CHAPTER VII.

Rod Reaches Panama

When Rod Standish changed finally into dry clothes and reappeared on the deck of the "Eitel Frederick," sober second thought had failed to suggest to his aching brain any ray of hope in the situation before him. His father's wallet was lost irrevocably. There was no compromising with this fact. And with it was gone the meager supply of cash that alone remained to him when he boarded the steamer in New York Harbor.

Rod carefully emptied his pockets, but his most systematic search brought to light just eighty-five cents in loose coins. Fifteen cents less than one dollar! And this was all that lay between him and beggary in a strange land, unless his father's letter procured him immediate employment.

The thought of the letter suggested another question of so uncomfortable a nature that the youth darted back to his state-room and snatched up his discarded coat. He felt hurriedly through its inner pocket and drew out a handful of
papers. It was not until he ran through them and recognized in one his father’s familiar handwriting that he breathed freely. His letter of introduction at least was safe!

Rod found that Judge Arnold and Edith were still in their cabins when he returned to the deck. The bustle and confusion of unloading were still continuing. The thrilling incident of the early afternoon had not altered the routine of the vessel in the slightest. Rod had vaguely expected to find the atmosphere of the deck changed, perhaps because he felt such a curious sense of unreality, himself. The only suggestion left of his adventure, however, was in the staring glances of a group of passengers as he passed, and a variety of audible comments from two pretty girls which caused him to quicken his steps in confusion.

The purser was leaning over the rail, staring out over the harbor.

"Can you tell me how deep the water is at this point?" Rod asked, as he joined him.

"Are you wondering how long it would have taken you and Miss Arnold to have struck bottom?" the officer queried with a grin. "The harbor on this side has a depth of something over seventy feet, I believe."

"How deep are the native divers able to go?" Rod continued.
“I think the record is about twenty-five feet. Why?”

“Then there would be absolutely no chance of one of them recovering an object on the bed of the harbor?”

Not unless you drained the water out first!” the purser said emphatically. You would need an expert with modern diving apparatus for your purpose. Have you lost anything?”

Rod hesitated. “Oh, my curiosity was aroused, that’s all!” he returned, parrying the question. “I had no idea the water was so deep!” And he turned away, with the glimmer of hope which had suddenly flashed before him, effectually shattered. To employ a diver to search the harbor would cost a sum four or five times as great as the contents of the lost wallet!

Rod jingled the coins in his pocket grimly. There were three of them—a half dollar, a quarter, and a dime. Eighty-five cents! He wondered vaguely how many times this sum had been tossed to the little colored divers that morning by the passengers of the “Eitel Frederick,” just for the pleasure of seeing them splash through the water!

That evening at dinner, the lad received another shock. Judge Arnold entered the dining room alone, and paused at his table to say in a low tone; “I am sorry to tell you that the
doctor gives me a very bad report of my daughter."

"I thought she was recovering nicely?" Rod cried in dismay.

"So she seemed to be at first. But she has been far from well for several weeks, and the shock and exposure of this afternoon have been too much for her. In fact, she is hovering on the verge of a serious siege of fever."

The next morning brought an even more alarming report from Edith's stateroom. Her condition had grown materially worse during the night and when the Judge met Rod shortly after breakfast it was with the grave-faced announcement that she had surrendered to the germs of typhoid, and even though she worsted the disease, she would not be able to walk for weeks.

Rod spent a long and tedious day. Even the bustle of disembarking when the "Eitel Frederick" pushed out from the Kingston wharf late in the afternoon failed to arouse his interest. Ordinarily he would have been keenly entertained by the strange sights on the dock, and the spectacle of the three hundred Jamaican laborers, bound for the Panama Canal, that the steamer took on board as steerage passengers. But he was too filled with the problem of his finanaces—or the lack of them—to give more than a passing attention to his surroundings. Should
he apply to Judge Arnold for aid? To Rod’s high-strung nature, this seemed too much like asking payment for saving Edith’s life. He could not cable back to Mr. Winters for help. Even if he used every cent of his slender supply of cash, he could not raise a quarter of the amount of the tolls. And he could not cable collect. He had already ascertained this. It was an ugly problem, and the longer he pondered it, the gloomier and more hopeless of solution it became.

Edith Arnold was no better the next day. When Rod saw the Judge late in the afternoon, she was wildly delirious, and the ship’s surgeon seriously doubted whether she would be in a condition to be moved from the steamer when they reached Colon.

His fears were realized. When the “Eitel Frederick” bore into the harbor the next morning, it was only too plain that an attempt to carry the girl either to her home or to the American hospital would end disastrously. There was only one course open to Judge Arnold in his predicament—to leave his daughter on the boat. The “Eitel Frederick” sailed from Colon during the evening for a week’s trip down the coast, touching at the Panamanian port again on her return, on her way back to “the States.” The Judge therefore, made his plans to remain on
the steamer, trusting that by careful nursing it would be possible to take Edith ashore at the end of the week.

Rod was one of the first of the group of passengers crowded about the rails as the boat entered the Colon harbor. The coast of Panama was extending across the horizon in a low fringe of sleepily nodding palm trees at the foot of a jagged line of very misty hills, whose dull, shadowy forms could only be seen here and there like the shoulders of a tall man in a fog. The harbor was a huge bowl of gray water set in an uneven rim of muddy land. Beyond it, the squat, dreary outlines of the town were jumbled together in a shapeless, confused mass. Rod’s first impression of Panama was confined to a dirty, dilapidated wharf, a straggling row of palm trees, wearily shaking their branches like a drowsy man stretching his arms, and a line of long, weather-beaten ware-houses seeming to rise sheer from the water, with huge sign in black and white paint sprawling across their front.

“Are you disappointed?”

Rod turned to find the smiling face of the ship’s surgeon at his side.

“Most of the new arrivals at Panama expect a glittering panorama,” continued Dr. Henderson, “and the reality falls considerably short of their expectations.”
"I rather imagined there would be some evidence of the Canal work," said Rod.

"No, indeed!" the doctor rejoined quickly. "As a matter of fact, you will have to go several miles inland before you will see the Canal-builders actually at work. That is why the average American tourist, who thinks he ought to see the dirt flying even before his ship docks, is disappointed. Colon is Panamanian territory. The United States has no jurisdiction in the town."

"I thought Colon was the Atlantic outlet of the Canal Zone?" said Rod in surprise.

"That is easily explained. The Americans are located in a suburb, that is called Cristobal. It is not over ten minutes' walk from the dock, and is really a part of the town. But so far as its manners and customs are concerned, it might be a thousand miles away. Colon is a sleepy mud-hole, thoroughly characteristic of the indolence of the tropics. Cristobal is a wide-awake American military post, spick and span, and full of bustle and energy. You could find no greater contrast, if you searched the world over, than there is between these next-door neighbors."

Dr. Henderson extended his arm toward one of the shadowy hills on the right.

"That is the cemetery of Colon. There is a
popular report that says the number of corpses in the town exceeds the living population. And I should not be surprised if this were true. Until two or three years ago, when the Americans in self-preservation were forced to clean up the place, it was little more than a disease-breeding swamp. I shudder to think of the ravages of yellow fever alone—‘Yellow Jack,’ we call it down here.”

“Is Colon the old sea-port of Panama?” asked Rod. “It seems to me that I have read that in the old days of the Spanish Main, Porto Bello, farther down the coast, was used as the outlet to the Atlantic.”

“You are right. That was in the hey-day of Panama’s glory when Spain ruled the country and the treasure of the Incas was transported overland on mule-back from the Pacific to be carried to Europe. In those days, the city of Panama was the metropolis of Central America, and Porto Bello was a far busier city than Colon has ever been.”

“Wasn’t that just after Pizarro’s conquest of Peru?” Rod queried, more interested in the discussion of the romantic past than in a survey of the scenes of the present.

“Yes. For the fifty years or so following Pizarro’s expedition across the Andes, Panama occupied a pinnacle of fame and fortune which
she has never equalled since, even with the prestige of the Canal. Millions of dollars worth of treasure passed through the country, and Panama was by all odds the center of activity of Central America."

"Why was the Atlantic port moved from Porto Bello to Colon?"

"Porto Bello was destroyed by the buccaneers, and either through superstition or because it was thought that Colon could be better defended in case of attack, the new city was moved northward, and Porto Bello was practically abandoned."

Dr. Henderson broke off suddenly as he caught sight of the quarantine officer boarding the ship.

"If you want a thrilling romance, read the history of sixteenth and seventeenth century Panama, when the traffic of the Spanish Main was at its height. Most people think of Panama only in connection with the Canal. To my mind, its past is far more interesting than its present."

Rod had already packed his baggage. After the examination of the health officer had been completed, there was nothing farther to keep him on board. The majority of the passengers were already dressed for the shore.

Rod was about to descend to the Arnold’s
state-room to make a final inquiry as to Edith’s condition when he almost collided with Reginald Wingrave and the Judge, rounding the deck. The young English attache was attired in a jaunty blue serge suit and white cap, and was plainly ready to land the moment the dock was reached. Judge Arnold caught Rod’s arm as the youth passed.

“I will see you later, Mr. Wingrave. I want a few moments’ conversation with Mr. Standish.”

Wingrave looked anything but pleased at the interruption, but gave Rod a careless nod, and left the two alone.

The Judge drew the lad across to a deserted corner of the deck, and placed his arm suddenly about his shoulders. The action brought a quick flush to Rod’s face.

“Do you realize, Standish, that but for your heroism the other day what my position would be this morning?”

Rod held up a quick, protesting hand.

“Don’t, sir!”

“I wouldn’t be human, my boy, if I didn’t want to thank you as you deserve to be thanked. With Edith’s illness, I have not had a chance to do so before. You are young, and a stranger in Panama. You will need friends, perhaps more than you realize now. I am not a rich man, but
it will be a pleasure if you will let me help you. Can you suggest a way?”

Rod hesitated. If Judge Arnold could only realize how much he did need his help! Circumstances could not have introduced the subject of the lost wallet more favorably. Since the Judge had asked it, he determined to present his dilemma frankly and ask for his assistance. Surely he would not refuse it.

“It is very good of you,” he began awkwardly. “I hardly know how to thank you, in my turn.” He reddened again as he shifted his position. He had never tried to borrow money before in his life. It was harder than he had expected. “To tell the truth, Judge,” he blurted out, “you can assist me if——”

The hoarse voice of a steward broke suddenly into the sentence.

“Has any one seen Judge Arnold?” As the two whirled around, the uniformed negro recognized the Judge’s tall figure.

“Please, sir, the doctor wants you at once in Miss Arnold’s stateroom!”

The Judge’s face whitened. Without a word he sprang toward the door of the passenger salon, and disappeared within. Rod started to follow him and then drew back.

“Is Miss Arnold worse?” he asked the steward. The man looked at him in surprise.
“I don’t think so, sir. Dr. Henderson merely wanted the Judge to consult with the quarantine physician, who is getting ready to leave the ship. I didn’t mean to alarm you.” And he walked away, blissfully ignorant of the blow which his sudden appearance had been to the grave-faced youth, staring gloomily into the water.

Rod slowly retraced his steps to his state-room. He seemed destined to fight his battle alone, after all. The transition from his newly awakened hope of assistance to his former doubt and uncertainty was such that for a moment he was tempted to rail at fate. Then the native grit of the Standishes came to his aid, and he resolutely picked up his suit case, asked the porter to follow with his steamer-trunk, and started toward the gang-plank.

Ten minutes later, he was on Panamanian soil, with the three solitary coins in his pocket jingling mockingly. Rod glanced at the porter, fumbled the aforesaid coins doubtfully, and then hurriedly tossed the quarter to the man in payment. It was an absolutely small tip, and the porter scowled as though he were tempted to refuse it, but Rod gave him no chance. Quickening his pace, he strode out into the street without a glance behind him.
CHAPTER VIII.

WORSE AND MORE OF IT.

ROD had not the slightest idea of the path he was taking. He only knew that he was headed toward the business part of the town. The earth under his feet again felt good. He was conscious of a desire to walk, to walk fast, with his chest expanded. The laggard sun had thrust its way through the clouds, and was pouring a cheery glow through the mist of the hills and down into the muddy puddles of the narrow, ragged street. It was a morning to inspire the most sluggish. And the pace Rod was maintaining, with head and shoulders thrown back and lungs breathing full and deep, is the surest cure that has yet been discovered for pessimism. Almost unconsciously the lad's eyes brightened, his cheeks flushed, and he began to view the future with something of his old doggedness of spirit.

Panama at last! The land of steam shovels and dynamite, tarantulas and alligators!

Rod slackened his steps, and began to consider both his destination and his surroundings. His first step, of course, was to find Captain Gray,
and deliver his father's note. The Captain was stationed at Cristobal, and Rod imagined that once across the line into American territory, it would be a comparatively easy matter to locate his home. His course, after he had delivered the note, depended upon Captain Gray. Unless his father had greatly erred, Rod was confident that the Captain would not fail him in his crisis. Surely it would not be difficult to secure him employment in a project as huge as the Panama Canal. Such is the elasticity of youth that in spite of his recent discouragement Rod began to whistle. The sound startled him, for he had dropped into one of the favorite airs of the Boston "Tech." He stopped abruptly to find a black-haired Panamanian girl, with a wooden platter of little molasses cakes for sale, smiling at him curiously. She held her stock out to him temptingly, but Rod shook his head.

"That is a pretty tune, Senor," she said in English that made the boy stare in surprise. "I have never heard it before."

"I don't wonder," answered Rod laughing. "That is an American college song."

"You Americans are a funny people," the girl said thoughtfully, with her black eyes fixed admiringly on the youth's well-knit figure as he moved away. "You will be bringing your colleges down to the jungle next!"
As Rod glanced over his shoulder, a battered sign on the corner told him that he was on Front Street, the principal thoroughfare of Colon—and as he was to discover later, the only one at all worthy of the dignity of a street. And it was a straggling, dejected looking street, seemingly beginning nowhere and ending nowhere. Its buildings were confined mostly on one side, while the other side extended in a gradual sweep down to the gray surf of the Atlantic, with only a line of discolored, creaking freight cars between the curb and the ocean. The buildings for the most part were little more than sheds, long, low, rickety structures, with shutters instead of windows. These opened into the walk and were raised and lowered by means of a pulley, serving the double purpose of admitting such stray beams of light as cared to enter, and allowing the proprietor a means of dealing with customers on the sidewalk without troubling them to go inside for their purchases.

Rod noted curiously that the majority of the merchants were Japanese, and later he found that this was true of the city of Panama also. A perpetually smiling little Jap, hardly reaching to the youth’s shoulder, although he was probably double his age, sought to attract him with a gaudy string of native beads. Next door, a curious array of native skins was offered for sale,
ranging from the pink and green hides of young alligators—strangely delicate in their shades in spite of the clumsiness of the animal—to the tawny fur of the mountain tiger. In a stuffy little store on the corner, a chattering monkey and a squawking parrot vied with one another to attract his attention, while the proprietor, a gesticulatory Panamanian with a yellow face and rings in his ears, offered to sell them both to him for five dollars, “American money.”

A brisk five-minutes walk changed the scene as sharply and abruptly as a new film in a moving picture machine. Rod felt tempted to rub his eyes to make sure he was awake. The dilapidated store buildings, the Japanese merchants, the native skins and birds, the parrots and monkeys had disappeared. Even the dreary view of the ocean and the rumbling freight cars had gone. Instead, he was gazing down a trim, neatly graded American street, with a curb as spick and span as though it had been newly scrubbed, and pretty green grass plots on the edges. And beyond, on either side was a row of square, white houses, with wide verandas, and nodding flowers along the rails. It was as though the lad had been suddenly whisked back home to one of the villages along the New England seashore. Had an American flag been unfurled before him, the scene would have been complete.
Rod knew without inquiry that he had stepped across the Cristobal line—that he was again in the domain of Uncle Sam.

The lad paused undecidedly in the middle of the block. Where would he find Captain Gray? A stiffly erect young man, in a khaki suit and leggings, evidently an orderly, turned out of the house at his left and surveyed him curiously as he passed. Rod called after him, seeking a guide in his quandary. The young man paused and jerked his head over his shoulder. By a curious coincidence, Captain Gray lived at the end of the same block.

Rod ran up the steps of the house, and pushed the bell. He had reached the end of his quest at last! His hand mechanically reached toward his breast pocket to assure himself that his note was still there. He half drew the envelope out as he stepped back, awaiting a response to his ring.

He was raising his finger to the bell a second time when there was a belated step in the hall and a maid turned the handle of the door.

"I would like to see Captain Gray, please," Rod said, stepping forward. "I have a letter for him."

"Captain Gray left this morning on a three-weeks' trip to Columbia," the girl answered, staring at the effect of her words. For a moment the youth stood gazing at her in dismay.
"Left this morning for Columbia, did you say?" Rod gasped finally.

"Are you ill?" the maid asked kindly.

The lad recovered himself with an effort. "No, not exactly." He tried to smile, but he was conscious that the effort was something of a failure. "I have a message which I am very anxious to deliver to the Captain as soon as possible. You don't think there is any chance that he may be back under three weeks, do you?"

"I'm afraid not. Indeed, he may be gone even longer than that," the girl said sympathetically. And then she brightened. "If your message relates to government affairs——"

Rod shook his head. "No, it is a personal matter. No one but Captain Gray will do." His brain was whirling. He wanted to get away somewhere and think. When would his misfortunes end? Was there an end?

He turned listlessly and mechanically raised his cap as he started down the steps.

"Would you like the Captain's Columbia address?" the maid asked.

Rod hesitated. "No, I will have to wait until he returns."

On the walk, he looked back. The girl was still watching him. No doubt his behavior had been peculiar, he admitted ruefully. How could it have been otherwise? He had thought he was
prepared to stand everything—to meet every blow of adversity. But this was too much!

First the abandonment of his college course, then the death of his father, then the loss of his parent’s scanty savings. And now he was denied even the help of a friend who was to find him employment!! Was ever a boy down and out more effectually—in a strange land twenty-five hundred miles from home? And it was only two weeks ago that he had been sauntering to his classes at “Tech” without a care in the world.

Rod’s bitter musings were broken suddenly and sharply. His wandering steps had taken him beyond Cristobal back into Colon. From the narrow street before him a hoarse burst of cries and the lash of an angry whip rang out.

As Rod came to a pause and digested the details of the astonishing scene ahead, even his own predicament was swept from his thoughts.
CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE AND A SURPRISE.

IT was indeed a startling scene.

A man and a horse that had lost their heads had brought about a situation that was rapidly verging toward a tragedy.

The man was a Panamanian cab driver, whose sallow face had grown almost white with terror. On the rough, uneven pavement, his mule-team was plunging wildly back and forth, dashing his abandoned vehicle from curb to curb so viciously that every instant it seemed as though it would be splintered into a mass of wreckage. This was the first detail of the impending disaster that struck Rod's eyes.

The second detail was a huge bay horse, hardly a quarter of a block away, that was plunging toward the swaying cab and the frightened mule-team at a pace showing clearly that it was completely beyond control. In its saddle was a very much flushed young man in the undress uniform of a lieutenant of the United States army, whose toes were digging sharply into the stirrups and whose every muscle was tense and
rigid in the desperate effort to check his steed's maddened flight. Even in that instant Rod was conscious of a thrill of admiration at his steadiness. There was not the slightest hint of fear in his bearing, although he must have known that he was facing death, with the odds frightfully against him.

The issue was plainly a matter of seconds. Even the crowd on the walk was pressing instinctively back from the curb as though fearing personal injury when the crash came. There was no effort at a helping hand, apparently there was no thought that there could be a helping hand. Rod saw only a row of stolid faces whose owners were divided between fear and curiosity. The cowardly coachman who had abandoned his team, was huddling back against a corner bazaar, with his knees shaking and his eyes rolling. Evidently he had been attempting to lash his horse beyond the danger-zone when they had rebelled in a panic, and he had fled.

Rod saw the whole panorama with the swiftness and vividness of a lightning flash. It could not have been over a dozen seconds from his sudden halt on the walk until he found himself in the street, an actor in the scene. A fat man behind him found his voice and shouted something hoarse and unintelligible after him, but the boy paid no heed. He was sprinting toward
the rearing mule-team, with his head high and his hands clinched like the winning runner in a hundred-yard dash. He was aware of but one thought pounding through his brain. An American in a strange land was in peril, and he was the only other American who could give him aid.

Even as he ran, he was conscious that there was but one way in which that aid could be rendered. The coachman had been flogging his team toward the corner ahead, with the evident intention of whirling into the side street and escaping the path of the runaway, when terror had gotten the better of his purpose and he had jumped from his seat. Rod gathered his muscles, fixed his eyes on the front seat of the lurching cab, and selecting an instant when the mules had apparently winded themselves, he gave a sudden upward leap into the vehicle, grasping for the flying reins as he did so.

Fortune was kind to him as he found when he recovered his balance and saw that his extended hands had closed over the lines. He probably could not have repeated the exploit again in a dozen trials, and no one realized better that if he had missed the lines, the situation would have been completely beyond him. The boy darted a swift backward glance toward the plunging runaway in his rear, and then kept
his eyes riveted on the backing mule-team and the corner ahead. Could he guide the cab into the side street before the bay horse reached the point of turn?

Rod braced his feet against the back-board, wound the lines about his wrist, and suddenly threw all his weight to the right. It was a risky move. It would be impossible to extricate himself from the reins if the mules refused to swerve in his direction, or if they should prove too strong for him and dash toward the runaway instead of away from it. It was a second of tense, gripping crisis. Rod’s arms suddenly felt as though they were being torn from his shoulders. Then the rearing team whirled on their haunches as sharply and abruptly as though they were set on pivots, the cab hung dizzily on the edges of its wheels until it seemed that a breath would send it toppling, and then, lurching like an over-rigged ship in a heavy gale, it was jerked wildly along the jagged pavement as the mules, apparently more terror-stricken than ever, settled down to a fast and furious gallop as though they were determined upon but one thing—the annihilation of themselves and their driver as soon as possible.

Rod had a blurred, confused glimpse of a row of gaping faces along the curb, with the features all jumbled together as though they had been
painted on cloth and the colors had run. He had no time for coherent thought. Afterward it seemed to him that his greatest fear had been that he would lose his cap!

The corner was now not a dozen feet away. He began to throw his pressure on the right rein again. He had a vague impression that the mule on this side was the more tractable of the two.

Would he—could he—make the turn in time? A hurried glance out of the corner of his eye showed that the runaway was gaining on the cab in swift bounds.

The young officer in the saddle saw his glance, and raised his voice in a hoarse shout of encouragement.

"Great work, old man! Hang on and you'll make it yet! Jumping bull-frogs! Look out for the curb, there!" Even as the warning was being uttered, the wheels of the cab reached the corner, swayed an instant on the edge as they ground against the curb, and then crunched by with a dozen splintered spokes and a cracked hub. Almost in the same breath, there was a swift clatter of hoofs at the boy's shoulder, a glimpse of a hatless, dishevelled young man gripping the reins of a wild-eyed bay horse, and the runaway was past with a clear path before it.

The turn had been made in safety. Rod realized this with a sharp indrawing of his breath
and a consciousness that his face and neck were bathed with perspiration. The bodies of the mules were covered with a white foam. The strain showed as greatly on them as on the youth at the reins. Already their furious pace was relaxing. Rod ventured to loosen his hold on the lines and shift his position to a more comfortable angle. The mules were rapidly becoming both winded and subdued. The boy flung a glance over the back of the seat and saw that the corner was now nearly a block away.

He gathered the lines suddenly in his hands, and gave a quick, firm tug with a sharp cry of whoa. As much to his surprise as to his relief, the team paused obediently, in fact coming to such an abrupt and unexpected halt that he almost pitched forward into the street before he could recover himself. A quieter, more docile, more innocent pair of mules could not have been found in all Colon. Their recent spasm of terror had passed as completely and suddenly as it had arisen. Had it not been for their white heaving bodies, Rod might have been tempted to doubt his own senses and regard the events of the past few minutes as the figment of a nightmare. A glance at his blistered hands and the splintered wheels of the cab, however, as he cautiously turned the team, effectually dispelled any lingering doubts as to their character that he
might have entertained. Moreover, he was becoming uncomfortably aware of some ugly bruises, and when he chanced to raise his hand he saw his collar had been torn away and his necktie lost. If he had won a bloodless victory, it was neither a painless nor a costless one.

At the corner he found that the attitude of the crowd had changed as suddenly as the danger had passed. The spectators who had scampered from the curb in terror a few minutes before formed a gesticulating, loudly talking circle about the exhausted team before he could spring to the ground. The cab-man, who had fled from his post, staggered through the crowd and resumed the reins with an amusing air of condescension. The storm passed, he was ready to pose as a hero.

As he caught sight of the damaged wheels, he turned with a loud cry and caught Rod by the sleeve.

"Senor, senor, you have ruined my cab! You have taken my bread from me!"

Rod stared in bewilderment. The man raised his voice and the crowd edged about his shoulders.

"I must have new wheels before I can drive again—new wheels, and I have not even money to buy feed. You are rich, senor. You must help me!"

Rod thought grimly of the sixty cents in his
pocket as he looked at the man’s greedily outstretched hand. Before he could answer, a sharp voice broke into the cabman’s whining sentences, and the crowd parted hurriedly as a perspiring bay horse halted suddenly at the curb and a dusty young man in the saddle flashed a contemptuous glance at the native’s importuning figure. Rod recognized the victim of the runaway.

The young officer was angry and he showed it in his very first sentence. “If you’re a wise man, cabbie, you’ll climb into that front seat and drive away from here as you never drove before! I’m in no mood for trifling. Your cowardice nearly cost me my life, and now after you deserted your post, you have the impudence to ask for damages! For monumental nerve, you are the eighth wonder of the world! Now, get out! Do you hear? Get out! In plain American, beat it!”

The cabman did not wait for further argument. The sight of the stern-faced young officer seemed to wilt him instantly. The man climbed sullenly back to his seat, and as the crowd scampered from the neighborhood of his mules, he brought his long whip down on the backs of the now thoroughly subdued team and clattered off down the cobble-stones into the main street.

Rod was turning to follow him with a rueful thought of his damaged collar and a mental
Advanced toward him with outstretched hands.
question as to how much of his sixty cents it would take to make the needed repairs when the young man on the horse slipped from his saddle and advanced toward him with outstretched hand.

"I say, old man, can you give me a tip as to just how I ought to put it?"

"Put what?" Rod repeated wonderingly as he took the sun-browned hand and noted that the other in spite of his lieutenant's uniform could not be more than five or six years older than himself.

"Why, my thanks for the service you have rendered me! Do you realize that you have saved my life and that if I value that possession at all you have put me under the biggest debt of gratitude one person can put another? I'm not much on oratory—in my class at the 'Point' I was always getting marked down for that—so I thought you might give me a few suggestions as to how to cloth the thoughts that are surging up in my bosom!"

Rod laughed. There was something in the twinkling gray eyes before him that forced one to respond to their owner's good humor. They reminded him vividly of Jack Winters, but the next moment he was sorry for the suggestion for it brought him back with an unpleasant shock to his own embarrassing situation and the
uncomfortable problem with which he was wrestling. The young lieutenant saw the swift change in his face and raised his eye-brows.

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Certainly not. Rod Standish, formerly of Boston."

"Well, I am Derrick Sterling and I am lucky enough to hold a lieutenant’s commission in the Culebra Engineering Corps. Shake again, Standish! I used to know some mighty good chaps in Boston."

Sterling hesitated. "I say, if it’s a fair question, what are you doing down here on this edge of nowhere?"

"I guess it’s a fair enough question, and I’ll give it a fair answer. I’m, I’m—well, I’m looking for work!"

Sterling whistled. "How long have you been here?"

"I came on the ‘Eitel Frederick’ this morning. You see, I haven’t had a very long look yet."

Rod buttoned the broken ends of his collar together and turned up his coat to hide the absence of his tie. "Those mules gave me a rather hard tussle. I guess I’m due for a hurry-up visit to a clothing store."

Sterling came out of his preoccupied study. "I’m going to ask you another question, Standish. If I’m butting into your private affairs,
don't hesitate to say so. What made you think you could find a job down here?"

Rod kicked a stray piece of gravel from the curb, looked into the friendly gray eyes, and decided to return frankness for frankness.

"I have a partial engineering training for one thing—I was a student at the Boston 'Tech' until two weeks ago—and then I had a letter to an old friend of my father's, Captain Gray of Colon. I was just leaving his house when I saw your runaway."

"And what answer did Captain Gray give?"

"He didn’t give me any. He has left on a trip to South America!"

Again Sterling whistled. This time before answering, he glanced down the walk. A native boy was idly running his toes into a yellow clay bank, studying the effect of the sticky earth on his sombre skin. The lieutenant raised his voice and held a dime up between his fingers.

"Here, you, do you see this money?"

The boy shuffled nearer with a suggestion of interest.

"Do you see this horse?" The youngster parted his teeth in an expansive grin.

"Well, if you'll take this horse to the government corral, the dime is yours. Is that clear?"

"But what are you going to do?" Rod broke in.
“I’m going with you—or rather, you’re going with me.” Sterling caught him genially by the arm. “Our first visit will be to a gentleman who can replace that collar and tie of yours. Then we are going across to the government Y. M. C. A. club-house for a good long chat. Now, I don’t want to hear any arguments. It’s a hot day, and I have had a strenuous half hour.”

In the next twenty minutes, Rod was given little opportunity for speech of any kind, of protest or otherwise. Whatever Lieutenant Sterling’s faults might be, silence was not one of them, and Rod shrewdly divined that he had a purpose in monopolizing the conversation. It was not until after they had reached the Y. M. C. A. club house, after a satisfactory visit to a neighboring clothing store where Sterling’s pocket-book had sought industriously to repair the damage of the rescue, that Rod found an opportunity to voice his growing bitterness.

“You’re mighty kind and all that, and I appreciate it, but I ought not to take up any more of your time, Mr. Sterling. A chap that’s out of a job, and down and out on his luck as I am, is a rather poor companion!”

Sterling gazed across at him with the twinkle showing again in his eyes.

“You are mistaken on at least one point, Stan-dish. You are not out of a job!”