



# The RIVER

## EDNAH AIKEN

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The door opened behind them, and Rickard saw the man whose description had been so deftly knocked off. He recognized the type seen so frequently in southern California towns, the pale, damaged exile whose chance of reprieve is conditioned by stern rules of diet and sobriety. It was the temperament which must perforce translate a personal necessity into a religious dogma.

"This gentleman's just—is just looking around," stammered MacLean, blundering, confused.

The vegetarian nodded, taking off his felt sombrero and putting it on a chair with care.

By this time it was apparent that no one save Hardin knew of his coming. He was ahead of Marshall's letters. He did not like the flavor of his entrance.

"What provision is being made for the new general manager?"

The question, aimed carelessly, hit the auditor.

"They are not talking of filling the position just yet," he responded. "There is no need at present. The



Ogilvie's Dismay Was Too Sudden.

work is going along nicely, better, I might say, adjusted as it now is, than it did before."

"I heard that they had sent a man from the Tucson office to represent Mr. Marshall."

"Did you hear his name?" stammered Ogilvie.

"Rickard."

The auditor recovered himself. "I would have heard of it were it true. I am in close touch with the Los Angeles office."

"It is true."

"How do you know?" Ogilvie's dismay was too sudden; the flabby facial muscles betrayed him.

"I'm Rickard." The new general manager took the swivel chair behind the flat-top desk. "Sit down. I'd like to have a talk with you."

"If you will excuse me," Ogilvie's bluff was as anemic as his crushed appearance. "I—I am busy this morning. Might I trouble you—for a few minutes? My papers are in this desk."

Rickard now knew his man to the shallow depths of his white-corporated soul. "If I won't be in your way I'll hang around here. I've the day to kill."

His sarcasm was lost in transit. Ogilvie said that Mr. Rickard would not be in his way. He would move his papers into the next room tomorrow.

The engineer moved to the French windows that opened on the alfalfa lawn. A vigorous growth of willows marked the course of New river, which had cut so perilously near the town. A letter "b," picked out in quick river vegetation, told the story of the flood. The old channel—there it was, the curved arm of the "b," one could tell that by the tall willows—had been too tortuous, too slow for those sweeping waters. The flow had divided, cutting the stem of the letter, carrying the flood waters swifter down grade. The flow had divided—hm! divided perhaps the danger too! An idea in that! He would see that better from the water tower he'd spied at entering. Another flood, and a gamble whether Mexican or Calixico would get the worst of it. Unless one was ready. A levee—west of the American town!

"Excuse me, sir—do you need me?" He turned back into the room. He could see that MacLean was aching to get out of the room. Ogilvie had visibly withered. A blight seemed to fall on him as his white, blue-veined fingers made a bluff among his papers.

"Thank you," Rickard nodded at

MacLean, who burst into the outer office.

"It's the new general manager from Tucson—Rickard's his name." His whisper ran around the walls of the room, where other arrivals were tilting their chairs. "The new general manager! Ogilvie wooled for nothing. You should have seen his face!"

"Did anyone know that he was coming?" Silent, the tanned giant, spoke.

"That's Marshall all over," said Wooster, bright-eyed and wiry, removing his pipe. "He likes to move in a mysterious way his wondrous to perform. (Used to sing that when I was a kid!) No announcement. Simply, 'Enter Rickard.'"

"More like this," said Silent. "Exit Hardin. Enter Ogilvie. Enter Rickard."

"And exit Ogilvie," cried MacLean. "It's a—d—d shame," burst out Wooster. No one asked him what he meant. Every man in the room was thinking of Hardin, whose shadow this reclamation work was.

"What's Rickard doing?" asked the infantile Hercules at the checkerboard. The force called him Pete, which was a short cut to Frederick Augustus Bodefeldt.

"Taking Ogilvie's measure"—this from MacLean.

"Then he's doing something else by this time. That wouldn't take him five minutes unless he's a gull," snapped Wooster, who hated Ogilvie as a rat does a snake.

The door opened and Rickard came in. Almost simultaneously the outer door opened to admit Hardin. Who would introduce the new general manager to the dismissed one? The thought flashed from MacLean to Silent, to the telegraph operator, Bodefeldt doubled over the checkerboard, pretending not to see them. Confusion, embarrassment was on every face. Nobody spoke. Hardin was coming closer.

"Hello, Hardin."

"Hello, Rickard."

It appeared friendly enough to the surprised office. Both men were glad that it was over.

"Nice offices," remarked Hardin, his legs outspread, his hands in his pockets.

"Ogilvie is satisfied with them."

The men rather overdid the laugh.

"Finding the dust pretty tough?" inquired Hardin.

"I spent a month in San Francisco last summer!" was the rejoinder.

"This is a haven, though, from the street. Thought I'd loaf for today."

Was Hardin game to do the right thing, introduce him as the new chief to his subordinates? Nothing, it developed, was further from his intention. Hardin, his legs outstretched, kept before his face the bland, impenetrable smile of the oriental. It was clearly not Rickard's move. The checker players sidgeted. Rickard's silence was interrogative. Hardin still smiled.

The outer door opened.

The newcomer, evidently a favorite, walked into a noisy welcome, the "boys" embarrassment overdoing it. He was of middle height, slender—a Mexican with Castilian ancestry written in his high-bred features, his grace and his straight, dark hair.

"Good morning, Estrada," said Hardin with the same meaningless smile.

"Good morning, gentlemen." The Mexican's greeting paused at Rickard.

"Mr. Estrada, Mr. Rickard."

Everyone in the office saw Hardin snub his other opportunity. He had betrayed to everyone his deep hurt, his raw wound. When he had stepped down, under cover of a resignation, he had saved his face by telling everyone that a rupture with Maitland, one of the directors of the reorganized company, had made it impossible for them to serve together, and that Maitland's wealth and importance to the company demanded his own sacrifice. Two months before Rickard's appearance Maitland had been discovered dead in his bath in a Los Angeles hotel. Though no one had been witness enough to speak of their hope to Hardin, he knew that all his force was daily expecting his reinstatement. Rickard's entrance was another stab to his chief.

"The son of the general?" The new manager held out his hand. "General Estrada, friend of Mexican liberty, founder of steamship companies and father of the Imperial valley?"

"That makes me a brother of the valley"—Estrada's smile was sensitive and sweet.

Estrada looked at Hardin, hesitated, then passed on to the checker players and addressed MacLean:

"I saw your father in Los Angeles. He has been chosen to fill the vacancy made by Maitland's death."

MacLean's eyes wavered toward Hardin, whose nonchalance had not faltered. Had he not heard, or did he know, already?

"I'd like to have a meeting, a conference, tomorrow morning." Rickard was speaking. "Mr. Hardin, will you set the hour of your convenience?"

Because it was so kindly done, Hardin showed his first resentment. "It will not be possible for me to be there. I'm going to Los Angeles in the morning. He turned and left the office, Estrada following him.

"Oh, Mr. Hardin, you mustn't take it that way," he expostulated, concern in each sensitive feature.

"I'll take orders from him, but he gave me none," growled Hardin. "It's not what you think. I'm not sore. But I don't like him. He's a fancy dude. He's not the man for this job."

"Then you knew him before?" It was a surprise to Estrada.

"At college. He was my—er—instructor. Marshall found him in the classroom. A theory slinger."

Estrada's thoughtful glance rested on the angry face. Was this genuine, or did not Hardin know of the years Rickard had served on the road; of the job in the bent-backed barrancas of Mexico, where Marshall had "found" him? But he would not try again to persuade Hardin to give up his trip to Los Angeles. It might be better, after all, for the new manager to take charge with his predecessor out of the way.

"MacLean's coming down tonight," he threw out, still watching Hardin's face. "With Babcock."

"I won't be missed," Hardin's mouth was bitter. "Estrada, if I had the sense of a goat I'd sell out, sell my stock to MacLean and quit. What's in all this for me? Does anyone doubt my reason for staying? It would be like leaving a sinking ship, like deserting the passengers and crew one had brought on board. God! I'd like to go! But how can I? I've got hold of the tail of the bear and I can't let go!"

"No one doubts you—" began Estrada. Hardin turned away, with an

ugly oath. The Mexican stood watching his stumbling anger. "Poor Hardin!"

In the office Rickard was speaking to MacLean, whom he had drawn to one side, out of earshot of the checker players.

"I want you to do something for me, not at all agreeable!" His tone implied that the boy was not given the chance to beg off. "What time does the train pull out in the morning?"

"Six-fifteen."

"I'll have a letter for you at the hotel at six. Be on time. I want to catch Hardin before he leaves for Los Angeles. If he's really going, I'll give him today to think it over. But he can't disregard an order as he did my invitation. I didn't want to rub it in before the men."

MacLean stared, then said that he thought he was not likely to!

Rickard left the office in time to see Hardin shutting the outer gate behind him. His exit released a chorus of indignant voices.

"An outrage!"

"A d—d shame!" This from Wooster.

"Hardin's luck!"

On the other side of the door Rickard deliberated. The hotel and its curious loungers, or his new office, where Ogilvie was making a great show of occupation. He had not seen Estrada. He was making a sudden dive for his hotel when the gentle voice of the Mexican halted him.

"Will you come to my car? It's on the siding right here. We can have a little lunch and then look over some maps together. I have some pictures of the river and the gate. They may be new to you."

Rickard spent the afternoon in the car. The twin towns did not seem so hostile. He thought he might like the Mexican.

Estrada was earning his father's mantle. He was the superintendent of the road which the Overland Pacific was building between the twin towns and the Crossing; a director of the Desert Reclamation company, and the head of a small subsidiary company which had been created to protect rights and keep harmonious relation with the sister country. Rickard found him full of meat, and heard, for the first time consecutively, the story of the rakish river. Particularly interesting to him was the relation of Hardin to the company.

"He has the bad luck, that man!" exclaimed Estrada's soft, mustel voice. "Everything is in his hands,

capital is promised, and he goes to New York to have the papers drawn up. The day he gets there the Maine is destroyed. Of course capital is shy. He's had the devil's own luck with men: Gifford, honest, but mullish; Snider, mullish and not honest—oh, there's a string of them. Once he went to Hermosillo to get an option on my father's lands. They were already covered by an option held by some men in Scotland. Another man would have waited for the three months to Scotland. Not Hardin. He went to Scotland, thought he'd interest those men with his maps and papers. He owned all the data then. He'd made the survey."

Estrada repeated the story Brandon and Marshall had told, with little discrepancy. A friendly refrain followed the narrative. "He has the bad luck, that man!"

"And the Scotch option?" reminded Rickard, smiling at his own poor joke.

"It was just that. A case of Hardin luck again. He stopped off in London to interest some capital there; following up a lead developed on the steamer. He was never a man to neglect a chance. Nothing came of it, though, and when he reached Glasgow he found his man had died two days before—or been killed, I've forgotten which. Three times Hardin's crossed the ocean trying to corner the opportunity he thought he had found. It isn't laziness, is his trouble. It's just infernal luck."

"Or over-astuteness, or procrastination," criticized his listener to himself. He knew now what it was that had so changed Hardin. A man cannot travel, even though he be bounding down a quick scent, without meeting strong influences. He had been thrown with hard men, strong men. It was an inevitable chiseling, not a miracle.

"I want to hear more of this some day. But this map. I don't understand what you told me of this by-pass, Mr. Estrada."

Their heads were still bending over Estrada's rough work bench when the Japanese cook announced that dinner was waiting in the adjoining car. MacLean and Bodefeldt and several young engineers joined them.

It had been outwardly a wasted day. Rickard had lounged, socially and physically. But before he turned in that night he had learned the names and dispositions of his force, and some of their prejudices. Nothing, he summed up, could be guessed from the gentleness of the Mexican's manner; Wooster's antagonism was open and snappish. Silent was to be watched, and Hardin had already shown his hand.

The river, as he thought of it, appeared the least formidable of his opponents. He was imaging it as a high-spirited horse, maddened by the fumbling of its would-be captors. His task it was to lasso the proud stallion, lead it in bridled to the sterile land. No wonder Hardin was sore; his noose had slipped off one time too many! Hardin's luck!

### CHAPTER VI.

#### Red Tap.

At ten o'clock the next morning Hardin, entering the office, again the general manager's, found there before him George MacLean, the new director, and Percy Babcock, the treasurer, who had been put in by the Overland Pacific when the old company was reorganized. They had just come in from Los Angeles, the trip made in MacLean's private car, to attend a director's meeting.

Rickard entered a few minutes later. Estrada behind him. Ogilvie followed Rickard to his desk.

"Well?" inquired the new manager.

Ogilvie explained lengthily that he had the minutes of the last meeting.

"Leave them here," Rickard waved him toward Estrada, who held out his hand for the papers.

Reluctantly the accountant relinquished the papers. His retreating countenance looked ludicrously whipped but no one laughed. Hardin's scowl deepened.

"Showing his power," he thought. "He's going to call for a new pack."

Estrada pushed the minutes through with but a few unimportant interruptions. He was sitting at the same desk with Rickard. Hardin, sensitive and sullen, thought he saw the meeting managed between them.

Several times he attempted to bring the tangled affairs of the water companies before the directors. Rickard would not discuss the water companies.

"Because he's not posted! He's beginning to see what he's up against," ran Hardin's stormy thoughts.

He was on his feet the next minute with a motion to complete the Hardin headgate. Violently he declaimed to Babcock and MacLean his wrongs, the injustice that had been done him. Marshall had let that fellow Maitland convince him that the gate was not practicable; had it not been for him the gate would be in place now; all this time and money saved. And the Maitland dam, built instead! Where was it? Where was the money, the time, put in that little toy? Sickening! His face purpled over the memory. Why was he allowed to begin again with the gate? "Answer me that. Why was I allowed to begin again? It's all child's play, that's what it is. And when I am in it again up to my neck he pulls me off!"

This was the real Hardin, the uncouth, overaged Lawrence student! The new manner was just a veneer. Rickard had been expecting it to wear thin.

"I think," interjected Rickard, "that we all agree with Mr. Marshall. Mr. Hardin, that a wooden headgate on slit

foundation could never be more than a makeshift. I understood that the first day he visited the river with you he had the idea to put the ultimate gate, the gate which would control the water supply of the valley, up at the Crossing on rock foundation. Mr. Marshall does not expect to finish that in time to be of first use. He hopes the wooden gate will solve the immediate problem. It was a case of any port in a storm. He asked me to report my opinion."

"Why doesn't he give me a chance to go ahead then?" growled the deposed manager. "Instead of letting the intake widen until it will be an impossibility to confine the river there at all?"

"So you do think that it will be an impossibility to complete the gate as planned?"

Hardin had run too fast. "I didn't mean that," he stammered. "I mean it will be difficult if we are delayed much longer."

"Have you the force to re-begin work at once?" demanded Rickard.

"I had it," evaded Hardin. "I had everything ready to go on—men, material—when we stopped the last time."

"Answer my question, please."

"I should have to assemble them again," admitted Hardin sulkily.

Rickard consulted his notebook. "I think we've covered everything. Now I want to propose the laying of a spur track from Hamlin's Junction to the Headgate." His manner cleared the stage of supernumeraries; this was the climax. Hardin looked ready to spring.

"And in connection with that the development of a quarry in the granite hills back of Hamlin's," continued Rickard, not looking at Hardin.

Instantly Hardin was on his feet. His fist thundered on the table. "It is absolutely unnecessary. We can't afford it. Do you know what that will cost, gentlemen?"

"One hundred thousand dollars!" Rickard interrupted him. "I want an appropriation this morning for that amount. It is, in my opinion, absolutely necessary if we are to save the valley. We cannot afford not to do it, Mr. Hardin!"

Hardin glared at the other men for support; he found MacLean's face a blank wall; Estrada looked uncomfortable. Babcock had pricked up his ears at the sound of the desired appropriation; his head on one side, he looked like an inquisitive terrier.

"There are always chances," interrupted his opponent coolly. "We are going to take none. I want Mr. Hardin, gentlemen, appointed a committee of one to see that the machinery is delivered at once, and the dredge rushed."

(To be continued next week.)

The Yankee soldiers have not been able to make acquaintance with the French dogs, because the dogs do not understand English. They pay no attention to a simple "come here" but obey instantly when a Frenchman says "Venez-z-ici."

The ex-Kaiser now states that he never desired war. Can it be that his memory is failing?



Hardin Turned Away With an Ugly Oath.



Instantly Hardin Was on His Feet.

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