



A DANGEROUS RIVAL.

BY ION G. WARNER.

"Mr. Hardy, you are wanted in the private office." James Hardy was cashier for the firm of Wood & Son, chemical manufacturers. He had entered the office when a boy of fourteen, and had steadily risen, and at twenty-five held the position of cashier and confidential clerk to Mr. Wood. Left early in life to make his own way in the world, Jim Hardy had studiously applied himself to mastering all the details that go to make up a successful business man's career. His father had died when young Jim was only ten years old; of his mother he had almost no recollection, for after the birth of a little baby girl, her gentle spirit floated away, leaving her two children to the care of the broken-hearted father. For eight years Dr. Hardy idolized his two children; but the day came when terror struck the hearts of the citizens of New York, for small-pox had made its appearance, and Dr. Hardy, who had been unremitting in his attentions to the sufferers, fell at last himself a victim to the dread disease. Dr. Hardy was not by any means a wealthy man, and barely sufficient to give his children a good education. After their father's death, their mother's brother—a confirmed old bachelor—took the children to his own house to live with him. At the age of fourteen, young Hardy, like most boys of his age, began to have ideas of earning his own living; and with this end in view, his uncle placed him in the office of Wood & Son. The Woods, father and son, were seldom in the office, Wood senior being away most of the time travelling in the interests of the business, while his son looked after the experimental work in the factory, so that James Hardy had, as cashier, practically the control of the whole business, signing all cheques and transacting all business in the absence of the elder Mr. Wood. Between Jim Hardy and young Wood an almost brotherly friendship had arisen, not altogether disinterested on young Hardy's part, for Richard Wood, senior, had a pretty daughter, and something stronger than friendship drew Jim Hardy towards pretty Mabel Wood. While not openly growing on his daughter's attachment for his cashier, old Dick Wood, as he was familiarly called, had privately forbidden his daughter to encourage the young man's attentions. No matter how highly he might think of his cashier in his office capacity and during business hours, he had other views for his daughter's future, and had no intention of accepting his confidential clerk as a son-in-law, more especially as the manager of the bank in which his money was invested was also an admirer of his daughter. He saw in David Henderson, a worthy husband for his only girl. Even if he was twenty years older than Mabel, he was undoubtedly wealthy, and if some of his transactions had not been quite fair and above board, he had the money just the same; and in the eyes of Dick Wood, money was an absolute necessity. It can be gathered from this that the young people had to meet in secret, young Dick Wood acting as letter carrier between them. The meetings were necessarily few—occasionally in the evening, when her father was away from home, but oftener during the time Jim Hardy left the office for dinner. He was in the habit of taking his meals at a neighboring restaurant, and generally left the office for this purpose at one o'clock, returning about half past two.

David Henderson was perfectly well aware of these numerous walks, but he was too shrewd a man to run complaining to the girl's father concerning the young couple. He knew well enough that to put obstacles in their path would probably result in drawing them closer together. He could afford to wait and quietly mature plans whereby he could remove his younger rival forever from his path. It was on returning from one of these walks that a clerk addressed him in the opening words of the story. A summons to the private office was no new thing for the cashier, so, hanging up his hat, he quietly knocked at the door and entered. Mr. Wood was sitting at his desk, and seated opposite to him was the manager of the Commercial Bank, Mr. Wood turned, as the cashier entered, as soon as the door was closed he said:

"Mr. Hardy, you cashed a cheque yesterday for five thousand dollars; can you tell me for what purpose it was drawn?"

"There must be some mistake, sir; I did not cash any cheque for that amount recently."

"Mr. Henderson informs me that you did, and that several times lately, during my absence from town, you have cashed cheques for large sums, and that when you presented one for so large a sum yesterday, he decided to ask me if he were doing right in paying them."

Jim Hardy looked straight at Mr. Henderson; he disliked the man, but the thought that he might try to injure his reputation had never before entered his head. As his eyes met the steady glitter in David Henderson's, the thought of treachery flashed through his brain, and his face paled somewhat for a moment, and his heart stood still, but he was suddenly recalled by the voice of his employer, saying:

"Mr. Hardy, kindly fetch me the cheque-book and also your cash-book."

Almost mechanically the cashier left the room, and unlocking the safe, got out the books and returned with them to Mr. Wood's private room. A stern look sat on the face of Richard Wood, which augured ill for his confidential clerk, as he slowly turned over the duplicate slips of the cheque-book and compared them with the entries in the cash-book. The date on the last slip was some four days previous, and was only for a small amount, the largest entry in the book being a thousand dollars; every slip in the cheque-book compared with the cash-book, and was in connection with business of which he was perfectly cognizant. He closed the books and locked them in a private drawer of his desk.

"They appear to be all right, Mr. Hardy; but will you kindly explain these cheques, which I notice are not entered in your books?"

The cashier took the cheques from his employer's hand and glanced at them; there were six in all, making a total of about eight thousand dollars.

"Are those in your hand-writing, sir?" said Mr. Wood.

"They certainly appear to be," replied the cashier.

"Appear to be? Do you mean to say you don't recognize your own writing? Do you mean to say that you did not write those cheques?"

James Hardy drew himself up and looked straight in his employer's face; his face was pale, but in a steady voice he said:

"I certainly mean to say, sir, that I neither wrote nor signed those cheques."

"You didn't, eh?" sneered Mr. Wood; "then, perhaps you'll deny that you presented them to this gentleman for payment?"

"I do deny it," came calmly from James Hardy's lips.

"Come, now, Hardy; you surely don't mean to say that you will deny being in the bank yesterday, shortly after two o'clock?" interposed the bank manager; "you remember the conversation we had regarding that cheque for five thousand dollars?"

"I can only repeat," said the cashier, "that I was not in the bank at all yesterday, and that I cashed no cheque for the sum you mention."

"It is enough, sir," roared Richard Wood; "I hold the proofs of your guilt in my hand, coupled with this gentleman's statement. I shall have you arrested at once. Mr. Henderson, kindly telephone for an officer to arrest this man."

In a short time an officer arrived, and in half an hour James Hardy was safely under lock and key, to await his trial for embezzling the funds of his employer. The evening of his arrest, young Richard Wood was allowed to see him.

"What's this, Jim, old fellow?" he said, on entering the cell. "What kind of a mess have you got into with the governor? He told me something about stealing money, but I don't believe a word of it; they can't make me believe it, old chap; I know you better than that. Here's a note from Mabel; she doesn't believe it either. I can't stay longer, but will get you off somehow. I'm going now to see your sister and uncle and explain the affair to them; good-night, old fellow; cheer up," and with a grip of the hand that proved his sincerity, the door closed on him, and Jim Hardy was left again in solitary confinement. Left alone, he opened the note—the last he was to receive for some time from the girl he held so dear; it was full of expressions of belief in his honesty, and went far to cheer him in his trouble. Next morning, James Hardy was arraigned before a magistrate, and committed to a higher court for trial by jury. Nothing of moment happened before the assizes. The prisoner's counsel worked hard to collect evidence in his favor, but all their efforts were unavailing. The case was the first on the list for trial, and as all the parties concerned in it were well known, the court was crowded. All eyes were turned on the prisoner as he took his stand in the dock. He was very pale, and his eyes roamed over the sea of faces, as if looking for someone he expected to see there. He nodded to his uncle and sister, and one or two of his friends nearest to him, but appeared to miss the object of his search. There were practically no witnesses for the defence to be called whose information would in any way tend to clear the prisoner, and James Hardy knew that all depended on the arguments of his counsel. The first witness for the prosecution was Richard Wood, his evidence being mainly a history of the prisoner as he knew him, and tended towards showing the good qualities of his clerk and the implicit confidence he placed in him. David Henderson, the bank manager, was next called; he gave his evidence in a reluctant kind of a way, with many covert insinuations that went far to prove the guilt of the prisoner in the eyes of the jury. It was this witness, the lawyer for the defence knew, that would most injure his client's cause, and he exerted himself to his utmost to weaken his evidence. But in David Henderson he met his match, and no amount of cross-questioning could shake his testimony. On being asked how it was that he appeared to be the only one in the bank who had cashed the cheques presented by James Hardy, he explained that, being a branch bank, it only required the services of one clerk besides himself to transact the business; and as James Hardy usually presented the cheques about two o'clock, he was generally the only one in the bank at that time, his clerk not having returned from his lunch. The clerk, he said, left the bank at two o'clock, and returned in about half an hour. The prisoner was asked where he had spent his time between leaving the restaurant where he got his dinner and his return to the office on the day before his arrest. He said he had visited the Picture Gallery.

"Were you alone?"

"No."

"Can you produce the person or persons who accompanied you?"

"I decline to call them as witnesses."

"What was the name of the person you were with?" asked the lawyer for the prosecution.

"I decline to answer that question."

At this point, a note was handed to the prisoner's counsel. After reading it, he announced that another witness for the defence had come forward, and begged that His Lordship would permit this evidence to be taken. His request was granted, and he called Miss Mabel Wood. Miss Wood entered the bank and he said to the afternoon in question, Mr. Hardy had been with her, and that they had both visited the Picture Gallery.

"What time did James Hardy leave you on that day?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"About two o'clock."

"Were you in the habit of meeting the prisoner in the afternoon?"

"Did your father know of these meetings?"

"No."

"That will do, thank you."

James Hardy's fate was sealed, in the eyes of the jury, almost before the last witness had left the box. The jury—mostly honest, simple-minded farmers—considered that any man capable of frequently meeting a young lady, without the knowledge of her father, would be guilty of almost any crime. Mabel Wood had done more to injure the prisoner than that of any other witness. Prisoner's counsel made a brilliant speech in his defence, but he could not disguise the fact that there was half an hour for which James Hardy could not account, and that it was during this time that David Henderson had sworn that the prisoner was at the bank. Jim Hardy had tried to screen the girl he loved, but instead of saving her, he had given the jury a most unfavorable opinion of him. The jury retired, and were absent three-quarters of an hour. On their return, the foreman announced that they unanimously found the prisoner guilty. The judge turned to the prisoner. "Young man," he said, "you have been convicted, after a fair trial, of a most serious charge; you have betrayed the confidence and faith reposed in you by your employer. I have, however, taken into consideration your previous good conduct and the representations made on your behalf by your able counsel. I cannot, however, pass a lighter sentence than that of five years, with hard labor."

Jim Hardy's face turned very pale as the judge ceased speaking, but he did not move a muscle; his clear face and finely-chiseled features betrayed no emotion, except by their pallor. As the judge passed his sentence, the scream of a woman rang through the crowded court-room. Mabel Wood, on hearing the sentence, had uttered one scream and fainted, and the last glimpse James Hardy caught of his sweetheart was one that filled him with pain, as he saw her pale face and apparently lifeless body carried out of court. He had no time, however, to look long, as a couple of stalwart officers approached to conduct him back to his cell; his lawyer shook hands with him, and James Hardy was left out of court with the sound of the girl's scream still ringing in his ears. David Henderson had accomplished his purpose; his plan had worked even better than he had expected, and a cruel smile played about his mouth as he left the court. His rival was safely out of the way for five years, at least. True, Mabel did not love him, he soliloquized; but then, perhaps, by her father's persuasion, and his own pleading, she might be brought to do so. That evening he dined with Mr. Wood and his son. Mabel did not appear at dinner, being still indisposed. The bank manager talked most agreeably during the meal, and when the subject of the late cashier's defection was touched on, he sympathized deeply with the poor, misguided young man. David Henderson had over-shot the mark, and had left out of his reckoning the nature of the girl he had to deal with. For a year and a half he paid his attentions to Mabel Wood, but she quietly, but firmly, repelled them all. Her father argued and threatened, but all in vain, until, at last, his death put a stop to the almost daily agony at his daughter's heart. Young Dick Wood, on his father's death, assumed the whole control of the factory. One of his first acts was to transfer his business account to another bank; the next was to forbid David Henderson's visits to his house. He evidently disliked the bank manager; but during his father's lifetime his hands had, in a measure, been tied. David Henderson cursed the man he had sent to prison, for the place he held in the heart of the girl that he himself had failed to win, and swore to be further avenged on him, and for that purpose he turned his attentions to the sister of the man he had so successfully ruined. Jessie Hardy was a year younger than her brother, and his disgrace had been a great blow to her—she had fairly idolized him. The wily bank manager knew this, and used his knowledge to pick the lock of the girl's heart. He sympathized with her, praised her brother, deplored the mistake he had made, and finally promised that if she would marry him,

he would try and effect her brother's release from prison. She accepted him; and then he stipulated that the marriage should be a secret one. The pure mind of the girl recoiled from this suggestion, but to save her brother, she consented. She secretly left her uncle's house one evening to meet David Henderson, and he conducted her to a place where he had a mock marriage performed, and then took her to a small house in the quiet part of the great city. The poor girl did not for a moment suspect any treachery, but believed that she was legally married to the man who professed to love her, and that he would faithfully carry out all his promises. For a year and a few months he kept up the deception, putting her off from time to time, when she questioned him as to the probable date of her brother's release. One morning, as they sat at breakfast, she questioned him rather more closely as to his ability to effect her brother's release. He burst into a hard, coarse laugh, and then told her, his passion rising with every word he uttered, how he hated her brother; how he hated her for her relationship to her brother; how her marriage was no marriage at all, but only a sham; how he had tired of her, and intended to leave her. Through all this tirade, Jessie Hardy sat as one stunned. So this was the end of her day-dream. Her head reeled, and she sank fainting to the floor. When she recovered, the man who had betrayed her had left the house; she did not try to follow him to the bank; she knew only too well that it would be useless. For four months she continued to live in the same place, and then she decided to move into lodgings, and find some suitable work till her brother's release. She decided to leave the furniture, and everything that had been provided by David Henderson, as it was, and let the landlord of the property communicate with him about it. In packing up her own things she came across an old coat that belonged to the man she had called husband. In one of the pockets she found a long, thin, worn pocket-book; she opened it; it contained some papers; mechanically she looked over one after another, till her eye was arrested by the sight of her brother's name, written not once only, but many times on the sheet of paper. Yes, it was her brother's writing. She laid it down and opened the next paper; it also bore her brother's signature, but the writing was slightly different. What could it mean? Why had David Henderson these pieces of papers in his possession? And why had he carefully kept them? She put the pocket-book away and sat down to think it over. A light began to dawn upon her. David Henderson "hated" her brother and he "hated" her, a man who would commit one crime would commit another. Was it possible that he had forged her brother's name to those cheques? Yes, she decided, he had. What would she do now? She thought for a while, and then made up her mind; she would go to her brother's friend, show him the paper, and ask his advice. It was growing dark, but she quickly dressed herself and hurried to the house of Richard Wood. She was shown into the library. Three years had not made much difference in the young man. He received her kindly. He knew of her disappearance from home, but was not aware with whom she had gone. She told him the whole story, and then handed him the papers with her brother's signature. He looked at them.

"The scoundrel!" he said—"the black-hearted scoundrel. Your brother will be released from prison the day after tomorrow; two years have been taken off his sentence for good conduct. You had better stay here till he returns; my sister will be glad to have you with her."

James Hardy was free once more. As he stepped out of the prison he drew a long breath. It was summer time, and the air all around him was fresh and sweet. Yes, it was good to be free once more; free to take a place among his fellow-men and try to regain his lost name. Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Jim, old man!"

"Dick, is it really you? I knew you wouldn't forget me."

"Forget you? No, indeed. Get into the carriage; it is waiting for the two of us here, and come home with me."

"But your father, Dick?"

"Oh, yes! I forgot. Of course, you have not heard. The governor died more than a year ago, so you have nothing to fear from him; and besides, your sister is stopping at our place; and there is such a lot to tell you."

Joyful was the meeting between brother and sister; and no less so was that between Mabel Wood and her lover, even if somewhat more shyly expressed.

"Jim," said Dick Wood, "I always said you were innocent, although you could not prove it; now I know it for a fact, and hold the proofs of it."

"What do you mean, Dick?"

"Look at those, Jim. Is that your writing?"

"No, it looks like it," said Jim.

"Man alive, don't you know your own writing?" said Dick, imitating his father's voice; "isn't that what the governor said to you? It isn't your writing, though, as I will show you. Now look at this," and he handed to the astonished Jim Hardy the other paper, in which his signature was not so well copied.

"What does it mean, Dick; I can't understand it yet!"

"Mean! Why, it means that that is David Henderson's writing, and that out of sheer spite, he forged your name to those cheques, and appropriated the money himself. It is a long story, but we have time to tell it before dinner, and then we'll go and make the scoundrel confess his guilt."

Richard Wood briefly narrated the whole story, including the bank manager's cruel treatment of his sister Jessie. It was a happy party that sat down to dinner; their troubles all forgotten in their new found happiness. After dinner, the two friends went to the bank and requested to see the manager. They were shown into his private office. He started at seeing James Hardy, but quickly recovered himself.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he said, quite pleasantly.

"We have called," said James Hardy, "for the purpose of making you confess your guilt, and my innocence, of the crime of which you have falsely accused me."

David Henderson's face turned ashy white, and then livid with rage.

"And if I refuse, he said."

"You cannot, for I hold the proof of your guilt, left behind you when you treacherously left my sister after you had ruined and blighted her life, as you did mine. Write out a full confession of your crime, I say, or I'll blow your brains out where you sit," and James Hardy drew out a revolver (lent him by his friend, in case the bank manager should show fight), and levelled it at the banker's head. With a trembling hand he wrote, while James Hardy dictated his confession. When he had finished it the cashier took the document, read it over, folded it up, and put it in his pocket.

"And now, Mr. Henderson, we will wish you good-day; and when we meet again, you will be the prisoner and I the witness."

They left the bank and walked to the police station, where they laid their charge against David Henderson. When the police officers arrived at the bank the manager had left, and on going to his house, found it all in confusion. They were told by the terrified servants that their master had just come home and shot himself. They found the statement true, lying across his bed they found the lifeless form of Mr. Henderson, with a bullet wound in his temple. Next morning, on opening the newspaper, Dick Wood saw the announcement of the suicide of the unfortunate man, and read it aloud. For a moment or two deep silence reigned, and then the voice of James Hardy broke the stillness.

"He has met his just reward at his own hands!"

Richard Wood took his friend into partnership with him; and after the necessary steps had been taken to establish his innocence in the eyes of the law, James Hardy was married to Mabel Wood. It was a quiet affair, and they still continued to live in the same house with Dick, Jessie Hardy making her home with them. Although they have been married a good number of years, since the day of his death neither Mabel or her husband have ever mentioned the name of his DANGEROUS RIVAL.

Vault
painters
makes
instruct
scenes o
served h
Berlin,
critic of
never ex
place of
On the
every li
their pe
In th
chalets
brought
The old
case to
taker in
upon ar
fountain
new au
but stu
home l
braids
We look
in its fa
window
are no
costume
grapher
itself.
who ob
A fe
many, o
ly popul
found
Americ
lately b
celebrat
Mr. G.
most in

My
"S," of
me a
stories,
me are
from th
tlewom
about
magistr
had a l
Irish b
fore b
trifling
Wishin
how m
comprel
duty to
neighb
him if
his pra
prompt
Lord's
further
that he
"Hall
magistr
plied th
want to
request
the Cre
much fr
to do s
came
"Born
anxious
up again
The
tourist
country
appears
of inter
Bridge,
Said th
greatest
your H
lives in
absente

"W
"B
"A
"A
"A
"A
"V
your
do mor
olive o
lashes
grow
to let