

The RIVER

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

By
EDNAH AIKEN

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RICKARD'S VIEWS DO NOT COINCIDE WITH THOSE OF HARDIN, AND THE INEVITABLE COMES TO PASS.

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 under Rickard in an eastern college and had married Gertrude 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. Rickard meets Mr. and Mrs. Hardin and Innes Hardin, the former's half sister. At the company offices he finds the engineers loyal to Hardin and hostile to him.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

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 Rickard, 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 fidgeted. 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 overriding 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 Matland, one of the directors of the reorganized company, had made it impossible for them to serve together, and that Matland's wealth and importance to the company demanded his own sacrifice. Two months before Rickard's appearance Matland 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 their 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 Matland'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 at 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.

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 heat-baked 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



Hardin Turned Away With an Ugly Oath.

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 ment, 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, musical 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 mulish; Sather, mulish 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 pass. 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 tucked 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 Tape.

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 countails 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.

"MacLean he's not posted! He's be-

ginious 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 Matland 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 Matland 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 silt 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 has 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 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 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.

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 fails? 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 interest 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 clenching 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 impotently 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 sputtering 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. Rickard 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



Instantly Hardin Was on His Feet.

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 colonel 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 tunelessness. "And it's nothing. A blank—I know then it's not going to happen. It is terribly final! It's happened, often. Now, I wait for that—veil. 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." He 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."

"Cor'nel, 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 is 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 iced.

"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 step 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 diluted the sneer that disfigured his face. He could see Innes as she moved around in the little fenced-in strip that surrounded her desert tent. She insisted on calling it a garden, in spite of his rally.

"Gerty's 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 a tender joke with him. He loved the Hardin trait in her, the persistence which will not be daunted. An occupation with a Hardin was a dedication. He would not acknowledge the Innes blood in her. Like that fancy mother of hers? Innes was a Hardin through and through!

"It's in the blood," ran his thought. "She can't help it. All the Hardins work that way. The Hardins always make fools of themselves!"

Innes, lifting her eyes from a crippled rose, saw that the black devils were consuming him again.

"Will you look at this wreck!" she cried.

Innes Hardin feels a bitter resentment against Rickard because of his supplanting her brother, whom she loves devotedly. Gerty's emotions are of a different character, but she carefully conceals them. Storms hover over the Hardin household. Watch for the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Unskilled Labor.

A man never realizes what the term "unskilled labor" can mean until he boldly volunteers to repair the water faucets and take down the screen doors.—Washington Star.

Oldest Known Element.

Sulphur is one of the oldest known elements; the ancient Assyrian alchemists regarded it as the principle of combustion and termed it "brimstone," literally burning stone.