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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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CHAPTER I.

It was Sunday night, and Robert Hardy had just come home from the evening service in the church at Barton. He was not in the habit of attending the evening service, but something said by his minister in the morning had impelled him to go out. The evening had been a little unpleasant, and a light snow was falling, and his wife had excused herself from going to church on that account. Mr. Hardy came home cross and fuming.

"Catch me going to evening service again! Only 50 people out, and it was a sheer waste of fuel and light. The sermon was one of the dullest I ever heard. I believe Mr. Jones is growing too old for our church. We need a young man, more up with the times. He is everlasting harping on the necessity of doing what we can in the present to save our souls. To hear him talk you would think every man who wasn't running round to save souls every winter was a robber and an enemy of society. He is getting off, too, on this newfangled Christian sociology and thinks the rich men are oppressing the poor and that church members ought to study and follow more closely the teachings of Christ and be more brotherly and neighborly to their fellow men. Bah! I am sick of the whole subject of humanity. I shall withdraw my pledge to the salary if the present style of preaching continues."

"What was the text of the sermon tonight?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"Oh, I don't remember exactly. Something about 'This night thy soul shall be demanded' or words like that. I don't believe in this attempt to scare folks into heaven."

"It would take a good many sermons to scare you, Robert."

"Yes; more than two a week," replied Mr. Hardy, with a dry laugh. He drew off his overcoat and threw himself down on the lounge in front of the open fire. "Where are the girls?"

"Alice is up stairs reading the morning paper. Clara and Bess went over to call on the Caxtons."

"How did they happen to go over there?"

Mrs. Hardy hesitated. Finally she said, "James came over and invited them."

"And they know I have forbidden them to have anything to do with the Caxtons! When they come in, I will let them know I mean what I say. It is very strange the girls do not appear to understand that."

Mr. Hardy rose from the lounge and walked across the room, then came back and lay down again and from his recumbent position poked the fire savagely with the shovel.

Mrs. Hardy bit her lips and seemed on the point of replying, but said nothing.

At last Mr. Hardy asked, "Where are the boys?"

"Will it getting out his lessons for tomorrow up in his room. George went out about 8 o'clock. He didn't say where he was going."

"It's a nice family. Is there one night in the year, Mary, when all our children are at home?"

"Almost as many as there are when you are at home," retorted Mrs. Hardy.

"What with your club and your lodge and your scientific society and your reading circle and your directors' meeting the children see about as much of you as you do of them. How many nights in a week do you give to us, Robert? Do you think it is strange that the children go outside for their amusements? Our home"—Mrs. Hardy paused and looked around at the costly interior of the room where the two were—"our home is well furnished with everything but our own children."

The man on the lounge was silent. He felt the sharpness of the thrust made by his wife and knew it was too true to be denied. But Mr. Hardy was, above all things else, selfish. He had not the remotest intention of giving up his club or his scientific society or his frequent cozy dinners with business men down town because his wife spent so many lonely, deserted evenings at home and because his children were almost strangers to him. But it annoyed him, as a respectable citizen, to have his children making acquaintances that he did not approve, and it grated on his old fashioned, inherited New England ideas that his boys and girls should be away from home so often in the evening and especially on Sunday evening. The maxim of Robert Hardy's life was "Self interest first." As long as he was not thwarted in his own pleasures he was as good natured as the average man. He provided liberally for the household expenses, and his wife and children were supplied with money and travel as they requested it. But the minute he was crossed in his own plans or any one demanded of him a service that compelled some self denial he became hard, ill natured and haughty.

He had been a member of the church

by Mary's side, he had asked her to be his wife. It seemed to him that a breath of the meadow just beyond Squire Hazen's place came into the room just as it was wafted up to him when Mary turned and said the happy word that made that day the gladdest, proudest day he had ever known. What, memories of the old times! What!

He seemed to come to himself and stared around into the fire as if wondering where he was, and he did not see the tear that rolled down his wife's cheek and fell upon her two hands clasped in her lap. She arose and went over to the piano, which stood in the shadow, and sitting down with her back to her husband, she played fragments of music nervously. Mr. Hardy lay down on the lounge again. After awhile Mrs. Hardy wheeled about on the piano stool and said:

"Robert, don't you think you had better go over and see Mr. Burns about the men who were hurt?"

"Why, what can I do about it? The company's doctor will see to them. I should only be in the way. Did Burns say they were badly hurt?"

"One of them had his eyes put out, and another will have to lose both feet. I think he said his name was Scoville."

"What! Not Ward Scoville?"

"I think Burns said that was the name."

Mr. Hardy rose from the lounge, then lay down again. "Oh, well, I can go there the first thing in the morning. I can't do anything now," he muttered.

But there came to his memory a picture of one day when he was walking through the machine shops and a heavy piece of casting had broken from the end of a large hoisting derrick and would have fallen upon him and probably killed him if this man Scoville, at the time a workman in the machine department, had not pulled him to one side at the danger of his own life. As it was, in saving the life of the manager Scoville was struck on the shoulder and rendered useless for work for four weeks. Mr. Hardy had raised his wages and advanced him to a responsible position in the casting room. Mr. Hardy was not a man without generosity and humane feeling, but as he lay on the lounge that evening and thought of the cold snow outside and the distance to the shop tenements he readily excused himself from going out to see the man who had once saved his life and who now lay maimed for life. If any one thinks it impossible that one man calling himself a Christian could be thus indifferent to another, then he does not know the power that selfishness can exercise over the actions of men. Mr. Hardy had one supreme law which he obeyed, and that law was self.

Again Mrs. Hardy, who rarely ventured to oppose her husband's wishes, turned to the piano and struck a few chords aimlessly. Then she wheeled about and said abruptly:

"Robert, the cook gave warning tonight that she must go home at once."

Mr. Hardy had begun to doze a little, but at this sudden statement he sat up and exclaimed:

"Well, you are the bearer of bad news tonight, Mary. What's the matter with everybody? I suppose the cook wants more pay."

Mrs. Hardy replied quietly: "Her sister is dying. And do you know I believe I have never given the girl credit for much feeling. She always seemed to me to lack there, though she is certainly the most faithful and efficient servant we ever had in the house. She came in just after Mr. Burns left and broke down, crying bitterly. It seems her sister is married to one of the railroad men here in town and has been ailing with consumption for some months. She is very poor, and a large



"One of them had his eyes put out."

family has kept her struggling for mere existence. The cook was almost beside herself with grief as she told the story and said she must leave us and care for her sister, who could not live more than a week at the longest. I pitied the poor girl. Robert, don't you think we could do something for the family? We have so much ourselves. We could easily help them and not miss a single luxury."

"And where would such help end? If we give to every needy person who comes along we shall be beggars ourselves. Besides, I can't afford it. The boys are a heavy expense to me while they are in college, and the company has been cutting down salaries lately. If the cook's sister is married to a railroad man, he is probably getting good wages and can support her all right."

"What if that railroad man were injured and made a cripple for life?" inquired Mrs. Hardy quietly.

"Then the insurance companies or the societies can help them out. I don't see how we can make every case that comes along our care. There would be no end of it if we once began."

"As nearly as I could find out," continued Mrs. Hardy, without replying to her husband's remarks, "cook's sister is married to one of the men who were

hurt this afternoon. She talks so brokenly in our language that I could not make out exactly how it is, and she was much excited. Suppose it was Scoville, couldn't you do something for them then, Robert?"

"I might," replied Mr. Hardy briefly. "But I can tell you I have more calls for my money now than I can meet. Take the church expenses, for example. Why, we are called upon to give to some cause or other every week, besides our regular pledges for current expenses. It's a constant drain. I shall have to cut down on my pledge. We can't be giving to everything all the time and have anything ourselves."

Mr. Hardy spoke with a touch of indignation, and his wife glanced around the almost palatial room and smiled. Then her face grew a little stern and almost forbidding as she remembered that only last week her husband had spent \$150 for a new electrical apparatus to experiment with in his laboratory. And now he was talking hard times and grudging the small sums he gave to religious objects in connection with his church and thinking he could not afford to help the family of a man who had once saved his life!

Again she turned to the piano and played awhile, but she could not be rested by the music as sometimes she had been. When she finally rose and walked over by the table near the end of the lounge, Mr. Hardy was asleep, and she sat down by the table, gazing into the open fire drearily, a look of sorrow and unrest on the face still beautiful, but worn by years of disappointment and the loss of that respect and admiration she once held for the man who had vowed at the altar to make her happy. She had not lost her love for him wholly, but she was fast losing the best part of it, the love which has its daily source in an inborn respect. When respect is gone, love is not long in following after.

She sat thus for half an hour and was at last aroused by the two girls, Clara and Bess, coming in. They were laughing and talking together and had evidently parted with some one at the door. Mrs. Hardy went out into the hallway.

"Hush, girls, your father is asleep! You know how he feels to be awakened suddenly by noise. But he has been waiting up for you."

"Then I guess we'll go up stairs without bidding him good night," said Clara abruptly. "I don't want to be lectured about going over to the Caxtons."

"No; I want to see you both and have a little talk with you. Come in here," Mrs. Hardy drew the two girls into the front room and pulled the curtains together over the arch opening into the room where Mr. Hardy lay. "Now tell me, girls, why did your father forbid your going over to the Caxtons? I did not know until tonight. Has it something to do with James?"

Neither of the girls said anything for a minute. Then Bess, who was the younger of the two and famous for startling the family with very sensational remarks, replied, "James and Clara are engaged, and they are going to be married tomorrow."

Mrs. Hardy looked at Clara, and the girl grew very red in the face, and then, to the surprise of her mother and Bess, she burst out into a violent fit of crying. Mrs. Hardy gathered her into her arms as in the olden times when she was a little child and soothed her into quietness.

"Tell me all about it, dear. I did not know you cared for James in that way."

"But I do," sobbed Clara. "And father guessed something and forbade us going there any more. But I didn't think he would mind it if Bess and I went just this one night. I couldn't help it anyway. Mother, isn't it right for people to love each other?"

"Tisn't proper to talk about such things on Sunday," said Bess solemnly.

"Clara!" said Mrs. Hardy. "Why, you're only a child yet! Is it true that James is— Why, he is only a boy!"

"He is 21, and I am 18, and he's earning \$40 a month in the office and is one of the best stenographers in the state. We've talked it over, and I wish we could be married tomorrow, so!" Clara burst out with it all at once, while Bess remarked quietly:

"Yes, they're real sensible, and I think James is nice, but when I marry I want more than \$40 a month for candy alone. And, then, he isn't particularly handsome."

"He is, too," cried Clara. "And he's good and brave and splendid, and I'd rather have him than a thousand such men as Lancey Cummings. Mother, I don't want money. It hasn't made you happy."

"Hush, dear!" Mrs. Hardy felt as if a blow had smitten her in the face. She was silent then.

Clara put her arms around her mother and whispered: "Forgive me, mother! I didn't mean to hurt you. But I am so unhappy!"

Unhappy! And yet the girl was just beginning to blossom out toward the face of God under the influence of that most divine and tender and true feeling that ever comes to a girl who knows a true, brave man loves her with all his soul. And some people would have us leave this subject to the flippant novelist instead of treating it as Christ did when he said, "For this cause"—that is, for love—"shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife."

Mrs. Hardy was on the point of saying something when the sound of peculiar steps on the stairs was heard, and shortly after Alice pushed the curtains aside and came in. Alice was the oldest girl in the family. She was a cripple, the result of an accident when a child, and she carried a crutch, using it with much skill and even grace. The minute she entered the room she saw something was happening, but she simply said:

"Mother, isn't it a little strange father sleeps so soundly? I went up to