

VII 3 Times
a Day,
at Work
or Play,
XII You need a
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VI Wayfer

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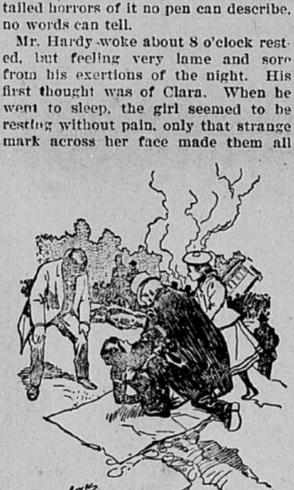
ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS.
A DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.
BY REV. CHARLES M. SHELDON,
Author of "In His Steps," "The Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Malcom Kirk," Etc.
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Mr. Hardy was almost overwhelmed by this last stroke, and yet he asked himself how many accidents had occurred this year on the road, and he had never given much thought to the suffering of those families afflicted. Now perhaps it had come to him, and bidding his wife pray and hope, he rushed out of the house and down to the station with the energy and rapidity of the youth who in college days had taken prizes for athletic superiority.
At the rail he found a special train just ready to go to the scene of the accident. It consisted of a wreching car, a caboose and one coach with tender and engine. He mounted the engine with a feeling that it was a little nearer the fatal spot and would reach there first. At the last minute no more definite news concerning the particular persons killed and injured had been received.
Mr. Hardy felt almost glad of the uncertainty as the engine pulled out and started on its run of 15 miles, soon attaining a speed of 55 miles an hour. The snow was falling in large, moist flakes. It was growing warmer and would rain before morning. He gazed at the narrow band of light on the track ahead and leaned forward as if to help the engine go faster. He did not speak, and so the train rushed through the night.
And so the second of Robert Hardy's seven days drew to a close.

CHAPTER VII.
As the engine drew near the scene of the wreck a great crowd could be seen standing about the track. Before the train came to a stop Robert Hardy leaped down from the cab and struggled forward, uttering cries of which he himself probably was not conscious. The accident had occurred upon a bridge which spanned a small river in the vicinity of Baldwin, near which town Mr. Hardy's brother lived.
The engine, mail car, two day coaches and two sleepers had crashed through and, falling a distance of 50 feet, had partly broken through the ice of the frozen stream. To add to the horror of the disaster the two sleepers had caught fire, and there was absolutely no means to fight it. Mr. Hardy caught confused glimpses of men down on the ice throwing handfuls of snow upon the blazing timbers in a frantic attempt to drive back or put out the flames. He fell rather than scrambled down the steep, slippery bank of the stream, and then the full horror of the situation began to dawn upon him.
The baggage car and tender had fallen in such a way that the trucks rested upright on the ice, and the position of the timbers was relatively that of the train before it had left the track. One day coach lay upon its side, but had broken completely in two as if some giant hand had pulled it apart, leaving the ragged ends of timbers projecting toward one another in such curious fashion that if the two ends of the car had been pushed toward the middle the splintered beams would have fitted into place almost as if made on a pattern. The other day coach had fallen upon one end, and one-third of the entire coach was under water. The other end, resting partly against the broken car, stuck up in the air like some curious, fantastic pillar or leaning tower.
Mr. Hardy was conscious of all this and more as he heard the groans of the injured and the cries of those begging to be released from the timbers under which they had been caught. But his own children! Never had he loved them as now.
The crowd of people had increased to a mob. The confusion was that of terror. Mr. Hardy rushed about the wreck searching for his children, a great throbbing at his heart as he thought of their probable fate, when the sweetest of all sounds, Bessie's dear voice, came to him, and the next minute he had caught up the child as she ran to him and strained her to his breast as in the old days when he had carried her about the house and yard.
"Where are Will and Clara?"
"Oh, father, they're here, and Will wasn't hurt much more than I was, but Clara has fainted, and she is lying down over here!"
Bess dragged her father out across the ice to the edge of the bank, where a number of the victims had been laid on the cushions of the seats, some dead, some dying. There lay Clara very white and still, with Will bending over her, himself bleeding from several wounds about the head and hands, but still conscious and trying to restore his sister.
Mr. Hardy knelt down in the snow by his son's side, and Will, seeing him there, was not surprised, but he sobbed excitedly. "Oh, she is dead!"
"No," replied her father; "she is not." Clara stirred, and her lips moved, but she did not open her eyes, and then her father noticed that a strange mark

lay over her face.
How Mr. Hardy succeeded in carrying the girl to the top of the bank; how he left her there in the care of brave hearted women while he went down into that hell's pit to rescue victims imprisoned and groaning for help; how Bess related the accident of the night and tried to explain how she was not hurt except a scratch or two, because she fell between two car seat cushions that were jammed around her and protected her from injury; how the excitement grew as it was discovered that the dead and dying would number more than 75 instead of 10 or 12, as Burns had telephoned; how finally Robert Hardy and Will and Bess and Clara, with other victims, were taken back to Barton, where a great crowd of anxious, pale faced people was surging through the station and over the track; how James Caxton was first to board the train down by the shops at the risk of his neck as in the rainy darkness he swung himself on the dead run up to the platform of the coach; how Mrs. Hardy met her children and husband; how there was sorrow in many a home in Barton that night and for many days to come; how Mr. Hardy finally, a little after midnight, entirely exhausted by the events of the day and night, fell asleep and dreamed the scene all over again—all this and a great deal more might be of interest concerning one of the most remarkable railroad accidents that ever occurred in this country, but would be out of place in this narrative. For it is all true, exactly and literally, only the detailed horrors of it no pen can describe, no words can tell.
Mr. Hardy woke about 8 o'clock rested, but feeling very lame and sorrowful from his exertions of the night. His first thought was of Clara. When he went to sleep, the girl seemed to be resting without pain, only that strange mark across her face made them all



anxious. It was not a bruise, but it lay like a brand across the eyes, which had not opened since her father found her lying by the frozen stream.
James had insisted on staying in the house to be of service, and Mrs. Hardy had felt grateful for his presence as she watched for returning consciousness from Clara, who still gave no more sign of animation, although she breathed easily and seemed to be free from pain. Every doctor and surgeon in town had been summoned to the scene of the accident. But Mr. Hardy felt so anxious for Clara as he came in and looked at her that he would not run out and see if any of the doctors had returned.
"Yes, sir; I'll go at once. How is she now, Mr. Hardy?" James looked him in the face with the look that love means when it is true and brave.
"My boy," replied Mr. Hardy, laying his hand on James' shoulder, "I don't know. There is something strange about it. Get a doctor if you can. But I know there must be many other sad homes today in Barton. Oh, it was horrible!"
He sat down and covered his face, while James with a brief "God help us, sir!" went out in search of a doctor.
Mr. Hardy went up stairs again and, with his wife, knelt down and offered a prayer of thanksgiving and of appeal. "O Lord," said Robert, "grant that this dear one of ours may be restored to us again. Spare us this anguish, not in return for our goodness, but out of thy great compassion for our sins repented of."
Will and Bess lay in the next room, and now that the reaction had set in they were sleeping. Will feverish and restless, Bess quiet and peaceful, as if nothing had happened out of the usual order of things.
"Where is George?" asked Mr. Hardy as he rose from his prayer.
"I don't know, Robert. He started down to the train a little while after you did. Haven't you seen him?"
"No, Mary. God grant he may not!" Mr. Hardy did not dare finish his thought aloud.
His wife guessed his thought, and together the two sat hand in hand,

drawn very near by their mutual trouble and by all the strange events of that strange week, and together they talked of the accident and of Clara and James and their eldest son, and then Mrs. Hardy said as she trembling drew her husband's face near to her:
"Robert, do you still have that impression concerning the time left you here to live? Do you still think this week is to be the end?"
Mrs. Hardy had a vague hope that the shock of the accident might have destroyed the impression of the dream, but her hope was disappointed.
"My dear wife," replied Robert, "there is not the least doubt in my mind that my dream was a vision of what will happen. There is no question but that after Sunday I shall not be with you. This is Wednesday. How lightninglike the days have flown! How precious the moments are! How many of them I have wasted in foolish selfishness! Mary, I should go mad with the thought if I did not feel the necessity of making this week the best week of my life, only I do not know what is most important to do. If it had been seven months or even seven weeks, I might have planned more wisely. Oh, it is cruelly brief, the time! But I must make the wisest possible use of it. This accident, so unexpected, has complicated the matter. I had not reckoned on it."
How many of us do reckon on accidents? They always come into our lives with a shock. Yet it seems possible that a man who lives very close to God every day might be so ready for everything that not even the most terrible catastrophe could make much difference to his plans for daily life, least of all deprive him of his reason, as it has so often done. Robert Hardy was just beginning to realize dimly that life is not one thing, but many things, and that its importance is the importance which belongs to the character of God himself.
He began to talk calmly with his wife concerning what he would do that day and was still talking about it when James came in with a doctor, who at once went up stairs. He was just from the scene of the accident and bore marks of a hard night's work. His first glance at Clara was hard and professional, but as he looked he grew very grave, and an expression of serious surprise came over his weary face. He laid his hands on the girl's eyes and examined them, raised her hand and dropped it upon the bed again. Then, turning to the father and mother, he said gently:
"You must prepare yourselves for a terrible fact resulting from the accident to your daughter. She has suffered a shock that will probably render her blind as long as she lives."
Mr. and Mrs. Hardy listened, pale faced and troubled. It was hard to think of the girl, so strong willed, so passionate and yet so capable of noble impulses and loving desires, as all her life shut up within the darkness thus. It was bitter to think of this for her. What would it be to her when she awoke to the whole consciousness of it?
The doctor spoke again slowly:
"There is another thing you ought to be prepared for. In rare cases like this it happens sometimes that a loss of hearing accompanies the loss of sight." Then, after a pause: "And with the loss of sight and hearing it is possible the peculiar shock has deprived your daughter of the power of speech. I do not know yet whether this has happened, but I prepare you for the worst."
"Blind and deaf and dumb!" murmured Mr. Hardy, while his wife sat down and buried her face in the bed-clothes and sobbed. It seemed terrible to them.
The doctor, after a little further examination, said nothing more could be done at present, gave directions for certain necessary treatment and departed after giving a look at Will and Bess and prescribing for them.
Mr. Hardy went down stairs and quietly told James all that the doctors had said. To a man living on the verge of eternity, as Mr. Hardy was, there was no time for evasions or the postponing of bad news or the utterance of soft speeches.
James took the news more calmly than Mr. Hardy thought he would. It was evident he did not realize all that was meant by it.
"Can you love Clara under these conditions?" asked Mr. Hardy, looking at James with a sympathy that the young man could not help feeling.
"Yes, sir; more than ever. Why, is she not more in need of it than ever?"
"True, but what can you do with a helpless creature like that?"
"God help us, sir! If she were my wife now and were dependent on me, don't you think I could care for her tenderly, better than any one else in the world?"
Mr. Hardy shook his head. "This is a hard blow to me, James. I don't know just what to say yet. But it is possible the poor girl may not have to suffer all that. Let us hope the doctor is not justified in his supposition. Indeed, he said he could not tell for certain that loss of hearing and speech would follow. If it does, I cannot see how Clara can retain her reason when she recovers from the shock. James, I believe you are a good fellow. I have not forgotten my own courtship. I will not stand in the way between you and your love for Clara in anything right and reasonable. I had hoped we might have a good talk together over the matter. This accident has made it impossible for a time at least, but I confide in you as an honest, true man. We must wait for events to take shape. Meanwhile let us pray God to give us wisdom and lead us into the way we need to go."
James Caxton listened to Mr. Hardy with a feeling of astonishment. This was not the Robert Hardy he had known all his life; this was a new man. For a moment his own hopes

and fears were almost lost sight of in the thought of the great change in the elder man. In a tumult of feeling he went home after begging Mrs. Hardy to send him word if Clara became worse or if there were any service he could render the family.
Robert went back up stairs, where his wife sat by the side of the injured girl.
"Mary," he said, "I must go down to the shops. You know I left word with Wellman to do what he could in the office until I could get down, but this accident has made it imperative that I be there myself. There are details the men cannot attend to. I cannot do any more here, and I must do what I can for the sufferers. God has been merciful to us, dear. Our dear ones are spared to us. Oh, when I heard Bessie's voice in that hell's pit it seemed to me God was taking pity on me for the burden I am carrying this week! And if she had been killed I do believe I should have gone mad. Pray for me, sweetheart!"
And with a kiss and embrace Robert left the house, and even in the sorrow of all her trouble Mrs. Hardy felt a great wave of joy flow through her at the thought of a love come back to her, and as she went to the window and watched the tall, strong figure swing down the street she almost felt a girl again and wondered if he would turn around and see her there and toss his hat to her as in the old days. Yes; just before he reached the corner where he had to turn he looked back up at the window, saw his wife standing there and took off his hat, with a smile, and she waved her hand at him and colored as when her Robert used to do the same thing while he was courting her.
"Two fools!" somebody says. Yes; two children of God who have seen his face and learned what all this life means.

He found much to do at the shops. The accident necessitated special work. It looked to him as if he must be down there all day. There was almost a panic in the planing rooms. The air was heavy with the horror of the night before. Owing to the wreck there was more need of work in the shops than ever, but along toward noon Burns came into the office, pulling a long face and asking Mr. Hardy to step across the yard and talk to the men, who had threatened, Burns said, to do mischief if they were not given the afternoon to go down to the scene of the disaster. Mr. Hardy, with a sinking heart, rose and followed Burns into the planing rooms. He told the foreman to get the men together in the center of the room. They stopped their machines and gathered in the largest open space between the planers, and Mr. Hardy addressed them:
"What do you want? Burns tells me there is dissatisfaction. Speak out so that we may know what the trouble is."
There was an awkward pause. Then one man spoke up:
"We think the company ought to give us the day off."
"What for?" asked Mr. Hardy mildly.
Under any other circumstances he would have told the men they might leave for good if they didn't like the pay and the company. He had done just that thing twice before, but things were different now. He looked at the men in a new light. He was a new man himself. Besides, it was imperative that the work in the shops go on. The company could ill afford to lose the work just at this particular time. All these considerations did not blind Robert to his obligations as an officer of the company. He was only anxious that no injustice should be done, so he said, "What for?" mildly and quietly and waited for an answer.
The spokesman was not quite ready with an answer. The directness of the question and the mildness of it also surprised him. Another man spoke up:
"Our friends were in the accident. We want to go see them."
"Very well. How many men had relatives or friends in the accident who are injured or killed? Let them step forward."
There was a moment of inaction. Then three men stepped out. Mr. Har-

and Mrs. Hardy stepped up between the two men before Burns could rise. He said: "You may go if you want to. Why didn't you ask for leave off if you wanted it? What reason have you to suppose the company would refuse such a request? Now, what is the trouble with the rest? The company is not in a position to grant a holiday at this particular time, and you know it. Come, be fair, men! I can't shut down the shops all day to let you go and see a railroad wreck. Be reasonable! What do you want?"
"We want more pay and freedom from Sunday work," said a big fellow, the Norwegian who ran the biggest planer in the shop. He had more than once proved troublesome to Burns, but he was a remarkably intelligent and skillful workman, and the foreman had endured much irritation on that account.
Mr. Hardy replied, still speaking



Instantly Mr. Hardy stepped up between the two men before Burns could rise. He said: "You may go if you want to. Why didn't you ask for leave off if you wanted it? What reason have you to suppose the company would refuse such a request? Now, what is the trouble with the rest? The company is not in a position to grant a holiday at this particular time, and you know it. Come, be fair, men! I can't shut down the shops all day to let you go and see a railroad wreck. Be reasonable! What do you want?"
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