

THE RIVER....



By EDNAH AIKEN

CHAPTER XIV.

(Continued From Last Friday)

"From the water-tower," MacLean's voice split the wind. "The wires are all down between the Crossing and the towns. Colonel was on the tower—he got the signal from the Heading—he's been there each night for a week!" This was a great night—for his chief, Rickard!

Gerty Hardin caught the thrill of his hero-worship. How splendid, how triumphant!

Innes found herself in her brother's buggy. His horse, under the whip, dashed forward. Suddenly he pulled it back on its haunches, narrowly averting a jam. "Where's MacLean?"

The boy rode back. "Who's calling me?"

"Give me your horse," demanded Hardin. "You take my sister home."

Gerty Hardin's party was torn like a bow of useless finery. Facing the wind now, no one could talk; no one wanted to talk. Each was thrashing out his own thoughts; personal ruin stared them in the face. Every man was remembering that reckless ex-

posed out of Hardin's; pinning their hope to that ridiculed levee. The horses broke into a reckless gallop, the buggies lurching wildly as they dodged one another. The axles creaked and strained. The wind tore away the hats of the women, rent their pretty chiffon veils.

The dusty road was peopled with dark formless shapes. The signals had spread the alarm; the desert world was flocking to the gorge of the New river, to the levee.

The women were dumped without ceremony on the sidewalk, under the screened bird cage of the Desert hotel. Shivering, her prey teeth chattering, Gerty Hardin ushered them into the deserted hall. The Chinese cook snored away his vigil in an armchair by the open fire. The men had rushed away to the levee.

"Women must wait," Gerty's laugh was hysterical. "We can do no good down there." She threw herself, conscious of heroism, into the ordeal of her spoilt entertainment.

It was always an incoherent dream to Innes Hardin, that wild ride homeward, the lurching scraping buggies, the apprehensive silence, this huddling of women like scared rabbits around a table that had else been gay. The women's teeth shivered over the ices. Their faces looked ghastly by the light shed by Gerty's green shades. She wished she were at the levee. She simply must go to the levee. "I'm going to get a wrap," she threw to Gerty as she passed. "I left it in the hall."

She stole through the deserted office, past the white and silver soda fountain, and out into the speeding blur of the night. Formless shapes, soft-footed, passed her. As she sped past the French windows of the dining room she could get a view of the shattered party.

Innes made a dive into the darkness. There was a dim outline of hastening



Innes Made a Dive Into the Darkness.

figures in front of her. She could hear some one breathing heavily by her side. They kept apace, stumbling, occasionally, the moving gloom betraying their feet. A man came running back toward the town. "It's cutting back!" He cried. "Nothing but the levee will save the towns!"

The levee! The harsh breathing followed her. As they passed the wretched hut of a Mexican gambler, a sputtering light shone out. Innes looked back. She saw the wrinkled face of Colonel, who

had left his water tower. His black coarse hair was streaming in the wind, his mouth, ajar, was expressionless, though the fulfillment of the Great Prophecy was at hand. Beneath the cheek-splotches of green and red paint rested a curious dignity. The Indian was to come again into his own.

What was his own, she questioned, as her feet stumbled over loosened boarding, a ditch crossing she had not seen. More corn, perhaps more fiery stuff to wash down the corn! More white man's money in the brown man's pocket—that, his happiness. Why should he not thank the gods? His gods were speaking! For when the waters of the great river ran back to the desert, the long ago outraged gods were no longer angry. The towns might go, but the great Indian gods were showing their good will!

She joined a group at the levee, winding her veil over mouth and forehead. Dark shapes swayed near her. The wind was making havoc of the mad waters rushing down from the channel. The noise of wind and waters was appalling. Strange loud voices came through the din, of Indians, Mexicans; guttural sounds. Men ran past her, carrying shovels, pulling sacks of sand; lanterns, blown dim, flashed their pale light on her chilled cheeks.

Not even the levee, she knew then, would save the towns. This was the end.

CHAPTER XV.

On the Levee.

Hardin did not go home that night. He was feeling to the quick the irony of his position; his duty now to protect the levee he'd ridiculed; now the only hope of the towns! The integrity of the man never faltered, though his thoughts ran wild. Like the relentless hounds of Actaeon, they pursued him, barking at his vanity.

He started the anxious ranchers at sacking sand. Bodefeldt ran up to tell him that there was a hill of filled sacks over in Mexicall. "Rickard had a bunch of Indians working for a week."

The confusion of the shy fellow did not escape Hardin. Oh, he knew what

Bodefeldt was thinking, what every one was saying! They were all laughing at him. The coincidence of this extraordinary flood had upheld Rickard's wild guess, haloed his judgment. It was all a piece of his infernal luck. Sickening, that's what it was! His orders scattered. He ran up and down the levee, giving orders; recalling them when he found he was repeating Rickard's.

This new humiliation, coming on the heels of the dredge fiasco, put him in execrable temper. He shouted his orders over the noises of the night. He rated the men, bullied them. No one did anything right! Lord, what he had to put up with! The other men, the ranchers and engineers, saw in his excitement certainty of the valley's doom.

The wind and the darkness contributed to the confusion. Eager shovels were tossing up earth before anyone could tell where the danger point would be. The water was not yet high enough to determine the place of battle. Sacked sand was being brought over from Mexicall. Fifty pair of hands made short work of Rickard's "hill." Lanterns were flashing through the darkness like restless fireflies. The wind and rushing water deadened the sound of the voices. It was a battle of giants against pygmies. In the darkness, the giants threatened to conquer.

At three in the morning, a horseman rode in from Fassett's, one of the big ranches to the north, cut by the New river.

"The river is cutting back," he called through the din, "cutting back toward the towns."

A turn in the gorge, a careless dump-pit had pulled the river like a mad horse back on its haunches. It was kicking back.

"They are short-handed up there. They need help."

"Dynamite," cried Silent and Hardin antiphonally. They happened to be standing near.

"We must have dynamite," bawled Hardin. "Are the wires down between here and Brawley? We must get a wire somehow to Los Angeles, to rush it down here this morning."

"It's here. There is a carload on the siding," yelled Silent.

Hardin did not need to ask by whose orders it was there. An angry scowl spoiled his face.

"Put some on the machine." He was turning away.

Silent called after him. Did Mr. Hardin think it was safe? There was no road between the towns and Fassett's. The night, the explosive—should they not wait till morning? The ques-

tion threw his late chief into a rage. "Did I ask you to take it?" It was the opening for his fury. "Safe! Will the towns be safe if the river cuts back here? The channel has got to be widened, and you talk of your own precious skin! Wait till I ask you to take it. Get out the machine. I'll take it to Fassett's myself."

Silent left the levee, smarting. He backed the machine out of the shed and sped through the darkness toward Mexicall, where the car of explosives was isolated.

Hardin, buttoned up to the ears, his soft hat pulled tight over his forehead, was waiting impatiently. Here was something to be done; he coveted the activity.

"I thought you were never coming," he grumbled. "Let me take it!" pleaded the engineer.

"Nonsense, there is no danger." Hardin saw personal affection in the plea. He put his hand affectionately on the man's shoulder.

"You go home and catch a nap; this is my job." He was standing on the step. "Crank her."

There was nothing for Silent to do but to get out. Hardin pointed the long nose of the car into the darkness. She was off like the greyhound she suggested, missing a telegraph pole by half an inch.

"Who is in charge here?" a woman's voice was piercing the racket of wind and wave.

The dawn was breaking. Down the New river he could see the wind whipping the water into whitecapped fury. "Vicious," he muttered. "Those heavy waves play the Old Harry with the levee."

"Where is my brother?"

"Miss Hardin!" cried Silent.

"Where is he?" demanded Innes. Her hair streamed away from her face. Her cheeks were blanched. Her yellow eyes, peering into the dusk, looked owlish. Her wind-sparked skirts clung to her limbs. To Silent she looked boyish, as though clipped and trousered. "Where is my brother?" she repeated.

Silent told her without reservations where he had gone and why. There was no feminine foolishness about that sister of Hardin's. A chip of the old block. Funny, the men all thought of her as Hardin's daughter on account of the difference of age. As to a comrade, proudly, he bragged of the taking of the dynamite over that roadless waste.

"Whom did he leave in his place?" Silent knew, only, that he himself was not in charge! Hardin had ordered him to bed.

"Maybe Mr. Estrada?" she hazarded.

"He is not here, he went down the road to look after the track. Hardin went off in such a hurry, I guess he told nobody," chuckled the engineer still glowing.

"Then I'm it!" cried Innes Hardin. "Will you take my orders, Silent?"

"Sure," he chuckled again. Through the rush of the wind and water came the whistle of a locomotive.

"A special!" cried Silent. Hardin's

sister and his friend looked at each other, the same thought in mind; Rickard, in from the Heading!

On her face Silent saw the same spectacular impulse which had flashed over Hardin's features a short time before.

She put her hand on his arm. "Silent, you're his friend. Straighten this out. We can't have him come back—spying—and find this." She waved her hand toward the disorganized groups. "I'd take more orders," suggested the engineer.

"Then send a third of them home, tell them to come back tonight at six. Send away the other third, tell them to come back at noon. Keep the other shift. Say you'll have coffee sent from the hotel, tell them Hardin says to stop wasting stuff. Tell them, oh, tell them anything you can think of, Silent, before he comes." Her breakdown was girlish.

She could hear the signal of the locomotive; coming closer. Then she could hear the pant of the engine as it worked up the grade. It was a steady gentle climb all the way from the junction, two hundred feet below sealevel, to the towns resting at the level of the sea. It quickened her thought of the power of the river. Nothing between it and the tracks at Salton. Nothing to stop its flow into that spectacular new sea whose basin did not need a drop of the precious misguided flow. She could hear the bells; now the train was coming into the station; she would not wait for Silent. She did not want to meet Rickard.

No one saw her as she left the levee. She passed Silent, who was issuing orders. She heard him say, "The boss says so."

She took the road by the railroad sheds, to avoid the dismissed shifts, moving toward. At full speed, she collided with a man, rounding the sheds' corner. It was Rickard. Her veil had slipped to her shoulders and he saw her face.

"Miss Hardin!" he exclaimed. "Whatever are you doing here?"

"I was looking for my brother."

"You ought not to be out at night alone here."

"It's morning!"

"With every Indian in the country coming in. I'll send Parrish with you."

She recognized Parrish behind him. She tried to tell him that she knew every Indian in Mexicall, every Mexican in the twin towns, but he would not listen to her. "I'm not going to let you go home alone."



She Collided With a Man.

planter of her brother. But she found herself following Parrish. She took a deep pride in her independence, her fearlessness. Tom let her go where she liked. She had an impulse to dismiss Parrish; every man was needed, but he would obey Rickard's orders. MacLean had told her that! "They don't like him, but they mind him!"

Rickard made his way down to the levee. "Where is Hardin?" he asked of every one he met. Silent came up to explain that Hardin had gone up to Fassett's just a few minutes ago to carry dynamite. The river was cutting back there. "Good," cried Rickard, "that's bully!"

"He left me in charge," glibly lied the friend of Hardin. "Any orders, sir?"

"Things are going all right?" began the manager. He stopped. From above came a dull roar.

"Dynamite!" cried Rickard. The friend of Hardin had nothing to say. "I thought you said he went only a few minutes ago?" demanded his chief.

There was another detonation. Down the river came the booming of the second charge.

"That's dynamite for sure," evaded Silent.

"Not a minute too soon!" declared Rickard, going back to his inspection.

CHAPTER XVI.

Rickard in Town.

The town woke to a matter-of-fact day. The sensational aspect of the runaway river had passed with the night. The word spread that the flood waters were under control; the men had gone home to sleep, so the women got breakfast as usual, and tidied their homes. The Colorado was always breaking out, like a naughty child from school. Never would the cry of "The River!" fail to drag the blood from their cheeks. But relief always came; the threatened danger was always averted and these pioneer

women had acquired the habit of swift reaction.

That afternoon, Mrs. Youngberg was to entertain at the A B C ranch the ladies of the Improvement club. It was a self-glorification meeting, to celebrate the planting of trees in the streets of Calxico, and to plan the campaign of their planting. Mrs. Blinn drove into town to get Gerty Hardin. Neither woman had seen her husband since the interrupted drive the night before.

"I don't know whether I should go," Mrs. Hardin hesitated, her face turned toward the A B C ranch. "Perhaps there is something we could do."

"I have just come from the levee," Mrs. Blinn's jolly face had lost its apprehension. "The water has no risen an inch since breakfast. Most of the men have been sent home. When Howard didn't come home to lunch, I grew anxious. But Mr. Rickard says he sent him to Fassett's with more dynamite."

"There he is," thrilled Gerty.

Mrs. Blinn's eye swept the street. "Where? Your husband?"

"No, Mr. Rickard. Passing the bank there, he's stopped. I wonder if he is going in? You call him, Mrs. Blinn." Obediently her friend hailed Rickard. He turned back to the windy street. He felt boyish; the crisis was giving him mercurial feet. He loved the modern battle. Elements to pit one's brains against, wits against force!

Gerty Hardin's face was flushing; and palling. "The river," she faltered. "Should we be alarmed, Mr. Rickard?" Smiling, he assured her she should not be alarmed; the levees would protect the towns.

"Mr. Hardin is up at Fassett's ranch, he will be coming back today. I told your husband, Mrs. Blinn, to catch a nap and then relieve Mr. Hardin."

Gerty found a significance in his words. He had said "Mr. Hardin," and "your husband, Mrs. Blinn." It was enough to weave dreams around.

"We can't do anything, Mr. Rickard, to help?" urged Gerty Hardin, her voice tremulous.

"I hope we won't have to call on you at all."

There was no excuse to linger. Gerty threw a wistful little smile at parting.

NEW ENGLAND MILLS WILL PAY FAIR PRICE

Shreveport, La., March 28.—Asserting that Eastern mills will as readily pay a high price for Southern cotton as a lower price, G. H. H. Soule, of the Cotton Exchange department of the Shawmut Bank of Boston, told members of the Louisiana Bankers' Association in session here tonight, that there is no reason to believe the proposed reduction in acreage in the South will decrease the output of the Eastern mills for the year.

"We must consider the fact that an immense portion of the 1918 crop is yet being held," he said. "This left over crop is sufficient to make up for the decrease in production from the farm; and yet so much of it being in the hands of the farmer with the cooperation of the Southern bankers and merchants, he should be able to obtain a fair price for both his 1918 and this year's crops."

New England cotton manufacturers, Mr. Soule said, are showing no objections to the proposed reduction in Southern cotton acreage.

NOTICE

Deputy Collectors Albert S. Fant and A. H. Wells will be at Abbeville, S. C., on Friday and Saturday, April 4th and 5th, 1919, for the purpose of giving information to corporations officials in regard to income tax returns of corporations, which returns must be in the office of the Collector not later than May 1st. It is regretted that these deputies will not be able to make out the returns for the corporations, for the reason that their time is limited to undertake this work. But they will cheerfully answer to the best of their ability, all questions relating to the application of the law to these forms.

They will also be glad to receive income returns of any individual taxpayer who for any reason was unable to make his return before March 15th, when the time for filing returns expired.

Taxpayers are advised to seek out these deputies and have them assist them in preparing the return. Where the delinquency was unavoidable, a statement in the form of an affidavit must be made, and the total amount of the tax must be paid.

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(To be Continued Friday.)