



The Panama Canal.

A TRIUMPH OF ENGINEERING.
(Continued from issue of January 2nd.)

THE HISTORY OF PANAMA.

The famous Isthmus and its vicinity first became known to whites in 1501, when Rodrigo de Bastides, a Spaniard in charge of one of the Spanish galleons then cruising about the Southern seas in search of gold, chanced upon it. The outlook was promising, but nothing was done until 1509, when Vasco Nunez de Balboa planted a Spanish settlement at Nombre de Dios to serve as a base for exploring parties.

Before long, stories of the wealth of the natives on the other side of the central ridge of land came to Balboa's ears. Though the distance was only forty-seven miles across, the difficulties in the way, chiefly from malaria and fevers spread by insects, were not inconsiderable, but with the lure of gold ahead, Balboa and his men set out, and, on Sept. 29, 1513, waded into the waters of the Pacific. Gold and pearls were, indeed, found in abundance, and returning, Balboa, as Mr. Scott reminds us, spread the news "that was to turn Central and South America into a slaughter-house, through the mad traffic that debauched Spain, made pirates of England's navigators, and reduced the original population to wretched slavery."

For Balboa, however, the discovery of riches booted little good. During his absence from Nombre de Dios, a new governor, one Pedrarias, had been appointed. As soon as Balboa returned, therefore, he was seized, tried on trumped-up charges, and executed.

Pedrarias, in his turn, essayed an expedition to the Pacific. In 1519, he founded the old city of Panama, about twelve miles from the site of the present city, and subsequently caused to be created between that point and Nombre de Dios, at great expense of labor and life, a paved road, parts of which may even yet be descried among the tropical overgrowth. This was the first highway across Panama.

For some time, as a base for Spanish expeditions, the "city" of Panama was known as a place of some importance, and it was from thence that Pizarro, in 1532, left on his famous venture which resulted in the conquest of Peru.

In 1584 the Spaniards left Nombre de Dios and founded a settlement at Porto Bello, and twelve years later Sir Francis Drake, cruising about the bay before the former in his search for treasure ships, died on board ship and was buried at sea.

Almost one hundred years later, events became once more spectacular in the vicinity of the Isthmus. In 1671, the famous Henry Morgan (knighted at a later date) made a successful attempt to take the city of Panama. With 1,600 men, he struck across the Isthmus, the party arriving before the city in a state of exhaustion. To meet the expected attack, the Spaniards and natives in Panama at once stampeded 2,000 bulls on the invaders, who immediately killed enough of the animals to suffice for their needs, then proceeded coolly to capture the city, which, as no treasure was found, was burned to the ground.

Early in the nineteenth century the Spanish power in these regions crumbled gradually away, and in 1821 the district of Panama joined the Confederation of New Granada, now known as Colombia. The Spanish power had passed, yet to this day Panama remains chiefly Spanish in language, customs, and religion.

During all of these many years the need of a better way across the Isthmus

was often enough realized, and, no doubt, navigators on the Atlantic side, with imagination inflamed by the stories of wealth to be found along the Pacific, cast many an exasperated glance at the low buttresses of mountain to the westward, so insignificant a portion of the great backbone of the Americas, yet as insuperable, apparently, as an adamant wall.

In the meantime a new nation was arising to the northward. The revolutionary war, resulting in the independence of the United States, had been fought, and new interests were becoming more or less dependent upon a passage across this portion of America to the Pacific.

In 1835, Senator Henry Clay intro-

The dream of a waterway was, however, by no means dispelled by these railway projects. As early as 1846, the United States Government had concluded a treaty with Colombia for the joint construction of a canal, but the clauses of the treaty were so unfortunate as to cause further delay and some unpleasantness. It excluded European powers from the use of the projected canal, and so precipitated a dispute with England, settled finally by the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, providing that, in event of the construction of a canal, Great Britain and the United States guaranteed its neutrality and use on equal terms to all the world.

Encouraged, probably, by the success

a company to which the French people subscribed \$265,000,000; had called a world's congress of engineers at Paris, and had decided upon a sea-level canal, despite the contention of one of the engineers, M. Lepinay, that a dam at Gatun, for a lock-type canal, would be more practicable.

On January 10th, 1880, the first blast was set off at Culebra by a young daughter of M. de Lesseps, and the work was under way. Locomotives and steam-shovels were brought in, tracks were laid, houses built, and an army of men brought to the spot, but the work did not prosper. Disease wrought havoc among the employees, the plans were found to be inadequate, and by 1885 it was found that a canal of the sea-level type would not do, and that calculations would have to be made for constructing one of a lock-type. By 1889, after \$234,795,017 had been spent, the company became bankrupt. The next year an extension of ten years' time for completing the canal was obtained from Colombia, a new company was organized, and \$18,000,000 more were spent; then the enterprise was given up.

The French had failed to complete their daring venture, but it must not be forgotten that they had paved the way, and paved it well, for the victorious Americans. They had made calculations that, when given over later to the United States, were of very great value; they had built houses which, subsequently, required but renovation to metamorphose them into habitable dwelling-places; they had brought in machinery, much of which, because carefully oiled and painted, was found, twenty years afterwards, to be in good condition and ready for work; they had excavated 29,908,000 cubic yards of soil (78,000,000 in all, but much not available) along the route ultimately chosen by the Americans; and, more important than all, they had discovered, by their mistakes, the pit-falls in the way, thus indicating to those who should follow the track that might safely be taken.

THE AMERICANS IN PANAMA.

In 1854, and again in 1875, United States exploring parties had crossed the Isthmus, and the last one, sent by President Grant, had surveyed the Panama route. In 1899, President McKinley also organized a Canal Commission, and again the Panama route, rather than the Nicaraguan, which some argued for, was chosen. It remained, however, for the prevailing personality of Mr. Roosevelt to push the United States into the midst of the great undertaking.

On the 28th of June, 1902, the Spooner Act was passed, providing for the formation of an Isthmian Canal Commission, and authorizing the Panama route, if the French property could be bought for \$40,000,000, and a right of way could be obtained from Colombia.

The immediate future, however, brought nothing but ceaseless bickering with Colombia. Treaty after treaty was drawn up and killed, then an undertone began to be heard from Panama itself. In 1908, threats were made that if Colombia did not grant a treaty to the United States providing for a canal, the Province might rebel.

Now, it is distinctly to be understood, as Mr. Scott tells us ("The Americans in Panama," by Wm. R. Scott), that the natives in Panama, as a whole, had nothing to do either with these threats or with the events that transpired. To quote Mr. Scott's own words, "In Panama, the masses of the people not only did not know about the revolution until it had passed, but no more than an ordinary mob, such as may be aroused on an hour's notice in any city, participated in it."

The whole "revolution," indeed, was



Painting by Mrs. McGillivray Knowles.

Exhibited at Royal Canadian Academy Exhibition, Ottawa.

duced into the United States Senate a resolution authorizing President Jackson to appoint a Commission to investigate the feasibility of a rail or water route at the Isthmus. Nothing was done, however, and the project hung fire.

In the meantime, the French were attracted by the possibilities of such a route, and secured a concession to build a railroad from sea to sea. Again nothing was done, and it remained for three Americans, Aspinwall, Stephens, and Chauncey, of New York, to carry out the scheme, as has been noted, 1850-55, for a considerable part of the distance.

of the French engineer, De Lesseps, in the construction of the Suez Canal, the eyes of the French again turned longingly toward Panama, and at last something definite was decided upon; France obtained a concession to build the canal, although to do so she had to buy the Panama Railroad, paying for it the sum of \$18,094,000. And now began one of the most tedious undertakings that ever led to gigantic failure.

In the first place, after the plans for the canal were made, this railway had to be moved back, an operation which involved five years' work. In the meantime, Ferdinand de Lesseps had floated