



The RIVER

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—K. C. Rickard, an engineer of the Overland Pacific, is called to the office of President Marshall in Tucson, Ariz. "Casey" is an enigma to the office force; he wears "dude" clothes but he had resigned a chair of engineering in the East to go on the road as a fireman and his promotion had been spectacular. While waiting for Marshall Rickard reads a report on the ravages of the Colorado, despite the efforts of Thomas Hardin of the Desert Reclamation company. This Hardin had been a student under Rickard and had married Gertrude Holmes, with whom Rickard had fancied he was in love.

CHAPTER II—Marshall tells Rickard the Overland Pacific has got to step in to save the Imperial Valley and sends him to the break. Rickard declines because he does not want to supplant Hardin, but is won over. "Stop the river; damn the expense," says Marshall.

CHAPTER III.

The Blessing of Aridity.

When Rickard left the main line at Imperial Junction the next afternoon his eyes followed the train he was deserting rather than the one that was to carry him to his new labors. He felt again the thrill of detachment that invariably preceded his entrance into a new country. With the pulling up of the porter's green-carpeted stool, the slamming of the train gates, the curtain fell on the Tucson set scene.

The long line of cars was pushing off with its linen-covered Pullmans and diners, steaming down grade toward the Sink, the depression which had been primeval sea, and then desert, and was now sea again. Old Beach, rechristened Imperial Junction for railroad convenience, was itself lower than the ancient sea line where once the gulf had reached. Rickard knew he could find shells at that desert station should he look for them. He picked up his bag that the porter had thrown on the ground and faced the rung-down curtain.

Its painted scene was a yellow station house broiling under a desert sun; a large water tank beyond, and in the distance the inevitable cardboard mountains, like property scene shifts, flat and thin in their unreal hues of burnished pink and purple. A dusty accommodation train was backing and switching, picking up the empty refrigerator cars to carry into the valley for the early melon growers.

Already the valley had asserted its industrial importance; the late rampage of the Colorado had made it spectacular. Those who would pay little attention to the opening of a new agricultural district in the heart of a dreaded desert opened their ears to the vagary of the river which had sportively made of a part of that desert an inland sea. Scientists were rushing their speculations into print; would the sea dwindle by evaporation, as it had done before? Or would the overflow maintain the paradoxical sea?

The flood signs were apparent. There cracks had split the desert sand; here water fissures had menaced the track; and to the south a fringe of young willows hid the path of the Colorado's debouch.

The men crowding the platform wore the motley of the new country. In Tucson the uniform of the male citizens, with the exception of those reckless ones who found inevitably that lotus is a liquid, was the willed pretense of a gentle civilization; de-spondent ducks and khakis and limp collars. Imperial Junction marked the downfall of the collar. The rest of the composite costume was irregular, badly laundered and torn, faded and sunburned; the clothes of the desert soldier. Rickard saw buttonless shirts, faded overalls, shabby hats—the sombrero of Mexico. The faces under the broad-brimmed hats made a leaping impression upon him of youth and eagerness. He noted a significant average of intelligence and alertness. This was not the indolent group of men which makes a pretense of occupation whenever a train comes in!

"Going in?" asked a voice at his ear. A pair of faded eyes set in a young-old face, whether early withered or well preserved he had not time to determine, was staring at him.

He assured his interlocutor that he was going in. His mood isolated the phrase; its significance vastly different from "going on."

"Buying?"

"I think not."

"It is a good time to buy," Rickard suspected a real estate agent. "For land is low—rock bottom prices on account of the uneasiness about the river. People are afraid. They want to see the company redeem some of its promises before they come in; and the company isn't in much of a hurry."

Rickard asked what company he referred to.

The young-old face with the faded eyes looked at him in surprise. "The D. R. company, Desert Reclamation, which brought us all here."

"Scamps?" The newcomer's survey

of the long line of naked mountains and lean lands that formed the neck

of the valley gave a snub of casualness to the question.

"No, fools!" The answer was as swift as a bullet. "Though some people think them worse than that, I don't go so far; I'm willing to say they've tried, I'll say that much. But they haven't the know-how."

The window seats, Rickard could see, were filled before the cars halted, by the experienced ones who had not waited for the train to be made up. In the scramble he spied a vacant window on the sunny side and made for it. A stranger dropped into the seat beside him.

Every window in the car was open. Each red velveted, dusty seat was filled. A strong desert wind was blowing sand into their faces, discoloring the seats and covering the floor.

The engineer turned to his companion, who was coughing.

"Do you mind this window being open?"

"I'd mind if it were not. It's always bad at the Junction. When we get into the cultivated country you will see what the valley will be like when



He Was "Going In."

it is all planted. The wind is not bad when it blows over grain or alfalfa. It is the desert dust that nags one." He coughed again. "Going in?"

Rickard said he was going in.

"Are you going to settle in the valley?" The inquisitor was a man of about fifty, Rickard decided, with a desert tan of apparent health. His face was clear cut and intelligent.

"I don't know."

"Just looking the country over?"

"You might call it that."

"Go slow," admonished his companion. "Don't let yourself be carried away. It is a wonderful country. But go slow. It's the ones who expect to make millions the first year that become the worst knockers. Go slow, I always tell them. Go slow."

"It's not a good time to buy, then?"

"Not so good as it was ten years ago! But land is cheaper than it was a year back. In some districts you can buy a good farm for a ticket back home, the farmers are so discouraged. Cold feet." The slang sounded oddly somehow. The man's voice had the cultivated precision of the purist.

"Cold feet. The river's chilled them. The valley's losing faith in the company."

"What company?" inquired Rickard again.

"There's but one company to the valley, the one that brought them here, the D. R. They don't call the railroad the company. They won't recognize that problem! It's had hard luck from the first, the D. R. At the very start the wrong man got hold of it. Sather, the first promoter, was a faker—a pretty thorough faker. The company reorganized, but it's been in bad odor with the public ever since."

Rickard's eyes left the deep cuts in the land made by the ravaging waters and looked at his companion.

"I thought Estrada was the original promoter?" he inquired.

"Estrada's a recent comer—oh, you mean the general. He started the ball rolling; that was all. Bad health, following the Bliss complication, tied his hands."

The man in the seat ahead was listening. His head was leaning, his body shivered, Rickard could see on the neck the ancient burns that had spared the magnificent head. The rest of the man had been shivered and twisted into terrible deformity. Rickard found himself puzzling over the incident with its accompanying miracle. There was not a scar on the powerful face.

"Estrada's business methods were

then not different from Sather's and Hardin's." It was a deep, rich organ. "Oh, you can't class Hardin with Sather," protested Rickard's companion. "Sather used Hardin. Hardin's honesty cannot be questioned. It's not money's he's after. His whole heart is in this reclamation scheme."

"Hardin's a false alarm," growled the owner of the massive head. "He makes promises. He never keeps them."

The older man's smile was tolerant. "Barton," he indicated, "is the president of the water companies. And if you want to hear about a rogue and a scoundrel ask the water companies their opinion of Hardin."

"Well, what sort of a hole has he got us into?" demanded the other with heat.

"Hardin's in a hole himself. No one seems to remember that he crucified himself to save the valley. I've a great respect for Thomas Hardin."

"Yes?" returned Rickard, whose liking had been captured by the speaker. The impression of distinction sharpened. The stranger wore a laundered pongee silk shirt, open at the neck but restricted by a brown silk tie; and it was trimly belted. There were but two neckties in the entire car, and they occupied Rickard observed, the same seat.

"The beginning of the canal system."

Rickard looked out upon a flat, one-toned country, marked off in rectangles by plows and scrapers. Farther south these rectangles were edged by young willows. He fancied he could see, even at that distance, the gleam of water.

It was the passing of the desert. A few miles back he had seen the desert in its primitive nakedness, which not even cactus relieved. He was passing over the land which man and horses were preparing for water. And he could see the land where water was.

"That was the way Riverside looked when I first saw it," commented the other man who wore a tie. "Come out on the rear platform. We can see better."

Rickard followed to the back of the dust-swept, stifling car. The glare on the platform was intense. He stood watching the newly made checkerboard of a country slip past him. Receding were the two lines of gleaming steel rails which connected and separated him from the world outside. He was "going in." Not in Mexico even had he such a feeling of ultimate remoteness. The mountains, throving perspective toward the throat of the valley, looked elusive and unreal in their gauze draperies of rose and violet. The tender hour of day was clothing them with mystery, softening their sharp outlines. Rickard felt the suspense of the next act.

It was a torpid imagination, he thought, which would not quicken over this conquest of the desert. East of the tract men and teams were preparing the newly furrowed ground for the seed. The curved land knives were breaking up the rich mold into ridges of soft soil as uncohesive and feathery as pulverized chocolate. It was the dark color of the chocolate of commerce, this silt which had been pilfered from the states through which the vagrant river wandered. The smell of the upturned earth, sweetly damp, struck against his nostrils. Rickard indulged a minute of whimsical fancy; this was California territory over which his train was passing, but the soil, that dark earth whose blades were crumbling, was it not the tribute of other states, of despoiling Wyoming, of ravishing Colorado and Arizona?

To the west new squares were being leveled and outlined. Shrubby rectangles were being cleared of their creosote bush and tough mesquite. Compared with other countries, the preparation for planting was the simplest. Horses were dragging over the ground a railroad rail bent into a V angle, which pulled the bushes by the roots and dragged them out of the way. Beyond, farther west, could be seen the untouched desert. The surface for many miles was cracked by water lines, broken and baked into irregular sand cakes; the mark of sand which has been imprisoned by water and branded by swift heat.

Close by men were putting in with care the seed that was to quicken the river silt. They were passing a square where the green tips of the grain were piercing the ground. Now they were abreast of a field of matured alfalfa over which the wind raced gratefully. Desert and grain field; death and life! The panorama embraced the whole eye.

They went back to their seats. After a few minutes the other leaned over his shoulder, his hand waving toward the passing mountains. "Those are the Superstition mountains you can see over yonder. An unusually apt name."

"Yes?"

"Why is it good, you mean? That pile of dark rock stands as a monument to an effete superstition. It is the gravestone for a gigantic mistake. Why, it was only the grossest ignorance that gave to the desert the label of 'bad lands.' The desert is a condition, not a fact. Here you see the passing of the condition, the burial of the superstition. Are you interested in irrigation?"

Rickard was not given to explain the degree of interest his profession involved, for the stranger drew a painful breath, and went on.

"Of course you are, if you are a western man. You are, I think?"

The engineer said he was, by choice. "Irrigation is the creed of the West. Gold brought people to this country; water, scientifically applied, will keep them here. Look at Riverside. And

we are at the primer stage only. We are way behind the ancients in information on that subject. I learned at school, so did you, that some of the most glorious civilizations flourished in spite of the desert which surrounded them. That was only half a truth. They were great because of it! Why did the Incas choose the desert when their strength gave them the choice of the continent of South America? Why did the Aztecs settle in the desert when they might easily have pre-empted the watered regions? Then there are the Carthaginians, the Toltecs, the Moors. And one never forgets Egypt!"

"For protection," Rickard gave the slightest question an interested recognition. "Was that not what we were taught at school? The forest held foes, animal and human. Those nations grew to their strength and power in the desert by virtue of its isolation."

"Superstition!" retorted the man with the tie. "We are babes at the breast measured by the wisdom of the men who settled Damascus, or compared with the Toltecs, or those ancient tribes who settled in northern India. They recognized the value of aridity. They knew its threefold worth."

"An inherent value?" demanded the college-bred man, turning from the window.

"An inherent value," declared the exponent of aridity.

"Will you tell me just what you mean?"

"Not in one session! Look yonder. That's Brawley. When I came through here ten years ago I could have had my pick of this land at 25 cents an acre. They were working at this scheme then—on paper. I was not alive to the possibilities then; I had not yet lived in Utah!"

The train was slowing up by a brand new yellow-painted station. There were several dusty automobiles waiting by the track, a few faded surreys and the inevitable country hotel bus. The platform was swarming with alert, vigorous faces, distinctly of the American type.

The man in the seat beside him asked Rickard if he observed the general average of intelligence in the faces of the crowd below. Rickard acknowledged that he had been struck by that, not only here but at Imperial Junction, where he had waited for the train.

"There is a club in the valley, lately started, a university club which admits as members those who have had at least two years of college training. The list numbers three hundred already. The first meeting was held last week in an empty new store in Imperial. If it had not been for the setting we might have been at Ann Arbor or Palo Alto. The costumes were a little motley, but the talk sounded like home."

The dust blowing in through the car doors brought on another fit of strangling. Rickard turned again to the window, to the active scene which denied the presence of desert beyond.

"The doctors say it will have to be the desert always for me." The stranger tapped his chest significantly.

"But it is exile no longer—not in an irrigated country. For the reason of irrigation! It is the progressive man, the man with ideas, or the man who is willing to take them, who comes into this desert country. If he has not had education it is forced upon him. I saw it worked out in Utah. I was there several years. Irrigation means co-operation. That is, to me, the chief value of aridity."

The wind, though still blowing through the car and ruffling the train dust, was carrying less of grit and sand. To the nostrils of Rickard and his new acquaintance it brought the pleasing suggestion of grassy meadows, of willow-lined streams and fragrant fields.

"It is the accepted idea that this valley is attracting a superior class of men because of its temperance stand. It is the other way round. The valley stood for temperance because of the sort of men who had settled here, the men of the irrigation type."

The engineer's ear criticized "irrigation type." He began to suspect that he had picked up a crank.

"The desert offers a man special advantages, social, industrial and agricultural. It is no accident that you find a certain sort of man here."

"I suppose you mean that the struggle necessary to develop such a country, under such stern conditions, develops of necessity strong men?"

evolved Rickard. "Oh, yes, I believe that, too."

"Oh, more than that. It is not so much the struggle as the necessity for co-operation. The mutual dependence is one of the blessings of aridity."

"One of the blessings of aridity!" echoed his listener. "You are a philosopher." He had not yet touched the other's thought at the spring.

"You might as well call me a socialist because I praise irrigation in that it stands for the small farm unit," retorted the valley man. "That is one of its flats; the small unit. It is the small farm that pays. That fact brings many advantages. What is the charm of Riverside? It comes to me always like the unreal dream of the socialist come true. It is a city of farms, of small farms, where a man may make his living off his ten acres of oranges or lemons; and with all the comforts and conveniences of a city within reach, his neighbors not ten miles off! A farmer in Riverside or in any irrigated community does not have to postpone living for himself or his family until he can sell the farm! He can go to church, can walk there; the trolley car which passes his door takes him to a public library or the opera house. His children ride to

school. His wife does not need to be a drudge. The bread wagon and the steam laundry wagon stop at her door."

Rickard observed that perhaps he did not know anything about irrigation after all! He had not thought of it before in its sociological relation but merely as it touched his profession.

"Not going into soil values, for that is a long story," began the older man, "irrigation is the answer which science gives to the agriculturist who is impatient of haphazard methods. Irrigation is not a compromise, as so many believe who know nothing about it. It is a distinct advantage over the old-fashioned methods."

"I am one of those who always thought it a compromise," admitted the engineer.

"Better call rain a compromise," retorted the irrigator. "The man who irrigates gives water to the tree which needs it; rain nourishes one tree and drowns out another. Irrigation is an insurance policy against drought, a guarantee against floods. The farmer who has once operated an irrigated farm would be as impatient were he again subjected to the caprice of rain as a housewife would be were she compelled to wait for rain to fill her wash tub. There is no irregularity or caprice about irrigation."

"Wonder how the old fellow picked it all up?" mused Rickard with disrespect. Aloud he said, "You were speaking of the value of the soil?"

"Look at the earth those plows are turning over. See how rich and friable it is, how it crumbles? You can dig for hundreds of feet and still find that sort of soil, eight hundred feet down! It is disintegrated rock and leaf mold brought in here in the making of a delta. Heavy rainfalls are rare here, though we have had them, in spite of popular opinion. Were we to have frequent rains the chemical properties which rain farmers must buy to enrich their worn-out soils would be leached out, drained from the soil. I can't make this comprehensive, but I've a monograph on desert soil. If you are interested I'll send it to you."

"I should like it—immensely," assented the engineer, still amused.

"It explains the choice of the Aztecs, of the Incas, of Carthaginians, the Moors," observed the stranger. "They chose the desert, not in spite of the soil but because of it. I doubt if they were awake to the social advantages of the system, but it was their co-

operative brotherhood that helped them to their glory. We are centuries behind them. I'm getting out here—

"Brandon's My Name."

Any one reading the income tax reports would form the opinion that there is still some money in the United States.

Imperial. If you come up to Imperial look me up. Brandon's my name. I no card these days!"

"There are several things I want hear from you," answered Rickard following brown necktie and point beard to the platform. "I'll be sure to look you up. Mine's Rickard."

The breeze which was now entering the car windows had blown over the clover-leaved fields. Its message was sweet and fresh. Rickard could see the canals leading off like silver threads to the homes and farms of the future; "the socialists' dream come true!" Willows of two or three year growth outlined the banks. Here and there a tent or a ramada set up brave defiance against the hard conditions of the land it was invading. Rickard leaned out of the window and looked back up the valley which was dominated by the range now wrapping around itself gauzy, iridescent drap-eries.

"The monument to an effete superstition!" he repeated. "That wasn't a bad idea."

(To be continued next week.)

A MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE.

Every year the United States ships tons and tons of chewing gum to China and Siam and the Malay Islands.

The question arises what could possibly have created the demand for such a commodity in Hong-Kong and Bangkok and Singapore?

It began with the missionaries—good resourceful people. They found that the natives, whom they had come to Christianize and civilize, had a dreadful habit of chewing betel nut. Betel nut is a concoction which contains small quantities of an injurious drug. Also its continued use turns the teeth jet black.

In order to counteract the effect of this deleterious habit the ingenious missionaries, having caught their natives, proceeded to cultivate in them a taste for Wrigley's Spearmint and a corresponding disinclination for betel nut. The natives came, they chewed, they were conquered, and much of America's chewing gum finds its final destiny in the mouths of Siam and Borneo.

We would suggest to these excellent missionaries that having worked this reformation in heathen lands, they would find more worlds to conquer in America. The field is a different one, but it exists.

Who has not been driven almost wild by the facial contortions of the reckless gum-chewer? Who has not been repelled when the band plays "The Star-spangled Banner" by a throng of patriotic jaws chewing in time to the music? What business man has not found wads of gum plastered upon desk or typewriter by thrifty and prudent employes?

We submit that the comfort and spirituality of the people of this country would be much enhanced if the missionaries would labor here to curb the zeal and dexterity of the gum-chewers. As they have met one problem effectively in Asia, they can doubtless meet another at home and will thus merit our undying gratitude.

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