

The RIVER

By EDNAH AIKEN

When the Colorado Burst Its Banks and Flooded the Imperial Valley of California

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HOW WILL HARDIN AND HIS WIFE RECEIVE HIM?—RICKARD IS NOT LEFT LONG IN DOUBT.

Synopsis.—K. C. Rickard, an engineer of the Overland Pacific railroad, is called to the office of President Marshall in Tucson, Ariz. While waiting Rickard reads a report on the ravages of the Colorado river, despite the efforts of Thomas Hardin, head of the Desert Reclamation company. Hardin had been a student of Rickard in an eastern college and had married Gerty Holmes, with whom Rickard had fancied he was in love. Marshall tells Rickard the Overland Pacific must step in to save the Imperial valley and wishes to send Rickard to take charge. Rickard declines because he foresees embarrassment in supplanting Hardin, but is won over. Rickard goes to Calexico and, on the way, learns much about Hardin and his work.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

"Bath right across the hall. Only room left in the house." The proprietor awarded him the valley stare. "Going to be here long?" He passed the last key on the rack to the darkly staggering under a motley of bags and suitcases. Rickard recognized his, and followed.

"I may get you another room tomorrow," called the proprietor after him as he climbed the dusty stairs. The signals of a new town were waving in the dining room. The majority of the citizens displayed their shirt sleeves and unbuttoned suspenders. One large table was surrounded by men in khaki; the desert soldiers, engineers. The full blown waitresses, elaborately pompadoured, were pushing through the swinging doors, carrying heavy trays. Gerty appeared to be their occupation, rather than mending, the diners accepting both varieties of attention with appreciation. The supremacy of those superior maidens was menaced only by two other women who sat at a table near the door. Rickard did not see them at first. The room was as masculine as a restaurant in a new mining town.

Rickard left his indoor view to look through the French windows opening on a side street. He noticed a slender but regular procession. All the men passing fell in the same direction. "Cocktail route," explained one of his neighbors, his mouth full of boiled beef.

"Oyster cocktail?" smiled the newcomer. "The real thing! Calexico's dry, like the whole valley, that is, the country, see that ditch? That is, Mexico, on the other side. Those about you can see are in Mexicali, Calexico's twin sister. That painted adobe is the custom house. Mexicali's not dry, even in summer! You can bet your life on that. You can get all the bad whisky and stale beer you've the money to buy. We work in Calexico, and drink in Mexicali. The temperance pledge is kept better in this town than any other town in the valley. But you can see this procession every night."

The Amazon with a handkerchief apron brought Rickard his soup. He was raising his first spoonful to his mouth when he saw the face, carefully

averted, of the girl he had met at the Marshall's table, Innes Hardin. His eyes jumped to her companions, the man a stranger, and then, Gerty Holmes. At least, Mrs. Hardin! Somehow, it surprised him to find her pretty. She had achieved a variety of distinction, preserving, moreover, the clear-cut babyish chin which had made its early appeal to him. There was the same fluffy hair, its ringlets a bit artificial to his more sophisticated eyes, the same well-turned nose. He had been wondering about this meeting; he found that he had been expecting some sort of shock—who said that the love of today is the jest of tomorrow? The discovery that Gerty was not a jest brought the surprised gratification which we award a letter or composition written in our youth. Were we as clever as that, so complete at eighteen or twenty-one? Could we, now, with all our experience, do any better, or indeed as well? That particular question was not "ings." Could we make it

here, isn't it?" She flashed at him the look he remembered so vividly, the childish coquettish appeal. "We dine at home, till it becomes tiresome, and then we come foraging for variety. But you must come to us, say Thursday. Is that right for you? We should love it." Still those two averted faces. Rickard said Thursday, as he was hidden, and got back to his table, wondering why in thunder he had let Marshall persuade him to take this job.

Hardin waited a scant minute to protest: "What possessed you to ask him to dinner?" "Why shouldn't I? He is an old friend. Gerty caught a glance of appeal. Gerty sister to brother. "Jealous?" she pouted charmingly at her lord. "Jealous, no!" bluffed Hardin. He thought then that she knew, that Innes had told her. The Lawrence episode held no sting to him. Once, it had enchanted him that he had carried off the boarding-house belle, whom even that bookman had found desirable—bookman! A superior dude! He had always had those grand airs. As if it were not more to a man's credit to struggle for his education, even if he were older than his class, or his teacher, than to accept it off silver plates, handed by lackeys? Rickard had always acted as if it had been something to be ashamed of. It made him sick.

"They've done it this time. It's a fool-choice." Again, that look of pleading from Innes. Gerty sister to brother. "Fool-choice?" she pouted charmingly at her lord. "Fool-choice?" she pouted charmingly at her lord. "Fool-choice?" she pouted charmingly at her lord. "Fool-choice?" she pouted charmingly at her lord.

Hardin shook off Innes' eyes. Better be done with it! "He's the new general manager." "He's the general manager?" "I'm to take orders from him." Gerty's silence was of the stunned variety. The Hardins watched her crumpling broad on the tablecloth, thinking, fearfully, that she was going to cry.

"Didn't I tell you? Her voice, repressed, carried the threat of tears. "Didn't I tell you how it would be? Didn't I say that you'd be sorry if you called the railroad in?" "Must we go over this again?" asked her husband.

"Why didn't you tell me? Why did you let me make a goose of myself?" She was remembering that there had been no protest, no surprise from Innes. She knew! A family secret! She shrugged. "I'm glad, on the whole, that you planned it as a surprise. For I carried it off as if we'd not been insulted, disgraced."

"Gerty!" expostulated Hardin. "Gerty!" implored Innes. "And we are in for a nice friendly dinner?" "Are you quite finished?" Hardin got up.

As the three passed out of the dining room, Rickard caught their several expressions: Hardin's stiff, indifferent; Gerty's brilliant but hard, as she dashed a finished, brave little smile in his direction. The sister's bow was distinctly haughty.

In the hall, Gerty's laugh rippled out. It was a laugh Rickard remembered, the light, frolicsome cadence which recalled the flamboyant pattern of the Holmes' parlor carpet, the long, crowded dining table where Gerty had reigned. It told him that she was indifferent to his coming, as she meant it should. And it turned him back to a dark corner in the honeysuckle-draped porch where he had spent so many evenings with her, where once he had held her hand, where he told her that he loved her. For he had loved her, or at least he thought he had! And had run away from her expectant eyes. A end, was he, because he had brought that waiting look into her eyes, and had run from it?

Should a man ask a woman to give her life into his keeping until he is quite sure that he wants it? He was revamping his worn defense. Should he live up to a minute of surrender, of tenderness, if the next instant brings sanity, and disillusionment? He could bury now forever self-reproach. He could laugh at his own vanity. Gerty Hardin, it was easy to see, had forgotten what he had whispered to Gerty Holmes. They met as sober old friends. That ghost was laid.

CHAPTER V.

A Game of Checkers.

The uneasy mood of the desert, the wind-blown sand, drove people indoors the next morning. Rickard was served a substantial, indifferently cooked breakfast in the dining room of the Desert hotel, whose limitations were as conspicuous to the newcomer as they were nonexistent to the other men. They were finding a soft contrast to sand-blown tents, to life in the open.

Later he wandered through the group of staid idlers in the office, past the popular soda stand and the few chair-tilters on the sidewalk, going on, as if without purpose, to the railroad sheds, and then on, down to the offices of the Desert Reclamation company. He discovered it to be the one engaging spot in the hastily thrown-together town. There were oleanders, rose and white, blooming in

the patch of purple blooming alfalfa that stood for a lawn. Morning-glories clambered over the supports of the veranda, and on-over the roof. Rickard's deductions led him to the Hardins.

What school of experience had so changed the awkward country fellow? He had resented his rivalry, not that he was a rival, but that he was a boor. His kisses still warm on her lips, and she had turned to welcome, to coquet with Tom Hardin! The woman who was to be his wife must be staidier than that! It had cooled his fever. Not for him the aspen who could shake and bend her pretty boughs to each rough breeze that blew!

Men tossed into a desert, fighting to keep a foothold, do not garland their offices with morning-glories! Was it the gracious quiet influence of a wife, a Gerty Hardin? The festive building he was approaching was as unexpected—as Captain Brandon! Rickard walked on, smiling.

He was fairly blown into the outer room, the door banging behind him. Every one looked up at the noisy interruption. There were several men in the long room, among them two alert, clean-faced youths, college graduates, or students out on furlough, the kind of stuff in his class at Lawrence. Three of the seasoned, road-coached type were leaning their chairs against the cool thick walls. One was puffing at a cigar. The other, a big, shy giant, was drawing clouds of comfort from a pipe. There was a telegraph operator at work in one end of the room, her instrument rapidly clicking. In an opposite corner was a telephone exchange. A girl with a metal band around her forehead was punching connections between the valley towns. Rickard lost the feeling of having gone into a remote and isolated room. The twin towns were on the map.

One of the older men returned his nod. The young men returned their hastily withdrawn attention to their game of checkers. The other smoker was watching with cross-eyed absorption the rings his cigar was sending into the air. Rickard might not have been there.

One of the checker players looked up. "Anything I can do for you? Do you want to see anyone in particular?" "No," it was admitted. "No one in particular. I was just looking round."

"It's the show place of Calexico. I'll take you around. It is the only place in town that is comfortable when it's hot, or when the wind blows, and that's the program all summer. Take my place, Pete."

Pete, the young giant, with the face of his infancy enlarged rather than matured, slipped into the vacant chair. He had been the first to discover the stranger, but he had evaded the responsibility. The game immediately absorbed him.

"It's nice here," repeated the young fellow, leading the way. They were followed by a few idle glances.

Rickard looked with approval at the tan skin figure which was assuming the courtesy of the towns. The fine handsome face was almost too girlish, the muscles of the mouth too sensitive yet for manly beauty, but he liked the type. Lithe as a young desert-reared Indian, his manner and carriage told of a careful home and rigid school discipline.

He was ushered into a large cool room. The furnishings he inventoried: a few stiff chairs, a long table and a typewriter desk, closed for the Sabbath.

"The stenographer's room," announced the lad superfluously. "Whose stenographer?" "General property now. Everyone has a right to use her time. She used to be Hardin's, the general manager's. She is still, in a way. But Ogilvie keeps her busy most of the time."

Rickard had not heard of Ogilvie. He made a mental register. "When did Hardin go out?" He



"I'll Take You Around."

know the date himself. He expected the answer would trail wisps of other information. He had a very active curiosity about Hardin. The man's failures had been spectacular.

The young fellow was thinking aloud. "The dam went November 29th. Hardin was given a decent interval to resign. Of course he was fired. It was an outrage—" He remembered that he was speaking to a stranger and broke off suddenly. Rickard did not question him. He made another note. Why was it an outrage or why did it appear so? In perspective, from the Mexican barranca, where he had been at the time, the failure of that dam had been another bar sinister against Hardin.

"I see that you are from the University of California?" Rickard said, and nodded at the pin of gold and blue enamel.

"Out for a year," glowed the lad. "Dad wanted me to get some real stuff in my head. He said the Colorado would give me more lessons—more real knowledge in a year than I'd get in six at college. I kicked up an awful row—"

The older man smiled. "Of course. You don't want to go back now?" "The boy made a wry face. "He expects me to go back in August. Says I must."

"You did not tell me your name," was suggested.

"MacLean, George MacLean," said the young man rather consciously. It was a good deal to live up to. He always felt the appraisal which followed that admission. George MacLean, elder, was known among the railroad circles to be a man of iron, one of the strongest of the heads of the Overland Pacific system. He was not the sort of a man a son could speak lightly of disobeying.

"Of course everyone calls me Junior." "I guess you'll go back if he wants you to," smiled Rickard.

"Oh, but what a rotten trick it would be!" exclaimed the son of the man of iron. "To throw me out of college—I was duffy to finish with my class, and to get me here, to get me interested—and then after I've lost my place to pull me back. Why, there are things happening every day that are a liberal education. They are only just beginning to understand what they are bucking up against. The Colorado's an unknown quantity; even old engineers are right up against it. There are new problems coming up every day. The Indians call her a yellow dragon, but she's a tricky woman, she's an eel; she's giving us sums to break our teeth on."

"Who has the next room?" "Used to be the general manager's. Ogilvie uses it now."

"And who did you say was Ogilvie?" They turned back into the room.

"You can go in. He's not here. He is the new auditor, an expert accountant from Los Angeles. Put in by the O. P. when it assumed control last year. He used to come down once a month. After Hardin went out he came down to stay."

"Whose says so?" "I don't know. The accounts were rotten, that's no office secret. The world knows that. Hardin is blamed for it. It isn't fair. Look at Sather's stone palace in Los Angeles. Look at Hardin's tent, his shabby clothes."

"I'd like to meet Ogilvie," observed the general manager.

"Oh, he's not much to meet. A pale, white-livered vegetarian, a theologian. You've seen 'em. Los Angeles is full of 'em. He was here when Hardin was fired. You could see him see his opportunity. His chest swelled up. He looked as if he had tasted meat for the first time. He thought that he could wuzzle into the empty place! He went back to Los Angeles, convinced them that the auditor should be here, protect the company's interests. It sounded mysterious, slouchlike, as if he had discovered something, so they let him bring the books down here. He is supposed to be ferreting. But he's 'wuzzling.' He used to be in the outer office. Said the noise made his head ache, so he moved in here. All the committee meetings are held here, and occasionally the directors' meetings. Water companies, too. Ogilvie's taking notes—wants to be the next general manager; it sticks out all over him."

"What's the derivation of wuzzle?" This with deep gravity.

"Walt till you see Ogilvie!" laughed his entertainer. Then as an afterthought, "This is all public gossip. He's fair game."

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 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-corpulent 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 towns. 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 these 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 Calexico 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 light 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 wuzzled 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 wonders 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. "His 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 checkboard. 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," snipped Wooster, who hated Ogilvie as a rat does a snake.

Rickard moves to save the valley in what seems to him the only possible way. His views do not coincide with those of Hardin. The next installment tends to justify the forebodings with which Rickard undertook his great task. Do not fail to read it.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Spotted it. "Jack said you were a bird." "Really," she exclaimed, delighted. "Yes, a parrot."—Boston Transcript.

Weekly Health 7

GOING BACK TO NATURE

BY DR. W. LUCAS.

People get sick because away from Nature, and the to get well is to go back. So grows out of the ground in of vegetation to cure almost all of these vegetable grow understood by man, and some Animals, it would seem, know do when they are sick betw men and women. Observe noted that a sick horse, do will stop eating food and the vegetable growth in the and, which, when found at often restores appetite and Haven't you seen these ani this very thing yourself?

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