"You are under no special obligations to the Careys, are you?" asked the general.

"No, I think not," said John with a laugh. "I fancy that their business will go on without me, after a fashion," and he took his leave.

CHAPTER XII.

And so it came about that certain letters were written as mentioned in a previous chapter, and in the evening of a dripping day early in November John Lenox found himself, after a nine hours' journey, the only traveler who alighted upon the platform of the Homeville station, which was near the end of a small lake and about a mile from the village. As he stood with his bag and umbrella, at a loss what to do, he was accosted by a short and stubby individual with very black eyes and hair and a round face, which would have been smooth except that it had not been shaved for a day or two. "Goin' t' the village?" he said.

"Yes," said John, "that is my intention, but I don't see any way of getting there."

"Carry ye over fer ten cents," said the man. "Carryall's right back the deepo. Got 'ny baggidge?"

"Two trunks," said John.

"That'll make it thirty cents," said the native. "Where's your checks? All right; you c'n jest step 'round an' git in. Mine's the only rig that drew over to-night."

It was a long clumsy affair, with windows at each end and a door in the rear, but open at the sides except for enamel cloth curtains, which

were buttoned to the supports that carried a railed roof extending as far forward as the dashboard. The driver's seat was on a level with those inside. John took a seat by one of the front windows, which was open but protected by the roof.

His luggage having been put on board, they began the journey at a walk, the first part of the road being rough and swampy in places, and undergoing at intervals the sort of repairs which often prevails in rural regions—namely, the deposit of a quantity of broken stone, which is left to be worn smooth by passing vehicles, and is for the most part carefully avoided by such whenever the roadway is broad enough to drive round the improvement. But the worst of the way having been accomplished, the driver took opportunity, speaking sideways over his shoulder, to allay the curiosity which burned within him, "Guess I never seen you before." John was tired and hungry, and generally low in his mind.

"Very likely not," was his answer. Mr. Robinson instantly arrived at the determination that the stranger was "stuck up," but was in no degree cast down thereby.

"I heard Chet Timson tellin' that the' was a feller comin' f'm N'York to work in Dave Harum's bank. Guess you're him, ain't ye?"

No answer this time: theory confirmed.

"My name's Robinson," imparted that individual. "I run the prince'ple liv'ry to Homeville."

"Ah!" responded the passenger.

"What d'you say your name was?" asked Mr. Robinson, after he had steered his team around one of the monuments to public spirit.

"It's Lenox," said John, thinking he might concede something to such deserving perseverance, "but I don't remember mentioning it."

"Now I think on't, I guess you didn't," admitted Mr. Robinson. "Don't think I ever knowed anybody of the name," he remarked. "Used to know some folks name o' Lynch, but they couldn't 'a' ben no relations o' your'n, I guess." This conjecture elicited no reply.

"Git up, goll darn ye!" he exclaimed, as one of the horses stumbled, and he gave it a jerk and a cut of the whip. "Bought that hoss of Dave Harum," he confided to his passenger. "Fact, I bought both on 'em of him, an' dum well stuck I was, too," he added.

"You know Mr. Harum, then," said John, with a glimmer of interest. "Does he deal in horses?"

"Wa'al, I guess I make eout to know him," asserted the "prince'ple liv'ryman," "an' he'll git up 'n the middle o' the night any time to git the best of a hoss trade. Be you goin' to work fer him?" he asked, encouraged to press the question. "Goin' to take Timson's place?"

"Really," said John, in a tone which advanced Mr. Robinson's opinion to a rooted conviction, "I have never heard of Mr. Timson."

"He's the feller that Dave's lettin' go," explained Mr. Robinson. "He's ben in the bank a matter o' five or six year, but Dave got down on him fer some little thing or other, an' he's got his walkin' papers. He says to me, says he, 'If any feller thinks he c'n come up here f'm N'York or anywheres else,' he says, 'an' do Dave Harum's work to suit him, he'll find he's bit off a

dum sight more'n he c'n chaw. He'd better keep his gripsack packed the hull time,' Chet says."

"I thought I'd sock it to the cuss a little," remarked Mr. Robinson in recounting the conversation subsequently; and, in truth, it was not elevating to the spirits of our friend, who found himself speculating whether or no Timson might not be right.

"Where you goin' to put up?" asked Mr. Robinson after an interval, having failed to draw out any response to his last effort.

"Is there more than one hotel?" inquired the passenger.

"The's the Eagle, an' the Lake House, an' Smith's Hotel," replied Jehu.

"Which would you recommend?" asked John.

"Wa'al," said Robinson, "I don't gen'ally praise up one more'n another. You see, I have more or less dealin' with all on 'em."

"That's very diplomatic of you, I'm sure," remarked John, not at all diplomatically. "I think I will try the Eagle."

Mr. Robinson, in his account of the conversation, said in confidence—not wishing to be openly invidious—that "he was dum'd if he wa'n't almost sorry he hadn't recommended the Lake House."

It may be inferred from the foregoing that the first impression which our friend made on his arrival was not wholly in his favor, and Mr. Robinson's conviction that he was "stuck up," and a person bound to get himself "gen'ally disliked," was elevated to an article of faith by his retiring to the rear of the vehicle, and quite out of ordinary range. But they were nearly at their

journey's end, and presently the carryall drew up at the Eagle Hotel.

It was a frame building of three stories, with a covered veranda running the length of the front, from which two doors gave entrance—one to the main hall, the other to the office and bar combined. This was rather a large room, and was also to be entered from the main hall.

John's luggage was deposited, Mr. Robinson was settled with, and took his departure without the amenities which might have prevailed under different conditions, and the new arrival made his way into the office.

Behind the bar counter, which faced the street, at one end of which was a small high desk and at the other a glazed case containing three or four partly full boxes of forlorn-looking cigars, but with most ambitious labels, stood the proprietor, manager, clerk, and what not of the hostelry, embodied in the single person of Mr. Amos Elright, who was leaning over the counter in conversation with three or four loungers who sat about the room with their chairs tipped back against the wall.

A sketch of Mr. Elright would have depicted a dull "complected" person of a tousled baldness, whose dispirited expression of countenance was enhanced by a chin whisker. His shirt and collar gave unmistakable evidence that pajamas or other night-gear were regarded as superfluities, and his most conspicuous garment as he appeared behind the counter was a cardigan jacket of a frowsiness beyond compare. A greasy neck scarf was embellished with a gem whose truthfulness was without pretence. The atmosphere of the room was accounted for by a re-

mark which was made by one of the loungers as John came in. "Say, Ame," the fellow drawled, "I guess the' was more skunk cabbidge 'n pie plant 'n usual 'n that last lot o' cigars o' your'n, wa'n't the'?" to which insinuation "Ame" was spared the necessity of a rejoinder by our friend's advent.

"Wa'al, guess we c'n give ye a room. Oh, yes, you c'n register if you want to. Where is the dum thing? I seen it last week somewhere. Oh, yes," producing a thin book ruled for accounts from under the counter, "we don't alwus use it," he remarked—which was obvious, seeing that the last entry was a month old.

John concluded that it was a useless formality. "I should like something to eat," he said, "and desire to go to my room while it is being prepared; and can you send my luggage up now?"

"Wa'al," said Mr. Elright, looking at the clock, which showed the hour of half-past nine, and rubbing his chin perplexedly, "supper's ben cleared off some time ago."

"I don't want very much," said John; "just a bit of steak, and some stewed potatoes, and a couple of boiled eggs, and some coffee." He might have heard the sound of a slap in the direction of one of the sitters.

"I'm 'fraid I can't 'commodate ye fur's the steak an' things goes," confessed the landlord. "We don't do much cookin' after dinner, an' I reckon the fire's out anyway. P'r'aps," he added doubtfully, "I c'd hunt ye up a piece o' pie 'n some doughnuts, or somethin' like that."

He took a key, to which was attached a huge brass tag with serrated edges, from a hook on a board behind the bar—on which were suspended a number of the like—lighted a small kerosene lamp, carrying a single wick, and, shuffling out from behind the counter, said, "Say, Bill, can't you an' Dick carry the gentleman's trunks up to 'thirteen?'" and, as they assented, he gave the lamp and key to one of them and left the room. The two men took a trunk at either end and mounted the stairs, John following, and when the second one came up he put his fingers into his waistcoat pocket suggestively.

"No," said the one addressed as Dick, "that's all right. We done it to oblige Ame."

"I'm very much obliged to you, though," said John.

"Oh, that's all right," remarked Dick as they turned away.

John surveyed the apartment. There were two small-paned windows overlooking the street, curtained with bright "Turkey-red" cotton; near to one of them a small wood stove and a wood box, containing some odds and ends of sticks and bits of bark; a small chest of drawers, serving as a washstand; a malicious little looking-glass; a basin and ewer, holding about two quarts; an earthenware mug and soap-dish, the latter containing a thin bit of red translucent soap scented with sassafras; an ordinary wooden chair and a rocking-chair with rockers of divergent aims; a yellow wooden bedstead furnished with a mattress of "excelsior" (calculated to induce early rising), a dingy white spread, a gray blanket of coarse wool, a pair of cotton sheets which had too obviously done duty since passing through the hands of the laundress, and a pair of flabby little pillows in the

same state, in respect to their cases, as the sheets. On the floor was a much used and faded ingrain carpet, in one place worn through by the edge of a loose board. A narrow strip of unpainted pine nailed to the wall carried six or seven wooden pegs to serve as wardrobe. Two diminutive towels with red borders hung on the rail of the washstand, and a battered tin slop jar, minus a cover, completed the inventory.

"Heavens, what a hole!" exclaimed John, and as he performed his ablutions (not with the sassafras soap) he promised himself a speedy flitting. There came a knock at the door, and his host appeared to announce that his "tea" was ready, and to conduct him to the dining-room—a good-sized apartment, but narrow, with a long table running near the center lengthwise, covered with a cloth which bore the marks of many a fray. Another table of like dimensions, but bare, was shoved up against the wall. Mr. Elright's ravagement of the larder had resulted in a triangle of cadaverous apple pie, three doughnuts, some chunks of soft white cheese, and a plate of what are known as oyster crackers.

"I couldn't git ye no tea," he said. "The hired girls both gone out, an' my wife's gone to bed, an' the' wa'n't no fire anyway."

"I suppose I could have some beer," suggested John, looking dubiously at the banquet.

"We don't keep no ale," said the proprietor of the Eagle, "an' I guess we're out o' lawger. I ben intendin' to git some more," he added.

"A glass of milk?" proposed the guest, but without confidence.

"Milkman didn't come to-night," said Mr.

Elright, shuffling off in his carpet slippers, worn out in spirit with the importunities of the stranger. There was water on the table, for it had been left there from supper time. John managed to consume a doughnut and some crackers and cheese, and then went to his room, carrying the water pitcher with him, and, after a cigarette or two and a small potation from his flask, to bed. Before retiring, however, he stripped the bed with the intention of turning the sheets, but upon inspection thought better of it, and concluded to leave them as they were. So passed his first night in Homeville, and, as he fondly promised himself, his last at the Eagle Hotel.

When Bill and Dick returned to the office after "obligin' Ame," they stepped with one accord to the counter and looked at the register. "Why, darn it," exclaimed Bill, "he didn't sign his name, after all."

"No," said Dick, "but I c'n give a putty near guess who he is, all the same."

"Some drummer?" suggested Bill.

"Naw," said Richard scornfully. "What 'd a drummer be doin' here this time o' year? That's the feller that's ousted Chet Timson, an' I'll bet ye the drinks on't. Name's Linx or Lenx, or somethin' like that. Dave told me."

"So that's the feller, is it?" said Bill. "I guess he won't stay 'round here long. I guess you'll find he's a little too toney fer these parts, an' in pertic'ler fer Dave Harum. Dave'll make him feel 'bout as comf'table as a rooster in a pond. Lord," he exclaimed, slapping his leg with a guffaw, "'d you notice Ame's face when he said he didn't want much fer supper, only

beefsteak, an' eggs, an' tea, an' coffee, an' a few little things like that? I thought I'd split."

"Yes," said Dick, laughing, "I guess the' ain't nothin' the matter with Ame's heart, or he'd 'a' fell down dead.—Hullo, Ame!" he said when the gentleman in question came back after ministering to his guest, "got the Prince o' Wales fixed up all right? Did ye cut that pickled el'phant that come last week?"

"Huh!" grunted Amos, whose sensibilities had been wounded by the events of the evening, "I didn't cut no el'phant ner no cow, ner rob no hen roost neither, but I guess he won't starve 'fore mornin'," and with that he proceeded to fill up the stove and shut the dampers.

"That means 'git,' I reckon," remarked Bill as he watched the operation.

"Wa'al," said Mr. Elright, "if you fellers think you've spent enough time droolin' 'round here swapping lies, I think *I'll* go to bed," which inhospitable and injurious remark was by no means taken in bad part, for Dick said, with a laugh:

"Well, Ame, if you'll let me run my face for 'em, Bill 'n I'll take a little somethin' for the good o' the house before we shed the partin' tear." This proposition was not declined by Mr. Elright, but he felt bound on business principles not to yield with too great a show of readiness.

"Wa'al, I don't mind for this once," he said, going behind the bar and setting out a bottle and glasses, "but I've gen'ally noticed that it's a damn sight easier to git somethin' *into* you fellers 'n 't is to git anythin' *out* of ye."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning at nine o'clock John presented himself at Mr. Harum's banking office, which occupied the first floor of a brick building some twenty or twenty-five feet in width. Besides the entrance to the bank, there was a door at the south corner opening upon a stairway leading to a suite of two rooms on the second floor.

The banking office consisted of two rooms—one in front, containing the desks and counters, and what may be designated as the "parlor" (as used to be the case in the provincial towns) in the rear, in which were Mr. Harum's private desk, a safe of medium size, the necessary assortment of chairs, and a lounge. There was also a large Franklin stove.

The parlor was separated from the front room by a partition, in which were two doors, one leading into the inclosed space behind the desks and counters, and the other into the passageway formed by the north wall and a length of high desk, topped by a railing. The teller's or cashier's counter faced the street opposite the entrance door. At the left of this counter (viewed from the front) was a high-standing desk, with a rail. At the right was a glass-inclosed space of counter of the same height as that