

## OVERSEER ON SUGAR PLANTATION

Overseer? The word was strange, and sounded ominous, but intriguing and challenging. I had no idea of the duties of an Overseer, nor how you planted cane. But it was a job, wasn't it? And I had been looking for a job for more than a year, and Seventy Dollars a month sounded like manna from heaven. After all, I had mastered a working knowledge of Spanish. Why couldn't I master cane planting? How was I to know I wouldn't plant a hill of cane in all the time I was there?

I took the train to Antilla, then hunted up a sailboat to take me across Nipe Bay and up the Mayari' (pronounced My-a-ree') River to the head of tide water to the town of Mayari'. Mayari', though a "termino municipal" corresponding to our county seat, was a very small place, consisting of the municipal offices, two or three business houses, a place that called itself a hotel and some two or three dozen palm-leaf shacks, and last, but not least, a brand-new frame building with a sign on it in big letters, Nipe Bay Co. You didn't need to inquire for any place, it was all in plain sight, right there on the bank of the river. I walked over to the office and found it locked. I asked a man nearby and he said the office men had gone to supper but would most likely be back after supper. I walked over to the so-called hotel; engaged a room; had supper and walked back. I asked the man at the desk for Mr. Garnett. He said Mr. Garnett had gone to Havana to meet his wife and attend to Company business and would be gone a week or more, but he was Mr. Garnett's brother, Frank, and was in charge while his brother was away. What could he do for me? I told him I was there in answer to Mr. Garnett's letter as I had advised in my letter. He didn't know a thing about it, but was very courteous. He went and got the

letter file and hunted until he found a copy of the letter to me, and my answer.

"We are just starting here. We have an engineers' camp out at Guaro where the mill is to be built. They are locating the railroad and surveying the cane fields. We have one overseer there, too, a Mr. Brown. You will be number two. I will send you out in the morning with a letter to him."

Next morning a Cuban showed up leading a horse for me. I had a saddle. Somehow, somewhere, I had gotten the idea into my head that overseers used saddles. If they didn't, I would be a lot more likely to have a saddle when I did need it, if I took it with me than if I left it behind. I had brought it. When the Cuban saw my rather large grip and the gunny sack, he couldn't see how we could carry them on our saddle horses and said we should have a pack horse. He probably had another horse; and, if I would authorize it, he would get rent for three horses instead of two.

I promptly solved the problem by taking his saddle off the horse I was to ride and leaving it till his return. I used the sack for a saddle blanket and saddled with my saddle; took the grip in front of me on the pommel of the saddle and we were on our way.

The road was what was called the Camino Real or Kings Highway to Holguin. The Cubans called it five leagues to Guaro and thirty leagues to Holguin. Frankly, I doubt if it had ever been measured, and I found out the hard way, that Cubans' distances were very elastic.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many times I have inquired a distance, ridden on for an hour or so and inquired again only to find I had gotten farther away. I remember once, years later, I was going to Puerto Padre. I inquired the distance and was told it was three leagues. About an hour later I inquired again and it was four leagues. Next time the man was very positive, "Five leagues, the devil himself measured it when

he was here on earth." I think the devil's measuring stick must have been out of order the day he measured it. Two very popular short distances are "canto de un gallo" (the distance you can hear a rooster crow) and "voz de un mantero" (the distance you can hear a woodsman's voice). I have never checked up on the woodsman, but you can sure hear a rooster crow a long way on a still, cold morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

When a Cuban says a league, most Americans translate it three miles, making the distances to Guaro and Holguin fifteen and ninety miles, respectively. Officially the league is about 2.66 miles so those distances would be just over thirteen and about eighty miles, respectively, had they been measured distances. The Kings Highway at this place was just a jungle trail that had at one time been widened out so ox carts could use it, but which the jungle had pretty much retaken. There wasn't a house along the whole road till we reached Guaro, and there wasn't one there either nor for many miles further until the Company started operation. The only reason I could see for ever widening the road to a cart road was that maybe sometime in the past they had hauled cedar and mahogany logs out of the woods for shipment abroad. There was certainly nothing to haul either into or out of Mayari. All supplies were shipped in by water; and, if there were any products for shipment, they went out the same way.

The only reason for keeping even a trail open was that "the mail must go through". There were very few people in Mayari who could read or write, much less carry on correspondence with outside parties. About the only mail was official communications, which went to Holguin once a week. The carrier took four days to make the round trip. He carried the mail in his saddle bags and the horse wasn't overloaded. That was the situation when I arrived, but he very soon had to lead a pack horse and both horses were over-

loaded. Furthermore, the Company wanted mail oftener than once a week. The railroad recently had been finished into Antilla, just across the bay, so the Company petitioned the Government to have the mail come to Antilla by rail and across the bay every day. I never learned whether the mail carrier lost his job or got a sailboat.

The camp building was the strangest I have ever seen. Mr. Garnett was an Englishman, educated in a private school in England and a finishing course in Germany. He had traveled widely in England's colonial possessions, and had worked in English Guiana and India and maybe other places. Somewhere in his travels he had seen something that made him come up with an original idea of a camp and this was it. I must say it was the most comfortable building I was ever in, in the tropics, though I fear it would not have stood a very strong wind.

It was two stories high, twenty-four by forty-eight feet and built on large, strong, round posts set deep in the ground. The ground floor was mother earth. The lower story was divided into camp kitchen, cook and helpers room, saddle room, and quarters for the Company guard and family, and another employee and family. The front of the kitchen and saddle room was sided with round poles set vertically, deep in the ground, so it would be difficult to break into. The rest of the building was sided with the boot legs of royal palms, called yaguas in Spanish. The upper floor was ten feet up and was made of the only sawed lumber in the whole building. The upper story was six feet high at the plates and about fourteen feet at the comb. The roof was of palm leaves and the eaves had an eight-foot overhang. On the sides which were protected by the wide overhang, the siding only went up three feet and was topped by a round pole, which served as a rail. The upper three feet was open. The stairway was on the outside and started up right by the kitchen door. The upstairs was

divided into two big rooms. The one where the stairway entered was twelve by twenty-four and was used as a bedroom. The other was twenty-four by thirty-six and was combined living room, dining room, bedroom and drafting room. There were, for a time, twenty of us living there and it took lots of cot space and table space.

On one inside post was a bulletin board with thumbtacks and all communications from the office were posted on this board; usually when all the engineers and overseers were in the field.

When I met Mr. Brown, I was very much surprised to meet a man I already knew. I had met him over near Holguin about a year before. He was a Carolinian of the old school and a soldier in the Army of Occupation after the Spanish American War. He liked Cuba, so went back to the States when he was mustered out of service; formed a company among his friends and came back to Cuba to buy land and plant a citrus grove. Why he went to Holguin, I will never know. Fortunately, he knew good land, for he bought it from—would I dare say a pair of the worst crooks of the American variety that ever hit Cuba?—Waterman and Towns.

\* \* \* \* \*

They went to Holguin right after the Spanish American War and bought a very large tract of land very cheaply. There was a little good land on it but by far the greater part of it was the poorest kind of savana, underlaid with hard igneous rock. They had it subdivided and sold it from the map to poor suckers back in the States—selling the poor land and holding back the good land for themselves. Part of it they sold and contracted to plant to citrus fruit. They took dynamite and blasted holes in that igneous rock; hauled in good soil to fill the holes; set out citrus trees; watered them well; and when they started growing nicely brought the purchasers down to show them how nicely the trees were growing and sell them more land

besides getting them to put up more money for care of the trees. I have seen some very good citrus groves planted that same way on limestone land. Citrus trees like limestone, but not igneous rock. Naturally the trees very soon died.

Crooks sooner or later fall out, even so with Waterman and Towns. I don't know who stung whom but Towns stayed with the project and planted a large citrus nursery on the good land. Waterman got out and went over on the railroad and bought a tract of very good land with a very bad title, and started his game all over again; but this time he, at least, had something to show, but dame nature took a hand. I just happened to be in Camaguey one time at the right time to attend his funeral, sometime around 1911 or 1912. Towns went on and built up two kinds of a reputation. It is said in Cuba they have there three kinds of liars: just common ordinary liars, d--- liars, and Thomas R. Towns liars. On his eightieth birthday the Cuban Government bestowed a special honor on him for developing an orange that will hang on the tree until picked, regardless of how long; thus enabling orange growers to hold their fruit for good prices when other oranges are out of season.

\* \* \* \* \*

Brown built a house; started clearing his land and sent for his lady love. She landed at Gibara and Sylvester Jones, the man most responsible for my going to Cuba, married them. They planted the grove; but the other members of the Company, for some reason, stopped sending money. When he could take it no longer, he sent his wife back to the States; went to Nipe and got a job. Having a house, cleared land to raise vegetables on between the trees, and tools to work with, he was able to hire a Negro to care for the place for about a fourth of what he earned at Nipe. I don't know how the grove came along, but can guess. They have a saying in Spanish, "The owner's eye

fattens a horse". And another, "He that has a store should either attend to it himself or sell it".

Brown had been in the army long enough to get the idea that all subordinates should come to attention, click their heels and salute when in his presence. That idea didn't go over at all with the Cubans. One day at noon, soon after I went there, he came in all hot and bothered. He had told a Cuban to do something which the Cuban not only didn't do, but was down right disrespectful. He didn't have a thing with him with which to enforce his order. That afternoon he buckled on a Colt forty-five and always carried it after that. It was so big and heavy it looked like it just about pulled him down.

The Cubans have great difficulty with American names. Me they called Mr. Gweely. Before the above incident, they called Brown Mr. Brong, with a heavy trill on the r. After that some called him Mr. Canyon and others Mr. Cabrone, which really means billy goat, but the Cubans give it a very much more vile meaning.

There was neither pasture, nor any other place to keep horses at the Guaro Camp. Neither can you ride horseback through the jungle nor freshly felled timber, so everyone, both overseers and engineers, walked.

It is a well known fact that when you cut down heavy forests you get far less rain. Mr. Garnett got the idea of compromising with nature. He would only cut a part of the timber. He cleared a railroad right-of-way one hundred feet wide, then came three hundred feet of forest, then the cane fields. The cane fields were laid out ten caballerias each, or three hundred thirty acres with three hundred feet of woods between each two fields. Had the railroad been straight the surveying of these fields would have been a very simple matter, but the railroad had curves in it, and Mr. Garnett added the additional condition that fields should not have streams through them where it could

possibly be avoided and yet get three hundred and thirty acres to a field. This made some of the surveys exceedingly complicated.

As fast as they were surveyed, they were let out to contractors to clear and plant to cane. At the same time, the contractor was handed the specifications of railroad ties and bridge and dock timbers. Each specification for construction timber told the kinds of wood that were acceptable. The process of clearing began by sending a bunch of men through with machetes to--as they expressed it in Spanish--"cut everything from the wrist down". Next followed the hewers. They went through and cut down all the trees that would fit any of the specifications and hewed them. Then trouble began. The specifications gave the price of each timber but neglected to say where it was to be received. Neither hewers nor contractors had any oxen; and, even if they did have, there was no feed nor pasture for oxen.

After the valuable timber was all cut, axmen went through and felled everything and chopped off the limbs so it would all lay close to the ground. After laying two or three months, if they could get a dry time, they set the whole thing on fire; went over it and picked up all the small stuff and piled it and burned it. Logs were left right where they were to rot. There were many kinds of wood, ranging in durability from the ceiba, which grew to seven or eight feet across the stump and which was so soft you could sink an ax in it to the eye; to the jiqui, so hard it would break an ordinary ax and so heavy it would sink in water like lead. The ceiba, if left lying with the bark on, will usually be pretty well rotten inside of a year; but, if peeled and hollowed out into a boat or a watering trough and kept in the water or full of water, it will last for years.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once, years later, I was running a railroad survey through solid jungle and found

an almasago tree about fourteen inches in diameter, with five jiqui rails sticking through the middle of it. Many years ago there had been a rail fence here and this soft wood had grown up beside it and encased the rails. The rest of the fence had been taken away but the rails remained through the tree and they were as solid as bone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Following the first good rain after the clean-up, each cane planter took a pole about the size of a woodsman's hand spike; jabbed a slanting hole in the ground; put two joints of cane into it and set his foot on it. The cane was planted. It was planted in irregular squares six or eight feet per side, right in among the logs and stumps.

I walked around a couple of days with Brown to get the lay of the land and an idea about the job, then they gave me one of the cane fields to "oversee". The contractor was just beginning. My job was to see that stumps were cut low. If the Cubans were left to their own devices, they would cut the trees waist high and ox carts couldn't straddle the stumps. I was also to see that all valuable timber was taken out before they started felling the useless trees. As one bunch did the hewing and another the felling of the useless trees, if I didn't watch them closely, they would cut down trees onto the hewed timbers before they were dragged out. As there were few oxen to get the hewed timbers out, that created a real bottleneck for all concerned. I was also to see that limbs were cut off the trees so they would burn well; see that all small stuff was picked up for the reburn; and look after planting the cane. But I never got to the cane planting. Also, I had to measure the amount of work done a month and make up the estimate. The contractor didn't have enough men on the job to keep me busy all the time so they handed me the job of receiving all ties and construction timbers delivered to the railroad right-of-way from

all the cane fields. The specifications gave dimensions of all kinds of construction timbers and first and second class ties and the kinds of wood acceptable. But I didn't know one kind of wood from another. I had to learn fast. One kind that was acceptable for ties was mahogany, and I received some of the nicest "birdseye" mahogany for cross ties, I have ever seen. Everything had to be placed far enough from the center-line of the railroad not to interfere with construction, and ties had to be piled so I could see both ends. I marked everything I received with a spot of paint on the end and marked the rejects with a cross. I located each assembly by stations on the railroad and made due entry in my notebook.

Looking after my field; piling ties; moving timbers away from center-line of railroad and personally measuring, painting and recording was just too much to handle alone, so I hired a Jamaica Negro to help me. That is when I learned to talk Jamaican, and believe me it wasn't easy. About the second morning he came up and said, "Mistahwilliam, whuzdehoilsuh?" No, you needn't look at it again, you can't pronounce it and I couldn't understand it. I asked him four or five times what he wanted and his answer was still incomprehensible. Finally, in desperation at my stupidity he said, "Whuzdehoilsuh? Dehoilsuh? Toputindepain, suh?" That did it. I, at last, grasped the idea that he wanted some oil to thin the paint with.

Going down the right-of-way one day, it suddenly struck me that one of my piles of ties was not as big as it was when I received it. I counted them and checked with my book and found it several ties short. Then I counted several more piles and most of them were short. I looked for tracks to see if they had been hauled away but could find no signs. It took some detective work but I eventually found out they were taking received ties; sawing off just enough of the

ends to get the paint; destroying the ends and putting the ties on new piles to sell to me again. After that we painted a stripe from bottom to top and across every pile. Even with that I could never be positive they didn't lift off the top ties; take a few from lower down; then carefully replace the top ones so the paint line was continuous. The only way to check it was to count every pile every time I passed by, and that was impossible. In the meantime, the bottleneck of hewed timbers still in the woods was becoming unbearable.

When we went into camp for dinner one day, there was a brand-new letter on the bulletin board telling one of the other overseers to take over my cane field, and telling me to turn over my timber business to Mr. Sawyer who had just arrived from the United States. He was a traveling salesman who had come to Cuba on account of asthma. The combined climate and out-of-door work did him a world of good. With all my work taken away, I began to wonder if I was to get a time check. I didn't have long to wonder. The very next paragraph took care of that. "We are naming N. K. Williams, Superintendent of Transportation. For the present you will have to do your hauling with oxen. There are forty yoke in the pasture at Santa Isabel. Help yourself. You will have to haul cane from the Company cane field at Cerrones to feed them, and your first job is to get the ties and wharf timbers out of the woods. You can put the ties on the railroad right-of-way and deliver the wharf timbers and piles to the Guaro wharf."

Santa Isabel was five or six miles in one direction, Cerrones three or four in another, and Guaro wharf about the same in another. There was a cart to haul the cane but all the timbers had to be dragged and oxen don't travel very fast. Furthermore, Cubans don't teach their oxen "Gee" and "Haw" as our ancestors taught theirs. Instead, to

turn left they call the near ox by name and tell him to back up, then call the off ox by name and tell him to come here. To turn right they reverse the process. How the oxen ever learn such a rigmarole I have no idea, but they do. But to work successfully they must always work with the same mate and on the same side. Any change upsets all the ox has ever learned. These oxen were bought all over the country and dumped in the pasture regardless of names or mates.

I rounded up a bunch of men who were looking for work and said they were ox drivers. I was Superintendent of Transportation, yet my only means of going anywhere was my two feet. We all walked over to Santa Isabel; drove a bunch of oxen into the corral; mated them as well as we could for size and began putting yokes on them. I soon learned that some of my self-recommended ox drivers didn't even know how to tie a yoke on an ox's head, and they didn't have a thing on me there. I didn't know how either, but I learned fast from those who did. Those who didn't, had to learn, too, or take a walk. With oxen that had new names and didn't know their mates, and with a large percent of drivers that didn't know anything about oxen, I really had troubles from that day on and my turnover in drivers was phenomenal so long as I held the job. Some of them quit of their own accord because they couldn't take the rain, the mud, the mosquitoes, and the jejenes (biting gnats). Others quit by request because they didn't know their work or were too lazy to do it.

European, or so-called American cattle, do not sweat. The only way they can cool their bodies is by lolling their tongues, and that is very inefficient. Hence they cannot stand much heat. The Asiatic cattle or zebus do sweat; hence they can stand the heat much better, and that is why they have become so popular through the southern part of the United States and throughout the tropics; but they had not yet been introduced

into Cuba when I was working oxen.

I very soon learned from the Cubans that if I wanted to get any work out of an ox, I had to work him in the cool of the day. I had the oxen yoked at daylight and at anytime between ten and eleven A.M. that we were nearest the feed lot, which was in the shade, they were unyoked, put in the feed lot and fed. They were not yoked again till three P. M., then we worked long enough to get in nine hours work for the day. By working this way, and also aided by the fact that much of the hauling was in the shade, I was really getting a lot of work done in spite of the handicaps mentioned above.

Then one day Mr. Garnett came by and said, "Williams, how many hours a day are you working the oxen?"

"Nine."

"That isn't enough, they will have to work ten."

"Mr. Garnett, they won't work ten."

"I'd like to know what in the hell you know about it."

I had looked a long time before I found this job and had no desire to start looking for another so I didn't start any argument, but told the drivers they would have to work ten hours. They told me just what I had told Mr. Garnett. "All right! You know it! I know it! And the oxen know it! But Mr. Garnett doesn't! You will have to keep them under the yoke ten hours a day."

Next day, when we went in at noon, there was an official notice on the bulletin board. "Oxen must work ten hours a day. Six till eleven and twelve till five." That's right through the heat of the day. We obeyed orders and did far less work in ten hours than we had been doing in nine and wore the oxen out much faster. I might say that oxen, not having any concentrated food, cannot work every day. We would work them till they were getting tired and thin, then send them to the pasture to rest and bring on some fresh ones. The reliefs had to come much more

frequently under the new system.

Then the blow really fell. About mid-May the rainy season set-in in earnest. The pile driver finished driving piles on one railroad bridge and had to be moved to the next. The only road was the right-of-way. It was full of stumps and the ground was soft between stumps. The right-of-way was cleared one hundred feet wide through the jungle; and, at this particular place, it was at right angles to the trade wind, so we couldn't get a breath of air. The sun was right overhead at noon and the ground was steaming. The oxen just couldn't pull. I was using three carts with four yoke of oxen to the cart and loading light, but everything happened. One time a load, loaded for four yoke, got stuck so badly it took eleven yoke to pull it out. Then, all my drivers quit but three. In looking over my diary, I find two days where I was trying to operate two carts with three drivers and eight yoke of oxen. The carts just weren't going at all, so we left one cart stand with the tongue oxen attached and with seven yoke of cattle and three drivers to give them the goad, we made one kilometer in all day.

\* \* \* \* \*

I think that "goad" needs a little explanation. The dictionary says it is "a pointed stick to urge on cattle". That is the American version. The Cuban version is a much more refined instrument of torture. They go into the woods and hunt as straight a stick as they can find that is about three-quarters of an inch in diameter at the little end, and cut it about eight feet long. Then they securely wrap the little end with strong cord or wire so it can't split and drive a nail into it, cut the head off the nail and file the nail to a sharp point. The nail sticks out of the wood anywhere from one-eighth of an inch to more than an inch, according to who is making it. They prod the oxen anywhere from gently to all the

weight they can throw into it, depending on the driver and how mad he is. An ox's hide is loose. If the driver is real cruel, and many of them are, and is real mad because the ox won't pull, he jams the nail through the skin, drags the skin with the nail and scratches his ribs. If done vigorously enough, many oxen have no choice but to pull till they drop dead. I have seen dead oxen on a muddy road that had been thus treated. I never allowed it to happen to any oxen in my care.

\* \* \* \* \*

That was in the rainy season and it rained almost every afternoon. By working when it was raining to cool the oxen off, we finally got those two carts over to their destination and unloaded. Next morning we started back with the empty carts. The sun was desperately hot, the ground steaming, and not a breath of air. The oxen all had their tongues lolled and couldn't pull. I was tired, heart-sick, and desperate, when suddenly looking down the right of way towards Mayari', I saw Mr. Garnett coming. When he turned off to one of the camps, I told the drivers to just wait till I got back and I walked back to see him.

I asked him if he could spare a few minutes as I had something to show him. He asked what it was and I told him I could show him much easier than I could tell him. He followed me back to the carts and when we arrived, I said to the drivers, "Let's go!" The way they went to work on those poor oxen was really criminal. Every time they sank the nail into an ox he leaned over against his mate and bellowed, but not a one of them tightened into the yoke. I let the punishment go on just long enough for Mr. Garnett to see what was going on, then stopped them. Then I turned to Mr. Garnett and said, "Mr. Garnett, I wish you would tell me the use of abusing these oxen this way. You are going to kill some of them."

"I have to have that pile driver moved."  
 "If you had told me to move the pile driver, instead of telling me to work these oxen ten hours a day, it would have been moved a long time ago."

He sat there on his horse and looked around in every direction as if looking for an answer from the hills or the sea. Then digging his spurs into the horse he said, "Dammit, move it!" We unyoked the oxen right there and put them in the shade. There was plenty of shade right alongside of the right-of-way. The cane field where we got our feed was nearby, so we cut and carried feed for them. At four o'clock that afternoon, we yoked up again, drove one cart into the cane field and loaded enough cane for the evening feed and went over where the rest of the pile driver was. I saw that the oxen were fed and the rest of the pile driver loaded before I returned to camp. Then I told the drivers to yoke up at two in the morning when the moon would come up and start traveling. As I came to the job next morning, I met the empty carts headed for the feed lot. They had already delivered their loads and the pile driver men were assembling the driver. I never again heard anything about working the oxen ten hours a day.

\* \* \* \* \*

Right here I am going to take a little time to describe my co-workers. I doubt if a more motley, cosmopolitan bunch was ever assembled on one job. I have already described Brown. Next in line, alphabetically, were the two Baileys. Young Bailey was Mrs. Garnett's kid brother, just out of school and just out of England—a genuine tenderfoot in more than one way. He had never been out of England before and knew nothing of the work, the Cubans, American slang, nor Spanish. His flesh was so tender the mosquitoes and jejenes raised great welts on him, more than on any one else I ever saw, either before or since. He came out to learn to be a sugar planter



and regardless of physical suffering he had the fortitude to stick it out without complaint.

The elder Bailey, from some place in the North, was past sixty years old and had worked many years in Mexico. He was in charge of laying the railroad track. He was the only teetotaler in camp except myself, and had more moral courage than any man in camp, including myself. One of the overseers was a big tall man from the island of St. Kitts, an English possession. I don't remember his name but do remember him. He was a man that has been aptly described as having a champagne appetite and only a beer salary. At the time he was there, our camp flunky was a Jamaican Negro named Sam. From the time this fellow came into camp he monopolized Sam like he was his personal valet. "Sam, come and get my shoes and clean them. Sam, polish my leggings. Sam hang my clothes out to dry them," and at meal time, two or three times during a meal, "Sam, get me a clean plate," and the plates were all downstairs. The whole bunch of us were very much disgusted with him and wanted to tell him off, but just hated to offend him. Brown ran the mess and was the one to give Sam orders.

Bailey had no more authority than any of us but one day during dinner, the usual, "Sam, go get me a clean plate." The older Bailey opened up on him. "Just who do you think you are? Do you think Sam is here just to wait on you? You are of the least importance and have the least responsibility of any man in the camp. Sam is here to serve the camp and no one individually, least of all you. Hereafter, when you want a clean plate you go and get it yourself, and clean your own shoes and leggings as the rest of us do." And he made it stick. The man from St. Kitts was soon fired and was the only one of the whole outfit fired while I was there.

Three of the engineers wore full beards, trimmed to nice Vandykes: Batchelder,

Fasting and Hill.

Batchelder's beard was coal black. He was surveying the cane fields. He would work a few days in the field, then spend a day in the office figuring out just where to cut the closing line that would make the field contain just the ten cabs. it was supposed to contain. When figuring, he always sat and twisted his moustache with his left hand. I don't think I could exactly call him anti-social, and yet he wasn't very sociable. The other men had little use for him, though I could never see the reason why. While we chatted and joked of an evening, he sat aside and read. He was a "down-east Yankee". He had worked on the Cuba Railroad when it was building. He had his wife with him when he worked on it, but she baulked on this one and stayed in the United States.

Was I surprised when two or three months after I left the Nipe Bay Company, I got a telegram from my boss to "Report to Batchelder, care of Brooks and Company, Guantanamo!" I worked under him several months without friction, but Birdie never liked him as she did others of my bosses.

\* \* \* \* \*

Who has not heard of "The Christ of the Andes"? For many years Argentina and Chili quarreled over their boundary and finally were on the point of going to war. Some other nation persuaded them to arbitrate the matter instead of fighting. The King of Norway was chosen as arbitrator and he sent out a commission to survey the boundary. Fasting was a member of this commission. After the survey was completed, the two countries jointly erected a statue of Christ where the boundary line crosses the most traveled pass, and on it is the Spanish version of the statement, "Never again will these two countries go to war".

\* \* \* \* \*

The Nipe Bay Company had been looking for more men. One day Garnett was out and said he had just hired another engineer. His

name was Fasting and he had just come off of the Argentina-Chilian Survey. Someone asked if he was a real engineer or someone just learning. "He is a real engineer. He speaks seven languages and plays the piano." After Garnett was gone, the boys had a lot of fun about the new qualifications for a good engineer. The men who worked with him said he would hardly class as more than fair. While he knew his mathematics, he was very slow and not too accurate in field work. He was a Norwegian, educated in Germany. He spoke English, Spanish, German, and, of course, his native Norwegian. I don't know the other three. I soon found he had another qualification. He could play chess. I had my chessmen with me and inquired if anyone could play chess. Spiess was the only one. I made a checker board and he and I played several games. We were fairly well matched. When Fasting came, I took him on and got more than I bargained for. At that time I had never heard of "The fool's mate". It is a series of moves that is very easily blocked, but if not blocked, you can checkmate your opponent in just four moves. I remember that time and time again it seemed I had hardly started playing till I was checkmated. Looking back on it now, I suspect he was pulling the "Fool's mate" on me and I didn't see it in time to block it. One night when Mr. Garnett was in camp, he, Fasting and Spiess surely made the woods ring with their German songs.

Hill was a northerner who had worked several years in Mexico, was of rather slight build and not very rugged. According to his own story, he had been quite a rounder in his youthful days. He died in less than two years after I left there. He had never married.

We hear a lot about nepotism. Harry Garnett sure did his share. He was Administrator of the sugar mill; his brother, Edgar, just a few years younger, was Assistant Administrator; his brother, Frank, several

years younger was Field Superintendent; and his brother-in-law, young Bailey, an overseer. Frank, being Field Superintendent, spent quite a bit of his time at camp. He was a large man about thirty and typically English. One event particularly sticks in my memory about him. When I first went out to camp, the flunky was a bald-headed Spaniard with a full beard, named Tino. His clothes were so greasy they would almost stand alone and he always had a dirty bath towel hung over his shoulder. Frank, in true English style, had to have a clean plate two or three times every meal. He would hand his plate to Tino and ask for a clean plate. Tino would take it and wipe off whatever was on it and hand it back, supposedly nice and clean. One day at noon, just after dinner, we were sitting talking and I guess something must have struck him. He suddenly looked around and said, "You haven't any dish cupboard up here."

"No."

"Where does Tino get those clean plates?"

Brown, laughingly, told him just what happened.

He didn't laugh. "Do you mean to tell me he wipes my plate on that dirty old towel? I never heard of such a thing." Next meal he was out there, when he emptied his plate Tino was there right on the job and picked it up. If you ever saw anybody grab quick—Frank grabbed that plate! He told Tino in his very best Spanish, which wasn't too good, that the plate was clean enough. Anyhow, he didn't want it wiped on that dirty towel. He never again asked for a clean plate. Somehow neither Harry Garnett nor Frank was as popular with the men as their brother, Edgar.

When I decided to leave the company for what I considered a better job, Frank tried to talk me out of it. As a final word he said, "If you leave now when we need men, you don't need to ever come back for a job. You won't get it."

Some years later I was in Hotel Plaza, Camaguey, and there sat Frank Garnett having

a drink with some of his friends. I walked up and spoke to him and he was really surprised and said, "Well, I'll be damned! Quaker Williams!" We had quite a little visit. He told me that he was Field Superintendent for the Jatibonico Sugar Company. His brother, Edgar, was Administrator of the Santa Cecilia Sugar Mill near Guantanamo. His brother, Harry, got a job as Manager of a sugar mill on an English island in the Southwest Pacific. I later heard that he was on his way to join Harry, when he was taken suddenly ill, died and was buried at sea.

Hulse was quite a husky blond engineer just out of college and a snake charmer. One day he came in from the day's work carrying what appeared to be something pretty heavy in a sack. It turned out to be an eight-foot snake. He found it and wanted to bring it home. Having nothing to put it in, he skinned off his undershirt and tied it up in that. Asked what he was going to do with it, he said, "Get rid of some of the rats." Palm-leaf roofs are positively the coolest roofs there are, but they are great rat harbors, and we had lots of them. He carried his snake up to the roof, grabbed him around the neck, stuck his head into the roof and held him up while he crawled in among the palm leaves. The rats disappeared overnight and I never saw the snake again.

There were five of the bunch that sported mustaches. Maurice Kelly, Spiess, Robinson, Martin and Taffy Williams. Kelly was a Texan, a good engineer when sober, though not a graduate. He had worked several years in Mexico and Central America. His mustache was very heavy and coal black. I happened to overhear two of the men in conversation one day. They were discussing the drinking habits of the various members of the camp. One of them said, "I can figure old man Bailey and Quaker Williams out all right. They are just plain teetotalers, but I can't figure Kelly out. He won't touch a drop and yet you can see it sticking out all over him that he is

a drinker." I got the story, years later, when I went over to the American Colony of La Gloria where his brother, J. C. Kelly, was Chief Engineer. Some years before I was there, they had built a macadam road from La Gloria to Port Viaro; J. C. was Chief Engineer, and Maurice was his assistant and inspector on the job. I suspect J. C. had trouble with Maurice before and was pretty much disgusted. He went out on the job one day and instead of being on the job looking after the work, he was lying down under a tree, drunk. J. C. went over and started bawling him out. After some argument J. C. said, "Maurice, I just can't have your drinking interfere with my work. You're fired!"

"J. C., you can't fire me, I've already quit. I can't allow your work to interfere with my drinking." When the saloon learned he had been fired and would have no more pay checks, they would sell him no more liquor and he had to sober up. When he heard that the Niye Bay Company was hiring engineers, he went over and got the job where I knew him. Whether he promised them he wouldn't drink any more or merely made it to himself, he kept it for several years.

The railroad across the Guaro River called for a long, high fill. The Company shipped in a carload of American mules and put Kelly in charge. He rounded up a bunch of Jamaican niggers; established a camp down on the job, so left our camp but was near enough that we saw him almost every day. He finished that fill and put in some more, then began building the railroad spurs into the cane fields by contract. He made good money; sent quite a bit to his mother in Texas; bought a piece of land joining the Company land; and worked till he had fourteen thousand dollars in the bank. Something happened then to start him drinking again. He went on a binge that lasted several months. He didn't sober up till the fourteen thousand was gone. His clothes were ragged; his shoes

were worn out; his eyes were bleary; and his face was bloated, but he hadn't let go of his transit nor his land.

He went back to the Company and asked for work but they turned him down. A Company employee, going along the road one day, heard an axman out in the woods, miles from where the Company had any work going on. His curiosity got the better of him and he went over to investigate. There was Kelly, cold sober, being a whole survey party all by himself. He had his transit set up and a range rod on line. He would cut line awhile, then go back; tie the rear chain to the last stake and chain up and drive another stake. He had to do a lot of walking but after all he had nothing else to do and he was getting it done. I never heard from him again.

Spieß was a Bohemian. He got his preliminary education in his native Prague and finished up in Germany. His mustache was very heavy, coal-black and he spent a lot of time and energy training it so he would look like Kaiser Bill, of whom he was a great admirer. He spoke four languages: his native Czech, German, English, and Spanish. He had worked in several South American countries, the Island of Trinidad, and Santo Domingo, where he married and learned cane planting. His wife was still in Santo Domingo till after I left Nipe. The six months he spent in Trinidad was the only time he ever spent in an English-speaking country and yet he spoke almost perfect English with only a slight foreign accent. He was an omnivorous reader of English magazines. He had one expression I will never forget. Where we would say, "moving in good society", or something of the kind, he always spoke of "going between decent people".

From him I got a new idea of what a Christian may do or may not do. Something was said about Christianity and he said he was a Christian.

I said, "From the language I heard you using the other day, I didn't think you

sounded like one."

"Why, I never swear."

I cited him the time and place.

"Hell! That was in Spanish! God doesn't understand Spanish."

"What language does he understand?"

"German. I never swear in German."

\* \* \* \* \*

Another day I got another slant on Christianity from a different source. I was walking along a muddy road when a Cuban rode up behind me and asked if I wanted to ride. Who wouldn't under the circumstances? We were riding along and came to some very deep mud and the horse began to flounder. He jabbed him unmercifully with the spurs.

I said, "Wait a minute. This horse is carrying double and this mud is awfully deep."

"So what? He is only a horse. When he is dead, I'll get another."

"But horses have feelings. How would you like for me to put a double load on you and when you got stuck in the mud get after you with an ox goad?"

"That wouldn't do at all; I am a Christian."

\* \* \* \* \*

Robinson was a Jamaican, educated in England. He was a small man and had a very light mustache, both in color and weight. I don't know where he met Garnett but he was one of Garnett's overseers at the Guanica Sugar Mill in Porto Rico and he brought him over here and made him head overseer. When he came, his wife, a Porto Rican, was not with him. As soon as the Company could build him a house in Mayari, he sent for her. With her came her brother, Oppenheimer. That name is German-Jewish. When or how it got into Porto Rico, I have no idea.

Just after the United States took over Porto Rico, they had a terrible hurricane and thousands were left homeless. Hawaii had been regularly importing Japanese and Chinese labor to harvest their cane. Following the Porto Rican hurricane, to relieve the suffering

in Porto Rico, the United States Government shipped thousands of Porto Ricans to Hawaii. Among them went young Oppenheimer and he learned the art of cane planting there in Hawaii; a style which differs from the Cuban style.

The women lived in Mayari', and the men spent their weekends there, after they came over.

Martin was a Jamaican, about Robinson's size, and his mustache about as heavy but coal-black. I don't know much of his background but he was an overseer on one of the Brooks plantations near Guantanamo just before coming to Guaro. We had had rain, rain, rain, and one morning he got up all hot and bothered. He had left a better job than this; true it was a little less money but he had a horse to ride and didn't have to wade this mud. He had a nice room all to himself and a private shower. Our only bath was the river. He figured the conveniences were worth more than the difference of salary, so he was going back. So instead of going to work he took off for Mayari'. That night he was back. I said, "I thought you were quitting."

"They raised my salary and promised me a mule to ride so I came back." A couple of days later in came the mule just at noon.

Sawyer had been having chills and fever, so after dinner Robinson said, "Sawyer, you had better take Martin's mule and ride into Mayari', and see a doctor or you will really be down sick." When I came in that night, Sawyer was there.

I said, "I thought you were going to see the doctor."

"It rained and I didn't have fever so I didn't go." I noticed a smile go around among the fellows and wondered if there was something fishy somewhere, but made no comment.

Next day at noon when I came in Robinson met me at the head of the stairs and was very solicitous about my welfare. That in itself was very suspicious for he had never interested himself in my welfare.

He said, "Williams, do you have to go out this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Well, you had better ride Martin's mule."

"Why, can't he ride him?"

"Yes."

"Did he ride him this morning?"

"Yes."

But it never occurred to me to ask how

far. "Why do you want me to ride him?"

"Martin doesn't have to go out this

afternoon and it doesn't make sense for you to go out and wade this mud while the mule stands idle in the corral."

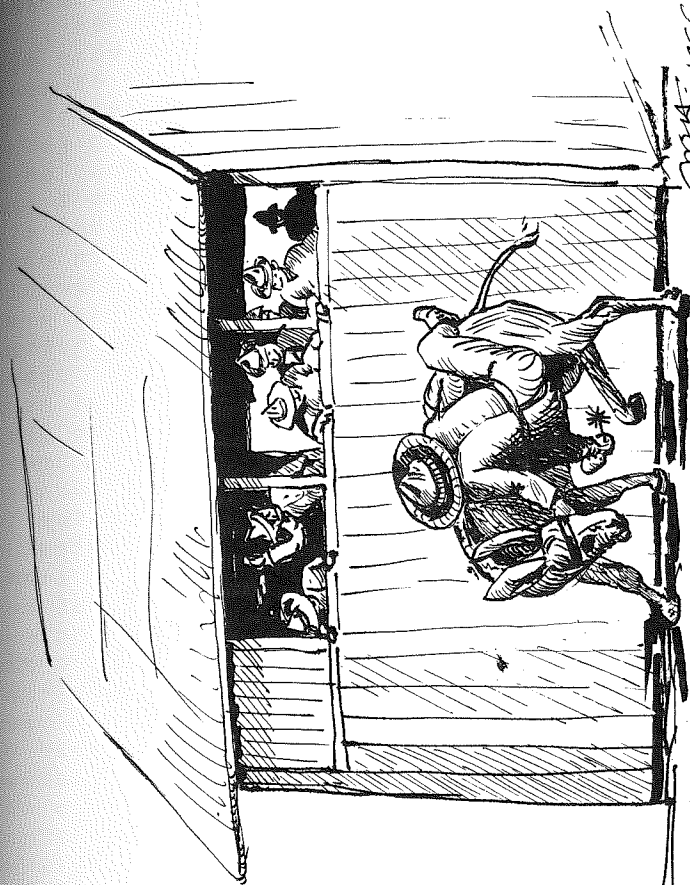
I could sure check him on that one so no more was said. When I was ready to go out after dinner, I called down to the stable man and told him to saddle Martin's mule with my saddle. The saddle the Company furnished Martin was an English saddle, a little bigger than a postage stamp. I hate the things. I buckled on my spurs and took my raincoat down and tied it on the back of the saddle and then happened to look up. Every man in camp was leaning over the rail watching me. I knew then that I was in for something. I was really on the spot. I was neither a bronco buster nor rodeo rider. I had no desire whatever to start off on an aerial expedition and wind up with a broken neck. I didn't dare back off without even trying to ride him with all that bunch watching me. If I had only taken time to think things through, I might have saved myself some very painful moments. (The Cubans break their horses to ride by putting pack saddles on them; loading them down with rocks and letting them buck till they are tired.) Though it is very likely he had never had a man on his back until Sawyer got on him to go to the doctor, he had many pack saddle scars on his back. The Cubans aren't always polite to their bores. Sometimes when someone is blowing off steam on some subject his listeners think he knows nothing about, someone will sing out, "Que sabe puerco de freno?" (What does a hog

know about a bridle?) The proverbial hog and this mule were in exactly the same category on bridle wisdom, but I didn't know it.

I had been told that a bronco buster riding wild horses without help, got his left foot in the stirrup, and with a firm hold on the reins and saddle horn with his right hand grabs the side of the bridle with his left hand and suddenly swings himself up into the saddle and at the same time swings the animal's head around against his side so suddenly he can't buck, no matter how badly he wants to. It isn't easy for a tenderfoot. I had never done it before nor seen it done, nor do I think I could have done it had it been a big animal, but he was a small mule only about four feet tall. I held his nose against my left leg till I was well settled in the saddle, and both feet in the stirrups, then with my right hand still firmly on the saddle horn, I let go of his bridle and grabbed the reins firmly in my left hand and prepared for action. When he got the use of his head, he trotted off like an old plow horse. What a let down! But not for long! When we had traveled some five or six hundred feet, we reached the corral gate where the other mules were and business came to a stand still. When I pulled the left rein, he dropped his chin down on his left shoulder. When I pulled the right rein, he dropped his chin on his right shoulder. Then I decided to back him out and pulled on both reins; he dropped his chin against his breast. When I spurred him on one side, he tried to kick my foot on that side. When I kicked the other side, he tried to kick that foot, and when I dug both spurs at once, he kicked up and tried to kick both my feet at once, and just about sat down. I was really stuck. Suddenly I knew why Sawyer hadn't gone to see the doctor and just how far Martin had ridden this mule. I was rapidly headed for the same disgrace and everyone was looking at me.

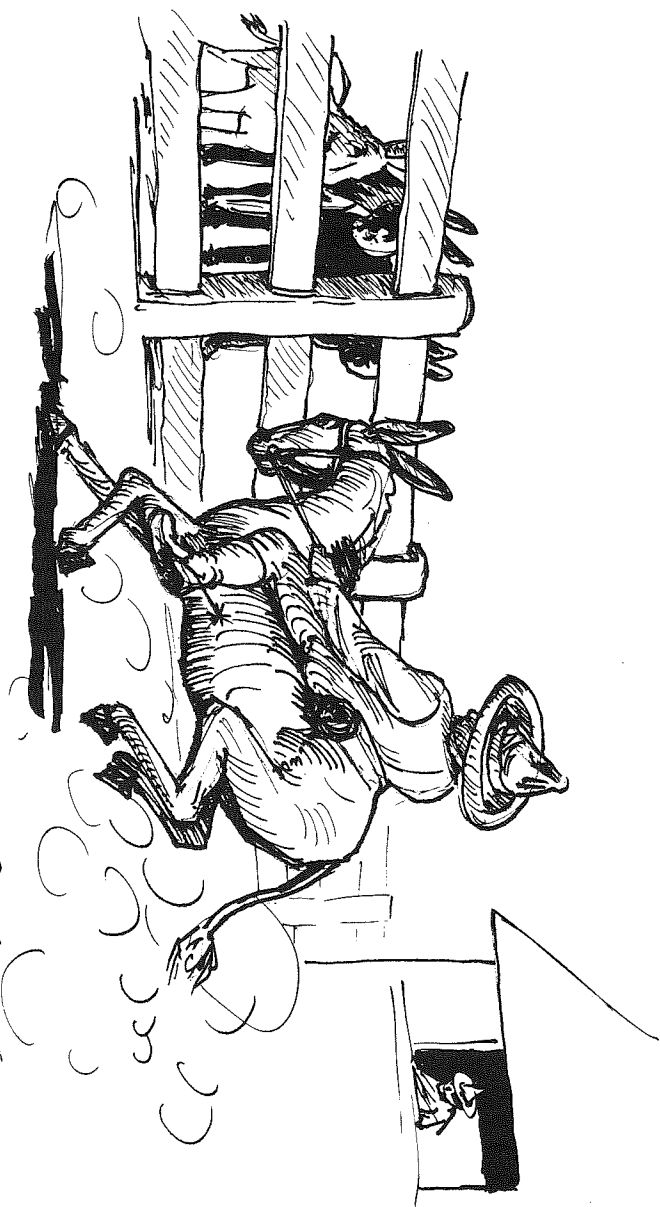
\* \* \* \* \*

Then, suddenly like a flash of lightning,



I mount Martin's Mule in spite  
of attentive gallery.

I had a flash of memory back to my boyhood days in Kansas. My father had a team of mules and one of them was definitely mulish. He was bridle-wise all right and worked well beside his mate; but, when we went to ride him, he was more like a crab. The direction his head was pointed bore no relation whatever to the direction he traveled. He seemed to travel forward, backward or sidewise with equal gusto. I remembered one Sunday we were coming home from church, all on horseback, and I was riding this mule and was just a little ahead of the others. Suddenly, with his head pointed homeward, he started running sidewise. We didn't ride with spurs in those days and the harder I laid on the whip, the harder he ran sidewise. There was a low hedge fence on the roadside and I thought when he got to that he would surely either stop or fall over it. He did neither. He stumbled a little but never stopped till he reached the barnyard where there was a pair of mules. All the pulling of the reins and whipping I could do, didn't budge him from there till the owner came out of the house and led him back to the road. He put him behind the other horses and we went on home without incident. It was in the fall of the year and the pasture was getting short, so next Sunday Romey, the hired man, volunteered to ride the mule and herd the cattle on the meadow. I was in the house getting ready for church when he took the cattle out, so don't know how he got them out, but suspect he walked and drove them and led the mule. I remember distinctly that when I came out of the house he was in the meadow standing beside the mule. Both the cattle and mule were grazing, then one of the cattle started to wander off. He mounted the mule and headed him toward the cow and the mule promptly took off backwards toward the barn. The harder he laid on the whip the faster he ran backwards and never stopped till he reached the barn. When we reached home, Romey very



Both he was reluctant  
to leave the Corral

W. A. R. - 1955.

triumphantly announced that he had found a way to make Jack travel the way he was headed — just whip him over the ears.

\* \* \* \* \*

With my flash of memory came an idea — if that would work on Jack, why wouldn't it work on this mule? I had run out of all other tricks and it wouldn't cost anything to try. I didn't have a whip but I did have a good pair of bridle reins and went to work. He put up quite an argument, threw his head up and down and sidewise and danced around in circles. I was getting far more action than I had before, so persisted. He eventually got the idea and took off down the road in the direction I wanted to go. I soon came up behind a man headed for Mayari'. The mule dropped in behind him just as if he were in a pack train and all went fine until I wanted to turn off of the Mayari' road. The mule wanted to go on but I had learned how to handle the situation and the mule was learning what a whipping over the ears meant. I soon straightened him out and had no more trouble till I got to the Guaro River near home.

It had been raining hard in the mountains and the river was badly swollen. Most animals wandering around in this part of the country can swim, so I took it for granted that this mule could. I took the things out of my pants pockets, put them in my shirt pocket and rode in. In spite of my pull on the upstream rein, when he hit the current he threw his head to one side and started swimming right downstream. If you pull an animal's head hard when he is swimming, you turn him over. The jungle came right down to normal water's edge so there was no possible landing until the railroad crossing more than two miles downstream. I had never been down the stream; but, if it was like others, it was full of drifts that might suck us under or do anything to us. I can swim but it had been raining and I had my raincoat on.



Only the foot-log pleases and the mule was definitely vile.





Swimming with a raincoat on isn't easy, if not impossible. I had heard of others who had tried it and drowned. The prospect wasn't pleasing at all; then suddenly I got a ray of hope. A few hundred feet downstream, I saw a palm tree that the men had cut down across the river for a foot-log. It was two and a half or three feet above water. It was time for some kind of hope, for I was getting panicky. When I saw that, I said, half to myself and half to the mule, "When we reach that foot-log, you and I are parting company. Too bad to lose you but you belong to the Company and aren't worth saving anyway; but I really hate to lose the saddle, it belongs to me and can't be replaced here." Much sooner than it has taken to tell this, luck came my way again. The mule struck his feet on what, in normal times, was a little island in the river. No sooner did he have all four feet on solid ground than I really went to work on him; and, if ever a mule got both sides and his ears worked over at the same time, he did. We still had the other channel of the river to swim but when I got him straightened out, he swam it like a veteran.

Next morning I stood at the rail with the other fellows and watched Martin mount and ride away. When he reached the corral, the mule stopped at the gate as before. Martin had very evidently watched me closely and the mule was learning, too. Just two wallops over the ears and he took off down the road where he was supposed to go. I walked but not for long. They started in buying mules for all of us; and, in addition, at the beginning of the next month, Brown and I got a ten dollar raise in salary each. As I had more ground to cover than any other one—much more than Martin—I got the next mule. He was a little bit of a thing, not much bigger than an overgrown jack rabbit, and was lazy besides. In this newly-cleared land we had lots of logs—big, little and indifferent—to get over. The little ones

we negotiated fairly well but the big ones were something else. He would rear up on his hind legs like he was going to jump them, and get his front legs across, and come down with his belly on the log. Then I would step onto the log and he would slowly and laboriously drag his hind legs over one at a time—quite a slow laborious job, but still it beat walking.

Spiess had the fields closest to camp so he was about the last to get a mule. When it finally came, I don't know if he tried to ride it and got bluffed out, or just didn't like its looks. Anyhow, he promptly jumped onto me to trade mules. Said the new mule, which was white, was much bigger and stronger than mine and could get me over my long route so much better than mine. I told him it was bigger and stronger, so was all the more reason he should ride it. I weighed one hundred forty, he was six feet one or two and weighed just about two hundred. We argued quite a while and as usual I lost but I did get in one condition. While this mule's back wasn't sore at present, it was horribly scarred up with the pack saddle. Once an animal's back is scarred, they get sore very easily; so I knew that with the everyday riding it would soon have a sore back. I refuse to ride a sore-backed animal, so put in the condition that when the white mule's back got sore, he would trade back. It sure looked incongruous to see that big man ride away on that little mule, but that's the way it was.

As for me, for the time being, it was a peach of a trade. This wasn't a big mule as we think of mules; it was still a pack mule but very much larger than the one I had just traded off, temporarily. She was strong and full of pep. She didn't stop to argue with any log on the job. She just hopped over it like a jack rabbit. Everything was just lovely until her back began to get sore. As there was a lot of our work we couldn't ride to, we had to tie up, walk a while and



*The old white mule was everything she used to be.*



A muddy end to a mule trade.

remount many times a day. As her back got sore, she objected to the remounting; and the sorer the back got the more strenuous the objections. One day I went to mount to go into lunch and her objections were so vigorous and so effective that when I landed on her back I was behind the saddle, not in it. That didn't make her a bit happy and her rear end came up so violently I was barely able to stay on by hooking both spurs in her flanks. Lots of animals that don't normally buck just don't like to have spurs hooked in their flanks. She had that dislike to the n'th degree. The next explosion was so violent even spurs wouldn't hold. She sent me for as neat an aerial somersault over her head as you would see in a circus, except that I lit on my back, not my feet. On both sides of the road was newly cleared land with machete stumps from two to six inches high, so thick I couldn't possibly have fallen there without getting at least half a dozen of them in my back and been very badly hurt. She was very considerate and picked out a very soft mudhole in the road to toss me into. Realizing how far I was from camp, I held onto the bridle reins for dear life. I was afraid she would turn and start kicking me, but she didn't. She tried to get away by running out backwards. She dragged me a little way and gave up. I wasn't hurt at all but I sure was "messed up". I tied her to a tree before I tried to mount again.

When I rode into camp, one of the boys rode up behind and asked, "What in the world is the matter with your back?"

"Nothing serious." When I got upstairs, Spiess was already there. I reminded him of his agreement and told him I wanted my little mule back.

"Now what's the matter?"

The man just behind me said, "If you'll just take a look at his back, I think you can see what is the matter."

He put up a little argument but a bargain

is a bargain, so he said all right. He never even tried to ride the white mule but sent her in for exchange and walked till a relief mule came.

Salpaugh was a rodman for the engineers. He was tall, slender, and about twenty. Though we slept on adjoining cots all the time I was there, he was so close-mouthed I never learned where he was from nor how he happened to be on the job. From his speech I think he was a mid-westerner, but don't know it. His trunk sat, back to the wall, between his head and mine. He was more industrious than I and took something out of his trunk every morning before I was out of bed. One beautiful moonlight night, at 1:30 in the morning, I awoke and was aware that the lid on the trunk was up and someone was searching in the trunk. My first confused thought was, "What is Salpaugh doing in his trunk so early? It isn't daylight yet." Then I said, "Is that Salpaugh?" He put the lid part way down then lifted it again and said, "Yeth." Like the apostle Peter at Jesus' trial, his speech betrayed him — he was a Gallego. Then I recognized him as our flunky Manuel and wondered why he was searching in Salpaugh's trunk. As I recovered consciousness better, I remembered he had been fired two days before, so I made a jump and grabbed for him but wasn't quite quick enough. I followed him downstairs but when my bare feet hit the gravel walk I gave up the chase.

It was Saturday night and several of the men were in town. Those that were there were at the rail in an instant and watched him run some three or four hundred yards to where the road ran into the woods, but I was the only one who saw him well enough to swear to his identity. When I returned upstairs, we all took stock. Kelly was the only one in the outer room that night. His pants had been cleaned. I was next. My pants were laying on Salpaugh's trunk; they had been

cleaned—my watch and eight dollars in cash. I dressed and went downstairs. The Company guard had heard the noise and was there. I told him who it was and he said he knew where he was staying over north of Mayari'. He said we should call the Rural Guard and have them hustle over and catch him, if possible, when he reached home. When we found them, they couldn't go because they had a prisoner to take into Mayari' in the morning.

Then we started looking for a pair of horses — found one but not two. I hired the one for the guard. He took the horse but nothing would induce him to ride on and try to catch our man when he came home. We took off for Mayari', he riding and I walking. I walked that whole thirteen or fourteen miles into Mayari'. As we came into Mayari', just at daylight, we overtook the prisoner the Rural Guards were going to take in. He was taking leg bail. We went first to the Rural Guard. They were asleep. After considerable delay, we were told the Chief was at his home. We went there. He, too, was asleep. After a lot of delay, he told us we would have to go to the Judge and get a warrant. There was just one run around after another until when they finally brought Manuel in it was 10:00 A.M. He produced a witness to swear he was at a dance in town, which could have been true. He could have been at the dance and walked out if he left at ten, or later, if he had a horse. He didn't have the watch on him and you can't identify money.

All that was left for me to do was walk back home, and then I had to pay the rent on the horse the guard rode. It was I who hired him. Salpaugh was in Mayari' that night and when he got home next day, he thanked me profusely for scaring the burglar out of his trunk. He had one hundred twenty-five dollars in it, but he didn't offer to share my loss. We figured he had searched the trunk while working there, but didn't dare take the money while he could be held responsible and had

now come back to get it.

Taffy Williams was the fifth one with a mustache. His was about the same color as Robinson's and not much heavier. He was five feet five or six and not fat but quite broad and heavy set. I have described him in a former chapter.

Swicher was assistant to the chief engineer and in charge of all the engineering work at that camp. He had spent many years in Mexico and Central America. He divided his time between the office and field. He was married and just as soon as he could get a house built in town he sent for his wife and spent his weekends in town. He was not only small but sickly looking. I heard that he died within two years after I left Niipe.

Sturdivant was a handsome, curly-headed blond from New York. He was a very likable young fellow and a fine illustration of the statement we heard repeated so many times on the construction of Hoover Dam. "It doesn't matter half so much what you know as whom you know." Garnett had met him in New York, very likely at some social function, liked him and gave him a job as Field Engineer. He didn't come down till there was enough clearing done to require such a service. He was given a combined compass and stadia mounted on a Jacob staff, with a stadia rod and a Jamaican Negro to carry the rod. His job was to go over all the fields twice a month and measure all the new work since the last time over, so contractors could be paid. It didn't have to be too accurate because any error would be cared for on next estimate; and, when that particular kind of work was done, his final estimate would bring his total to ten caballerias. It didn't take a great deal of showing till he could do the field work O.K. but he had no idea how to figure the irregular areas.

I don't think he asked any of the engineers; I know he didn't ask me how to figure them, but, naturally, he wouldn't. I was Superintendent of Transportation. The first

evening he brought field work in, he was just dazed. I can imagine how he felt. He was conscientious and had accepted the position, supposing that all areas would be more or less in right angles. They were far from it. He had come clear down from New York; couldn't do the work and faced the almost certainty of having to go right back without a single pay day. He wasn't dumb, just hadn't had the proper schooling for the job. I felt sorry indeed for the poor boy, so took over and figured his problem for him. He was indeed grateful. Our regular routine became that he did his field work in the daytime and I did my field work, and at night I did his figuring and taught him. One night Robinson, the Head Overseer, said, "Williams, it looks to me that you should have been in the engineering department."

"That's what I thought, too; and I told Mr. Garnett I could do this kind of work but when he hired me he said he needed overseers more than he needed engineers, so here I am." I continued to do his figuring so long as I stayed there, though he was learning. I was getting eighty dollars a month. He was getting one hundred.

He is the only man I ever saw have his first drunk. I sincerely hope it was his last. Everybody there, but three, drank and there was liquor regularly on the table. Naturally, he got to drinking a little if he didn't before. He spent one Saturday night in Mayari, probably drinking some, and maybe had a little in the morning, then rode to camp in the hot sun and had another drink at dinner. Soon after dinner, he got awfully sick and vomited all over the place. He appealed to me. "Williams, why did you let me drink so much?"

"I'm not your guardian and, furthermore, you didn't ask me."

He finally laid down on his cot—boots and all—and never awoke until next morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some seven or eight months after I left

there, Birdie was on her way to the United States and he got on the train. Americans travelling on the train in those days just naturally gravitated together. He introduced himself and when she told him who she was he said, "Oh, I know your husband well." Their finding each other made the long trip to Havana much more pleasant for both of them. I never heard of him afterwards.

\* \* \* \* \*

Near the end of June, like a bolt from the blue, I got a telegram from Erwin Marx, the man who gave me my start in engineering, offering me seventy-five dollars per month and expenses, as levelman on a railroad survey, if I would show up in Camaguey by July 1. I immediately showed the telegram to both Robinson and Frank Garnett but it took me a few days to make up my own mind. I was really up against a dilemma.

I had kept my lady love waiting for more than two years for me to get a job and a home for her. Garnett promised to build me a house soon after I went to work there. On the strength of that promise, I sent her money to come on. She was sailing from New York in just about two weeks and there had been no move toward a house and there was not a house available either in camp nor in Mayari'. She was at that time visiting either in Iowa or Indiana and I didn't have her address. There was no cable from Mayari' and mail was so slow there was no certainty I could reach her even in New York with a letter. And, even if I did reach her, she would be over two thousand miles from her home in Nebraska. Consequently, no place to stop her. If she came on there, she was sure running into a dead end; but my job apparently was a permanent one. On the other hand seventy-five and expenses is considerably more than eighty without expenses. The telegram gave no hint as to how long the railroad job was; where it was; nor how long it would last. I knew the railroad was not in Camaguey, nor how far it was away from there, but Camaguey was the

headquarters; was at least a semi-civilized place; there were houses available there and I had friends there. So after a few days deliberation, I accepted the offer; wired Marx; and told Robinson. He sent his brother-in-law, Oppenheimer, with me to take over my work and on June 30th, I got all my effects down to the Guaro dock to cross to Antilla and take the train. No boat! Then a sailboat came in bringing grass for our mules. I made arrangements to have my goods taken to Antilla by the first boat in, and shipped collect to Camaguey. Then I took the grass boat to Santa Isabel landing; walked a league to Santa Isabel; hired a man to take me on horseback three leagues to a flag station on the railroad and flagged a train to Alto Cedro. Next day I caught the train into Camaguey and showed up on schedule.