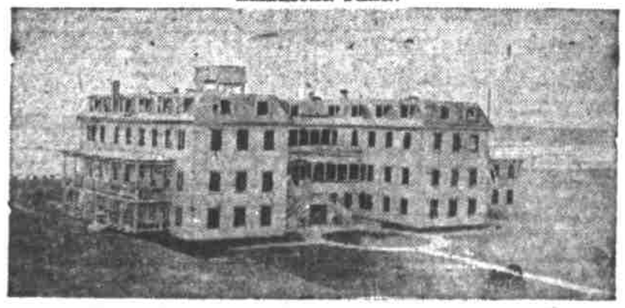

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