

#### CHAPTER XIV.

WHATEVER might have been John's repugnance to making a confidant of the man whom he had known but for half an hour, he acknowledged to himself that the other's curiosity was not only natural but proper. He could not but know that in appearance and manner he was in marked contrast with those whom the man had so far seen. He divined the fact that his coming from a great city to settle down in a village town would furnish matter for surprise and conjecture, and felt that it would be to his advantage with the man who was to be his employer that he should be perfectly and obviously frank upon all matters of his own which might be properly mentioned. He had an instinctive feeling that Harum combined acuteness and suspiciousness to a very large degree, and he had also a feeling that the old man's confidence, once gained, would not be easily shaken. So he told his hearer so much of his history as he thought pertinent, and David listened without interruption or comment, save an occasional "E-um'm."

"And here I am," John remarked in conclusion.

"Here you *be*, fer a fact," said David, "Wa'al, the's worse places 'n Homeville—after you git used to it," he added in qualification.

"I ben back here a matter o' thirteen or fourteen year now, an' am gettin' to feel my way 'round putty well; but not havin' ben in these parts fer putty nigh thirty year, I found it ruther lonesome to start with, an' I guess if it hadn't 'a' ben fer Polly I wouldn't 'a' stood it. But up to the time I come back she hadn't never ben ten mile away f'm here in her hull life, an' I couldn't budge her. But then," he remarked, "while Homeville aint a metrop'lis, it's some a diff'rent place f'm what it used to be—in some ways. Polly's my sister," he added by way of explanation.

"Well," said John, with rather a rueful laugh, "if it has taken you all that time to get used to it the outlook for me is not very encouraging, I'm afraid."

"Wa'al," remarked Mr. Harum, "I'm apt to speak in par'bles sometimes. I guess you'll git along after a spell, though it mayn't set fust rate on your stomech till you git used to the diet. "Say," he said after a moment, "if you'd had a couple o' thousan' more, do you think you'd 'a' stuck to the law bus'nis?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied John, "but I am inclined to think not. General Wolsey told me that if I were very anxious to go on with it he would help me, but after what I told him he advised me to write to you."

"He did, did he?"

"Yes," said John, "and after what I had gone through I was not altogether sorry to come away."

"Wa'ai," said Mr. Harum thoughtfully, "if I was to lose what little I've got, an' had to give up livin' in the way I was used to, an'



couldn't even keep a hoss, I c'n allow 't I might be willin' fer a change of scene to make a fresh start in. Yes, sir, I guess I would. Wa'al," looking at his watch, "I've got to go now, an' I'll see ye later, mebbe. You feel like takin' holt to-day?"

"Oh, yes," said John with alacrity.

"All right," said Mr. Harum. "You tell Timson what you want, an' make him show you everythin'. He understands, an' I've paid him for't. He's agreed to stay any time in reason 't you want him, but I guess," he added with a laugh, "'t you c'n pump him dry 'n a day or two. It haint rained wisdom an' knowledge in his part o' the country fer a consid'able spell."

David stood for a moment drawing on his gloves, and then, looking at John with his characteristic chuckle, continued:

"Allowed he'd ben drawin' the hull load, did he? Wa'al, sir, the truth on't is 't he never come to a hill yet, 'f 't wa'n't more 'n a foot high, but what I had to git out an' push; nor never struck a turn in the road but what I had to take him by the head an' lead him into it." With which Mr. Harum put on his overcoat and cap and departed.

Mr. Timson was leaning over the counter in animated controversy with a man on the outside who had evidently asserted or quoted (the quotation is the usual weapon: it has a double barb and can be wielded with comparative safety) something of a wounding effect.

"No, sir," exclaimed Chet, with a sounding slap on the counter, "no, sir! The' ain't one word o' truth in't. I said myself, 'I won't stan'

it,' I says, 'not f'm you ner nobody else,' I says, 'an' what's more,' says I——" The expression in the face of Mr. Timson's tormentor caused that gentleman to break off and look around. The man on the outside grinned, stared at John a moment, and went out, and Timson turned and said, as John came forward, "Hello! The old man picked ye to pieces all he wanted to?"

"We are through for the day, I fancy," said our friend, smiling, "and if you are ready to begin my lessons I am ready to take them. Mr. Harum told me that you would be good enough to show me what was necessary."

"All right," said Mr. Timson readily enough, and so John began his first day's work in David's office. He was surprised and encouraged to find how much his experience in Rush & Company's office stood him in hand, and managed to acquire in a comparatively short time a pretty fair comprehension of the system which prevailed in "Harum's bank," notwithstanding the incessant divagations of his instructor.

It was decided between Timson and our friend that on the following day the latter should undertake the office work under supervision, and the next morning John was engaged upon the preliminaries of the day's business when his employer came in and seated himself at his desk in the back room. After a few minutes, in which he was busy with his letters, he appeared in the doorway of the front room. He did not speak, for John saw him, and, responding to a backward toss of the head, followed him into the "parlor," and at an intimation of the same silent character shut the doors. Mr. Harum sat



down at his desk, and John stood awaiting his pleasure.

"How 'd ye make out yestidy?" he asked. "Git anythin' out of old tongue-tied?" pointing with his thumb toward the front room.

"Oh, yes," said John, smiling, as he recalled the unceasing flow of words which had enveloped Timson's explanations.

"How much longer do you think you'll have to have him 'round?" asked Mr. Harum.

"Well," said John, "of course your customers are strangers to me, but so far as the routine of the office is concerned I think I can manage after to-day. But I shall have to appeal to you rather often for a while until I get thoroughly acquainted with my work."

"Good fer you," said David. "You've took holt a good sight quicker 'n I thought ye would, an' I'll spend more or less time 'round here fer a while, or be where you c'n reach me. It's like this," he continued; "Chet's a helpless kind of critter, fer all his braggin' an' talk, an' I ben feelin' kind o' wambly about turnin' him loose—though the Lord knows," he said with feeling, "'t I've had bother enough with him to kill a tree. But anyway I wrote to some folks I know up to Syrchester to git something fer him to do, an' I got a letter to send him along, an' mebbe they'd give him a show. See?"

"Yes, sir," said John, "and if you are willing to take the chances of my mistakes I will undertake to get on without him."

"All right," said the banker, "we'll call it a heat—and, say, don't let on what I've told you. I want to see how long it'll take to git all over the village that he didn't ask no odds o' nobody.

Hadn't ben out o' a job three days 'fore the' was a lot o' chances, an' all 't he had to do was to take his pick out o' the lot on 'em."

"Really?" said John.

"Yes, sir," said David. "Some folks is gaited that way. Amusin', ain't it?—Hullo, Dick! Wa'al?"

"Willis'll give two hunderd fer the sorril colt," said the incomer, whom John recognized as one of the loungers in the Eagle bar the night of his arrival.

"E-um'm!" said David. "Was he speakin' of any pertic'ler colt, or sorril colts in gen'ral? I hain't got the only one the' is, I s'pose."

Dick merely laughed. "Because," continued the owner of the "sorril colt," "if Steve Willis wants to lay in sorril colts at two hunderd a piece, I ain't goin' to gainsay him, but you tell him that two-forty-nine ninety-nine won't buy the one in my barn." Dick laughed again.

John made a move in the direction of the front room.

"Hold on a minute," said David. "Shake hands with Mr. Larrabee."

"Seen ye before," said Dick, as they shook hands. "I was in the barroom when you come in the other night," and then he laughed as at the recollection of something very amusing.

John flushed a little and said, a bit stiffly, "I remember you were kind enough to help about my luggage."

"Excuse me," said Dick, conscious of the other's manner. "I wa'n't laughin' at you, that is, not in pertic'ler. I couldn't see your face when Ame offered ye pie an' doughnuts instid of beefsteak an' fixins. I c'd only guess at that;



but Ame's face was enough fer me," and Dick went off into another cachinnation.

David's face indicated some annoyance. "Oh, shet up," he exclaimed. "You'd keep that yawp o' your'n goin', I believe, if it was the judgment day."

"Wa'al," said Dick with a grin, "I expect the' might be some fun to be got out o' *that*, if a feller wa'n't worryin' too much about his own skin; an' as fur's I'm concerned——" Dick's further views on the subject of that momentous occasion were left unexplained. A significant look in David's face caused the speaker to break off and turn toward the door, through which came two men, the foremost a hulking, shambling fellow, with an expression of repellent sullenness. He came forward to within about ten feet of David's desk, while his companion halted near the door. David eyed him in silence.

"I got this here notice this mornin'," said the man, "sayin' 't my note 'd be due to-morrer, an' 'd have to be paid."

"Wa'al," said David, with his arm over the back of his chair and his left hand resting on his desk, "that's so, ain't it?"

"Mebbe so," was the fellow's reply, "fur 's the comin' due 's concerned, but the payin' part 's another matter."

"Was you cal'latin' to have it renewed?" asked David, leaning a little forward.

"No," said the man coolly, "I don't know 's I want to renew it fer any pertic'ler time, an' I guess it c'n run along fer a while jest as 't is." John looked at Dick Larrabee. He was watching David's face with an expression of the ut-

most enjoyment. David twisted his chair a little more to the right and out from the desk.

"You think it c'n run along, do ye?" he asked suavely. "I'm glad to have your views on the subject. Wa'al, I guess it kin, too, until *to-morro'* at four o'clock, an' after that you c'n settle with lawyer Johnson or the sheriff." The man uttered a disdainful laugh.

"I guess it'll puzzle ye some to c'lect it," he said. Mr. Harum's bushy red eyebrows met above his nose.

"Look here, Bill Montaign," he said, "I know more 'bout this matter 'n you think for. I know 't you ben makin' your brags that you'd fix me in this deal. You allowed that you'd set up usury in the fust place, an' if that didn't work I'd find you was execution proof anyways. That's so, ain't it?"

"That's about the size on't," said Montaign, putting his feet a little farther apart. David had risen from his chair.

"You didn't talk that way," proceeded the latter, "when you come whinin' 'round here to git that money in the fust place, an' as I reckon some o' the facts in the case has slipped out o' your mind since that time, I guess I'd better jog your mem'ry a little."

It was plain from the expression of Mr. Montaign's countenance that his confidence in the strength of his position was not quite so assured as at first, but he maintained his attitude as well as in him lay.

"In the fust place," David began his assault, "*I* didn't *lend* ye the money. I *borr'ed* it for ye on my indorsement, an' charged ye fer doin' it, as I told ye at the time; an' another thing



that you appear to forgit is that you signed a paper statin' that you was wuth, in good and available pusson'ls, free an' clear, over five hundred dollars, an' that the statement was made to me with the view of havin' me indorse your note fer one-fifty. Rec'lect that?" David smiled grimly at the look of disconcert which, in spite of himself, appeared in Bill's face.

"I don't remember signin' no paper," he said doggedly.

"Jest as like as not," remarked Mr. Harum. "What you was thinkin' of about that time was gittin' that *money*."

"I'd like to see that paper," said Bill, with a pretence of incredulity.

"You'll see it when the time comes," asserted David, with an emphatic nod. He squared himself, planting his feet apart, and, thrusting his hands deep in his coat pockets, faced the discomfited yokel.

"Do you think, Bill Montaig," he said, with measureless contempt, "that I didn't know who I was dealin' with? that I didn't know what a low-lived, roost-robbin' skunk you was? an' didn't know how to protect myself agin such an'muls as you be? Wa'al, I did, an' don't you stop thinkin' 'bout it—an'," he added, shaking his finger at the object of his scorn, "*you'll pay that note* or I'll put ye where the dogs won't bite ye," and with that he turned on his heel and resumed his seat. Bill stood for a minute with a scowl of rage and defeat in his lowering face.

"Got any further bus'nis with me?" inquired Mr. Harum. "Anythin' more 't I c'n oblige ye about?" There was no answer.

"I asked you," said David, raising his voice

and rising to his feet, "if you had any further bus'nis with me."

"I dunno's I have," was the sullen response.

"All right," said David. "That bein' the case, an' as I've got somethin' to do beside wastin' my time on such wuthless pups as you be, I'll thank you to git out. There's the door," he added, pointing to it.

"He, he, he, he, ho, ho, ha, h-o-o-o-o!" came from the throat of Dick Larrabee. This was too much for the exasperated Bill, and he erred (to put it mildly) in raising his arm and advancing a step toward his creditor. He was not swift enough to take the second, however, for David, with amazing quickness, sprang upon him, and twisting him around, rushed him out of the door, down the passage, and out of the front door, which was obligingly held open by an outgoing client, who took in the situation and gave precedence to Mr. Montaig. His companion, who so far had taken no part, made a motion to interfere, but John, who stood nearest to him, caught him by the collar and jerked him back, with the suggestion that it would be better to let the two have it out by themselves. David came back rather breathless and very red in the face, but evidently in exceeding good humor.

"Scat my —!" he exclaimed. "Hain't had such a good tussle I dunno when."

"Bill's considered ruther an awk'ard customer," remarked Dick. "I guess he hain't had no such handlin' fer quite a while."

"Sho!" exclaimed Mr. Harum. "The' ain't nothin' to him but wind an' meanness. Who was that feller with him?"

"Name 's Smith, I believe," replied Dick.



"Guess Bill brought him along fer a witness, an' I reckon he seen all he wanted to. I'll bet *his* neck's achin' some," added Mr. Larrabee with a laugh.

"How's that?" asked David.

"Well, he made a move to tackle you as you was escortin' Bill out, an' Mr. Lenox there caught him in the collar an' gin him a jerk that'd 'a' landed him on his back," said Dick, "if," turning to John, "you hadn't helt holt of him. You putty nigh broke his neck. He went off—he, he, he, he, ho!—wrigglin' it to make sure."

"I used more force than was necessary, I'm afraid," said Billy Williams's pupil, "but there wasn't much time to calculate."

"Much obliged," said David with a nod.

"Not at all," protested John, laughing. "I have enjoyed a great deal this morning."

"It *has* ben ruther pleasant," remarked David with a chuckle, "but you mustn't cal'late on havin' such fun ev'ry mornin'."

John went into the business office, leaving the banker and Dick.

"Say," said the latter when they were alone, "that young man o' your'n's quite a feller. He took care o' that big Smith chap with one hand; an' say, *you* c'n git round on your pins 'bout 's lively 's they make 'em, I guess. I swan!" he exclaimed, slapping his thigh and shaking with laughter, "the hull thing head-an'-shouldered any show I seen lately." And then for a while they fell to talking of the "sorril colt" and other things.

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN John went back to the office after the noonday intermission it was manifest that something had happened to Mr. Timson, and that the something was of a nature extremely gratifying to that worthy gentleman. He was beaming with satisfaction and rustling with importance. Several times during the afternoon he appeared to be on the point of confiding his news, but in the face of the interruptions which occurred, or which he feared might check the flow of his communication, he managed to restrain himself till after the closing of the office. But scarcely were the shutters up (at the willing hands of Peleg Hopkins) when he turned to John and, looking at him sharply, said, "Has Dave said anythin' 'bout my leavin'?"

"He told me he expected you would stay as long as might be necessary to get me well started," said John non-committally, mindful of Mr. Harum's injunction.

"Jest like him," declared Chet. "Jest like him for all the world; but the fact o' the matter is 't I'm goin' to-morro'. I s'pose he thought," reflected Mr. Timson, "thet he'd ruther you'd find it out yourself than to have to break it to ye, 'cause then, don't ye see, after I was gone he c'd lay the hull thing at my door."