



The RIVER

EDNAH AIKEN

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"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 Heading." 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. "I shall oppose that," he flared. "It is ab-



Instantly Hardin Was on His Feet.

olutely 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.

Hardin spread out his hands in helpless desperation. "You'll ruin us," he said. "It's your money, the O. P.'s, but you're lending it, not giving it to us. You are going to swamp the Desert Reclamation company. We can't throw funds away like that. One hundred thousand dollars! Why, he could have stopped the river at any time if he had had that sum; once a paltry thousand would have saved them—" "I didn't ask the O. P. to come in and ruin us, but to stop the river; not to throw money away in hog-wild fashion." He was stammering inarticulately. "There's no need of a spur-track if you rush my gate through."

"If," Rickard nodded. "Granted, if we can rush it through. But suppose it falls? Marshall said the railroad would stand for no contingencies. The interests at stake are too vital—"

"Interests!" cried Tom Hardin. "What do you know of the interests at stake? You or your railroad? Coming in at the eleventh hour, what can you know? Did you promise safety to thousands of families if they made their homes in this valley? Are you responsible? Did you get up this company, induce your friends to put their money in it, promise to see them through? What do you know of the interests at stake? You want to put one hundred thousand dollars into a frill. God, do you know what that means to my company? It means ruin—" Estrada pulled him down in his seat.

Rickard explained to the directors the necessity in his opinion of the spur-track and the quarry. Rock in great quantities would be needed; cars must be rushed in to the break. He urged the importance of clutching the issue. "If it's not won this time, it's a lost cause," he maintained. "If it cuts a deeper gorge, the imperial valley is a chimera; so is Laguna dam."

The other men were drawn into the argument. Babcock leaned toward Hardin's conservation. MacLean was judicial. Estrada upheld Rickard. The spur-track, in his opinion, was essential to success. Hardin could see the meeting managed between the newcomer and the Mexican, and his anger impetuously raged. His temper made him incoherent. He could see Rickard, cool and impersonal, adding to his points, and MacLean slowly won to the stronger side. Hardin, on his feet again, was spitting helplessly at

Babcock, when Rickard called for a vote. The appropriation was carried. Hardin's face was swollen with rage.

Rickard then called for a report on the clam-shell dredge being rushed at Yuma. Where was the machinery? Was it not to have been finished in February?

"Why not get the machinery here? What's the use of taking chances?" demanded Rickard.

Hardin felt the personal implication. He was on his feet in a second. "There are no chances." He looked at MacLean. "The machinery's done. It's no use getting it here until we're ready."

"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."

The working force was informally discussed. Hardin said they could depend on hobo labor. Eckard agreed that they would find such help, but it would not do to rely on it. The big sewer system of New Orleans was about completed; he had planned to write there, stating the need. And there was a man in Zacatecas, named Porter—

"Frank Porter?" sneered Hardin, "that—murderer?"

"His brother," Rickard answered pleasantly. "Jim furnishes the men for the big mines in Sonora and Sinaloa. He'll send us all the labor we want, the best for our purpose. When it gets red-hot, there's no one like a peon or an Indian."

"You'll be infringing on the International contract law," suggested MacLean.

"No. The camp is on the Mexican side," laughed Casey. "I'd thought of that. We'll have them shipped to the nearest Mexican point, and then brought to the border. Mr. Estrada will help us."

The meeting had already adjourned. They were standing around the flat-top desk. Estrada invited them all to lunch with him, in the car on the siding. MacLean said that he had to get back to Los Angeles. Mr. Babcock was going to take him out to Grant's Heading in the machine. He had never been there. They had breakfasted late. He looked very much the color to Rickard, his full chest and stiff carriage made more military by his trim uniform of khaki-colored cloth.

"May I speak to you about your boy, Mr. MacLean?"

Hardin caught a slight that was not intended. He pushed past the group at the door without civility or ceremony.

The steady grave eyes of the big frame looked at Rickard inquiringly.

"He wants to stay out another year. I hope you will let him. It's not disinterested. I shall have to take a stenographer to the Heading this summer. There is a girl here; I couldn't take her, and then, too, I'm old-fashioned; I don't like women in offices. My position promises to be a peculiar one. I'd like to have your son to rely on for emergencies; a stenographer could not cover."

MacLean's grave features relaxed as he looked down on the engineer, who was no small man himself, and suggested that his son was not very well up in stenography.

"That's the least of it."

"I hope that he will make a good stenographer! Good morning, gentlemen."

At table, neither Estrada nor his guest uncovered their active thought which revolved around Hardin and his hurt. Instead, Rickard had questions to ask his host on river history. As they talked, it came to him that something was amiss—Estrada was accurate; he had all his facts. Was it enthusiasm, sympathy, he lacked? Presently he challenged him with it.

Estrada's eyes dreamed out of the window, followed the gorge of the New River, as though out there, somewhere, the answer hovered.

"Do you mean, do you doubt it?" exclaimed Rickard, watching the melancholy in the beautiful eyes.

Estrada shook his head, but without decision. "Nothing you'd not laugh at, I can laugh at it myself, sometimes."

Rickard waited, not sure that anything more was coming. The Mexican's dark eyes were troubled; a puzzle brooded in them. "It's a purely negative sense that I've had, since I was a child. Something falls between me and a plan. If I said it was a veil, it would be something!" His voice fell to a ghost of tuncfulness. "And it's nothing. A blank—I know then it's not going to happen. It is terribly small! It's happened, often. Now, I want for that—well. When it falls, I know what it means."

"And you have had that—sense about this river business?"

Estrada turned his pensive gaze on the American. "Yes, often. I thought, after father's death, that that was

what it meant. But it came again. It kept coming. I had it while you were all talking, just now. I don't speak of this. It sounds chicken-hearted. And I'm in this with all my soul—my father—I couldn't do it any other way, but—"

"You think we are going to fail?"

"I can't see it finished," was Estrada's mournful answer. He turned again to stare out of the window.

"Who are the river men in the valley?" demanded the newcomer. "I want to meet them, to talk to them."

"Cornel, he's an Indian. He's worth talking to. He knows its history, its legends. Perhaps some of it is history."

"Where's he to be found?"

"You'll run across him! Whenever anything's up, he's on hand. He senses it. And then there's Matt Hamlin."

"I'll see him, of course. Has he been up the river?"

"No, but I'll tell you two who have. Maldonado, a half-breed, who lives some twenty miles down the river from Hamlin's. He knows the Gila as though he were pure Indian. The Gila's tricky! Maldonado's grandfather was a trapper, his great-grandfather, they say, a priest. The women were all Indian. He's smart. Smart and bad."

Estrada's Japanese servant came back into the car to offer tea, freshly leech.

"That's what I want, smart river men, not tea!" laughed Rickard. "I want river history."

"There's another man you ought to meet. He was with the second Powell expedition. He's written the best book on the river. He knows it, if any man does. You wanted these maps." Estrada was gathering them together.

"Thank you. And you can just strangle that foreboding of yours, Mr. Estrada. For I tell you, we're going to govern that river!"

Estrada's pensive smile followed the dancing crip of the engineer until it carried him out of sight. Perhaps? Because he was the son of his father, he must work as hard as if conviction went with him, as if success awaited at the other end of the long road. But it was not going to be. He would never see that river shackled—

CHAPTER VII.

A Garden in a Desert.

His dwelling leaped into sight as Hardin turned the corner of the street. There was but one street running through the twin towns, flanked by the ditches of running water. The rest were ditches of running water edged by footpaths. Scowling, he passed under the overhanging bird cages of the Desert hotel without a greeting for the loungers, whose chairs were drawn up against the shade of the brick walls. The momentum slackened as Hardin neared the place he called his home. An inner tenderness dulled the sneer that disfigured his face. He could see Innes as she moved around in the fenced-in strip that surrounded her desert tent. She insisted on calling it a garden, in spite of his railing.

"Innes in bed, I suppose," thought Tom. He had a sudden vivid picture of her accusing martyrdom. His mouth hardened again. Innes, stooping over a rose, passed out of his vision.

It came to Hardin suddenly that a man has made a circle of failure when he dreads going to his office and shrinks from the reproaches at home. "A has-been" at forty! he mused. Where were all his ships drifting?

Innes, straightening, waved a gay hand.

"She's raising a goodly crop of barrels." His thought mocked and caressed her. Her garden devotion was

"He had grown to be a great man!"

That piquant meeting, the week following had been the brightest of his life. He was sure then that Gerty loved him. The wrangles were only their different ways of looking at things. Of course, they loved each other. But Gerty couldn't stand pioneer life. She had loved him, or she would not so easily have been persuaded to try it over again. She yearned to make him comfortable, she said. So she had gone back, and pulled down his ramada, and put his clothes in the lowest bureau drawer!

"It wasn't either of our faults," he ruminated. "It was the fault of the institution. Marriage itself is a failure. Look at the papers, the divorce courts. A man's interests are no longer his wife's. Curious that it should be so. But it's a fact. It is the modern discontent. Women want different careers from their husbands."

Yes, how could he help throwing his life into his work? He had committed himself; it was an obligation. If it were not for that indefinable something, his allegiance to the cause which mocked at reasons and definitions; oh, he knew—he had tilted with Gerty and been worsted!—he would have resigned from his company, his company which had dishonored him. Why should he stay to get more stabs, more wounds? And the last blow, this pet of Marshall's!—Hardin gave a scantling in his path a vicious kick.

The girl's prattle had died. She walked with him silently.

At the door of her tent, she stopped, looking at him wistfully. She wished he could hide his hurt. If he had only some of Innes' pride!

"How are things?" She used their fond little formula.

"Oh, rotten!" growled Hardin, flinging away. The gate slammed behind him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Under the Vener.

An hour later Innes, blinking from

the sun, stepped into the tent, when had been partitioned with rough red-wood boards into a bed chamber on the right, a combination dining room and "parlor" on the left. Her glance immediately segregated the three stalks of pink geraniums in the center of the Mexican drawn-work cloth that covered the table. Gerty, herself, in a fresh pink gingham frock, was dancing around the table to the tune of forks and spoons. It was just like Gerty to dress up to her setting, even though it were only a pitiful water-starved bouquet. She had often tried to analyze her sister-in-law's hold on her brother; certainly they were not happy. Was it because she made him comfortable? Was it the little air of formality, or mystery, which she drew around her? Her rooms when Innes was allowed to enter them were always flawless; Gerty took deep pride in her house-keeping. Why was it, Innes wondered, that she could never shake off her suspicion of an underlying untidiness? There was always a closed door on Gerty's processes.

"May I help?" The sun was still yellowing the room to her.

"Hello!" Hardin looked up from the couch where he was lying. Innes suspected it of being a frequent retreat. She had found it tumbled once when she ran over early. It was then that Gerty made it understood that she liked more formality. Innes was rarely in that tent except for meals now, or during her alternating week of house chores.

"I was afraid I was late," said the girl.

"Lunch will be ready in a few minutes," announced Gerty Hardin. "Won't you sit down? There's the new Journal. Sam came to clean this morning, and I couldn't get to the lunch until an hour ago."

Innes, settling herself by the reading table, caught herself observing that it would not have taken her an hour to get a cold lunch. Still, it would never look so inviting! If Gerty's domestic machinery was complicated and private, the results always were admirable. The early tomatoes were peeled as well as sliced, and were lying on a bed of cracked ice. The ripe black olives were resting in a lake of California olive oil. A bowl of crisp lettuce had been iced and carefully dried. The bread was cut in precise triangles; the butter had been shaved into foreign-looking roses. A pitcher of the valley's favorite beverage, iced tea, stood by Hardin's plate. There was a platter of cold meats.

It came home to Innes for the hundredth time, the surprise of such a meal in that desert. A few years ago, and what had a meal been? She thought of the credit of the little lunch to sulky Tom Hardin lying on the portiere-covered couch, his ugly lower lip thrust against an unsmiling vision. It was Tom, Tom and his brave men, the sturdy engineers, the dauntless surveyors, the Indians who had dug the canals, those were the ones who had spread that pretty table, not the buxom little woman darting about in pink gingham.

"Is it because I don't like her?" she mused, her eyes on the pictures in the style book which had just come in that morning. Certainly Gerty did have the patience of a saint with Tom's humors. If she would only lose that set look of martyrdom! It was not for an outsider to judge between a husband and wife, even if the man were her own brother. She could not put her finger on the germ of their painful

scenes; she shrank from the recollection of Tom's temper; his coarse streak, the Glegg fiber, her own mother called it. Tom was rough, but she loved him. Why was it she was sure that Gerty did not love her husband? Yet there was the distrust, as fixed and as unjust as perhaps as the suspicion of Gerty's little mysteries.

She said aloud: "This is your last day. My week begins tomorrow."

Mrs. Hardin adjusted a precise napkin before she spoke.

"I think I will keep the reins for a month this time." Her words were reflective, as though the thought were new. "I get my hand in just as I stop. I will be running out for my visit in a few weeks. It will be only fair for me to do it as long as I can."

Again the girl had a sense of subtlety. Whenever Gerty put on that air of childish deliberation, she hunted for the plot. This was not far to seek. Her sister-in-law was passing out the hot season to her.

"It's all ready," Gerty's glance was winking, birdlike, over the table. Note-

nothing had been forgotten.

was vivid from eager Gert. Hardin looked at her appreciatively. He liked her khaki suit, simple as a uniform, with its flowing black tie and leather belt. She looked more like herself today. She had bleached out, in Tucson. She had been letting herself get too tanned, running around without hats. Sunburn paled the value of those splendid eyes of hers. He could always tease her by likening them to topazes.

His eyes ran over the pink and purple lines of cord-trained vines which made floral screens for her tent. Free of the strings overhead, they roted over the ramada, the second roof, of living boughs. He acknowledged their beauty. They gave grace to bare necessity; they denied the peating, thirsty desert just beyond.

He remembered his own ramada. Gerty had hated it, had complained of it so bitterly when she came home from New York that he had had it pulled down and replaced by a V roof of pine boards, glaring and ugly. Gerty was satisfied, for it was clean; she no longer felt that she lived in a squaw house. Let the Indians have ramadas; there was no earthly reason she should. He had urged that the desert dwellers had valuable hints to give them. But what was a ramada to him, or anything else? Hardin turned to leave.

She did not want him to go so soon. She pointed out a new vine to him. She had brought it from Tucson; "Kudzu," they called it; a Japanese vine. And there was another broken rose, quite beyond the help of stripped handkerchiefs and mesquit splints.

He followed her around the tent, her prattle falling from his grim mood. He was not thinking of her flowers except as a mocking parallel. The desert storm had made a havoc of his garden—a sorry blotch of his life. He and Innes had been trying to make a garden out of a desert; the desert had flouted them. It was not his fault. Something had happened; something quite beyond his power. Luck was turning against him.

Innes, why, she was playing as with a toy. It was the natural instinct of a woman to make things pretty around her. But he had sacrificed his youth, his chances. His domestic life, too—he should never have carried a dainty little woman like Gerty into the desert. He had never reproached her for leaving him, even last time when he thought it was for good. The word burned his wound. Whose good? His or Gerty's? Somehow, though they wrangled, he always knew it would turn out all right; life would run smoothly when they left the desert. But things were getting worse; his mouth puckered over some recollections. Yet he loved Gerty; he couldn't picture life without her. He decided that it was because there had never been anyone else. Most fellows had had sweethearts before they married; he had not, nor a mistress when she left him, though God knows, it would have been easy enough. His mouth fell into sardonic lines. Those half-bred women! No one, even when a divorce had hung over him. Oh, he knew what their friends made of each of Gerty's lengthened flights; he knew! But that had been spared him, that vulgar grisly spectacle of modern life where two people who have been lovers drag the carcasses of their love over the grim floor of a curious gaping court. He shuddered. Gerty loved him. Else, why had she come back to him? Why had she not kept her threat when he refused to abandon his desert project and turn his abilities into a more profitable dedication? He could see her face as she stared flushing up into his that nipping cold day when he had run into her on Broadway. He remembered her coquetry when she suggested that there was plenty of room in her apartment! His wife! She spoke of seeing his pictures in the papers. "He had grown to be a great man!"

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he had supplanted. The thought crossed his mind that perhaps Hardin had taken to drinking. It made his answer curt.

"I don't know." "You have no report to make, Mr. Hardin, until I see the gate." "And you went to the Crossing without going down to the headgate?" Hardin did not try to conceal his disgust. "I did not go to the Crossing." "Didn't go—" Hardin's mouth was agape. Then he rudely swiveled his chair. The door slammed behind Rickard.

Hadn't been to the Crossing? Then where in Hades did he go? He halted MacLean who was passing him. "Are you going to the Crossing tomorrow?" Hardin knew he should be proud to betray his eagerness, but the words ran away with him. "Not tomorrow. Mr. Rickard just told me he might not be able to get off until next week." "Hardin's anger sputtered. "Next week. Why does he rush so? Why doesn't he go next year? The Colorado's so gentle, it'd wait for him, I'm sure. Next week! It's a put-up job, that's what it is. Oh, I can see through a fence with a knothole as big as your head. He doesn't want to finish the headgate. He wants to put off going until it's too late to go on with it; I know him. He'd risk the whole thing, and all the money the O. P. has been dumped into it, just to start with a clean slate; to get the glory of stopping the river himself. It turns my stomach; it's a plot." The lower lip

couldn't stand it there; she had not the courage to go to Los Angeles, where her friends would pity her. It was crushing her. She was not a Hardin; she was sensitive; she could not justify everything a Hardin did as right, no matter what the consequences. The pretty eyes obscured, she rushed, a streaming Niobe, to the room.

The brother and sister avoided each other's eyes. Innes rose and cleared the table of the dishes. She made a loud noise with the running water in the shed, racketing the pans to drown the insistence of Gerty's sobbing.

She kept listening for Tom's step. She wanted to go with him when he left; he must not reach the office in the blackness of that mood. She wished he would not betray his feelings; yet she knew it was not he who was to blame.

When she heard the screen door slam, she flashed out the back way. "Going?" she called after him. "Wait for me." She dashed into her tent for her hat. She had to run to catch up with him.

"Doesn't this give you an appetite?" demanded Innes heartily. "And I'm to be a lady for three more weeks." The remark was thoughtless. A bright flush spread over Gerty's face. She caught an allusion to her origin.

Innes saw the blush and remembered the boarding house. She could think of nothing to say. The three relatives sat down to that most uncomfortable travesty, a social meal where sociability is lacking. Innes said it had been a pleasant morning. Gerty thought it had been hot. And then there was silence again.

Innes began to tell them of her Tucson visit, when Gerty laid down her fork. "I've meant to ask you a hundred times. Did you attend to my commission in Los Angeles?"

"I forgot to tell you. I raked the town, really I did, Gerty." For there was a cloud on Gerty's pretty brow, "I could have got you the other kind, but you said you did not want it."

"I should think not." The childish chin was lifted. "Those complicated things are always getting out of order. Besides, if I had an adjustable form, everybody'd be borrowing it."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Tom, waking up. "Who'd borrow your what, Gerty?"

"Please don't call me Gert, Tom," besought his wife plaintively. "A figure. I wanted Innes to try to get one for me in Los Angeles."

"I did try," began Innes.

"Yours is good enough for anyone. Why should you get another?" He was openly admiring the ample bust swelling under the pink gingham.

"Don't, Tom."

Innes tried to explain the sincerity of her search. She had visited every store "which might be suspected of having a figure." She could not bring a smile to her sister's face. "There was none your size. They offered to order one from Chicago. They have to be made to order, if they are special sizes. You are not stock size, did you know that?"

"I should think not," cried Gerty, bridling. "My waist is absurdly small for the size of my hips and shoulders."

Innes wondered if it would be safe to agree with her.

"When will it be here?"

"You'll be disappointed." Innes found herself stammering. "But not for six weeks. I did not know whether to order it or not."

"And I in Los Angeles with my surveys sewed all done! What good will it do me then?" The pretty eyes looked ready for childish tears.

"I know. That is, I didn't know what to do," apologized Innes Hardin. "I decided to order it as I'd found the place, and was right there, but I made sure that I could countermand the order by telegram. So I can't very well afterwards. I knew you would be disappointed. I was sorry."

"I'll need it next winter," admitted Gerty, helping herself to some of the chilled tomatoes. "I'm sure I'm much obliged to you. I hope it did not put you to much trouble."

The words raised the wall of formality again. Innes bent over her plate.

"What made you change your plans?" suddenly demanded his wife of Hardin. "When Sam came in with your bag, he surprised me so."

"My boss kept me," Hardin's face looked coarse, roughened by his ugly passion. "Rickard, your old friend. He served a subpoena on me at the station."

"Oh," cried Gerty. "Surely, he did not do that, Tom?"

"Sure he did." Hardin's face was black with his evil mood. "I'm only an underling, a disgraced underling. He's my boss. He's going to make me remember it."

"You mustn't say such things," pointed his wife. "If it does not hurt you, if you do not care, think how I must feel—"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Hardin. The veneer was rubbed down to the rough wood. Innes saw the coarseness her mother had complained of, the Glegg fiber.

"I suppose you think I like to take orders, to jump at the snap of the whip?" He was deliberately beating up his anger into a froth. "Oh, sure, I do. That's a Hardin, through and through."

Again the angry blood flooded his wife's cheeks. He, too, was throwing the boarding house at her.

"You did it yourself," Gerty with difficulty was withholding the angry tears. "I told you how it would be. You would do it!"

"Oh, hell!" cried Tom, pushing back his plate.

His sister looked drearily out the wire-screened door. Her view was a dusty street. Hardin got up, scraping his chair over the board floor.

"And to keep it from me," persisted the wife. "To let me ask him to dinner—"

"Does that dismal farce have to go on?" demanded Hardin, turning back to the table. "You'll have to have it without me, then. I'll not stay and make a fool of myself. Ask him to dinner. Me! I'll see myself."

Innes wished she was in the neighboring tent. Tom was lashing himself into a coarse fury.

To her dismay, Gerty burst into tears. It was killing her, the disgrace, she cried. She couldn't endure it. She

CHAPTER IX.

The Rivals.

From the window of the adobe office building of the company, Hardin saw Rickard jump from the rear platform of the train as it slowed into the station. He noticed that the new manager carried no bag.

"Wonder what he's decided to do about the headgate. He didn't waste much time out there." Hardin was fidgeting in his seat, his eyes on the approaching figure.

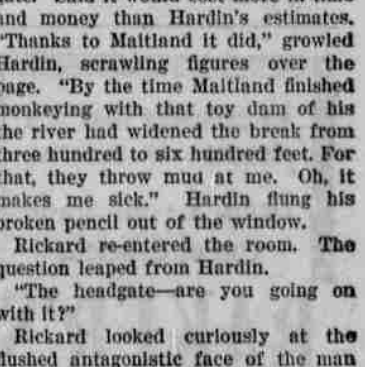
Rickard passed through the room, nodding to his office force. The door of the inner office shut behind him. Hardin stared at the blank surface. He moved restlessly in his swivel chair. Did the fellow think a big thing like that could hang on while he unpacked his trunks and settled his bureau drawers? He picked up a pencil, jabbing at the paper of his report. He covered the sheet with figures—three hundred—six hundred. Six hundred feet. Whose fault that the intake had widened, doubling its width, trebling its problem? Whose but Marshall's, who had sent down one of his office clerks to see what Hardin was doing? Wouldn't any man in his senses know that the way Mailand would distinguish himself would be by discrediting Hardin, by throwing bouquets to Marshall; praising his plan? They all go at it the same sickening way! Office clerks, bah! Sure, Mailand had advised against the completion of the gate. Said it would cost more in time and money than Hardin's estimates.

"Thanks to Mailand it did," growled Hardin, scribbling figures over the page. "By the time Mailand finished monkeying with that toy dam of his the river had widened the break from three hundred to six hundred feet. For that, they throw mud at me. Oh, it makes me sick." Hardin flung his broken pencil out of the window.

Rickard re-entered the room. The question leaped from Hardin.

"The headgate—are you going on with it?"

Rickard looked curiously at the flushed antagonistic face of the man



Are You Going On With It?

he had supplanted. The thought crossed his mind that perhaps Hardin had taken to drinking. It made his answer curt.

"I don't know." "You have no