

on the ten-thirty P.M. train. She gathered up some of the neighbors and came down to meet me. I stood on the car steps as the train pulled in, and rode right by them. Not one of them recognized me.

Next morning was Sunday and she refused to go to church with me unless I shaved my whiskers off; but she did allow me to get my brother-in-law to come over and take my picture.

## Chapter 18

## CAMAGUEY

On my return from one of my trips across the swamp, instead of my usual pay check, Stockley handed me a letter from my brother-in-law, Dr. Anderson, addressed to Mr. Jack Gass, Chief Engineer, Zapata Land Company. It said that my wife was in Camaguey and stranded. That I was somewhere out in the swamp and she could not contact me. Would he kindly send her a check for \$100.00 and take it out of my pay? And that's how we moved to Camaguey.

Since I was away from home so much of the time, and it was so lonesome and inconvenient for Birdie, I had tried to sell the place at Galbis but couldn't find a buyer. She had found a buyer and sold it at my price, and moved to Camaguey. The catch was she had sold the home, and the team, wagon and harness, and didn't get one dollar down payment. Walter Miner, her buyer, was a bachelor about fifty years old, and as honest and hard-working a man as you could find anywhere, but somehow he just didn't have the executive ability to get ahead in the world. In all his fifty years his accumulated wealth amounted to just about nothing. In their negotiations I can see what Birdie was thinking about. She was thinking of just one thing. Getting away from Galbis. But I can't see what Miner was thinking about to take on that obligation in that place, where there wasn't a thing he could do to even earn a living—let alone pay for a home.

Again, Lady Luck rode with both of us. About two years later, Salvador sold the whole tract of land to Pete Green, a cattleman. Cattlemen have to have a place to live. Here, right in the middle of his ranch, was the finest country house for miles around—palm-leaf roof—yes, but a good one—hard-wood floor, board sides, glass windows, and running water in the kitchen. Miner sold for enough to pay me and leave him a profit besides, and I made the deed direct to Pete and got my money.

When I finished in the swamp, naturally I went to my new home in Camaguey. I soon found that living

there wasn't all peaches and cream. In Calbis we had our garden, chickens and milk, and got our groceries wholesale through my store. The store gave a little profit, and I frequently found a little surveying to do. Here, to begin with, we had to pay rent, then buy our milk, eggs and vegetables, and buy our groceries retail—all going out and nothing coming in. For just about two months I didn't earn a nickel.

Then a telegram arrived from Ames. He sent me to Guayacanes, a little town on the railroad in the western part of Camaguey Province, to locate a spur railroad to a point out in the woods a few miles away, where they were going to build the Algodones Sugar Mill. They had to have the railroad before anything else to haul in materials and machinery. When I finished there, I returned to Camaguey; but this time I found a few little surveying jobs to mix in with my loafing. Not enough to keep me busy nor to pay living expenses, but they helped.

Then I got a call from my old friend, Birbeck. Yes, the same little runt for whom I threw out the liquor a few years before. He wasn't drinking now. He said it looked like history was going to repeat itself. The Cuba Company had just signed a contract to build a railroad from Placetás del Sur, in Santa Clara Province, to Trinidad, an isolated city on the South Coast. This time there would be no camouflage. We would be working for the Cuba Company in the open. He was again going as Chief of Party and asked if I would go as transitman. His topographer was Charles McKercher from Iowa. He had worked on the Florida East Coast Railroad Extension to Key West, then came over to Cuba; got a job; liked it; married a Cuban girl and settled down to stay. At present he was permanently employed by the Cuba Company as maintenance engineer, but loaned for this job.

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Fourteen years later when Henry Kaiser got his contract to build the National Highway, he hired McKercher as his Chief Engineer, but he developed cancer and died before the job was completed.

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The levelman was a Mexican named Le Cato. One of the projects of E. H. Harriman, the great financier and railroad promoter, was a railroad down in Mexico.

One of his peon laborers was accidentally killed, leaving a widow with two small sons. Because the accident happened on his job, Harriman took the two boys to his New York mansion and brought them up as members of the family. This Le Cato was one of the boys. Harriman sent him to an engineering school, but he just didn't have what it takes to make an engineer. He had advanced as far as levelman and couldn't have made good on that had it not been for McKercher's frequent coaching.

We picked up our survey in Fomento, right where we had left it four years before. Just south of Fomento are the Trinidad Mountains. Just as the Colorado River cut its way through the high plateau of Arizona to form the Grand Canyon, so the Agabama River, in past geological ages, had cut its way through the Trinidad Mountains. There was no other possibility to get to Trinidad but to follow the river—and that wasn't easy. Many of our Western rivers have a shelf near the bottom of the canyon where railroads have been built. The Agabama had the shelf all right; but it, also, has a very large water shed—and Cuba has a very heavy rainfall. Consequently the river has a 100-foot rise, which is far above the shelf. Our instructions were to follow the river, and keep at least one hundred feet above normal low water in the river. As a result, our railroad was—and still is—the most scenic railroad in the Island of Cuba; and, by the same token, it was also the most difficult one to locate and build that I ever worked on.

Our immediate problem was to find places, at least one hundred feet above the water in the river, where we could set up our surveying instruments, then find a footing where we could stand and look at points both ways from the instrument. In some cases we had to use ropes tied to bushes; and in others hang onto overhead limbs of trees to keep from falling off the canyon wall, while our feet stood just a little lower than the instrument head, then bend almost double and look first one way, then the other, without moving our feet. Our next problem was to fit curves along the canyon wall so we could shoot off just a reasonable amount of material to leave an adequate roadbed, without either running into the canyon wall or falling off into the river. At one

place the river made a sharper than right-angle bend. Using the sharpest curve we were allowed to use, we still would have to shoot off more than enough material to dam the river, and there was no possible road to haul it out on. We went on down the river, as we were instructed, for many tortuous, difficult kilometers. We had to cross the river in a narrow canyon and at a very small angle, and, of course, on a bridge more than one hundred feet high.

Then, we got a big idea for saving the company money and putting in a much better road. In the States railroads were spending millions to reduce curvature; ease grades; and shorten distances. Why couldn't we do the same here? We went back to the above-mentioned sharp bend in the river and ran a new survey straight across the river, up over the canyon wall and down the other side of the mountain. We found that by crossing the river where our survey did, the crossing would be in a narrow place and at right angles to the stream. We would then enter about a thousand-foot tunnel and emerge on a gently rolling plateau, where location was no problem at all, and tie into our other survey downstream from the river crossing on that survey. This line was four kilometers shorter than the other; a much better river crossing; and, aside from the tunnel, much lighter work. We were congratulating ourselves on what a fine job we had done.

When the plan was presented to Sir William Van Horn showing both routes, he took just one look at it; ran his blue pencil through our tunnel line, and said, "You fellows are crazier than bedbugs. Tunnels cost money and lots of it. The Government is paying me twelve thousand dollars a kilometer to build this road. You would knock me out of forty-eight thousand dollars before we start. It pays to shorten competitive lines, but there will never be another railroad built here, and every passenger and every ton of freight will pay by the kilometer over the entire route from here on out. So just think of all the revenue you would knock me out of over all the years to come." The road was built on the first survey, and we learned that even in engineering things are not always what they seem.

In order to hasten the survey, the company put on another party at Trinidad to work to meet us.

Not long after we finished our tunnel survey and started on for Trinidad, Chief Engineer Reid came out to see how things were going and visited both camps. He said they needed Birbeck back in the office very badly, and that the other party was running very short-handed. So he dissolved our party; took Birbeck back to the office; and sent McKercher and me to the other party as draftsman and topographer, respectively. Our new Chief was Juan Real, an American-educated Cuban. The transitman was Juan Portuondo, also an American-educated Cuban. I never will understand some people, nor why they do some of the things they do. Portuondo was a bright young man just out of college and had good prospects before him as a successful engineer. Three years after this job, he joined the mob that rebelled against the government and was killed in the very first battle. After this job I didn't see Juan Real again for fifteen years.

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When I went to work for Kaiser on the National Highway, he had a sub-contract under Kaiser to build the overpass at Florida. After the usual greeting of old friends long separated, he said, "Williams, did you ever see any black Gallegoes?"

"No, I never did."

"Let me show you some." He took me over to where his men were at work, and practically everyone of his carpenters was a Jamaica Negro. That was during a great depression in Cuba and the government had written a clause into the highway contract, forbidding the employment of any laborers except Cuban and Spanish. Juan had previously employed these men on other jobs; knew they were good men; so he gave them all Spanish names and brought them onto this job. The pay rolls all had to go into the government office for inspection, but evidently the inspector didn't get out onto the job very much. At least Juan finished the job with his "black Gallegoes".

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When I reached home after the Trinidad Survey, I learned that war had broken out in Europe and was spreading fast (World War I). Of course no one had any idea how far it would spread, nor what would happen. The immediate effect was to scare everyone with any money, and practically paralyze all business. Later men began to realize that, war or no war, people

must eat and things began to loosen up a little. Later still, when the sugar interests saw that no sugar could be raised in Europe while the war went on—and all indications pointed to a long war—they began to clear land; plant sugar cane; and build Sugar Mills, which created the biggest boom Cuba ever had. It lasted for two years after the war was over, and ended with the worst financial crash Cuba ever had. I will give a fuller account of that in the proper sequence.

After about six weeks loafing and looking for work, I got a telegram from Ames to meet him in Guayos, in Santa Clara Province.

Guayos was the same place where I made my second survey for Marx and Windsor. In the nine years intervening it had changed from a mere railroad siding to a prosperous village with brick buildings and good stores, and the country around from woods and grasslands to waving fields of sugar cane. Ames told me that the farmers in this vicinity had become over-ambitious and planted far more cane than there were mills in the neighborhood to grind it. In looking around for a contract of some kind, he found a complete set of grinding machinery for a sugar mill lying on the dock in Havana. It had been ordered, manufactured and shipped. On its arrival the buyer, for some reason, couldn't pay for it, and Ames learned that he could get it by paying for it. He had gone out among sugar men of his acquaintance and pointed out to them the need there was going to be for more sugar. Then he told them of the surplus of cane there was here, of the sugar machinery on the dock, and got them sufficiently interested to organize a new sugar company. Now he had the job of building the mill. He said he needed my help and handed me the combined jobs of Resident Engineer and Superintendent of Construction. I had been around many sugar mills when building railroads into them, but this was my first attempt to build one. With competent heads of departments that Ames knew and furnished me, we erected it in record time and were able to grind all the surplus cane in that vicinity before the rainy season set in.

Our first problem was concrete. We had neither crushed rock, rock crusher, nor concrete mixer—nor did we know where to get any one of them. The one

thing we did have was plenty of cheap and efficient labor. Nearby was a stone quarry of stratified limestone. I put men to quarrying that and hauling it up on ox carts, and had forms built just the same as for concrete. I made a mixing-board and put men with shovels to mixing sand and cement into a thick mortar, and put masons to laying the limestone and filling in all cracks with mortar—right out to the forms. Skeptics told me my foundations—particularly of the heavy machinery—would crack off along the seams. I was back by there thirty-nine years later and asked the present manager if they had ever given any trouble. He said they had not, and he had never suspected, until this minute, that they were not made of standard concrete. We crushed our rock for floors with hand-hammers, and mixed the concrete with shovels on our mixing-board. We couldn't get a crane nor a hoisting engine anywhere, so erected our building with gin poles and hand winches.

I was getting tired of so many intervals of inactivity and little or no income between jobs, and decided to do something about it. I got hold of some literature put out by a correspondence school in Washington, D.C. It told of the great profits made by qualified real estate salesmen, and of the very moderate price they charged for their full course in real estate salesmanship. I subscribed and spent my evenings—while on this job—studying, and passed my examination. When I finished at Guayos, I rented an office in downtown Camaguey and hung out my shingle as Real Estate Agent, Interpreter, and General Business Agent. As might be expected of a new undertaking, my business didn't flourish very well. I didn't have business to justify a stenographer nor money to pay her, so every time I had to go out on an errand I had to lock the door. Then I met a German named Roeder. He had an office right across the street from the depot; but, like me, he had to lock up when he went out. He offered to let me move into his office, rent free, if I would always be around to keep the office open when he needed to be out. This was in a better location than my office, since it would catch the American trade. A lot of them needed an interpreter when they came to town. There was just one drawback to his offer. If I had a business deal on that required my going out just at the time he was going out,



I would be stuck. Then I found a solution. In the rear of the office were living quarters that were unoccupied. I rented them and we moved in. Birdie kept the office open when both Roeder and I had to be out.

The school I graduated from, instead of giving me instructions on how to increase my business, kept my mail flooded with propaganda on how Washington, D.C. was growing; how much money salesmen were making selling lots in subdivisions; and how much money purchasers were making by holding their lots till the prices went up. They kept me well supplied with maps of new subdivisions, and frequently put in a personal letter urging me to get busy and send some orders in. Just imagine trying to sell lots in Washington, D.C. to natives of Camaguey, Cuba—a deal about on a par with selling refrigerators to Eskimos. I didn't even try. I did run an ad in the paper; got a good-sized list of houses in town and land in the surrounding country that was for sale. I didn't sell a single house. I did contact a Swede who wanted to buy a farm, and showed him one. He could talk Spanish; inquired of the neighbors who the owner was; contacted him and bought it direct. There was no law in Cuba to protect real estate salesmen, so I never got a cent.

Soon after the Spanish American War, there was quite a rush of Americans to buy land in Cuba. Several bought land; subdivided it into five and ten acre tracts; and sold it in the States to people who hoped some day to go to Cuba to retire. For one reason or another, people's plans didn't work out as expected, and many purchasers—or their heirs—were very anxious to sell. I contacted several of these and sold their land back to the natives. It was my best-paying real estate business. The only trouble there was I couldn't find the addresses of several owners of tracts that adjoined Cuban owners who wanted to buy.

My business agency really brought me a variety of things to do, and one real headache. Mr. Mahs of Sabanaso, the next station east of Omaja in Oriente Province, raised a lot of tomatoes for the New York market. By some slip up a good-sized shipment just missed the boat at Antilla, and there would not be another for two weeks. He promptly reshipped them to

Camaguey, and dumped them in my lap without one word of warning. It was a real headache but I sold every one of them. Not at New York prices, but at prices much better than letting them rot on the dock. As I became acquainted, I learned that there were several small surveying jobs, taking two or three days each, strung around the country. While Birdie kept the office open, I went out and did them. There were not enough of them to keep me busy—nor to make me a living—but they sure helped.

As stated before, I was in an office with a German named Roeder. Each of us had his own desk, and each of us attended strictly to his own business, tho I was vaguely aware that his business was a German Colony over on the North Coast. I distinctly remember one day we were both in the office, each working at his desk, when the mail carrier put the mail in the box on the front door. He got up and got the mail and went back to his desk. Then he opened a letter and started reading it before he sat down. His face went red and he exploded, "Wagner is an ox!" That was all he said just then, but later he unburdened himself. He had a German Colony over on the south-east corner of Nuevitas Bay. His local manager was an American named Wagner. He spoke no Spanish and was as dumb as an ox. What would I take to go over and take over the management? I didn't answer it right then; but, after a few days further discussion and consideration, I named him a price and he accepted it. He told me that he had bought a very large tract of land to colonize with Germans, but had run into trouble. On account of the war he couldn't get Germans out of Germany. He had a few Germans over there that he had recruited in the States, but just now the U.S. was very busy making munitions to sell to England and France. (The U. S. had not yet entered the war.) All the Germans in the U. S. were busy at good wages making munitions to kill their fellow countrymen with, and wouldn't leave. In the meantime, he was cutting the timber off and making charcoal for the Havana market; and, at the same time, he was clearing the land for agricultural purposes, tho he had not yet decided what he was going to plant. He took me over to his colony; introduced me to Wagner; told him to turn all Company property and Company accounts over to me; and to consider his services as no longer

required. He could return to New York and collect his salary from the President of the Company, who had hired him. Roeder then gave me some general instructions as to what to do; told me his money was running out; that he was going to New York to get some more; and that he would write me and send me money from there. He promptly left for N. Y. by way of Havana. The boat direct from Nuevitas to N. Y. didn't leave for several days, so Wagner hung around and I got pretty well acquainted with him. I found him to be a pretty decent sort of a fellow and much more intelligent than Roeder had classified him. But he didn't speak any Spanish, which was a big handicap. He told me things about the proposition, that if Roeder had told me, I never would have taken over. Now that I was in it and Roeder gone to the States, I had to do the best I could.

Roeder had bought this very large tract of land. Wagner didn't know how much there was in it nor what he paid for it. Then he went to the U. S.; got some other men interested with him and incorporated with Wagner's friend as President of the Company and employed Wagner as manager. They had sold land to a few Germans, and they had come down when Wagner did. Among them was a widow with five children. Her husband had carried rather large insurance, so she was pretty well provided for. Roeder had talked her into putting all her money into the proposition and to come down to run a boarding house. The only boarders she ever had was Wagner and her own family. When these Colonists arrived, naturally there were no houses. They went inland about three miles from the Bay—where there were fewer mosquitoes and jejenos—and set up tents in a little sabana. The Cubans named it Pueblo Blanco (White Village). One of these men was a glove cutter in a factory where they made fine gloves. I never learned what trade the others had, if any. Certain it is that there wasn't a farmer among them. If any of the men ever did a tap of work of any kind while I was there, I never caught him at it. I put the men down as a pretty sorry bunch, but the women were workers. They got out and planted gardens; tended them well; and pretty much supplied a very large part of their living. These people had bought land, but there had never been a survey line run nor any attempt made to settle them

on their own land. They were there just waiting for the Company to do something.

Wagner, on Roeder's orders, had hired a lot of Gallegos to clear land and burn charcoal. I learned in the Zapata Swamp that burning charcoal is a highly technical art. If you don't know how to burn it, all you get is heat and smoke—no charcoal. In the swamp all charcoal was burned by the sack. If a man was careless with his burning, it was his own charcoal he burned up, not someone else's. Here all men were hired by the day; kept their own time; and worked just as they pleased—no supervision whatever. Wagner had made one sizable shipment of charcoal to Havana, but the return fell far short of paying for the production. The Company owed practically all the men money, which I couldn't pay. I promptly put the men to burning the charcoal by the sack, so the amount we owed them would not increase until they had something to sell, and that would sell for more than it cost to produce it. But working men have to eat, so I went over to see my old friend, Ramon Alvarez, in Nuevitas. He was a wholesale grocer and I had bought my groceries from him for my various camps while working around there. I bought supplies on my own credit and sold to the men to be paid out of the charcoal they were burning.

As time went on and no word from Roeder, I decided it was time to do something about it. I went to Camaguey to see Mrs. Roeder. Some months earlier, when I went into the office with Roeder, the first time he intended to be out of the office at mail time he told me to be sure and get his mail and put it under cover so his wife would not see it. He said he ran his business and she ran hers. That surprised me very much since she always called, both at noon and in the evening, to walk to the hotel with him. They both seemed to be much more devoted than the average couple of their age. Wagner had told me they had been married but a short time, and he was quite sure he had married her for her money. Wagner thought that Roeder probably got a little money from her right at first, but that she was now awake to the situation and he wasn't getting any more. After seeing her devotion to him, I think it far more likely that her late husband, anticipating something of this kind, had left his estate so tied up that neither she nor a

second husband could get hold of it to squander it, but that he had provided so she could draw enough to live on comfortably and to educate the children. She had a son and daughter, somewhere around eighteen or twenty years old. I had met them both and they seemed like intelligent, well-behaved young folks. The boy had been out to the colony. Wagner said he was intelligent; could see through Roeder; and distrusted him thoroughly.

With that background, about all I now expected to learn from Mrs. Roeder was where he was and when he would be back. When I went to their hotel, I learned that she and the children had checked out only a few days after he did. Then I went to the bank to investigate their bank accounts. He had an account there, but there was nothing in it. She had had quite a sizable account there, but had closed it out the very day she left town.

Then, I went to see Sanchez—the man who had sold Roeder the land—to see if the land was clear of incumbrance, or if Sanchez held a mortgage on it. Sanchez told me he had never sold the land. Roeder had paid him a sizable amount for an option on the place, somewhat like Bowman had on Salvador's land at Galbis. Roeder was to subdivide it; and, whenever he sold a piece, Sanchez would make the deed directly to the purchaser. Roeder had not run a single survey line, nor paid for an acre of land. His option was almost out; and, unless business really picked up fast, Sanchez would not renew the option.

While I was trying to figure out what to do next, the blow really fell—a letter from Mrs. Roeder in N.Y.! She said that Roeder wrote her from Key West that he was sick and needed her. Would she please come on home? When she got to New York in the middle of the night, she expected him there to meet her, but he was not there. Instead, the President of the Company was there and gave her a letter from Roeder, written in Jacksonville, Florida. It said he was sick in body and in deep trouble financially and was going to commit suicide. He said he barely had enough money to pay his hotel bill and had given his suitcase to a boatman to take him for a ride out on the bay. She was not to weep for him nor worry. He was taking a little bottle of cyanide with him, and at the proper time he would drink it, and would be dead before he

hit the water. So this was good-bye. After reciting the contents of the letter she added, "At the time I believed it." I don't know what had happened in the meantime to change her mind, but that sounded very much to me like she didn't believe it when she wrote to me. Personally, I think that since he was about to lose his option and couldn't get hold of his wife's money, he chose that story to keep his wife from setting a detective after him and he went somewhere else to look for another rich widow. He wasn't the kind that commits suicide.

Back in Nuevitas, I translated Mrs. Roeder's letter to Ramon Alvarez and asked him to come over and repossess what groceries were left and levy onto enough charcoal to pay the rest of his bill. He studied a while, then said that the amount was not very great. To do anything over there, he would have to get a court order and getting tangled up in Cuban courts was always a troublesome business. He would rather lose it than go to court over it.

Over at the laborers' camp, I translated Mrs. Roeder's letter to the men; divided what groceries were left among the different gangs; and told them that each gang could dispose of their own charcoal and pay themselves off.

The German camp was really the hard proposition. I handed Mrs. Roeder's letter to the woman who had the best command of English, and asked her to translate it to the others. It was like a funeral. They had put their life's savings into land and transportation, hoping to have a future home in a good climate. Now, suddenly, they discover that they are in a foreign land; broke; can't speak the language; have no jobs; and, as far as I know, there was no job on the Island that they knew how to do. I was sorry for the whole bunch, but sorriest of all for the widow and five children—and her late husband had left her and the children so well provided for. I offered to help them any way I could, but told them my resources were very limited. After some deliberation, they decided they wanted to go to Camaguey. I helped them to get there. I took them to Ike Grossman, owner of the Plaza Hotel. He was both the richest and the best-known German in Camaguey. I asked him to help them if he could; and, if not, to turn them over to the German Consul.

When we got to the office, there was a letter there from Germany for Roeder. Since he was supposed to be dead, we were all very anxious to know if it was something that should be answered. The English-speaking woman opened it; read it to the others; then translated it into English for the rest of us. It was from his wife in Germany. She said his sons were growing up; needed a father's care; and she, too, wanted to see him, so please come home. So Roeder had already added bigamy to his other crimes. I don't know if the German woman answered it or not. I sent the letter to the American wife without comment. I thought she could most likely find an interpreter there. I never heard from her again. Luck was not with me on this deal. I not only didn't get one cent for all the time I spent at the German Colony, but had to pay my own board and transportation.

I hadn't been at home but a few days when I got a letter from Ames. He was going to build a sugar mill near Aguada de Pasajeros, in the extreme southwest corner of Santa Clara Province and wanted me as Superintendent of Construction and Resident Engineer. There had been a mill there before the war of 1895 and the mill building and some of the houses were still standing. I picked out a house that didn't need too much repairs; fixed it up and wrote Birdie to store the furniture; close the office; quit advertising; and join me.

Times were pretty hard then and work very scarce. Ames brought all the heads of departments we had had at Guayos, except the Chief Clerk, up here. The Cubans are a pretty proud race. In spite of the fact that it cost just twice as much to ride first class as it did to ride third class, every Cuban that pretended to be anybody always rode first class. I rode first class when I was working for the railroad and had a pass. At other times, I rode third. One day after dinner, we were talking about how hard the times were. One of the foremen said he had been out of work all summer, and was so hard up he even had to come third class to this job. One by one the other foremen explained why they came third class, and when they got to the new Chief Clerk, an American named Abbott, he said, "I can very easily explain why I came third class. It was because there isn't any fourth."

This mill was much larger than the one at Guayos. In addition, we had to practically rebuild the railroad coming into the old mill from the southwest; then locate and build several miles of new railroad to connect us to another road to the northeast so we could get cane from along that road. At the peak of construction, counting both mill and railroad men, I had over eleven hundred men working at one time—which was the biggest number I ever did have.

The work was all pretty much routine, but we had three unusual accidents—all three of which should have been fatal but were not. A sugar mill uses lots of water. At Guayos we got our water from a nearby stream, but there was no stream nearby here. We decided that the answer was a Cuban well—a dug well eight or ten feet across. We contracted the digging by the foot to a gang of Gallegoes. One of our hand winches got so the gears would slip out of mesh, hence we set it aside as unsafe to use. One day, in passing the well, I noticed that these men, without saying anything to me, had rigged a half barrel for a bucket and installed this winch to handle it with. The idea was a good one, but the winch was bad and I told them so. They would watch it. Some days later, a messenger hunted me up and told me the winch had slipped and killed one of the men in the well. It was a shock but no surprise. By the time I got there, the other man in the well had got the supposedly dead man into the barrel and got in with him to hold him in while the men on top drew them out. On the way up, the supposedly dead man had revived sufficiently that he was pouring out a string of Spanish invective on his companion—so vile it would make a Cuban ex-driver ashamed of himself. It was quite a relief to know he wasn't dead. We had a railroad motor car. I hunted up the operator and sent the man to the doctor. Evidently the barrel had fallen before it was very high and the rim of the barrel had hit his head, for it cut his scalp so badly it took several stitches to sew it up. In twenty-four hours he was back on the job, but he didn't go back in the well. He helped man the winch on top.

In digging the ditch that was to carry the big pipe that runs from the mill to the cooling pond, the diggers found a very thick ledge of rock. As it was



close to the mill and houses, they drilled several holes and loaded them with small charges of dynamite, instead of loading one or two holes with big charges. They counted their charges; cut their fuses of different lengths; and counted the shots as they went off, so they would know when they were all fired and it was safe to return to work. The shots all went but one, and after waiting for some time, they decided that maybe two shots went off at once—as sometimes happens. One of them went up to within ten or fifteen feet of the blasts; stood there looking at it while he called to the others, "For God's sake, don't come yet! It hasn't gone!" The force of the blast knocked him down and his face was just filled with fine pieces of rock. By some miracle, no big rock hit him nor did any fine rock hit him in the eye. I hunted up my motorman and sent him to the doctor. In two or three days he was back at work.

As stated before, the building that had housed the old sugar mill was still standing. I cleaned it out; patched the roof; built some outside latrines and used it for a barracks. It is unbelievable to a person who has never lived among them just how dirty, filthy, and unsanitary a lot of those Cuban and Spanish laborers can be. A big lot of them, if they need to go out at night—particularly if it is raining—instead of going to the latrine, would step over and relieve himself beside someone else's hammock. In almost no time at all the place was wholly unfit for human habitation. I cleaned it out again and put one guard by day and another by night to enforce sanitation and prevent looting.

One morning, when Ames just happened to be out there, shortly after I went to work a messenger hunted me up and told me Ames wanted to see me at the house. When I went in, Ames and Birdie were giving first aid to my day watchman. His machete hand had been cut off right at the wrist—as slick as anything is ever cut off. Ames wanted me to get the motorcar ready and send him to the doctor. They put a tourniquet around his wrist; some antiseptic on the stub and tied it up. In Aguada, the doctor fixed him up a little more and put him on the train for the hospital in Cienfuegos. After he left our place, Ames told me that he had asked Ames to ask me to hold his job for him until he got back and Ames

had promised that he would. Then added that frankly he didn't think the poor fellow would ever go anywhere but to the cemetery.

What had happened was that the watchman, in order to get a little more money, had taken a boarder. While the watchman worked, the boarder made love to his wife. (Our mail service here consisted of a push car and a mule that hauled mail and passengers between Aguada and Violeta, our new mill, over what had once been a railroad.) On this particular morning, the wife and the boarder decided to run away together. A neighbor saw them get on the car together; ran over and told the watchman. The car always made a side trip to pick up the mail at one of the colonias. The watchman ran down to the junction and waited for the car to return. When it did, machete in hand, he challenged the boarder to get off and fight like a man. He had challenged the wrong man. The boarder was a better macheteman than he was. He had hit him one glancing lick on the side of his head that laid a patch of his skull bare; another glancing blow on his forearm that he held up for defense that bared about three inches of the forearm bone; had hit him two or three licks in other places and wound up by cutting his machete hand off at the wrist. When men went to the scene after the fight, they found the hand still holding onto the machete. After the fight, the boarder took off on foot through the canefields. It took the Rural Guards two or three days to find him; and, when they did, the judge sent him to the penitentiary. About six weeks after the fight, the watchman and his wife came back together and seemed as happy as a pair of newly-weds. I never will understand people. My temporary watchman said he was a rigger, so I gave him a job with the riggers, which paid more money; gave the old watchman back his job and everybody was happy. In all my life, I have never seen anyone cut up like that watchman was.

Birdie had not been to the States for six years, and we decided she could go when this job was done. It lasted about eight or nine months, but ended about the end of February. That just isn't a proper time of year to take a bunch of young Cubans into the cold north, so we went to Omaja to wait for the weather to warm up a little. We had scarcely got settled to wait when I got a letter from Sydney Brown. He had been a

fellow Chief of Party in the Zapata Swamp. He said that Tarafa was at long last going to build the railroad that we had located three years before, and that he was Chief Engineer, with headquarters in Moron, and he wanted me to help build it.

The first theorem in most geometry textbooks is: "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points". Our geometry professor told us that the ancient mathematicians said that theorem needed no mathematical demonstration. Every jackass knew it was true. If you don't believe it, just hold an ear of corn out to one of them. You won't find a one that will walk around the field to get to it. The first principle of railroad location is to pick out the points that the railroad must go through, then connect those points with as nearly a straight line as the combination of contributing factors will permit. Larcada located this end of the railroad; and, from the immediately visible factors, he did a very good job. But when Brown took a look at it with one eye on the future, it changed the picture quite materially, and I agreed with Brown. It just so happened that Larcada's straight line skimmed alongside of a very large swamp for several miles; swamp clear to the sea to the north, and a very large area of fertile jungle to the south. What Brown and I saw was that just as soon as this railroad was built, sugar mills would be built along it and many thousands of acres would be planted to sugar cane, which produces more tons of freight per acre than any other agricultural product. If the road were shifted to the south through the heart of the jungle, it would increase its length but little and it would get practically double the amount of cane to haul over the years. So Brown put me to relocating the road.

When I went to work there, I told Brown that when the weather warmed up in the north, I wanted to take a week off to ship my family. I located about fifty kilometers, then took my week off. I like construction much better than location. Most engineers do. So, as I went through Moron, I asked Brown how about giving me a residency when I got back. He said, "All right. You can have the second residency east of Moron." I went to Omaja and gathered up the family, together with Helen Blossor and Clara Wilde, neighbor girls who were going to the U. S. to go to school

and were taking advantage of Birdie's trip to have a chaperon. It turned out to be a lucky break for Birdie, too. She was very seasick much of the way. The girls were not, and they took over the care of the children.

I took them to Antilla for embarkation. Yes, this was the same place I had worked two-and-a-half days under George Stackhouse twelve years before. It had changed both its name and its face since then and definitely needed to change more. It was then Corojal, and solid jungle except room for the railroad and bridge camp. Now there was a railroad, depot, very extensive docks and warehouses, stores, hotels, and a large village of palm-leaf shacks, but not a sidewalk nor a paved street in the whole town. We arrived about one o'clock in the morning, and it had been raining for several days. The nearest hotel was about a block and a half from the depot, and the heavy traffic had worked that sticky, black mud into a loblolly. Fortunately for me, I had on my wading boots. I always wore them in Cuba. When I saw the situation, I asked Helen and Clara to stay at the depot and keep Vera, the four-year-old, till I could take the others to the hotel. Kenneth, the two-year-old, was sound asleep so I carried him. Soon Birdie was stuck in the mud and couldn't budge, so she told me to take the children on to the hotel and return to help her. Elizabeth, the eight-year-old, fell face down in the mud. She couldn't get any muddier, so she got up and plowed through. Without taking time to register, I laid Kenneth down on a table and left Elizabeth to watch him while I went back for Birdie. She was so completely stuck that the only way she could get loose was by pulling her feet out of her shoes. I rescued the shoes and she hung onto me while she walked to the hotel in her stocking feet. I went back to the depot and carried Vera while Helen and Clara plowed through. By the time I got back to the hotel, other passengers on the train had taken every room, so I had to get out and find another hotel. I found one about a block away on a less-traveled street so the road was not so muddy, and I registered before I started moving. We didn't get to bed till after two in the morning.

Next morning, I looked for a restaurant but couldn't find one in town, so bought some groceries

and we ate in our rooms. Then we had a general shoe cleaning. I took the family on board at ten o'clock, which was the time set for passengers to go aboard. They didn't sail till next day, but everybody ate on board but me. That night before I went ashore I was talking with the First Mate and asked him about what time they would sail.

"I don't know. Just as soon as we finish loading."

"You are about loaded now."

"I'd like to know where you got that idea."

"The Plimsoll line is down to the water now."

"That doesn't mean a thing. We have hauled many thousands of bags of sugar from here to New York for sixty cents a bag. We are now getting two dollars and eighty cents. So we can't let a little thing like a Plimsoll line interfere with our profits. We won't leave as long as there is a bag of sugar on the dock."

Next morning, when I looked out, the boat was still there, so I went over for a last farewell before catching my train. They had finished loading and were battening down the hatches. I took a look at that Plimsoll line, which is put on all boats to indicate the load the boat can safely carry. It was more than three feet under water.

While I was on this trip I got another big idea. I had just been given twenty-five kilometers of railroad to clear and grade. It takes a lot of men to do that much work in anything like a decent amount of time, and they all eat, and there wasn't a store east of Moron for well onto a hundred miles. Miner had just sold the place at Galbis and paid me, so I was pretty flush with cash. He had the team and wagon Birdie sold him, no place to go and nothing to do. I took the team and wagon back, instead of asking him to pay for them out of his profits on the place. The wagon was low-wheeled and getting old. I sold it to one of the few farmers who had stuck; bought a new, high-wheel wagon and two more horses; shipped the whole outfit to Moron and hired Miner to operate it hauling supplies to my men.

I got my camps built, and my work organized and going well, when the Company sent a young Cuban out for timekeeper. I never did learn whose big idea it was to put on a timekeeper, for all these men were

working by contract and being paid by the amount of work they did, not by the amount of time they put in doing it. Furthermore, on moonlight nights they worked by moonlight, and slept in the daytime. It was much more pleasant working that way. So if he went over the line in the daytime, his record would not show anything like the number of days actually worked. Then again I had twenty-five kilometers of railroad. To cover it all and get back to camp, he would have to walk fifty kilometers, or more than thirty-one miles a day. A good walker can do that much, but that boy just wasn't built right for that much exercise, and the Company didn't furnish him a horse. He was of the "Smart Aleck" type if there ever was one, and knew all the answers. About the first day he was on the job, he caught some men putting some logs in the grade. In a very abusive manner, he told them to take the logs out. They, as promptly, told him where he could go to. They put logs in the grade and brush on top of the logs, so it will take less dirt to make the fill. The first really big rain that comes washes the dirt down through the brush, and leaves a big hole in the grade with logs and brush in the bottom of it. The men, of course, hope to collect their money and be gone before that happens.

The first day my wagon was not working, he borrowed one of my wagon horses; rode into Moron and bought a thirty-eight Colt Revolver—but neglected to buy a license. He buckled on the gun, then really paraded his stuff up and down that part of the grade which was near camp and abused the men till they all detested him. Another day when the wagon was not working, he borrowed one of my horses to go with me. Tho' he was supposed to go over the entire line every day, he had never been to the far end. Not that I blame him much. It was a senseless job in the first place; and, when you consider the great distance he would have to walk, the only thing I blame him for was taking the job unless he meant to do it. On this particular day, a gang had finished their contract and I was going to receive their work. I had learned the hard way that you couldn't trust a Gallego, so had gone to a blacksmith and had him cut me a long thin rod and sharpen it to a fine point on one end, and I never received any grade without first sounding it for logs. I found plenty of them in this grade,

and noted their location in my field book. I copied my notes onto another piece of paper; handed it to them; and told them we paid for grade built of dirt, not logs and brush; and I would not receive their work until they dug those logs out and built up the grade with dirt.

They admitted they were in the wrong and said they would do as I ordered, then asked how soon I would be back. I told them as nearly as I could. All the time I was sounding, writing, and talking with the men the timekeeper was fretting and grumbling. He said the whole fill was rotten, as were the men that had made it, so why waste time with it? "Let's go." I don't know what was his hurry, and he was not my boss, but he made those men awfully angry.

On our return I found that they had taken out a few of the logs which I had seen, and they were on ahead, as I supposed then, taking out more logs. The fill there was about four feet high and I was riding on one side of it while the timekeeper was riding on the other. I stopped to measure a ditch and a culvert, and he rode on until he was five or six hundred feet ahead of me when he stopped, as I supposed, to talk to the men. I was too far away to hear the conversation, but suddenly I saw him pull his gun. Just as suddenly, five of the men pulled guns out of their pockets and the other two started for him with their grading forks. Then he fired right into the bunch. I can't see how he missed hitting someone. At the crack of the gun the horse jumped and ran toward camp, and he fired back at them as the horse ran. All five of them fired at him until their guns were empty. They were between him and me, and one of his bullets kicked up the dirt so close to me that had it been six inches higher it would have cleared the fill and hit my horse. I wheeled around and got out fast. I had suddenly lost all intentions of going to camp by my usual route and was looking for a trail I knew existed that would take me by a longer route.

The Foreman of the bunch called to me and motioned to me to come back. I stopped but did not go back. He held his gun up so I could see him eject the shells from it; then put it in his pocket; and came on to where I was. He was so nervous he could scarcely speak. He said the quarrel was not with me. That I

was wholly within my rights, but the timekeeper had called them a gang of Cabrones (Billy Goats; tho' the Spanish races give a much more vile meaning to the word.) and no one could call them Cabrones and get away with it. He vowed they would kill him if they ever saw him again, even if it was in a Rural Guard Station. He said they had taken out a few logs and found it a much bigger job than they thought, so were waiting to talk things over with me and see if I wouldn't receive it as it was by making a reasonable discount, and he had come along and started abusing them. There was something fishy somewhere. No one will ever convince me that those men were in the habit of working at that kind of work with guns in their pockets. I will always believe they went and got the guns after we were there in the morning. The question is why? The timekeeper had been very insulting, but I didn't think it was bad enough to justify murder. Had he ever walked that far from camp and made them mad at some previous time? I don't think he ever walked that far. Or had they got the guns to intimidate me? It wouldn't do them any good to kill me, for I was the one who had to sign their estimate; but they may have got the idea that a little intimidation could induce me to sign in spite of the logs and brush. Those are questions that will never be answered. He told me the names of people to whom they owed money, and asked me to go and get their bills and pay them, and said they were leaving now. I told him they had better wait till things were settled up and they could get their money, but he said there was bound to be trouble now, so they would just go. He shook hands with me, thanked me for my agreement to look after their accounts, walked with me as far as their camp, and told me good-bye.

The timekeeper rode on into Moron to file complaint against the men, and the first thing the judge did was fine him twenty-five dollars for carrying a gun without a license. By the time the Rural Guards got out to their camp, the men were all gone. The Guards over-ran the whole place and hung around for two or three days, but if they ever found a man I never heard of it. I got the bills as requested, and turned them in to the Company. They gave me checks to pay them, and I delivered the checks. After the bills were all paid the men had



quite a little money coming to them, so the Company made money on the deal.

The timekeeper accused me of being a coward and running away, leaving him in a tight spot, and added that if the horse hadn't jumped he would have gotten himself a Gallego. I told him it wasn't my fight. He was the one who had picked it, so why should I stand around to be shot at? Furthermore, it was his bullets, not the Gallegoes, that were coming my way. As to getting a Gallego if the horse hadn't jumped—he had that in reverse, and should be thankful to the horse, for if he hadn't jumped the Gallegoes would most certainly have got him. From the brand of marksmanship around there, the ones with the guns might not have hit him, but the boys with the grading forks were in dead earnest and would have killed him just as certainly as they ever reached him.

In the meantime, Brown had been replaced as Chief Engineer by a man named Reece. I never did learn the reason why. He was an older man than Brown and had worked both in Mexico and Peru. When I was finishing up my work there, I asked Reece if he had another residency out ahead for me. He said there was more work out there all right, but he had another idea for me.

"Didn't you tell me that you located a railroad through here for the Cuban Central Railroad on a three-tenths of one-percent grade?"

"I did."

"Since you located a road for the Cuban Central on a three-tenths grade, is there any reason why you can't do the same thing for us?"

The road we located for Tarafa, of which Reece had the plans, was located with a maximum grade of five-tenths of one-percent. In rolling country you can locate a shorter, more nearly straight line on a five-tenths grade than on a three, but after you get it built it takes a bigger engine to pull the same length train.

"I don't have any of the notes; but I do have a pretty good memory, and survey lines show a long time in the woods. I might even be able to find some of the Cuban Central survey lines and save a lot of cutting, as well as preliminary surveys."

"I have a full survey party up ahead, under a competent locating engineer. He has a full set of

the plans Smith and Ames made for Tarafa, and is going on from where you left off this Spring; but, as you know, that is a long way from the original survey. He is now bearing back to the north, hoping to tie in to it and follow it through, but there is a very serious doubt if he will recognize it when he finds it. If he should find it, as you also know, there is a lot of half-percent grade ahead. If you can find the Cuban Central line, that's what I want. I will give you two hundred a month and board to go out there just as guide."

"But I have my freighting outfit here."

"Survey parties eat and move camp. I will hire it, too."

I had very little trouble finding survey lines in the heavy timber. There were several of them, but I did have trouble identifying the one I wanted. I had to go several miles ahead before I found a place where I could positively identify my line. Once I was positive of my identification, I followed it back to the vicinity of where they were working and had them tie into it. From there to the Maximo River—some thirty or forty miles—with due care, I was able to follow the old line with no cutting at all save a little young growth. We made as much line in a day as it would be possible to make in a week on original survey—thus saving the Company thousands of dollars. Across the Maximo River, we ran into cane fields and all exact identification was lost, but I remembered enough old landmarks near the line to be able to run in a good location with very little preliminary work.

I remembered that on the original survey, as we approached Nuevitas Bay, there was a seven-meter cut, two or three kilometers long, with the Nuevitas and Camaguey railroad on one side and the coastal ridge on the other. I told Caither what was ahead of us, and that there was a very large area of flat land before we got to the big cut. If flat country doesn't have drainage in Cuba, it soon becomes a lake. This land was wet all right, but it definitely was not a lake. There was no place for that water to drain but into the Bay, so somewhere there must be a break through the coastal ridge. Our job was to find it. He had never been up ahead but said my reasoning sounded logical. So, we went to Nuevitas and hired a sailboat to take us out sailing on the Bay. We sailed

west, far enough from shore so we could get a good view of the skyline. Sure enough, a few miles west we saw where the skyline dropped quite materially. We had the boatman put us ashore; and, compass in hand, we worked our way through the jungle to the south till we came to the old survey. We marked it and when the survey party reached the place, we turned almost a right angle to the north and ran to the Bay. We then followed the Bay till we tied in with the old survey beyond the big cut.

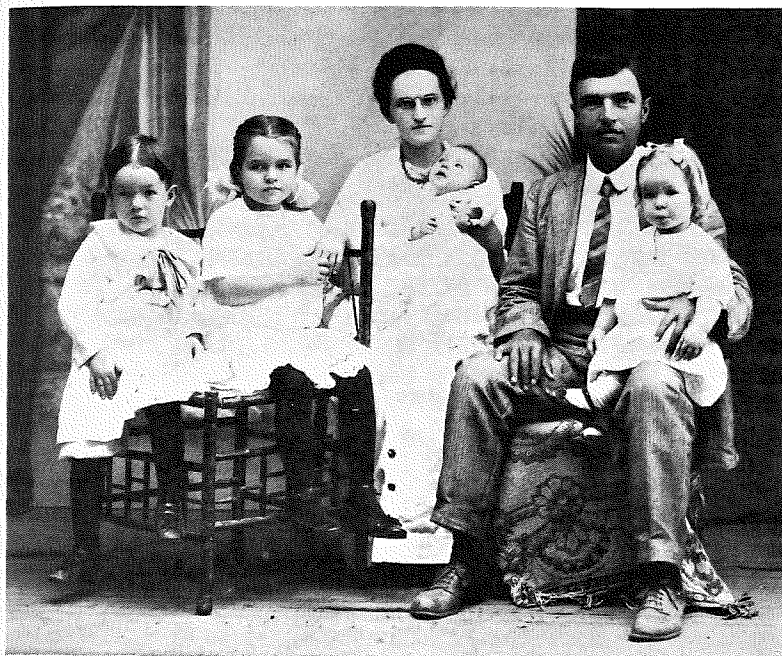
I remembered Sir William Van Horne and our proposed tunnel. This was not a proposed tunnel on the Cuban Central survey, but long, seven-meter cuts can also get very expensive. This, also, was a subsidized railroad; and, as Sir William had pointed out, extra length, with cheap construction is an advantage, since freight is paid by the kilometer. The track could almost be laid on the ground on our new survey, and nowhere was there so much as a meter of either cut or fill. The road was built on the new location.

We often hear that elephants have good memories. I can testify that some horses do, too. On all these surveys, I rode my afore-mentioned Roxy. On all former occasions, we began at the east and ran west, then returned to the east to go home. This time she was shipped to Moron, then went east from there. She hadn't been over the route for more than three years; but just the same, whenever she came to a trail turning off the road that led to a good pasture where she had been, she headed into it. I don't think she missed one.

As I mentioned before, Robert Anderson and I had bought 1064 acres of land near the new railroad. Most sugar mills would loan money to landowners to plant sugar cane for their mills. As we went by the Senado Sugar Mill, I went to see if they would loan me money. The manager said that our land was quite isolated from their land and other cane, and as of now there was no way to get the cane to their mill. It would be difficult to get seed cane to the place to plant so much. But if we, on our own, would plant enough cane this year for seed for the whole tract and the railroad was built, so they could haul the cane, they would finance the whole thing next year.

It was not of my planning, but just so happened that we reached Nuevitas just about the time Birdie

and the children were coming back from the U.S. Instead of asking for another residency, I resigned my place with the Company; rented a house in the American Colony of La Gloria, which was only four miles from the new railroad and seven or eight from our land; hired our furniture hauled over from Camaguey; and, when Birdie arrived, we moved in and I prepared to go to planting cane.



GORDON, ELIZABETH, BIRDIE & KENNETH, NOAH & VERA  
CAMAGUEY, CUBA ---1914