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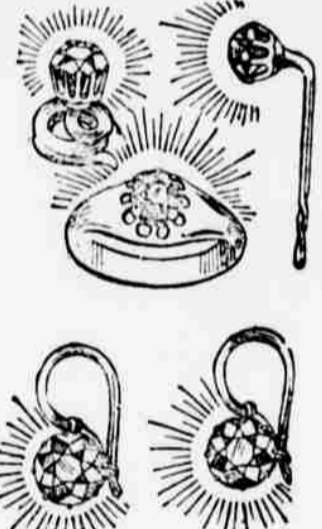
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ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS
 A DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

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

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[CONTINUED.]

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 coach-
 es 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 abso-
 lutely 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 felt 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 en-
 tire coach was under water. The other
 end, resting partly against the broken
 car, stuck up in the air like some curi-
 ous, 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 ter-
 ror. 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 bend-
 ing 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 sob-
 bed 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 carry-
 ing 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 well's pit to rescue vic-
 tims 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 sur-
 ging 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. Har-
 dy finally, a little after midnight, en-
 tirely 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 de-
 tailed horrors of it no pen can describe,
 no words can tell.

Mr. Hardy woke about 8 o'clock rest-
 ed, but feeling very lame and sore
 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 conscious-
 ness 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 went down
 stairs and asked James if he wouldn't
 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 ap-
 peal. "O Lord," said Robert, "grant
 that this dear one of ours may be re-
 stored to us again. Spare us this an-
 guish, 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. Har-
 dy 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 to-
 gether the two sat hand in hand,
 drawn very near by their mutual trou-
 ble 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 trembled drew
 her husband's face near to her:

"Robert, do you still have that im-
 pression 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



"Oh, she is dead!"

mind that my dream was a vision of
 what will happen. There is no ques-
 tion 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 mat-
 ter. I had not reckoned on it."

How many of us do reckon on acci-
 dents? They always come into our
 lives with a shock. Yet it seems pos-
 sible that a man who lives very close to
 God every day might be so ready for
 everything that not even the most terri-
 ble 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 char-
 acter 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 upstairs. 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 pro-
 fessional, but as he looked he grew
 very grave, and an expression of seri-
 ous 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 acci-
 dent to your daughter. She has suffer-
 ed 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

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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 phrases.

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. Meantime 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 upstairs, 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 swinging 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 'here 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-



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?"

"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 pleasantly, "The matter of more pay is one we cannot well discuss here now, but I will say to you and all the rest that as far as it is in my power there shall be no more Sunday work demanded—'while I live,' Mr. Hardy said instead, 'of the men in the shops.'"

"Still, that is not the question," replied the man in an insolent tone. Mr. Hardy looked at him more closely and saw that he had been drinking. Several of the workmen cried out:

"Shut up, Herman! Mr. Hardy is right! We be fools to make row now at this time!"

A dozen men started for their machines to go to work again, while Burns went up and laid his hand on the Norwegian's arm and said to him roughly:

"Quit off now. You've been dipping that beard of yours into a whisky barrel. Better mind your peps or you go your walking papers."

"Mind your own, Burns," replied the big man heavily. "You be something of a beard drinker yourself if you had the beard."

Burns was so enraged at the drunk on retort that he drew back as if to strike the man, when the Norwegian smote the foreman a blow that laid him sprawling in the iron dust. Instantly Mr. Hardy stepped up between the two men before Burns could rise. We have spoken of Robert's intense horror of the coarse physical vices. It seemed totally wrong to him that workman should degrade himself with drink. Besides, he could not tolerate such actions in the shops. He looked the drunken man in the face and said sternly:

"You are discharged! I cannot afford to employ drunken men in the shops. You may go this instant."

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