





THE LAST DITCH



Hildreth making a sensational thirty-yard run to the line

THE LAST DITCH

A STORY OF PANAMA
AND THE CANAL ZONE

By

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To
My Father
*in grateful appreciation
of his never-failing help and advice
I affectionately dedicate
this book*

THE LAST DITCH

PART I

CHAPTER I

HIS FATHER'S LETTER

“**A** LETTER fo' Mistah Carvel Hildreth!”
“Marcus Aurelius” Jones, venerable colored sweep of Denning, the junior dormitory, who was honored with such a dignified name because of his quaint philosophy, bowed with deep reverence on the threshold of Captain Bill Hoke's room, where several of that football leader's teammates were gathered.

The big, serious fellows who were to battle on the gridiron the next day for the glory of the Gold and Green were striving to appear unconcerned, something quite out of the question, as the conversation inevitably veered around to conjectures of Hamilton's line, the speed of the ends, or the weight of the backfield. Besides, in the corridors of Denning, Wilton, Dwight, and MacCabe the excited students were eagerly devouring news of them, and out under the white glare of the arc lights in Campus Square the yell leaders were urging the enthusiastic rooters to shout themselves hoarse for Bill Hoke's team!

College and campus throbbed and pulsed with the spirit of the big game. For three weeks the

squad had toiled under the caustic commands of the slave-driving coaches; around the five players from last season a fast, alert team had been built, the raw material had been battered into shape for scrimmage, and the loyal scrubs had fought fiercely against the 'Varsity, to develop them for the hard work of the season. There had been blackboard talks at night, and the fellows had come to dream of mass plays, cross-bucks, and the forward pass, while Captain Hoke wildly muttered signals in his sleep.

Downtown, the strong Hamilton eleven, with a string of coaches, trainers, and rubbers, was quartered at the Hotel Central, in the lobby of which the carload of Red and Blue rooters sang and cheered. The town was full of Ballard graduates who had come back for the game. They dropped into Billy Treglor's eating place as of old, to renew their college memories. There were glad reunions on the street, with staid gentlemen piling into Dan McCarthy's ramshackle hack for a ride up to College Hill.

Head Coach Collister, coming from Captain Hoke's room after a final warning to the football fellows to be in bed by ten o'clock, was caught on the steps of Denning and forced to make a speech. He was cheered loudly when he announced that every man was in great trim, and that the eleven could be depended on to fight until the last second of play. Then the students massed under Hoke's windows and cheered each player and substitute, until the yell leaders led them away.

It was no wonder, then, that the dignified Marcus Aurelius Jones felt awed as he entered Bill Hoke's room, for he was in the presence of Ballard's hero throng. Besides Captain Hoke, the fullback, there was "Cupid" Cavanaugh, the fast little left end, "Biff" Hogarth, a giant right guard, big "Dad" Hickson, center, Brannock, right end, and Carvel Hildreth, the phenomenal right tackle, whose wonderful work in that position had for three seasons brought victory to the Gold and Green.

In the room there were others, not of the squad,—"Chip" Craddock, the manager of the football team, Miguel Mendoza, a short, brown-faced junior from Panama, and Sig, the bulldog mascot of the eleven, who wore a Gold and Green collar and barked his defiance of all things Hamiltonian.

Hildreth, a tall, superbly developed young fellow, with a handsome though somewhat haughty face, was lounging at ease on the davenport, laughing as Chip Craddock humorously and vividly described the latest sensational escapades of the right tackle—the wrecking of Billy Treglor's dining room on the night of the senior banquet, and the subsequent exploit, in which Hildreth had won undying notoriety when he ran "Tug" Warrington's touring car at full speed into Parker Chapel, to the devastation of the car.

Carvel Hildreth, who was a senior more by the grace of the Faculty than because of his own mental attainments, was the only son of Robert Hildreth, Ballard '89, now a successful banker and promoter

in New York City. Accustomed all his life to an abundance of spending money, Carvel's three years at college had been a wild riot of the most reckless adventures, usually ending in the smashing of everything breakable in sight.

But most of the property owners thus afflicted had come to welcome these incidents, since Hildreth would carelessly tell them to send their bills for damages to Mr. Robert Hildreth, Bankers' Building, New York, who would settle them at once, which was always the case. In view of the fact that the enraged proprietors invariably made the bills double the damage, the collegian was a popular visitor.

With a brilliant mind and the ability to lead his class with high scholastic honors at Ballard, Hildreth never studied, but spent his nights in daring escapades that startled the college. Despite his father's wealth, he was not overbearing, but profligate with his money and friendship, so that his generosity was forever entangling others in Faculty reprimands. A loyal, good-natured, and impetuous fellow, he was being ruined by having too much money at his command.

"Toss the letter here, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus," Carvel drawled. "I suppose it contains a couple of checks from Dad, to reimburse Billy Treglor for his broken china, and to buy Tug a new front for his touring car. I had so much fun both times that the expense does not bother me in the least, especially so long as my father foots the bills!"

Marcus Aurelius Jones, after presenting the letter to Hildreth with much the same awed homage as a South African would offer gifts to a tribal chief, backed slowly from the room, thrilled to the heart at actually having been in the very midst of the college heroes who would struggle against Hamilton the next day for the glory of old Ballard!

“ ‘Mother and father pay all the bills,’ ” chanted Dad Hickson, “ ‘and we have all the fun, with the money that we spend in college life!’ ”

“As I was relating,” resumed Craddock, whose harrowing narrative had been interrupted by the reverential entrance of Marcus Aurelius, “Hildreth scrambled on top of the table to inform the world as to the grandeur of the senior class, when the head waiter, a new one who did not know how willing Billy is to have Carvel smash things so he can send Mr. Hildreth a bill for twice the breakage, ventured to remonstrate.

“Then Carvel hurled the chinaware in every direction, kicked the cutglass from the table, scattered the silver about, and caused a general havoc. When we seniors dragged him out at last, Treglor was sitting alone amid the remains, like Marius brooding over the crumbled ruins of Carthage!”

“Yes,” laughed Cupid Cavanaugh, “but he was counting up how big a bill he might send to Carvel’s father. The funniest stunt that Hildreth has yet shown Ballard was after the banquet, when he sent Tug’s car head-on into Parker Chapel to give us a realistic demonstration of how our stone-wall defense

will stop the rushes of the Hamilton backfield to-morrow. Crash, and the car stopped dead!"

While the football fellows laughed at the memory of Hildredth's exploits, the tall right tackle was carelessly ripping open the envelope; he knew the letter was from his father, as the firm's name was in the upper left-hand corner. As Billy Treglor and Tug Warrington, at his request, had sent bills to Mr. Hildreth, he felt sure the letter contained a check and a lengthy arraignment of his reckless college career.

For a few moments, as he glanced indifferently at the writing, the smile remained on his face, as though it took him some time to grasp the context of the message. Then Hildreth sat staring at the sheet, a look of sheer amazement coming to his countenance, while his companions wondered what alarming news the letter could contain.

"What ees the mattaire, Carvel?" demanded Mendoza, seeing how dazed the senior was. "Ees eet that your fathaire has refuse' to pay for ze automobeel and eating place which you haf wreck'?"

"No, fellows," muttered Hildreth, handing the letter to Captain Bill Hoke for him to read aloud, "but Dad has reached the end of his patience at last. I might have known that the smashing of Tug's car was too much, but I just had to show how we will stop Hamilton to-morrow. Read it out, Bill."

Captain Bill Hoke, a big, serious chap, weighed down with the great responsibility of leading his

college eleven, looked troubled as he read the letter that had stunned his teammate.

“DEAR SON CARVEL:

There is an end to all things, and you have at last reached it with my patience. For three years I have settled bill after bill to pay for your utterly senseless pranks, but when you take to the malicious destruction of property, as in this last stunt, I can stand no more.

“It has been my fault, for I should never have allowed you so much money at college; perhaps I should have made you work your way through, as I did when a student at Ballard. But I remembered how I was forced to sacrifice much of that joyous college comradeship because my work for an education took my spare time, and I wanted you to enjoy what I missed.

“You have disappointed me sorely, Carvel, for in your college course you have not taken a scholastic honor, and your class records are miserable. You have chosen riotous companions, leading them into the wildest exploits, and have depended on me to pay the bills. Because you were my son, and I wanted you to enjoy the golden college years that come but once, I have been lenient, but you have crushed all my hopes of you.

“These are the last bills I shall settle for you at Ballard, of any kind. Either come to New York and take a minor clerkship in the office, or make your own way at college for the rest of the year on your own resources.

“If you can make your way at college for the rest of the year, and show me that you have the making of a man in you, I will help you afterward, or if you come home to start in at the bottom, here in my office. Otherwise, you must shift for yourself, in your own shiftless way.

“Your father,

“ROBERT HILDRETH,
Ballard College, '89.”

There was a silence. Every fellow in the room knew that Carvel had wasted three years at Ballard,

and all felt his father was right, though his determination seemed stern.

"That is straight from the shoulder," remarked Biff Hogarth, "but you have brought it on yourself, old man. You have been warned by friends, foes, and the Faculty, but you were heedless. Still, you must stay; you can't leave now, with the football season just started. You can tend furnaces, or—"

"I won't work!" raged Carvel, with an unreasoning anger against his father seething within him. "I have been used to having all the money I wanted to spend, and I can't stay here and hustle. I'll take him at his word, and accept the position in his New York office."

Mendoza, the little Panamanian, leaped to his feet excitedly.

"I haf eet!" he shouted. "You go to ze Canal Zone, Heeldreth! You get a fine job working on ze Beeg Deetch; you safe ze money for nex' fall; then you come back to old Ballard and graduate!"

He plunged into a fervid description of the Canal, and the vivid word pictures that the student from Colon drew, in his quaint English, fascinated them, for Mendoza, as are all who have seen the stupendous undertaking, was thoroughly under the spell of the glorious achievement. As he talked, they saw the tall, graceful palm fronds on the white beach at Cristobal, the orderly rows of Isthmian Canal Commission houses, the enormous dam and locks at Gatun; they heard the rattle and roar of steam

shovels in Culebra Cut, and smelled the powder of the dynamite blasts.

“I see myself digging a ditch!” said Carvel, in contempt. “I might work in an office, but never in the torrid sun and pouring rain of the tropics. But we won't worry over this until after the big game to-morrow, for come what will, we must beat Hamilton!”

CHAPTER II

THE DECISION

LEAVING his teammates to talk excitedly over his father's letter, and to shake their heads sorrowfully over his wasted years, Hildreth strode from Denning and walked across Campus Square to Dwight Hall, the sacred abode of the seniors. On the steps of MacCabe, the freshman dormitory, were "Pop" Corrigan and "Doc" MacGruder, the elongated yell leaders, tying themselves into knots, getting entangled with the big megaphones, and inciting the collegians to the seventeen different kinds of riot and insurrection known as "rooting."

"Standing on his own thirty-eight-yard line," shouted MacGruder, as Hildreth passed, "with only a minute of play, and neither eleven having scored, Hildreth, the Ballard right tackle, dropped back for a try at goal. Hickson passed the ball perfectly. Hildreth stood undismayed as the Latham backs ripped their way through the line, and a moment later the pigskin flew across the bar, winning for Ballard!"

It was a newspaper account of the Ballard-Latham game, and the collegians went wild at hearing it quoted. They clamored for a speech, and Hildreth paused under an arc light long enough to shout:

“We won’t need a drop-kick to-morrow, fellows! Ballard is going to win the game on touchdowns!”

Escaping from the students, while Pop Corrigan went through all sorts of gymnastics to get a cheer for Hildreth from the riotous gathering, the right tackle made his way to his room, where he could still hear two hundred voices insisting to the campus that “He’s—all—right! Hildreth! Hildreth! Hildreth!” He was thrilled with the knowledge that he was an idol among his fellows, a football hero, but the memory of his father’s letter rankled.

Back in ’89, Robert Hildreth had graduated from Ballard with the highest class honors; his record had been clean in every way, and Ballard was proud to number him as one of her sons. The fact that he had worked his way through the four years made his popularity and power for good all the more wonderful, and his friends remembered him as resourceful, honest, and loyal to his alma mater.

In Carvel he had hoped to realize the expectations of a proud father. Since the death of the boy’s mother he had come more and more to center all his hopes and ambitions on his son, giving him the finest preparatory-school training, and fitting him to make his mark at college and university. Instead of appreciating this, Carvel had studied little, had gone in zealously for athletics, and had spent his time as wastefully as he had squandered his father’s money.

“Grinder” Graham, Hildreth’s roommate, was

studying diligently as his chum entered, for the fact that the big game was to come off next day was not sufficient reason for him to neglect his class work. He looked up from his Horace, and seeing that Carvel was in an angry mood he asked, quizzically:

“Faculty after you again, old man?”

For answer, Hildreth flung his father’s letter down before Graham, and despite his wrath he smiled in anticipation of Grinder’s rebuke. The studious, bespectacled little senior read it through carefully, then regarded him sadly.

“So you are at the last ditch?” he said slowly. “You have sown wild oats for three years, and now you must reap the harvest! It is up to you to make good on your own ability, and will you be able to do it? Will the years of wasted opportunities and the memory of reckless escapades help you now, Carvel?”

Hildreth was silent. Usually the mention of his college adventures filled him with pride, but in the presence of this hard-working, plain-spoken Grinder Graham he did not see things in the same light as when a group of joyous collegians laughed at his sensational exploits.

“Oh, I don’t know, Grinder,” he said at last, “I have had a good time, but you can’t say that I have done anything so terribly wrong. All college fellows go in for a lot of larks, you know; I have n’t shone much in class work, but you have no right to regard me as a criminal just because you are a grind.”

"Have n't I?" demanded the excitable Grinder. "You have blasted your father's hopes of you, wrecked your own life, wielded a bad influence in college because of your wildness, yet you have done no wrong! You have been a wastrel with your money; you have led foolish freshmen to follow your riotous example; by your good nature and fine football you have made yourself a hero and an idol, and you misuse this influence! Isn't it a crime to have your record, Hildreth? Have n't you done wrong to flunk out and barely pass from year to year, when with your brain you could have led the class? And all this, when your father hoped in vain for *some* good report of you!"

Somehow, when put in such clear, forceful sentences, Carvel's three years at Ballard did not bring him the satisfaction he had once felt. All that he had done, besides the football playing, had been to set a bad example for students who followed him blindly, causing them to engage in affairs that brought them shame and disgraced their college.

"Think it over," said Graham gently, for he saw that his words had hit the mark. "What have you ever done for the glory of old Ballard? Have you ever made the State Intercollegiate Oratorical Contest? Have you ever written for the *Ballard Monthly*? Have you ever done any scholastic work to be proud of? In your class affairs, did you ever get elected to an office? No, you were an idol when you raided the kitchen or hazed the freshmen, but your class judged you unfit to lead them through

college! Have you ever done a worthy thing, off the gridiron, here at Ballard?"

"No!" groaned Hildreth, miserably.

"You are right," said Grinder with grimness. "After each wild act the college said, 'That is Hildreth, '13!' That is how you reflected glory on our class! That is your true college spirit! Can't you see that your father is right, and that now you *must* redeem yourself?"

"I know it," answered Hildreth sadly, "but it's all too late, Grinder. I have wasted three years, and I am a senior. I have been used to squandering my time and money, and I cannot stay here and work. I can't study, for I have never learned how."

Graham flung an arm across his shoulders.

"It's never too late to win out, old chum!" he said earnestly. "Just make a last-ditch fight, and win the game! I'll help you, the Faculty will help you, when you tell them you will try to do right, and the fellows will stick with you. Will you try it?"

Hildreth hesitated. From the window, in the moonlight, he saw the athletic field, with the gaunt goal posts and the gridiron, marked for the big game; the campus spread out before him, with Campus Square, and all the college buildings grouped around it—MacCabe, Wilton, Denning, and Dwight, the Science Hall, the Gymnasium, and white Parker Chapel. He heard the students, led by MacGruder and Corrigan, singing softly, "Ballard, Ballard, hail, all hail!" The lights

gleamed from the dormitory windows, and there sounded the twang of a banjo, mingling with the melody of a junior quartette.

For the first time in his three years at Ballard, Carvel Hildreth felt a thrill of true college spirit. He saw that his course should have meant more to him than nights of fun, wasted opportunities in classroom, debating hall, and among his fellows,—more than a little football glory. He should have been a leader in class affairs, a fine orator, a power for good in college. It was old Ballard that he gazed on now, and he had disgraced his alma mater!

“I’ll do it, Grinder!” he declared with determination. “I’ll go to Prexy to-night and tell him that I have been all wrong, and that I’ll reform. And I’ll send Dad a telegram, saying that I shall stick here and make good!”

Deep within Hildreth there were the stirrings of a sincere desire to make good, to atone for the wasted college career and to bring happiness to his father, but as yet they were buried beneath his idle, reckless nature. There was fine material for true manhood in him, but it would take severe discipline to bring it out.

“I’ll finish the year at Ballard and show Dad!” he cried, thrilled with his own confidence. “Come down to the telegraph office, Grinder, and I’ll wire him my decision at once!”

“Remember,” cautioned Grinder, as they left the room, “it won’t be as easy as you imagine, Carvel, for old habits will hinder you; there will

come times when the old, reckless spirit will seize you, when you will weary of books and of hustling and are wild to cut loose. You will miss the money, the freedom you have had. It is your one chance, but there is a fight ahead of you."

"Oh, I'll make good," promised Hildreth buoyantly. "You just watch me play the game against Hamilton to-morrow on the line of scrimmage, and you will know how I am going to buck this other line."

Ten minutes later, with the serious Grinder shaking his head dubiously over the dramatic wording of the message, Carvel Hildreth was sending a telegram to his father in New York. It was full of promise and determination, and was destined to make the financier feel a new pride in his son.

It read: "I am at the last ditch—but will win out here!"

CHAPTER III

THE YELLOW STREAK

“**H**IT low and hard, fellows!”

Big Bill Hoke, captain and fullback of the Ballard College eleven, smote the right tackle on his steaming back and ran to his position on the defense, as the chaotic mass of bodies untangled and with automatic speed shaped itself into opposing lines of scrimmage and of backfields.

Carvel Hildreth, fighting the game of his life, moved his stiffening lips in response to the panting captain's cry, but his face was white and set beneath its crust of blood and dirt as he crouched low on the line and waited tensely for the next catapult from the Hamilton backfield.

In the stands a silence reigned; hushed alike were the riotous cheers of the Hamilton contingent and the clamorous confusion led by the tall Corrigan and MacGruder. The great crowd was on its feet, swaying, intense, but still save for the gasps that came involuntarily when the two teams crashed together, or when the linesmen waved Hamilton toward the Gold and Green goal line. Undergraduates and alumni of old Ballard, maddened by the steady onrush of the enemy, stood up and waited for the inevitable defeat, unless time alone saved them.

Suddenly Doc MacGruder raised his big megaphone and boomed out to the desperate Ballard fighters:

“Hold 'em two more minutes, fellows, and Ballard wins!”

This was the great day, the afternoon of the big game! For this a score of former Ballard football stars had sacrificed their business affairs, giving cheerfully of time and services to coach the eleven. For weeks, with a loyal, hard-fighting scrub, the first-team fellows had endured the weary scrimmages, the strict training, the battering on the field in practice; everything was centered on this first big game of the season, this hour of play against the Red and Blue rival.

After the time keeper's whistle blew again, announcing the end of it all, there would come relief and rest, and for Ballard, if her line held a few more seconds, it would be rest in the memory of a glorious victory!

Five hundred joyous, noisy rooters had accompanied the Hamilton eleven, confident in the speed and strength of the big Red and Blue warriors. Flushed with the remembrance of last year's score, when Ballard had been downed for the first time in the history of their athletic relations, Hamilton had played a vicious game from the kick-off, keeping Captain Hoke's team constantly on the defensive.

Ballard, as silent and grim as the stands, from which volumes of sound had broken earlier to roll across the field, was making a last-ditch fight against

the terrific onslaught of the enemy. In the first half, before the superior weight of Hamilton's backfield had crushed and splintered the Gold and Green line, Ballard had scored a touchdown on a tackle-back play, with Hildreth breaking loose for a sensational thirty-yard run to the line, and kicking the goal afterward.

After that, the cruel concentration of weight and power in the backfield of the enemy, shot into line plunges, had battered Hoke's team, and in the last few minutes of play the Red and Blue made first down after first down, marching steadily, by bucks and tandem plays, straight for the Ballard goal line. They were determined to beat their way across, and that meant victory, for their quarter had kicked a field goal from placement in the first half.

"Stick, old man!" breathed Biff Hogarth, next to Hildreth in the line.

"I'll try," Hildreth groaned, "but my side is gashed where some one kicked me, Biff!"

After Hildreth's wonderful run, the Red and Blue quarterback had driven line plunges, tandems, and cross-bucks, one after another, straight at the star right tackle, determined to wear him out and have a substitute sent in to take his place. Carvel was a finely built chap, but even in the best of condition his splendid frame must weaken under the constant hammering of the bone-breaking rushes, or worse, his fighting spirit might be broken!

In a sort of trance, as the Hamilton backs charged at him, he remembered the night when he ran Tug Warrington's car headlong into Parker Chapel, to show his chums how the Ballard line would stop the Red and Blue rushes; somehow, he wished the big touring car might replace these backs that tore at him—he did not believe the impact would be so dizzying then.

“One more rush! One more rush!” he caught himself repeating, and he felt a sensation of nervous dread as he awaited the terrific collision that must grind him between the Hamilton play and his own secondary defense. This steady driving and smashing at him had broken him in body and muscle, but his spirit was still strong as he grinned desperately at the opposing left tackle.

It was the last ditch! Could the hard-fighting Ballard eleven stem the vicious rush of the enemy for only a few seconds, that night the college would celebrate the victory, and they would be heroes; one instant of weakening, and the powerful Hamilton backs would gain enough momentum to drive through the defense and hurl across the goal line, ten yards away.

One mighty cheer of encouragement burst from the crowd, a mingled yell of triumph from the Hamilton cohorts and of desperate defiance from Ballard; it rolled out in a mighty sweep, then stilled. Nothing was heard but the hoarse panting of the players, the call of the quarter's signals, and Sig's snappy bark as he growled at the enemy.

The instant had come when physical strength deserted the Ballard line; on their sheer fighting spirit alone were they waging the conflict, and Hildreth had been chosen as the brunt of successive rushes, the point of continued attack, to be worn down until he broke and a rush could surge over him. Mechanically he had flung himself low and hard to meet the plunges, for his body was weak and helpless, and now the opposing tackle smiled and set his cleats in the sod as he heard the signal for a cross-buck against the tired Hildreth.

"Signal!" panted the Hamilton quarter. "Formation left; 23-66-32-9!"

"Steady, old man!" breathed Biff Hogarth, digging his elbow into his teammate's side for encouragement. "It means *you!*"

Old Ballard men in the stand knew that the last play would crash into Hildreth; the students knew it, and hoped. A word of encouragement came pantingly from Captain Bill Hoke, and Hildreth fought hard to keep his reeling senses. He was afraid of the blinding crash, and the grinding shock, that must follow. He wanted to yell frantically for the coaches to drag him out, before the last rush stretched him, bloody and broken of bone, on the field!

Yet he gritted his teeth and stuck pluckily, determined to stop that last rush, or die. Suddenly he felt Hogarth's sharp elbow jab against his side. He saw the horror on his teammate's face as he understood what he had done, and all at once he grew

blind and faint with pain. Then, to the consternation of all who saw, he yielded to an apparently palpable feeling of terror, and drew back!

Then came the crash! On Hildreth alone had depended the result of the big game. Had he flung himself, heedless of death and disaster, against the last rush, the Ballard backfield would have driven in behind him, the play would have been checked in a few feet, and the time keeper's whistle, that sounded at that moment, would have announced a victory for the Gold and Green.

But that brief instant of weakening on the part of the right tackle had given the powerful Hamilton tandem the time to gain speed, and over his prostrate body it plowed, ripping the Ballard defense like a plowshare, and leaving a furrow of turned bodies in its wake as it hurtled across the goal line—to victory!

Sick and weak, Hildreth found himself beside Biff Hogarth, who had been left limp and senseless on the turf after that fatal rush. For a moment he was unable to grasp the terrible significance of it all; then he remembered, and staggered to his feet in time to see the Hamilton crowds stream on the field and do a wild snake dance, bearing the victorious eleven off in triumph.

The Ballard players trailed dejectedly from the field; tears rolled down Captain Bill Hoke's face, and Hickson was muttering incoherently in his disappointed rage. Three students carried the unconscious Hogarth to his room, and last of all,

with his head held low with the shame of it all as he passed through the crowd of ominously silent Ballard collegians, came Carvel Hildreth.

"The yellow streak!" he heard some one whisper. "Think of it—played on the eleven three seasons, and it never showed until to-day!"

Passing through the gate of Alumni Field, Hildreth met his roommate, Grinder Graham. For an instant Graham's eyes rested on the white-faced, blood-stained right tackle, then, as though he had never seen Carvel, he turned away! Hildreth had opened his mouth to speak, but he closed his lips again and plunged madly into the surging crowd.

As he went through Campus Square on his way to Dwight, Hildreth was forced to go by a gathering of angry and gloomy Ballard fellows, who were talking of the game and of his cowardice. He tried to face them bravely, but the silence that ensued was more than he could stand, and he hurried on, hearing the murmurs and hisses that broke out. He understood how much the collegians despised him; he saw the future, shunned as he would be by all; he, who a short time before had been the football idol of Ballard!

At Dwight he found the one hope of his vindication gone, for Hogarth, suffering from concussion of the brain, had been hurried to a city hospital, and he had not regained consciousness before he left the campus. Biff alone could clear him of the unjust suspicion of cowardice, but it would be weeks before the right guard returned, if ever, and he felt that

he could not endure the odium and the ostracism that long.

In the dormitory he encountered the same chilling silence. His own classmates, they who had been his ardent admirers through the three years of his brilliant football career, now scorned him as he returned from the game he had lost. The following of worshipful freshmen, who had idolized him, had faded away, and none of them would speak to him. Baynard, the editor-in-chief of the *Monthly*, gazed at him with utter contempt in his eyes, and Hildreth knew that the next issue would contain a graphic and crushing account of his cowardice.

In his room he found Grinder Graham, who had made an athletic idol of him, placing him on a pedestal despite the lectures he gave Hildreth on his reckless career. When they had been freshmen together Hildreth had shielded the weaker boy from the tortures of the sophomores, and the grind had been grateful. Now he was hurriedly ripping pennants and pictures from the walls, and hurling his possessions into a trunk.

"Why, old man!" Carvel forgot his misery at the sight. "You are not leaving college? What's up?"

"What's up?" shrilled the irate Grinder. "Do you think I'll room with a coward? No! I can't find a room in Dwight, so I'll go over to Denning. Don't you think we all know? Why, every one saw you dodge back when that last rush came at you, when you might have checked it and saved the game! You lost what the others fought so hard to

win, you, who sent a telegram to your father about winning out at the last ditch! Bah!"

Without a word, not reminding Graham that it had been his run that had made the touchdown for Ballard, the right tackle left the room and went slowly over to the shower baths in the gymnasium basement. It was a trying ordeal, to enter where beneath the grateful warmth of the showers the players were easing their bruised and battered bodies. As he went in through the clouds of steam there was a cessation of the confused talk, and then — a single, sharp hiss!

"None of that, fellows!" cried Hoke. "I'll thrash the next one who does it!"

Hildreth, determined to make an explanation, faced them all.

"Bill, I—" he faltered, then stopped, realizing how futile any words would be then, in that bitter hour of defeat.

"Don't make excuses," said Hoke coldly. "You played the coward and lost for Ballard. Had you met that last rush like a man—oh, what's the use!"

Without another effort to clear himself of the unjust charge that but one fellow could help him refute, and he, Hogarth, in the hospital, Carvel tore off his sweaty togs and hurled them away. The fellows made room for him under the showers by leaving when he came near, but he set his teeth and was silent.

It would have been hard enough for him to bear had he been guilty of the accusation, but when he

knew he had not shown the yellow streak it was unbearable. If only Hogarth had not been knocked out, he might hope for vindication, but now he had to face the condemnation of the college and the scorn of his friends, and he was utterly helpless.

After supper Hildreth, bitterly determined to stay and fight it out until spring, when he would graduate, walked out in Campus Square. The lights gleamed from the dormitories, and he heard the voices of the still angrily excited students. Everywhere his name was spoken, and his act, that had dragged the Gold and Green in the dust of defeat, was bitterly arraigned.

As he stood there, remembering that with it all he had to work his way, the football fellows passed him; Bill Hoke, who had been his best friend; Cupid Cavanaugh, who, he had thought, would stand by him through thick and thin; the trainer, who had looked on Hildreth as on an idol; all the fellows with whom he had fought for the glory of old Ballard, now passed him by and looked the other way! None had a thought for the games he had won by sheer prowess, giving his best for the team; none recalled the times when his defensive work had held an enemy scoreless, and they did not consider that he might not, after all, have been a coward. They knew only that his failure to meet that fatal last rush had lost Ballard the big game.

Carvel Hildreth, so short a time before the most popular fellow in Ballard College, idolized as a football star and liked for himself, now stood alone

and discredited in Campus Square, unnoticed by those whom he had thought were his loyal friends, and spurned by all. And this, just as he had resolved to put the past away and make good, for the sake of his father!

“For three seasons I have been bruised and battered on the field,” he muttered savagely. “I have trained and practiced. I have fought till I was nearly worn out, and now, when I fail through no fault of mine, when I was so near dead that I ought to have been out long before, I am ostracized!”

And yet, when a squad has trained and prepared for the big game, when for a week the college has been a turmoil of enthusiasm and excitement, when the team fights and suffers torment to hold a hard-earned victory in its grasp until the last second, with the enemy battering away at it, and then, when the player upon whom all depends, instead of hurling himself at the play when the eleven is at the last ditch, is to all appearances a coward, and draws back, the wave of feeling is natural. Had Hildreth stuck grimly for a few weeks, the sentiment against him would have died away, and he would have had a chance to speak.

As he made his way back to his room, deserted now by Graham, the bitter loneliness seemed too great to be endured. For the first time since the game he recalled his father's letter, and the brave telegram he had sent to New York. Everything had happened at the critical hour; his father had tired of his useless career, and now, just when he

wanted to stay and redeem himself, he must face the silent scorn of the college.

He read his father's letter over again. It offered him his choice; he might stay at college and work his own way until Commencement, or come to New York and take a lowly position in the office. He could read between the lines that his father would rather have him decide to stay at Ballard, but that was impossible, for he could not, now. Circumstances were fast making him what he had not been on the gridiron, a coward.

"I'll go to New York and work," he said. "I can't stay here. I can't stand it all. If only Hogarth had not been hurt!"

Then he thought of the brave message he had sent his father: "I am at the last ditch—but will win out here." He had not known, when he sent it, that he could be beaten back farther than he was, but so it was. He was not to be given a chance to stay and make good, after the game had been lost by him, unless he was morally courageous.

As yet there was no thought of his father's vain hopes of him; he did not understand that Mr. Hildreth had made his stern decision in the thought that it might sober Carvel to a sense of his wasted career, and that being thrown on his mettle might make a man of him. Perhaps, had not the incident of the football field occurred, he might have stayed and made good, but now the fight before him was too great, and he lacked the courage to stay.

As he entered his room he found Sig, the football

mascot, on the bed. He extended his hand to pet the great head of the bulldog, for Sig had been a self-appointed guardian of the right tackle. The animal looked up at the collegian, friendship in his great brown eyes, and wagged his stumpy tail furiously.

Then Hildreth flung himself on the bed, face downward, clenching his hands in an agony of anguish.

“I’ll go! I’ll go!” he burst forth wildly. “When only a dog will stand by me, I can’t stay and endure the shame of my friends’ ridicule and hatred!”

CHAPTER IV

DISOWNED!

MR. ROBERT HILDRETH sat at his desk near the window of his office in the Bankers' Building, New York, on State Street, watching the ocean liners move up and down North River. In his hand he held the day's newspaper, and he was enjoying a moment of anticipation before he turned to the sporting page to read the account of the Ballard-Hamilton football game.

As he was a graduate of Ballard College, and in his day had been a great athlete, he was eager to have Carvel distinguish himself in football; in fact, in view of Hildreth's reckless college career, it was the only source of pride that the financier enjoyed in him. Carvel had, indeed, made a wonderful record for himself on the gridiron.

"He has made a sorry mess of his studies," Mr. Hildreth reflected, with a look of keen regret on his face, "and he has sorely tried my patience, but his telegram shows he has the right material in him, and so long as he can play the game, I have hopes of him. That is what fitted me for the battle of life, and you won't find a fellow dodging anything hard after he has tackled runners for three seasons.

"I am glad he has the courage to stick, for had he given up and come to New York I should have

lost all hope in him; he must make good where he has wasted his years."

On his desk was Carvel's telegram: "Am at the last ditch — but will win out here." He gazed at it for a while with a glad look in his eyes, then he turned to his paper. His eyes traveled swiftly up and down the columns, and at last rested on the glaring caption:

"Ballard's Right Tackle Loses Game! Shows Yellow Streak!"

With no muscle of his impassive face showing the cruel disappointment in his heart, the financier read of how Hildreth, the famous right tackle for the Ballard eleven, had palpably lost his nerve when the last rush of the big game crashed at him, and had drawn back, his cowardice losing a bitter contest that the Gold and Green had otherwise won. There was no mention in the paper of how Carvel's chums and teammates had turned in scorn from the fallen idol, but Mr. Hildreth understood.

Unheeded, the paper slipped from his grasp and fell to the floor, as he sat, staring with unseeing eyes. Even this hope of his son was to be unrealized now; he had played the coward in a football game! For a while Mr. Hildreth was crushed; then he remembered the day he had seen Carvel play, and he pictured the long, well-built body shooting unflinchingly at a mass play that stretched him senseless on the field.

"I don't believe it!" he said loyally. "There was something wrong with him, and he ought to

have been pulled out of the scrimmage. No matter what he has done or failed to do at college, he is not a coward. I shall wait till I hear from him before I pass judgment. It's a shame, too, just as he decided to stay at college and redeem himself!"

A ubiquitous office boy thrust his red head in at the door.

"A young fellow to see you, sir," he chirped. "Says his name is Hildreth."

"Carvel!" exclaimed the banker, as his son pushed past the office boy and closed the door behind him. "What does this mean? Why are you not at college, and what have you to say about this?"

He held the paper before Carvel's eyes, but the collegian pushed it away with a gesture of weariness.

"I know it all, Dad!" he returned. "It was fine copy for the newspapers, but death to me. I could not stand the misery of being left alone, shunned by all I had believed my friends. I did vow to stay and graduate in June, but I just had to leave. I have decided to take that position in your office."

"You will go back to Ballard on the next train!" announced Mr. Hildreth grimly. "No son of mine shall show the white feather. I know that you are not a coward, Carvel, and that there is something back of all this newspaper rot. Tell me just how it all happened."

"I don't quite know," confessed the collegian, "but I give you my word of honor that I was not a coward. Hamilton drove play after play at me,

till I was physically unfit to be in the game. Was it cowardice to stay in the scrimmage when I could hardly move, and my body was one big ache, because I knew the coaches had no substitute who could stand the strain, if I failed?"

"No!" exclaimed the banker. "Then what?"

"My side was cut by a cleated shoe," said Carvel quietly, "and just as that last rush started, Biff Hogarth, our right guard, dug his elbow into the sore place, with the good intention of encouraging me, for he had forgotten I was hurt. The intense pain made me sick and blind for the moment, and I forgot the rush, the game, everything! Then it came, too late for me to throw myself at it, as I would have done, even though it meant death. That is the truth, but you can understand how it would do to offer it to a mass of defeated, infuriated students."

"But this Hogarth!" urged Mr. Hildreth. "Get him to tell of how he dug you in the side! Show that you were hurt! Surely he will remember your telling him of the injury."

"Hogarth is in the hospital with concussion of the brain," answered the right tackle sadly. "It will be weeks before he returns to college, and maybe he will not come back at all. I cannot prove that I was not a craven, and I cannot stay at Ballard; I'll work here with you."

"I believe what you have said," replied the banker earnestly. "You are not a coward, I am sure of it. I have been to college, and I know how utterly

unreasonable a student body can be when they taste defeat. But it will all blow away in time, and you will be vindicated. I am sorry that you yielded and came away, but go back now and fight it out. Get into the game, and redeem yourself in their eyes. Then you will be heard in this affair."

He placed his hand on the athlete's shoulder, and was about to add something, when Carvel looked up with troubled gaze.

"I can't go back there, Dad," he said slowly, "I just can't! It might come all right, and it might not, but I cannot stand the utter misery of it all. Every one, from dormitory sweep to the coaches, from senior to freshman, regards me with the contempt that I do not deserve. Let me stay here, and —"

The office boy interrupted to give Mr. Hildreth a card.

"Tell him to wait in the outer office," he directed. "I may have some work for him at once."

Mr. Hildreth faced his son. He knew that this football game had precipitated a crisis in Carvel's careless life, and that if he wanted to save him from being a coward, when he did not deserve the odium, he must act with decision. He knew that his son had spoken the truth when he explained his strange action at the football game; he had been brave to stay in the scrimmage when he was hurt, and he had not been able to control his body when the gashed side was jabbed, paining him cruelly.

So far he had been courageous, but should he

now run away from the storm of criticism and condemnation that he must face he would be a moral coward, and from that it would be but a step to an abject physical craven. Carvel must go back and fight it out alone, or be a coward the rest of his life. Mr. Hildreth's former decision was annulled by this crisis.

"Carvel," he said at last, "when your mother died, I naturally centered on you all the hopes and ambitions of my lonely life. I wanted to make it easy for you at college, because I had worked my way there, and had been forced to miss many phases of college life, so I allowed you all the money you asked for. I made a mistake, for, knowing how my hardships laid the foundation of success, I ought to have helped you by letting you earn your education.

"It has been a joy to have you at Ballard, where I graduated. You will never quite understand how keenly bitter has been my sorrow at the way you have wasted your college years, and won an unenviable name where I hoped you would reflect glory upon it. I wanted you to play football, for I regard it as a great training for life, and your work in it has made me proud.

"In this game you have stood the physical test nobly, for because there was none to take your place so well, you fought on where others would have left the field; you were unable to control your body for a moment, when the pain was too intense. However, for the present you cannot explain that

at college. You are really a hero, though shunned and scorned, and in time it will all clear up. Stay and fight, as you did in that game!"

"But," protested Carvel, "I —"

"Listen to me!" thundered his father. "Go back and play football! You may not get a chance to play on the 'Varsity soon, but join the scrubs and show them that you are fighting. You have got to act from the students' viewpoint until Hogarth returns. The time will come when the team will need you; then go into the game to win. After that, they will believe you in this matter."

But Carvel hesitated. The memory of his intense loneliness and the bitter criticism of the college was still too vivid for him to forget. He could not go back to Ballard, to the cruel ostracism.

"As for that other affair," said the banker, "well, we'll just forget the past. In your telegram you showed me that you have the right spirit, and as you need me, I'll stand by you now. I'll pay your expenses the rest of the year and give you a moderate allowance until you graduate. Can't you see, Carvel, that for your sake, and mine, you must go back?"

Carvel was picturing in his mind the events of the day when the big game had been played and lost. He saw himself, disconsolate and miserable, the target for contemptuous glances and scathing remarks. He was avoided by all; no one would speak to him, or answer his questions. He thought of his room in Dwight, once the rendezvous of Bill

Hoke, Cavanaugh, Hogarth, Hickson, and all of the jolly old crowd, now deserted by even Grinder Graham, who looked on Carvel as a traitor to Ballard. It was the middle of September, and he must stand the undeserved odium, and the lonely life, until June.

"I can't go back!" he protested vehemently. "I should rather stay here and work, Dad! Give me a position of any kind, and I'll make good, but don't ask me to go back there!"

"You shall go!" Mr. Hildreth seized him tensely. "Do you understand, you shall! If you do not, Carvel, I vow that I will disown you, and let you live your own life. No son of mine shall play the coward! Why, you *are* a craven, you are giving them the right to call you one. If you run away now, you will never be believed."

Carvel gazed at his father in wonder, scarcely able to believe him in earnest. Was this the father who had sent him money to live at ease at college, who had settled bills for his escapades? He could not understand that this was a crisis in his life, and that Mr. Hildreth saw the need of urgent measures to save him.

"You—you will disown me?" he stammered. "Dad, you can't mean that!"

"Will you go back?" Mr. Hildreth's voice was unwavering.

"Dad," Carvel burst out, "I cannot! Disown me if you will; I'll go out in the world and show you that I can succeed. I'll make good somewhere!"

"Carvel," said his father sadly, "no matter how well you succeed, it won't give me any joy unless you go back to Ballard and make good there first. All your success in life won't be worth a snap if its foundation is this act of moral cowardice, and you know it. I shall gladly stand by you and help you in every way I can; I shall forgive the past, and pay your expenses, if you will go back. Will you?"

"No," faltered the collegian, determined; "I should rather face anything than the scornful silence there!"

"This is final?" asked Mr. Hildreth in a low voice. "You won't return, after I have put aside the three wasted years?"

"Yes, it is final!" With a peculiar sort of courage, Carvel Hildreth faced anything rather than go back to Ballard, to the awful condemnation and loneliness. He would suffer his father's disavowal of him, even endure starvation.

"You coward!" His father pointed to the door. "Go! You are no longer a son of mine! Make your own way in the world, for I shall not know you. Now you must choose; when you return to college, I shall recognize you. Make your decision rightly, or go out of my life!"

There could be no doubt as to his terrible earnestness, and Carvel quailed for a moment under the wrath he faced. There was no relenting in the impassive countenance, and the finger still indicated the door.

Dazed, but determined, Carvel moved away. He

turned once, but the finger stretched out unwaveringly, and he went on. He closed the door behind him and strode through the outer office, in his blind rage not seeing the waiting young man who sat there, and who looked at him in wonder.

He could not see, or know, that after his departure his father had pressed a button notifying the stenographer in the outer office to send in the young man, and that he had sunk into a chair and buried his face in his arms, crushed by the sorrow and the disgrace of it all, by the shameful cowardice of his son.

CHAPTER V

A QUICK DECISION

PLUNGING blindly in his rage from the Bankers' Building, Carvel Hildreth was soon mingling with the crowd of humanity that surged along State Street. He had no destination in mind; he did not know where he was going; but he was filled with a wild, frenzied desire to keep moving, before the anger that boiled within him should burst its bounds. In continuous motion there seemed a certain relief, and unaware of his action, he boarded one of the horse cars that bowled past him at that moment.

Mechanically he paid the conductor, and, not heeding the curious glances of the passengers, sat down. For a while he saw nothing, but as his anger began to cool he looked at the great piers along North River, where the big, black hulks of the Trans-Atlantic liners loomed up, and he read the signs above the pier entrances. Suddenly he saw —

“Pier 52 — The Panama Railroad Company — Weekly Sailings to the Canal Zone.”

Then he remembered Miguel Mendoza, the Panamanian who was a junior at Ballard College and who had pictured so glowingly the digging of the Big Ditch; he had suggested to Hildreth that he go to the scenes of the great enterprise and secure work, saving until the next fall for his last year

at college. The idea impressed the collegian now, thrown on his own resources in the world, and he gazed at the pier thoughtfully.

What Hildreth did not know was that the scope of the work had changed greatly since Mendoza left Panama three years before, when the Canal Zone had been a Mecca for the unemployed; now the Isthmian Canal Commission was steadily reducing the working force as the Canal neared completion, and when finished but one thousand men would remain where thirty-five thousand had labored for seven years.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed aloud, to the surprise of a dozing drayman who sat at his side. He jumped from the low running board of the car, and a moment later was making his way toward the pier; it was then nearly three o'clock, and a notice informed him that the *Cristobal* would sail promptly on the hour. As he rushed out toward the gangway, he collided with a well-built fellow who looked at him for a moment, then, to Carvel's amazement, held out his hand with a smile.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but is n't this Hildreth, the chap who was a terror at right tackle on the Ballard eleven last season?"

"I am Hildreth," admitted the collegian in wonder, "but you have the whip hand of me, though it seems that I have seen you somewhere —"

"Bayliss is my name," laughed the other, "Bob Bayliss, of Hamilton; I was a freshman there year before last, and ran on the track team in the State

Inter-collegiate meet held at Alton. The following June I left college and went to the Canal Zone, where I am a time keeper in the Culebra Cut; I am just about to sail, as my six weeks' vacation is over, and I am encroaching on the ten days of grace the I. C. C. employees are allowed."

"You are the Bayliss who broke the state record in the quarter-mile!" marveled Hildreth. Then a sudden terror seized him, for this was an old Hamilton student and he must have read of Hildreth's losing the football game through what the newspapers called his yellow streak. But his companion's next words reassured him.

"By the way, Hildreth, how did my alma mater make out in the game? I was in such a big rush to get to New York and make my ship that I did n't get hold of a sporting page. Say, aren't you supposed to be at college this fall?"

"Hamilton won the game by a score of ten to seven," answered Carvel, "and I was at Ballard; in fact, I played in the game against your old chums, but I decided that it was better to take my departure, for reasons best known to —"

"Not a word!" grinned the Hamilton fellow. "A little run-in with the august Faculty—I understand. But say, old man, it is n't any of my affair, but are you bound for the Canal Zone? If we are to be shipmates, let's try to book our passages for the same stateroom."

Hildreth hesitated. He had fifty dollars in his possession that had not been wasted in riotous

living at Ballard, and here was a good-natured fellow who knew the Canal Zone, and would help him in every way possible. Why not book his passage for Panama, get work on the Canal, and show his father that he could make his own way in the world, without assistance from the banker's wealth?

The big bow of the *Cristobal* loomed up, the iron plates red-rusted, with here and there a bit of seaweed, yellow and dried, clinging to the anchor chains. The huge derricks on the forward main deck were swinging the cargo aboard, with a rattle of winches and windlass and the "Heave, ho!" of the sailors, swart Spaniards with red turbans, Jamaicans, and giant Barbadoes negroes. The sight seemed to bring a picture of the tropics, and Hildreth was thrilled.

The long pier was filled with a shifting throng of passengers, friends, officials, and roustabouts; porters were hurrying aboard with the smaller luggage, and there was all the excitement and confusion attendant on the sailing of a big liner. To one side, seated on their filthy baggage, were three Arabs, a merchant from Honduras and his wife and child, a like number of Hindus, their headdresses wrapped tightly, and several chattering Chinese.

"I'll be honest with you, Bayliss," answered the collegian. "I had to leave college, and my father cast me off. I am on my own resources, and I have only fifty dollars. Answer me two things: What is the lowest fare to Panama, and can I get work in the Canal Zone if I go there?"

"The steerage fare to Cristobal is thirty dollars," answered Bayliss, "and you will have plenty of room, as this ship accommodates ninety third class, and on the down voyage there are seldom more than twenty. My father is an official in the Pacific division of the administration, and I can promise you some kind of work."

"Then I am with you!" Hildreth extended his hand. "After we get better acquainted, Bayliss, I will tell you why I left college. Come with me now to get my passage."

He knew his companion believed he had left Ballard as a result of some college prank, and he was content to let Bayliss think so for the present, as his life was bitter enough without losing this new friend. Together they sought the purser's office, which was aft on the main deck, and thirty dollars of Hildreth's slender resources went for a steerage passage to Cristobal, the American town on the Atlantic side of the Isthmus.

"I'll be first class," said Bayliss, "but I'll drop down to your quarters every night, after it gets cool, and we can talk. When you have worked on the Canal six months you can get free steerage passage to the States, and after a year you get a six weeks' vacation with pay, and first-class passage both ways; if a man contracts a chronic disease as a result of his work, he gets sent back to the States free, with a year's pay."

They walked up to the promenade deck, as the steerage restrictions required by Hildreth's ticket

did not take effect until sailing time. Standing at the rail, they watched the crowds coming up the gangway, the farewells on the long pier, and the work of the picturesque sailors as they heaved at the ropes. Suddenly the Ballard collegian gasped in surprise as a gray-haired, dignified gentleman of middle age, accompanied by a young girl, appeared at the foot of the gangway, where an obsequious porter took their suitcases.

"Why, it's Mr. Barton, and Neva!" he exclaimed, to the surprise of Bayliss. "They can't be going to Panama, too! I must not let them see me on board ship!"

But it was too late, and before the startled Bayliss could wonder why his friend must not be seen by this Mr. Barton and his daughter, the girl, coming up the gangway to the promenade deck, had caught sight of Hildreth, and was pointing him out to her father, who raised his hat with a smile of greeting. In a few moments they were on deck, and Hildreth, his face a trifle pale, was shaking hands with them.

"What does this mean, you young rascal?" he demanded. "I thought you were at Ballard, playing that barbarous game of football, and here you are coolly standing on the deck of a Panama liner! Does your father know of this? I'll bet it's some wild adventure at college that brings you to New York."

"I have left college," said the embarrassed Hildreth. "I am going to the Canal Zone to find

work, as my friend here has assured me of a job. There was a little affair at college—however, Dad knows of it. I am amazed to see you, for I thought Neva was at school and you were building skyscrapers.”

Mr. Barton had been a friend of his father's for many years, and Neva, now an attractive girl, had been Carvel's childhood friend. They had been playmates together in the country town where they had lived before Mr. Hildreth went to New York to win success, and Neva's father had become a successful investor in the great city.

“I'll explain why I am leaving New York and taking a jaunt down to the jungles of Panama, Carvel,” Mr. Barton returned. “I recently met a gentleman who has spent several years in Panama, and he so impressed me with the wonderful undeveloped possibilities of the country, with its fertile lands and valuable woods, that, being an investor and a promoter, I am going down to gather first-hand information, and to see if a company can be formed to raise and sell the products.

“This gentleman owns—or thinks he does, as land titles in Panama are uncertain—several thousand acres of land in Bocas del Toro, where the banana fields of the United Fruit Company are located. I hold options on other lands, less accessible than these, and he wants us to join forces, form a company, and exploit and develop the land. We would have several irons in the fire, for the land is not only rich in bananas, rubber, and cacao, but there are

abandoned gold mines, pearl fisheries, and the cabinet woods of the interior.

"But it is to straighten out, if possible, the tangle of deeds and titles that I am sailing to Panama, and as Neva insisted on seeing the Canal, now so near completion, I let her come along. If I can get clear titles to the land I hold options on, I shall feel free to invest in and develop it."

Bayliss smiled.

"Pardon my saying so," he began, "but it is my opinion that even if you got the Panama government to clear up the titles, your troubles would have only begun. The land in Bocas del Toro, near railroad and wharfage, is all right, but the other gentleman owns that; as to the rest, well, you may have a gold mine within ten miles of the coast, but find it impossible to transport the products."

"I realize that," agreed the investor. "The total lack of bridges and the inability to procure labor are serious handicaps. The Panamanians are too lazy to work, and to import Barbadoes negroes is costly; many concerns, after spending fortunes to acquire clear titles to valuable lands covered with cabinet woods, have failed, unable to ship their priceless products, or even to raise the bananas. However, it is on these lands in Bocas del Toro that I pin my faith, if this gentleman can prove his ownership."

Bayliss, who had traveled all over the republic of Panama, was greatly interested in the ambitions of the promoter, and as Mr. Barton recognized in the

bronzed young fellow a mine of valuable information, the two became engaged in an earnest conversation that left Hildreth and the girl alone.

"Carvel," said Neva seriously, as they leaned over the rail, "Dad never reads the sporting papers, so he does not know why you left college. But I am always wild to see the football scores, and I was heartbroken when I read the account of the Hamilton game. I don't believe you were a coward!"

"I was not!" Hildreth answered, with a flash of spirit. "Let me tell you of the game, Neva, then judge for yourself if I deserve the name of coward."

Graphically, convincingly, he described the hammering rushes, the crisis, and the encouragement of Hogarth, with its fatal result. The girl listened eagerly, and he saw by the sympathy in her eyes that she believed. When he finished, this playmate of his childhood laid a hand on his arm.

"But you are going back!" she said firmly. "Your father is right, Carvel; this is a serious moment with you, and you must not be a coward in spirit. Won't you go right back to Ballard and show the fellows that you are brave enough to stand their condemnation?"

"I—I can't," muttered Hildreth, feeling wretched, for Neva's friendship meant much to him. "I did n't play the coward, but they don't understand. I am going to Panama, Neva, to work. I'll save money, and come back to some other college to graduate; I'll show my father that I can make good."

"Then you are not my old friend!" Neva's eyes flashed. "It is your place to stay at college at any cost; if you have been weak, it is not too late to go back and redeem yourself. If you were not to blame, there is all the more reason for your staying. Go now, Carvel, before the ship sails and it is too late to return!"

But the memory of it all was still too crushing, and Hildreth could only gaze at her unbelievably.

"Do you mean it, Neva?" he asked. "You won't be friends? Why, we have known each other since we were children, when we lived in the country, and used to talk to each other through the fence between our yards! Can't you see that it is best for me to go down there and work on the Canal?"

"You cannot avoid the truth," she declared. "If you do not go back to college we are no longer friends. Carvel, for my sake, go back!"

But it was too late now. His encounter with his father, his losing of that battle, had weakened him and he could not fight. In the football game, with his team at the last ditch, he had not weakened in spirit, only in body; now he was being forced back and soon he would reach that last ditch in his life, when he must win out, or be a coward.

Disowned by his father, discredited by all his chums at Ballard, his friendship with Neva broken, all because he would not go back and fight it out to the end, though the shame and disgrace were undeserved, Hildreth looked at the girl for a moment, then turned, and, without waiting for

Bayliss, walked toward the companionway, to go down to the main deck forward, where the steerage was located.

As he descended he ran against some one who was about to ascend the companionway ladder to the promenade deck. He looked up and saw that it was a handsome young Panamanian, attired in cool white flannels, and with a Panama hat thrust jauntily on the back of his head. The collegian stepped aside, thinking nothing of the incident, but the dark-faced young man flared up.

"You clumsy peeg!" he cried. "Look where you go after thees! You haf run into me, you gringo!"

"Now see here," grated Hildreth, who was in an angry mood, "you say much more to me like that, and I'll spoil that handsome face of yours! I don't feel in such a terribly good humor, and a good scrap would let off steam."

"You—you heet me!" The little Panamanian fairly danced. "Me, I am José Gonzales, nephew to ze Alcade of Bocas del Toro! I weel make you suffer for ze insult; I weel haf you cast into preeson!"

With a contemptuous lift of his shoulders, Hildreth pushed the frantic little Panamanian out of the way and went out on the main deck forward, to watch the final preparations for the voyage, the battening down of the hatches, the lashing of the derricks, and the tightening of the tarred ropes. He was sorry that Neva and her father would be aboard the *Cristobal*, but as he was in the steerage and they first class, the chances of seeing them were few. In

Panama he might run across them, but Mr. Barton would probably press on to the other provinces.

He had staked his money on the Canal Zone on Bayliss' promise of securing him work there, and he grimly resolved to see it to the end. He tried to convince himself that he was brave in thus sailing away to a strange land, there to try his fortune, but deep in his heart he knew he was a coward, that his father and Neva were right.

It was almost sailing time when a young man of medium height, compactly built and plainly dressed, came hurrying out on the pier, seeking the passenger agent. Together they came aboard, and Hildreth idly wondered if the late comer would be in the steerage with him. Soon the young man appeared on the main deck forward, and seeing Hildreth, he asked for the steerage.

"On this deck," said Carvel, "right inside. We are not allowed farther aft than amidships, nor can we go on the upper decks. Are you steerage? Then, as we are to be bunkies, let's get acquainted; Hildreth's my name."

"I am Douglas Corning," said the other, "and after seeing the Hindus and Chinks, the Arabs and Mexicans that will be steerage, I am glad to see an American. I am bound for the Canal Zone, as I found it advisable and necessary to leave New York as soon as I could. Let's stick together, friend, for we can help each other down there."

Hildreth agreed, but the fellow's words had shaken his confidence in him. Why had he found it

necessary to leave New York? He might be wanted by the police! Perhaps he was a crook, making his escape! Hildreth resolved to be on his guard, and to watch carefully what money he had left. Nevertheless, there was something attractive about the chap, and soon they were talking of the voyage and of their prospects in the Canal Zone.

The *Cristobal*, carrying concrete for the locks at Gatun, Miraflores, and Pedro Miguel, left on no regular schedule, yet there were two hundred cabin passengers when the ship left the pier. Most of them were Canal Zone employees, returning, like Bayliss, from their vacation in the States, but there were some on business bound, like Mr. Barton, and a few job hunters.

Hildreth and Corning stood in the bows as the screeching tugs pulled the big liner from her berth, out into the river, and headed her in the right direction, and Carvel, looking up at the tall office building where he knew his father was, wondered what the banker would say if he knew his son's destination, as the ship moved down the channel.

Gradually the crowd on the pier blurred in the distance, the tall skyscrapers were passed, and the Battery, the Statue of Liberty, and all the sights familiar to the seasoned ocean traveler. On the promenade deck forward, at the front of the superstructure amidships, a number of first-cabin passengers had gathered, and Hildreth, from the shield of the bow on the main deck, glanced backward and up at them. Corning made a remark, but it

went unheeded in the exclamation of anger and dismay that broke from his lips.

Bayliss, still talking to the interested Mr. Barton, waved to him, but he saw it not, for leaning on the rail was Neva, and with her, a smile of triumph on his swarthy face, was José Gonzales, the nephew of the Alcade of Bocas del Toro!

CHAPTER VI

STRICTLY STEERAGE

“**A** LA MESS, gentlemen!” shouted Jacob, the Venezuelan steerage steward, at six o’clock, appearing in the doorway of the steerage. Somewhere on the upper decks the first-cabin steward was calling the passengers to their sumptuous supper by banging lustily on a dishpan. Corning hurried in, but Hildreth remained for a few minutes longer, gazing wistfully at the lights along the Jersey coast, his last view of land.

The *Cristobal* was steaming along at a good speed, having discharged the pilot off Sandy Hook. Hildreth had sat on the forward hatches, watching the ship pass the Narrows, and out into the ocean, feeling his loneliness more keenly as the vastness of the deep impressed itself on him, stretching away as far as the eye could see, blue and mysterious.

For a moment he had forgotten his misery in watching the splendor of his first sunset on the ocean; the great red ball, sinking lower and lower on the horizon, shed a pathway of light across the waste of waters, reflecting like a vivid flame on the background of clouds. Then it sank until it seemed that barely an inch was between the orb and the ocean; a moment more, and it touched and poured itself into the sea, disappearing gradually, as though swallowed by the mighty Atlantic.

"I suppose I must eat," he ruminated gloomily, "but if all that heathen crowd I saw on the pier is in the steerage, it will be sickening."

Corning greeted him with a wry smile as he entered the steerage and took his seat beside the young chap. They were the only Americans at table, and their appetites were not sharpened by the company of Arabs, Chinese, and Mexicans who jabbered away in their native tongues, for they were a squalid, filthy aggregation. The little Arab girl, whose fat mother constantly called "Mari-ah," had no scruples about climbing on to the table, seizing in her fat fingers whatever she wanted, and running off to eat it on deck.

They ate from a wooden, trough-like table of unplanned boards, using tin plates and heavy iron knives, forks, and spoons, helping themselves from the big dishes and pans that Jacob brought from the kitchen. The manners of the others were shocking, and Hildreth, accustomed to refinement, could not eat; he was surprised at the cheerfulness with which Corning adapted himself to circumstances.

"Seven days of it," remarked his companion, "so one might as well learn how to eat. You should be thankful that you have n't got the Hindus added to this menagerie, Hildreth."

"Why, don't they eat with the rest?" asked the collegian, noticing for the first time the absence of the orientals, with their classic features and black faces, long, flowing beards, and heads wound with cloth.

“Gracious, no!” exclaimed Corning. “The Hindus are the most religious people in the world, and they would be contaminated by eating with us, though that seems impossible, judging from their appearance. But they are educated, for I saw them reading Sanscrit before supper.”

Try as he would, Hildreth could not eat when associated with the slovenly steerage passengers, so he made some sandwiches and betook himself to the deck again, to the infinite disgust of Jacob, who declared that a king could not ask for better food than he served in the steerage.

On his way out, the collegian stopped at the doorway of the room occupied by the Hindus, and watched them; one was squatted on the floor, engaged in making cakes out of a dough, another was unpacking pans from their baggage, while in guttural tones the third read aloud from a huge volume of Hindustani. The bearded orientals looked pleased at having an American visit them, and they said a lot of things that Hildreth could not understand.

Bayliss came down after supper, and as Corning joined them, the three sat on the forward hatch and talked. The Mexicans were quarreling in the steerage, the Hindus stayed in their bunk room, while the Arabs and Chinese stretched out on the hatch aft of the mainmast, so the Americans were undisturbed.

“Take your last view of land for five days,” said Bayliss. “All you can see now is the outline of

the Jersey coast; the next land we see is Watling Island, which was the first land that Christopher Columbus saw when he made his voyage to the West Indies."

"Seven days of — this!" mourned Hildreth. "With that motley crowd! And when we near the tropics, and it gets sizzling hot—"

"Wait till we cross the Caribbean," reminded Bob. "After Cuba and Haiti have been left behind, if a trade wind is kicking up a high sea all these people will get seasick, and then you will enjoy life. But that is for two days only, and then you are at Cristobal!"

"Tell us about the Canal," urged Corning. "I think every American ought to know its history, but I confess I have never learned it myself."

"Back in 1846," said Bayliss, who had thoroughly studied the history of the Canal, and who knew the tragic failure of the French Company and De Lesseps, "the United States made a treaty with Colombia, then New Granada, by which that government gave to our nation the right of way or transit across the Isthmus of Panama, on any modes of communication then existing or afterward constructed, to be open and free to the government and citizens of the United States. By the fourth, fifth, and sixth articles of this treaty, the United States guaranteed to preserve the neutrality of the Isthmus, so that free transit from ocean to ocean might not be embarrassed, and the United States also guaranteed the rights of sovereignty and

property which New Granada had and possessed over the Isthmus.

“Our nation supposed this meant that we were to keep transit uninterrupted across Panama, even if we had to use force; in fact, the United States of Colombia several times requested our government to land forces on the Isthmus to keep order.

“We had for many years thought of building a canal between the two oceans, and at first the Nicaraguan route was favored. None of the private companies formed ever did anything, and when the French company received a land grant from the United States of Colombia to try the Panama route, we ceased to bother.

“After the French failed, many Americans tried to get our government to try again, and the Spanish-American War, when the *Oregon* sailed around the Horn, gave an impetus to the plan. Finally Congress authorized the building of such a canal, leaving the President to decide on Nicaragua or Panama, with opinion favoring the latter route, for the Panama Railroad lay along this line, and also the work done by the French.

“The Walker Commission made a report on both routes, stating that if we bought the rights and property of the De Lesseps Company for not more than forty million dollars, the Panama route would be better; otherwise, they favored the Nicaraguan route. This decision scared the New French Company, which had been holding the concessions, for if Nicaragua were chosen they could never sell out

to another nation, so they offered all rights, work done, and machinery at this price.

“In December, 1902, the Colombian government sent Dr. Thomas Herran to Washington as *chargé d'affaires*, and he and Secretary Hay began drafting the necessary treaty, which on January 22, 1903, was signed. It was agreed that Colombia was to allow the new Panama Canal Company to sell all its rights, privileges, and property, including the Panama Railroad Company, to the United States; we were to have perpetual administrative control of a strip of land thirty miles wide, extending across the Isthmus.

“However, the sovereignty of the Zone would remain with Colombia. Colombian courts were to settle Colombian disputes, and American courts our quarrels, with a third, a mixed court, to fix international differences. We were to pay Colombia ten million dollars cash, and a hundred thousand dollars a year rental, to begin nine years after the treaty was ratified.

“On March 17, 1903, the treaty was ratified by us; then trouble started, for the politicians of Bogotá, headed by Dr. Marroquin, seemed to think we were sworn to the Panama route, and they tried a hold-up game on the United States. Matters hung fire for some time, when Hay reminded Colombia that the negotiations were instituted by them, and should they reject the treaty the friendliness between the countries might suffer in a way Colombia would regret.”

“Bully for Hay!” said Corning.

“On June 20, 1903, the Congress met in Bogotá, and on August 12 the Colombian Senate rejected the treaty. On September 8, 1903, Colombia told the United States that, despite this rejection, it would propose negotiations again the following July, which did not please us. All this time the shareholders of the French Canal Company were crazy with suspense, for, after all, we might choose Nicaragua and thus render their shares valueless.

“The United States was between two fires, for Nicaragua offered favorable privileges to get the Canal, but she might be a robber, too, if she knew we were forced by Colombia to turn back to the other country for a route. Then the Panama revolution, famous in history, took place. There had been fifty-three of these in fifty-seven years in Panama, financed by foreign capitalists.

“The merchants of Panama, with the stockholders of the French Company, anxious to sell, had an interest in causing a revolution that would make sure the Panama Canal would be dug. Panama hated Colombia, and would have revolted before, had we allowed it. But one thing held up the revolution—the treaty in which the United States had promised, in 1846, to defend Colombia’s property rights in the Isthmus, and to keep transit open.

“Most people believe that we were justified, after Colombia’s high-handed proceedings, in neglecting the treaty we had acknowledged, and others think the Roosevelt administration provoked the revolution

in Panama. The Panamanians did not know how we would act, and they formed the Revolutionary Junta, citizens of Panama and Colon, which sent Dr. Amador to New York for information. Johnson's history of Panama and the Canal states that Secretary Hay informed Amador that no matter how the United States sympathized with Panama's hopes of independence, or how it might resent Colombia's rejection of the Canal treaty, it could not aid a revolution, or promise aught in advance.

"It would fulfill its duties as a neutral, and maintain its rights and privileges under the treaty of 1846 with New Granada. These rights and privileges included free neutral transit across the Isthmus, and the guarantee of the sovereignty of land *against alien aggression, though it did not guarantee Colombian possession of the Isthmus against local and domestic revolution!*"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hildreth. "There is the pivotal point!"

"Dr. Amador went back to Panama," Bob went on, "and the revolution took place. But there was no bloodshed, for American warships appeared to see that free transit was maintained; the Navy Department on November 2 ordered free and uninterrupted transit, for the railroad to be occupied if threatened by armed force, and for the prevention of the landing of an armed force with hostile intent, either government or insurgent, at Colon, Porto Bello, or other places.

“An army of four hundred Colombian soldiers had been sent to Colon on the third of November. As the revolution had not started, the warships could not interfere, and they landed. The generals went over to Panama ahead of their troops, then the Panama railroad refused to transport the army; so the Colombian generals were disarmed and the Republic of Panama proclaimed on November 4. Three days later the United States recognized the new republic.

“The politicians at Bogotá were crushed, for they had not thought we would recognize Panama; they notified Washington that if we would put down the Panama revolt the next Colombian congress would recognize the Herran-Hay Treaty. But we had already recognized the Republic of Panama, and Colombia’s chances were gone!”

“Has there not been a lot of criticism of our government about the whole affair?” demanded Corning. “Aren’t we accused of helping on the revolt in order to get the Canal Zone from Panama?”

“The whole thing shows that we permitted the revolution,” said Bob, “rather than urged it, and we did so after Colombia had broken faith with us. Anyhow, we got the Canal Zone from Panama, and you will see how the United States has gone on with the great work.”

“What did we pay Panama?” asked Hildreth.

“By the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of November 18, 1903,” finished Bob, “we agreed to pay Panama ten millions cash, and beginning nine years from

date, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars yearly rental. In return we got all we asked for, a zone ten miles wide over which we have the 'rights, power and authority which the United States would possess and exercise if it were the sovereign of the territory, to the entire exclusion of this exercise by the Republic of Panama, or of any sovereign rights, power, or authority.'

"Article Two of this treaty, says, 'The Republic of Panama further grants to the United States in perpetuity the use, occupation, and control of any other lands and waters outside the zone above described which may be necessary and convenient for the construction, maintenance, and operation, with sanitation and protection, of said Canal.'"

"Now I understand matters more clearly," laughed Corning. "When I read the history of the French Company, I'll be ready to see the Canal under the American administration."

A few minutes later Bayliss went up to the first cabin, after they had thanked him for his information, and Hildreth followed Corning to their bunks in the steerage. They were hard and stuffy, and the little room was hot, but Corning soon dropped off to sleep; Hildreth, however, tossed from side to side, listening to the chatter of the Mongols in the room adjoining.

"Strictly steerage," he groaned, "and seven days of it!"

CHAPTER VII

THE TREACHERY OF THE PANAMANIAN

IT WAS pleasant out on the forward hatches of the *Cristobal*, after the blazing, blistering sun that beat down all day from a copper sky had dipped into the ocean, the cool, tropical night had come on, and the delightful trade wind that lashed the Caribbean into mountainous waves blew across the main deck forward. All the stars were out, gleaming with a hard brilliance, the wireless snapped and crackled at the masthead, the steady wash of the waves was soothing, while the orchestra sounded back in the salon.

The next morning would find the *Cristobal* at anchor in Limón Bay, waiting for the quarantine officers to come aboard. Even now, near midnight, the lights of Porto Bello, the island twenty miles from Colon, twinkled in the distance off the port bow, and the passengers were astir with eagerness to land.

The six days had passed miserably for Hildreth in the squalor of the steerage, with his misery making life bitter for him, though Corning had accepted his surroundings with cheerfulness, and had even made friends with fat little Mariah, the little Arabian maid.

As the tropics drew near, the heat by day was stifling, radiated as the sun's rays were from

the iron plates of the deck, and even at night, in the stuffy little bunks where they were tossed by the roll of the ship, the small porthole admitted but little air, though it was cooler on deck. Hildreth decided that his companion had seen the world, for he accepted what came with a smile, which the embittered collegian was unable to do.

Five days out from New York, Watling Island arose from the blue ocean, a long, low strip of white sand that sank into the water astern; Castle, Bird Rock, and Fortune islands were sighted, and in gazing at the gleaming beaches, the tall palm trees, and the frame houses, Hildreth forgot for the time his loneliness, that had been more intense when the vastness of the ocean surrounded him. Cuba loomed up on the starboard bow, and for two hours the coast, with the wrecked Norwegian steamer, and the wooded mountains inland, could plainly be seen. That afternoon the gloomy outlines of Haiti, the volcanic republic of negroes, arose on the port side. They could see little villages, from which sailing craft ventured out, nestling in the shadow of the towering mountains.

Then Haiti and the smaller islands faded away, and the next land they would see rising from the water would be Manzanillo Island, where Cristobal and Colon, formerly Aspinwall, are located.

While the first-cabin passengers attended the last-night dance, Bayliss, who preferred the pleasant nights on the forward hatches, exchanging college memories with Hildreth, had come down from the

promenade deck. Corning was reading in his bunk, but rather than swelter inside, Carvel was stretched on the after hatch, lulled by the roll of the ship, and Bob sat beside him.

"I guess I have told you all about Panama and the Canal Zone that I know," laughed Bob, after another question from Hildreth. "I have turned myself into a history for you, and a bureau of information, on this voyage. To-morrow morning we land at Cristobal, and then you will be plunged into the new land, to see for yourself its wonders. Remember, though, the Canal is nearly done, and only at four places can you find much colossal work being accomplished."

Hildreth was silent. In his mind he was fighting a great battle, trying to decide if he should tell Bayliss the truth of his leaving Ballard; the two collegians had become great friends on the voyage, for Bob had come down to be with Carvel every night, and Hildreth, who was honest, whatever other faults he might have, felt that he should let Bob know how matters stood.

"Bob," he began at last, "I have gone on letting you think I left Ballard because of some escapade I was in, but that is not the case. In the football game with Hamilton, my chums believed I played the coward, but I —"

"Never mind, old man," interposed Bayliss, seeing that his friend was determined to plunge ahead, "you had a sore side, and your right guard plunged his elbow into it at the critical moment."

"How did you know?" demanded Hildreth, amazed.

"There are some newspapers in the reading room," explained Bayliss. "Then I have become acquainted with Mr. Barton and his daughter, and she told me the account you had given her of the affair."

"Then you will desert me, too!" said Carvel bitterly. "My friends at college denounced me without a trial, my father cast me off, Neva broke our friendship because I would not go back to face the scorn of my chums, and now you —"

"I will stay with you," answered Bob quietly. "I have played football, I have been to college, and I know how you dread what you had to face, since I have been in a similar position, though for a different reason. If you want me for a friend that will stick I'll stand by you, and get you work in the Canal Zone."

Their hands met in a firm clasp, and the compact of friendship was made.

"I have experienced what you suffered at Ballard," said Bayliss, after a pause, "and I was a coward, perhaps—that is why I am not at Hamilton now. I cannot explain it to you now, but perhaps some time you will know. Let's quit talking on such gloomy subjects. Do you know, there is something mighty queer about this Panamanian, Gonzales, and his acquaintance with Mr. Barton?"

"I have wondered how they came to know one another," agreed Hildreth. "He and I had an

encounter on the day we sailed; I ran into him at the foot of the companionway, and he was highly indignant that a 'gringo' had touched him."

"The 'Spiggoties' hate the Americans," laughed Bob. "They call the United States the 'Vulture of the North,' and fear that we will swallow South America in time. Oh, we call them 'Spiggoties' because when the natives were first spoken to, they replied, 'No spiggoty Inglis,' and that is their nickname now.

"But the way I figure it out is this—young Gonzales is the *son* of the Panamanian gentleman who has interested Mr. Barton in the Bocas del Toro land, and in the inland tracts, and this wealthy Spiggoty, who is as treacherous as his kind are, wants to get possession of the Bocas del Toro land, on which Mr. Barton holds an option. Now, as Mr. Barton wants to develop the land that Gonzales owns in the interior, the worthy gentleman has craftily suggested a partnership; but, let him destroy in any way Mr. Barton's options on the Bocas del Toro land, so that *he* can exercise *his* second option, and get the coveted land, all deals are off!"

"You may be right," pondered Hildreth. "So Gonzales is the gentleman's son, is he?"

"I have warned Mr. Barton as to Panamanian treachery," said Bob, "but he will not heed. He imagines that if he can clear up the titles and exercise his options on the Bocas del Toro land, then Gonzales, to get in on the money to be made

there, will give him a chance to buy or be partners in the valuable woods of mahogany and the like that the Panamanian owns. But young Gonzales will tear up those options of Mr. Barton's, if he gets a chance, so his father can buy the land on the second options, and laugh at the investor."

"I don't like it," returned Hildreth firmly. "It looks as though he were making friends with Neva just to get a chance at the options. I don't trust that brown little Panamanian, and Mr. Barton should have such valuable papers locked up in the purser's safe."

"And be on your own guard, Hildreth," warned Bayliss, as he went up the companionway to the promenade deck. "He will knife you in a second, if he gets a chance. It is hard to realize how lawless and hotblooded these Latin-Americans are, but they are a vengeful crowd."

Hildreth remained on the hatch, enjoying the cool breeze and watching the broken clouds overhead, the distant flashes of lightning, and the electric outline of the wireless when the operator was sending. He was wondering about Mr. Gonzales and Mr. Barton, and if they were fighting a battle of wits, each trying to get possession of the other's land without a loss of all rights to his own. If so, he decided, Neva's father was in danger, for Gonzales the younger looked like a chap who would halt at nothing to gain his ends.

Then Carvel tried to imagine why Bob Bayliss had left Hamilton, especially after his fine track

record of the spring before; he tried to think what trouble his friend could have had, but at last gave up in vain. He became sleepy, and deciding that even the hard bunk was better than the hatch, he arose and walked down the iron plates of the deck, toward the steerage.

As he neared the door he looked up at the superstructure above him, which was aglow with lights, except for the darkened bridge. He heard the clang of the bells in the crow's nest, the call of the lookout that another light on Porto Bello was sighted, then he saw two figures on the promenade deck; one was Neva, and the other—José Gonzales!

For a moment he stood, then, realizing that he had no right to speak to his old friend now, he started to enter the steerage. At that instant he heard a faint scream from the girl, and he saw that the Panamanian was striving to wrest something from her, that she was struggling violently. In three strides the collegian had bounded up the companionway and was on the promenade deck, which was deserted save for the three of them. Gonzales, unconscious of Hildreth's coming, was conquering the girl.

"I weel haf them!" he panted. "Ah, now I weel tear them up!"

Hildreth's fist shot out straight from the shoulder and caught him with terrific force back of the ear. Another blow smote his neck, and he sank with a groan to the deck, while Hildreth caught the frightened girl. But despite her alarm she recognized



Hildreth's fist shot out straight from the shoulder and Gonzales sank with a groan to the deck

him and drew away; before she could speak, the terror in her eyes warned him, and he whirled to face the Panamanian, who had drawn a knife.

In a few seconds Hildreth, holding the struggling Gonzales with one hand, had twisted the knife away and sent it whirling over the side. Administering a few hearty kicks to the nephew of the Alcade of Bocas del Toro that hurt his dignity more than his anatomy, he sent him raging from the scene. Then it was that the girl faced him.

"You *are* brave!" she said. "Father dropped these papers from his pocket at supper, and I picked them up, intending to give them to him, but he has been in the smoking room; Gonzales saw me secure them, and for some reason he tried to get them from me."

"The options!" exclaimed Hildreth, after an examination. "Get them to your father or the purser at once, Neva, before he tries to destroy them, and tell your father of his efforts."

"Carvel, won't you go back?" she begged. "You have proved to-night that you are not a coward, that you have never been one. Go, and be a man!"

"I can't, Neva!" he protested. "Physically I can fight them all, but the shame and loneliness are too much; their bitter scorn cannot be met! You are asking too much of me!"

"Then never speak to me again!" she said sadly. "You are not worthy of my friendship, Carvel. Good-by."

Without another word she turned and left the collegian, standing at the top of the companionway, staring after her. He knew that he was unworthy of her friendship, but there was no turning back now, so near to Panama; he must see his determination through.

After an hour in the intense heat of the bunk-room, in desperation he seized his pillow and went out on the forward hatch again, where it was delightfully cool, with the trade wind blowing across the ship. Soon he was in a deep slumber, wholly unaware of the deadly peril that threatened him, for crawling stealthily over the hatch, with a keen knife in his upraised hand, was one of the Mexicans of the steerage.

On the deck above, Gonzales, the treacherous, leaned over the rail and watched with exultant gaze the approaching death of his enemy. This was a sweet revenge for the thrashing he had received at Hildreth's hands earlier that night. No one could save the gringo now, for the semidarkness hid the black deed from all eyes, save those of the arch plotter. Nearer and nearer writhed the Mexican. A foot more, and the keen knife would fall!

Yet Nature herself came to the rescue. At the critical moment, when an instant's delay meant death to the sleeping collegian, a heavy wave struck the ship quarteringly on the port bow, and a great cloud of spray came wraithlike through the gloom, bursting with drenching force on the hatch, and

arousing Carvel to a sense of his danger. Like a cat he leaped to his feet, ducked low under the murderous blow, and came up with a swinging upper cut that hurled the Mexican from the hatch and laid him quivering on the iron plates of the deck.

“You murderous beast!” Hildreth raged. “I’d like to throw your carcass over the side. I wonder what you have against me—can it be that Gonzales —”

He dashed up to the promenade deck, but the Panamanian, furious at the failure of his dastardly attempt, had disappeared, and he could not be sure that the treacherous Gonzales was at the bottom of the affair. After giving the recovering Mexican a warning not to repeat his work, he let him creep away with aching jaw and head. It was out of the question for the collegian to sleep on the hatch again, so he made his way regretfully to the bunkroom, where he acquainted Corning with the attack on him.

“Why did you not throw the hound into the sea?” exploded that young man. “We must lock this door, old man, even if we roast. Never mind, in the morning we shall be in Panama!”

The heat was stifling with the porthole alone to give air; sleep was out of the question, and Carvel on the top bunk next to the room of the Mexicans, soon heard the low mutter of voices. The partition did not extend to the top of the room, and as his light was out he raised his head and peered over; there were three Mexicans, paying strict attention

to the words of a fourth man, none other than José Gonzales!

“It is a plot!” Hildreth told himself, but to his dismay they spoke in Spanish, and all he understood from the jabber was “Señorita—Cruces—Bocas del Toro!”

“I’ll have Bayliss warn Mr. Barton to-morrow,” he decided, as he lay down again. “After the way young Gonzales tried to tear up those options when Mr. Barton carelessly lost them and Neva recovered the papers, there is some villainy being planned.”

Then he lay awake for a long while, as the big *Cristobal* wallowed through the rough Caribbean, thinking of his bitter experience at Ballard, wondering what his old chums were doing. Then he began to look forward. To-morrow he would be in Panama, in the Canal Zone!

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

IN A STRANGE LAND

HILDRETH awoke the next morning to find that the motion of the ship had ceased, and jumping excitedly from the bunk, he looked from the porthole for his first view of Panama. But it was too foggy for a clear vision, and as he and Corning were on the starboard side, what sight they had was of the Caribbean Sea. So they dressed hurriedly and hastened out on deck.

It was a dismal scene, and the collegian was depressed, remembering all the bitterness that had been his since the football game. The *Cristobal* was anchored off quarantine, and the launch bearing the yellow flag was headed for the liner, with white-clad officials who would examine the vaccination records of the passengers, examine the steerage for trachoma, and give the ship a clean slate before it was permitted to dock.

A heavy, gray rain was driving across the harbor in sheets, vivid, forked lightning split the dull sky at frequent intervals, and the crash of thunder seemed to rock the ship. Hildreth was experiencing his first tropical thunder storm, and for a time he was awed by the grandeur of it.

Standing in the doorway of the steerage, Hildreth gazed across the gray, rain-beaten water to the curving bow of the white beach, with the great docks projecting from it like an arrow about to be shot; he saw the tall, graceful palm trees, bending under the torrents that fell, and beneath them, orderly rows of green, screened bungalows, Isthmian Canal Commission houses, laid off as evenly as a city in the States. There was the De Lesseps house on the promontory, now headquarters for the Atlantic division of the Canal Zone Administration, and the statue of Columbus and the Indian in front of it.

Farther away, across Cristobal, the maze of masts and black funnels that arose told vaguely where the shipping of Colon, the port visited by freighters of every nation, lined up and down the Avenida del Frente, where the liners of the Hamburg-American, United Fruit, Royal Mail Steam Packet, and other companies dock. At Cristobal, the American town, the ships of the Panama Railroad Company alone land, owned and operated by the United States government.

On board, all was confusion and excitement with the preparations for landing after the seven days' voyage. The quarantine officers lined up the steerage passengers and examined their arms, the three Hindus alone failing to pass muster, but after a stormy scene allowing themselves to risk contamination rather than be deported to Bombay. After the quarantine launch had sped away toward the

misty shore, the *Cristobal* weighed anchor again and was towed toward the dock.

The long pier, at which the *Panama* was warped, was crowded; there were Canal Zone officials, clad in white flannels, young civil engineers and surveyors in khaki and leather puttees, American women with white parasols, and little children; the more aristocratic Panamanians, jauntily attired, lounged at ease against the bales and boxes, while the peons, in overalls, sat on the floor, lazily watching the gangway being put up to the promenade deck.

In Hildreth's eyes the Panamanian peon did not seem different from the American negro, and he could imagine he was at a small wharf in Virginia, where dozens of them loafed on the pilings. One of them, standing out from the shelter of the pier shed, was being drenched by the rain, but he did not seem to care, evidently unwilling to expend the energy necessary to get out of the rain.

The customs officers were already busy with the baggage, and the great derricks on the main deck were swinging huge nets of bales and boxes to the pier. In the background a train of yellow cars could be seen, each marked "The Panama Railroad Company." Bayliss, who had a lot of baggage to get through the custom lines, rattled down the companionway to the main deck for a word with Carvel and Corning, who were gazing with undivided interest at the new land before them.

"Come up on the promenade deck," he called.

"We go down the gangway from there, and after our baggage is passed, we take the special train which the Panama Railroad sends for every incoming government ship. I'll take you over to Culebra, and to-morrow we shall see to the jobs. If in any way we get separated in the crowd, get on the special train and I'll find you."

"Does that train belong to the Panama Railroad Company?" asked Corning. "I see it has the name on the cars and engine."

"Most of the passenger stock is marked that way," explained Bob. "That of the excavation and Canal work is marked 'I. C. C.' or 'U. S.' We'll reach home in less than two hours, and find Dad at once."

In the excitement of the strange scenes, Hildreth had quite forgotten for the time the misery of the past, the scene with his father, and that with Neva. He saw Mr. Barton and his daughter at a distance, but they were soon swallowed up in the crowd that surged out on the dock, mingling with those who had come to meet returning relatives and friends. There were many greetings, and Hildreth remembered that he was a stranger in a strange land.

So engrossed was the collegian in watching the shifting scenes on the dock, and in viewing the fussy little government tugs that skimmed about Limon Bay, and the lazy Panamanians who stood around, rain soaked and heedless, that he failed to notice he had become separated from Bayliss and Corning. When at last he realized that the crowd had pushed

them apart, he looked about him in alarm, but was unable to find them again.

"He said to take the Panama special," reflected Hildreth, forgetful of the yellow train that waited. "I must find where the station is, or I shall miss it."

As his baggage consisted only of a suitcase, which he had hastily packed when he left college, it soon passed the customs and he strode from the dock. He hesitated for a moment, gazing at the rain that fell from a leaden sky, but he had no raincoat or umbrella, and as the peons were getting wet philosophically, he could see nothing else to do, especially as the torrents showed no likelihood of ceasing. So he turned up his coat collar and struck out through Cristobal, walking along one of the macadamized streets, past the screened houses.

Had he but known it, he could have taken a Canal Zone carriage and ridden to any point in Cristobal or Colon for ten cents, gold, but he imagined the rickety conveyances, drawn by scraggy little horses and driven by Panamanians, were the private property of the rich Spiggoties, though he was at a loss to explain the gongs that clamored on them. Not knowing that the carriage system in the Canal Zone supplies the lack of street cars, passing given points at regular intervals, he walked, and got thoroughly soaked.

There is nothing more depressing than rainy weather, and Hildreth, hurrying along through the tropical downpour, was sick at heart. It was

intensely humid, and his exertion caused him to perspire freely. The rain trickled down his neck, ran off his nose, and caused him extreme discomfort, but he thought that the special left from the Colon station, as an American on the dock had told him the station was in the Panama town, and he lost no time in getting there.

“They are surely up to date down here!” he marveled, as he passed through Cristobal, which is far more beautiful in a civic way than are most of our American towns. “Uncle Sam has exercised the right to do as he pleases with the strip gotten from Panama!”

He saw housewives at work in their kitchens, or buying provisions from the commissary wagons that backed up to their doors; little children played on the double porches, and he heard a piano, with a woman singing. It was all so homelike that it was hard to feel he was in a strange land, until he looked at the palm trees that towered above the bungalows.

Farther on, he passed a finely appointed fire-engine house, with modern apparatus, the big horses in their stalls, and the engine shining and ready, for all the world like a city fire department at home, with the uniformed men sitting around, waiting an alarm. Next came the Canal Zone police station, and Hildreth looked in, to see the tall, splendidly built Canal Zone policemen, the desk sergeant, and the clerk, just as they looked back in the States. He saw the post office next, and

turning, he walked out in front of the big commissary stores, where everything necessary to the welfare of the Canal Zone workers can be had.

It reminded him of the department stores of big American cities. There were women with market baskets, buying with their books of commissary tickets, for everything is purchased with tickets in the Canal Zone; busy clerks, for the most part colored, waited on the customers. There were various departments for food, clothing, and other things, and Hildreth saw different doors where the "gold," meaning white, and the "silver," other employees, entered.

Bayliss had told him much about Panama, and he remembered that the silver workers were paid off in Panamanian coin, which is worth half as much as American money, almost coin for coin, and as the Spiggoties have no paper currency, and it takes two big, silver cartwheels to equal one of our dollars, it is not an unusual sight to see the silver employees leave the paymaster's office with a sack of money on their shoulders, their month's wages!

Then the collegian crossed a street beyond the commissary stores, and was in Colon!

Nothing, neither reading matter nor lecture, can teach the thorough effectiveness of the United States government's administration in Panama and the Canal Zone as does the transition from the beautiful American town of Cristobal to the squalid, rickety, ramshackle city of Colon, though even with its present appearance it is nothing like

what it was before the Americans came there and cleaned it up, enforcing sanitation. Instantly Hildreth was struck by the vast difference between a nation of the highest civilization and one of tropical laziness, and he began dimly to understand what wonders his nation had worked.

All the buildings along the one side of the Avenida del Frente, for on the other side are the wharves of Colon, are made of wood; big two- and three-story houses, with double and even triple porches extending over the pavement, with stairways opening on the sidewalk and running up into the regions above. The general appearance of Colon is one of insecurity and frailty; one is forced to think that a strong wind or a fire would quickly devastate the Panamanian town, for all the buildings in the blocks seem to join.

There are Japanese and Chinese shops along the street, stores run by Jews, Greek restaurants, and American drug stores; almost every other place seems to be a long bar room, with the numberless little round tables, and, what amused the collegian, the inevitable barber chair near the entrance, with a native barber at work. Everything in Colon is wide open, night and day; the absence of window glass impresses the stranger until he gets accustomed to it, and the presence of locks on the tumbledown shacks is amusing in the extreme.

There are several money changers' establishments here, and Hildreth wondered at the careless way as much as two thousand dollars in coins and bills

would be spread out on top of a box, right out along the street! For a reasonable fee, these money changers will change currency of any nation into Panamanian money, or the reverse, if a traveler is leaving Panama. Only twice has it been recorded that any one made off with the money, each time when a French cruiser was in Colon, but it is wonderful that some one does not pick up boxes and all.

The low, yellow station of the Panama Railroad Company was in sight ahead, and Hildreth quickened his pace. Hurrying into the waiting room, he saw that there were different ticket windows and rooms for the first-class and second-class passengers. On the latter side there were giant Barbadoes negroes, indolent peons, sloe-eyed Chinese, and Martinique women. But there was no time to lose, so he made his way to the window, where a clean-cut young American waited on him.

"What time does the special leave?" he inquired of the alert young man in shirtsleeves, who looked at him in wonder.

"The special?" he echoed. "You mean the train that met the *Cristobal*? Why, that leaves the pier, friend; did n't you see a string of yellow cars at the back of the pier, waiting for the ship to dock? It does n't come to the station, but goes on out past Cristobal, across the Isthmus, leaving returning Canal workers at their stations."

CHAPTER IX

HILDRETH TO THE RESCUE

HILDRETH was aghast. The special had gone, bearing with it Bayliss and Corning, and on the former the collegian in exile had put his hopes of securing work in the Canal Zone. A stranger in a strange land, he had forgotten the name of the town where Bob had said he lived, and he did not understand the compactness of the administrative work, or he could have found out at the Atlantic Division Building at Cristobal. There was a train about to leave for Panama City, a regular, but Hildreth decided it would be better to wait in Colon, in the hope that Bob might come for him.

After all, he reflected with the old bitterness, he had no claim on the young fellow who had been so friendly to him on the *Cristobal*, and as for Douglas Corning, the memory of that likable but mysterious chap's words in New York still puzzled Carvel. He turned away from the station, pulling out what money he had left in order to ascertain his resources.

"Sixteen dollars!" he murmured. "Well, that will see me through for a week, and in that time I can get a job, for sure. This is Saturday, so I will hang around Colon and see this end of the Canal first, and perhaps Bayliss will look me up tomorrow."

What struck the collegian more than anything else that he saw as he passed along the Avenida del Frente, the show street of Colon, was the lottery business; he saw the office, with its busy clerks, and at every turn he was accosted by wrinkled old women seated on boxes, holding out to him the long pink tickets of the Lotterie de Panama, and in the windows of the money changers' offices they hung invitingly from wires. Everything seemed to remind him of the lottery, for even the stores and bar rooms were agencies for the tickets that were on sale each week; here and there along the street Americans and Panamanians bought, just for luck!

Bayliss had told Hildreth and Corning of this famous institution, which is legalized in Panama. It is run under a government franchise, and a certain percentage of the proceeds goes to charity. For a wonder, it is honestly run, the prizes being paid promptly at Panama or Colon on presentation of the winning numbers. The tickets, numbered from 1 to 9999, are sold each week across the Isthmus from end to end, and each Sunday in Panama City there is a public drawing by a child of three or four years. The holders of the winning numbers drawn get the big prize, and the smaller prizes.

The lottery is a great sport among the natives and the Americans, and every Sunday there is a feverish interest to know which number has taken the Big Prize, as no one concerns himself with the smaller gains.

"On Sunday," Bob had explained, "the number that wins the first prize is posted in the lottery buildings in Panama and Colon, so that the agony of national suspense can be relieved. If you hold the winning number, your money is assured, for it pays them to run the thing on the square."

So Hildreth, as the idea appealed to him of having one chance out of 9999 to win, yielded to temptation and paused before one of the old women, who held out her book of lottery tickets. The collegian told himself that he was as likely to win as any one, which is the argument of those who have played it for nine years without success. He asked her the price of a pink slip.

"Two dollar one half, silver," she replied. "Get ze lucky number here!"

Thanks to Bayliss, Hildreth knew the value of "Spiggoty" money, and the gold and silver meaning, for in Panama all United States money is "gold" and all Panamanian is "silver"; thus a silver American dollar is gold there. But he did not know that because they have no paper money, the natives seize eagerly on our bills, and give all change in their heavy coins. So, when he handed the woman a ten-dollar note and received eight dollars and seventy-five cents in change, he got sixteen silver "Spiggoty" dollars, and a lot of smaller change.

"I'll have to have a cart!" exclaimed Hildreth. "Here, what number shall I draw?"

He had been brought up with no idea of the value of money. His father was rich, and he had

squandered at college the abundant allowance given him. So now, though his steerage fare and a tip to the steward had brought his wealth down to sixteen dollars, he paid for the lottery ticket.

"I'll take number 3333," he decided, detaching it. "Three is my lucky number, for on my third trial I cleared the bar in the pole vault last spring, and beat the field."

Then he started out to find a hotel, and encountered what is the common experience of the stranger in Panama who is not an Isthmian Canal Commission worker. Outside the commissary hotels, open only to these, there are but two caravansaries worthy of the name on the Isthmus, the Washington, a new hotel at the edge of Colon, with a fine view of the Caribbean, and the Tivoli, an American hotel at Ancon, but open to all, where the rates are three dollars and up a day for a room alone.

Hildreth, with no knowledge of this, sauntered carelessly along the Avenida del Frente, gazing curiously at the ever changing scenes, until he came to the Palace Hotel, a Panamanian place. As usual, the rickety stairway went up from the pavement in the middle of the building; on the right was the bar and a café, and on the left the office and dining room, on the ground floor. An orchestra was playing, and Hildreth noticed that most of the diners were foreigners.

The collegian stepped up to the desk, where a Panamanian clerk eyed him languidly and finally aroused himself sufficiently to inform Carvel that

a room would cost him three dollars a night, silver. So Hildreth paid for two nights, reducing his wealth to ten dollars, a fact that did not worry him, as money with him had always been easily procured, and more easily wasted.

"Third floor, number 67," said the clerk, handing him the key. "Just go right up ze stairway."

There was no elevator, bell hop, or other evidence of civilization, so the collegian climbed two flights of stairs that shook under his weight, and at last located his room on the third floor. The hall was wide and cool, extending from end to end of the house, and opening front and back on wide porches which extended around three sides of the hotel, as it was on a side street as well as facing on the Avenida del Frente. Whatever it lacked, there was a fine breeze blowing down the corridor.

The room that Hildreth entered was not one calculated to inspire confidence or a sense of security. The partitions between the rooms lacked a foot of reaching the ceiling, the windows opened on the cool hallway, with the shutters closing on the frames, as there are no sashes in Panama. Hildreth, when he shut the door and tried to lock it, watched the lock and key fall to the floor.

"A fine hotel!" he laughed. "All modern inconveniences; no electric push buttons, no bell boys, nothing! The bed has n't been made, nor the dirty towels taken away since the last victim left, and there is the private bath, a washbowl, on the floor."

He braced the door with a chair, and as he was

sleepy, for he had not rested well the last night on the *Cristobal*, he threw himself on the bed, knocking several slats to the floor, and was soon in a deep slumber. It was dark when he awoke, and he switched on the electric light hurriedly, to get his bearings. Then he remembered that he was in Panama, and as it was after seven o'clock he decided to see the town.

The night was beautiful, as tropical nights are, with the stars shining, and a cool breeze stirring the palm fronds overhead. Hildreth was thrilled with the novelty of it all, and he walked along the shipping, looking at the huge liners, flying the flags of many nations, that poked their bows into the Avenida del Frente. This street has the shipping on one side, the shopping on the other, and the Panama Railroad tracks running through the middle, all of which makes it the most important street in Colon.

As it was Saturday night, and the Canal Zone employees were paid off for the month, the street was crowded with Americans, who had run in from Culebra, Empire, Gorgona, and even from Ancon, across the Isthmus; the shops were filled with buyers, the bar rooms did a thriving business, and everything was running at full blast. Tiring of the Avenida del Frente, which he had seen fairly well, the collegian, in ignorance of the geography of Colon, walked down the Calle de Paez, and before he knew it he was in the worst section of the town, the *cantina* district.

Colon bears the unenviable reputation of being the second worst city in the world, with Port Said, on the Suez Canal, the first, though Havana might give either a race. There were sailors and soldiers thronging the streets as Hildreth walked along, stevedores from the liners along the docks, a lawless element at best, and worse than ever on Saturday night. Panamanian policemen, short of stature and comparing to a disadvantage with the magnificent Canal Zone officers, patrolled the streets, and Carvel remembered that Bob had said it took six Colon policemen to arrest an average American.

In one *cantina* the disturbance seemed unusual, and, as in the cities of the States, there was no policeman near. Looking in at the open door, Hildreth saw an American engaged in a furious struggle with four natives, who were trying to down the plucky fighter. For a moment he hesitated, uncertain what to do, but the sight of a Panamanian drawing a knife and circling around the fracas, decided the collegian.

“Keep it up, American!” he shouted, plunging in. “I am with you!”

The Panamanians hold the vigorous, hard-fighting Americans in awe, and the sight of Hildreth, tall and well built, caused the natives to release their hold on the American. He at once swung on one’s jaw, and the disturbance began anew. Hildreth, finding in the fray an outlet for his bitterness, struck out right and left with appalling effect, and the American got in some telling blows.

At last came a lull in the fighting, due to the fact that most of the Panamanians were *hors de combat*; then the American seized Carvel and literally dragged him from the place, for the Panamanian policemen, eager for a chance to arrest an American, were now hurrying to the scene of turmoil.

"Don't let the Spigoties get you!" panted the other. "They'll chuck you into a dirty, dark jail, and there you will rot, for all the justice you'll get. Quick, up this street!"

When they had gone a safe distance, the American stopped, and Hildreth saw that he was grinning affably, despite the blood on his face.

"Much obliged," he said earnestly. "'Bout the tightest place Billy Long was ever in, and I've been down here ten years now. Spigoties said I cheated at cards, and even I did, they ought n't to have said so. I guess they would have knifed me, if you had n't come along."

"Come to my room at the hotel," urged Hildreth, "and wash your wounds. The blood is flowing pretty fast."

Keeping to the street back of the Avenida del Frente, a deserted thoroughfare at night, they reached the rear of the Palace Hotel, and made their way to Hildreth's room by the back stairway without having been seen.

CHAPTER X

THE "OLD-TIMER"

"I AM what they call an 'old-timer' here in the Canal Zone," explained Billy Long, whose stature belied his name, as he was short and wiry, with a cheerful, ever grinning countenance. "I came down here the first year we Americans started excavation, and I've decided to stick till the old ditch is full of water, and the ships are hiking across the Isthmus."

Hildreth, who was anxious to hear the adventures and experiences of this pioneer on the Big Job, cordially invited the old-timer to spend the night with him, which Billy accepted complacently. Seated on the bed, with his knees hugged up to his chin and his back propped against the footboard, the old-timer began a string of reminiscences that thrilled the collegian.

"I've held dozens of jobs," said Billy Long, "and now I am a car-wheel inspector in the machine shops at Gorgona, a peaceful work after some of my first experiences. I was on a surveying corps when I first got here, and we used to carry our lunches tied on our heads, and eat them standing waist deep in the water.

"Colon and Panama were then pest holes of mud and disease, the mosquitoes carried yellow fever,

and we caught the chills and ague in the jungle and swamps. The French had dug a little at each end, and a little more at Culebra Cut, and that was all. Their equipment was rotting along the Canal route, and even to-day you can find engines and cars, never used, ten miles in the jungle."

"It must have been a hard life," remarked Hildreth. "But things are changed now, I guess."

"Changed!" The old-timer laughed. "Well, I reckon so. Wait till you go across the Isthmus and see what the jungle is like, then imagine everything like that, none of the neat towns built, the laborers sleeping in puddles, everything rotten with dirt. Now we'll be surprised if Paradise is any more comfortable than the Canal Zone since Uncle Sam took hold."

To get a good idea of what has been done in the Canal Zone, there is no better way than to listen to an old-timer tell of his seven years' work on the Big Ditch; he has all the fervor of the enthusiast, for one and all are wrapped up in the work that "we" are doing, and his experiences are wonderful. As Hildreth listened to Billy Long, he had unfolded before him in graphic language the coming of the Americans to the fever-smitten jungle, the marvelous sanitation enforced by Colonel Gorgas, and the cleaning of Panama City and Colon.

He heard how the yellow fever was driven out entirely, how mosquitoes were totally exterminated, and how, before a single shovel of dirt was taken out, all these preparations were completed, including

the building of employees' houses. As he sat, thrilled by the old-timer's talk, he understood that the magnitude of the Panama Canal work does not consist alone in the ditch itself; that the building, tearing down, and moving of whole towns, the instituting of schools, churches, police stations, fire departments, and Young Men's Christian Association clubhouses, is fully as great a task.

He was told how the United States built commissary stores and hotels, where for thirty cents a fine meal could be had by employees of the Isthmian Canal Commission; he learned to his wonder that there were sports in the Canal Zone, baseball, tennis, and big track meets, held by the Y. M. C. A.'s of the different towns, that scores of college and university men were down there, and that any entertainment is seized on and carried to success because it is a relief from the monotony of work.

"The second year I was here," ruminated Billy, his bronzed face puckered in thought, "I got a job as employment agent, with my station down on the island of St. Thomas, in the Barbadoes Islands. The I. C. C. had tried every kind of labor; the Panamanians were too lazy, the Hindus and Chinese so stupid they would get blown to the sky every time a dynamite blast went off, and none suited till we got the Barbadoes niggers; then we went ahead. I used to bring a shipload of them up to Colon every once in a while, but I soon got tired of chaperoning the cargoes of 'black ivory.'

"Then I came back to Panama, and I've been

time keeper, commissary clerk, steam-shovel fireman, and I don't know what else. I've seen the work grow from year to year, the steam shovels fighting for the monthly record, the locks growing bigger, and the Cut gashing the Cordilleras. Now it's nearly done; a few more tons of concrete in the locks, the finishing of Culebra Cut, and we go home."

He was silent for a moment, then he regarded Hildreth quizzically.

"What's that shindig they have at college?" he demanded. "You know, when the fellows get their rolls of paper and pull up stakes for good?"

"Commencement?" suggested Hildreth, with a pang as he thought of Ballard.

"That's it!" chuckled Billy. "Well, somehow, down here in the Canal Zone reminds me of a Commencement; when I first came there was a jolly bunch of us, but where are they now? Some down in South America, some trying to get rich off the land in Panama, others in Australia, and some dead! The government cleaned up the Zone so that all the crooks had to go.

"You see, friend, in the wake of every great enterprise, as well as ahead of it, there follows a gang of crooks, cutthroats, and thieves. So it was with the Panama Canal; most of these saloons and gambling dens are run by Americans who came down here to make money off the I. C. C. employees. But the place is clean now, and since the Presidente of Panama banned poker playing, it is about the end."

"But there are other sports," said Carvel. "Bull fighting?"

"Right!" grinned the old timer. "Go out to the Plaza del Toros to-morrow afternoon and see it, and watch how the Spiggoties and Americans bet money. Oh, you will find that Sunday down here is the worst day of all; sometimes I feel like it will be a relief to enjoy a quiet day in the States, hearing the church bells again. But go to the window there and listen —"

Hildreth crossed to the window that opened on a side street, and to his ears there came a wild commotion of sounds; from the many cafés he heard the riot of voices, the tinkle of glasses, and the scraping of chairs. There were guitars twanging, a woman singing, and at intervals, above it all, applause, shouts and yells of encouragement.

"That's a cock main," smiled the old-timer, "another great thing down in this sun-blazed, rain-soaked, tropical land. Just remember this, anything to create excitement and relieve the monotony is permitted here, where there are no theaters or amusements. Wait till you see the crowds at the baseball games and the track meets, and see how the men bet on each turn of the game! And there are some mighty fast runners here, from the big colleges in the States!"

"A track meet down here!" marveled Hildreth. "Why, up north they are in the football season now."

"There's to be a big track meet at Cristobal, on Roosevelt Avenue, in a week or so," affirmed Billy.

"All the Y. M. C. A. clubs will compete; last month Empire won, but we Gorgona chaps are going to romp off with it. If you have any speed, friend, you can easily get in the running, if you are an I. C. C. worker."

"I have sprinted some at college," answered Hildreth. Then, as a sudden inspiration seized him, "Do you know a fellow named Bob Bayliss, whose father is an official somewhere in the Canal Zone? He works at—I can't remember the town he named."

"Do I know Bob Bayliss!" roared Billy Long. "Say, ask me if I know Colonel Goethals, or Teddy Roosevelt! Why, his father got me this job at Gorgona, after I got tired of quarrying rock down at Porto Bello, where we had to take a rotten tug trip every time we wanted to see Colon. He lives at Culebra, and he is a time keeper in the Cut."

"Culebra!" exclaimed Hildreth. "That's the town! I'll go there to-morrow and find him; he came down on the *Cristobal*, as I did, and promised to get me work here."

"His Dad will do it, too," reassured the old-timer, "but it's good that you have the pull with an official, for the I. C. C. is laying off men by the hundreds, now that we have nearly finished. Where we had thirty-five thousand at work, there will be a permanent force of one thousand, when the Canal is done. Well, I am tired after that scrap, and as I've got to catch the five o'clock train to Gorgona, I'll go to sleep."

He turned over calmly and went to sleep, but Hildreth, after he had switched off the light and stretched out on the bed beside him, was afraid to trust himself to slumber. He placed his money under the pillow, but neglected to take the lottery ticket from his coat pocket, and the garment hung on a chair at the foot of the bed.

A thousand different thoughts crowded to mind, now that he had time for quiet thought for the first time since leaving New York. It was only at such moments as this that the old bitterness came back to him, and he felt the utter loneliness of this new experience—this making a man of himself, as he called it. He realized more and more that what his father and Neva had said was true; he could never make good so long as that unfought battle remained back at Ballard.

The last thing he thought about before he fell asleep, with the cool tropical breeze blowing in, and the twanging of a banjo, mingled with the soft *patois* of a voice singing a Spanish melody, was his companion, snoring away at his side. He was gripped by the wonderful experiences that this pioneer had related to him that night, from the very start of the stupendous work down to the nearing of the end.

Gradually the spell of the Big Job was seizing him, though as yet he had seen nothing of the Canal, and he looked forward with eagerness to the time when he would find Bayliss, and go to work, helping his country to make good. Dimly he understood

that the task had cemented the workers with bonds of loyalty to their nation, and that in toiling for the Commission they had been made better Americans.

Then, soothed by the breeze and the medley of noises from the streets of wide-awake Colon, Hildreth fell asleep.

It was bright daylight when he awoke, and for a wonder the sun was shining. From the distance he heard a clock striking, and to his amazement, it was eleven! He remembered that it was Sunday, but as Billy Long had stated, it was the worst day of all in Panama, judging from the noise in Colon. Then he thought of his night's "bunkie" and turning, he saw that in the early hours of the dawn the old-timer had stolen away.

And that was not all he had stolen, for an inventory of the pillow and his clothing showed the horrified Hildreth that he had taken, along with his departure, Carvel's gold watch and all the money but a five-dollar bill. The collegian was puzzled at first to know why the old-timer had left it, and was about to ascribe it to sentiment—when he reflected that it had been in a fold of the pillow and was probably overlooked. The lottery ticket was untouched, for nine years in Panama had taught Billy Long the futility of hope.

"In the wake of every great enterprise," quoted Hildreth sadly, "there follows a gang of crooks, thieves, and so forth!' Billy, you spoke rightly, but you were in error in stating that the Canal Zone had been cleaned, for you are here!"

The collegian was not as panic stricken now as he would have been, for he was sure the five dollars would take him to Culebra, and Billy Long had at least informed him where Bayliss could be found. He had paid six dollars and a valuable gold watch for the knowledge, and for the pleasure of hearing the old-timer talk, but he was not cast down.

"I'll drop into the station," he said, after dressing, "and see what the fare to Culebra is, for I want something to eat if there is any money left."

It was too early in the day for much excitement, but crowds were sauntering up and down the Avenida del Frente, the Canal Zone carriages were clanging past at intervals, and the shops were doing a thriving business. There were plenty of Americans on the street, and white women in the carriages, as they seldom go afoot outside the government corrals.

Consulting the timetable in the station, he found that the round trip to Panama City and return was five dollars, gold, the exact amount he possessed, and that the next train left at twenty minutes past two.

"I'll wait until to-morrow," he decided. "I don't know when I shall have a chance to see Colon again after starting to work, so I'll see it well."

After a short walk he entered Roosevelt Avenue, and followed the water around to the De Lesseps house on the promontory near the Cristobal docks. He saw the breakwater, the huge terminals being

built at the end of the Canal, the great warehouses and plants of the Commission, and he marveled at the completeness of the work that covered every possible detail.

"Why, they have created a new nation down here!" he breathed. "There are entire towns built, with all the attributes of a city in the States; there is a railroad, with machine shops, and an ice plant! All we need is an army and a navy, and we could whip any Central or South American republic!"

Hildreth was getting thrilled with the Big Job; a few weeks of hard work, and he would be as enthusiastic as any of the young fellows, clad in flannels, that he found at the Cristobal Y. M. C. A. a few minutes later, when he walked up Broad Street and entered the clubhouse.

"I wonder what number wins this week?" speculated one. "I never got a thing yet, though I have faithfully contributed my dollar and a quarter each week to the lottery."

"In Nicaragua once," commented another of the group, which was sipping drinks from the Y. M. C. A. soft-drink bar, a blessing to temperance Canal workers, "I pulled down five hundred dollars. I'd like to land the first prize here before I am laid off; it would top my savings beautifully."

"Right!" was the chorus. "Seven thousand dollars is worth having."

Hildreth gasped. Seven thousand dollars in gold, in good American coin! It was not the amount that impressed the collegian, for his father being rich,

he was accustomed to hearing of larger sums, but at that time, in his state of poverty, down to five dollars and facing starvation, unless Bayliss were found, it was a fortune. If he should win —

“I would go back to the States like a millionaire,” he imagined. “I’d see this old ditch from end to end first, put up at the Tivoli and be a sport, then travel first class to New York, enter a college, and graduate. I’d show Dad and the rest a few things!”

He started back to the Palace, as he had paid for another night, and on the way he passed the branch office of the Panama lottery; Bayliss had said that the winning number each week was posted on Sunday, and as he neared the wooden building on the Avenida del Frente he glanced at the electric-light arrangement that would blazon out the number when darkness came.

His heart leaped madly, and for a moment he stood still; then his hand went to his inside coat pocket and drew out the pink pasteboard slip that Billy Long had neglected to take with him. The number on the ticket was 3333; Hildreth hardly dared to look up, but when he raised his eyes, that on the sign of the Lotterie de Panama, in the electric frame, was 3333!

CHAPTER XI

THE LOTTERY OF LIFE

FOR an instant Carvel Hildreth was too overwhelmed by this great good fortune to realize what it meant to him. A moment before he had but five dollars in his possession, and actual starvation had stared him in the face, in the event of a failure to find Bayliss; now, the pink bit of pasteboard in his hand, bearing the magic number 3333, was as good as a check for fifteen thousand Spiggoty dollars, or seven thousand five hundred in American currency!

Gradually it dawned on him that he did not have to find work in the Canal Zone, that his father's casting him off did not matter now, since he had several thousand dollars. What a fine time he would have back in the States, finishing the year at Hamilton, or some other college than Ballard! He would enjoy this lottery prize to the full.

As it was Sunday, he decided to take the afternoon train across to Panama City, so as to present his number at the lottery office the first thing on Monday morning; the Panamanians were a treacherous set, and he would feel better when the prize money was in his possession. Two dollars and a half, gold, would buy him a ticket across the Isthmus, and the rest would put him up at a cheap hotel

for the night, leaving him a trifle for food. Flated, with every vestige of the bitterness that had been his since leaving college erased by his luck, he hurried toward the Palace, to get his suitcase.

“Seven thousand dollars!” he breathed. “Won’t I have a good time? I’ll travel this ditch from end to end, I’ll sail back to New York *de luxe*, and I’ll have my fling at some college until June. I guess I’ll show Dad that my being thrown on my own resources did n’t make me lose out!”

In the natural exhilaration at having the money, Hildreth did not pause to consider that since it had been won through pure luck, and not by any worthy effort of his, it was far from representing success in anything. Instead of his going toward making good, this money would put him back in his old reckless life, and he would lose what little ground he had gained, or the manhood that might have been his through hard work.

By this lottery prize, all his father’s desperate measures, which had almost broken the banker’s heart to adhere to, were put at naught. Mr. Hildreth had first declared that Carvel must make his own way at college, in the hope that this would sober his son, and make him depend on himself; later, he had disowned him because he would not go back to Ballard, hoping that rude contact with life would make the collegian see he was wrong, so he would return. Now, with seven thousand dollars, there was small chance that Hildreth would win to manhood.

In that hour, all his former good resolutions were forgotten; he threw aside all memory of the shame and sorrow he had caused his father by his failure; he did not think of the telegram that he had sent before the football game; all he saw was the pink slip in his fingers, and glorious visions of the hilarious times he would have back in the States with his fortune.

Reaching his room, he seized his suitcase and hurried down the rickety staircase, striding toward the station, and brushing aside angry little Panamanians as he hastened to catch the two-twenty train for Panama City. The street was filled with an indolent crowd, the cafés ran at full blast, and Colon was getting ready for Sunday night, but Hildreth did not care.

“One way to Panama City,” said Hildreth, at the first-class ticket office. “What time shall I get there?”

“The running time is about two hours,” said the American agent. “About half-past four. Two-fifty, gold.”

With two dollars and a half in his possession, Hildreth went through the turnstile and boarded one of the yellow cars of the Panama Railroad train; he admired the clean rattan seats, placed crosswise in the first-class compartments, and lengthwise in the cars of the second-class passengers. The train crew was composed of Americans, and as the train pulled out of the station shed and rattled along the Avenida del Frente, on past Cristobal, Hildreth

settled back for a thorough enjoyment of his trip across the Isthmus, for now that he was the winner of the lottery he was at peace with the world.

Back in the second-class car he could see a strange gathering of nationalities; the giant Barbadoes negroes, those from the West Indies, gesticulating Italians, and sullen Spaniards; there were women from the ill-fated island of Martinique (where Mt. Pelee spread devastation some years ago), with turbans on their heads; there were Hindu coolies with their heads bound, almond-eyed Chinese, and vociferous Panamanian peons.

In Carvel's car there were the aristocratic Panamanians, the women resembling the Spanish, only darker, and the men graceful and indolent in speech and in action. Almost all of the passengers were Americans, however, for the Canal Zone is like a big community, and they travel all over it at will. There were the well-dressed officials of the administration, handsome American women, and stalwart young chaps in yellow shirts, khaki trousers, and puttees, on their way to work for the next day.

As the train sped past the end of the Colon shipping, where there is a stretch of open beach, Hildreth saw several long canoes, laden with coconuts and tropical fruits, nosing the white sand, and what seemed to be Indians wading ashore.

"They are San Blas Indians," said an American beside him, noticing his amazed look. "They are remarkable as the sole tribe that has kept its race blood pure, from the time Balboa crossed the

Isthmus, through the Spanish invasion, and the French work, to the present. All other tribes have intermarried with all nationalities, but the San Blas women cannot even be spoken to. It is a rule of the tribe that no child born of a foreign father shall live, and the mother is punished."

The train went through Monkey Hill, Lion Hill, Tiger Hill, and Corozal, which means "merry-go-round," and crossed from Manzanillo Island to the mainland of the Isthmus. The collegian, as he gazed at the evidences of what had been done in the Canal Zone, where the jungle had been beaten back step by step, the marshes cleared and drained, and roads built from town to town, marveled at the wonderful efficiency of Colonel Goethals, the head of the administration. Oil barrels stood here and there, humble monuments to the sanitation of Colonel Gorgas, who had driven malaria and yellow fever from the Zone.

But farther on, as the train left the Canal, at times the tracks ran through sheer jungle, and Hildreth drew a deep breath as the impenetrable walls of green arose on either side, with their strange birds, rare flowers and fruit, and the most brilliant foliage. As he gazed at the tall trees, with their roots in marsh and water, with tangled vines and undergrowth enmeshed with the plants and bushes, he got an idea of what the pioneers who surveyed the Panama Railroad route back in 1850 had had to endure. And they were Americans, too!

"Gatun! Gatun!" the conductor shouted, and

the first big point along the Canal was reached, though the station is too far away for a clear view of the dam and locks to be had. Still, the collegian gasped as the outlines of the enormous concrete walls, surmounted with giant berm cranes, loomed up; he could see the dam that had been built to stem the roaring Chagres River, and to form an artificial lake of a hundred and fifty square miles. Then he began to grasp in a measure the stupendous achievements of modern engineering.

"From the Atlantic entrance at Colon," said the American at his side, for Canal workers never lose a chance to enthuse over the work, "the ships sail seven miles to Gatun, where they pass through the three locks yonder and into Gatun Lake, the man-made body of water; sailing twenty-three miles across it, they reach Culebra Cut, a nine-mile gash through the mountains of the Cordilleras, and after steaming through it, they reach the locks at Pedro Miguel, then a short way to Miraflores Lake and locks, after which it is only seven miles to the Pacific entrance."

"Then it is n't really a canal," said Hildreth; "that is, I expected to see an even affair, probably lined with concrete on each side, extending straight across from ocean to ocean."

"The Canal is a surprise to many," agreed the American. "It really consists, as you heard, of a few miles of canal at each end, an artificial lake, and a natural lake, all joined together. At places the water will spread out for miles, and the Canal will

be marked out by buoys, while at others, as in Culebra Cut, it is narrow."

"It is wonderful, even at that!" answered Hildreth, and his companion was satisfied.

For twenty-three miles after leaving Gatun the train passed through country that would be under water when Gatun Lake was filled, and many native villages years old would be erased from the map, literally. As they passed Ahorca Lagarto, Hildreth remarked on the immensity of a project that thought nothing of wiping out villages.

"That is a small item," laughed the American, a civil engineer who was relocating the Panama Railroad. "As a writer on Panama aptly says, 'We Americans dropped down into the heart of a jungle of unequaled denseness, built a young mountain—meaning Gatun dam—balanced a lake of a hundred and fifty square miles on top of the continental divide—Gatun Lake—gouged out a cañon ten miles long, three hundred feet wide, and two hundred and fifty feet deep—Culebra Cut!'"

At points where the Canal was neared, numberless tracks ran off into the jungle, and there were cars of rock, or loaded with dirt, which the engineer explained would be taken from Culebra Cut to build up good land in the marshes. At times the feeble scars of the French digging were seen, in places overgrown with the jungle that had claimed its own again.

The next point of interest on the trip, besides the jungle, which fascinated Hildreth, was Gorgona,

where the large roundhouses and repair shops of the two railroad systems, the Panama, and the Canal work, are located; there were scores of hissing engines on the tracks, long rows of flat excavation cars, cranes, steam shovels, and apparatus, hauled in for repairing. To Hildreth it looked like the railroad yards of a great city in the States, and again he thrilled with the completeness at which a nation had reproduced itself in the jungle of Panama.

Empire, an important Canal Zone town, looked to the collegian just like a country village along a railroad in the States, though the bungalow effect of the houses, and the palm trees near them, destroyed the resemblance somewhat. The crowds that alighted from the cars or boarded them, or met friends at the station, were for all the world like the families of suburban commuters, meeting husbands and fathers; there were girls and little children, just as in the country Hildreth had left. To put on the finishing touch, the word "Empire" was formed on a bank in letters of flowers.

Everything, even the lottery prize, was forgotten by Hildreth as he rode across the Isthmus of Panama, and when, between Gorgona and Empire, he caught his first glimpse of the Culebra Cut, where practically all of the work, besides that of the three lock stations, was being concentrated on the finish, he was breathless. He could see, far down the gash through the hill, endless tracks, crossing and recrossing, rows of excavation trains, and big steam shovels,

all at rest, but ready for the morning's work. On each side of the Cut the banks were red, as though still bleeding from the lacerations of the busy Canal diggers.

"I must see it when they are at work," he told himself, as a curve shut off the view of the great Cut. "It is wonderful, well worth a trip down here to see, just to find out what a great nation is ours!"

It was not yet dark when the train pulled into the station at Panama City, and Hildreth, as he alighted, stared at the brick houses that met his gaze; he had grown used to Colon, with its endless frame buildings, frail and insecure, with their projecting porches, and he was amazed when he saw a city like those in the States, with paved streets and wide sidewalks.

"A good hotel?" an American he accosted answered. "Well, if you have the price, there is the Tivoli, across the bridge yonder, in Ancon; you will find the Panazone, in the Plaza del Central, Panama City, about as good as any Spiggoty, I guess."

There was the Hotel Mexico across the street, diagonally from the railroad station, but Hildreth sauntered up the Calle del Central, looking curiously at the quaint shops that border it, and noticing that the number of Americans on the streets was much less than in Colon. The Panamanians he addressed to ask the way were not so fluent in English, but he finally reached the Panazone, on the beautiful Plaza del Central, and secured a room for the night, paying two dollars.

“Fifty cents for supper!” he laughed. “Then to-morrow, seven thousand dollars to spend! I guess I can stand one night of poverty for that!”

The room was much better than the one he had occupied at the Palace in Colon, where Billy Long had taken most of his money when he left, and the accommodations were far superior, though behind those of hotels in the States. Coming down into the lobby, Hildreth discovered that he was hungry, and decided to go out to a restaurant to eat, investing his last cent for a good supper, so he finally landed in the dining room of the Hotel Mexico, where a meal was advertised for a dollar, silver.

The salt was like paste, the butter had melted, and the food was far from appetizing, but Hildreth managed to make a good meal, as he was in fine spirits. Then, without a cent, but with the precious pink lottery ticket in his pocket, he strolled through the city, gazing out from the Sea Wall, seeing Balboa on his right, where the West Coast steamers land and the Pacific entrance to the Canal is located. Farther out, the blue Pacific stretched away in the distance, while back of the city Ancon Hill, whence a view of two oceans at once may be had, reared its majestic height.

He stopped in Cathedral Square to gaze at the ancient cathedral, with its twin spires decorated with pearl shells that gleamed like fire in the last rays of the setting sun. Then, tired by the excitement of his trip, Hildreth read in the reading room of the Panazone for an hour or so, and at last went

to bed; this time the door of his room could be locked, so he had no fear that he would be robbed of his lottery ticket. He went to sleep, to dream of what he would do with the prize money back in the States, and of the larks he would have at college.

He slept late, and when he awoke the rain was falling in torrents. When it rains in Panama, which it does frequently, it does not hesitate to do so with all its might, and while it lasts it is exceedingly discomforting. Hildreth was depressed at the way the water fell, splattering up from the paved streets below; but he took out the lottery ticket and looked at it, and the sight cheered him.

After an hour the weather cleared, the sun blazed down fiercely, and Hildreth started out to cash his winning ticket. He found the office on the ground floor of the Episcopal Palace, for the place is rented from the Bishop of Panama. As he entered, a smiling Panamanian clerk with a pen behind his ear came forward, and Hildreth advanced to the counter.

"First prize!" announced the collegian proudly, tossing the pink ticket down with a careless air before the little Panamanian. "Number 3333! I'll take the money right along with me, please."

There was an awkward silence, for instead of betraying any joy or other emotion at Hildreth's words, the clerk was staring at the ticket and then at Hildreth, as though convinced the American had gone crazy from exposure to the tropical sun.

"Ze—ze first prize of ze lotterie!" explained the

Ballard chap, under the delusion that the clerk spoke no English, though just how this jargon would convey intelligence in that case was hard to say. "See, ze numbaire on ze —"

He dropped his already broken English suddenly, for the petrified clerk was pointing at a number posted on the wall. For a moment Hildreth gazed at it in a dazed sort of manner, then it began to dawn on him slowly that the figures made up the number—3456!

"Ze lucky gentleman, Meester Armendaros, got hees prize dis morning," stated the puzzled clerk. "Ze numbaire on ze wall, 3456, wins the lottery. What makes you think you haf won eet?"

"In Colon yesterday at noon," faltered Hildreth, "I was passing the branch office and I saw the number 3333 posted; I had been told that the winning number is put up each Sunday, so that the people can see who—"

"Eet ees true," interposed the clerk, "but eet ees Sunday *night* when ze numbaire ees posted! Ze drawing takes place in Panama City in ze afternoon! Let me see—ze numbaire winning ze beeg prize last week was—3333!"

"Then it was last week's number still posted!" Hildreth groaned. "I saw it and thought that I had the winning ticket. It was not until last night that I could have seen the number that won for this week just ended yesterday!"

Crushed by this last blow, after the loss of his money by the old-timer's theft, the collegian turned

slowly away, while the Panamanian clerk, who was glad that a "native son" had won the big prize that week instead of a "gringo," grinned pleasantly into a mirror on the wall. In desperation and despair, Hildreth walked out into the Plaza; he had not one cent in his possession, and his dreams of the seven thousand dollars had been broken to fragments!

It was a cruel and bitter hour for Carvel Hildreth. The rain was pouring again in a steady, dismal sheet, the dampness reeked from the foliage, and a fog arose from the paved streets, the palms of the Plaza drooped gloomily, and the little Spiggoty policeman sought his sentry box for shelter. Everything had grown dark for the collegian, and as he wandered aimlessly in the rain, he was muttering wildly:

"The last ditch! I thought I was at the last ditch when I sent my father that telegram from Ballard, but now —"

Blind with rage and disappointment, not seeing or caring where he went, he rushed against some one who was hurrying past with head bent to keep the rain out of his face. He heard an exclamation of anger, changing to one of surprise, and he felt his arm seized excitedly.

"Hildreth! What are you doing here in Panama City? How did you lose me on the special Saturday? Old man, I am glad I have found you at last!"

Looking up, Hildreth saw that it was Bob Bayliss.

PART III

CHAPTER XII

THE OLD BITTERNESS

IT HAD been two days since Hildreth was separated from his friends on the crowded pier at Cristobal, yet it had seemed like a century, and his gladness as he shook hands with Bayliss was heartfelt. It was a strange meeting, under the dripping palms of the Plaza, and the little Spiggoty policeman, eying the scene from his sentry box, wondered if he ought to arrest the young Americans for riot, as Bob was thumping Hildreth on the back in a way that convinced Carvel effectually of Bayliss' friendship.

"I have scoured the Canal Zone for you, old chum!" cried Bob. "I don't go to work until to-morrow, so this morning I took the first train here, as I had been all over Colon, determined to find you. Corning is at work now. Dad got him a job as 'flannel-foot' in the Pacific Division, so he will live with us over in Culebra."

"A flannel-foot!" repeated Hildreth, puzzled. "What is that, Bob?"

"A detective—a sleuth," grinned Bayliss. "You see, Carvel, here in the Canal Zone, while there is no big graft, there are countless chances for employees

to make money on the side; a time keeper, like myself, could issue extra time checks to a laborer, and by a previous agreement receive half when they were cashed. The I. C. C. has a detective force to watch for such things, and Corning has a job. The flannel-foot is far from popular down here, of course, but a necessity."

Hildreth's relief at having found his only friend in Panama was so great that he had quite forgotten the rain, but Bayliss suddenly shook his raincoat, and waved the drops from his hat.

"Let's get out of this young flood," he said with a laugh. "Dad's over at the University Club, and I'll introduce you, old man. You had better take whatever job he can offer you, for, believe me, they are few and far between now in the Canal Zone."

"I'll be thankful to get anything," avowed Hildreth earnestly, "for I have n't a cent in the world, Bob. Half an hour ago I thought I possessed seven thousand dollars, but it was all a myth."

As they hurried through the Plaza to the University Club, which fronts on the beautiful square, Hildreth hurriedly outlined to his chum the sorrowful history of the lottery ticket; Bayliss, while he sympathized with him on his loss, was wondering to himself if, after all, it had not been for the best. Now, he had a chance to make a man of himself by hard work, but with seven thousand —

In a few minutes Hildreth was comfortably ensconced in a big leather chair in the lounging room

of the University Club, while Bayliss went in search of his father, an official of the Pacific Division of the I. C. C. administration. There was a mixed crowd in the room; steam-shovel drivers from the Cut, concrete mixers from Gatun, Miraflores, and Pedro Miguel, members of the dynamite squad that blew up the hills for the steam shovels to nose away into flat cars, engineers of the excavation trains, time keepers, surveyors, men from all the phases of the Big Job.

Everywhere the Canal was the topic, as over in Cristobal; the number of cubic yards that such a steam shovel had dug so far that month was remarked, the amount of concrete poured into the walls of the duplicate locks at Gatun, the great slide that had threatened to engulf the town of Culebra in the abysmal gorge below, all fascinated Hildreth. He was soon to be plunged into this big work, to be one of the army that was bending brain and muscle to its accomplishment!

He saw Bayliss enter, accompanied by a tall, bronzed gentleman in white flannels, wearing that earnest, thoughtful air of the Canal workers, and he decided it was Bob's father, the Isthmian Canal Commission official. He was sure that his friend was telling of Hildreth's need of a job in Panama, and that they were consulting over what would be the best job for the collegian, and, on Bob's part, the easiest.

The collegian would have been amazed had he heard what was said by his friend of the *Cristobal*;

Bayliss knew the story of the football game and what had followed; he saw clearly that Hildreth was passing a crisis in his life, and that only stern measures could save him from his weaker self. The affair of the lottery ticket had been a narrow escape for Carvel, and Bob shuddered as he thought of what would have been had the winning number for that week been 3333.

Bayliss understood, with Mr. Hildreth and Neva Barton, that the one hope of making Hildreth worth while was to make him return to Ballard, even though it would be to face the same bitter scorn and ostracism from which he had fled. Hildreth's life had been one of luxurious ease, and he had never worked to earn a dollar; nothing but the hardest kind of physical labor could impress the reckless collegian with manliness and self-reliance, with the courage to face anything and not flinch.

"I might give him a position as clerk in the police station at Gorgona," said Mr. Bayliss reflectively. "Young Casey left to-day for the States, and we need a new fellow at once. If this Hildreth can do office work—"

"Don't give him so easy a place, Dad!" Bob interposed earnestly. "Can't you see, he has got to buckle down to work, he must sweat and ache all over! Give him the hardest physical job in the Zone, make him do the work of the Barbadoes negroes! He is in good shape and can stand it; if he sticks, I can get him back to college; but if he fails, there is no hope for him."

Mr. Bayliss had been intensely interested in the story of Hildreth's moral cowardice, told to him in the strictest confidence by his son, and he looked over at the athletic young collegian who had been shunned by his friends for what they believed the yellow streak, and disowned by his father for his refusal to go back to Ballard. Here was a tall, clean-cut chap, splendidly built, with an attractive face, yet one that showed he had been used to having what he wanted.

Work on the Big Job had enabled Mr. Bayliss to study others, and he understood the condition of this young fellow at once; here was a collegian who gave his body, while suffering torture, to his eleven, and yet who lacked the will power to go back to endure mental anguish!

"Bob is right," he decided. "In view of what he has told me, the hardest kind of physical labor alone can make a man of him. If he sticks to it for a day, and the next morning, stiff and sore, gets up and goes at it again, then there is hope. It is the supreme test for him, and I'll try to save the fellow."

"I'll introduce him, Dad," said Bob. "Remember, not a word to remind him of the past, and don't let him know that we are working to help him. But whatever you do, make him sweat!"

In response to his call, Hildreth walked over to where the Commission official and his son were standing by the door; Bob introduced them, and Carvel felt the firm, strong handclasp of this bronzed,

earnest looking man, who studied the young collegian without seeming to do so.

"You have sought Panama at the worst time for work," said Mr. Bayliss, in perfect truth. "Had you come down three years ago, you might have done well, but with the Commission reducing the force from thirty-five thousand to one thousand, you can see that there is a poor choice. Are you afraid of hard work?"

"I have never done any work," confessed Hildreth, "but I am in training, having come from the football field, and I believe I can stand it."

"If you need work badly," continued Mr. Bayliss, "and are willing to grit your teeth and stick, I can put you on the crew of steam shovel 33, which is now working at the bottom of the fresh slide at Culebra Cut; you will have to shovel coal like a stoker, and that is not easy. If you are ready to work to-morrow, the job is yours; sixty a month, gold, and 'bachelor' quarters at Culebra. It is work usually handled by Barbadoes negroes, but it means a living for you, until the force is cut to almost nothing."

"And believe me," laughed Bob, "you will have to shovel like a Turk! Shovel 25 is eating at the top of the slide, and the two are going neck and neck for this month's excavation record; to make it worse, Bill Rosslyn, the 33 craneman, is from Yale, and 25's craneman is from Harvard! Maybe there is n't a rivalry, too!"

Hildreth was unaware that there was a position

as clerk which he might have had, if Bob had not been determined he should work out his own salvation and manhood by the sweat of his brow. He dreaded the daily toil and hated the thought of laboring where Barbadoes negroes usually toiled, but the memory of the previous hour came to him, when he had stood, penniless and wet, in the Plaza del Central, and he knew there was a choice between shoveling coal and starving.

"I'll take the job, Mr. Bayliss," he said at last, "and I thank you for letting me have it, for I was in a bad fix when Bob found me. I am ready to go to work any time you say."

"You and Bob can run out to Culebra this afternoon," decided Mr. Bayliss. "I have business in Ancon, but will come home on the night train and fix matters up for you. Bob, get him working togs and a commissary book. Mr. MacNamara, the engineer of 33, will tell you what to do."

They had a pleasant dinner in the balcony of the University Club, waited on by quick, efficient attendants, and gazing out at the beautiful foliage of the square beneath them. The University Club is the meeting place of the hundreds of college and university men in the Canal Zone; here old gridiron games are retold, old classmates may hold reunions, and friends get together for a cheerful evening.

After parting from Mr. Bayliss, who was as busy as the average Canal Zone official, Bayliss and Hildreth sauntered down the Avenida del Central toward the railroad station, where they would get

the first afternoon train to Culebra, to find Douglas Corning. They were talking of what had taken place since they were parted, and Bob was interested in Hildreth's experiences in Colon, and particularly that one with the old-timer, Billy Long.

"He is an old offender," laughed Bob. "We shall put Corning on the trail. But your troubles are ended now, old fellow, with a job safely landed."

The train up from Balboa, the Pacific terminal of the Panama Railroad, and where the big docks are located, was on time, and they boarded the first-class car, after Bob had bought a ticket for Hildreth. As they rattled out of the city, passing the filthy shacks of the peons, Carvel was buried in thought, though he gazed at the snorting little engines that hauled excavation trains, for which the express had to wait, as dirt trains have the right of way in the Canal Zone; he glanced at Ancon Hill, beyond which the Canal writhed like a gigantic snake, but Bob saw he was preoccupied.

Hildreth was thinking of the work ahead of him; on the morrow he, Carvel Hildreth, the son of Robert Hildreth, a prosperous New York financier, was to shovel coal as a common laborer! He was to do the work of a Barbadoes negro, when two weeks before he had been a spendthrift at college! While his physical condition was superb, the athlete dreaded the hours of toil with the shovel, the blistering his hands with work.

The thought made him bitter toward his father,

who had cast him off because he would not return to Ballard. Had Mr. Hildreth given him a clerkship in the New York office, he would not have been reduced to the necessity of being a laborer. The memory of the lottery disappointment still hurt, and the bitterness that started with the Ballard-Hamilton game, increased in his father's office, and was added to by the meeting with Neva, was now crushing him.

"Never mind, old chap," said Bob, understanding his mood. "Wait till the first day of work is done, and you have gotten over the soreness. In a few days you will catch the spirit of the Canal, and all I shall hear will be you raving over what number 33 has dug! You will be wild for 25 to be beaten for the monthly steam-shovel record; as soon as I hear you say 'we' did this or that, then I'll know you are a true Canal digger."

"I'll stick," vowed Hildreth moodily, "simply because I've got to, Bob. But it looks black enough now, goodness knows, when I thought I had a lot of money to take me back to the States."

The train drew into Culebra in half an hour, and they descended from the yellow car to mingle with the crowd. A short walk brought them to the American town, which resembled Empire, Gorgona, and the others Hildreth had seen, so that the only interesting feature was the fact that it perched precariously on the verge of that vast chasm, Culebra Cut. Bob took his chum to house 145, for the Commission buildings are numbered in the Canal

Zone, and showed him the room that he and Corning would have.

It was a comfortable room on the second floor, with windows opening on a broad, screened porch, and Hildreth was taken with his quarters. The bachelor quarters in the Canal Zone reminded him of college dormitories, and as many of the occupants are college graduates, there is sufficient reason for the thought. He could see the houses of the married men, with little children playing on the verandas, and the housewives at work inside.

Going over the house, Bob introduced him to several vigorous looking young fellows who had come in from work because of the excessive rains that made impossible any accomplishment for the day in the Cut. They were reading papers, sleeping, or talking of the one and only thing worth while, the Canal, and Hildreth was impressed with the manliness of these chaps who were living in exile to build the Big Ditch. He sensed again what had struck him with force in Cristobal, that despite all that was done for their comfort, which they appreciated, they were suffering from homesickness.

He was asked eagerly for news from the States, and for the time the Canal Zone baseball league faded from mind as they queried about the Giants and the Red Sox back north. He gave them all the football news that he could, and was amused at the way these Canal Zone workers thirstily drank up all information about the doings in their old country. Even the Big Job cannot keep thoughts of home

from besieging the single men, and at times the more fortunate married men look forward eagerly to the end of the work, and the going back to the States.

"This is Bill Rosslyn, of Yale," said Bob as a big chap got up to shake hands with Hildreth, for the Americans in Panama are fraternal always. "He is the craneman of number 33, where you will shovel coal. Bill, meet Mr. Carvel Hildreth, the former star right tackle of Ballard College."

It was an unfortunate introduction, for, after scrutinizing Hildreth, the man did not take the hand that the Ballard collegian extended.

"I would rather not shake hands with a coward!" he said coldly. "We read of you over at the University Club, in the papers that came down on the *Cristobal* Saturday, and some sharp things were said about you. We read how you lost the Hamilton game by dodging back when the last rush came at you. So that's the kind of chap who is to shovel coal for 33! Small chance of the record for us!"

He made no attempt to conceal his scorn, and Hildreth's heart sank within him. Was he never to live down results of that one uncontrollable action that had unjustly branded him a coward? If even here in the Canal Zone the enmity of others was to be felt, he must have done right, after all, to leave Ballard. But he could not satisfy himself with false reasoning; he knew that it showed him he ought to have stayed, since the consequences of his act followed him to Panama.

“Mr. Rosslyn,” he said, striving to be calm, “I was not a coward in that game; my side was severely gashed, and as that last rush started my right guard rammed his elbow against it, making me blind and faint. Had I been master of myself, I should have flung my body at that rush, no matter what happened. I was a coward to leave college, afraid to endure the shame of disgrace, but never a physical coward. You may believe me or not! I don’t care about any one’s opinion now!”

Bayliss felt a thrill, for this was the first time Carvel had confessed his cowardice in leaving college. With his having realized he had done wrong, there was now some hope that he could be induced to go back; everything depended on the way he worked at shoveling coal.

“Old man,” he said, when he had rejoined Carvel, who had turned away from Bill Rosslyn, not seeing that the Yale man was convinced by his words, “down here the fellows read everything in the papers from the States, and I guess they know all about that unfortunate game. Of course, they don’t dream you are here, and if you take another name—”

“No!” exclaimed Hildreth angrily. “I’ll face it, if I have to! I don’t care what happens now! I was not a coward, no matter who thinks so!”

That night, after Corning had talked the events of the past two days with him and had gone to sleep, Hildreth walked out on the upper porch. The moon, rising over the palms that fringed the

distant jungle, shed a soft light on the great Cut that stretched away between Gold Hill and Contractor's Hill, showing the jagged outlines of the gash on the face of Nature. He was bitter against the world now, for the meeting with Bill Rosslyn had shown him that his so-called cowardice was known even down in Panama, where he had come to escape the odium of it.

"Where will it all end?" he muttered wearily.

He gazed for a long time, broken in spirit, until he remembered that the next day meant work for him, and then, with a last look at the dark, mysterious jungle, he went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

BY THE SWEAT OF HIS BROW

HAD good old Bill Hoke, little Cupid Cavanaugh, big Dad Hickson, or Grinder Graham stood on the grassy plot back of the Commission clubhouse at Culebra and peered down into the smoke-enshrouded chasm that stretched away to either side, he would have been astonished at a sight more wonderful to him than the mighty scenes of the Cut, one never witnessed at Ballard—that of Carvel Hildreth hard at work!

Clad in greasy, coal-smutted overalls, the football star was shoveling away furiously, toiling until he ached in a fierce effort to satiate the ravenous maw of steam shovel 33's furnace, as the huge scoop nosed into the earth and devoured rock and dirt from the bottom of the latest Culebra slide. The sweat poured down Hildreth's face in streams, streaking the black grime, and his yellow shirt clung affectionately to his muscular back as he shoveled.

Without bothering to consult the engineers of the Commission, a peculiarity of Canal slides, this gigantic one had rumbled gently down into the Cut, adding two million cubic yards of excavation to the calculations made, and seriously endangering the Culebra post office, fire department, police station, and a few other buildings. The traveling

house-wrecking gangs had been hurried to the scene, and the imperiled buildings were torn down, to be rebuilt at a safe distance from the edge of the gorge.

Mr. Bruce MacNamara, engineer of steam shovel 33, had been sent to work at the bottom of the slide, with his bitter rival, 25, eating away at the top; spur tracks from the network at the bottom of the Cut ran past the shovels, and as fast as one excavation train was loaded, another of empty flat cars was waiting to take its place. Four mouthfuls of the dipper filled a car, so that it was a ceaseless performance of coal shoveling for Hildreth, as the system in the Cut is so perfect that there is never an instant's delay.

The collegian was doing the hardest kind of physical labor,—thanks to the determination of Bayliss to make him man enough to go back to Ballard,—work that was always assigned to negroes, for of the thirty-five thousand workers in the Canal Zone of two years ago, about five thousand were white Americans. Mr. MacNamara was the engineer, standing in the “house” and operating the levers that swung the big boom, with the dangling shovel, from the hillside to the flat cars. Bill Rosslyn, a young giant, was the craneman; he sat on the boom and knocked the catch that opened the dipper and let the mouthful of excavation vomit into the car, and glanced curiously at Hildreth from time to time, as Carvel shoveled doggedly.

From where 33 shoveled away, swallowing the hillside below the clubhouse, Carvel had a wonderful view of the famous Culebra Cut, and once, when the catch refused to work and Rosslyn had to fix it, he rested on his shovel and gazed in silent awe at the most wonderful engineering feat of modern years, the slashing in two of a mountain range, digging eighty-five feet deep, and breaking the backbone of the great continental divide.

To his right, facing the Cut, were Gold Hill and Contractor's Hill, looming up mistily, with their heads clouded in smoke, and the deepest part of the Cut lying between them, while on his left the great gash stretched away five miles toward Empire, a long, gloomy chasm, with a bewildering network of railroad tracks on its floor, red, jagged slopes, and filled with Lilliputians who urged big iron monsters to devour the earth. Through the gorge numberless excavation trains hurried, the motor-car specials loafed through, and the rock cars bound for Gatun roared along, drawn by toy engines.

The dampness had driven downward the curtain of smoke that always hangs over the Cut, and it lowered over the hills, broken from below by the spurts of white steam from the roaring, screeching monsters that attacked the hills. Here and there the "dynamite squad" hurried, drilling holes, stringing wires, and placing the heavy charges that would blow the hills into crumbling fragments for the hungry steam shovels to eat later. At noon and at evening, when the Cut is clear of men, a button

is pressed, and the terrific explosion is felt for miles.

Hildreth was amused at the sight of the motor-car specials, whose wheels fitted the tracks, being held up impudently by insignificant excavation trains; pompous Congressmen, seeing the Cut in the worst possible way, had to wait while the dirt-loaded flat cars rattled past, for work has the right of way in the Canal Zone. The system is so complete that if one excavation train runs off the end of a dump, as often happens, a dozen others and a few steam shovels will be thrown out of order. No loaded train is ever still; the instant its last car is full, it is off toward Gatun or the Pacific, and does not stop until it gets there, while the string of empties comes up to the steam shovel at once.

The collegian was amazed at the simplicity of a system that insured such a vast amount of accomplishment; each steam shovel was working at the top of a grade, and when a heavy excavation train left a shovel, it rolled downhill to the Pacific or the Atlantic, while the empties return by different tracks, doing all the uphill climbs. And the right kind of car, for rock or dirt, as the shovel dug in different soils, was always waiting for excavation!

It was a Lidgerwood shovel that gave Hildreth such hard work, and already he was proud of the enormous load the dipper could scoop up and swing over to the flat car on the track. At times number 33 groaned and snorted in protest, but always the vast load of rocks or dirt, five cubic yards, came up,

thanks to Bill Rosslyn's shouts, and MacNamara's encouragements. To the crew, the steam shovel was human. They had worked with it for months, and knew its crazy freaks; they petted and talked to it, and declared that they alone could get good work out of it.

The Culebra Cut was a source of never-ending excitement and enchantment to Hildreth, though his glimpses were few until eleven o'clock, when the morning shift was over, as the working hours all over the Zone are eight to eleven, and two until five. All over the Cut he heard the warning shrieks of the steam shovel whistles as a "dobey" shot went off, dynamite having been plastered against the side of a rock too big for a shovel dipper, and it was blown into smaller bits, easier handled. At times hundred-weights of rock hurtled high in air, and then there was hasty dodging in the Cut.

There were a hundred miles of tracks in the nine miles of Culebra Cut, and over them dozens of dirt trains and empties, with their ridiculous little engines, rattled constantly in a most bewildering chaos, sliding down grade toward the Pacific or Gatun, or climbing up to the shovels with empties, crossing and recrossing through switches at every few yards. Here Jamaican negroes were switchmen, and they waved red and white flags insanely; but with all the bustle and roar, there was never any confusion.

No wonder that Carvel Hildreth, on his first day of work in Culebra Cut, had no time to think of the

bitterness that had been his in the two weeks that had passed since the football game at Ballard. He was becoming more and more fascinated and impressed with each succeeding demonstration of the wonderful efficiency of Colonel Goethals' administration, and he thrilled with the thought that *he* was one of the Canal Zone Americans, laboring for its success, and living with these earnest, purposeful fellows in bachelor quarters at Culebra.

And more than all, he told himself that he was working, earning his own living by the sweat of his brow! He pictured his lazy, careless life at college, studying little, lounging in his cozy room, or downtown in some escapade; he had thought he was happy then, but now, despite the aches of his body, there was a glow of satisfaction that he could not forget. At times he felt like throwing down the shovel in despair, for he was racked with pain and the torture of muscles that had not been used before, but he stuck grimly.

Yet the physical strain on him, football athlete that he was, had proved to be something terrible. He sweated profusely in the red-hot glow from 33's furnace fires, and the shovel handle wore big blisters on his hands that broke, and burned when the coal grit got into them. There were more muscles in his anatomy than he had ever dreamed of, and each was an aching, paining source of agony, while he was sure his back was broken.

"I will stick!" he panted, as the whistle tooted and the rattle of the chains sounded again. "I

won't let Rosslyn say I am a quitter, not after the way he acted yesterday!"

It was the supreme test, and Hildreth, thanks to Rosslyn's presence, and the spell of the Big Job, was on the way to stand it. At times he thought of Douglas Corning, and he envied his shipmate his easy job as compared with the torture of his own; then he felt that impression that is shared by all engineers, surveyors, dynamite men, steam-shovel crews, and all who come in contact with the actual digging of the ditch—he was doing the *real* Canal work! He would rather sweat and dig at the coal until his hands bled, knowing that 33 was gnawing at the hill and aiding in this colossal task, than to be a white-handed official, or a flannel-foot!

At eleven o'clock, a welcome hour for Hildreth, the steam shovels all screeched in a most unearthly fashion, and the dynamite squad put on the finishing touches to their work that would provide broken rock for the shovels that afternoon. There was no loitering in the Cut, but all hurried for Culebra, to wash up and run in the commissary hotels for the fine meal the Commission serves to its employees for thirty cents, paid for by their commissary tickets, for all purchasing in the Zone is done by this means.

Bill Rosslyn, climbing down from the steam-shovel boom, came striding over the dirt and rock fragments to where Hildreth was wrapping his cracked, bleeding hands in rags. There was admiration in his gaze, and the collegian was astonished when he held out his hand to Carvel.

"Hildreth," said the Yale man frankly, "you were never a coward! I don't care what the papers say, I believe you told the truth yesterday. Will you shake hands now?"

It was wonderful what that morning's work in Culebra Cut had done for Hildreth, for he had actually sweated from his pores all the bitterness; the night before he would have refused to meet this friendly advance, after Bill's refusal to shake hands; but now, when he had toiled with Rosslyn on 33, he felt a strange comradeship. Were they not working together for the I. C. C., to build the Panama Canal?

"Sure," he answered heartily. "Ouch, Bill! Don't squeeze so, for my hands are as raw as steak! Are we ahead of 25?"

Rosslyn grinned. So this big, athletic-looking fellow was getting into the spirit of the work, that good-natured yet keen rivalry that is encouraged among the steam-shovel crews by the Commission! Already he was eager to know if *his* shovel was ahead of 25, which was crowding 33 for the month's excavation record.

"We are ten cubic yards behind," he answered, as they swung up the side of the Cut toward Culebra, "but you have got to shovel, pal, for that Harvard man is out to beat us. Ten yards is n't much to make up, when the shovel eats five at a swallow!"

At the commissary hotel, where the big dining room was filled with a noisy, chattering crowd of enthusiastic workers whose ardor grew with each



Earning his living by the sweat of his brow

succeeding day that saw the Big Job nearer completion at their hands, Hildreth and Bill Rosslyn found Bayliss, whose work as time keeper took him farther down the Cut. As the Panamanian waiters set their food before them, Hildreth told his companions of how he was awed and gripped by the Culebra Cut, and of how he had come to love his work of shoveling coal to 33's fires.

"That's the stuff!" rejoiced Bob. "But wait until morning, old man, and you have to crawl out of bed! If you can go to work to-morrow, and stick all day, even when the rain falls in torrents, then the worst is passed. By the way, I saw Mr. Barton, Neva, young Gonzales, and a Panamanian gentleman whom I took to be his father, over at Empire."

"They won't come through the Cut!" gasped Hildreth, who dreaded having his old friends see him do the work of a Barbadoes negro. "I can't have them see me shoveling coal!"

"I am afraid you are in for it," grinned Bob. "They have a special at the station at Empire, where they are eating dinner, and they will come through the Cut to Bas Obispo; the track runs right by number 33, too!"

After dinner they had until two o'clock for rest, and the tired collegian made the most of his opportunity, though it would have been better had he kept in motion, for lying down made his muscles stiffen. But his zeal mastered his weariness, and after the steam-shovel whistle chorus summoned

the army of gnomes to labor in the dark abyss, he was shoveling coal with a will, though his hands were cracked open, and bleeding.

Bob's prophecy was fulfilled, for near three o'clock, when the work in the Cut was tearing along at top speed, a motor car came rolling along the track that passed within a few yards of 33, and to Hildreth's consternation he saw that Mr. Barton and his party were in it. The guide, supplied by the Commission, had the special stop near the roaring monster that nosed into the rocks and dirt, swung around to the flat car, and then vomited its mouthful over a fourth of its surface.

"Here we have a close view of a steam shovel at work!" he called, above the clatter and confusion. "Observe the immense load that the dipper can take up and deposit on the flat car! You will see that this shovel keeps the tired Barbadoes negro shoveling coal at a great rate!"

This was one on Hildreth, for the guide had not observed that there was a white American stoking 33's fires. But Neva and her father, gazing at the young fellow who so persistently kept his back toward them, wondered why 33 had him, instead of the peon labor they had seen at other shovels. Even young Gonzales did not recognize Hildreth, and he was hoping that all would go well, when Bill Rosslyn unconsciously spoiled everything.

"Say, Hildreth," he bawled from the boom. "let out another notch, old man! I see 25 is making a big hole in the top of the slide!"

"Hildreth!" echoed the promoter, stepping down. "Why, Neva, it's Carvel! Young fellow, what under the sun are you doing this for? Does your father know you are doing the work of a peon down here?"

He had hastened to Hildreth, but he had to wait till the collegian swung a shovelful of coal on the blazing furnace of 33. Then Hildreth, his face red with the heat, and grimed with smoke and dirt, grinned through his black mask at Mr. Barton.

"Well, Mr. Barton," he said pleasantly, "how goes the scheme to get land in Bocas del Toro? Have the titles been cleared yet?"

"Carvel," Mr. Barton lowered his voice, "I confess that I am worried; I believe the Gonzales are guilty of trickery, and from what I have seen, and what Neva told me occurred on the ship, I am convinced that they are trying to steal my options, and tear them up!

"I have seen the government at Panama City, and I believe that the deeds to the Bocas del Toro land can easily be cleared up, so that I shall be able to buy with clear titles. That seems to anger these Panamanians, for I hold a first option on the valuable banana land, and they have a second option. They want my land, but hate to share their own in the interior, which I have been after."

"I have suspected that all along," agreed Hildreth. "He tempted you with promises to sell or share his interior acres, just to keep with you. Let him destroy the first option you hold on the Bocas del

Toro property, so he can use his second option, and he will throw you down."

After a few more words, for Bill Rosslyn was chafing with fear that this delay would let 25 gain a lap on the record, Mr. Barton, who was plainly worried, walked back to the car. José Gonzales, who had been staring at Carvel, remembered the experience with this collegian on the *Cristobal*, and made a remark that stung Hildreth.

"In ze Canal Zone, Mees Barton," he said suavely, "ze men of brains do ze superintending, and ze brutes do ze labor!"

But Neva was gazing at Hildreth wonderingly, and Carvel persuaded himself there was a touch of admiration in her look. The girl watched the splendid muscles ripple up and down his back, and wondered that this childhood playmate, brought up in luxury, could stand such hard work. She began to hope that he might gain courage, by this mingling with men, to return to college; then Mr. Barton, after inviting Carvel to visit them at the Tivoli in Ancon, went away, and the special rolled on through the Cut.

Two hours later the whistles announced the end of the day's toil, and Hildreth, almost ready to drop with fatigue, was heartily glad. His body was tired and aching, but his spirit was fresh, for he was thoroughly under the thrall of the Big Job. He walked to Culebra with Rosslyn, and leaving that toughened athlete, he went into his room, to fling himself at full length on the bed.

"My first day's work!" he told himself contentedly. "And I stuck! To-morrow will be hard, but not like to-day. I have shown myself and the others that I can make good here!"

He was one big ache from head to foot, his torn hands throbbled with pain, and his wrenched muscles ground on each other in a torturing way, but there was a strange satisfaction that rested him. Try as he would, he could not remember the bitterness at college; all he thought of was the wonderful Culebra Cut, with its myriads of workers, the big point of the Canal, and that *he* was working!

It had been a cruel test, from a physical standpoint, but Hildreth had stood it nobly. Now that he had not won the lottery prize, he had been thrown among men of purpose, he was toiling amid scenes that stirred his soul to a desire to be worth while; though he tried to shake it off, deep within him there was a thought that he would like to be back at Ballard, facing bravely the shame and loneliness he had left!

Before he went to sleep, to slumber as one dead until Bayliss and Corning called him to supper, he muttered sleepily to himself:

"I am really at work, and it's queer, but I believe I like it!"

CHAPTER XIV

BOB'S STORY

THE municipal band was giving the Sunday night concert in the Plaza del Central, Panama City.

The dreary, insistent tropical rain of the day had ceased, and the leaden clouds had broken into drifting masses through which the stars gleamed, and the moon shed a soft radiance down on the old cathedral by the square, and filtered through the broad palm fronds around the Plaza. From the windows of the Panazone Club on one side, and the University Club on the other, Panamanians and Americans listened to the music of the gayly uniformed native band.

A varied, brilliantly dressed crowd thronged the Plaza, for the Sunday night concert offers a dress parade to Panamanians. Through the walks, bordered with the bright tropical plants and flowers in a wild confusion of colors, moved the restless, shifting throngs. Short, dark-faced Panamanians, swarthy Spaniards, with the haughty, red-lipped Castillian belles, here a "yellow Chinee" from the city shops, and there a statuesque Greek woman; all impelled by the spirit of unrest that is bred in the tropical heat.

On the seats in the Plaza near the stand where the musicians gave the concert a number of Americans

from Ancon and the other government towns along the railroad were resting, white flanneled and at ease, in strange contrast to the hot-blooded Panamanians who were constantly on the move. Some had brought their wives, and little children played about, under the mothers' watchful eyes; it was for all the world like a city square back in the States, so far as the Americans were concerned.

On a seat some distance from where the spires of the ancient cathedral reared themselves in the pale moonlight, sat Carvel Hildreth and Bob Bayliss, who had spent most of the afternoon in seeing Panama City, Balboa, and the picturesque ruins of Old Panama. Bayliss, since his father was an official in the Canal Zone, had seen most of the Isthmus near the Canal, but he was mildly interested in watching the Panamanian belles, accompanied by their mothers, followed at a safe distance around and around the square by their admirers.

To Hildreth, however, Panama was a source of never-ending pleasure. He had landed in Cristobal a week before, and was now shoveling coal for steam shovel 33, in Culebra Cut, having pluckily stayed at his job after the terrible first day. The curious habits of the Spiggoty people interested him, and the wonderful scenery was a revelation, with beautiful foliage and luxuriant vegetation. He had never ceased to wonder at the contrast between the modern appearance of the Canal Zone, and the ancient, shiftless, and indolent Panamanian towns.

With a careless indifference to the fact that the band was playing furiously some Panamanian air, Hildreth, with a feeling of patriotism, was whistling "My Country, 'T is of Thee!" as he watched the crowds surge past them. Born and reared an American, he was proud of his native land, and all the more now, having seen the marvelous achievement of the government on the Big Ditch.

"Shut up, Hildreth!" Bob spoke irritably. "The band is n't playing any of your national airs. Wait until the finish, when they pander to the applause of the Americans in the Plaza by murdering 'The Star Spangled Banner.' "

Carvel stopped whistling and looked in wonder at his chum.

"My national airs?" he repeated. "Why, are n't they yours, too?"

"I have n't any," said Bayliss with bitterness. "To me 'The Watch on the Rhine,' the 'Battle Hymn of Austria,' 'Yankee Doodle,' and 'God Save the King,' are one and the same. How can you expect me to get up and cheer when the band plays 'The Star Spangled Banner'? I left the United States when I was two years old, and I landed in New York two years ago in September, for the first time, to enter Hamilton."

Bob had never referred to the trouble that he had mentioned on the *Cristobal*, and he hesitated a moment now, then went on.

"You have told me what bitterness has been yours," he said, "and I am trying to make you go

back to Ballard and fight it out there. I am going to tell you why I cannot feel like cheering when the band plays American airs.

“When I was two years old, Dad, who was then a promoter, was appointed the foreign representative of a large American company that was formed to promote and build factories in European countries. He took me with him, as my mother had died a few months before, and as a result I grew up in several lands; a year or two in England, a part of my childhood in France, some time in Germany, three years in Switzerland, and short periods in Egypt and other places. Not until I was to enter college did Dad, a Hamilton graduate, send me back to the States, for he came here to Panama.

“As a natural consequence, Hildreth, I am a proficient linguist, for I have a knowledge of several languages, but I have no love for any particular country. I admire the beautiful scenery of rural England, the vastness of London; I am enthusiastic over gay Paris, and the industry of the German people is wonderful; the wild beauty of the Swiss mountains is thrilling, but I feel no pride in any one of these lands. As for the United States, it is only a land that my father boasts of, and in which I feel no interest.”

“But your father?” asked Hildreth. “Does n't this trouble him?”

“It is a source of keen regret to him,” confessed Bayliss, “that I feel no love for the ‘Land of the free, and the home of the brave,’ but he understands

that it is the inevitable result of the roaming life I have led until now. He says that he should have left me in the States, to be brought up with a patriotic love for the land of my birth, but he was lonely, for mother had died, so he wanted me with him. Now he hopes that in some way a spirit of patriotism will be awakened in me for the United States."

"I understand," answered Hildreth gently. "But it is the land of your birth, Bob, and it seems impossible that sooner or later you will not love it. Why, don't you feel a thrill when you see the Canal, with the Cut, the gigantic work at Gatun, and know that our nation is making a success of it all?"

"That's it!" returned Bob gloomily. "It's your nation, Hildreth. I'd like to feel that *my* country is doing the Big Job, but there would have to be an administration of Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, Egyptians, and Swiss before I could arise and sing an anthem of praise composed in several languages."

Hildreth was forced to laugh, but he sobered instantly.

"I won't talk about it now, old man," he said earnestly, "but I have hopes of making a true American of you before I leave the Canal Zone. You are working to make a man of me, and to make me go back to Ballard, as I should, so I'll take a hand with you, Bob. Well, you have your bitterness, as well as I; I have n't a college, or a father, but you have n't a country!"

"By the way, Carvel," remarked Bayliss, after a pause, "after the concert we must walk over to the University Club. Mr. MacDonald, the secretary of the Games Committee of the Y. M. C. A. League, who has charge of the big meet at Cristobal next week, called me by telephone to-day and asked me to meet him there at ten, and to bring you along."

"Bring me?" echoed Hildreth. "I wonder what he wants?"

"I have an idea he wants you to run," explained Bob. "You see, the Americans here get fearfully lonely, despite the baseball games and tennis, so they are eager for any big event, and a track meet in the Canal Zone is a great day. There are lots of college men from the States, and the events are well contested."

"Then you must get in shape, Bob!" exclaimed Hildreth enthusiastically. "I saw you run in our dual meet with Hamilton, and if you can't beat any runner for a quarter mile that is in the Canal Zone, I am mistaken!"

He remembered the quarter mile in which Bayliss had broken the tape ahead of the Ballard sprinters with ease, and he was confident that his chum could win that event in the Cristobal meet. As for himself, he had gone in for field events at Ballard, being a pole vaulter, and he was not sure of being able to place against such former 'Varsity stars as would be in the meet.

"There it goes!" exclaimed Bob, as the band

struck into the closing piece with a crash, "The Star Spangled Banner," played out of courtesy to the numerous Americans in the Plaza. Hildreth arose with the rest of his countrymen and took off his hat while the selection was being played, but Bayliss, with a set expression on his face, remained seated. When the last strains and the applause had died away, Carvel turned to him in surprise.

"Why, you did n't take off your hat, Bob!" he exclaimed. "I could never have remained still while that selection was being played."

"You are an American," reminded Bayliss sadly, "while I am a composite nothing. You felt your heart leap when they played it, but I was not moved. It would have meant the same to me if the band had played the national air of any country. I have tried hard to be an American, for Dad's sake, but I can't do it!"

There was a bitter sorrow in his tone that touched Carvel, and made him forget the anger he had felt at seeing Bob remain seated during the playing of the piece that had made him surge with pride of country. He changed the conversation into another channel as they arose and walked through the Plaza to the University Club.

"Now we shall see what this Mr. MacDonald wants of you, Bob," he laughed. "He must have some great plan for entertaining the Canal workers, and wants you to show your wonderful speed in the event you star in always. But why he told you to bring me along is a puzzle."

"Well," returned Bob, as they walked up the steps, "here we are."

An attendant informed them that Mr. MacDonald was in the reading room, and they hastened to find him. To their amazement, they found there were several other young fellows with the secretary of the Games Committee. One of them, a short, sullen-looking Panamanian, Bayliss recognized as Pedro Nunez, son of an interpreter in the Isthmian Canal Commission, and he eyed the chap with suspicion, for he knew Nunez to be treacherous and unreliable. The others he knew slightly, for all were employed on the Canal in some manner, either as clerks, time keepers, or in some other of the numberless positions on the Big Job.

"I was waiting for you, Bayliss," said Mr. MacDonald, who was a Princeton man, and an excavation train engineer in the Cut, "and for your friend. You will be surprised to see what a 'congress of nations' I have assembled here to-night. These fellows are Nunez of Panama, Lockwood of England, Lefevre of France, and Oleson of Sweden; this is Bob Bayliss of the Canal Zone, and his friend, Hildreth."

"Ay bane glad to meet you," said Oleson gravely. He was a stout, sturdy chap, with white hair and red face.

"*Oui!*" agreed Lefevre, who was tall and thin. "I am charmed."

"Quite a joke, don't you know," laughed Lockwood. "This beats the Hague Peace Conference,

y' understand. Tell them what a jolly good plan you have, Mr. MacDonald!"

Nunez's shifty eyes scrutinized Bob's fine build with appraising gaze, and at once Hildreth took an instinctive dislike to the little Panamanian, for he read in his face a cunning deceit, and an animal cruelty that would stop at nothing in the accomplishment of a cherished ambition.

"In looking over the entries for the quarter mile in the Cristobal meet next week," began the secretary of the Games Committee, "I found to my surprise that five nationalities were represented. I conceived the idea of having an international race, and the committee decided it would be a great thing, so I got you fellows to meet each other here."

CHAPTER XV

BOB DECIDES

“AN international race!” breathed Hildreth. “What a hit that will make! Say, Bob, I envy you your sprinting powers; would n’t I like to represent the United States in that event!”

Bayliss waved him aside with a gesture of weariness.

“Each contestant will wear his national colors,” continued Mr. MacDonald, “and the band will play the airs of the different countries. All have agreed but Bayliss, and I will enter him to represent the United States, if he is willing.”

“Eet weel be a great race!” said Pedro Nunez, a queer gleam in his black eyes. “I haf seen all ze fellows run but Meester Bayliss, and they are fast. Me, I cannot run fast enough to win for ze Republic of Panama.”

“Don’t you believe that, fellows,” said Bob quickly. “He has torn off a quarter in fifty-two flat more than once.”

“Hurry up, old man,” urged Hildreth. “Tell Mr. MacDonald that the plan is a great one, and that you will wear the Stars and Stripes in the international race at Cristobal!”

But Bayliss hesitated.

“Give me time to think it over,” he said to the secretary. “I don’t know that I want to enter

such a race, for there are reasons that I cannot explain to you. When must you have my decision?"

"By to-morrow at ten o'clock," said Mr. MacDonald promptly, "for the entries must be closed at that hour. You and Hildreth go home and talk it over, Bob, and call me up at the Culebra Y. M. C. A. to-morrow morning. Be sure and say that you will enter, for you are the fastest quarter-miler our country can enter."

"Come on, be a sport, old chap!" exhorted the English youth. "It's a bully idea, you know, to run for your own nation. Even Nunez here will run his heart out for his country!"

"I'll do as you advise, Mr. MacDonald," said Bob shortly. "Carvel and I will talk the matter over to-night, and let you know in the morning. There are some details in the affair that only he knows about. Good night."

They shook hands with the athletic secretary, who drew Hildreth aside and begged him to influence Bayliss to enter the race, as it had been for this purpose that he had sent for Carvel, too; then they descended to the street. The other fellows followed. Lockwood and Lefevre lived in Empire, but would be at the Tivoli, in Ancon, that night; Oleson, from Gorgona, was at the Panazone, and Nunez lived in Panama City. Hildreth and Bayliss, as it was too late for a train to Culebra, had arranged to bunk with friends in the Ancon bachelor quarters.

Nothing was said between Bob and Hildreth concerning the race until after they had left the

other two below the railroad station on the Avenida del Central, where one road winds over the slope to the Hotel Tivoli, and the other turns to the left and leads to the American town of Ancon, on past the caravansary.

“Of course you will represent the United States?” questioned Hildreth with eagerness. “I have come to understand why, down here in this torrid land, the Americans get more enjoyment out of baseball and track meets than we do in the States. This unusual race is for the purpose of helping the Canal Zone people to enjoy a good time, so you must run for our nation.”

“I don’t know,” answered Bob slowly. “I have n’t any particular love for the United States, Hildreth, any more than I have for France or England. I don’t see why I should put on the Stars and Stripes and run in that race. If I were as ardent a patriot as you, it would be a different thing.”

“I just wish I could run the quarter!” exclaimed the Ballard collegian. “I would give anything to beat that treacherous little Nunez. He will win that race by fair means or foul, and if you run, Bob, keep a watch on him. But even if you haven’t any love for the best land on earth, old chum, for my sake run, will you?”

They were passing the fire-department house, turning to their left and walking down a side street of Ancon, between neat, orderly rows of screened houses to number 143, where they were to stay for the night with some of Bob’s friends. The moon

was bright overhead, and as Hildreth asked the question, Bob turned quickly at a sound in the road behind them, and caught sight of a form that slunk behind the vegetation at the roadside, in the shadows of the palms.

“Wait a minute!” he whispered to Carvel. “Some one is following us! Go on talking as though you suspected nothing, and when I touch your arm, make a dash into the shadows back of us, to the left. I think it is a Panamanian, and maybe he is out to rob us.”

A few seconds later Hildreth felt a hand on his arm, and obeying the signal, he whirled suddenly and ran in the direction of a figure that slipped from the shadows and sped down the road away from them. Hildreth was soon distanced in the chase, but Bayliss exerted all his speed and gained on the fugitive. A little past the fire-engine house they had lately passed, he made a flying tackle and cut the Panamanian to the ground.

The little fellow fought frantically, but when Hildreth came up he was quickly subdued, and together they turned him over, to let the tropical moon shine full in his dark face, distorted by fear and anger.

“Pedro Nunez!” cried Bayliss. “What do you mean, you tricky little Spiggoty? Why have you followed us here, when you live over in Panama City?”

“I will haf revenge!” snarled Nunez savagely. “I haf done nothing to you; I haf come thees way to

see some one in Ancon. What for haf you run after me, to knock me down? Ah, you call me tricky, you call me a little Spiggoty!"

"You followed to hear what we had to say," retorted Bob grimly. "And now you know just what we think of you. Get back to Panama as fast as your short legs will bear you, Pedro. If you don't run any faster than this in the international race, I think you will finish last."

Nunez drew himself up proudly.

"I will represent my country!" he declared dramatically. "I haf already run ze race faster than ze English, ze French, and ze Swede, and I fear them not. But you, Bayliss, I am 'fraid of; I hear you are fast. Leesten; you haf insult me, and I will haf revenge! I will win ze race from ze United States, eef I have to keel both of you to do eet!"

"Try it!" blazed Bayliss, his temper aroused at last. "I'll be in that race, Nunez, and I'll beat you, no matter what you do or say! I can give you ten yards and then beat you out. You try any killing business, and we'll give you a good spanking!"

Nunez shrank back and retreated a few paces. But before he turned and hurried down the macadamized road toward Panama City, he shot his parting arrow.

"Remember!" he taunted. "There ees many a slip between ze cup and ze lip! Down with ze United States! Ze Republic of Panama will win ze race!"

They watched him until the shadows far down the road had swallowed him up. From the Hotel Tivoli, across from where they stood, there came the sound of music, and the hotel was ablaze with light, for all the American and Panamanian notables were in the ballroom for a diplomatic dance. Back of them, Ancon Hill looked dark and impressive, looming against the clear sky.

"Well," exclaimed Bayliss, "what did I tell you? And that is no idle threat of his, Carvel, for these Latin-Americans have no idea of law and order. He would as soon have you and me knifed and flung from the Sea Wall into the Bay of Panama as not."

"We must be on our guard," cautioned Hildreth. "He is nothing if not patriotic, and he wants to win for his country. By the way, Bob, you talked as though you intend to be in that international event."

Bob faced his companion.

"You are right; I shall run it!" he declared. "But it is because I am not going to let that little sneak beat me, Carvel. You may tie the Stars and Stripes on me and yell when *your* country wins the race, but I'll win it for my own sake, and not for the United States. I have n't a country, but I can't stand by and see Nunez make this dinky little republic carry off the glory!"

Hildreth smiled, but refrained from telling Bob what his opinion on the matter was. He only said, teasingly:

"Not that you love the United States more, but Panama less. Well, you call up Mr. MacDonald

to-morrow and tell him that you will run for the U. S. A. That will assure us of victory, no matter what makes you run. I have hopes of landing a country for you before long, Bob. How would the Republic of Panama strike you?"

Then Bayliss chased him into the house.

CHAPTER XVI

HILDRETH'S PLOT

ALL the week that passed before the Saturday of the big track meet at Cristobal, Hildreth was so occupied in thinking of his friend's strange plight that he entirely forgot his own exile from college and home. While he shoveled coal to the blazing fires of 33, a task that was easy now, as his muscles were like iron, he tried to think of some way to make a real American of Bob Bayliss. At times he became so engrossed in thought that Bill Rosslyn, peering down from the boom, had to remind him in a polite yell that 25 was five cubic yards ahead of them.

On the morning of the day before the meet, Bayliss joyfully informed Hildreth that he had secured leave of absence for them until Monday, though Corning, who was not under Mr. Bayliss' supervision, would have to work until Saturday at noon. The Commission had kindly allowed the men entered in the track events to have this time off, in order to prepare for their contests, for the I. C. C. is ever ready to encourage anything that helps make the Americans content.

"Then I have a plan to suggest," rejoined Hildreth, who was happy at this chance to try his idea of making Bob a patriot. "Let's take the first

train over to Gatun, and stay between trains there; I have never seen the locks and dam at close range."

"And then stay in Cristobal to-night?" queried Bayliss, as they arose from the breakfast table at the commissary hotel. "That is a good thought, Carvel, for it will give me a chance to see how the work at Gatun is progressing, and then I can get a good night's rest before the meet."

The workers at each important place in the Canal Zone, as Culebra Cut, Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, and Gatun, are always eager to see how their rivals are progressing; those who labor in the Cut run over to Gatun on Sundays to watch the rising of the lock walls, the men quarrying rock down on the island of Porto Bello take the tug to Cristobal, and then the trains to see the Canal, and there is a keen interest in all of the Big Ditch by the various sections. It is *their* work, *their* accomplishment, and they are justly proud of it.

Leaving the hotel, they had to sprint for Culebra station, as the yellow train was already pulling in. Both had their commissary ticket books, and they reached the platform in time to swing aboard the first-class car as the engine began to puff for a start. Seating themselves in the rattan chairs, they looked from the window at the clouded sky that frowned on the smoky Cut.

"Rain to-morrow," said Bob gloomily. "This is the rainy season, and we cannot expect good weather, not even for the big meet. That is about

the only thing that the I. C. C. can't regulate in the Canal Zone—the weather!"

A little over an hour's ride brought them to the station at Gatun, half a mile from the gigantic work on the dam and locks, and they left the train. It was a part of Carvel's plan for Bob's patriotism to get Bayliss to feel what so awed the Ballard collegian—the immensity of the undertaking that the United States was bringing to a successful completion. He hoped that when Bob thought seriously of what colossal things had been achieved, as he himself had been impressed in the barren room at the Colon hotel, where the old-timer held him enthralled, he would surely have awakened within him a pride for this land of his birth.

As the train pulled out of the Gatun station Hildreth seized Bob's arm and pointed excitedly at a face that was peering from a window of the parlor car. It was that of the young Panamanian, Pedro Nunez.

"Now, I wonder what he is up to?" questioned Bayliss. "Oh, I guess he is on his way to Colon to spend the night before he runs in the meet. Most all of the athletes will do that, rather than ride on the crowded specials to-morrow."

They walked down the road from the station toward the Canal. Before them the great Gatun Lake spread out, a hundred and fifty square miles of water, held in place by the enormous Gatun dam, a small mountain range in itself. The dam runs a mile and a half from Gatun village across to the

other side of the Chagres Valley, and is a masterpiece of modern engineering, a project that was scoffed at when suggested by the De Lesseps congress at Paris, in 1879.

While they stood gazing at the marvelous scene, a young engineer in yellow shirt and corduroy trousers, with leather puttees, came up to Bayliss and shook hands cordially. He was a Cornell engineer, and Bob had met him several times in Culebra Cut; he was introduced to Hildreth as "Tug" Worthington, the former Red and White fullback.

"How was the dam made?" responded the engineer, in answer to a query from the enthralled Hildreth. "Well, I have been at work on it ever since the start, so I guess I am competent to say a little about it. At first we ran a parallel line of trestles across, about a quarter-mile apart, and the dirt and excavation trains from Culebra Cut made a continuous line, going and coming with spoils, which they dumped at the foot of each trestle.

"They called these places the 'toes' of the dam, and loose rock, from the steam shovels in the Cut, was brought on the rock trains and dumped on these heaps of dirt until they were sixty-five feet above the sea; then the weight of the toes pressed out the soft soil below them until they sank to a solid foundation. The suction dredges are filling between them with sand and clay; outside of the toes material is being placed.

"When the dam is completed, which will be soon,

it will be a mile and a half long, one hundred and fifteen feet high, eighty feet wide at the top, and close to a mile wide at the bottom!"

"Think of that, Bob!" gasped Hildreth. "Human beings have constructed such an immense thing, and Americans they are, too!"

Near the middle of the dam a hill of solid stone arose, which the engineer informed them was the foundation for the spillway, to relieve the dam of the strain that will come when the freshets cause the Chagres River to pour vast volumes of water into the lake.

"Up at Gamboa," said Worthington, "the water rose forty feet inside of twelve hours, one time. The *Canal Record* shows—you can read the back copies from the start of the Canal work—that we have had corps of men inspecting the watersheds that empty into the Chagres Valley, which we have dammed here. And they are the true heroes of this mighty enterprise, too!"

"Why?" demanded Bayliss. "Is their work harder than any other?"

"They plunged into the jungles outside the Zone," explained Mr. Worthington, "far from the sanitation that has been done here. *Machete* wielders cut a path through the virgin jungle, so the surveyors could follow, and the men swallowed sulphate of quinine all the time, forty or more grains a day. At regular intervals fever victims floated down the river in native canoes, to the hospital at Ancon.

"But the results have repaid them. They have

maps of the watersheds, records of the rains and droughts, and the problem of keeping the water in the lake is correctly solved; down to level in wet season, and up to it in the dry. There is to be a system of gates on the spillway, to regulate the flow of water.

“By telephone, rapid rises of water in the upper regions of the Chagres will be reported to the man in charge of the spillway, and he will figure out how many gates to open, so as to keep the water at the right level. And so wonderful is the system here, that the water flowing through the spillway is not wasted, but will be used by a turbine plant to make electricity for the operation of the gates, and the apparatus that will tow ships through the locks.”

Accompanied by the engineer, they walked toward the locks. As they neared the scene of industry they saw the excavation trains rumbling from Culebra, and Hildreth was given the chance to witness what was done with the earth and rocks that he helped 33 to dig from the hillside of the Cut. There were great berm cranes on top of the ninety-foot walls, sliding concrete into the caverns below; huge concrete mixers rattled and roared, machinery clanked, yet all this with a definite purpose of accomplishment.

Hildreth had been thrilled at seeing Culebra Cut for the first time, but a close view of Gatun impressed him into silence. Here was an intimate sight of the great locks that were the awe and admiration of an engineering world; here was a vast lake, built as

a side issue to the work itself, and dammed by a mountain thrown across a valley!

"And the United States is doing this!" he exulted, with a covert glance at Bayliss, who was gazing raptly at the sight. "Does n't that make you feel proud of your country, Bob, that it is doing this stupendous work?"

"I have no country," said Bayliss briefly.

"The locks are made in duplicate here," resumed the engineer, "as well as at Miraflores and Pedro Miguel. They are at Gatun one thousand feet long, a hundred and ten feet wide, and forty-one feet deep, all of solid concrete!"

Standing on the edge of one of these gigantic chambers, they peered down at the depths below, where the myrmidons of men rushed to and fro. They could see across a valley a hundred feet wide to the center wall, and three quarters of a mile toward the end of the three immense locks. It was a sight that must be seen to be grasped in its vastness, for no descriptions can bring to mind a picture of the Gatun locks.

The engineer who had helped to build this Gatun dam, which would stand as a lasting monument to his prowess, went with them all over the place; they descended by the spiral iron staircase to the very bottom of the locks, and saw the tracks laid on the floors, with the little trains puffing through noisily, bearing tons of concrete for the mixers.

"Think it all over, old man," said Hildreth softly, after Worthington had left them. "Begin at the

very start of it all, when the jungle had to be conquered, the fever driven away, and the towns built. Think of what has been accomplished in these years of American administration—the building of whole towns, the bringing to Panama of a new nation, with a working system of life!”

“It is wonderful,” admitted Bob. “I have lived and worked with it all, Hildreth, but not until to-day have I viewed the work as an outsider might, and I feel thrilled with the mightiness of it all.”

They went from point to point, seeing the great dam, the spillway over which water was roaring, the locks, and every part of the work at Gatun, before the tropical darkness fell; and then the day shift went off, at five, and the night workers came on, for at Gatun the work goes on without cessation. The thousands of electric lights strung from place to place, and extending across the dam, flashed into existence, and the scene was like fairyland, with gnomes and pygmies at work in the abysmal depths of the lock chambers.

“It has been a wonderful revelation!” breathed Bayliss, as they hurried to catch the seven-o’clock train for Colon. “It is well worth a trip to Panama just to see it. I have become used to Culebra Cut, but I never dreamed that Gatun was so enormous a project.”

Hildreth was well satisfied. He had suspected that Bayliss, like others at work on the Big Ditch, had been so engrossed with his own job that he had

never taken the time to view the Canal building as an entirety, considering the years of preparation, the sanitation, and other aspects. Once Bayliss caught the magnitude of it all, as Hildreth had done from the old-timer, there was hope. It seemed strange that Hildreth, with his bitterness of exile, should be striving to make an American of Bob Bayliss, who was working to make a man of the Ballard collegian!

“As a finishing touch,” laughed Carvel, when they were on the train and flying through the dark jungle, “we shall stroll over Colon, with its squalor and indolence, and see what a difference there is between the American towns and the native places.”

“I think I understand things better,” said Bayliss slowly. “I have n’t a country yet, but if I could choose, I know which one would do for me!”

CHAPTER XXVII

KIDNAPED IN COLON

IT was dark when the train rattled past Lion Hill, Tiger Hill, Monkey Hill, past the repair shops outside of Cristobal, skirting the edge of the American town itself, and sliding down the Avenida del Frente, Colon, to the railroad station. Hildreth, looking out at the lighted thoroughfare, recalled the events that had followed in bewildering succession since the moment when he found he had missed the special bearing Corning and Bayliss away: the night with the old-timer, the loss of his money, the lottery ticket, with his joy at winning, the cruel disappointment in Panama City, and then the meeting with Bob.

Somehow, except for the moment of bitterness when Bill Rosslyn had refused to shake hands, misery which the manly Yale chap had erased later, things seemed to have been brighter after the loss of the lottery. He had lost all of his old reckless attitude toward life, his supercilious scorn of work and of those who had to make their own way. He had mingled with purposeful men, he had breathed the fine atmosphere of the Canal achievement, and best, he had learned to love work.

"Let's take a stroll over Colon," suggested Bob, as they sauntered across to the brilliantly lighted

Avenida del Frente, a blaze of continuous brilliance, for crowds of Americans had come in from the Canal, to be on hand for the big meet at Cristobal the next day.

Bob was strangely silent as they pushed through the crowds on the street; past the Chinese and Japanese curio shops, the Jewish clothing stores, the Greek restaurants, and the noisy cafés. On past the Lotterie de Panama they strolled, and Hildreth laughed as he remembered his happiness at having, as he had thought, won the prize. He thought of the rivalry with steam shovel 25, the joy of feeding the fires of 33, with big Bill Rosslyn grinning from the boom, and Mr. MacNamara in the engine room. He would have missed all that had he won the lottery; he would have been the same indolent, heedless Hildreth, of Ballard!

The Panamanian town was a great beehive now, throbbing with life; Saturday night had been pushed back, for the Commission had ordered a holiday in honor of the big meet. A "congress of nations" surged along the sidewalks, with Americans, sailors from the shipping of Colon, Panamanians, Spaniards, Barbadoes and Jamaican negroes, Greeks, and orientals. Music sounded in the cafés, with loud talking and singing; the lottery women called their wares in high, cracked voices, and Hildreth thrilled with a scene old to Bayliss.

"Colon was knee-deep in mud before the Americans came," remarked Bob, as they turned down a side street, with barnlike houses on each side, some

with double porches, and dark stairways running up from the pavement. "But it is n't so fine even now, when we have installed sewers, electric lights, and telephones. Here we are in the *cantina* district, the vilest of Colon."

The noise and confusion on the Avenida del Frente had been that of business and commerce; here, on the Calle de Paez, there came sounds of revelry, the shouts of drunken men, and the tinkling of musical instruments, with the notes of a ribald song. There was the clinking of glasses behind the swinging doors, the harsh echoes of quarreling voices, and a mad unrest surged through the whole section, as on the night that Hildreth had helped Billy Long.

American sailors and soldiers passed along the narrow street, the little Panamanian policemen sauntered past, or idly looked at the scenes of riot and confusion. There seemed to be a dozen fights in progress at once, yet the brave police force of Colon remained discreetly away from the turmoil, when Americans were concerned in it.

"What a lawless town!" shuddered Hildreth. "Murder and arson seem to haunt the streets! Let's get out of here and go to Cristobal, before we are robbed or assaulted!"

They had gone some distance down the side street, which ended aimlessly in a stretch of sandy, water-soaked land outside of Colon. Now, when they turned to retrace their steps toward the better lighted business section, they were confronted by

four men, dark Panamanians, who blocked their way. Bayliss stepped back against the side of the house to let them pass, but they paused before the two fellows, and by the malignant expression on their faces, Bob knew they were in for trouble.

"Well?" demanded Hildreth angrily. "What do you want? Let us get past."

"Eet ees you we want!" said one of the four. "Will you come with us in peace, or must we make eet that you come? See, we haf peestols; one shout, and we put ze holes in you! Will you come, now?"

The street at that point was dark and deserted, and there seemed to be no help near, while the revolvers pointed ominously at their hearts. It was useless to resist the weapons, though the collegians felt sure they could have fought off the little Panamanians and made their escape under ordinary conditions. The only course to pursue was to give themselves up to their captors and await a better opportunity to escape.

Memories of what he had read concerning the dark Panamanian dungeons came to Hildreth's mind, tales of the rank injustice done to American prisoners, left to rot in their underground cells, without ever a chance of escape. He knew the enmity of the Panamanians toward the Americans, and for a moment he thought a fight would be better than captivity. But he realized that they were in a deserted place, where they could be shot down without their captors being caught.

"We'll have to go with you," said Bob, in a rage, "but you can bet that when Colonel Goethals hears of this there will be trouble for your insignificant little republic! If you want our money, take it, and let us go."

"We not want ze money," said the spokesman of the kidnaping party. "We haf you two, and that is what we want! Turn around and march along ze street till I say halt. March!"

Not caring to start an argument with four loaded revolvers held by hotheaded, lawless Panamanians, the two Americans obeyed, and the six marched along the street; past the *cantinas* they strode, with the four Panamanians around them. At last a dark, ramshackle structure reared its ungainly, two-porched height before them, and they were commanded to halt. They stood at the foot of a stairway that went from the pavement to the dark, mysterious regions above.

"Up!" was the command. Then, as they hesitated, "Queeck, or we shoot!"

There was nothing to do but obey, no matter what fate awaited them in the black darkness before them. They stumbled fearfully up the shaking, rickety stairs into the silent gloom above, with their hearts pounding at a great rate, for their destination was unknown. They could ascribe no reason for the high-handed kidnaping unless they were to be held for ransom, or murdered and put out of the way. They were pushed roughly into a room, and a second later a light flashed on.

Their four captors wore black masks, but had they not been disguised it would have been hard for Hildreth to identify them anywhere, for to him all the Panamanians looked alike. But Bob surveyed them closely as they closed the door. After a hurried conversation between two of them in Spanish, the other two left the room. Those who remained, seated themselves on the floor, revolvers in hand, and kept a close watch on the prisoners.

"Well!" ejaculated Bob. "Of all the cool, outrageous proceedings! What under the sun do they want of us, anyway? I wish I could talk their jabber. I'd tell them what I think of them, one and all!"

"Let's yell!" suggested Carvel. "Perhaps some one will hear us, and come to our assistance. Anything is better than this suspense."

"No use," returned Bayliss quickly. "We are in a section of Colon where murder can be done and no one will care a snap. Besides, if we shout, these bandits may shoot. No, we have plenty of time to match our American brains against the cunning of these Latin-Americans, so let's keep cool."

An hour dragged by, then there came the sound of feet on the wooden stairs. The door shook as a series of knocks came, evidently a signal, and this time three figures, all masked, entered the room. One of them was smaller than the others, and instantly a sudden suspicion flashed on the mind of Bob Bayliss.

“Pedro Nunez!” he cried. “Take off that mask, you sneak! I know who you are! You hid your ugly face, but you forgot to cover that scar on your right hand! Let us out of here, or you will suffer!”

“Bah!” panted the Panamanian, tearing the black handkerchief from his face. “What care I eef you know who eet ees? I said that you, Bayliss, would not run in ze race to-morrow, and now you see I keep my word. These men shall guard you to-night, and in ze morning you shall be bound. After ze international race is won by me for ze Republic of Panama, you are free!”

“But,” argued Hildreth craftily, “I am not to run in that race, Nunez. What is the use of trussing me up, when I am not against you? Let me go, but keep Bayliss, if you will.”

Pedro Nunez laughed loudly.

“You Americans sink we Panamanians haf not ze brain!” he chuckled. “You would not gif ze alarm, oh, no! You would not haf ze Canal Zone poleece down here in an hour, eh? No! You are in ze bad company with Bayliss, and you stay here till I haf won ze race!”

The Panamanian runner gave some directions to his men in Spanish, and they listened with attention. It was evident that Nunez, senior, must be a man of much importance in the bitter politics of Panama, for his son was obeyed without question by his four henchmen.

Nunez paused at the door for a farewell fling at his prisoners.

"There ees many a slip, eh?" he reminded tauntingly. "Remember eet when ze time for ze race comes to-morrow! Ze Republic of Panama shall cross ze line a winner, while ze great United States of America, where ees he? A captive in ze power of Pedro Nunez! *Adios*, Americans!"

He was gone, leaving Bob and Hildreth to writhe in helpless rage. For a moment Bayliss was tempted to rush the guards, despite the threatening revolvers, but his cooler judgment prevailed, and he restrained his desire to attempt such a reckless action. Two of the Panamanians, who had evidently been hired by Nunez only for the capture, went out, but the others remained.

"Maybe they will go to sleep," whispered Bayliss, "and then we can get away. I have got to be in that race to-morrow, Hildreth! I will never let that rascally little Panamanian get away with such a deed as this! I am going to run in that race! I must win!"

One of the guards left the room for a few minutes, returning with a coil of stout rope, which he touched significantly as he remarked with a triumphant smile:

"To-night, *senores*, we guard you. To-morrow, when eet ees time for Nunez to win ze race, ze ropes keep your anger down!"

"They will tie us!" exclaimed Hildreth angrily. "Then we shall never get out in time for the race, Bob! What are we to do?"

"Just wait!" counseled Bayliss, with determination in his face. "If Pedro Nunez thinks that his

Panamanian wits can beat the brains and grit of two native-born Americans, he will be badly fooled, Hildreth. It's the United States of America against the Republic of Panama, and we must win out!"

Bayliss did not see the gleam of satisfaction that shone in Hildreth's eyes at this brave declaration. Then the Ballard collegian turned over and went to sleep as peacefully as though the reputation of his country were not at stake, but Bob Bayliss sat still, staring at the two Panamanian guards, and thinking hard of some way to escape in time to win the international quarter-mile for —

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ESCAPE

FOR a long time Bob Bayliss sat with his back against the bare boards that formed the wall of the room; there was no plaster, and, like all the tropical houses, no window sashes or glass. It was about eleven o'clock now, and all the confusion of Colon floated through the open windows, with the riot from the *cantinas*, the singing, and the twanging of guitars. The two Panamanians sat by the door, one asleep while the other kept his vigil with the revolvers, and Hildreth still slumbered.

But there was no sleep for Bayliss, for too much depended on his escaping from that house where the cunning of Nunez had entrapped him and Carvel. He knew that what Pedro had said he would execute, if possible, and that they would not be set free until after the Cristobal track meet, where the Y. M. C. A. clubs would compete for a cup, and the international quarter-mile originated by Mr. MacDonald would cause intense rivalry and enthusiasm.

A thousand thoughts went fleeting through his mind as he sat in the bare room of the deserted house on the Calle de Paez, striving to coax slumber to his wide-open eyes. For the first time in all his stay in the Canal Zone, he had been able to get outside of his work, and to view the Big Job with the unprejudiced eyes of a stranger; he had become

so accustomed to working in Culebra Cut that its magnificence had dimmed, but the sight of Gatun had been a revelation.

Now he saw vividly the great gash laid open on the face of Nature, where the Americans had cut through the mountains to make a passage for the ships of all nations. The smoky, noisy scenes came back to him, and he understood the magnitude of the conquest, in which he had had his humble part; he linked it with Gatun, with Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, and with the years of preparation for work in the Canal Zone of Panama. He summed up the sanitation, the excavation, the making of a new nation in the jungle, the implanting of a social system, and as his mind grasped the whole marvelous achievement, instead of thinking of the Cut alone, because it was his own sphere, he felt as Hildreth had in the Palace Hotel at Colon, when the old-timer graphically made him see what the pioneers had suffered.

With this first comprehending of the Big Job, the dawning on him of its vast detail and completeness, with the power of its head, Colonel Goethals, and the mastery of the officials, the engineers, surveyors, and all of the Canal Zone army over seemingly insurmountable natural obstacles, came a flash of admiration for the nation that gave birth to such giants of mind and muscle. He began to see why the name "American" means achievement and prowess all over the world, a nation of men, dauntless and brave.

Bayliss' position was a natural one, resulting from

the way he had been brought up. Away from the United States from his second year until he came back to enter Hamilton College, he could not be expected to feel any love for the nation of his father. It would require some great influence to create this, and now it seemed that the mighty power and spell of the Big Job would accomplish it.

He started with a new thought; surely, it would never do for Nunez to succeed in his plot to keep the United States, the builder of the Panama Canal, from being represented in the international race that the Games Committee had planned for the track meet at Cristobal! A nation that had done such marvelous work in the Canal Zone must never be beaten by a one-horse republic like Panama. *He* was the one on whom the loyal Americans pinned their hopes of victory!

"I must escape and run for the United States!" he told himself. "It is not my country, of course, for I never had one, but we can't let that little Spiggoty defeat us. The United States of America has built the Canal, and Panama simply shan't beat such a nation in a track meet!"

Yet there seemed to be no hope of escape before the time when Nunez should see fit to free them. The hours of the night wore slowly on, the noise of Colon lessened a trifle, and still the Panamanians alternated on guard, taking turns at napping. Hildreth was sleeping as peacefully as though he were in his cot at Culebra, for he felt there was nothing that could be done.

But into Bob's heart there had crept a great admiration for the United States, and he was wild to make his escape and foil the treacherous Nunez by running in the event, and winning for the Stars and Stripes. He felt confident of his ability to defeat the Panamanian, for the night of the chase at Ancon had shown him he possessed more speed; then, Pedro had confessed a fear of him alone, boasting of his ability to defeat the other runners in the event.

Gradually the light of dawn crept in at the window, and Carvel Hildreth at last opened his eyes and yawned. He stretched himself luxuriantly, not awake enough to realize that he was not in the bachelor quarters at Culebra, then he gazed bewilderedly at Bayliss, who had not slept all night and who was still wide-eyed with anger and an eagerness to escape.

"I wonder if we are to get any breakfast?" inquired Hildreth, when the memory of what had happened returned to him. "Since we are not to be murdered in cold blood or flung into a Spiggoty dungeon, I am hungry. Is it a part of Nunez's plans to make us fast because of our sins against him? I'd like to have that little wretch in my hands now!"

"The meet is at ten o'clock this morning," groaned Bob, "and it must be about six now. Hildreth, I have been thinking hard all night, and I must win that race! I—I want to make the United States a winner for what the nation has

done here in the Canal Zone; I can't stand back and see the Stars and Stripes lose out to a little, quarter-size republic!"

"That's the spirit!" exulted Hildreth. "Spoken like a true American, old man! I knew my plot would make you love the U. S. A.! Now for a way to outwit these imitation guards."

Some time in the night the guard had aroused his companion, and now both were awake. An idea came to Bayliss, and he called to one of the Panamanians.

"Say," he began pleadingly, "don't we eat this morning, Spiggoty? Chase out and round us up a meal, will you? I'll see that it is worth your trouble."

The greed of the guards for American money was too much, and after a short consultation the one addressed came back to the captives.

"There ees but one way," he said. "My fren' and I must tie you Americans so you will not escape for ze race. Then we go out and get you some food to eat, fruit and bread, maybe. Eef you are willing that we should tie you while we leave ze room, eh?"

"Let it go at that," consented Bayliss, prodding Hildreth as a signal for agreement, for he understood that the Panamanians' consultation had been a quarrel as to who should go on the errand, resulting in this decision for both to go. "And be sure to get a lot of stuff, for we are hungry."

While the awakened guard stood near with revolvers, the other took the rope and trussed the

prisoners up until they were powerless; he made them doubly secure by tying their hands behind their backs, and then making the end of the rope fast to their bound ankles, a method of Indian tying that is absolutely impossible to untie on the part of the victim. It was evident that he knew his business, for he laughed with pride as he surveyed his work.

“Maybe we haf time to stop in ze café, Ramôn?” he suggested. “Thees rope never get untied. We stay so long as we like, eh? Me, I smoke ze cigar Nunez gif me.”

He lighted a vile smelling cigar, blowing the smoke carelessly into the faces of the prisoners; enjoying this pastime a few seconds, he was interrupted by his companion, who snatched the cigar from his lips and flung it to the floor with an exclamation of anger.

“Fool!” he breathed. “Thees house ees suppose’ to be empty! Ze poleece see ze smoke from ze window—he sink eet ees a fire! People come to thees room, and then ze Republic of Panama lose ze race by Nunez!”

Still protesting volubly, the other Panamanian followed him from the room, and the Americans heard them tiptoe down the creaking stairs. Then Bayliss, who was lying with his face to the rough floor, whispered excitedly:

“Hildreth! Are you game for a risky trial at an escape? Good! Roll over with your back to me; I’ll try to get that cigar in my mouth before

it goes out, and I'll burn your wrist ropes through. Once your hands are free—"

He rolled over until his face was near the end of the cigar, and then began a performance of balancing and gymnastics that would have been hilarious under less serious circumstances. Time and again he tried to get the cigar end between his lips, but still it eluded him. Finally he got it pushed against the wall, and a second later he had it in his teeth, puffing away lustily.

For a moment it seemed that even this forlorn hope was gone, for the cigar was almost out. Bayliss had seldom smoked, but he drew away now with vigor, and a cry burst from Hildreth as it began to send forth jets of smoke; fortunately, the Panamanian had thrown it down as soon as it was lighted, so there was a long roll yet to be burned.

"Try not to yell if it hurts," said Bayliss, as he rolled over behind his chum. "We have got to get away now, or not until it is too late! There, I am almost through one rope."

"I have a knife in my pocket," returned Hildreth, as he set his teeth to endure the pain of the burn that must come when Bob tried the last rope. "Get my hands free, and we are safe!"

It was a painfully slow operation, and they feared the Panamanians would come back before the ropes were burned through, but the guards had faith in the ropes, with good cause, and were taking their time. Gradually the cigar burned toward its end, and the ropes parted, strand by strand; at last

Carvel's hands were free from his ankles, and but a strand remained to be parted. He strained at it wildly, it parted, and the hot end of the cigar made him wince, but his hands were free!

"Good!" he exulted. "Now, Bob, roll close, and I'll cut your bonds with the knife I have in my pocket!"

It took some time to extricate the knife from his pocket, for the ropes still bound his body, but he succeeded and in a few seconds he had slashed Bob's ropes, and Bayliss was free. Then he cut the bonds of his chum, and they arose to stretch their cramped limbs before hurrying from the house.

"Hurry!" panted Hildreth, in alarm. "We have been a long time, Bob, and they will be returning soon. Listen—they are coming now. We are too late!"

They looked at each other in dismay. Was all their ingenuity to go for nothing, because they had been a few instants too long? On the stairs resounded footfalls, and their spirits sank as they waited.

"There is only one of them, Hildreth!" muttered Bob. "He won't suspect us of being free. Get on one side of the door, and I'll get behind it. When he opens it, make a fierce dive tackle at his knees and upset him; I'll pile on, and get his revolver if I can. It's our only chance, old man. Are you game?"

"Yes!" declared Hildreth, his heart pounding with excitement. "I'll hit him harder than I ever

hit a football line at Ballard, Bob. Steady, now—”

The footsteps came nearer, and the Panamanian ceased climbing the stairs; he was crossing the landing to the door, humming lightheartedly a Spanish song, all unconscious of his danger. A hand fumbled with the lock, a key turned, and the door opened wide, while the Panamanian strode into the room, packages in hand.

At that instant Hildreth shot out as though propelled from a catapult, struck the guard at the knees with terrific force, and hurled him off his feet, flat on his back on the floor. Never was a runner tackled more viciously on a football field! With a leap, Bob was on him and had wrested the revolver from his pocket. The Americans were masters of the situation!

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHAGRIN OF NUNEZ

“**Q**UICK! Drag him into the room!” cried Hildreth. “Shoot him if he makes a noise, Bob. We must tie him up quickly and get away before the other one comes back. He is in some café near by.”

“Once on the street, we are safe,” assented Bayliss. “We have n’t time to tie him; pull him into the room, and we’ll lock the door. I must get to Cristobal to the Y. M. C. A. clubhouse and stay there until the time for the race, so Nunez won’t know I am free.”

Together they dragged the Panamanian into the room, and Bayliss aimed the big revolver at their terrified prisoner, for the Spiggoties are deadly afraid of Americans at best, and this one thought he had helped catch a pair of Tartars the night before.

“This fellow is going to run in that meet,” said Hildreth tensely, “if he has to kill you and Nunez to get there. Now, if you stick your nose outside this house in less than ten minutes, you Spiggoty, you will run a risk of getting a bullet in your black heart. Understand, you are up against Americans now!”

The Panamanian shrank against the wall, fully

believing that the revolver was about to go off at any moment, so ferocious was the expression on the faces of the two vigorous young chaps. Then they hurried from the room, locking the door behind them, and Bob tied the rope to the knob, making the other end fast to a post of the stairway.

"We are all right now!" he exulted. "Even if we do meet the other one on the street, he won't be able to do a thing. I would like to see his face when he gets back and finds the birds are flown!"

"You will enjoy just as pleasant a spectacle," reminded Carvel, "when you answer the roll for the international quarter-mile, and Pedro Nunez sees you step forth."

They hurried up the Calle de Paez to the Avenida del Frente; as they turned the corner into that busy thoroughfare they looked back and saw the other Panamanian, his hands full of fruit, hurrying from the bazaar toward the house from which they had just escaped. Like his companion, he had been eager to earn the reward of American gold offered by Bob.

"If only we don't meet Nunez," said Bayliss, as they crossed the railroad tracks and entered the even streets of Cristobal. "I don't want him to know that I am out, for there is no telling what he might do in his desperation before the meet."

They reached the Y. M. C. A. clubhouse, operated by the Commission for Canal Zone employees, on Broad Street. The lobby was crowded with athletic looking young fellows from the American towns along

the Canal, gathering here to dress for their events in the big track meet at ten o'clock on Roosevelt Avenue. The clubs of Cristobal, Empire, Culebra, Gorgona, and Bas Obispo would be represented, and as the rivalry among them in baseball, track, basketball, and tennis is keen, the competition in the various events promised to be exciting.

But the international quarter-mile, originated by secretary MacDonald of the Games Committee, was the subject of conversation, and it was evident that the idea would provide the excitement and amusement craved by the Canal workers. The thought of five nations represented by speedy sprinters in that event, wearing their national colors, while the band played appropriate music, was enough to create intense interest. Bayliss was greeted with shouts as he and Hildreth entered the lobby, for they knew that he was to represent the United States against the fastest runners for England, France, Sweden, and Panama.

"We are betting on you, Bayliss!" A big fellow in a Harvard jersey patted him on the shoulder. "The Spiggoties think Nunez is a wonder, and for some cause they are putting all their money on him, more than I would care to risk even on a marvel like you."

Hildreth smiled grimly. The reason for the heavy betting of the Panamanians was clear to him and Bayliss; Nunez, thinking he had the American sprinter tied up in the empty house on the Calle de Paez, Colon, had advised his friends to

put their money on him, for he was sure of defeating the other entrants. Betting in Panama and the Canal Zone exists to a deplorable extent, chiefly because the monotony of the work makes the employees eager for excitement of any kind.

"Nunez won't come here to dress," decided Bob. "He will get into his togs in some hotel over in Colon. Hello, here are the other fellows who are with me in this race, though."

They had been hurried to the gymnasium on the second floor, now used as a dressing room for the athletes in the meet. Here they found Lockwood, Lefevre, and Oleson, already attired in their running suits. They greeted Bayliss joyously, for they were enthusiastic over the novel race, and while each was determined to run his best for his country, there was no ill feeling, such as Nunez had exhibited. In fact, Pedro's hatred of the Americans was common to all Panamanians, for the nine years of the "gringos" in Panama has not caused the Spiggoties to love their visitors from the north.

"*Vive la France!*" exclaimed Lefevre excitedly, slapping his tri-color jersey. "*La belle France toujours!*"

"Rot!" said the serious Lockwood with frankness. "Frawnce has n't a bally bit of a chawnce, don't you know? I am free to say that I believe it will be between Bayliss and that Panama chap, Nunez. By the way, where is Pedro? I have n't seen him since that night in Panama City, y' understand."

"Aye tank Aye saw him in Colon yesterday," offered the stolid Oleson. "But Aye have n't seen him since. He will win dis race."

"No, he won't!" Bayliss was so firm that they looked at him in surprise, though Hildreth smiled, for he alone knew what was on his chum's mind. "The United States of America is going to win this event, believe that! I'll run my legs off before that rascal of a Nunez shall make his one-horse-power republic win."

"One-horse-power?" repeated the young Englishman. "Why, you're wrong, Bayliss, indeed, you're quite in error! I assure you there is more than one horse in Panama! Think of the cabs in Colon and Panama City; the whole locomotive power in Panama is the horse, you know!"

Hildreth was convulsed with laughter, but Bayliss soothed Lockwood's excitement by answering soberly:

"You are right, Lockwood. I never saw it in that light before, but you have put it so logically that I cannot fail to see it as you do."

From time to time the athletes entered in the other events came in to encourage Bayliss, and Hildreth began to get some idea of how much interest was taken in this track meet. He realized that it would be nothing less than a tragedy if any other nation than the United States won this international event, and if Panama won —

"Bob," he said soberly, "I have never seen Nunez run, but I have seen you beat the best runners of

Ballard. Until now I have regarded this meet as an amusement, but I understand that it is taken with intense seriousness by the Americans. Of course, your event is the only one that foreigners will be in, so all the responsibility of winning for the United States hangs on you!"

Mr. MacDonald came in, and handed Bayliss a printed program of the meet, which, like all Canal Zone track meets, was under the sanction of the Amateur Athletic Union. It was to Hildreth another instance of how thoroughly the United States had been reproduced in the Canal Zone of Panama.

"The international quarter is last." Bob scanned the list of events. "I guess it will arouse the most excitement and enthusiasm. There are a bunch of old track and field stars from the States in the other events, Hildreth, so you had better get down along the avenue for a good sight of the track."

Hildreth, who had decided not to enter any of the events, as he would not have a chance to get into pole vaulting shape, looked at him in surprise.

"Why, aren't you coming with me?" he inquired.

"I want to give Nunez a shock when he sees me," laughed Bob. "It will take his breath so he won't be able to run. You go down and see the former 'Varsity stars of the States contest again, and come for me in time for my event."

Oleson, who was massaging a sore tendon, decided to go along with Hildreth, and after wrapping himself in his bathrobe, they started from the

gymnasium. When they reached the doorway of the clubhouse Hildreth saw to his dismay that the rain was falling steadily, and that Broad Street was already muddy. He was sure that the meet would have to be postponed, but Oleson, who had been in the Canal Zone for two years, assured him gravely that he was mistaken.

"Dese people in Panama bane tired always," he explained. "Anyt'ing like a track running bane gude to watch. The rain bane all the time falling, and you can't wait for a gude day. You will find a big crowd on the track."

Other athletes splashed past them, on their way to Roosevelt Avenue, which is not macadamized, and affords an apology for a running track. Hildreth had played football in the snow, late in the season, but never had he experienced the sight of a track meet run off in the heavy tropical downpour that now saturated everything in sight.

"Aye tank we need bathing suits for dis," remarked Oleson, with a near approach to humor, "and boats for to ride back to the clubhouse in."

When the Ballard collegian reached Roosevelt Avenue, the wide, palm-shaded driveway that starts at the entrance to Cristobal and sweeps around along the shore of the Caribbean to the promontory by the docks, joining there with Columbus Avenue, he saw how badly he had been mistaken in his estimate of the Canal Zone people's interest in the track meet. Up and down both sides of the avenue for two hundred and twenty yards ropes had been

stretched, making the course, and back of these ropes were immense crowds.

Most of these were Americans, middle-aged men, women dressed in white, young girls, and children; there were many umbrellas, but a majority of the spectators were ready to watch the events unprotected by anything except raincoats. The porches of the Canal Zone houses that line one side of Roosevelt Avenue were filled with people, and the houses were decorated with American flags.

A large grandstand had been erected at the finish line, and here all the officials of the Canal Zone administration sat, while a band played furiously. Hildreth saw Colonel Goethals, taking as keen an interest in the sports of his workers as in their labor, and he understood why every American in Panama swears by this master of the whole Big Ditch, because he was one of them, entering into their own lives. Mr. Bayliss was in the stand, eager to see his son represent the United States, and hoping for what he had thought vain, that Bob might come to love the Stars and Stripes.

Several thousand people, rain-soaked but enthusiastic, had gathered to see the Canal Zone track athletes compete; there were cheers as some star made his appearance, jogging up and down the course, in the mud that was deepening at every moment. Over on the beach jumping standards had been erected, and the jumpers and pole vaulters slipped and slid as they dashed at the bar for a take-off.

It was a strange scene to Hildreth, this track meet on the beach of Cristobal, with the blue Caribbean stretching out before him, the graceful palm fronds waving overhead, the great crowd of enthusiastic Americans along the avenue, and the rain falling steadily. He had not learned that whatever is to be done in Panama is done regardless of the weather, for the rain never consults the plans of human beings, so a track meet is run when scheduled, for a clear day is a rarity.

There were runners from the universities and colleges of the States, men who had been famous a few years back. Hildreth saw the Blue of Yale, the Crimson of Harvard, the Green of Dartmouth, and there was a hurdler from Leland Stanford, a pole vaulter from Penn, and a sprinter from Michigan; all met again in this strange track meet of the tropics! In the crowd, groups of fellows got together here and there, giving their old 'Varsity yells for their former college chums.

Suddenly Hildreth, pressed against the rope facing the beach, heard an exclamation of anger and consternation from a sprinter who was jogging past, and on turning toward the avenue again he saw Pedro Nunez, aghast with dismay.

CHAPTER XX

BOB'S COUNTRY

“ON your marks! Get set! Bang!”

The first heat of the hundred-yard dash was on; five lithe-limbed athletes had crouched on the starting line, a chalk mark almost lost in the mud; they had tensed their muscles at the second command, and when the pistol cracked, they shot forward—all but one. The sprinter wearing the Red and Blue of Penn slipped with the force of his effort, and instead of impressing the spectators with his beautiful running form, he made a profound impression on the mud of Roosevelt Avenue with his face.

The others, however, found a footing with their long spikes, and they sped down the hundred yards straightaway; King, the former Colgate crack, Farquar of Yale, a stranger from Princeton, and the famous Fordham, wearing the Crimson of old Harvard. The absence of training, with the months in the hot tropics, had taken a lot of their speed, but the heat was close, and the great crowd went into raptures when Fordham nosed out King at the tape.

“It’s the greatest sight yet!” breathed Hildreth, to whom the scenes of the track meet in the pouring rain, which no one seemed to mind, was something more wonderful than Culebra Cut, or Gatun, with

its locks and dam. At times he had to glance out at the rolling Caribbean, or at the dripping palms, to convince himself that he was not at the intercollegiates in the States, at Franklin Field or the Harvard Stadium, so natural was the sight of the jerseys of the runners.

The hurdle race was an hilariously humorous event, for the slippery mud of Roosevelt Avenue made it a matter of fortune if the contestants cleared the standards or not. One athlete slipped as he took off for the fifth hurdle, and struck it with his knee, falling flat in the ooze and sliding several yards, amid the cheers of the spectators, who welcomed the diversion, and the others picked their way down the avenue and over the hurdles like dancing masters.

"Such records!" laughed the collegian. "Twelve and a fifth for the hundred yards' dash! Still, let some of the Ballard sprinters enter a meet down here, with the rain falling and the track a sea of mud, and I guess they would do worse."

Across the avenue, on the sandy beach, the pole vaulters were having as much trouble as the runners, for the shifting sands afforded a poor place for the pole to be planted; and as no landing pit had been dug, when the vaulters came down to earth it was usually with a jar. Yet Hildreth noticed that all the athletes entered into the spirit of the meet with zest, striving to give their best performance under the miserable conditions. It was the spirit of the Big Job, applied to this track meet in the tropics.

As the events were run off in order, affording more amusement as the mud of the track made the going harder, Hildreth began to think of the crowning race of all, the international quarter, and he decided to go back to the clubhouse and come down with Bayliss. He was elated at the success, so far, of his plan in showing Bob the work at Gatun, and in getting the Canal worker to feel the magnificence of the nation for which he was giving his time and effort, and he felt sure that once the race started, Bayliss would run his best for the United States.

Rain-soaked, bedraggled athletes jogged past him up Broad Street, returning from their events to the dressing rooms, bespattered with mud, but cheerful with it all. It was a matter of surprise to Hildreth that the wretched weather did not take the energy and ambition out of them, but now that he had seen the marvelous interest taken in the meet by both contestants and spectators, for specials had brought thousands to it, he began to understand.

He found Bayliss and Mr. MacDonald in the gymnasium at the Y. M. C. A. clubhouse; Bayliss was in his running togs, a finely built sprinter, and the secretary handed Hildreth a sash of red, white, and blue as he entered.

"Here," he said, "tie that on your friend, Hildreth. Bob, don't let the United States be defeated here in the Canal Zone, where we are building the Big Ditch. Think of the thousands of Americans who will cheer for you; remember that it is your

country for which you are running, and win!"

"My country!" repeated Bayliss, but this time Hildreth noticed that he said it reflectively, and there was no bitterness in his tone.

When they had jogged back to Roosevelt Avenue, the last event before Bob's, the mile run, had just been finished, and the vast crowd was astir for the race of the five nationalities. It was a novel event, and the excitement that it created was sufficient reward for Mr. MacDonald, who had originated it to entertain the Canal Zone employees and their families.

There was a tremendous outburst of applause when the event was announced through big megaphones, and the band blared forth a medley of national airs. Then the clerk of the course stepped forward to call the names of the entrants, and the nations they represented.

"Sweden—Carl Oleson!" The blond young fellow answered, "Present," and was given a generous round of clapping.

"France—Jean Lefevre!" The vivacious little Frenchman cried, "Vive la France!" and was cheered loudly by the amused spectators.

"England—Arthur Lockwood!" called the clerk, and the English youth answered, receiving his meed of attention from the impartial crowd.

"The Republic of Panama—Pedro Nunez!"

As the Panamanian stepped out and bowed, for the benefit of the few hundred of his countrymen who had come to see him win the money

of the Americans for them, there was a howl from the Spiggoties, for his speed was well known in the Canal Zone. There was a hush, and then the clerk of the course, with a thrill in his voice, called distinctly—

“The United States of America—Robert Bayliss!”

The band began playing “The Star Spangled Banner,” the immense crowd roared forth its patriotic encouragement, and Bayliss’ response was lost in the noise; Hildreth was watching with amusement the conflicting emotions of anger, dismay, and chagrin that crossed the dark face of Pedro Nunez. Though he had been somewhat prepared for this by the sight of Carvel, he was yet mystified at the escape of his prisoners.

The five quarter-milers lined up at the starting line in front of the grandstand, which would also be the finish of the race, as they must run two hundred and twenty yards down Roosevelt Avenue, make a sharp turn in the width of the driveway, and sprint the same distance back to the tape. There was no chance of fast time being made, for the mud made the going dangerous, and the turn would knock off what speed the runners had at the end of the first lap.

“The race won’t be to the swift,” warned Hildreth, “but to the fellow who keeps his head, his feet, and his wind. Just make your stride sure, Bob, and don’t risk slipping in the mud. Go in to win—for *your* country!”

At the starter's command, for he raised the revolver behind the runners as they knelt on their marks, the crowd subsided into breathless expectancy, and Bob grimly dug his spikes into the clayish mud. Here was a race where the crowd could unite in its partisanship for a country, instead of dividing into cohorts for the various Y. M. C. A. club runners, and if Bayliss failed to give them a chance to cheer for a victory—

The pistol cracked, and Bayliss shot forward quickly, slipping a trifle, but keeping his footing; Oleson and Lockwood, both heavily built athletes, nearly fell at the start, but the little Panamanian was like a squirrel, and he jumped into the lead with a quickness that was startling, and that brought cheers from the admiring but anxious Spiggoties. Down the avenue, through the mud and water, sped the five runners, between the long lines of cheering spectators, with Nunez three yards in the lead.

Bayliss, running second, dreaded the sharp turn at the end of the two hundred and twenty yards, for it meant the breaking of his perfect stride and the loss of his speed. With the rain beating in his face, he remembered Hildreth's warning, and contented himself with keeping Nunez from gaining a big lead; there would be time enough for sprinting when the turn was made, and it was seen whether Pedro would keep up his pace.

Close behind him Oleson and Lockwood were pounding, both valiantly fighting for their countries, but hopelessly outclassed by the speed of the

American and Panamanian representatives. Pedro Nunez, short of build, had a distinct advantage over Bayliss, who was afraid to lengthen his stride lest he slip and fall, losing the race.

The Panamanian, having the lead, made the turn first, and was starting back up the avenue as Bayliss finished the lap. So dense was the crowd, and so cleverly did the treacherous Panamanian turn the trick, that before the American realized his purpose he had tripped Bob, and sent him sprawling in the mud. It was a cowardly act, and for a moment Bayliss was dazed, but some one pulled him to his feet and gave him a push forward.

“Beat the scoundrel!” yelled Hildreth, wild with anger. “Head him once and he will quit. Run—for the United States!”

The words sent a mighty thrill through Bayliss. He was running for the United States, for the nation that had done the marvelous work of preparation in the Canal Zone, that had effected sanitation where pestilence reigned, built whole towns after conquering a virgin jungle, and that was now bringing to success the greatest feat of modern ages, the marriage of two oceans. This country had not failed, nor must its representative fail in this race. He was running for the Stars and Stripes! But Nunez, for Panama, was ten yards ahead, and on the last lap!

He was amazed at the speed of Nunez, for he had not run so fast on the night of the pursuit in Ancon. Perhaps fear had unnerved him then so that he could not sprint; now, at least, he was running in

a wonderful manner and Bayliss sprinted in a vain effort to come abreast of him, though he gained two yards.

Now the wildly yelling Americans, thoroughly patriotic, were imploring Bob all along the lines to finish first, to uphold the honor of his nation, for it was a vital thing to them in that moment. Men and women called to him, begging him to go faster, to head the flying little Panamanian and take the Stars and Stripes over the finish line a winner!

Suddenly Bayliss caught sight of the finish line ahead, where the white tape stretched invitingly across Roosevelt Avenue. Some one was standing back of the line, waving madly a large American flag, and his heart gave a leap as he saw it. After all, the thought rushed on his mind as he ran, it was the land of his birth, and he knew, after seeing the Canal, that it was the greatest country of all!

He felt a sudden fierce pride in the Stars and Stripes that girdled his waist; he knew that he loved the United States at last, that he had found his country in this hour. He must not let *his* land be defeated by the treachery of little Nunez; Old Glory must wave triumphant in the rain after the race had ended.

He started a steady sprint, making every stride sure. Now he was not running for individual glory, or for revenge on Nunez because of his treachery in trying to keep him from the race, for tripping him at the turn; he was not running because he admired the United States and wanted to keep her

from being beaten by a little republic like Panama. He was sprinting his fastest because he was representing *his* country, because into his heart, at sight of the flag beyond the finish line, had leaped a great love for the United States—a true patriotism!

They were fifty yards from the finish now, slipping through the mud and floundering along between the yelling, cheering, and leaping crowds. Nunez was a bare yard in the lead, for Bob's sprint had gradually cut down the intervening distance, and the Panamanian was growing windblown and tired. The fearful condition of the track made speed out of the question, and it had worn on the endurance of the two leaders so that they panted hoarsely, their breath coming in great sobs.

The band struck up "The Star Spangled Banner," and it gave new strength to Bob's weary limbs. He remembered what he was running for, and he clenched his teeth, gripping his hands for a final effort. It was *his* country, the United States of America, the land that he had come to love at last, the nation of his birth, and he must win, or die in the attempt!

A few yards more, staggering almost helplessly through the mud, and Bayliss came abreast of the struggling Nunez. He remembered what Carvel had shouted about the Panamanian quitting when he was once passed, and he threw all his remaining strength into a lurch that sent him reeling a few inches in the lead, amid the deafening shouts of the Americans, and the blare of the band. He saw

a look of despair come to the dark, distorted face of the Panamanian, and he knew the race was won.

Staggering, falling, for ten yards more, and he tumbled across the tape, breaking it with his chest as he slid blindly into the mud at his feet. He felt strong arms raise him, he was borne aloft on the shoulders of several men, and carried around by the admiring Americans, while the band played national airs and the crowd shouted its joy and exultation.

The gentleman who had waved the big American flag back of the line came rushing through the crowd, and Bayliss saw with surprise that it was his father! The silk hat of the Canal Zone official had been smashed by an ecstatic employee, but his face was one big smile of joy.

"My son!" he exclaimed, as Bob fought his way to earth. "You could not have won such a race unless you were an American! You must have the love of your own country at last!"

"You are right, Dad!" returned Bob warmly, as he shook his father's hand. "I am an American, heart, body, and soul, and I am happy!"

Back in the dressing room at the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium, when Hildreth was able to talk coherently for joy, he congratulated his chum on his newborn love for the United States, and informed him that England was second, France third, Sweden fourth, and Panama, in the shape of Pedro Nunez, quit a yard from the tape when he saw Bayliss had won, and walked from the track.

Slowly, Bayliss took off the sash of Stars and

Stripes, mud-bedraggled and drenched, and laid it on the bench at his side.

"I saw the American flag Dad waved," he explained, "and it made me feel I just had to win, or die. I never felt that way before, Hildreth; I admired the United States after I had seen the Gatun work, but this was a different sensation, a great love for *my* country, and when it came to me I knew I should win.

"I know now, Dad, that the United States is my country, and that if one has been born an American he will have that love for his native land somewhere in his heart, and some day it will be fanned into life, as mine was to-day. I am an American, and I love the United States!"

Hildreth was strangely silent as Mr. Bayliss joyously put a hand on the shoulder of his son, and Bob understood; now that the excitement was over, and Bayliss had lost his bitterness, had found a country, the Ballard collegian was remembering that football game, and that he was practically an exile from the United States.

Into Bob's mind a wonderful plan crept, a great idea that was to shape itself into a definite plan for the redemption of Carvel Hildreth, so that he might gain the moral courage to go back to Ballard College, facing the ostracism and scorn he had fled, and win his fight there, to be recognized by his father, and to win the manhood that should be his!

PART IV

CHAPTER XXI

BLOWN OUT OF A JOB

ON the Monday after the big track meet of Canal Zone employees a thorough search from the terminal docks at Cristobal to the Sea Wall of Panama City would not have revealed a more happy fellow than Bob Bayliss. Before the night when he and Carvel Hildreth had met Mr. MacDonald, secretary of the Games Committee, at the University Club, the knowledge that he was without a country oppressed him with the thought of the sorrow it caused his father.

Now everything was different, and the man who dared to speak sneeringly of the Stars and Stripes would have a fight with Bayliss on his hands, for the young fellow was a true American at last. The sight of the great work at Gatun, with the gradual realization of the stupendous accomplishment of the nation which had created the Canal Zone, the treachery of Nunez, putting in peril the chances of the United States in the race, and last, the thrilling race itself, with each entrant giving his best for his country, had converted Bob.

He was stiff and sore on Monday morning when he stepped out on the upper screened porch of their

bachelor quarters house at Culebra, where Corning was already standing, gazing down into the smoky chasm of the Cut. Bayliss, now that he had left his trouble in the past and was an American, was all the more anxious to help Hildreth win his battle, to influence him in a decision that would take him back to Ballard, and he wanted Corning's aid.

The "flannel-foot" had proved a companionable chap, and Hildreth, in one of his despondent hours, had confided in Corning the story of his leaving college and being disowned by his father, so that Bayliss would not be forced to violate any confidence of Carvel's by discussing the affair with Douglas. The Ballard collegian was getting into his working togs in their room, and Bob lost no time in starting the conversation with his companion.

"Corning," he began directly, "you and I are about the only friends Hildreth has down here in the Canal Zone, and it's up to us to help him. His coming down here to Panama has had a peculiar double influence on him, both for good and evil."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Corning, taking his eyes from the impressive scene beneath him and facing Bob. "I think it is making something out of the chap, Bayliss; he can do a hard day's work shoveling coal, and he is learning to judge men by their worth, and not by their money."

"True," agreed Bob, "and physically, Panama has done wonders for Carvel Hildreth. But can't you see, Corning, that it is the spirit that makes the man, and not the perfectly muscled body? If

Carvel goes back to Ballard, now that he has come to love hard work and to mingle with his fellows, it will be the making of him, and all this will be worth while. If, on the other hand, his spirit is not brave enough to make him return, he will be worse off than ever!"

A screaming, screeching chorus of steam-shovel whistles came up from the Cut, giving the small army of workers in Culebra the first summons, and Bayliss spoke hurriedly, for Hildreth would soon come out on the porch.

"Corning," he said earnestly, "the time when Hildreth might have been glad to return to Ballard was that day in Panama City, after he had thought to win the big lottery prize and had been disappointed cruelly. If he could not have landed a job then, and we had offered to send him back to the States, he would have gone. Prosperity has ruined him; he thinks he is making good in the world, now that his father refused to own him until he went back to college. Perhaps—"

"You mean," Corning returned slowly, "that if he lost his job now, and got reduced to desperate extremes, that he would accept any offer of ours to help him get to the States, provided he promised to go to Ballard?"

"It seems the one hope for him," Bayliss said sorrowfully. "Here is the thing, Douglas—Hildreth regards the fact that he is making his way in the Canal Zone as a triumph over his father, and his ability to do hard work only increases this

feeling. Make him feel his helplessness, and then—”

Further conversation along that line was rendered out of the question by the appearance of Hildreth, ready for another day's work on the Big Ditch. The collegian was joyous because of his friend's new-found patriotism, and he slapped Bayliss on the back riotously.

“You are no longer the ‘Man without a Country’!” he cried enthusiastically. “You are a real American now, Bob, and you can bet you are the hero in the Canal Zone, after that magnificent race!”

“Hildreth,” said Douglas Corning, with a thoughtful survey of the splendidly built young fellow, “I have never talked about *your* trouble, but now that Bob has cast his aside, isn't it time that you returned to Ballard College, and showed the fellows that you have gained moral manhood as well as a fine physique?”

Bayliss waited eagerly for the answer. Hildreth was silent for several minutes, as he watched the smoke of the steam shovels float up from the somber abyss of Culebra Cut, mingling with the vaporous fog that arose from the rotting vegetation of the near-by jungle.

“I am sorry you asked me that, Corning,” he said at last. “The excitement of Bob's race at Cristobal Saturday had driven all memories of that bitterness from my mind. I had tried hard to forget it, and was succeeding, when you recalled it all again!”

"You can never forget it, old man," interposed Bayliss seriously. "It may be lost for the time being in moments of stress, but when you are alone the regret and anguish of remorse will return tenfold. There stands but one thing between you and true manhood—that unfought battle at Ballard!"

"Go back!" urged Corning, with an emotion that surprised even Bayliss. "You will have your month's wages soon, and that will pay your steerage fare to New York City. Your father will help you, if you decide to wipe out that cowardly flight from college, from the scorn of your chums."

"It would be harder than ever now," declared Hildreth. "Had I kept on as I was headed in Panama City, with the rain drenching me and starvation staring me in the face, then I might have been glad to go back to a lesser evil. Now I have a good job, I am in love with hard work, and am thrilled with the Big Ditch; it would be easier to leave adversity for my lot at Ballard, but as it is, I cannot go!"

Bill Rosslyn, who had been over to the Culebra post office for that letter which came for him on every ship, came smilingly out on the porch, and tossed an official looking envelope to Hildreth.

"Some class to you, Carvel," he remarked, "getting letters from the Hotel Tivoli! Next thing we know, you will be a guest of the Presidente of Panama, over in the palace at Panama City."

Hildreth saw with surprise that the letter was from Mr. Arthur Barton, the father of Neva, and

he wondered at it, for he had neither seen nor heard of them since the day they passed through the Cut on the motor-car trip. Tearing it open hastily, he drew out the sheet of paper, covered with a strong handwriting.

He read:

“DEAR CARVEL:

“Yours and Neva’s suspicions regarding that infamous young rascal José Gonzales were well founded, and I have broken with him. I have learned that he is not the nephew to the Alcade of Bocas del Toro, but that he is a daring speculator and get-rich-quick schemer. He does not own any valuable land in the interior, though he holds options on it, and he is not related to the Mr. Gonzales who is with me.

“Mr. Gonzales, who seems to be thoroughly reliable, owns and has shown me clear titles to this woodland property inland, and he is very anxious to sell it to me, so that I may form a company to exploit the products, but this young villain in some way learned of this ambition, and secured a sixty days’ option on it. In order to get a chance to buy the Bocas del Toro land on which I hold options, and which he really wants, he baited me by pretending to own the land I need in the interior.

“Yesterday I caught him in my room here at the Tivoli, and with my options in his hand. With a revolver I kept him from destroying them, and made him give them to me again. I kicked him from the room, and, vowing vengeance, with threats to keep me from getting the land I want most, he left the hotel. I guess with him go my hopes of acquiring inland woods and property that contain unlimited possibilities of wealth, but I still have the options on Bocas del Toro.

“Neva and I have been looking for you to visit us here at the Tivoli, but you have not shown up. She told me about your unfortunate affair at college, and if you will take my advice, Carvel, go back at once! When I see you, there is something of importance that I have to tell you, something that will be of

interest. If you decide to come over, make it in a few days, as we leave for Bocas del Toro in a short time, and then sail for the States.

“Yours truly,

“ARTHUR BARTON”

Hildreth read the letter to his companions, and waited for their comments, which came in forcible sentences.

“A tricky speculator!” declared Corning. “He found out how anxious Mr. Barton is for that inland property of Mr. Gonzales, and he secured an option on it at once, probably before Mr. Gonzales heard of the New York promoter. In order to secure the Bocas del Toro land, which is more accessible, he is using this option.”

“There is no limit to what he will do to get it,” averred Bob, “or to destroy the options of Mr. Barton. We haven’t heard the last of that treacherous little Panamanian!”

It was with a vague, inexplicable feeling of uneasiness that Hildreth went down into the noisy, smoke-covered Cut that morning at eight o’clock. It was not raining, for a wonder, but a heavy pall of sullen clouds lowered over Gold Hill and Contractor’s Hill, the curtain of smoke from the chasm was dense, and the damp fog from the jungle reeked with disease, so that his spirits were depressed.

An hour of work shoveling coal into the blazing furnace of 33, however, restored him to his natural buoyancy, and he forgot the unpleasant memories recalled by Corning’s question. At the top of the

slide, at the bottom of which MacNamara's pet was eating rocks and dirt, 25 was working away furiously, and as the end of the month was near, with these two Lidgerwoods leading in excavation, they were bitter rivals for the record.

This rivalry in Canal achievement is wisely encouraged by the Isthmian Canal Commission in every department; the men building the concrete locks at gates near the Pacific, at Miraflores and Pedro Miguel, compete with those at Gatun, near the Atlantic side, both in the work done and in the lessening of expense. There is no surer way to start a fight in the Canal Zone than by depreciating the methods used in one section or the other of the concrete-laying gangs.

"If everything goes O.K.," said Bill Rosslyn, from the boom, "we'll lick old 25 out of her boots this month. We are only one cubic yard behind now, and with you shoveling like a demon, Hildreth, we shall eat our way to the record!"

Hildreth, as he felt his iron muscles tighten and swell with the swing of the heavy coal shovel, was thinking of his marvelous physical condition, and regretting that it could not be used against Ballard's rivals, for the glory of his college. Days of hard work in the Cut had given him a tireless body, and a back with muscles like steel ropes; his wind was perfect, and now the toil of the short Canal Zone hours did not tire him, and, better than all, he liked work!

Yet he could not help thinking of his old team,

and wondering what shape the eleven was in for the hard games, especially the biggest game of all, that with Alton, which would end the football season. It was for this game that Ballard trained and practiced, and even the great contest with Hamilton, so memorable to Hildreth, was but a preparation for the mighty struggle with the Black and Blue.

So far, Hildreth's hazardous jaunt to Panama had been a great thing for the pampered, reckless collegian, used to plenty of money and having his own way. It had taken away forever his old careless, heedless spirit and had given him a new outlook on life and a knowledge of its responsibilities. The spell of the Big Job, the mingling with men, purposeful and determined, had awakened him to the fact that there were men in the Canal Zone who did things worth while. It had taught him to be one of this vast army, and to recognize ability, whether in a steam-shovel engineer or in an administration official, and it had given him a keen love for hard work.

Yet, with all this, it had not brought him the resolution to go back and fight it out at Ballard. Instead, it had helped him, in the thrill of new experiences, to forget his cowardice, and now Bayliss and Corning saw clearly what the future held for Hildreth, when the Big Job should be finished and he must return to the States. Then there would be no thrall of the ditch to help him; he must make his own way in life, pitifully unfitted, and so near his father.

It was with this realization that Bayliss was planning a desperate measure,—a conference with his father to persuade him to take Hildreth's job from him, and make him dependent on his friends; then, Bayliss argued, he would accept passage to the States from him and Corning, and they would make him promise to go back to Ballard at once. The memory of what he had faced that day in Panama City might make him go back, if he feared that it was coming to him again.

But Fate intervened in a way that shattered poor Bill Rosslyn's body, as well as his ambition to get the excavation record for 33, and, in a way that Bayliss had not wanted, executed Bob's plan for him. At noon the dynamite squad went past 33, putting into holes clean sticks of brown paper-wrapped dynamite, ramming earth on them carelessly, and wiring the charges with caution. In the two hours of rest the Cut shook and shivered, and cascades of rock and earth rumbled down the hillsides as the explosions rattled windows over in Ancon.

Through no fault of the wiring squad, for these men work with extreme care, but because of something not to be explained, a great charge of dynamite that had been put in the slide to loosen it, failed to go off with the rest, and the deadly sticks were lying dormant in the mass of rock and dirt when Mr. MacNamara started the shovel at two o'clock. When the crash came Bill Rosslyn, out on the boom, was laughing at Hildreth's energetic shoveling.

Without an instant's warning, the hillside belched out an angry volcano of fire and smoke, with a fusillade of broken rock; the big Lidgerwood reared up a moment, toppled uncertainly, like a wounded monster of iron, then fell over on one side, a shattered, twisted ruin, half buried under the débris. Mr. MacNamara, in the "house," was unhurt and Hildreth escaped with bruises from the flying rocks, but Rosslyn was pinned beneath the wreckage, maimed and broken. A terrific explosion of dynamite, for the dipper of the steam shovel had struck the small fulminate cap fairly, had caused what the noon blasting failed to do, and a fearful accident was the result.

"Quick, save Rosslyn!" shouted Hildreth, beside himself with grief. "He will burn to death!"

The accident suspended work in that part of the Cut. Men came running to the scene, and a huge traveling crane came up on a spur track used for the excavation trains, speedily lifting the wreckage from the body of the craneman of 33. He was still breathing, though unconscious, and when the switch engine hurried up he was laid on a stretcher and carefully placed on the tender, for he must be rushed to the hospital at Ancon without delay.

Bayliss had been near, and with Hildreth he accompanied Rosslyn to Ancon on the switch engine, having right of way over all trains, while a young surgeon examined the craneman as they swayed and rocked through the jungle. He announced that several bones were broken, but that

unless there were internal injuries there was a good chance of his recovery.

Half an hour's reckless speeding brought them to Panama City, and there an automobile met them, taking the pain-racked victim to the Government Hospital at Ancon, where Rosslyn was laid between cool, white sheets. There was nothing that his chums could do, so they returned in sorrow to Panama City, to go back to Culebra Cut on the switch engine.

"He will have the finest medical and surgical attention in the world," said Bayliss. "The hospital corps of the I. C. C. is second to none, so Bill will have every possible chance."

"We must run over and see him every day," answered Hildreth. "It was a terrible thing, Bob; everything running smoothly one instant, and the next a great crash that made everything black before me!"

Bayliss stopped suddenly on the street, and stared at his companion.

"Hildreth," he said slowly, "this accident has stretched Bill Rosslyn out on a hospital cot, broken in body, but how about you?"

"Why," stammered the startled Hildreth, "what do you mean, Bob?"

"I mean that the explosion that shattered number 33 and crushed Rosslyn," answered Bayliss tensely, "has blown your Canal Zone job into space!"

CHAPTER XXII

HIS FIRST PAY DAY

IT was a dismal dawn to which Hildreth awoke the next morning, for a rain that threatened to eclipse all Canal Zone records had been falling in steady torrents since midnight, and showed no signs of letting up when the eight o'clock morning shift should have gone to work. But Carvel learned that the rain in Panama often gives enforced holidays to the Canal workers, at least to those engaged in the outdoor labor along the excavation of the Big Ditch, and this was to be one of them for him.

As much rain had fallen already, the official order had been sent along the line to lay off for the day, and the employees who toiled in the Cut prepared for a good rest. Hildreth and Bayliss, the former out of a job and the latter prevented from work by the tropical torrent, decided to descend into Culebra Cut and see what damage had been done to number 33 by the delayed explosion of dynamite.

Wearing rubber boots and raincoats, and bearing umbrellas, they made their way down into the murky abyss, to find that the rain, which must have poured down most of the night, had made the bottom of the long gash a sea of mud and water; in the steam-shovel pits the loose boards and tools

floated around aimlessly, while the flood threatened to enter the furnaces. The network of tracks in the Cut was submerged in a yellow pond, slimy mud trickled down the steep sides of the chasm, and on the banks the gorgeous vegetation of the jungle drooped dismally in the rain.

Culebra Cut was deserted as Hildreth and Bayliss reached the bottom of the famous slide where 33 had been eating away, with her rival, 25, hungrily devouring the top. Here and there a monster steam shovel stolidly resisted the deluge, a traveling crane loomed up disconsolately on a spur track, trains of excavation flat cars were being drenched, and all the spirit of the Big Job seemed to have been soaked out overnight.

The big Lidgerwood, now a hopeless wreck, lay on one side, where the great crane had swung it to release the crushed Bill Rosslyn. The house was splintered by a furious cannonade of flying rock fragments, the great boom was twisted, and the machinery broken and ruined beyond the powers of the Gorgona shops to repair. As a mute evidence of how gallant old 33 had died in a brave effort to defeat 25, the dipper of the shovel, which had done the mischief by striking the deadly fulminate cap, was embedded in the mass of rock and earth.

It was a dismal, disheartening sight, and Hildreth, who had come to feel a love for 33 such as inspires every member of a steam-shovel crew for the iron titan that devours the hills, was depressed. He pictured Bill Rosslyn, his face white and drawn,

his eyes closed, and his yellow shirt streaked crimson, as the switch engine had hurried him to Panama City, and he realized, as he gazed at the wreck, that what Bayliss had said the day before was true — the terrible explosion that had shattered the Yale man had also blown his job to nothing.

Bob Bayliss, as he saw the fearful havoc wrought by the dynamite that had exploded too late, understood that the very plan he had pondered over had been worked out by a higher power than his own. He had come to know that while Hildreth had his job and was in love with the work, he would never return to Ballard; that bitter adversity alone could bring him to that desperate condition where he would gladly promise to return, if given the chance. The explosion that crushed 33 gave Bayliss the opportunity that he had desired, and he determined to make the most of it.

“Hildreth,” he began earnestly, as the collegian stared at the débris of the steam shovel from under his umbrella, “old 33 is out of commission for good and all — the ditch is so near finished that her place will not be filled. Bill Rosslyn is done, for he will go home as soon as he gets out of the hospital, and Mr. MacNamara sails for the States Tuesday with his family.

“To-day you draw a month’s pay over in Cristobal—enough to pay your steerage passage to New York, with thirty dollars over. The *Panama*, whose steerage is great, sails Tuesday. Promise me that you will go back to Ballard on her.”

The terrible depression of the jungle, frowning down on the Cut from the edges of the banks, had seized Hildreth, a vague unrest forced on him by the dreary, incessant downpour of rain, and he was despondent again, with the knowledge that he had lost his job.

"I can't go back, Bob," he said dispiritedly. "I could never stand the loneliness and scorn now, after having gotten along so well in Panama. I must stay in the Canal Zone, where I can forget the past bitterness at Ballard; your father can get me another job, and I am not going to worry while I have money."

Bayliss was silent a while, then he faced his chum bravely.

"Old man," he began, "when my father tried to get you work there were but *two* openings to be found; he could give you this chance to do the work of a Barbadoes negro, or you might have been a clerk in the Administration Building at Ancon. He was about to offer you that, but I begged him to give you this 'nigger' job —"

"You—you made me do the labor of peons!" gasped Hildreth. "Think of my first day at work, when my hands were bleeding and sore, cracked and blistered from the shovel handle, and filled with grit! That night my back was nearly broken, and every muscle in my body was a separate torture! And I have called you my friend!"

Bayliss turned on him angrily.

"I am the best friend you ever had, Carvel

Hildreth!" he blazed. "Look back over the time since I ran into you in New York. Who befriended you in the steerage when you were miserable? Who found you in Panama City, at the end of your rope, robbed, and disappointed in the lottery? Who got you the job that kept you from utter starvation, but me?"

"What I said is straight—I told Dad that good, hard labor was a test. It might make a man of you, show you how to judge a man by his worth, and shame you to a knowledge of your cowardice in leaving Ballard, so you would go back. Have you lost anything by having to make your living by the sweat of your brow? Would you rather be actually digging the Big Ditch, or a clerk in an office?"

Hildreth held out his hand impulsively.

"Forgive me, Bob," he said in sudden remorse, "it has been the best thing that could have happened to me, this having to get out and work. I fully understand that you are eager to get me back at Ballard, that you are striving to help me redeem myself. I felt that way about you when you told me of your trouble, over in Panama City, and there was n't a happier chap alive, except you, when you became a true American and found a country."

"I know that." Bob spoke with vigor. "And right there in the gymnasium at the Cristobal Y. M. C. A. I determined to get you back at Ballard sooner or latter. Hildreth, I was going to have Dad take this job from you, to turn you out of the

I. C. C. employ, so that you would have to go to the States. But this accident has done it for me, and I speak the truth when I say that Dad cannot land you another job at this time."

They were making their way up the side of the Cut to Culebra, and neither spoke until the plot of ground back of the Commission clubhouse was reached. Then Hildreth broke the silence.

"Well," he concluded, "to-day I draw my first pay over in Cristobal, though it may be my last down here, and until that is gone I shall not worry. I'll try to get work until thirty dollars is spent, and then I'll take the last thirty for steerage to the States, but not to Ballard!"

Bayliss saw that it was useless to argue further with Hildreth. He was confident of getting work again in the Canal Zone, and the possession of a month's wages made him independent. When the money was gone, and he had not found a job, he might listen to reason. The day when Bob had met him in Panama City, Hildreth would have promised a return to Ballard to get himself out of his troubles, but now that he had earned his own money he felt sure of being able to take care of himself; the one hope of getting him to go back, Bayliss believed, was to reduce him to desperate extremes again.

When they got back to the bachelor quarters they found Corning on the upper porch, his chair tilted back against the house, gazing thoughtfully out at the reeking jungle.

"If it clears away by noon," he said, "I shall have to go across to Cristobal to see the police department there on business. You fellows are going to be paid off, so we can run over together on the afternoon train."

"Yes," laughed Hildreth, with a look at the deluge, "it looks like fair weather, with the rain pouring in gallons!"

"That is no indication," remarked Bayliss. "It may be coming down like Niagara falls one hour, and the next the sun will be trying to dry every drop of it. I am not a weather prophet, but I believe you will need a straw hat this afternoon as a sunshade."

When they came from the commissary hotel dinner they found that Bayliss had hit the mark, for a hot sun beat down from a copper sky, and a vaporous steam arose from the jungle vegetation. It was torridly hot, for in Panama the humidity causes all the discomfort, but it was a relief from the rain, and the three friends were in a good humor as they waited at Culebra station for the train.

Once ensconced in the comfortable rattan seats, they chatted about the Big Job, as usual, and Hildreth commented on the crowd of Americans on the train, dressed in holiday attire instead of working togs, with their wives and children accompanying them.

"Oh, I had quite forgotten it," explained Bayliss, after a hasty survey of the car. "There is the Gorgona baseball nine, for to-day is the day of the

championship game between Gorgona and Culebra for the pennant of the Canal Zone Baseball League. It will be played in the ball park at Colon, and there will be an immense crowd to witness it. We must take it in ourselves, fellows."

"By all means," agreed Corning. "I have never ceased to wonder at the consideration the I. C. C. has for the employees; track meets, baseball, Commission clubhouses, women's clubs—everything to amuse them. The administration will give a half holiday almost any time to allow the workers to take in an athletic event in the Canal Zone."

"It is the best way to get good results on the Canal," said Bob. "When the excavation first started, Corning, it was a difficult problem to keep a contented, dependable force down here; homesickness sent men back to the States quicker than fever, for there was nothing here to interest them. I'll bet there never has been a man in the Canal Zone who at one time or other has not been seized with a desire to get 'back home.'

"Well, the Commission did a sensible thing and encouraged married men to bring their families down, and the single ones to get married. The housekeeping quarters were fixed up, arrangements made for a commissary store where housewives could get everything necessary, electric light, coal, and ice furnished free, and houses. Naturally, with their homes here, the married men were content."

"But what of the poor bachelors?" grinned Hildreth.

“Problem number two,” said Bayliss. “They had no harmless amusements at first, and in their homesickness they drifted to the Panamanian dissipation, a terrible thing in the tropics—bullfights, cock mains, gambling, and drinking, from a sheer craze to dispel thoughts of home. Then the Commission built the Y. M. C. A. clubhouse in every American town; you have seen the comfortable lobbies, the finely equipped gymnasiums, the reading rooms, and soft-drink bars.

“If you tell this back in the States you may be doubted, but it is true—in the Canal Zone there is a force of men who study the needs of the workers for amusement and entertainment, who encourage baseball leagues, basketball, bowling, track meets, swimming contests, and other things. It has been proved that with the installation of bowling alleys, billiard rooms, gymnasiums, camera clubs, and other things, the consumption of intoxicants among the Americans fell off sixty per cent. Now you can understand why the I. C. C. encouraged the track meet at Cristobal, and the unique international quarter-mile race.”

On reaching the station at Colon they hurried to the paymaster's department in the big commissary building near the railroad tracks, and Hildreth went in to draw his first month's wages. Notice had been made on the payroll of his color, so he was not subjected to the humiliation of entering the “silver” office with Panamanian peons and Barbadoes and Jamaican negroes. He was paid in “gold”

with Bayliss and Corning, and there never was a prouder chap than Carvel Hildreth when the first money he had ever earned was in his hands.

“Sixty dollars!” he exulted, when they started for Colon again. “And I earned every cent of it by hard work!”

Back at Ballard, Hildreth had wantonly wasted that much in a month on his riotous escapades, and a hundred dollars had meant nothing to him; here in Panama, under the spell of the Big Job, the sixty dollars he had earned was the proudest possession of his life. He had taken a long stride toward manhood since he landed in the Canal Zone, but his moral cowardice still handicapped him.

“Now,” said Bayliss, “will you go back to your father, and to Ballard?”

“No!” Hildreth’s face darkened. “I know how to work, and I shall not ask him for help again. I love the Big Job here, and I shall stay until it is finished; I cannot go back to college now, for it is too late.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE THIEF

AS the three young fellows from Culebra left the commissary building and started along the Avenida del Frente, on their way to the baseball park of Colon, a well-built chap who was swinging across the railroad tracks, coming from Cristobal, called to Bayliss, and the trio waited until he caught up with them.

"I say, Bob," he began, a worried look on his face, "the Culebra nine is in a plight, for Warrington, on whom we depended for victory because of his pitching, is down with malaria. You three chaps are from Culebra—can any of you do well in the box?"

"Not I," answered Corning promptly, "never went in for baseball."

"I am afraid I can't help you, Dickson," said Bayliss, after introducing the Culebra captain, "but Hildreth here is a great college football athlete, and if I remember correctly, he held the Alton team hitless last spring."

"The very fellow!" breathed young Dickson. "Hustle out to the grounds and I'll have a suit ready for you, Hildreth! We had no one to go on the slab, and the fellows began to fear the game was lost. It's for the league championship, so pitch your arm off. See you at the park!"

He was off like a shot to convey the good news to his teammates, leaving Hildreth to survey the grinning Bayliss reproachfully.

"Now you have gotten me into it!" he began. "I have n't pitched a ball since last spring, Bob, and these fellows are in the best of practice. I'll make a nice spectacle of myself before that crowd of enthusiastic rooters from Culebra and Gorgona!"

"Never mind," smiled Bob, as they started again. "I have faith in you, old man; remember, you are from Culebra, and your nine must win the pennant!"

They were a part of the gay crowd of Americans headed for the ball park, where Gorgona and Culebra were to battle for the victory that would decide the championship of the Canal Zone Baseball League, as the two nines were tied for first place. Empire, Gatun, Cristobal, and Corozal were in the league, but the two leaders had raced far ahead, and the season was about to end.

As they passed one of the cafés along the boisterous Avenida del Frente, where the doors were open and the inevitable Spiggoty barber was shaving his "victim," as Hildreth dubbed him, Bayliss caught each of his chums by the arm, for some one was singing in a loud, clear tenor. Everything in the café was silent, for the roisterous crowd was listening, the glasses were held quietly, and the Americans seemed awed by the song, which was being sung by a man whose hair was gray. Hildreth caught the words:

"Close the door; across the river

He is gone.

With an abscess on his liver,

He is gone.

Many years of rainy seasons,

And malaria's countless treasons

Are among the several reasons

Why he 's gone.

"Close the sunken eyelids lightly;

He is gone.

Bind the shrunken mouth up tightly;

He is gone.

Chinese gin from Bottle Alley

Could not give him strength to rally.

Lone, to wander in Death's Valley,

He is gone!

"In his best clothes they've arrayed him;

He is gone.

In a wooden box they've laid him;

He is gone.

Bogus Hennessy and sherry

With his system both made merry,

Very hard he fought them—very,

But he's gone."

In the hush that followed Bayliss whispered that it was an old song of the "old-timers," common to the early days when death haunted the workers with dread fever, before the sanitation had cleaned up the Zone, a song seldom heard now, unless an old-timer rendered it in a café. There was something in the voice that had been strangely familiar to Hildreth—it brought back a night in a barren room at the Palace, when that same voice had

thrilled him with wonderful stories of the Canal pioneers.

Peering into the café, he saw the old-timer, who was raising his head from the table, and the collegian saw that the man who had stilled the riot of the room with the weird song was Billy Long! He was saddened at the sight, for here was a man who had given nine years of faithful service to his country, and yet whose natural instincts kept him from being worthy of notice. With sixty dollars in his pocket, Hildreth could forgive him for the dollars he had stolen that night.

When they arrived at the Colon ball park Hildreth was amazed to see a fine grandstand, packed with a representative crowd of Americans, with a sprinkling of Panamanians, a neatly laid off infield and outfield, and two uniformed teams in the field. It was so like a baseball scene back in the States that he forgot he was in the tropics, or that Uncle Sam had transplanted a nation to Panama; then he remembered how the Commission encouraged such sports, and he understood.

The interest in the Canal Zone team league games is second only to the series between the Americans and the Panamanians, for like the Cubans, the latter turn out a fast nine. Hildreth, as he and his friends passed through the gate into the grounds, felt a hand on his shoulder, and wheeling, he found himself face to face with Mr. Barton.

"Carvel Hildreth, bless my heart!" exclaimed the promoter. "Is n't this a queer land, where

you meet your friends at a ball game? So you have not gone back yet? Boy, you are doing wrong. Go back to your college, and your father!"

"It does seem queer," smiled the collegian, disregarding his last words. "But I thought you were in Ancon, at the Tivoli."

"Neva is spending the afternoon with a girl friend in Cristobal," explained Mr. Barton, "so I came out to the championship game. To-morrow we sail for Bocas del Toro, where I shall examine the land I expect to buy, and then we shall sail for the States. I guess young Gonzales, with whom I told you I had a break, has me blocked in my ambition to buy that interior land, though it is rich in possibilities, for he got ahead of me and holds options on it."

Carvel explained that he was to pitch for Culebra, and after congratulating him, Mr. Barton said good-by to the collegian. Before he went into the grandstand, however, he came close to Hildreth.

"If you need money to get back on, Carvel," he said, "I'll gladly advance you all you want, for your father's sake. You are the object of all his love and ambition, and you are hurting him cruelly, boy. Say the word, and I'll buy you a first-class passage—"

"No!" returned Hildreth firmly. "He disowned me, and I have learned how to make my own way in the world. Good-by, if I don't see you down here again."

Yet there was an ache in Hildreth's throat as he

made his way to the dressing room, where Captain Dickson had an outfit ready for him. He knew too well how he had disappointed his father by his career at college, and that every day he stayed away from Ballard was an added hurt to Mr. Hildreth. But he had told himself so often that he could not go back, that now he believed it really was too late.

Corning and Bayliss went into the grandstand, where they joined the crowd of Culebra rooters and yelled themselves hoarse as Hildreth warmed up by tossing the ball slowly to little "Tod" Weeks, the Culebra catcher, who formerly played behind the bat for Columbia. Carvel's arm was stiff, but after a few minutes he started a perspiration, and soon he was shooting curves at Tod in a way that made the little athlete wild with enthusiasm.

"Play ball!" called the umpire, and as Culebra had won the toss, they went into the field first. Hildreth walked into the box, and while the infield tossed the ball around, he gazed at the grandstand. It was a wonderful sight, with the cool white flannels of the men as a background for the gay dresses of the women or the brilliant scarfs of the Panamanian belles; in a special box sat the officials of the Isthmian Canal Commission, and Hildreth knew dignified Colonel Goethals, the "Big Boss," as soon as he saw that master of the Big Job.

Sheer luck saved Hildreth in the first inning, for he passed the first two batters and the second singled, though the runner was stopped at third

base; then a double play engineered by the shortstop and second baseman relieved the agony, and he showed his true form by fanning the third out. He was surprised at the fine baseball played by the Canal Zone teams, and at the enthusiasm displayed by the rooters in the stand.

Ford, a former Amherst star, was in the box for Gorgona, and he showed that the tropical heat had brought his arm back in shape, for he dazzled the Culebra batters, striking them out in quick succession, and bringing a nod of praise from the Big Boss in the private box, for Colonel Goethals enters into the play of his people, even as they enter into the spirit of his Big Job—perhaps his interest accounts for their loyalty.

For seven innings Ford was invincible, not a Culebra batter reaching third base; it was the most marvelous game of his Canal Zone career, and the great crowd shouted its approval. Hildreth, by the splendid support of his team, got out of a few dangerous places, and improving as the contest progressed, he held the enemy to three hits after the third, and to no runs. At the start of the eighth inning neither team had scored, and the excitement was intense when Hollister, for Gorgona, advanced to the plate.

That inning was a comedy of errors for Culebra. Hollister lifted a long, easy fly to the right field for what ought to have been an out, and it was dropped, leaving him on second. The next hitter drove a hot one to third, and the baseman got tangled up

with the ball, holding Hollister on second, but filling first base, and then Hildreth hit the batter with a pitched ball; three men on bases, and not one out!

"I will show them!" Hildreth set his teeth. "Oh, for a few minutes of my old-time speed and control!"

He put all his speed into the next ball, and the batter missed it, striking after it plunked into Tod Weeks' big glove. A sharp inshoot followed, and a second strike, then a ball, after which Hildreth sent one over so fast that it was not offered at, and a man was out. The second was easy, for he was plainly afraid of the collegian's terrific speed, but when big "Pudge" Hartley, once of Penn, a famous home-run hitter, came up, Gorgona went wild. Never a game passed but what Pudge put the ball over the fence, and he was sure to do it now.

Hildreth was quite cool; he was in possession of his wonderful control, and a desire seized him to strike out this heavy hitter for Gorgona. If he failed, the game was lost, for Pudge was good for a two bagger, scoring two runs, and Ford would hold Culebra scoreless in the next two innings. The Ballard collegian felt the thrill of the crisis—a championship hung on his pitching!

He sent the ball over for a fast high one, and Pudge Hartley smiled as a ball was called. Then a fast straight one cut the plate, and he had one strike; he swung his bat carelessly, and some one in the stand yelled, "'T is Casey at the bat!" Hildreth tried a sharp outcurve, and had a second

ball called on him, and Pudge let another strike go by, with a contemptuous smile. Then he set himself determinedly, and Hildreth wound up for the decisive pitch. The collegian went through all the motions of delivering the swiftest ball possible, and Pudge swung at it with a quick, heavy swing; but a great roar went up from the stand, for Hildreth had sent in a slow drop, and the mighty Pudge had fanned!

“Great work, old man!” called Bayliss. “Hold them one more inning and score a run, then Culebra will be champions!”

But Ford pitched superbly, and the eighth inning closed without the Culebra team having made a hit. Determined to score, Gorgona came to bat in the first of the ninth, but Hildreth had struck his pace, his arm had loosened up in the hot sun, and his speed was bewildering as he struck out the first man, caused the next to pop to first, and fanned the third on three pitched balls, setting the crowd wild with enthusiasm and admiration.

“Now, fellows,” he shouted, as he ran into the bench, “let’s score one run, and win the game for Culebra!”

Gorgona was playing desperately, but the tide of victory was with Culebra, and the first batter was hit by a pitched ball, a sign of Ford’s weakening. He promptly stole second by a magnificent slide, and went to third on a sacrifice hit. Then Hildreth came to bat, cool and determined, but Ford’s speed got two strikes on him quickly. He

swung his bat, and the crowd was silent until Corning called:

“Drive out a hit, old man, and win the game!”

Hildreth knew his own speed, and he resolved on a desperate chance. He shortened his grip on the bat when the ball shot toward the base and bunted toward third, the runner diving for home on the instant. The Gorgona third baseman had been too far back; he got the ball, but hesitated a fraction of a second before throwing to first, and running at terrific speed, the collegian shot across the bag, the downward motion of the umpire's hands indicating that the game was won for Culebra!

A game and a championship had been won by Hildreth, and he was the hero of the Canal Zone as Bob Bayliss had been after winning the international quarter-mile race in the Cristobal meet.

A few minutes later, when he was dressing, surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd of Culebra players and rooters, a tall, soldierly looking man with white hair and mustache and a military bearing, entered the dressing room. A word with Captain Dickson, and he advanced toward Hildreth, holding out his hand.

“I want to congratulate you on your marvelous pitching!” he said warmly. “It was magnificent! That of Ford was great, but you had all the odds against you, and won out. That is the type of men who have built the Panama Canal!”

Embarrassed by the praise, and by the presence of the Big Boss, Hildreth flushed and was silent

as Colonel Goethals gave his hand a hearty clasp. A few words of commendation to the other players of both teams, and the best loved man in the Canal Zone was gone, leaving Hildreth impressed with the might of the man who had made the Big Ditch a possibility.

After the happy collegian had dressed, Corning and Bayliss joined him, and they walked toward Cristobal, where Douglas was obliged to visit the police station. Hildreth was telling them of his meeting with Mr. Barton, and the offer the financier had made.

"I guess he did n't know that I had sixty dollars in my pocket," he laughed exultantly, "that I earned by the sweat of my brow, too. I've spent lots of money at Ballard foolishly, but I'll bet none of it ever gave me the true pleasure that this does."

He thrust his hand into his inside coat pocket, where the six crisp ten-dollar notes had been carefully stowed away after leaving the paymaster's department at the commissary building. For a moment he stood, a dazed look on his face, and then his hand came away—empty!

"What is the matter, Hildreth?" exclaimed Bayliss, seeing the agonized look on his friend's face. "You don't mean—"

"It is gone! Stolen!" breathed Hildreth frantically. "Every cent that I toiled and sweated to earn is lost!"

A sudden vivid thought flashed on his mind.

He recalled what Corning had said to him as they stood on the forward deck of the *Cristobal* before the ship left New York. "I found it advisable and necessary to leave New York as soon as I could."

Was Douglas Corning the thief?

CHAPTER XXIV

HILDRETH'S PROMISE

"HILDRETH," said Bob Bayliss earnestly, "either Fate or Fortune has handled your case far better than I could have done. First, number 33 was blown to smithereens, throwing you out of a job, and now some one has relieved you of your last dollar. Old man, can't you realize that all this means you must return to Ballard and make good?"

The three friends had returned to Culebra after the baseball game in which Carvel Hildreth had won the admiration of the Canal Zone by his superb pitching, bringing the league championship and pennant to Culebra. The town on the edge of the Cut was celebrating the victory over Gorgona, and enthusiastically honoring the Ballard collegian, but there was no joy in Hildreth's heart that night, for while in Colon he had been robbed of the sixty dollars he had toiled so hard to earn.

Below them the night shift labored in a fairyland of electric lights, strung across and up and down the Cut, gleaming from the dark abyss; the rattle and clatter of the machinery, the clanking and shrieking of the steam shovels, and a hundred other noises, softened by the distance, floated up to them on the calm air. From where they sat

on the upper screened porch of the bachelor quarters they could see the exultant Culebra rooters in the Commission clubhouse, riotous over the great victory that had made them league champions.

Hildreth was despondent. Try as he might, he could not drive from his mind the haunting impression that Douglas Corning had taken the sixty dollars; there was the strange speech that he had made on the *Cristobal* at the New York pier, and everything had indicated then that he needed money. It was true that Billy Long had been in Colon—for Carvel remembered that other theft—and any one could have picked his pocket in the crush and jam of the crowd that poured into the ball park. It might have been done while he was interested in conversation with Mr. Barton, but, somehow, he could not help thinking of Corning.

That young man, however, seemed not to feel the weight of Hildreth's suspicions, for he sympathized with the downcast collegian, and offered him any assistance in his power should Carvel decide to return to college. Bayliss also pledged his help, but only on the promise of Hildreth that he would go back to Ballard and graduate, no matter how hard a fight he had to stay. Bob saw that circumstances had brought the collegian to that desperate condition which had seemed necessary for a right decision, and he determined to make the most of them.

"Give us your promise that you will go straight to Ballard," said Corning, "and we will buy you

a passage on the *Panama*, sailing next Tuesday. We'll see you through here until sailing day, too."

"Come, promise!" urged Bayliss. "Go to New York on the *Panama*, hurry around to your father's office and make him happy, then hike back to college. I'll bet you that everything is forgotten now, and that all the fellows will welcome you!"

Hildreth was almost ready to give in and make the promise. This last blow of the cruel Fate that had pursued him since the Hamilton game was too much; it had crushed his spirit, and he pictured again the starvation he had faced in Panama City. One thing was certain; he could not stay in the Canal Zone without a job, and if he let his friends send him to the States, his father would gladly forgive him when he went to Ballard, and would recompense Bayliss and Corning.

The loss of his month's pay had taken all the independence out of Carvel Hildreth, but he had fought and rebelled so long against going back to the bitter loneliness that he had left at college, that even now, on the verge of ruin, he could not surrender without a struggle.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, fellows," he declared at last. "I will make one more effort to get work here in the Canal Zone, and if I fail, then I will accept the loan of enough money to get me back to Ballard. If I cannot get a job to-morrow I promise, on my word of honor as a Hildreth, to go back to college and graduate!"

"Good!" exclaimed Bayliss gladly. "Hildreth, I

am happy in the firm belief that you won't be able to land a job, for I want you to go back now. Take to-morrow and do all you can to get work, and if you fail—"

"Then you have my promise," said Hildreth quietly. "But I warn you, Bob, that I am going to take a desperate chance—I shall go to see Colonel Goethals himself."

"The Big Boss!" gasped Corning. "Say, old man, I never thought of that! And he made a special visit to the dressing room at the Colon baseball park, just to congratulate you on your wonderful pitching."

"That visit is what I am counting on," answered the collegian. "He said that the Canal was being dug by the kind of fellows that I seemed to be, winning the game against big odds, and I am going to see what he will do to keep me here on the Big Job. I am going to turn in now, fellows; you have my promise that if I do not get work after an appeal to the "old man" himself, then I'll go back to college."

For a long time after Hildreth had gone to bed, Corning and Bayliss remained on the upper porch, with the brilliant moon silvering the palm fronds around the house, and the delightful tropical breeze blowing from the cool Pacific. They both understood that the Big Boss unwittingly had it in his power to make a man of Hildreth, or perhaps to ruin him by giving him work on the Big Ditch.

"Well," said Bayliss regretfully, "we have done

all in our power, Corning, and it is up to Colonel Goethals now. I dare not go to him and ask him not to let Hildreth have work; all we can do is to hope there is none available. If Carvel lands a job our last chance of getting him to do right and go back to college is killed; if he fails, then we have his word of honor that he will return."

The next morning at ten o'clock, after Bayliss and Corning had gone to their work, Hildreth walked over to the Administration Building, which reared itself on top of Culebra Hill like a huge barn with a corrugated iron roof. He entered and strode down the broad corridor to the office, where he found Colonel Goethals' private secretary and his assistant, ready to wait on every need of their chief. The secretary came forward politely.

"I wish to see Colonel Goethals," said Hildreth, "if it is possible now."

"The name, please?" inquired the secretary.

"Hildreth," answered the collegian, and then, with a flash of inspiration, he added, "Tell him I am the fellow who pitched for Culebra yesterday."

While he awaited the return of the secretary from the "throne room," as the private office of Colonel Goethals is called by the Canal Zone workers, Hildreth surveyed the innumerable blueprints that covered the walls of the outer office, and the numberless maps, drawings, and diagrams, all of the work along the Big Ditch. In a few minutes the secretary came back, and motioned him into the presence of the Big Boss.

The "old man," as he is affectionately called by his loyal army of workers, was standing by his desk as Hildreth entered, a tall, military figure, with a finely shaped head covered with white, close-cut hair, and a complexion bronzed by long exposure to the tropical sun. He smiled a friendly greeting to Carvel, but his eyes seemed to pierce into the young fellow's very soul, and the collegian felt that one must have a clear conscience before he could gaze into the eyes of the Big Boss without faltering.

"Your trouble seemed urgent," he said, in his pleasant, well modulated voice, "or I should have asked you to wait for my Sunday court. But when you made me remember you by your great work for Culebra yesterday, I decided to see you at once."

Every Sunday, from seven-thirty to ten-thirty in the morning, the Big Boss holds court in his "throne room," when any and all who have grievances may be sure of a sympathetic hearing from Colonel Goethals. From the highest official to the most humble peon along the Big Ditch, he is ready to listen to their cases, and to judge them justly and humanely; family troubles, charges of petty graft, injustice of bosses—all are poured into his ears in these Sunday conferences.

"I came to ask you for work, sir," began Hildreth bravely. "Yesterday in Colon I was robbed of my month's wages, sixty dollars, and I have n't a cent in the world. I reported my loss to the police, but I guess I'll never recover it."

"Work is scarce now, my friend," said the Big

Boss thoughtfully. "We are gradually cutting down the working force, and —"

"I had a job," interposed Hildreth quickly. "I was shoveling coal for steam shovel 33, under Mr. MacNamara in the Cut, but she was shattered by a delayed explosion of dynamite, and I was blown out of work."

The "old man" pressed an electric buzzer on his desk, and instantly the alert secretary was in the private office, waiting the order.

"Look over the accident files," said Colonel Goethals, "and bring me the report of the wrecking of steam shovel 33, please."

The filing system in the administration office is so perfect that the Big Boss can press the buzzer, give his order, and have any report or document laid on his desk within a few minutes, from contracts with labor agents and specifications of new machinery for the Cut, down to the excavation record of any steam shovel, the amount of concrete used on a certain day in the Gatun locks, or a personal report on the behavior of any employee on the Canal work. So, in a short time, he was looking over the details of the terrible accident that had shocked the Zone and injured Bill Rosslyn.

"A very sad affair, friend." He laid a hand on Carvel's shoulder, and the collegian was thrilled at the touch. "So you were a member of 33's crew when she was blown up! You shall be taken care of, never fear. Let me see—ever do any office work?"

"I have never done clerical work," began Carvel eagerly. "But I am quick at figures, and —"

"Come back on Monday at nine," concluded the Big Boss. "I shall have you provided for by then. Take a good rest and get over the shock of the accident; we have a favorable report of Rosslyn from the Ancon Hospital this morning. Remain in your quarters here at Culebra. Here is an order on the paymaster's department for a week's wages to run you until Monday. Good day."

Before he could thank the "old man," Hildreth found himself out of the room and making his way along the broad hall to the open air, dazed by the dispatch with which Colonel Goethals had handled his case. Before the interview he had regarded the Big Boss as a demi-god, not to be approached by his subjects; now he knew him for a kindly, sympathetic man, and an exceedingly busy one. Already he had come to love this organizer of the Canal Zone, and he admired his efficiency, as do all who come in contact with him.

Hildreth could hardly wait for the day to pass and five o'clock to come, so he could tell Bayliss and Corning of his good fortune. When at last the afternoon shift was over, and they reached their bachelor quarters, Carvel was waiting for them on the lower porch, and in a few graphic sentences he told them the result of his interview with the Big Boss. There was a silence, broken at last by Bayliss.

"I am sorry, Carvel," he said plainly. "It was

your last chance to make a man of yourself by going back, and had Colonel Goethals known the truth he would have told you to return to college."

"We can do no more." Corning was discouraged. "Had you failed to land a job it would have meant your keeping the promise to go back to Ballard and win a victory where you were a moral coward to leave, but now —"

Hildreth felt that they were right, and that he had lost another battle, but he could not feel angry at the way they had heard of his fortune. He knew that they were treating him squarely and that they would have given anything to get him back to college. But he was overjoyed at having work again, and he smiled tolerantly at them.

Bayliss drew an envelope from his pocket and held it out sorrowfully to his exultant chum.

"Here," he said regretfully. "Count it, old man, and see that it is all there—sixty dollars. I took it from you after the game yesterday at Colon, for I was determined to make you return. You know that I am not a thief; I would have paid your passage with my own funds, and then mailed you this money. I knew that as long as you had a month's wages you would not start, and I wanted your promise to go at once."

Bewildered, Hildreth gazed at the six ten-dollar notes and then at Bob, who was watching him in deep dejection. For a moment he could say nothing, and then he grasped his chum's hand tensely.

"Bob," he muttered, "I don't think I have realized until right now just what a true friend you have been to me. I know that I ought to go back, and I would have done so had I failed to get work. I'll stay a little longer, and save money, and then perhaps I'll make up my mind to return."

"It is now or never!" said Bayliss earnestly. "If you do not decide to be a man before you start to work Monday, Carvel, you will always be a coward. I have done all I could to save you from your weaker self, and now it is up to you!"

They walked into the house to wash and dress for supper. Somehow, Hildreth did not feel as happy as he had when he came from the interview with Colonel Goethals; he seemed to feel that he had fallen back an entrenchment in his fight with self, and the possession of work and his month's wages did not make him content. Bob was gloomy and Corning not much better, so they were poor companions for Carvel.

"I don't care," he told himself. "I'll go back — later."

CHAPTER XXV

THE KIDNAPING OF NEVA

AFTER a month of shoveling coal for number 33 in the noisy chasm of Culebra Cut, the enforced idleness of the week the Big Boss had given Hildreth grew monotonous, burdened as he was with the knowledge that he had done wrong not to go back to his father and old Ballard. He was beginning to see clearly that the stigma of cowardice which he richly merited for leaving college would haunt him always, and that if he craved peace of mind and conscience he must return.

Try as he might, in these days when he was not swinging the shovel and feeding the ravenous appetite of the big Lidgerwood, he could not drive away thoughts of his father, with the bitter memory of how cruelly he had disappointed him in the three years at Ballard. What a crushing blow he must have dealt Mr. Hildreth by running away from the storm of condemnation unjustly showered on him, and this after his riotous college career!

It was on Friday that Bayliss telephoned the collegian to meet him and Corning at the Gatun police station; the "flannel-foot" was over probing rumors of petty graft in the locks gang, where the bosses were reported as having issued extra time checks to certain trusties, and collecting most of the profit from the laborers thus favored. Bob, as

time keeper for the excavation train crews, had to be at Gatun to check up the trains coming from the Cut, so he told Carvel to come over on the afternoon passenger.

Corning was talking earnestly with the police lieutenant when the collegian entered the Gatun police station, which, as are all in the Canal Zone, was exactly like station houses in cities back in the States. Bayliss, who was chatting with a red-haired young clerk, called to Hildreth and introduced him to Casey, an alert, talkative little Irishman.

"Sure, Bob," he remarked cheerfully, "the Canal Zone police force is composed av the foinest men in the wurruld! Look at wan of thim Spiggoty cops, an' thin see our lads! Hello, here comes me uncle, Dinnis Casey, who is the biggest policeman in all Panama."

The giant who strode into the police station seemed to deserve the distinction; he was at least four inches over six feet in height, and his weight must have been two hundred pounds, yet not an ounce of it was superfluous and he carried his immense frame with a catlike grace. He was dressed in the khaki uniform and puttees of the Canal Zone police, and wore his badge on his coat, while a big revolver hung in its holster at his belt.

"This is me uncle, Dinnis Casey!" announced the young clerk with pride. "He was wance a mumber of the King's Guard, London, where they have to be six fate tall. Ain't he a fine broth of a lad, though?"

With a good-natured smile at his enthusiastic

nephew, the Canal Zone policeman shook hands with Bayliss and Hildreth, giving their hands such a hearty grip that it was some time before they recovered from the effects of it. As Hildreth admired the splendid physique of the man, he did not wonder at the perfect order maintained in the Canal Zone, when men such as this patrolled its confines; he compared Casey, senior, with the Spiggoty pygmies, and smiled at the difference.

"Law an' order reign down here," said Dennis Casey, when Bayliss asked if he ever had much trouble on his beat. "The majisty av the law has made the hotheaded Panamanians respect our flag, an' the Americans already did. But I ray-mimber whin I first came down, nine years ago; thin a man might expect to feel a bullet or a Spiggoty knife in him at inny moment."

"I have heard Panama was lawless," averred Bayliss. "The old-timers say—"

His sentence was never finished, for at that moment a well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman of prosperous appearance rushed excitedly into the police station, panting with alarm and the stress of a long run. He hurried up to the desk of Police-Lieutenant Corrigan and interrupted that official's conversation with Douglas Corning.

"Send out a squad, quick!" he gasped. "My daughter has been kidnaped! Five Panamanians seized her on the road from the station to the Gatun locks and put her on a hand car! Hurry, they must be a mile down the railroad now!"

"Some dirty Spiggoties kidnaped an American girl in broad daylight!" ejaculated Lieutenant Corrigan, stupefied with amazement at the sheer daring of it. "Which way did they go, man?"

"Toward Panama City!" exclaimed the gentleman, grasping at the general geographical direction the fugitives had taken. "Send your men to rescue Neva!"

With an exclamation of surprise Hildreth had recognized Mr. Barton, and instantly he knew what had happened; Gonzales, in a last desperate attempt to block the financier in his intentions to exercise the options on the Bocas del Toro land that José wanted, had kidnaped Neva, as she walked along the half-mile road from the railroad station to the locks and Gatun dam. Evidently the plot had been arranged carefully, for a hand car had been waiting and the Panamanians were now speeding down the track toward Culebra.

In a few sentences Mr. Barton explained to Hildreth that Neva had insisted on seeing the Culebra Cut and the works at Gatun before they sailed to Bocas del Toro, so they had taken another motor trip through the Cut, and had then come to Gatun. While he had been talking with an official near the locks, Neva had walked slowly back toward the station, and then it was that Gonzales and his men seized the girl.

"Dennis Casey," roared Lieutenant Corrigan, "take three men, find a hand car, and go after them treacherous villains! Shoot them like dogs if you

have to, and don't come back without the girl—alive! I'll teach the Spiggoties to violate the majesty of the American flag by such outrageous actions!"

The big Irishman, Dennis Casey, was transformed into a Berserker by the very thought of such Panamanian impudence, and he picked out three Canal Zone policemen almost as husky as himself, arming them with *machetes*, to cut their way through the jungle, and with revolvers. Hildreth, in horror at the thought of Neva, his friend since childhood, in such peril; Mr. Barton, wild with alarm; and Corning and Bob Bayliss, boiling with rage, followed the Canal Zone policemen down to the railroad station, where a hand car was pressed into service.

"Gonzales will fly into the jungle!" shouted Mr. Barton. "He will take her to some native village and hold her until I give him the options. We must catch them before they get so far into the forest that we cannot find them."

While Lieutenant Corrigan was burning the wires to notify the entire Canal Zone of the high-handed abduction of Neva Barton, Hildreth and Dennis Casey, aided by Corning and Bayliss, were pumping vigorously at the handles of the hand car and it was tearing along through the jungle at a fast clip, with Mr. Barton urging them to greater efforts. As they whizzed past the thatched huts of the natives, the peons gazed in open-mouthed wonder at the strange sight of a hand car crowded with "gringos" chasing another loaded with Panamanians.

“We must stop at Ahorca Lagarto,” called Dennis Casey, “an’ see if the spalpeens went through the village. They might drop off av the track an’ take to the jungle any time!”

A stop was made at the native village, consisting of an American railroad station and one Canal Zone house, with half a dozen miserable Panamanian huts scattered along the edge of the jungle for a few rods. The operator at the station came out on a dead run, waving his hands excitedly.

“Keep on!” he shouted. “A hand car just went through—you are hot on their trail! Watch out for it on the tracks, if they take to the jungle!”

On again they sped, past the native huts where dark women were washing clothes and lazy peons loafing in the sun, gazing indolently at the Americans as they shot past. Into the cleft made by the railroad between the walls of the jungle the hand car rattled, worked now by the three Canal Zone policemen and the indefatigable Dennis Casey, faster and faster, until—

“Down brakes!” yelled Bayliss, who was looking ahead. “There it is, stalled on the track—they have taken to the jungle!”

A few hundred yards ahead the hand car was standing on the rails, where the Panamanians had left it, doubtless with the vengeful hope that the pursuers would crash headlong into it. But they stopped within a few feet of it, and piling from the hand car that had borne them from Gatun, they found fresh foot tracks in the mud on the fringe of

the deep jungle, where a trail led into the dark, silent recesses of the tropical forest.

"After thim!" Dennis Casey plunged into the jungle impetuously. "They've got a good start, but raymimber, we're Americans!"

"Heaven help them if they get lost and hit the Black Swamp at night!" came from one of the squad. "It has n't any bottom, and if they blunder into it in the darkness, we'll never find a body!"

A few minutes of rushing along the trail, which was deep with mud, and the jungle had swallowed them completely; they could see a few yards ahead and behind, where the trail was, but on either side a vast green wall of vegetation arose, thick and impenetrable, a vivid expanse of variegated hues. The tracks of the fugitives could be followed with ease while daylight lasted, for the mud held the impressions clearly, and Casey made good time along the trail, for he knew that when darkness fell the crafty Panamanians might elude them.

The sun was just setting, though in the somber jungle the shadows had already begun to fall, and its last red rays shed an unearthly glow on the tops of the giant trees, with their clouds of flowers. There was a wild riot of hues and tints, bewilderingly beautiful, in the profusion of tropical flowers and plants in endless varieties, a lurid crimson, a bright yellow, or a dazzling white—a ceaseless succession of marvelous colors, all with that amazing background of vivid green.

Here a giant buttercup, several inches wide,

topped a slender stem fifteen feet high; there several *lignum vitæ* trees, with their flowering tops, towered above the jungle profusion, with gnarled, twisted vines hanging everywhere, and huge clusters of large, purple grapes tempting the eye. Some of the trees burst into clouds of yellow blooms that could be seen, on the mountain slopes, at a distance of several miles.

There were magnificent ferns, luxuriant grasses, and a multitude of smaller, yet particularly brilliant flowers, and there were orchids! Hildreth gasped in sheer wonder at these superb tropical beauties, the great white one, called "The Tears of the Virgin," and a red variety, "The Seventh Deadly Sin"; then there was the "Annunciation" and the "Bride of Christ," as the Panamanians have named them. The collegian, remembering the cost of these flowers back in the States, sighed as he gazed at the hundreds to be had for the taking.

Everywhere there was a bewildering network of creepers and vines, interlacing with the trees and shrubbery and forming a network that caused the *machetes* to be wielded frequently. At times some wild animal scurried away before the march of the invaders—a stunted deer, or an affrighted tapir; on the ground, covered with rotting leaves, ants paraded, beetles crawled along, and the air was full of ghostlike moths, fluttering in the dim light.

But to Hildreth the wild birds of the Panamanian jungle, with their gorgeous plumage, was the most

wonderful sight of all. Chattering, scolding little gold and green paroquets were in abundance, gay humming birds blended with the flowers, and once, when they waded neck deep in water to ford a river, he caught sight of hundreds of white aigrette herons standing along the banks. So enthralled was he by the gorgeousness of the jungle that he could have loitered along; but there was Neva's peril, so he hurried along in the mud after Dennis Casey.

"On!" urged Mr. Barton, who was keeping up the pace despite his weight. "We must come up with the rascals soon!"

The darkness was falling rapidly and it was with difficulty that Dennis Casey kept to the trail, which was faint at best. On through the slippery mud they tramped, bitten by the pestiferous little red bug and sweating with the intense humidity of the dense jungle. At times the *machete* was used to slash a way through the natural barriers of tangled and matted vegetation, and then they would plunge on again, up or down slippery inclines of ooze and mud.

"They have circled!" Dennis Casey called out. "They are headed back toward the Atlantic side of the Isthmus; I believe they are lost!"

"Gonzales evidently knows what he is about," said Bayliss. "He will take her to one of the many inland native villages and keep her, then notify Mr. Barton where to send the options he wants destroyed."

At last the energetic Casey called a halt, and it

was a miserable little squad that paused in the deep silence of the jungle. The rain had begun to patter on the foliage some time before, and now it came down in torrents, the thunder crashed and reverberated, and the vivid, forked lightning split the leaden sky. In the darkness they had lost all sense of direction, and they feared to attempt even a return to Gatun, for they might plunge deeper into the jungle.

"If they run into the Black Swamp in this darkness," breathed the Canal Zone policeman who had spoken of this death trap before, "it means the end!"

The Black Swamp, across which the Panama Railroad runs at one narrow place, extends from the Canal to the Chagres River near the village of Ahorca Lagarto, and it is a stretch of the blackest mud imaginable, with stagnant water, through which hummocks protrude. It is of quicksand nature, and is said to have no bottom; the *Canal Record* of some years back gives interesting accounts of the terrible difficulty the railroad builders encountered in constructing a foundation on which to lay the road bed, dumping excavation material and rocks until the foundation was made.

At one time in the Canal construction the railroad tracks across Black Swamp sank without warning, carrying ties, rails, roadbed and all to a depth of twelve feet for a distance of five hundred yards. It was this desolate, terrifyingly dismal expanse that the kidnapers might blunder into with Neva

in the inky darkness, and Hildreth shuddered at the thought, for he had several times seen the ooze and bubbling mire, and had heard weird tales of its death-trap nature.

For an hour the tropical storm beat down. Then the thunder died away, the rain ceased, and a most brilliant moon shone down on the jungle, giving a strange, supernatural appearance to the gaunt trees and the vegetation. This did not impress Dennis Casey, however, for he had a sudden inspiration.

"Perhaps they are near us," he said. "We have walked so long that we may be close to each other now. They won't suspect it, so let's call and perhaps the girl can answer before the villains can prevent her."

They raised their voices in a shout that echoed horribly in the dark, silent jungle, then listened in strained silence. Almost as an echo, sounding close on their left, yet faintly, there came a response in a girl's voice:

"Help! Quick—on the railroad tracks—"

Then the cry was smothered, as though a Panamanian had laid his hand rudely over Neva's mouth!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BATTLE

“**F**OLLOW me!” bellowed the enraged Dennis Casey. “Get your revolvers ready, lads, and shoot thim down if they start a fight. We’ll learn the murtherin’ haythen to run off with an American gurrl!”

One who has never been in a South American jungle cannot conceive of the almost incredibly thick vegetation to be found in it; in the day it presents a green wall that is absolutely impenetrable except on a regular trail unless the *machete* is used, and the so-called trails cross and recross in a bewildering fashion, so that a stranger cannot go a mile without being hopelessly lost. Large-trunked trees, hanging vines, thickly interwoven bushes, all help to make the thick jungle, while underfoot lies swamp, mud, and water.

Add to this a black darkness ahead, for the moonlight could not break through the foliage to the trail, and one has an idea of their plight. But the pale orb that peeped through the drifting clouds gave Casey his direction, and without hesitation he plunged on toward the place where the cry for help had sounded. After him the others fought their way, Hildreth close at his heels, eager to aid his friend, Bob, ever ready, Corning, the three

Canal Zone policemen detailed with the big Irishman, and Mr. Barton, on whom the rigor of the pursuit was beginning to tell at last.

At times Dennis Casey floundered into briers, scratching himself cruelly, but he kept doggedly on, and soon the jungle grew less dense, indicating that they were nearing the railroad. It was evident to them that José Gonzales had also lost his way in the baffling forest, and that instead of keeping on toward the inland native village he had in mind, he had circled like a lost person in the darkness, and had emerged from the jungle on the railroad again, some distance below where he had left the hand car.

The strange experiences that Carvel Hildreth had encountered since the day he left Ballard had prepared him for almost anything, for after the night with the old-timer in Colon, the big track meet at Cristobal, the baseball game, and the wonders of Gatun and Culebra Cut, it seemed a most natural thing that he should be pursuing the desperate Panamanian through the tropical jungle. He could not realize that the chase was full of peril, and that Gonzales and his men would fight like wolves when cornered.

He had seen a fracas in Colon, and several smaller fights in the *cantina* districts of that town and Panama City, but not enough to acquaint him with the wild, hotheaded lawlessness of the Latin-American races, especially those of the Panamanian republic, that before the secession from Colombia

could boast of fifty-one revolutions in fifty-seven years.

Finally big Dennis Casey stumbled over something and fell to his knees, but was up again like a cat.

"The saints be praised!" he panted. "Thim's the railroad tracks! Run, men, and we'll catch the rascals!"

They dashed down the railroad tracks, grateful for the solid footing of the roadbed; Casey, who seemed made of iron, was leading, a huge revolver in each hand, while Hildreth, consumed with rage against Gonzales and wild to fight the treacherous little Panamanian, was at his heels. The collegian would have rushed headlong into danger, regardless of what threatened, but Casey held him back.

"Be careful, lad!" he warned. "Hear that roarin'? That's the Chagres River, and we are near the Black Swamp. We have roamed around in a circle, like thim Spiggoties did, an' have come out below where we went in, near Ahorca Lagarto. One misstep, an' we'll niver get your carcass!"

"Go slow, old man!" panted Bayliss. "Have your revolver ready, for Gonzales won't give up without a fight, now that he has brought the wrath of Uncle Sam on his head. Let Casey lead us against them."

They could hear plainly the voices of the Panamanians farther down the railroad tracks, where Gonzales was urging them to stand and fight; Mr. Barton was so infuriated that the Canal Zone

policemen had to grasp the financier to keep him from dashing across the Black Swamp and attacking the kidnapers singlehanded. The Americans paused just where the tracks start across the murky, forbidding waste, and the Panamanians had halted on the other side, at a distance of several hundred yards. They evidently did not intend to take to flight, so Casey prepared for action.

"I wonder what they will do?" breathed Hildreth, fingering the automatic that Bayliss had slipped to him. "We must look out for an ambush. Yet, since we are on the edge of the Black Swamp, they cannot surround us."

There was a red flash some distance ahead of them, and a bullet whined dangerously close to their heads. At this Casey gave a savage exclamation and hurled himself flat on the ties, as did all except Hildreth, who seemed to have been changed into a reckless daredevil by his bitterness at Ballard; with a shout of defiance he dashed off at full speed in the direction of the shot!

"Come back, Hildreth!" cried Bayliss, in an agony of fear, by his anxiety for his chum giving the Panamanians warning of what Carvel was doing. A fusillade of shots from the desperate enemy answered him, and one of the Canal Zone policemen clutched his left arm spasmodically. But the collegian was unscathed, and the sound of Neva's voice, pleading with Gonzales to let her go to her father, spurred him to an unreasoning rage.

He remembered when he had last talked to her, on the *Cristobal*, on the night when, after his encounter with José Gonzales, he had refused to go back to Ballard; she had broken their friendship then in sorrow. Now Neva was in peril, and the thought came to him that he would show her he was not a coward. Without a thought of peril to himself, he dashed on in the face of the shots that whistled past his head.

His position was extremely perilous, for on each side of the Panama Railroad tracks the Black Swamp, dark and mysterious, stretched out, that strange marsh that has baffled engineers for years, and ahead of him was Gonzales and his men, rendered desperate by the fate that had caused them to become lost in the jungle, and had brought them out on the railroad again, when José had planned to be deep in the forest, at some native village, where he would have kept Neva until Mr. Barton had sent him the options on the Bocas del Toro land. Now, circling in the jungle, he had come back into the power of the pursuers.

Guided by the moonlight and the flashes from the Panamanian revolvers, Hildreth plunged ahead, holding his automatic ready for use but not firing lest he hit Neva. But the Spiggoties, with the prospect of a settlement with the United States for the kidnaping of an American subject, knew that they were doomed to a prison term. Gonzales fired shot after shot as the collegian came on, missing him. Hildreth's friends were afraid to fire,

for fear of hitting him or Neva, but the bullets of the enemy came uncomfortably close to them.

The foolhardiness of Hildreth proved fatal, for in his blind anger and desire to rescue Neva, he ran headlong into the trap that the crafty and cornered Gonzales laid for him.

With his men firing to deceive the Americans, Gonzales, a keen knife in his hand, crept snakelike along the tracks, writhing ahead, hidden by the shadows of the gloomy jungle; Hildreth, unsuspecting this new peril, surged fiercely on. He might have suspected something from the fact that the bullets now screamed high over his head, but he knew only one thing—Neva was in danger!

A few seconds more and he understood, for without a sound to warn him, he felt a strong, sinuous body wind about him, and taken by surprise, he crashed to the tracks with Gonzales' knee at his throat. The moon, breaking through the clouds at that moment, flooded the jungle with a silver light and showed to Hildreth the look of fiendish triumph on the dark face of Gonzales; it also revealed to him the gleaming knife poised for a death blow, and he caught the descending wrist in a grip of iron.

Only the days of toil shoveling coal for number 33's fires could have fitted Hildreth for this mighty struggle with the desperate and maddened Panamanian on the railroad tracks over the Black Swamp. It was a thrillingly dramatic fight, and over the combatants swept the fire of the other

Panamanians, driving back the furious Americans when they would rush the enemy. Hildreth tensed his steel muscles and prepared for a great writhe that should hurl that catlike form from his body.

"Ah, I haf you!" hissed José, renewing his efforts to bring the blade down to Hildreth's heart.

But the collegian was fighting for his life now, as well as for the friend of his childhood, and he held the supple wrist in a merciless grip as he fought to rise. Gonzales was wiry, and exerted every muscle to keep Hildreth pinned to earth so he could drive the knife home, but with a superhuman effort the football right tackle arose to his knees with his lighter adversary, and renewed the battle.

"Hold him, lad, we're comin'!" shouted Dennis Casey, but a volley from the Panamanians across the Black Swamp checked the rush. The enemy had no particular love for Gonzales, and to save themselves they would risk hitting him, so long as they held the Americans at bay. The duel of Gonzales and Hildreth, on the tracks of the narrow roadbed across the marsh, was clearly seen in the bright moonlight.

It was a weird and terrible scene, in a strange setting. The dank stagnancy of Black Swamp, the gloom of the frowning jungle, the plaintive notes of startled night birds, with the pale light disclosing the two figures on the tracks across the waste, made a ghostly impression. On either side of the two tracks lay the Black Swamp, silent and gruesome; hummocks of mud arose from the still, black

ooze, and at times the splash of an alligator or some reptile was heard.

And in the grim silence, the American and the Panamanian fought on!

At last Dennis Casey, wild with the enforced idleness, took a chance and fired past the fighting figures, aiming at a moving form that he saw at a distance past them. There was a cry in a man's voice, and a storm of Spanish curses, which made the Irishman chuckle.

"Don't try that again!" cautioned Corning. "You can shoot past Hildreth, but it would be like the Spiggoties to hold the girl up to shield themselves."

"Don't hit Neva!" groaned Mr. Barton. "This is terrible! Can't we move?"

"You bet we can!" answered Casey grimly. "The Panamanians are shooting anyway, and Hildreth may be hit. We must risk a rush, for they are such cowards that a dash will make them run. Ready—let's go!"

With the giant Canal Zone policemen in the lead, Corning and Bayliss ran across the swamp toward Gonzales and Hildreth, while Mr. Barton, with a courage born of desperation, followed. But when they were twenty yards from the conflict Casey halted in horror, beholding a terrible tragedy that was enacted before the eyes of the startled Americans.

The collegian, exerting all his strength, arose to his feet and hurled the snarling Panamanian from

him, sending him reeling a few paces away. Then Gonzales, like a wolf, leaped back madly at his enemy with raised knife, but at that instant a stray bullet from one of his own men caught him in the shoulder; weakened by the shock and blind with rage and pain, he staggered blindly to one side, stumbled over a rail, and shot into the Black Swamp! Hildreth made a frantic grasp at him, but was too late, and the splash told of the Panamanian's fate.

"He's gone!" shouted Casey, horrified at seeing even such a wretch as Gonzales lose his life in such a manner. "He'll niver come up again, for the mud will stifle him. There's no bottom to the Black Swamp!"

Terrified at the tragedy, the other Panamanians surrendered and Neva was free at last. Even as the Americans stared down at the black mud and water where a few bubbles floated, she came tottering out to them, and was caught in her father's arms. But after he had kissed her again and again, with a heartfelt joy at her deliverance, she came to Hildreth.

"Oh, it was splendid!" she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "I was afraid you would be killed, Carvel, and then I saw you throw him off! It was a terrible experience, but thanks to the heroism of my rescuers, I am unharmed!"

With the frightened Panamanians in the grasp of the Canal Zone policemen, and Neva walking between her joyous father and Carvel Hildreth, the party made their way to Ahorca Lagarto, where

they could telephone to Colon for an engine. As they made their way slowly along, a thought came into Hildreth's mind.

"One thing is certain, Mr. Barton," he said. "You are free to go ahead and buy that inland property that has clear titles, for José Gonzales will never exercise *his* options on it now!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAST DITCH

IT was on Saturday morning that Bob Bayliss was seized with a sudden inspiration, and a brilliant idea flashed on his mind as to how he might influence Carvel Hildreth to go back to Ballard. The young fellow, now a thoroughly loyal American, was grateful to Hildreth for helping him to forget his bitter past and find a country, so he was intensely eager that his chum should win his fight at college. Remembering how the impressive sight of the locks and dam at Gatun, with a summing up of the marvelous accomplishment in the Canal Zone, had awakened in his heart a love for the United States, Bob formed a plan by which Hildreth might be swayed to a right decision.

Tired, and sore in every muscle from their thrilling pursuit of José Gonzales through the jungle, Bayliss and Corning had knocked off from work the next day, and with Hildreth they were lounging at ease on the upper screened porch of the bachelor quarters at Culebra.

After the dramatic battle on the railroad tracks crossing Black Swamp, ending with the terrible tragedy in which the renegade Panamanian lost his life in the bottomless depths, Mr. Barton had abandoned his plan of going to Bocas del Toro and

had engaged passage for himself and Neva on the *Panama*, sailing Tuesday. Now that young Gonzales could never use his options on the valuable inland properties of hardwood forest, rubber, and other products, Mr. Barton had been able to secure options on it from Mr. Gonzales, and these, with those he held on the Bocas del Toro land, necessitated a quick return to the States.

Back in New York, the promoter would interest a number of big investors in the project, get together a large capital, form a company to exploit the products, and then return to Panama to close his options and buy the lands. He had found that there were clear deeds and titles, a most unusual thing in Panama, and he was confident that a railroad could be built from Bocas del Toro inland; this effected, it was certain that fortunes could be made. The possibilities of the undeveloped Panama land are unlimited, if the obstacles of lack of roads, scarcity of labor, and befogged titles are once overcome.

Neva was none the worse for her adventure, for it had been Gonzales' plan to keep her a prisoner in one of the small native villages deep in the Panamanian jungle, so that he could force Mr. Barton to give up his options on the coveted Bocas del Toro land; the crafty Panamanian, according to one of his men, had planned to make the financier refuse to prosecute him, before he would have given the girl to her father. But his getting lost in the jungle had frustrated his own plot, and he paid for his desperate deed by losing his life in Black Swamp.

Bayliss, whose chair was tilted back at a comfortable angle against the side of the house, had been gazing meditatively out at the gash between Gold Hill and Contractor's Hill, where a heavy pall of black smoke hovered, and the noise of the excavation in the Cut floated up at times. Suddenly he let his chair crash to the porch and leaped to his feet, while Corning and Hildreth stared at him in mild surprise.

"Hildreth!" he shouted. "I am a lunatic, a raving imbecile! Oh, why didn't I think of it before?"

"What on earth is the matter with you, Bob?" demanded the collegian. "Have the harrowing events of yesterday and last night turned what little mind you ever possessed?"

"Come with me!" Bayliss seized him by the arm. "You took me to Gatun and impressed me with the marvelous work *our* nation is doing, when I had no country; by that magnificent sight I was influenced, and it helped to make me an American. Now—well, come!"

Leaving Douglas Corning to wonder what hallucination the hot tropical sun had burned into Bayliss' brain, Bob hastened away with Carvel Hildreth. Leaving Culebra, with its neat, orderly rows of screened houses, they walked along the bank of Culebra Cut for some distance, until Bayliss struck off toward the jungle, with Hildreth following him in wonder. At last they reached a place where the jungle had once been cleared away

but was now creeping back again; here Carvel saw endless heaps of red-rusted machinery, twisted piles of iron, rows of engines, tarnished from long exposure to the air.

Over it all spread the fast-growing vines and creepers of the jungle, twining with the neglected apparatus, a triumph of Nature over the puny attempts of men to conquer it—a picture of how the Panamanian jungle had won over the brave but futile efforts of the French. For years the steam shovels, toys beside the mighty American equipment, had rotted and fallen to pieces, still unloaded from the flat cars; the engines, in whose boilers steam had never been raised, rusted with the rain, while the woodwork of the cars was decayed and discolored.

“This is the famous French ‘bone yard,’” said Bayliss, when they paused to gaze at the melancholy ruins. “This is a silent evidence of the failure of the French administration, Hildreth. Look at the millions of dollars’ worth of wasted machinery, the ‘bones’ of a lost project! Back in the jungle for ten miles you can find lines of engines, never under their own steam, worthless and broken now.

“Take a native *cayuga* and paddle up the Chagres River, and you will pass rotting old French dredges, hopelessly inadequate for the great work; steam shovels are in ruins all along the line of French excavation. Look at Limón Bay, with the old French entrance, near that of the successful American Canal; success and failure, side by side! And

besides what one sees, remember the amount of equipment we used of the De Lesseps Company, rebuilding what we could employ, or using the scrap iron for repairs on our apparatus.

“Think of how the French failed, with their *snow shovels* and torches, their pygmy equipment, their careless lack of preparation for a colossal work, and then consider that the Americans, with the depressing sight of De Lesseps’ failure before them, won the fight with Nature!”

There were piles of useless iron, twisted frames, rotten woodwork; ruins of the old French machinery under the corrupt and erratic De Lesseps régime, now monuments to the folly and incompetency of that misguided Frenchman. Hildreth gazed at the long rows of antiquated steam engines that had never had fires in their furnaces, standing now in mournful loneliness on tracks that were streaks of red rust in the jungle desolation. Steam shovels whose dippers had never bitten into the earth, decayed with the dampness of the tropics, were green with age, and lay in broken ruins. Everywhere in the “bone yard” the neglected and abandoned machinery spoke the word—Failure.

And so near, down in the roaring, clamorous nine miles of Culebra Cut, the Americans were digging their way to Success!

“Think of it!” said Bayliss. “When the Americans came to Panama a narrow path fifteen feet wide through the jungle from Colon to Panama was here; we had to beat back the jungle with *machetes*

along this right of way. From Gatun to Colon a narrow ditch had been dug, and there was all this equipment, as the French had left it, with the frightful sanitary conditions of the Isthmus to face.

“Impressing our pioneers on every hand were these silent evidences of the French failure—testimony that terrible obstacles were to be overcome, and barriers of man and nature to be passed. But think of what has been accomplished in these nine years! A nation reproduced in a jungle, Americans transplanted to the tropical wilderness, the fever vanquished, and the Big Ditch dug! Did we give up in despair and go back because the French had failed?”

“Not a bit of it!” Hildreth declared proudly. “For we profited by the mistaken ideas of our predecessors, and made good. But you must remember, old man, that the men who have dug the Big Ditch are Americans.”

“And so are *you* an American!” Bob drove the point home. “But have you won your fight, Hildreth, as these Canal Zone builders and big-ditch diggers won theirs down here against terrible odds? Look at the wreck and ruin of the French equipment before you, and understand what a sight of the Panama Canal, nearly finished, means to us; can’t you see, Carvel, the United States was at the *last ditch* when they took up this gigantic work where another nation had failed!”

“What do you mean by the ‘last ditch’?” asked Hildreth.

“De Lesseps, with his mighty forces, had failed,” Bob went on. “The eyes of the civilized world had witnessed a national failure to make good. Then the United States, after expending years and millions of dollars in preparation, threw enormous sums of money into the finest equipment possible, spent four millions to drive the fever-bearing mosquito from the Zone, built a new nation here, brought out an army of loyal Americans, and left undone no smallest detail that would work toward success.

“The Panama Canal, Hildreth, as built by Colonel Goethals and the American administration, is the *last ditch*. Man, in his fight to connect the Atlantic and the Pacific by a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, had been beaten by fever and pestilence, and unsurmountable obstacles, and had failed miserably. With man in a last-ditch stand against Nature, and the United States representing man, we have won out at this *last ditch*—the American Panama Canal!”

Like a flash of light, Bob’s meaning shot through the collegian’s mind. In the futile effort of the French Company, and their giving up, Hildreth saw himself reflected; he had given up the fight and had left Ballard, instead of carrying it on to victory despite all odds. Suppose his nation had abandoned the great work in Panama because of adverse and unjust congressional criticism, or when a great slide bore millions of extra cubic yards of excavation into the Cut!

He understood what Bayliss meant—he was at

the last ditch even now in his losing fight against his weaker self; a victory, with a decision to go back, and he would be worth while; a defeat, and his life would be as worthless as the French machinery, desolate and ruined, in the "bone yard" of wrecked purpose.

The Panama Canal of the Americans was the last ditch, in every sense of the word, that would ever be attempted in Panama, the last-ditch fight that the brain and resources of man were making against Nature on the Isthmus. The French had failed utterly, but the United States, undaunted, after years of preparation, had tried and was now making it a success. Had Americans failed, after such stupendous plans and executions, no other nation would have tried.

All at once Hildreth felt how mean and despicable had been his cowardice in leaving Ballard, and in refusing to go back.

"So I am at the last ditch, too!" he said at last. "And I was losing *my* fight, Bob, but now I shall go back and win! No matter what ridicule or scorn I must face, I shall remember the criticism the administration here had to endure. Dad was right; I should go back to college, and redeem myself. I'll show the world I am no longer a moral coward, no matter how bitter the struggle may be!"

It was the powerful influence of the Big Job that had saved Carvel Hildreth from himself, the wonderful sight of what his nation had done in Panama, that thrill of a mighty work that moves all who

gaze at it, and of itself inspires in one a desire to make his own life worth while, to do big and noble things! The days of toil in Culebra Cut had strengthened this feeling, for Hildreth had been one of the vast army that had built the Big Ditch, and there he had learned how to work as a man.

This desire to redeem his wasted past, with those reckless years at college, had been faintly stirred by the old-timer's thrilling tales that night in Colon, when by his graphic stories of pioneer days in Panama with the Canal work he had given Hildreth a clearer knowledge of the vast obstacles and hardships overcome than books can give. The constant presence of the Big Job, the gradual learning of the enormity of all that had been done in the Canal Zone, the being with earnest, purposeful men, throbbing with enthusiasm and loyalty to the great work, had slowly brought Hildreth to a sense of his own littleness.

But it had been Bob's inspiration that had completed his redemption, when he had taken Carvel to the "bone yard," and had shown him the vivid contrast between the French failure and the great Culebra Cut, alive with rattling machinery and the vast industry of American success. He had impressed on the collegian's mind how similar his giving up had been to that of the French Company, and now, as they walked back to Culebra, gazing down into the gorge of the Cut, Hildreth was filled with a quietly determined resolve that he, an American, would win his fight at the last ditch,

after one failure, even as the United States, when the French had lost out, had won the fight with Nature!

"I am going back to Ballard," he said firmly, and Bayliss threw an arm across his shoulders happily. "I'll sail on the *Panama* Tuesday, and when I get to college, Bob, I'll play on the scrub team if I must, but I'll play the game!"

"Now you are a true American!" exclaimed Bayliss. "Go back and make your father glad, win your fight at college, and make the rest of your year there worth while. Old man, you have won out at the Last Ditch!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

BACK AT BALLARD

IT was with a feeling almost of terror that Carvel Hildreth heard the brakeman call out "Stanford!" as the six-twenty express neared the college town. He gazed eagerly from the car window, waiting for the moment when the train would round a curve and he could command a sight of College Hill, atop of the grade that inclined from the center of the town upward. It had been a month and a half since he had left the campus, crushed under the blow that had fallen on him; now, as he returned, he wondered what his welcome would be.

A moment more, and his heart gave a great leap as he saw the tall spire of Parker Chapel, the gleaming white stone of the gymnasium, the towers of the dormitory buildings, and through a rift in the trees of the campus he caught sight of the goal posts on the football field. A great love for his alma mater surged in his heart, a thrill of true college spirit; then he thought of the sensation he would create when he strode across the campus. Would he face that old scorn and ostracism that he had fled from, or had time lessened the bitterness of his chums against him?

A week before, Hildreth had sailed from Cristobal on the *Panama*, regretfully leaving the Canal Zone and the marvelous scenes of the Big Ditch. But

there had been a bewildering whirl of happenings between the moment when he made his decision to return and the sailing hour. When he and Bayliss had gotten back to their bachelor quarters at Culebra, where they found Corning waiting on the porch, Bob had told him of Hildreth's victory over himself; the young man had grasped the collegian's hand in a grip that hurt, and then he had said:

"I am going back to New York with you, Hildreth—my work here is done."

"Why," Hildreth was surprised, "what do you mean, Corning?"

"On the day you rushed from your father's office in the Bankers' Building, Carvel," responded Corning, "I was waiting in the outer office. Your father summoned me in haste, and hurrying to the door with me he pointed to you, waiting at the elevator shaft, and said, 'Corning, stay with my boy wherever he goes, and do not let him starve. Let him learn by bitter experience, but don't let him suffer too much, and if you can, make him go back to college.' That is why I came to Panama on the *Cristobal* with you."

"But I don't understand—" began Hildreth.

"I am a detective," smiled Corning. "That is why I got a job as 'flannel-foot' in the Canal Zone with such ease. But I came to regard you as a friend, and if you will accept my sincere friendship, I'll be glad."

Hildreth, as he shook Corning's hand heartily,

understood things better; he knew now the meaning of the young man's words when he had said it was necessary and advisable for him to leave New York at once. So his father, though he had disowned him until he went back to college, could not cast him adrift entirely! The collegian resolved that the rest of his year at Ballard should bring gladness to Mr. Hildreth.

"Don't tell Dad that I have gone back," he said. "I'll go straight to old Ballard as soon as I get to New York, and wire him myself. Give me the joy of making him happy again, Corning."

"Sure!" agreed Corning, rejoicing at Hildreth's decision.

Then Bob Bayliss had surprised and made his chum wild by informing him that he, too, would be a fellow passenger on the *Panama*, as he had talked with his father and they had decided that since he was a patriotic American, he ought to graduate from college. So he was going back to complete his course at Hamilton, and the three friends would sail together, with Mr. Barton and Neva.

Hildreth had sixty dollars, for he returned the paymaster's order to Colonel Goethals on his decision to go back to college, and Bayliss insisted on adding enough to buy Carvel a first-class passage to New York, so that it would be a happy party that sailed on the *Panama*. It was with keen regret that the collegian left the Canal Zone, for he was thoroughly filled with the spirit of the Big Job, but

it had been the powerful influence of it that had helped him to conquer himself.

The voyage had been delightfully short, as the *Panama* steamed fifteen knots an hour, and the Caribbean was soon crossed; then the white-beached West Indies were left in the foaming wake. When the ship headed up the Atlantic coast the joy of the prodigal increased every day, as the log reeled off the miles between him and his college. Finally Sandy Hook was reached, the pilot taken aboard, and after the usual delay at the quarantine, the ship docked at the New York pier. After their baggage had passed the customs Hildreth's first act, when he had said good-by to Mr. Barton and the happy Neva, was to buy a newspaper.

"Ballard plays Alton Saturday," he read. "I'll be there in time for the big game, Bob! But what does this mean? 'The Gold and Green misses the services of Hildreth, who did such great work in the Hamilton game, and who afterward mysteriously disappeared from college. With him in the line, a victory over Ballard's greatest rival would be assured.'"

"They have forgiven you, perhaps," smiled Bayliss. "You were foolish to go away, for you can't judge the sentiment of such a bunch of fellows after a football defeat. You have won your fight, though, and even if there is feeling against you, I know you will stick now."

"I will!" said Hildreth, with a quiet firmness that convinced Bob his redemption was complete.

"Well, I won't say farewell now," Bob laughed at parting. "I'll go back to Hamilton and get settled, and then I'll run over to the Ballard-Alton game; I want to see you in the line, old man."

Hildreth had taken the first train he could get for Stanford, as the *Panama* had been half a day late at New York, and now, as it drew into the station, he was hopeful and despondent by turn. The memory of the bitter, lonely past became stronger as he saw College Hill, and he dreaded the hard battle he might have to fight. He had won the struggle over himself that day when he gazed at the French "bone yard" near Culebra, but the future was still uncertain and dark.

But what could all the commotion and riot on the station platform mean? As he stepped from the car he saw Brannock, Dad Hickson, Captain Bill Hoke with Sig at his heels, little Cupid Cavanaugh, staid Grinder Graham, Pop Corrigan, Chip Craddock, and all his old chums, while it seemed that the entire student body had turned out to meet him. Ballard pennants were waving wildly, the fellows were all shouting lustily, and they broke into a yell as Hildreth appeared. Bill Hoke waved his arms and shouted excitedly:

"There he is, fellows! The gamiest, pluckiest right tackle Ballard ever knew; stayed the last half of a game with a battered side, and stuck when he was dead with the pain! The yell for Carvel Hildreth, all together!"

There was a mighty roar from a hundred throats,

and the tears came to Hildreth's eyes as he heard his name at the end of the dear old Ballard yell. This was the homecoming that he had dreaded! He had been a moral coward to run away, but down in the tropics of Panama, under the power of the Big Job, he had won his fight with self, and this was his reward! He was soon engulfed in the riotous crowd, with everybody shaking his hand or thumping his back, and Biff Hogarth, pale but happy, was at his side.

"You old villain!" Captain Bill Hoke tried to conceal his emotion. "Why didn't you tell us about that hurt side? You let us act like a bunch of cads, and no wonder you left college. As soon as Biff came to his senses he asked how your side was, and told how he knew it was bruised terribly, and that he dug it with his elbow before that last rush, but you had gone. We put 'ads' in the paper, but they never found you."

Singing and cheering, the procession of students accompanied the right tackle up College Hill. Coach Collister, on his way downtown, gave a glad welcome to Hildreth, and gazed at him with assumed sternness.

"Report for practice to-morrow," he commanded severely. "The very idea of your leaving college when we needed you so! I guess you are in poor training, but we need you in your old place against Alton."

Hildreth grinned as he thought of his iron muscles and perfect wind, gained by his work shoveling coal

in Culebra Cut for steam shovel 33. His frame had put on a muscular development that would make him able to stand with ease the grueling punishment of a football game, and he was eager for the fray.

The return of Carvel Hildreth to Ballard was in the nature of a triumphal march, for the football squad was wild with joy at having him back, and the students were eager to make amends for their misjudging of him. In his heart Hildreth blessed the impulse that had made him decide to sail for Panama, for had he gone somewhere else than to work on the Big Ditch, he might not have been made a man by the sight of the stupendous undertaking. His life might have been wasted, when back at his college the scorn and condemnation of his chums had been turned to remorse and admiration by Biff Hogarth's explanation.

Then he wondered how the students had known on what train he would return, or how they had heard he was coming back at all, and he asked Bill Hoke.

"I got a telegram from New York," smiled the football captain. "It was signed 'Douglas Corning,' whoever he is. We decided to do things up properly, for we had acted wretchedly to you after the Hamilton game, and even Sig got wild when he heard you were coming."

Sig was frisking around Hildreth in an ecstasy of delight, and it was all that was needed to make the prodigal's happiness complete. It was dark when

the crowd of students turned into Campus Square, but the lights in the "dorms" were agleam, fellows were singing in Denning and MacCabe, while a banjo strummed as of old in Wilton.

At the sound of the cheering in the square, windows went up, heads were thrust out, and Hildreth received an ovation that ended only when he stammered out a speech, telling the fellows brokenly that it was "all right now, and they would lick Alton by a big score!" Then Hildreth was caught up and borne to his old room in Dwight, where Grinder Graham had moved back, and could not find words to express his joy at having his old roommate again.

Until midnight Hildreth held a reception in his room, and the football fellows rejoiced at his return. The students kept piling in, to make amends for the undeserved scorn they had heaped on Carvel after the Hamilton game, and all the time he was shaking hands the collegian was thinking—suppose he had lost that fight down in Panama and had not come back to Ballard! He would have missed this comradeship restored, the chance to make good at college and please his father.

At last Bill Hoke, who ruled the football squad with an iron hand, interrupted.

"We are near the last and biggest game of the season," he said, "and here you football chaps are up until midnight! To bed, the whole mob of you! Hildreth, hit your couch at once, and get in shape for the best game of your career!"

One by one the students left, until at last Hildreth and Grinder Graham were alone in their old room. The serious, bespectacled little grind was overcome with shame at the memory of how he had flung away from his roommate after that fatal last rush, and he tried to give his chum an idea now of his self-condemnation.

“Let up on that, Grinder!” said Hildreth firmly. “You were not to blame. It was a bad case against me, with Biff knocked out. I don’t care what Bill Hoke says about bed, you take a seat, and I’ll tell you how the Panama Canal has helped me.”

For an hour he held Grinder Graham thrilled as he related his adventures in Panama and the Canal Zone, telling of the lottery disappointment, of the encounters with José Gonzales and the old-timer, of the track meet, of the awakening of Bob Bayliss to patriotism, and of his own redemption by the influence of the Big Ditch, inspiring him to greater things.

“You were the one who made me see how I had wasted my college years and hurt my father, Grinder,” he finished, “and even though circumstances drove me away to Panama, where the Big Ditch and Bayliss saved me, you deserve a large share of the credit. To-morrow morning you and I will go to the station again, and I’ll send Dad another telegram—‘Am back at Ballard; won out at Last Ditch!’”

CHAPTER XXIX

THE END

HILDRETH practiced faithfully the few days remaining before the Big Game, and brushed up on the signals, showing Coach Collister that he was in the best of physical trim, and he stopped the rushes of the hard-hitting scrubs with ease. The fellows were wild over his return to the eleven, and promised themselves all manner of victory over Alton. But Captain Bill Hoke expected a hard game, and he rejoiced that the star right tackle was back in the line-up.

The day of the game came at last, and with it Bob Bayliss, whose face was aglow as Hildreth told him of the riotous reception at the station, and of what a mighty welcome his chums had given him. Bob informed him that he had settled down to college life at Hamilton, and that he intended to go in for track work, in order to make a faster quarter-mile record than the one on Roosevelt Avenue, Cristobal, when he had defeated Nunez.

“But I have n’t heard from Dad,” Hildreth said sorrowfully, “though I wired him the day after I got back. Perhaps he won’t own me again.”

When the time for the game arrived, Hildreth, in his old football togs, trotted out on the field again, thrilling at the great roar that went up from the stands at sight of him. It was a greater contest

than that with Hamilton, and it seemed that the entire Alton student body had accompanied their team, judging from the volume of sound their rooters put forth. It was the biggest game of all, and the Ballard right tackle was wildly happy as he ran through plays in practice.

Soon he would be with his teammates again, the past forgotten, battling for the Gold and Green, with Brannock at his side, where Biff Hogarth had been. All the bitterness was gone from his heart now, and he was glad to be back.

As the referee's whistle sounded for the kick-off Hildreth chanced to look up in the packed stands, where the riot of Gold and Green pennants waved; he recoiled with surprise, for he saw Mr. Barton and Neva, Douglas Corning, and his own father! Neva waved a pennant at him, his father nodded again and again, and Corning shook hands with himself, grinning at his friend's amazement.

Then the plunk of the Alton fullback's toe against the pigskin sounded, the yellow oval sailed toward the Ballard right halfback, and with a fierce exultation at being in the game once more, Carvel Hildreth flung himself into the interference for the runner, and crashed into the enemy's onrushing right end.

The Ballard-Alton game was almost a repetition of the struggle with the Hamilton eleven early in the season. At first, while the Gold and Green players were fresh, and spurred on by the sight of Hildreth, their fast, snappy play swept the heavy enemy from their feet, and before the half was

ended Ballard had scored a touchdown and had kicked goal. Hildreth was playing like a demon, flinging his body recklessly at each rush that came at him, feeling a wild joy surge through him as he did so.

“I won’t jab you in the ribs as Hogarth did!” panted Brannock, fighting at his side.

But little by little the constant line bucking of the enemy’s heavy backfield began to wear out the Gold and Green linesmen, and toward the end of the last quarter the Alton eleven advanced the ball steadily. Whether or not the idea came from a memory of Hildreth’s action in the Hamilton game, the Alton quarter now directed a series of old-fashioned line plunges, tandems, and cross-bucks at Hildreth, whose body, toughened by work in Panama, stood the attack nobly.

“Hold them!” breathed Brannock. “The backfield will back you up, and they won’t score this time. It’s your chance, old man!”

Hildreth knew what he meant—that to make his vindication complete nothing could be more effective than his holding the enemy’s rushes in check, and bringing a victory to Ballard in the big game. With the hammering campaign against him continuing desperately, it became a mechanical action for him to throw himself low and forward as a rush started, and his body, iron though it was, became bruised and battered. But his spirit was buoyant, for all his misery was ended, and he fought with a grim pleasure now.

Slowly, as in the Hamilton game, Ballard was forced back toward her own goal line. Rush after rush netted Alton small gains, but the progress was slow, and Bill Hoke, after a signal from a collegian on the side line, called to Hildreth:

“One more minute, old man! We are at the last ditch now, and if we can hold them, the game is ours!”

The last ditch! A flood of vivid memories swept over the right tackle as he heard the words. Again he stood on the Canal bank, with the ruins of the French machinery before him, viewing the mighty fight that his country was winning, where others had failed. The thought nerved him, put new strength into his worn frame, and he crouched low for the powerful tandem that was starting at him.

It came, and like a hawk he swooped down at it, grasping in both arms the knees of the opposing tackle, and bringing him low. Over their prostrate bodies the rush tripped and fell, and the man with the ball was slammed to the turf a bare three yards from the goal line, while the time keeper's whistle, announcing the end of the game, was sweet music to the ears of the Ballard collegians.

“Hildreth! Hildreth!” was the cry, but the blood-stained, dust-grimed hero was making at full speed toward the stand. After him trailed the enthusiastic students, waiting like wolves to pounce on him when he started for the gymnasium.

Carvel, sweeping the crowds with eager gaze, felt a hand on his padded shoulder, and turning, he

faced his father. Instantly their hands met in a firm clasp, and each knew that the other understood the glad promise of the future, and that the past was wiped out.

"I am so glad, my boy!" said Mr. Hildreth simply. "You won your fight, and came back, as I hoped you would. Corning here told me the whole story, after I got your telegram, and I came to see you play this last game. Your return here was a glad one, but your victory is fully as great as though it had been bitter, for when you made your decision you did not know that you were understood."

Mr. Barton and the smiling Neva, with Corning, came toward Hildreth, and the collegian was soon blushing at the ardor of their congratulations on his great playing.

"Now I'll tell you something, Carvel," said Mr. Barton. "Your father is to be my partner in the company that is to market the products of that Panamanian land, of which you know the history. You finish your year at college, and we may need you down in Panama, when we begin operations at Bocas del Toro and on the inland property."

"You are worthy of our confidence now," smiled his father, "so you will be a valuable aid to us, with your experience down there. I am proud of you, Carvel; I knew that you had the fighting spirit, and I never lost faith that you would win out at last!"

"I was sure he would," agreed Neva. "You should have seen him fighting on the tracks over

Black Swamp with Gonzales! After I saw him then, I knew he would come back to Ballard.”

That night Ballard celebrated the great victory over Alton that marked a glorious close of the football season, and after midnight, when at last the bonfire had died to red embers and the hoarse students had left Hildreth's room, Bob Bayliss, who was to stay that night with his chum, gazed with pride at Carvel, who was looking out over the campus, too happy to speak.

He was back at Ballard, with his senior year before him, in which he had an opportunity to win scholastic honors, and to atone for the wasted years he had spent in reckless escapades. All the old bitterness was gone, and with it the careless, wasteful nature that had been his; the work in the Culebra Cut had taught him the joy of accomplishment, and the spell of the Big Job had brought him an earnest purpose in life, the desire to do something worth while.

It had been less than two months since he left college, a coward, but the days in exile had brought him manhood, and had redeemed him. Now, as he turned from the window to the fellow who had stuck by him since they met in New York, to whom he had given a country, and who had helped him conquer himself, with a smile he grasped the hand of Bob Bayliss.

“Old man,” he said unsteadily, “you are going through Hamilton, and I shall graduate here at Ballard this June. In 1915 the Big Ditch will be

opened to the ships of the world, and the fleets of the nations shall pass from ocean to ocean, through the achievement of the Americans! I may be down there after graduation, working for Dad's and Mr. Barton's company developing the Panama land, but when the Canal is officially thrown open, Bob, you and I will be there.

"We shall remember that we helped make a success of the most colossal undertaking ever accomplished by man. We shall witness the final act of all, the union of oceans, and thrill with the knowledge that we are a part of that army which built it. It will be a grand moment, Bob, and you and I must be there, where I won my fight!"

"I am with you," responded Bayliss softly, "to the last ditch, Hildreth!"

A TALE OF THE PONTIAC WAR

THE WHITE CAPTIVE

By R. CLYDE FORD

Illustrated by C. L. COLE

In the year 1760, when Detroit was surrounded by a stockade and the Union Jack waved above it, Willy Langford, an English boy, is redeemed from Indians by Waboose, and enters the service of the quartermaster of the fort. Separated for years from his mother, herself a captive, the object of his life is to learn her whereabouts and secure her freedom. As factor's clerk and frontiersman, he experiences many thrilling adventures; he takes part in the Indian warfare of the day and is wounded in the Battle of Bloody Run, when Pontiac, the famous Ottawa chief, engages in his great combat with the English. The graphic and accurate descriptions of such tragic events, of the life and customs of Indians and early settlers, as well as of lake and forest scenery, cannot fail to appeal strongly to the imagination of a boy.

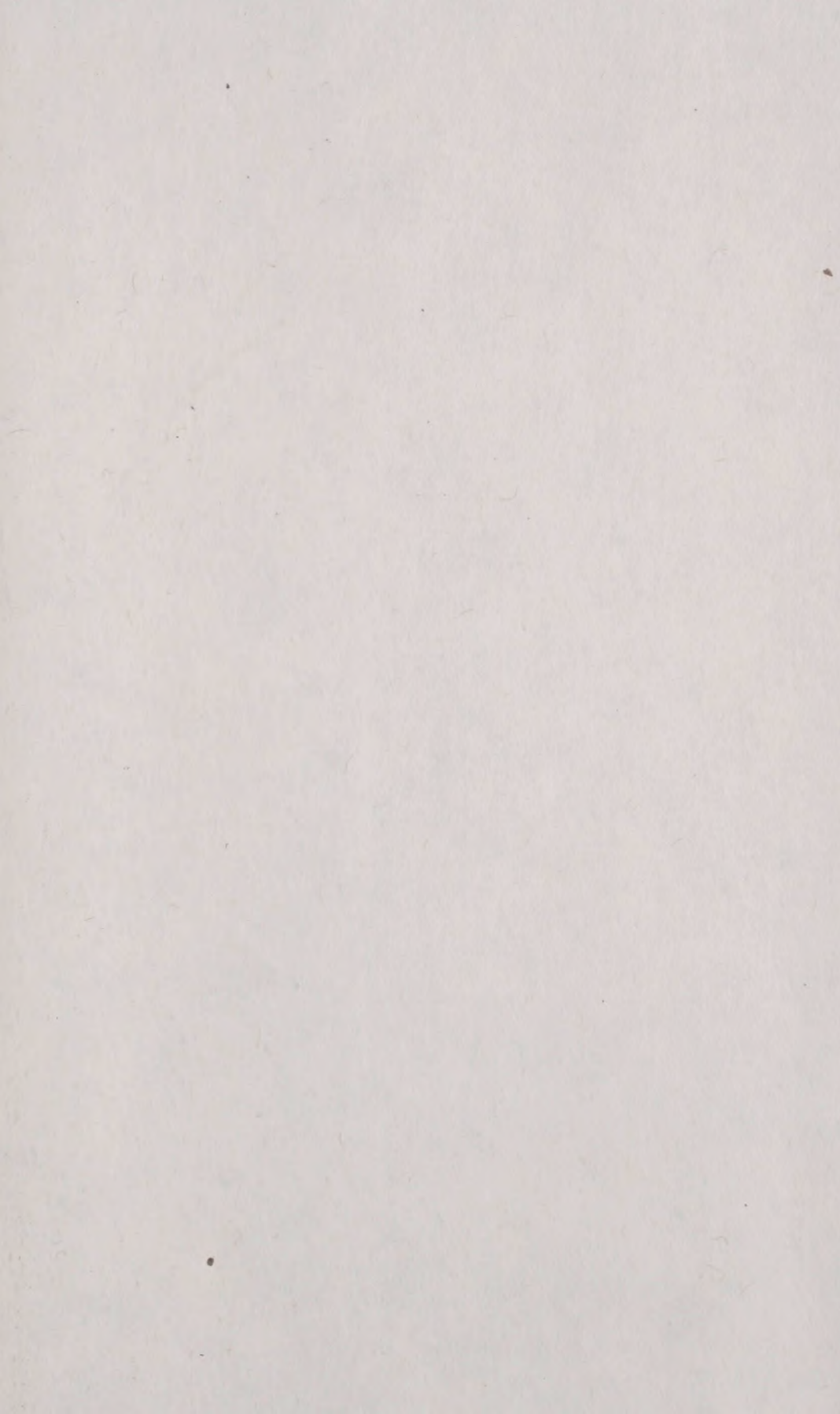
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