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1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS.

A DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

BY REV. CHARLES M. SHELDON,
Author of "In His Steps," "The Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Malcom Kirk," Etc.

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Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

[CONTINUED.]

"George Hardy, if you think more of your old stovepipe hat than you do of your sister, all right. You'll never get any more of my month's allowance. And if I do smash your things I don't come home drunk at night and break mother's heart. That's what she's crying about this morning—that and father's queer ways. Oh, dear, I don't want to live; life is so full of trouble!" And little 12-year-old Bess sobbed in genuine sorrow.

George forgot his headache a minute. "Come, Bess, come and kiss and make up. Honest, now, I didn't mean it. I was bad to say what I did. I'll buy a dozen hats and let you sit on them for fun. Don't go away angry. I'm so miserable."

He lay down and groaned; and Bess went to him immediately, all her anger vanished.

"Oh, let me get you something to drive away your headache, and I'll bring you up something nice to eat! Mother had Nora save something for you. Didn't you, mother?"

Bessie asked the question just as her mother came in.

Mrs. Hardy said "Yes" and, going up to George, sat down by him and laid her hand on his head, as his sister had done.

The boy moved uneasily. He saw the marks of great suffering on his mother's face, but he said nothing to express sorrow for his disgrace.

"Bess, will you go and get George his breakfast?" asked Mrs. Hardy, and the minute she was gone the mother turned to her son and said:

"George, do you love me?"

George had been expecting something different. He looked at his mother as the tears fell over her face, and all that was still good in him rose up in rebellion against the animal part. He seized his mother's hand and carried it to his lips, kissed it reverently and said in a low tone:

"Mother, I am unworthy. If you knew!"

He checked himself, as if on the verge of confession. His mother waited anxiously and then asked:

"Won't you tell me all?"

"No, I can't."

George shuddered, and at that moment Bess came in bearing a tray with toast and eggs and coffee. Mrs. Hardy left Bess to look after her brother and went out of the room almost abruptly. George looked ashamed and after eating a little told Bess to take the things away. She looked grieved, and he said:

"Can't help it. I'm not hungry. Besides, I don't deserve all this attention. Say, Bess, is father still acting under his impression, or dream, or whatever it was?"

"Yes; he is," replied Bess with much seriousness, "and he is ever so good now and kisses mother and all of us goodby in the morning, and he is kind and ever so good. I don't believe he is in his right mind. Will said yesterday he thought father was non campus meant us, and then he wouldn't tell me what it meant, but I guess he doesn't think father is just right intellectually."

Now and then Bess got hold of a big word and used it a great deal. She said "intellectually" over twice, and George laughed a little, but it was a bitter laugh, not such as a boy of his age has any business to possess. He lay down and appeared to be thinking and after awhile said aloud:

"I wonder if he wouldn't let me have some money while he's feeling that way?"

"Who?" queried Bess. "Father?"

"What! You here still. Curiosity? Better take these things down stairs."

George spoke with his "headache tone," as Clara called it, and Bess without reply gathered up the tray things and went out, while George continued to figure out in his hardly yet sober brain the possibility of his father letting him have more money with which to gamble, and yet in the very next room Mrs. Hardy knelt in an agony of petition for that firstborn, crying out:

"O God, it is more than I can bear! To see him growing away from me so! Dear Lord, be thou merciful to me. Bring him back again to the life he used to live! How proud I was of him! What a joy he was to me! And now, and now! O gracious Father, if thou art truly compassionate, hear me! Has not this foul demon of drink done harm enough? That it should still come into my home! Ah, but I have been indifferent to the cries of other women, but now it strikes me! Spare me, great and powerful Almighty! My boy! my heart's hunger is for him! I would rather see him dead than see him as I saw him last night. Spare me! spare me, O God!"

Thus the mother prayed, dry eyed and almost despairing, while he for whom she prayed that heartbroken prayer calculated, with growing cold-

pale, almost haggard, face and his extremely thoughtful appearance.

"Mr. Hardy," said James frankly, "you are in trouble. I wish I could—"

"Thank you. No, you can't help me any in this except," continued Mr. Hardy, with a faint smile, "except you solve this trouble between you and my daughter."

"There is no trouble between us, sir," replied James simply. "You know I love her and have loved her for a long time, and I believe I am able to support her and make her happy. Won't you give your consent, sir? We are not children. We know our minds."

James was beginning to speak very earnestly. He was beginning to hope that the stern, proud man who had so curtly dismissed him a little while before would in some unaccountable manner relent and give him his heart's desire.

Mr. Hardy walked along in silence a little way. Then he said almost abruptly:

"James, do you drink?"

"No, sir."

"Or gamble?"

"You forget my mother, Mr. Hardy." The reply was almost stern.

Mrs. Caxton's younger brother had been ruined by gambling. He had come to the house one night, and in a fit of anger because his sister would not give him money to carry on his speculation he had threatened her life. James had interposed and at the risk of his own life had probably saved his mother's. Mrs. Caxton had been so unnerved by the scene that her health had suffered from it seriously. All this had happened when James was growing out of boyhood. But not a day had passed that the young man did not see a sad result of that great gambling passion in his own mother's face and bearing. He loathed the thought of a vice so degrading that it ignored all the tender ties of kindred and was ready to stop at nothing in order to get means for its exercise.

Mr. Hardy knew the story, and he exclaimed: "Forgive me, James. I did not think." Then, after a pause: "Are you a Christian? I mean do you have a faith in the revelation of God to men through Jesus Christ, and do you try to live according to his teachings, with a supreme love for God controlling life? Do you live every day as if it might be the last you would have to live?"

James started. Was Mr. Hardy out of his mind? He had never heard him talk like this before. The idea of Mr. Hardy caring about his religious character in the event of his becoming a son-in-law was an idea too remote for occurrence. He could see, however, that some very powerful change had taken place in Mr. Hardy's usual demeanor. His words also produced a strong effect upon the young man. He was like thousands of young men—temperate, honest, industrious, free from vices, strictly moral, but without any decided religious faith.

"Am I a Christian?" he asked himself, echoing Mr. Hardy's question. No; he could not say that he was. He had never said so to any one. He had, in fact, never been confronted with the question before. So he replied to Mr. Hardy:

"No, sir; I don't think I am what would be called a Christian. As for living as if every day were to be my last—do you think that is possible, sir?"

Mr. Hardy did not answer. He walked along thoughtfully. In the course of the conversation they had reached the corner where the young man turned down to his office, and the two paused.

"I want to have another talk with you," Mr. Hardy said. "Today is Tuesday; say tomorrow evening. I want to see your father also, and"—Mr. Hardy was on the point of saying that he wanted to ask the elder Caxton's forgiveness, but for some reason he stopped without doing so.

James exclaimed eagerly as Mr. Hardy turned to go:

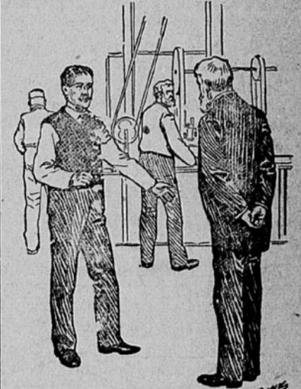
"Then you don't forbid my entertaining some hope of your good will in the matter of my love for Clara?" He lowered his voice and spoke very strongly. "You don't forget your own youth and the way in which you yourself began your home?"

Mr. Hardy answered never a word to this appeal, but looked into the young man's face with a gaze he did not forget all day, then wrung his hand and turned on his heel abruptly and walked rapidly down the street.

James looked after him as he disappeared among the crowds of people going to their business, and then turned to his own tasks. But something in him gave him hope. Another something appealed all day to his inner nature, and he could not shake off the impression of Mr. Hardy's question, "Are you a Christian?" And even when he went home at night that question pursued him more strenuously than any other and would not give him peace.



"James, is it true that you and Clara are engaged?"



"I'm afraid there'll be trouble, sir. I can feel it in the air."

CHAPTER VI.

Robert Hardy reached his office just in time to see Burns, the foreman, go out of a side door and cross the yard. The manager followed him and entered the machine shop in time to see him stop at a machine at the farthest end of the shop and speak to the man at work there. The man was a Norwegian, Herman by name. He was running what is called a planer, a machine for trimming pieces of cold metal just from the foundry or the casting room. He was at work this morning on one of the eccentric bars of a locomotive, and it was of such a character that he could leave the machine for several minutes to do the planing.

Burns talked with this man for awhile and then moved across the floor to the other workman, a small boned, nervous little fellow, who was in charge of a boring machine which drove a steel drill through heavy plates of iron fastened into the frame.

Mr. Hardy came up just as Burns turned away from this man and touched him on the shoulder. The foreman

started and turned about, surprised to see the manager.

"Well, Burns, how goes everything this morning?" asked Robert.

"The men here are grumbling because they don't have a holiday same as the men in Scoville's department."

"But we can't shut down the whole business, can we?" asked Mr. Hardy, with a momentary touch of his old time feeling. "The men are unreasonable."

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble, sir. I can feel it in the air," replied Burns.

Mr. Hardy made no reply in words, but looked at him. Within the blackened area of the great shop about 200 men were at work. The whirl of machinery was constant. The grind of steel on iron was blended with the rattle of chains and the rolling of the metal carriages in their tracks. The Genius of Railroad engineering seemed present in the grim strength and rapidity of several machines which moved almost as if instinct with intelligence and played with the most unyielding substances as if they were soft and pliable clay. In the midst of all the smashing of matter against itself, through the smoke and din and dust and revolution of the place, Mr. Hardy was more than usually alive this morning to the human aspect of the case. His mind easily went back to the time when he himself stood at one of these planers and did just such work as that big Norwegian was doing, only the machines were vastly better and improved now. Mr. Hardy was not ashamed of having come along through the ranks of manual labor. In fact, he always spoke with pride of the work he used to do in that very shop, and he considered himself able to run all by himself any piece of machinery in the shops, but he could not help envying these men this morning. "Why," he said, "probably not one of them but has at least seven weeks to live, and most of these seven months or years, while—Why should these men complain because they are not released from toil? Isn't toil sweet when there are a strong body and a loving wife and a happy home? O God," he continued to think, "I would give all my wealth if I might change places with any one of these men and know that I would probably have more than a week to live."

Mr. Hardy walked back to the office, leaving the foreman in a condition of wondering astonishment.

"Something wrong in his works, I guess," muttered Burns.

Mr. Hardy sat down to his desk and wrote an order releasing all the men who desired to attend Scoville's funeral in the afternoon. He did not have it in his power to do more, and yet he felt that this was the least he could do under the circumstances. The more he thought of Scoville's death the more he felt the cruel injustice of it. The injuries were clearly accidental, but they might have been avoided with proper care for human life, and Robert Hardy was just beginning to understand the value of humanity.

He worked hard at the routine of his office work until noon. He did what seemed to him the most necessary part of it all with conscientious fidelity. But his mind a good part of the time was with the men in the shops. He could not escape the conviction that if a railroad company had the willingness to do so it could make the surroundings of these men safer and happier without getting poorer work or even losing any money by it.

When noon sounded, he went home resolved to do something as far as lay in his power to make the men feel that they were regarded as something more than machines.

George was down stairs when his father came in and looked at him with