

PRIDE OF GRAFT.—A TALE OF PANAMA

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BY HENRY C. ROWLAND

Jim Morgan, grafter, went to the Isthmus, drawn by the same lure which had led his early prototype, Sir Henry Morgan, buccaneer. It was loot which led them both.

Jim was sprung from a line of looters. Father and grandfather both died in jail. Jim was a policeman, by instinct and actual service. But at heart Jim was an artist, a poet, a dreamer of dreams, and idealist.

Jim loved his profession, but even more he loved the things which stirred his fantasy; books, music, flowers, animals and great wastes. Perhaps it was this love of the primitive as much as the tales of big graft which led him to the Isthmus.

Still, these tidings had reached him, and so he took passage for Panama.

When he had been two days in Panama, Jim presented himself before the chief of the I. C. C. police and asked for a billet. The officer looked curiously at the boyish face and figure.

"What do you want?" he demanded. Jim's pale eyes flashed up for an instant, then fell again.

"A sergeant's billet, sir," he answered, in his soft, low-pitched voice.

The man raised his eyebrows, but some quality in Jim's swift look smothered his irony.

"What experience have you had?" he asked dryly.

"Sergeant of Honolulu police for one year; eighteen months under Captain O'Brien of San Francisco in Nagasaki, when he was sent out there reconstructing the Japanese police; two years as opium tracker in Seattle and San Francisco. I have also done some work as private detective, sir."

"Very well," he said finally. ". . . bring me your papers and we'll give you a chance. . . ."

Before he had been a week in the

police he began to make his pressure felt. He talked little, seldom smoked or drank, never looked directly at any one for more than an instant, yet in a fortnight's time he had taken the criminal inventory of the Zone.

But all of this time Jim was watching and waiting; very little escaped him, yet he saw no sign of the "big graft" which he had come to the Isthmus to find. Once or twice he thought that he had struck a hot trail, but the hope proved futile.

In the course of time he was sent out to the Culebra station, and there he formed the habit of wandering about the works and talking with the workmen, and little by little there began to grow in him a strange, new interest, an odd feeling of proprietorship and responsibility in the achievement itself. Heretofore the canal had been to him a helpless, full-blooded monster capable of nourishing thousands of parasites, but as day after day he watched the workers and sat in their tents and listened to their plans and projects, an honest wonder fell upon him when he realized that these men were not there for graft nor entirely for pay, but to dig the canal!

The discovery puzzled him; these were intelligent men, men of sound wisdom. They were far from fools in any sense, yet were they not sacrificing pleasure and risking health for less money than he took each month from the divekeepers?

It was a Sunday and he had climbed alone to the summit of Gold Hill, where for a while he leaned against a tree trunk and let his pale eyes rest upon the marvelous view. Far below him on the slope there was a splash of movement and color, punctuated by tiny jets of steam; one of the big American shovels had been half-buried in a slide and was pluckily