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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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CHAPTER III.
 When Mr. Hardy woke on the morning of the first of the seven days left him to live, he was on the point of getting ready for his day's business, as usual, when the memory of his dream flashed upon him, and he was appalled to decide what he should do first. Breakfast was generally a hurried and silent meal with him. The children usually came straggling down at irregular intervals, and it was very rare that the family all sat down together. This morning Mr. Hardy waited until all had appeared, and while they were eating he held a family council.

His wife was evidently in great excitement and anxiety, and yet the love and tenderness she felt coming back to her from her husband gave her face a look of beauty that had been a stranger to it for years.

The children were affected by their father's remarkable change in various ways. George was sullen and silent. Will looked thoughtful and troubled. Alice, a girl of very strong and decided opinions and character, greeted her father with a kiss and seemed to understand the new relations he now sustained to them all. Clara appeared terrified, as if death had already come into the house, and several times she broke down, crying at the table, and finally went away into the sitting room. Bess sat next to her father, as she always did, and was the most cheerful of all, taking a very calm and philosophical view of the situation, so that Mr. Hardy smiled once or twice as she gave her advice.

Mr. Hardy was pale, but calm. The

impression of the night before was evidently deepening with him. It would have been absurd to call him insane. His wife was obliged to confess to herself that he had never appeared more sound in judgment and calm in speech. He was naturally a man of very strong will. His passions, as we have already seen, were under control. Never in all his life had he felt so self-contained, so free from nervousness, so capable of sustained effort. But the one great thought that filled his mind was the thought of the shortness of the time.

"Almighty God," was his prayer, "show me how to use these seven days in the wisest and best manner."
 "Robert, what will you do today?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"I have been thinking, dear, and I believe my first duty is to God. We have not had morning worship together for a long time. After we have knelt as a family in prayer to him I believe he will give me wisdom to know what I ought to do."
 "I think father ought to stay at home with us all the time," said Bess.

"Robert," said Mrs. Hardy, who could not comprehend the full meaning of the situation much better than little Bess, "will you give up your business? How can you attend to it? Will you have the strength and the patience while laboring under this impression?"

"I have already thought over that. Yes, I believe I ought to go right on. I don't see what would be gained by severing my connection with the company."
 "Will you tell the company you have only"—Mrs. Hardy could not say the words. They choked her.

"What would you do, Alice?" asked her father, turning to his oldest daughter, who, although a cripple, had more than once revealed to the family great powers of judgment and decision.

"I would not say anything to the company about it," replied Alice finally.

"That is the way I feel," said Mr. Hardy with a nod of approval. "They would not understand it. My successor in the office will be young Wellman, in all probability, and he is perfectly competent to carry on the work. I feel as if the matter were one that belonged to the family. I shall, of course, arrange my business affairs with reference to the situation, and George can give me half a day for the details. But you know, Mary, I have always kept my business in such shape that in any case of accident or sudden death matters could easily be arranged. Thank God! I shall not have to take time for those matters that I ought to give to more serious and important duties."

It was true that Mr. Hardy, always a man of very methodical habits in a business way, had always arranged his affairs with reference to accidental removal. His business as manager necessitated his being on the road a great deal, and he realized, as many railroad men do realize, the liability of sudden death.

But such a thought had not had any influence on his actions to make him less selfish. He thought, as all men do, that he should probably live right along after all; that death might take the engineer or conductor or fireman, but would pass him by.

Suddenly Will spoke up: "Father, do you want George and me to leave college?"
 "Certainly not, my boy. What would be gained by that? I want you to keep right on just as if I were going to live 50 years more."

George did not say anything. He looked at his father as if he doubted his sanity.

His father noticed the look, and a terrible wave of anguish swept over him as he recalled the part of his vision in which he had seen his oldest son in the gambling room.

Again the prayer he had been silently praying all the morning went up out of his heart, "Almighty God, show me how to use the seven days most wisely."

"Father," said Bess suddenly, "what will you do about Jim and Clara? Did you know they were engaged?"
 "Bess!" said Clara passionately. Then she stopped suddenly, and, seeing her father's brow grow dark, she covered, afraid of what was coming.

But Mr. Hardy looked at the world differently this morning. Twenty-four hours before he would have treated Bess's remark as he usually treated her surprising revelations of the secrets of the family. He would have laughed at it a little and sternly commanded Clara to break the engagement if there was one at once, for James Caxton was not at all the sort of man Mr. Hardy wanted to have come into the family. He was poor, to begin with, and, more than all, his father had been the means of defeating Mr. Hardy in a municipal election where a place of influence and honor was in dispute. Mr. Hardy had never forgotten or forgiven it. When he began to see his children intimate with the Caxtons, he tried to forbid their going to the house, with the result already described.

day and rose to face it, the great burden of his responsibility beginning to rest upon him for the first time. He sat down for a moment by his wife and kissed her, putting his arms about her, while Bess climbed up on the side of the couch, and the boys stood irresolute and wondering. Any outward mark of affection was so unusual on the part of their father that they felt awkward in the presence of it. Mrs. Hardy was almost overcome.

"Oh, Robert, I cannot bear it! Surely it was nothing more than a dream. It couldn't have been anything more. You are not going to be called away from us so soon."

"Mary, I would to God that I had seven years to atone for my neglect and selfishness toward you alone. But I am certain that God has granted me but seven days. I must act, God help me! Boys, you will be late. We will all be at home this evening. Alice, care for your mother and cheer her up. You are a good girl and—"

Again Mr. Hardy broke down as he thought of the many years he had practically ignored this brave, strong, uncomplaining nature in his own house, and remorse tore him fiercely as he recalled how he had practically discouraged all the poor girl's ambitious efforts to make her way as an artist, not on account of the expense, for Mr. Hardy was not a niggard in that respect, but because he had a false idea concerning the profession. He looked at the girl now as she limped across the floor to her mother, her pale, intellectual face brightened by her love and her eyes shining with tears at her father's unusual praise.

"O God," was the inner cry of Mr. Hardy's heart, "what have I not neglected when I had it in my power to create so much happiness!"
 The thought almost unnerved him, and for a moment he felt like sitting down to do nothing. But only for a moment. He rose briskly, went out into the hall and put on his overcoat and, coming back a moment, said: "I am going down to see poor Scoville the first thing. I shall be so busy you must not look for me at lunch. But I will be back to 6 o'clock dinner. Goodby."

He kissed his wife tenderly, and she clung to him, sobbing. Then he kissed his daughters, a thing he had not done since they were babies, and shook hands with the boys and marched out like one going to execution, something bright glistening in his own eyes.

Ah, ye fathers and husbands, who who are tolling for the dear ones at home, how many of you have grown so unaccustomed to the tender affections of home that your own wife would almost faint and think something was going to happen to you if you kissed her goodby when you went away to your work in the morning? How do you know that she who has been your faithful friend and lover all these years and nursed you through peevish sickness and done a thousand things every day for you without so much as a word of thanks or praise on your part—how do you know she does not care for these demonstrations of affection? And if she does not, how does it happen except through neglect? Call it not a little thing. It is of such little things that heaven is made, and it is of the home where such little things are found that it can truly be said, "Love is master, and the evil one cannot find an entrance to blot with his foul tread the sweetest thing on earth."

Mr. Hardy hurried down toward the tenement where Ward Scoville lived, revolving in his mind as he went along plans for his future happiness and comfort.

"I'll deed him the place where he lives and arrange it in some way so that he won't have to go to the hospital or come on the county when his poor wife is gone. It will be the best I can do for him. Poor fellow! What a shame I did not come down last



He kissed his wife tenderly, and she clung to him, sobbing.

night! And his wife a hopeless invalid and the oldest child only 4 years old, Mary said!"

He was surprised as he drew near the house to see a group of men standing there outside and talking together earnestly. As Mr. Hardy came up they stood aside to let him pass, but were barely civil.

"Well, Stevens," Mr. Hardy inquired of one of the men, recognizing him as one of the employees in the casting room, "how is Scoville this morning?"
 "Dead!"
 Mr. Hardy reeled as if struck in the breast with a heavy blow.
 "Dead, did you say?"
 "He died about an hour ago," said one of the other men. "The surgeon was late in getting around, and after the amputation it was ascertained that Scoville had received severe internal injuries."
 "Was he conscious?" Mr. Hardy asked the question mechanically, but all

the while his mind was in a whirl of remorse.

"Yes; up to the last moment."
 Mr. Hardy went up to the door and knocked. A woman, one of the neighbors, opened it and he went in. The sight stunned him. The dead man had been removed to a rear room, but his wife lay upon the very same ragged lounge Mr. Hardy had seen in his dream. The surgeon was bending over her. The room was full of neighbors.

The surgeon suddenly arose and, turning about, spoke in a quiet but decided tone:

"Now, then, good people, just go home, will you, for awhile! And suppose some of you take these children along with you. You can't do anything more now and your presence disturbs the woman! Ah, Mr. Hardy!" he exclaimed, seeing the manager. "You here? This is a sad business. Come, now, ladies, I must ask you to retire."

Everybody went out except the surgeon, the poor woman's sister and Mr. Hardy. He drew the surgeon over to the window and inquired concerning the particulars. Mr. Hardy had received a shock at the very first, and he trembled violently.

"Well, you see," explained the surgeon, "Scoville was a dead man from the minute of the accident. Nothing could have saved him. When the accident happened, I was down at Bayville attending the men who were injured in the wreck last Saturday. I telegraphed that I would come at once. But there was a delay on the road, and I did not get here until 3 o'clock in the morning. Meanwhile everything had been done that was possible. But nothing could save the poor fellow. This shock will kill his wife. I doubt if she lives through the day."

"What will be done with the children?" Mr. Hardy asked the question mechanically, again feeling the need of time to think out what was best to be done. The surgeon shrugged his shoulders. He was accustomed to scenes of suffering and distress continually.

"Orphans' home, I suppose," he replied laconically.

A movement and a man from the woman called him to her side, and Mr. Hardy, left alone, he thought a moment, then stepped over to the surgeon and asked him if he could go into the other room and see the dead man. The surgeon nodded a surprised assent, and Mr. Hardy stepped into the rear room and closed the door. He drew back the sheet from the face of the man and looked down upon it. Nothing in all his experience had ever moved him so deeply. The features of the dead man were fixed, it seemed to him, in an expression of despair. Mr. Hardy gazed steadily upon it for half a minute; then, replacing the sheet, he knelt down by the side of the rude bed and prayed God for mercy.

"O Lord," he groaned in his remorse, "lay not the death of this man to my charge!" Yet, even as he prayed, he could not drive back the thought which chased across the prayer: "I am this man's murderer. I issued the order compelling the Sunday work. I refused a week ago to inspect the retorts which were declared unsafe, on the ground that it was not my business. I compelled this man to work under the fear of losing his place if he refused to work. I compelled him to work on the one day in which God has commanded all men to rest. I, a Christian by profession, a member of the church, a man of means—I put this man in deadly peril upon a Sunday in order that more money might be made and more human selfishness might be gratified. I did it. And this man once saved my life. I am his murderer, and no murderer shall inherit the kingdom of God."

So the wretched man prayed there by the side of that cold body. Yet the world today goes on with men in high places who have it in their power to change the conditions that exact Sunday labor from thousands of weary men and drive the commerce of the world across the continent at the cost of that priceless thing, the soul of man, in order that the owners of railroad stock and the men who get their salaries from it may have more money. What! Is it not true that every Sunday in this land of Christian homes and hearts many and many a well fed, sleek, self-satisfied, well-dressed man, with a high salary and well established social position, with a luxurious home and money in the bank, goes to church and sits down in a softly cushioned pew to listen to the preaching of the gospel, while within hearing distance of the services an express train or a freight thunders by upon the road which declares the dividends that make that man's wealth possible?

On those trains are groups of coal-begrimed human beings who never go inside a church, who never speak the name of God or Christ except in an oath, who lead lives that are as destitute of spiritual nourishment as a desert of sand and rocks and who are compelled to labor contrary to God's everlasting law of rest in order that man may have more to feed his body and indulge his passions! Do not tell us it is necessary labor. It is labor for the making of more money. It does not need to be done. The community could dispense with it, and in the sight of God it is a wicked use of human flesh and blood and souls, and the starved spiritual natures of these men will come up at the judgment day before the men who had it in their power to say, "Not a wheel shall turn on these tracks Sunday even if we don't make a little more money." Money or souls! Which is worth more in the thought of the railroad corporation? Let the facts make answer.

Mr. Hardy did not know just how long he knelt there in that bare room. At last he arose wearily and came out, but his prayer had not refreshed him. The surgeon glanced at him inquisitively, but asked no questions. The sick woman was in a state of semiconsciousness. Mr. Hardy's

look, her sister, sat listlessly and worn out by the side of the lounge. The surgeon rapidly gave directions for the use of some medicine and prepared to go. Some of the neighbors called, and the surgeon let two of the women come in. Just as the two men were going out together, Mr. Hardy still absorbed in his great desire to do something of importance for the mother and her children, his minister, Mr. Jones, appeared.

He looked surprised at seeing Mr. Hardy, inquired the news of the doctor and at once asked if he could see the poor widow. The doctor thought it would do no harm. Mr. Jones whispered to Mr. Hardy:

"She was a faithful member of our church, you know."
 Mr. Hardy did not know it, to his shame, he confessed. This sister of his in Christ had been a member of the same church, and he had not even known it. If she had happened to sit on the same side of the building where he sat, he would probably have wondered who that plain looking person was, dressed so poorly. But she had always sat back on the other side, being



The features of the dead man were fixed in an expression of despair.

one of a few poor women who had been attracted into the church and been comforted by Mr. Jones' simple piety and prayers.

The minister knelt down and said a gentle word to the woman. Then, as if in reply to a low voiced request, he began a prayer of remarkable beauty and comfort. Mr. Hardy wondered as he listened that he could even have thought this man dull in the pulpit. He sat down and sobbed as the prayer went on and took to himself the consolation of that heavenly petition. When Mr. Jones rose, Mr. Hardy still sat with his hands over his face. The surgeon was called out by some one. Then the minister, after making arrangements with the woman who had come in for the funeral of Scoville, started to go out, when Mr. Hardy rose, and they went away together.

"Mr. Jones," said Mr. Hardy as they walked along, "I have an explanation and a confession to make. I haven't time to make it now, but I want to say that I have met God face to face within the past 24 hours, and I am conscious for the first time in years of the intensely selfish life I have lived. I need your prayers and help. And I want to serve the church and do my duty there as I have never before done it. I have not supported your work as I should. I want you to think of me this week as ready to help in anything in my power. Will you accept my apology for my contempt of your request a week ago? I will come into the meeting Thursday night and help in any way possible."

Mr. Jones' eyes filled with tears. He grasped Mr. Hardy's hand and said simply: "Brother, God bless you! Let me be of service to you in any way I can."

Mr. Hardy felt a little better for the partial confession and parted with his minister at the next corner, going down to his office.

CHAPTER IV.

It was now 10 o'clock, and the day seemed to him cruelly brief for the work he had to do. He entered the office, and almost the first thing he saw on his desk was the following letter, addressed to him, but written in a disguised hand:

Mr. Hardy—Up in the casting room don't see me looking after, but maybe the next pot of hot iron that explodes will be sent the safe if you think we have bodies but no souls some morning you will wake up believing another thing. We ain't no easy led as sun support. Better look to house and employ special patrol; if you do we will black his face for him.

There was no signature to this threatening scrawl, which was purposely misspelled and ungrammatically composed. Mr. Hardy had received threats before and paid little attention to them. He prided himself on his steady nerves and his contempt of all such methods used to scare him. Only a coward, he reasoned, would ever write an anonymous letter of such a character. Still this morning he felt disturbed. His peculiar circumstances made the whole situation take on a more vivid coloring. Besides all that, he could not escape the conviction that he was in a certain sense responsible for the accident in the casting room. It was not his particular business to inspect machinery. But his attention had been called to it, and he felt now as if he had been criminally careless in not making the inspection in the absence of the regular officer. An investigation of the accident would free Mr. Hardy from legal responsibility, but in the sight of God he felt that he was morally guilty. At this moment Mr. Burns came in. He looked sullen and spoke in a low tone:

"Only half the men are back this morning, sir. Scoville's death and the injuries of the others have had a bad effect on the men."

Mr. Hardy crumpled the letter nervously in his hand.

"Mr. Burns, I would like to apologize to you for my neglect of the injured men. Who are they and how badly are they hurt?"