Chapter 11

LEVELMAN

When I arrived in Camaguey, Marx told me, to my very glad surprise, that the railroad we were going to survey was from Cacocum to Holguin—the route I had been over so many times on foot—but that his chief of party had not yet arrived from another job. In the meantime, he and Windsor kept me pretty busy making some computations and doing errands around town. The chief of party was Shaler C. Houser, a graduate of the University of Alabama Engineering School. He was not many years older than I, but already an experienced engineer. We took with us one experienced rodman and one experienced chainman: Fermin Palazuela and Maximo Gonzales. Fermin was white and of average size. Maximo was well over six feet, and as black as ever came out of Africa. They were both intelligent and unusually good men. The rest of the men we picked up around the job. We took up our headquarters in Cacocum in a fourth class joint that had the nerve to call itself "Hotel Progreso". All I can say for it is, it would sure have to progress a whole lot farther before it would be fit for decent human habitation. The very first night a big Negro came in to supper and sat down beside Houser. Having seen explosions in both Kansas and Oklahoma when Negroes sat down beside Southerners, I looked for fireworks. Nothing happened. When we got into our room after supper, Houser said, "Did you see that big buck nigger sit down beside me?"

"Yes, and I wondered what you were going to do about it."

"Do about it? There isn't a thing I can do about it. This is his country, and so long as I stay here I have to play the game according to his rules. But Boy! He had better not do that in my country."

I had studied leveling in college, and

done some practice leveling with the transit, but had never had my hands on a wye level. Houser gave me a lesson on the wye level and I found it simpler and easier than leveling with the transit. He took both of the experienced rodmen on the transit party, and told me to select a rodman from the men we had picked up. A rodman must know how to read and write, and there was only one in the whole bunch who could qualify, Juan Fuentes. His father had taken him to the U.S. to get out of the War of 1895, and he had grown up there. He could read and write in both languages, and spoke English without an accent; but his qualifications as a rodman ended right there. He was the dumbest person I ever tried to break-in as a rodman, and the slowest mortal I ever worked with at anything. Fortunately for me, cutting line through the jungle takes a lot of time; so, despite his slowness, I had no trouble keeping up with the transit party.

The first thing we did was run a road traverse to get the direction the railroad would have to go, and the difference in elevation of the two ends.

While in Holguin, Charles Haworth and I went down to see the judge and arrange the preliminaries so I could get married when Birdie arrived. The judge told us that to get married in Cuba both parties had to be twenty-three. Birdie didn't qualify. She was only nineteen. We told him she was already on her way to Cuba. He said she would have to have her father's consent signed before a Notary Public. At that time, there was neither radio, overseas telephone, nor air mail, and cables were very expensive. I lost no time in getting a letter off to her father in Scotia, Nebraska, explaining the situation.

Then we returned to Cacocum and started our preliminary survey from that end. I wore no leggings and in a very few days my legs began to itch and to swell up till I could get no rest, day nor night. Houser told me

I ought to ride into Holguin and see a doctor—which I did. The trouble was a poisonous bush resembling the American sumac. The Spanish name is guao. It didn't affect some people at all, and affected others far more than it did me. I have seen men's faces swollen with it till it looked like they had the mumps. The remedy—wear leggings or high boots when working where it is; try to avoid touching it; and if you do get it, bathe the affected part with a strong solution of sugar of lead (lead acetate). From that time on, as long as I was in Cuba, I always kept sugar of lead in my first aid kit.

I arrived in Holguin late, and didn't go to see the doctor till after supper. On my way back to the hotel, I passed the Holguin office of the Munson Steamship Company. They were just closing up for the night and I asked if they had heard when the Olinda would reach Gibara. That was the boat Birdie was coming on and it was due in two or three days. He said, "Yes, it came in this morning." I said, "It wasn't due for two or three days. Are you sure?"

"It sailed three days early and we got our cargo manifest on this morning's mail."

So, Birdie was already in Gibara and no one to meet her. I had to think fast what to do next. I went down and got Mr. McCracken to report to Houser for me, and run levels next morning. Then I took the morning train to Gibara, and found Birdie at the Quaker Mission. Naturally, when she got to Gibara, she expected me to meet her. When she didn't find me nor anyone else who spoke English, she was one lonesome girl. Finally the manager of the Customs House, who spoke English, saw her plight and came to her rescue. He asked her where she wanted to go; and, when she told him to the Quaker Mission, he sent a laborer with her to act as guide and carry her grip. Owing to the extreme unevenness of the sidewalks, he took the center of the street. Naturally, she thought she should walk beside him. Apparently he had other

ideas, for the harder she tried to walk beside him, the faster he walked so she couldn't. She said that she suspected that everyone who saw them thought they were running a foot race. I got her trunk through Customs, and next day we went to Holguin. As permission to marry had not yet arrived, I left her at the Quaker Mission and returned to my job at Cacocum.

On August second, the permission came; and on August third, 1905, Charles Haworth married us in the Quaker Mission and gave us a wedding supper. I had got Mr. McCracken to run the level for me while I took time off to get married. Next evening Houser showed up and said, "Williams, I hate to cut your honeymoon short, but that old man has got those levels so badly messed up I have no idea if I am running high or low. You can take any rodman you want, but go clear back to where you left off and rerun the levels clear up to date." Next morning before the men were through their breakfasts, I was out at camp. I had the cook to fix two lunches and I took Fermin for my rodman. We ran ten kilometers of levels that day.

When we finished the preliminary survey, Houser said, "Now you can take your honeymoon while I take this plan to Havana and get expert help in making the paper location."

Birdie had just married a farm, so naturally she wanted to see it. The American women in Cuba at that time rode horseback with divided skirts, so I started inquiring where I could borrow one for Birdie. Mrs. Haworth objected. She said the Cubans looked down on women who rode astride. She would lend her her riding habit, side saddle, and pony if she would use them. I got another horse, and we rode out one day; spent a day on the farm and visiting among my neighbors; and came back the third day. The neighbors were all very friendly, and gave my bride a hearty welcome, tho she didn't understand much of it. She did sense their friendliness.

She had had her back injured when she was a girl and that side saddle was really torture. That was the first, last and only time she ever rode a side saddle.

When Houser returned from Havana, we went to Cacocum and ran-in the location just as they had figured it out in Havana—just plain hard work, and we found but two impediments. The first was Dr. Law. He was the nearest to an embodiment of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde that I ever knew, personally. He was an American from some place in the North. I think it was Michigan. He had his license to practice medicine there. He went before the examining board in Havana, and they turned him down because he was a foreigner. Later because of the great need and the fact that the Cuban doctors just would not go to the country, they gave him a license to practice in the country, but not in the city. No matter how dark the night; how hard it was raining; how deep the mud; how far away; nor how poor the patient, if they sent for him, he went. If it was far from home, and the patient was seriously sick, he would stay until the patient was better, or he was certain there was no hope. For his fee he took what they had to offer: eggs, chickens, pigs, or a calf. If they had nothing, it was all right anyhow.

I remember meeting him one time in a driving rain, on a very muddy road, and more than twenty-five miles from home. He had been to see a patient, and had collected his fee. He was leading a pack horse loaded with chickens and eggs.

He owned a cattle ranch that ran from the Camino Real to the river. Both the road and the river ran from Holguin to Cacocum and there was just no place to run the railroad but between the two. Everybody along the line had been begging for the railroad for years, and we never dreamed there would be any trouble. When we reached his place with our preliminary line, we went right across it just as we crossed all the places. It

just so happened that Dr. Law was not at home when we crossed. When he came home and saw our stakes, he went hunting for Houser and found him at the hotel. He told Houser that he was going to pull up those stakes, and they were not going to run that railroad across his ranch. Furthermore, if he ever saw Houser or any of his men on his ranch, he would shoot him. Houser told him that when he got ready to do any shooting to just please remember that he was from Alabama. Houser had a thirty-eight Colt and a license to carry it; but up to that time I had never seen him have it on. Next morning, he buckled it on, and I never saw him on the job without it after that.

Knowing the trouble, when they went to put the location on paper, they contrived to put the grade line across his ranch right on the ground, and put a curve on the farm so that if lines run across it from opposite directions didn't meet they could make them meet on the curve. When we went to put the final location on the ground, we ran up to his fence; put in a hub; turned and ran a traverse out to the road and around his place, back to where the railroad was to go; put in another hub, and resumed the course of the railroad. Law had a lot of fun telling the Cubans what fools they were to let the railroad cut their farms in two. He wasn't going to let it cross his land, and to prove it he would take them out and show them how the stakes came up to his land, then turned and went out into the road.

Then, one day the "right-of-way" man showed up and tried to buy right-of-way across his place. He offered him a good price for it. No, indeed! He wouldn't sell at any price; and, furthermore, they were not going to build a railroad across his ranch. The graders built the grade right up to his fence on both sides of his farm, and the track gang laid the track up to one side. They didn't turn and lay the track out to

the road as he had assured his neighbors they would. They just stopped. Next Saturday afternoon, after the judge's office had closed so that no court injunction could be obtained, a work train rolled up to the fence with three or four flat cars ahead of the engine. The cars were loaded with engineers, work gangs, fence posts, barbed wire, telegraph wire, telegraph poles, cross ties, and railroad rails. The engineers staked out the center line, and the labor gangs went to work at their various tasks, and by Monday morning when the judge's office opened he had a perfectly good railroad, two good fences, and a telegraph line clear across his ranch. In fact, he now had two ranches, and the upper one had no water for the cattle.

The Railroad Company had offered him a good price for his land; and, if he had been reasonable, they most likely would have built a culvert under the track so the cattle could pass back and forth and go to the river for water. As it was, the Company started condemnation proceedings to get title to the land. According to law, the judge appointed appraisers to fix the value of the land. Knowing Cubans as I do, I always will believe that the Railroad Company paid those appraisers some graft to make the kind of appraisal they made. Instead of appraising the land the Company was taking, at its market value, and adding a reasonable amount for the damage incurred by cutting the farm in two, they appraised his whole farm at what it was supposedly worth before the railroad was built, then subtracted the amount of land the Company was taking from the original farm, and appraised what land he had left at what they said it was now worth with transportation. The result came out that he owed the Railroad money. The amount was small and I don't think he ever paid it; but the Railroad got their deed, and if they ever paid him one cent it was after I left.

The other impediment was the cab drivers and draymen. When we ran our preliminary survey, we ran around the east side of town and hooked up with the narrow-gauge railroad running to Gibara so that both passengers and freight passing through could transfer at the existing depot. The cab drivers and draymen got together, went before the City Council, and brought enough pressure to bear on them, that they requested the Railroad Company to stop the railroad in the south part of town, and build a depot there, so they could earn a living making the transfers. Why build a railroad at all? They could earn a whole lot more making the transfers clear from Cacocum. I presume the fly in the ointment was the very bad road. I have no idea how much freight, nor how many passengers have been transferred over the years, but I was in Holguin in February, 1957, and they still have the two depots more than fifty years after the last one was built.

When the location was finished, Houser left for Camaguey. He told me he didn't know if Marx and Windsor were going to hold me there for the construction, or send me somewhere else. I hung around for ten days, and didn't hear a thing from anybody. There were two of us eating and paying rent, now—not just one as formerly; so I decided it was time to do something about it. I got up very early one morning, hung my grip on my back with shoulder straps, and headed for Cacocum. The road was very muddy, so I took the survey line. Just as I came out on the road near Cacocum, Editor Luqui of the Holguinera, with whom I was acquainted, came along in a volanta and started kidding me about making so much money as an engineer and being too stingy to spend it for a ride.

I said, "Wait a minute. My regular job is to walk down this survey line every day, and the engineering instruments I carry are heavier than this grip, and I have saved more this morning than I earn in a whole day."

I will never forget his answer to that one; "My father left me on the trot. I am going to leave my children on the run."

In Camaguey I went to the office. Marx told me he didn't know just what Windsor had in mind for me; but, in the meantime, Mr. Strickland, whom I knew, was putting on a subdivision and had asked them to survey it for him, but as yet they hadn't got around to it. I could do that while I waited to hear from Windsor.

I was getting my equipment ready to make the survey when a telegram came from Windsor. He had sent it to Holguin and Birdie had forwarded it to me. It said, "Report to Batchelder, care of Brooks Company, Guantanamo." There was only one train a day going my way and it had already gone. I wired Birdie to pack a trunk with both of our clothes and meet me on the train at Cacocum next afternoon.

Then, her troubles began. She couldn't speak a word of Spanish so enlisted the help of both Haworth and McCracken to see if they could find a way to go to Cacocum. The volanta already had its load, and didn't haul trunks anyway. The road was so muddy the guagua driver didn't know if it could get through. Two or three other passengers had already asked to go. With the added revenue of Birdie and her trunk, they would try; but must start early lest they get stuck in the mud. They wouldn't guarantee anything. Haworth saw that she and her trunk got onto the guagua and then she was on her own. In due time, they took off with three horses and two drivers. Two horses were hitched in the usual way and the third to the end of the tongue. She couldn't say a word to anyone. Somewhere along the road they stopped in front of a palm-leaf shack, and everybody got out and went in. Some kind soul finally got the idea across to her that they had stopped for coffee. She was very fond of coffee so joined the rest.

Later they got stuck in the mud. After

belaboring the horses a while, one of the drivers unhitched the lead horse; mounted him and rode away. Everybody else sat still so she did, too; but had no idea why they were taking the situation so cooly. After a long wait, the driver reappeared, accompanied by a farmer and a yoke of oxen. The oxen got them out of the mud-hole and they arrived in Cacocum in time for the train. She was sure glad to see that I was on the train, and I was just as glad to see that she was there to get on!

We reached Santiago at ten-thirty at night, and barely had time to catch the little tub of a steamer, Benito Esteben, that made the run around through the Caribbean Sea to Guantanamo. Every cabin was taken and there were dozens of deck passengers. Fortunately, it was a beautiful night. We steamed out of the harbor, and right over the Collier Merrimac that Lieutenant Hobson sank in 1898, and past Moro Castle where he was held prisoner. After we hit the open sea, I stretched my hammock from the mast to the rail for Birdie to sleep in, and spread my raincoat on deck for me to sleep on. The combined roll of the ship and swing of the hammock made her seasick. I got up and lowered the hammock till it all but touched the deck, then I moved over so that my body served as a chock to keep the hammock from swinging. That way, we got through the night and reached Caimanera, Guantanamo's port, early in the morning and took the train to Guantanamo.

After breakfast, I reported to the Brooks' office and met Richard Brooks, head of the railroad department. He told me that Batchelder was out at Jamaica, and that I would most likely be located there, too, as that was central point for most of their work. He said there was a train out there at three o'clock. He would give the conductor our tickets and I should report to Batchelder. He was one of the engineers at

Nipe Bay when I was there. Since there was no hotel at Jamaica, we had to return to Guantanamo for the night; and, since the train only stayed in Jamaica one hour, we had to talk and plan fast. Batchelder was Resident Engineer for all the Brooks' railroads, and I was to be his assistant.

The Brooks Co. owned several sugar mills and a railroad system connecting most of the mills, Guantanamo, and the Port of Caimanera. Our principal work would be to locate and build railroads to connect to the sugar mills that were not already connected, and to locate and build railroad spurs out into the cane fields.

The tickets Brooks gave the conductor were not one-way tickets. They were individual passes for both of us, good just as long as I continued to work for the Company. Birdie found her's quite convenient, many times. When she got lonesome at home, and could figure out some excuse to go into Guantanamo, all she had to do was go down and get on the morning train; spend the day there, and return on the evening train. It didn't cost one cent.

We returned to Guantanamo for that night; and, next morning, caught the early train back to Jamaica, prepared to stay. We rented a house, bought a bed, two folding chairs, a rocking chair, a kerosene lamp, a charcoal brazier and a few dishes and moved in. I bought some lumber and made a table, and made a cupboard out of some kerosene boxes. That is the way we started housekeeping.

Our first job of any size was to locate a railroad to Romelie, a sugar mill some nine or ten miles away. The country was quite rolling, so it took a lot of study to find the most economical place to build. We had worked on it about a week when Batchelder announced that it was getting too far away for us to continue to live in Jamaica. We would have to move to Romelie. He said we probably would not have to live there more than two or three weeks, so we should take

just as little furniture as we could possibly get along with.

That proved to be the high-light, or maybe I should say the low-light, of Birdie's Cuban adventure. High spot in adventure, low spot in comfort. The "bus" that hauled passengers over there was a two-wheel army construction cart—no springs. The seats were boards fastened to the sides of the cart facing in, and the backs built up high enough so the wheels couldn't throw mud on you. The front end of the seats were higher than the rear. As to how much, depended on the height of the wheel mule. It was pulled by two mules—one between the shafts, the other hitched on ahead. Each seat held three or four persons, depending on the size of the persons—maximum capacity: seven passengers and the driver. The difference in height of the two ends of the seat made sitting very uncomfortable. The freight cart that hauled our furniture, was identical with the passenger cart, less the seats.

Batchelder had rented for us two rooms in a long barracks built for laborers. I have seen hog barns in the North that were more respectable. Don't blame Batchelder. He got the best that were available—the two rooms on one end. There was a porch with a dirt floor, running the entire length of the north side of the building. Each apartment consisted of two rooms—seven or eight by eight or nine feet. It was lucky we didn't bring any more furniture. We had to step up two steps from the porch into the front room, then one step down into the back room. Don't ask me why it was built that way. I haven't the slightest idea. Each apartment had a front door; an opening between the two rooms called a door, but no door to close it; and an opening in the back room called a window. It had a board shutter but no glass. The rafters and studding were all exposed—no ceiling. Our apartment was better than the rest in that being the end apartment it had

an extra so-called window, hence more light and ventilation. Our first job was to scrub, and it sure took some scrubbing. After we finished scrubbing, and were moving in, I was working in the back room and Birdie in the front, when she called me. A great big fat Negro woman was standing in the front door with one elbow leaning on the door-post. Birdie told me to ask her what she wanted. "Nothing. Just looking." She was not abashed in the least. Just stood there and continued to stare. It annoyed Birdie very much.

We had so very few conveniences, Birdie decided we should just eat at the restaurant, instead of trying to cook. We tried it just once. It was quite a distance away and there were spots in the trail so muddy she just couldn't get through. She didn't have wading boots. I had, so I carried her over the worst spots. The restaurant's method of cooking and seasoning food put it in such condition that it just wouldn't adjust itself to a civilized American's stomach. Furthermore, they didn't put up lunches and I had to carry my lunch. And if they had fixed my lunch, Birdie couldn't have gotten to the restaurant for her's. So we had to prepare for her to cook at home.

She had to cook on a charcoal brazier sitting on the ground on the front porch. I had to get more kerosene boxes and make more cupboards. I made one for dishes that we could set on the floor. We couldn't put any food in that on account of rats and ants. I made another that we hung with wires from the rafters. That kept the rats out but the ants went clear up overhead and came down the wires. We had to soak small pieces of cloth in kerosene and tie them around the wires to stop them.

Cuban beds have woven wire springs. That obviates the necessity of big, thick mattresses; and besides, with a quilt or very light mattress, you get ventilation from underneath in warm weather. To save freight, I left the

bedstead at home, taking only the woven wire springs, intending to find some pieces of board to nail on them for legs. While moving in, I saw so many rats I decided that a better idea would be to hang the springs from the rafters just as I had the food. That looked on the surface like a good idea, but every time either of us turned over, the bed would swing and Birdie was seasick all night. Next day, I saw a pair of carpenters' saw-horses that were not working and borrowed them to put the springs on. Cuban carpenters saw from themselves, not as American carpenters do, so use much taller saw-horses. The saw-horses gave the bed a solid bearing all right, but we had to get onto the trunk to get into it. The very first night I felt a rat run over my face and made the mistake of telling Birdie. She didn't sleep any more that night. Next day, I bought a rat trap. While I tried to sleep that night, she listened for rats, and nine times I felt her elbow in my ribs. "Get up; there's a rat in the trap." There was a shelf on one wall about three feet long, sixteen inches wide and table-high. It was very small for a table, but there was not room to bring in another, so we had to make out with that. There was no toilet, neither inside nor out. We had to resort to a slop jar and empty it before daylight, and after dark.

A Missouri mule skinner and a Cuban ox driver would run a pretty close race in the artistic line of profanity they pour out to their charges. Our barracks was built fronting on the Camino Real, and the lane running to the sugar mill woodyard turned off of it right by the corner of our apartment, and ran along the east end of the barracks. Both roads were so close, that the owner planted a big log on end about three feet from the corner and so deep that the oxen couldn't pull it over, to keep the carts from tearing the corner of the house down. At the time we lived there, the carts were hauling in the year's supply of wood for the mill.

There were many carts; the mud was deep; the carts often got stuck; and profanity really flew.

When we were first married, I had asked Birdie to study Spanish in the daytime, and recite to me at night so she could learn to carry on conversations with her neighbors and not be so lonesome. No indeed! If she heard anything at all during the day, it was Spanish, so at night she was going to hear good old United States English. These carts hadn't been passing very long till she began to sit up and take notice. Every evening when I came in, she had a list of words for me to translate into English. I thought it better to tell her than to let her "stump her toe" as I had done, so she very soon had quite a vocabulary of the vilest profanity in the Spanish language.

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Some time after I moved out to my farm, I spent a night at the Mission in Holguin. Next morning at breakfast, Rev. Haworth said that he heard that Spanish was a very profane language. He didn't know if the statement was in error or if the Cubans respected his calling and were careful of their language when in his presence; but, he had never heard a profane word. Then he asked if I had. I told him I didn't know enough Spanish to know. Then he asked if I had heard any words I was suspicious of, and asked me to name some of them. Miss Maria de los Santos Travinyo, Santos for short, the Mexican girl who had come to Cuba with the first Quaker missionaries to teach them Spanish, was sitting at the table with us. I don't remember the first word I mentioned; but, when I mentioned the second, Santos' face went red as a beet and all conversation went dead.

As we walked out of the dining room, Haworth asked, "What do you suppose that word means?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"It must be something pretty bad. Did you see Santos' face?"

"Did you notice that I didn't mention any more words?" Suffice it to say, it is a word that is never used in mixed assemblies.

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As all nightmares eventually end, our Romelie adventure also ended, and we returned to Jamaica.

Batchelder was a graduate of the International Correspondence School, and had some of his books with him. I had in college all the mathematics required for a full engineering course, so borrowed some of Batchelder's books to study theories on railroad location and construction. I was getting practice every day, so made rapid progress toward becoming an engineer. Our work was scattered all over the Brooks Estate. When the work was close by, we walked to it. When it was near where the passenger train passed, we took the train. The train stopped to let us off, or to pick us up anywhere we asked them to. If the work was somewhere else, we phoned in and got Brooks' steam railroad motor car to take us.

By New Year's we had the work sufficiently rounded up so that Batchelder could handle it without an assistant. He very kindly got me a job with The Cuba Eastern Railroad, as assistant to Mr. Digby, their Resident Engineer. It was a competitor of the Brooks Company. Whoever started it or why, I never knew. The Brooks Co. was an English Co. and had been there many years before the Spanish American War. As I stated before, they had several sugar mills. They built the railroad primarily to serve their mills; but had made it a public carrier and ran regularly scheduled trains to serve the public, and adequately served the whole valley with both passenger and freight trains. The Brooks seaport was Caimanera, on the west side of Guantanamo Bay. Their Main Line ran into Guantanamo, and from there they had branches running east, west, and north, to their various sugar mills.

The Cuba Eastern was an American Co., and was not even thought of until after the Spanish American War. Their seaport was Boqueron on the east side of Guantanamo Bay. Their line ran up through the east side of the city; crossed two or three of the Brooks branch lines; then swung to the west to tie up to The Cuba Company railroad at San Luis, some forty miles away. At that time the only product in that whole region was coffee or chocolate. That is very light freight, and what there was had been coming out by pack train for generations. So there was no immediate revenue in sight for a railroad. But there was an enormous amount of rich virgin land that could be put into cultivation, and quite a bit of cedar, mahogany, and hard woods that could be taken out. So the competition with the Brooks Co. was potential, rather than actual.

As stated before, the Brooks Co. was an old company; and had been doing business in Cuba for many years. In order to survive and prosper they had to do business, not according to Cuban law, but Cuban custom. They bought a lot of goods all over the world; and, in order that the Customs House would not get filled up with freight, they put the customs officer on their payroll as their agent, to look after their interests. Consequently, all freight for them was rushed through the Customs House just as soon as it arrived, shipped to the Brooks warehouse on the first train, and a bill for the duty mailed to the head office. Many times the office learned that long-expected freight had arrived by receiving the bill for the duty.

Sims, President of the Cuba Eastern, had been Professor of Engineering at the University of Iowa, and was a man of very high moral principle. He positively would not pay graft to anybody. To push his railroad faster, he needed more engineers with their instruments. He ordered his instruments and hired engineers in the States. When the instruments

arrived, the customs officer said they would have to wait their turn to be passed through customs. When the engineers arrived, the instruments were in the Customs House, and there they remained for just about a month while the engineers drew their pay and loafed.

The real climax came over a shipment of mules. As stated before, when the Cuba Eastern built their railroad north they crossed two or three Brooks spur railroads. Brooks had some young cane west of this new railroad, so before harvest time they started to build a spur railroad to it from their Santa Isabel Sugar Mill. The most natural place in the world to locate a railroad is down a valley, if you can find one going your way. Brooks' engineer, Carrier by name, found such a valley. While working under Batchelder, I cross-sectioned it. It so happened that the Cuba Eastern crossed this valley with a very steep grade on both sides. All trains must stop for a R.R. crossing. So if Brooks built their railroad along the valley, every train crossing the valley would have to grind to a stop on that steep grade; then pull up the other steep grade from a standing start, with no chance to build up momentum. Sims promptly got out a legal injunction, and stopped their construction.

About that time Sims had a shipment of mules come in which he very much needed for his construction on his western extension. The customs officer said the mules would have to wait their turn to pass customs, which might be a month or more. In the meantime, the mules would have to be fed and watered. Neither threats nor persuasion would move the customs officer, and Sims would not pay graft.

Somebody told Brooks about the mules and he promptly got his agent on the telephone and asked if it was true that he had the mules there and if Sims could get them. "Yes, Mr. Brooks. The mules are here, but you know the regulations. They will have to wait their turn to go through customs."

I remember one culvert that had a fifty-two-foot fill over it. An eight by eight box culvert with a fifty-foot head against it will handle a lot of water. The bridges were built of hewed caguiran logs, framed into bents, and set on mud sills which had been dug down to a solid foundation. If they didn't have logs long enough to reach the track, they built another bent and set it on top of the first. Some of the bridges had three bents, one on top of the other. We called them three-deckers. I never knew of a wreck on one of them but they sure looked shaky to me.

The thing I didn't know then, nor for quite sometime afterward, is that the Government was subsidizing them quite heavily to build the road, but had also put a deadline on the date they must get the trains over the road. So, they were bending every effort, and taking every possible short-cut to meet the deadline, and made it. The story is, that when the Government inspector came to inspect the road, some of the railroad officials accompanied him, and took a deck of cards along. The road master, of course, knew the road, and they all stood on the back platform looking at it. When they were approaching a bad piece, the road master would tip someone off, and he would suggest they go in and have a game of cards. After the bad place was passed, the same man would suggest it might be a good idea to view the road again. Whether that story is true or not, the road was received and the Company got its subsidy. When the rainy season came, the cuts caved in and they had one awful mess, that stopped traffic for some time. But they had anticipated it and ordered some steam shovels. They put the steam shovels to work, cleaned up the mess and took the cuts out to standard specifications at much less cost than taking them out by the original method, and they had their subsidy.

I hadn't been there very long till, one morning, I was riding past a labor camp on

my way to work, and was introduced to a Mr. Carrier. I had heard of him. The Brooks Co. had also decided to build their railroad west and connect with the Cuba Company railroad. They employed Marx and Windsor to make a survey along the south side of the same valley the Cuba Eastern was building in, and tie up with the Cuba Company's branch line to La Maya. Carrier was their Chief of Party. I had ridden but a little way when he rode up behind me and said, "Wait a minute." When I stopped, he asked, "Are you married to these people?"

"What do you mean by married to them?"

"I mean are you tied up to them by a contract? I have heard of you. My levelman is drunk about half the time and I can't run a survey without levels. I understand you are too much the other way; but I would far rather have a man who never drinks than one who drinks too much. What's the chance to get you to come back to work for Marx and Windsor?" He offered me a ten dollar a month raise if I would. A ten dollar raise in those days was quite a raise. I told him I wouldn't leave where I was if they would raise me. If not, I would accept. I would go into Guantanamo over the weekend to find out and would let him know Monday morning.

When I asked Digby for Saturday off and a horse to ride, he said his only pinch was a lot of cross-sections to figure. So I figured cross-sections till twelve-thirty that night, then rode the grade to Sempre'. I think I could best describe the night as jerky. It was a beautiful moonlight night when I started but soon fogged up so thick you could almost slice it, then cleared up as beautiful as before, and repeated the process two or three times before morning. I reached Sempre'in time to catch the morning train, and went in to see Mr. Sims. He didn't take kindly to the idea of raising my salary when I had worked so short a time, so I handed in my resignation.

Then I went over to Bardwell's to see Birdie. She was surprised and very glad to see me, but the most homesick girl I ever saw. She had nothing to do there but twiddle her thumbs, and that had become very monotonous. I think she would have died of homesickness had she had to stay on there. I was going farther into the woods to be gone indefinitely, so we looked up the boat sailings out of Havana and I dug up the money for her to catch the first boat home to Mother.

In Carrier's camp, I learned how to deal with race relations problems. In Cuba, generally speaking, there is no color line; but, once in a great while, someone tries to make something of it. Carrier had as his labor foreman and head chainman the same Maximo Gonzalez we had had in Holguin. One morning one of the men came up and wanted his time. He said he wouldn't work under a nigger foreman. He had already been working some time, so there must have been some other reason for his wanting to quit,which he didn't want to tell. Carrier paid him off and made the remark, "We won't let that happen again." Then he called Maximo and told him this man had quit, to keep his eyes open and see if he could find another to take his place. After that when he wanted more men he would call Maximo and tell him how many men to hire. No matter how many men came looking for work, he would never tell them "yes" or "no". "You can talk to my foreman." After they saw the foreman, if they didn't want to work under him they could just keep on walking.

The going here was very hard. The country was rough and hilly; the jungle was very heavy; and there were a lot of coffee and chocolate plantations. With a substantial gang of axmen and machetemen, we cut through the jungle, but we couldn't cut through either coffee or chocolate plantations. The coffee can hardly be called trees—just tall, slender bushes. We bent

them over and tied them so we could see through. The chocolate trees are good sized, branching trees. By telescoping our instrument legs down, setting the instruments low, and working on our knees, we could generally get through under the limbs. Young coffee must be shaded. Most people shaded it with bananas; but once in a while we ran into a plantation where they had shaded the coffee with chocolate trees. Then we were in trouble.

One day, running through a plantation, I was carrying my level forward when I passed near a shack. A little dog came charging out like he was going to tear one of my legs off. I waited till he was just the right distance away, then landed a good swift kick right under his chin. He went running around the shack yelping for dear life; and, as he did, a big Negro woman came running out of the shack, mad all over and screamed, "Deme un palo car-r-r-ajo." (Give me a club----) Then she charged right in my direction. About twenty feet from me, she found her club. Seeing the mood she was in, and with her club in her hand, I couldn't make up my mind if I should set the level down to run, or if I should carry it with me, so I just stood there. When she straightened up with that club in her hand and saw me standing there with the level over my shoulder, I think she must have thought it was a two-handed club. Considered as such, it made her and her club look very insignificant. She took one good look at me, then headed back into the shack as fast or faster than she had come, cursing the dog.

Another day I was running through a coffee plantation when a man came up and jumped all over me in Spanish, for running through his coffee. I told him we were not hurting his coffee. We were tying it over. He said he ought to know if we were hurting it or not. We were knocking the bloom off. Then I called to the transitman up ahead and asked him if he was still running uphill. I told him we

had about reached the limit that we could go up, and the owner of the coffee was there raising cane about running through the coffee. The owner said in perfectly good English, "No, he's not raising cane. He has his rights and he wants them respected." My rodman was a Jamaican Negro, and I had not said one word in Spanish. Why did he jump onto me in Spanish? Fortunately, I had said nothing to be ashamed of, but it sure was a surprise. I learned later that he was an Englishman. His father had brought him to Cuba as a boy, and gone into the coffee business. He had grown up with the Cuban children, so was a genuine bilingual. His father later sent him to England for his education, and he was now the biggest coffee and chocolate grower in that part of the valley.

One night I came the nearest to having a fight I have had since I was grown. We engineers had two tents that we set up, end to end, with just room enough between to stretch a fly, and that was our dining room. Running in heavy country, there is a tremendous amount of figuring to do. So after supper every night, we had the cook clean off the table, and we sat there and did our figuring. Our Topographer was a young Alabamian named Snow, tall and slender and just out of college. He weighed about 120 pounds. He sat right across the table from me and always smoked as he worked. On this particular night the wind was just right to blow his smoke right into my face, and he made no effort to remedy the situation. I said, "Snow, I wish you wouldn't smoke in my face."

"It's good for you." He took a big draw and deliberately leaned over and blew it into my face.

I said, "Snow, I have asked you nicely not to smoke in my face. Now please don't do it any more."

Again, he said, "It's good for you" and repeated the performance.

I said, "Snow, if you and I were out together and were very thirsty, and found a beautiful spring of water, how would you like me to spit a gob of tobacco into it just as you went to take a drink of it?"

"I wouldn't like it and you had better not do it either."

"Well, that is exactly what you are doing to me. Here is nice fresh air that I want to breathe, and before I can breathe it, you fill it full of tobacco smoke. I would almost as soon a man would spit in my face, as to blow tobacco smoke in it."

"Oh, no! It isn't the same thing at all." He leaned back and drew in all the smoke he could, then leaned across the table as far as possible and blew it in my face; as he did, I spit in his. Talk about a jack rabbit spitting in a bulldog's face. The reaction was exactly the same, though the final outcome was quite different. He jumped up and started around the table to wipe up the earth with me, and might have done it had we come to fisticuffs. For although he was about twenty pounds lighter than I, he was very quick. But I had played football in college, and met him at the end of the table with a football tackle and threw him down with me on top.

While he was struggling to turn me over, Carrier said to Ash and Urner, "If you two will hold Williams, I will hold Snow." I thought of telling him that if he would just hold Snow, Williams would stand without holding, but didn't.

After we were both on our feet and both securely held, Snow said, "You're a dirty ill-bred Yankee, that's what you are!"

Carrier was also a Yankee. He and Snow occupied the same tent. He said, "That will do now, Snow. You and I are going to bed." He led Snow into their tent, and we saw no more of them till morning. Neither did the rest of us do any more figuring that night. The event was never mentioned so long as Snow

stayed on the job. Also, as long as Snow stayed on the job we sat at the table and figured every night, but Snow took good care to watch which way the wind was blowing, and see to it that no smoke came into my face. His father, in Alabama, took seriously ill and he had to go back to look after his father's business. I never heard from him again, neither directly nor indirectly. After he was gone, Carrier mentioned it one day, then told of his run in with Snow, and laughed at Snow's blind impetuosity on both occasions.

Soon after Snow came to work for the Company, they were running a railroad survey west of Havana. That is open country and there was a paved road near where they were running the survey, so they used a two-seated, horse-drawn carriage for transportation. One day there was a rain coming up. Everybody went to the carriage but Snow. He was running the level, was inexperienced, and had got behind. One of the men called to him to hurry as it was going to rain. He called back that he had to catch up with his levels. Then Carrier called, "Come on, you little fool. Can't you see that it is going to rain?" That did it. Carrier had called him a fool, and nobody could call him a fool and get away with it. He dropped everything and came running over to whip Carrier. As I said before, he weighed 120 pounds. Carrier weighed 225, and was the most active big man I ever knew. The others laughed at him so much, and pointed out the size of the job he was taking on that he didn't try it.

The Ponupo Manganese mine, where we were supposed to tie up with the La Maya branch of the Cuba Co. railroad, was on the extreme end of a high ridge that projected east from a high tableland. We ran several trial lines but just couldn't get up there. Windsor came from Camaguey to help us out and after a look at the country, he and Carrier made a reconnaisance to El Cristo to see if

they could tie up there. That wasn't much better and a much longer line, and railroads cost money. So they wired Miller A. Smith, a Consulting Engineer in Havana, to come out. His first comment when he looked at our plan was, "Don't you fellows know you can't run a grade line uphill?" We were coming from the southeast, and trying to climb the south side of the ridge. He took a ride up onto the ridge, looked the ground over, then told us to locate the lowest point on the railroad from La Maya to Ponupo which we were to tie into; start a line at that point and run down on the north side of the ridge at maximum grade; swing around the east end of the ridge onto the south side; follow that till we hit the main tableland; always going downhill at maximum grade on the slope of the land, till we reached the level land of the valley. On level land we could tie in anywhere. Very simple. Why didn't some of us think of it?

About the time we finished, we got a telegram from Windsor to ship our outfit to Camaguey, and sending us to various assignments. I was to report to the Camaguey office. On the way, passing the flag-stop, Omaja, I saw a team of mules, an American wagon, two or three men who looked like Americans, and nearby two or three houses that definitely were American.

On my arrival in Camaguey, Marx sent me to report on a couple of cattle ranches—Corcobados and Soloburin', down on the Salado River, that they contemplated buying. On the cattle ranches, I found much less grass-land than had been represented, and I further learned they were both "pesos de posesion". I had been badly stung on "pesos de posesion" and when I made my report to Marx, I told him I hated to make a bad report after spending money to go down there; but, frankly, I wouldn't put any money into it. He said, "Don't worry about spending money. That's what we sent you down there for. Some of the best money we ever spent was in keeping out

of things."

On that same trip I also learned something on my own. I had to spend a night in Las Tunas, both coming and going. In the hotel where I stopped, was an American, Otis Miller, his wife, his mother-in-law, and two small boys. One of the boys was very sick. They had come to bring him to the doctor. None of them spoke any Spanish and I was able to be of some service to them. They were from Omaja, and told me there were several Americans there already and there were plans for a very large colony there. I asked who was promoting it, and was told D. E. Kerr and C. E. Bowman. I had previously become quite well acquainted with both of them at Hotel Norman. I got to thinking, "If they have any kind of a colony, they must have their land surveyed. If they have as much land as Miller says, it will take two or three years to subdivide it all into ten acre lots. Someone will have to do it. If I can get the job, Birdie will come back. We can live among American people, and she will not be lonesome." So when I got back to Camaguey, I looked up D. E. Kerr and asked about the job. It was too sudden. He would have to think it over, and talk it over with Bowman. Also, I would not quit my job without notice. When I asked Windsor about taking another job, he said they had work for me but would not stand in my way if I could better myself. After Kerr saw Bowman, I saw the two of them together and made a verbal contract to do all the surveying they required for twenty-two dollars per mile.

Chapter 12

OMAJA'

After Sir William Van Horne completed the Canadian Pacific Railroad, he began looking for other worlds to conquer. That was just after the Spanish American War and he found that Cuba had no railroad connecting cities in the central part of the island from Santa Clara to Santiago, a distance of more than four hundred miles. So, he got a franchise of General Wood and proceeded to build one. For that purpose he imported a lot of mules and mule skinners from the United States. One contingent had been recruited around Omaha, Nebraska; set up their camp in Oriente Province ; and just naturally hung out their sign, Omaha. When the railroad went to put names on their stations, they found the sign, changed the "h" to "j" to conform to Spanish spelling, and that is the name it still carries.

In 1904, while I was looking for work, quite by accident I met an army engineer from the U. S. Naval Station in Guantanamo. He had a few days' vacation and was scouting around looking for a piece of land to buy but getting nowhere. Since I wasn't busy, he hired me to go with him as guide and interpreter. My friend, Lindelie, told me there was a large tract of land at Omaja that was for sale, so we took the train and went to see it. When we got off the train, the only house in sight was a palm-leaf shack with a dirt floor. We went over and asked about the place. Manuel Gomez, the man who lived there, told us he was the owner, and to prove it he took down quite a stack of deeds. He told us how many caballerias he owned; and showed us the deeds to several big farms. Among them was a deed to Las Paras. I had been there with Burke and Thompson to buy cattle and spotted it. I said, "Why, that belongs to Winceslao Infante of Holguin."

"Yes, he has possession, but I have the