

Colon. The American control of the Canal Zone was apparent at once. Here were no vultures but an efficient system of mechanical scavenging. The streets were laid out in straight lines and were in an excellent state of repair. The traffic was capably managed. But on the other hand there was none of the vivid if primitive life which characterized Cartagena. Many American women were to be seen, of that listless beauty which comes of too much attention to hygiene, while even the negroes seemed to have lost their vitality. Indeed the greater part of the population was occupied in running cafes and selling the tickets of the national lottery; the remainder sat idly at the doors of shops which contained little but cheap American and Chinese goods. I had meant to buy a Panama hat, but was disgusted to find that a good one cost D10, as much as you would pay in England. (By the way, as I have no "dollar" sign on my typewriter, I shall use the above abbreviation. Remember that D1 = $\frac{1}{2}$ 4s.). All that I bought was a pair of silk pyjamas for D1, and two shirts for about 1s.3d. each.

The architecture was of a standardized pattern, all the houses being made of wood while the pavements were covered in with a roofing which formed the floor of a verandah on the single storey above. Thus there was an ample amount of very necessary shade. The public buildings were few and meagre, and I saw no churches or other institutions; I should think that the town had little communal life. It was a good deal smaller than I expected, and when I had traversed it in all directions I returned to the ship where I wrote some more letters.

I had been given a roving commission by Alan to discover whether Colon was really the "vice city" which his American newspapers declared it to be; and so in the evening I unleashed my famous pack of stink hounds and with them set forth for the town. All the shops were open and remained so, I was

told, until 11 or 12 at night. I strolled slowly up and down the various streets for quite a long time during which I was not once solicited, a thing which would have certainly happened several times in many districts of London. Then I looked into several cafés, but everybody seemed to be innocently engaged. Finally, I passed a perfectly hideous red and white building called the Moulin Rouge, the entrances of which were blocked by screens, obstructing a direct view. However, by peering round these I was able to get a view of the interior and there on long settees against the wall were a number of women on whose presence it was impossible to put an innocent construction. Outside were a number of advertisements of a cabaret which I examined closely, but none of them were obscene. In several more cafés there were predatory women, but at not more than half a dozen places in all. I was not invited to go into any of them. It is true that M. Caro next morning told lurid stories of women sitting at the entrance to ground-floor bedrooms in the back of which he saw rich silk hangings (here he rubbed his hands together); but I am convinced that these people were quite innocently employed. Indeed, until I receive further evidence from Alan, I shall remain convinced that this story of a "vice city" has been concocted by the American authorities as a bait to lure visitors.

At 10 the next morning (March 15) we left Cristobal and steamed towards the entrance of the Panama Canal. I shall give you a very detailed account of the Canal, partly because I myself had only the haziest idea of what it was like, partly because one of you (I think John) asked me for a full description. The entrance narrows greatly until it looks like the mouth of a tropical river, the banks of which are covered with thick vegetation of the most vivid and luxuriant green. The country for some distance is flat, interrupted here and there by an oil tank or an encampment of some kind, but

rising on the western side in a series of low hills. (It is worth remembering that the Canal runs roughly North and South and not, as might be expected, East and West). After a short distance a narrow channel is seen to cross the main waterway at a small angle. This is the original French working, and it is perhaps used by the small boats of the inhabitants, for its course was quite free of vegetation. A little further on the great Gatun locks come into sight. They are the largest work of visible engineering in the whole Canal, and they raise ships in three stages to a height of about eighty feet. If you imagine the Canal as an arterial road, the locks (4) are like a section divided into two carriageways. Thus ships travel independently and at the same time in both directions, and as the two parts are identical I shall only describe one of them. Taking the right-hand path we entered the first lock. The central division between the upward and downward locks consisted of a great stone causeway on which stood massive pylons to light the locks at night. On this causeway as well as on the two sides ran "electric mules" or small electric engines to which the ship was immediately coupled by steel hawsers. These "mules" did not pull the ship, but merely guided and kept it straight as it entered the narrow lock.

The surroundings of the locks were laid out with agreeable lawns and gardens while expensive cars stood before the official buildings over which flew the American flag. American territory extends for exactly five miles on either side of the Canal, but the greater part of it has been left as virgin forest, from which malarial mosquitoes alone have been exterminated. At Cristobal a number of negroes had been taken on to deal with the frequent coupling and uncoupling of ropes during the passage of the locks, and these men cooperated with their companions on shore with the utmost

skill. Indeed I was amazed at the silence in which all the complicated operations were carried out, there being no sound save for a bell on the "mules" which indicated when the ship was to stop and start, and a gurgling from the ~~sinks~~ water driven into the locks by electric pumps. We entered the first lock as far as the great steel gates which closed the entrance to the second, and then two pairs of similar gates, which had stood open flush with the sides of the lock, shut to behind us. The water could be seen in four places on each side bubbling up from the pumps into the lock, and the ship rose with surprising speed. As I stood in my cabin I could see the immense blocks of stone gradually disappearing below, and in a few minutes we had risen the first twenty-odd feet. The next gates swung open and in entering the second lock the "mules" climbed an extraordinary gradient (5), being tilted at an angle of perhaps 60 degrees which was made possible by running them on a kind of rack-and-pinion arrangement.

The whole process of raising was repeated twice more, and from the summit we looked down (6) at ships which were waiting their turn far below us. This was a remarkable sensation, the perfect straightness of the locks and the approach making the height seem much greater than it was. Then, when the last gates had been opened, we were released upon the Gatun Lake, a great expanse of water along which we were guided by buoys. On all sides inlets and creeks stretched remotely back into the jungle, while the islands near which we steamed glittered with all manner of strange vegetation. The sky was full of islands of cloud, the blue waters of the lake rippled round our bows, and the banks were so close that we seemed to be travelling at a much greater speed than upon the infinite sea. Urged on by all these happy feelings we crossed the Gatun Lake, the island foliage sometimes almost touching our sides and the crocodiles ~~was~~ heaving themselves from their afternoon

doze at our approach. After some distance the channel permanently narrowed and we turned sharply to the left, passing a large radio station. Our speed was reduced and it became easier to imagine that we were passing through a canal. Although the passage is still 500 ft. wide here, it looks very much less, the height of the ship no doubt contributing greatly to the impression of narrowness.

From this point onwards there are many curves in the Canal whose banks, rising to a height of about fifty feet, are plastered with signs and posts very much like those to be seen on an English railway, but much more numerous. Some of them are planted one behind another at sharp bends, and seem to be used for setting the ship's course. At about 35 miles from the breakwater at the entrance, we passed Camp Elliot which is used as a base for cranes and dredgers, and then entered the famous Culebra Cut. Here the channel narrows to 300 ft. and the banks become very steep, though they are not for the most part higher than the 50 ft. I have mentioned. It is easy to see how heartbreaking this part of the construction must have been - working in the fearful heat in a malarial district on banks which slipped down into the cut as often as they were shored up. Even now it is necessary to reduce speed to a crawl lest the wash of the ship should disintegrate the banks; and in many places we saw gangs of workmen reducing their slope. All along the Culebra Cut there was no attempt at cultivation and the jungle came close to the water; but in many places there were small huts which were perhaps medical or look-out stations of some kind. At last we reached the most difficult point in the construction of the whole cut - a hill perhaps two hundred feet high which had had to be sliced clean through. In the black and jagged flanks of this hill a bronze tablet had been set. Not long after this the channel widened again and we approached the Pedro Mi-

Aguel Locks. Here there was a considerable colony of houses, some of them large with fountains in their gardens, the largest of all belonging to the Commander of the Panama Canal, an American naval officer who is appointed, the captain says, for five years. Having descended through this lock, which is in one stage, we went onwards to the Miraflores Locks, which are in two stages. At the upper level of the three groups of locks stand enormous structures of latticed steel, which appear to revolve on gigantic turntables. These, I was told, are emergency gates by which the canal can be barred in time of danger. The architecture of the Canal is identical throughout, so that I need not describe again the causeways, the sluice gates or the buildings: they are the same on the Pacific as on the Atlantic sides. But it may be worth mentioning that a single track railway runs from one ocean to the other, though it does not follow all the way the line of the Canal. At Colon an extra passenger embarked - an aged American somewhat resembling the brothers Auld, but a little more lively - and he told me that he had travelled the previous day on this railway which crosses the Gatun Lake by a series of bridges.

When we had passed through the Miraflores Locks we were not far from the mouth of the Canal. In a cutting on our left we could see the hulks of dredgers used in the original construction - the only reminder of the terrible difficulties then encountered, whose traces have now been so neatly swept away. At this end of the Canal lies the city of Panama and the old Spanish town of Balbao, but neither of them was in sight, and we did not stop there. So, fifty miles from the breakwater at the entrance and six and a half hours after leaving Cristobal, we entered the Pacific. The captain told us at dinner that in all his experience he had never made a smoother passage of the Canal, for usually there were slight hitches or delays. He added

that, narrow as the Canal appeared to be, it could accommodate all but the largest ships, such as the Queen Mary or the Normandie. His last passage had taken 17 hours, owing to the presence in front of the Empress of Britain which could only be manoeuvred through very slowly.

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After Panama we turned northwards and sailed on through the Pacific. It was clear at once that it had a different appearance from the Atlantic, its waters not being so intensely blue, but very much smoother than the Atlantic ever was. We never saw the Atlantic without white horses and long swelling waves, even when there was little motion of the ship; but now, though there is a good deal of motion, the waves are as gentle as the waters of a lake. We have passed in succession the shores of Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and to-night we put in at Corinto, a small port in the last-mentioned state. The captain says that Cartagena is a paradise compared with Corinto, which is buried in a desert of sand.

The days provide endless panoramas of beauty as the mountainous coastline, always within sight, changes in outline and colour. While we sailed up the coast of Costa Rica, the sky was filled with masses of cloud of a beauty I have never seen equalled. Black and white, grey and bronze and apricot, formed in all manner of shapes from the most attenuated to the most majestically solid, they recalled in their variety and profusion that wonderful passage in the first part of the Testament of Beauty. So it is every day now. At a little after six the sun rapidly goes down, and in a few minutes the clouds, which had seemed to shine with a radiance of their own making, become no more than puffy lumps of grey. Only here and there, and often in a quarter of the heavens remote from the descended sun, great caverns of

cloud glow still with red and orange, as if their light refused to be extinguished. Then another change comes over the sky. The west brightens into a dusky red with the afterglow and the clouds, lit only from behind, stand out in solid shapes of black. Over the far shores of Costa Rica the silver lightnings glitter from clouds still charged with the light of day. The quick breeze sings through the rigging and the ship seems to advance more quickly in the dusk. Then the sky pales again, and this time the stars jump out in infinite array. By the time dinner is over, the full moon is high up the sky and is casting a great band of light over the tropical waters. The sailors gather out of doors in the stern and accompany the swing of the ship with french songs sung in chorus. Far above them rises the mast like an ebony pillar, the lights on its cross-beam swinging as the planets swing among the fixed stars.

The news from Europe is still uncertain and anxious. Even the deformed Lithuanian ~~is~~ (? Latvian, Lett or Lett) has a place in it, for a countryman of hers seems to have assassinated a Polish frontier guard and provoked one of those mobilizations which are now of almost daily occurrence. At such a great distance from the centres of information, we have to be content with radioclingly simplified outlines of news, and we miss in consequence the links which connect great events and the subtle overtones which give them much of their permanent importance. We cannot tell whether the overwhelming mass of the Austrian people really welcomed Hitler to Austria, and if they did so why it was; nor are we told, though we can easily guess, the uneasiness which these events must really have caused in Italy, despite official statements to the contrary. All is obscure, and it is only possible to see in general outline the great worsening which has taken place in European affairs.

The other passengers irk me more every day. You may have guessed from this record that I have become reconciled in some degree to the monotony of the long voyage, though I would never willingly undertake another. But I am less worried than formerly by the endless sea, the crashing noises made by the sailors over my head in the early morning, the piteous and continual wailing of the cat at the same time, the noise of the engine which has increased since the time when it stopped and now resembles that of a French locomotive standing in a station, even the insects which gather nightly round my bed. Mr. Auld says that for a third class passage this is quite good, and that in some ships there are so many insects that they fall off the ceiling onto your head at meals. I could tolerate that state of affairs only to see an insect fall into M. Caro's all-guzzling soup spoon; otherwise, the existing complement is quite enough for me. And I do not like them in my bed!

But, as I was saying, it is the passengers who really irk me. Every day I gaze with a morose fascination at Frau Wohlgenuth's extraordinary hair; for I have noticed that whereas most of it is of an unnatural red, where it bends down towards the parting it first becomes blue and then black. At first I thought that this was because the dye was not spread evenly in these parts - but then it occurred to me that as the hair grew, it would begin to appear undyed near the parting and that any attempt to rectify this would result in uneven coloration. Perhaps one of the feminine experts would say if this is a likely explanation. It was a long time before I thought of it.

Other sources of irritation occur at breakfast. The old grandmother Caro is by no means the fastest but is certainly the most relentless eater. She arrives on the stroke of 8 and gathers round the rim of her plate the

firstfruits of all the other dishes, in the manner of our old friend, Mr. Edward Herries. When once fairly launched, nothing will stop her. Long after everyone else has finished she is still extending a skinny arm to grab a distant butter-dish, or lapping up the jam with a spoon direct from its tin. The deformed Latvian creeps into the room and begins talking German to the others. She speaks in a slow, coarse voice, and they have great difficulty in understanding what she says. Opposite me, Mr. Auld croaks out some sudden exclamation in a voice distorted by a lifetime of deafness. To this it is impossible to make reply save through the medium of a block of paper. On my left his brother is probably quavering some mistaken impression about the European situation, arising from the Babel of languages he hears but cannot comprehend. He is a dear old man and it is only a small kindness to tell him that war has not broken out, and that the French have not invaded Germany.

Moreover, it is now possible to anticipate everything that everybody is going to say. The same jokes are endlessly repeated at meals, the same comments made about politics. When the French government falls, the officers fling up their hands and exclaim, "La France est finie!" When a new government is formed, they discuss the list of Ministers in minute detail, balancing their respective views with exquisite exactitude. But towards other news ~~it~~ they are fatalistically indifferent. It has happened. Nothing can change it.

The Chief Engineer flirts mildly with Fräulein ^{C. A. H. J.} ~~W. H. J.~~, though neither can understand a word that the other is saying. The massive German replies to the Frenchman with clumsy gestures, and there is general laughter at their ambiguous meaning. The Chief Engineer is a genius at sleight of hand, and nearly always has a new trick to keep us amused after dinner. There