

THE PANAMA CANAL

AN INTERESTING DESCRIPTION

A few weeks ago the Assistant Secretary of State suggested that the bones of Christopher Columbus, now resting in the city of Santo Domingo, Hayti, be placed aboard the first ship to go through the Panama Canal. On August 8 the replicas of the three caravels of Columbus, the Pinta, the Nina, and the Santa Maria were taken from Jackson Park lagoon in Chicago, and are now being prepared for their voyage by way of the Canal to the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. It is within the range of possibility then that one of those caravels should bear the remains of Columbus to the waters of the Pacific (says a writer in an American exchange). Many a time in our school days and after, our admiring spirits have accompanied the heroic admiral across the unknown waters of the Atlantic on that first voyage to the western continent, which ended at San Salvador, October 12, 1492. Let us accompany him once more in spirit on the voyage to the Pacific; for fancy may well picture the soul of the immortal discoverer hovering again above the deck of another Santa Maria on the first voyage through the Canal that cuts in twain the continent he discovered four hundred years ago. Let us imagine ourselves, then, on an ocean vessel approaching in the Atlantic or northern

Entrance of the Great Canal,

prepared to enjoy this initial trip and to wonder at the sights in store for us. In the word 'northern,' writes E. W. Pickard in the *Child Apostle*, from which we take the account which follows, lies the first surprise for many of the passengers who did not know that the canal runs not from east to west, but from north-west to southeast. This seeming anomaly is due to the fact that the Isthmus of Panama here trends almost east and west. It is still early morning when a watchful passenger shouts 'Land,' and all who are up rush to the port rail to gaze upon the hilly, jungly coast of the isthmus between Porto Bello and Colon. As the vessel ploughs swiftly through the waters as blue as ever were those of the Mediterranean a cheer goes up from the deck, for we have caught a glimpse of the Stars and Stripes fluttering above a fringe of cocoanut palms. That marks the location of one of the big forts built to protect the canal in time of war, and is on Margarita Island, virtually a part of the mainland. Colon, flat and unpicturesque, now comes into view, and directly ahead of us an immense breakwater stretches a mile out from the shore on the right. At its land end, on Toro Point, is another fort, whose great guns are masked by the tropical foliage. Now we have virtually

Entered the Canal,

for the 500-foot channel extends far out from the shore line. At reduced speed we enter Colon Harbor and the Bay of Limon and steam past the pretentious Washington Hotel, Uncle Sam, proprietor; the docks of Colon, crowded with shipping from the United States, Europe, and many a port of Latin America, and the American town of Cristobel on whose water front stands the statue of Columbus sent over long years ago by the Empress Eugenie. Skipping about the bay, looking like long, black water beetles, are the cayukas or native dugouts, and moving lazily before the sea breeze are the little sailing craft in which the queer San Blas Indians are bringing their products to market. Four miles and a-half we sail through Limon Bay and the shores narrow in on our 500-foot channel, still at tide level. Now look ahead three miles and get

A Glimpse of the Gatun Locks,

that tremendous flight of three water steps up which we are to be lifted. In a few minutes we reach the towering dividing wall of concrete, our sails are now furled and the electric locomotives on the lock walls take us in tow. Four of these powerful machines attach their hawsers to our ship—two in front to pull

it and two astern to keep it steady and to bring it to a stop when entirely within the lock chamber. The immense gates close silently behind us and at once the water begins to flow into the chamber through culverts that have their openings in the concrete floor. Slowly the vessel rises until it is on a level with the second chamber, 28½ feet above sea level, when the gate ahead is opened and the electric mules move forward, this time up a heavy grade by means of the centre racks in the tracks. Twice this operation is repeated, and now we are at the summit, 85 feet above the sea. The last gate opens and the locomotives pull us into Gatun Lake.

As we move slowly out into this immense artificial lake, a marvellously beautiful landscape is spread before us. The surface of the lake is dotted with islets, once the summits of Tiger Hill, Lion Hill, and a dozen other eminences; on both sides are steep promontories, lovely little peninsulas and deep bays and inlets where the water has spread into the once jungle-filled valleys. Before we get too far from the locks, let us step to the starboard rail and have a look at the Gatun dam, an enormous stretch of rock, sand, and clay that has formed Gatun Lake by impounding the waters of the Chagres River. It is in reality a low ridge, one and a-half miles long, built across the valley, and when we are told that it is nearly half a-mile wide at its base, 400 feet wide at the water surface and 100 feet wide at its crest, which is twenty feet above the level of the lake, how utterly ridiculous seem the fears of those alarmists who predicted the dam would be pushed over by the Chagres in time of flood! Nearly in the centre of the dam we can see the famous spillway through which pass the surplus waters of the Chagres. It is a concrete lined channel 285 feet wide cut through a hill of rock and across it is built a curved dam of concrete on top of which is a row of regulating gates. Just below the spillway, out of our sight, is the hydro-electric station which supplies power for the operation of the entire canal and the lighting of the whole zone.

Our channel through the lake—for we still must follow a path indicated by range towers on the shores—is now a thousand feet wide and leads us somewhat tortuously through a maze of islands. Look down as we near some of them and you will see below the surface the tops of giant trees. For we are sailing over what but a few months ago was the valley of the Chagres, dense with tropic vegetation and dotted with native villages surrounded by banana and cocoanut plantations. Close to the shores the stoutest of trees still stretch their naked, dead limbs above the water, but before long these, too, will have rotted and fallen, leaving the luxuriant landscape unmarred.

Passing over the sites of Bohio, Frijoles and Chagresito, we now come to the place where Tabernilla once stood, and here both lake and channel narrow down, the latter being first 800, then 700, and finally 500 feet wide. On the hillsides to the right stand a few abandoned houses, all that remains of Mamei, Juan Grande, Gorgona, and Matachin, busy places while the canal was building, now covered by the spreading waters. Along the left shore of the channel runs the relocated Panama railway, and here at Gamboa it crosses the Chagres River, which our vessel now leaves to enter the far-famed Culebra Cut. This great gash through

The Spine of the Continent

is 300 feet wide at the bottom, but, because of the tremendous earth slides which cost Uncle Sam so much money and time, its width at the top is astonishing, being half a mile just here opposite the town of Culebra. Beyond, on our left, towers Gold Hill, 495 feet above the bottom of the canal. Far up on its rocky slope we discern a streak of white paint which marks the level to which the French company carried its excavations. Nearly opposite is Contractor's Hill, 364 feet high. As we move between these, the loftiest hills along the route, and pass the location of the Cucaracha slide, the Pedro Miguel lock stands before us, white in the noonday sun. This, a single flight lock, is 30 feet high, the highest in the canal. Again we are taken in tow by electric mules, and in less than half an hour we have

Photographs!

How sweet she looks in her Spring Frock? Yes—but Spring will pass, and she won't always look the same. Get pictures made of her now by , ,

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