

CHAPTER XVI.

SOME weeks after John's assumption of his duties in the office of David Harum, Banker, that gentleman sat reading his New York paper in the "wing settin'-room," after tea, and Aunt Polly was occupied with the hemming of a towel. The able editorial which David was perusing was strengthening his conviction that all the intelligence and virtue of the country were monopolized by the Republican party, when his meditations were broken in upon by Mrs. Bixbee, who knew nothing and cared less about the Force Bill or the doctrine of protection to American industries.

"You hain't said nothin' fer quite a while about the bank," she remarked. "Is Mr. Lenox gittin' along all right?"

"Guess he's gittin' into condition as fast as c'd be expected," said David, between two lines of his editorial.

"It must be awful lonesome fer him," she observed, to which there was no reply.

"Ain't it?" she asked, after an interval.

"Ain't what?" said David, looking up at her.

"Awful lonesome," she reiterated.

"Guess nobody ain't ever very lonesome when you're 'round an' got your breath," was the reply.

"What you talkin' about?"

"I ain't talkin' about you, 't any rate," said Mrs. Bixbee. "I was sayin' it must be awful lonesome fer Mr. Lenox up here where he don't know a soul hardly, an' livin' at that hole of a tavern."

"I don't see 't you've any cause to complain long's he don't," said David, hoping that it would not come to his sister's ears that he had, for reasons of his own, discouraged any attempt on John's part to better his quarters, "an' he hain't ben very lonesome daytimes, I guess, so fur, 'thout he's ben makin' work fer himself to kill time."

"What do you mean?"

"Wa'al," said David, "we found that Chet hadn't done more 'n to give matters a lick an' a promise in most a year. He done just enough to keep up the day's work an' no more an' the upshot on't is that John's had to put in consid'able time to git things straightened out."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Aunt Polly.

"Keeps him f'm bein' lonesome," remarked her brother with a grin.

"An' he hain't had no time to himself!" she protested. "I don't believe you've made up your mind yet whether you're goin' to like him, an' I don't believe he'll *stay* anyway."

"I've told more 'n forty-leven times," said Mr. Harum, looking up over his paper, "that I thought we was goin' to make a hitch of it, an' he cert'nly hain't said nuthin' 'bout leavin', an' I guess he won't fer a while, tavern or no tavern. He's got a putty stiff upper lip of his own, I reckon," David further remarked, with a short laugh, causing Mrs. Bixbee to look up at him

inquiringly, which look the speaker answered with a nod, saying, "Me an' him had a little go-round to-day."

"You hain't had no *words*, hev ye?" she asked anxiously.

"Wa'al, we didn't have what ye might call *words*. I was jest tryin' a little experiment with him."

"Humph," she remarked, "you're alwus tryin' exper'ments on somebody, an' you'll be liable to git ketched at it some day."

"Exceptin' on you," said David. "You don't think I'd try any experiments on you, do ye?"

"Me!" she cried. "You're at me the hull endurin' time, an' you know it."

"Wa'al, but Polly," said David insinuatingly, "you don't know how int'restin' you *be*."

"Glad you think so," she declared, with a sniff and a toss of the head. "What you ben up to with Mr. Lenox?"

"Oh, nuthin' much," replied Mr. Harum, making a feint of resuming his reading.

"Be ye goin' to tell me, or—air ye too '*shamed* on't?" she added with a little laugh, which somewhat turned the tables on her teasing brother.

"Wa'al, I laid out to try an' read this paper," he said, spreading it out on his lap, "but," resignedly, "I guess 't ain't no use. Do you know what a count'fit bill is?" he asked.

"I dunno 's I ever see one," she said, "but I s'pose I do. They're agin the law, ain't they?"

"The's a number o' things that's agin the law," remarked David dryly.

"Wa'al?" ejaculated Mrs. Bixbee after a moment of waiting.

"Wa'al," said David, "the' ain't much to tell,

but it's plain I don't git no peace till you git it out of me. It was like this: The young feller's took holt everywhere else right off, but handlin' the money bothered him consid'able at fust. It was slow work, an' I c'd see it myself; but he's gettin' the hang on't now. Another thing I expected he'd run up agin was count'fits. The' ain't so very many on 'em round now-a-days, but the' is now an' then one. He allowed to me that he was liable to get stuck at fust, an' I reckoned he would. But I never said nuthin' about it, nor ast no questions until to-day; an' this afternoon I come in to look 'round, an' I says to him, 'What luck have you had with your money? Git any bad?' I says. 'Wa'al,' he says, colorin' up a little, 'I don't know how many I may have took in an' paid out agin without knowin' it,' he says, 'but the' was a couple sent back from New York out o' that package that went down last Friday.'

"What was they?" I says.

"A five an' a ten," he says.

"Where be they?" I says.

"They're in the draw there—they're ruther int'restin' objects of study," he says, kind o' laughin' on the wrong side of his mouth.

"Countin' 'em in the cash?" I says, an' with that he kind o' reddened up agin. "No, sir," he says, "I charged 'em up to my own account, an' I've kept 'em to compare with."

"You hadn't ought to done that," I says.

"You think I ought to 'a' put 'em in the fire at once?" says he.

"No," I says, "that wa'n't what I meant. Why didn't you mix 'em up with the other money, an' let 'em go when you was payin' out?"

Anyways,' I says, 'you charge 'em up to profit an' loss if you're goin' to charge 'em to anythin', an' let me have 'em,' I says.

"What'll you do with 'em?' he says to me, kind o' shuttin' his jaws together.

"I'll take care on 'em,' I says. 'They mayn't be good enough to send down to New York,' I says, 'but they'll go around here all right—jest as good as any other,' I says, 'long 's you keep 'em movin'.'"

"David Harum!" cried Polly, who, though not quite comprehending some of the technicalities of detail, was fully alive to the turpitude of the suggestion. "I hope to gracious he didn't think you was in earnest. Why, s'pose they was passed around, wouldn't somebody git stuck with 'em in the long run? You know they would." Mrs. Bixbee occasionally surprised her brother with unexpected penetration, but she seldom got much recognition of it.

"I see by the paper," he remarked, "that the' was a man died in Pheladelphia one day last week," which piece of barefaced irrelevancy elicited no notice from Mrs. Bixbee.

"What more did he say?" she demanded.

"Wa'al," responded Mr. Harum with a laugh, "he said that he didn't see why I should be a loser by his mistakes, an' that as fur as the bills was concerned they belonged to him, an' with that," said the narrator, "Mister Man gits 'em out of the draw an' jest marches into the back room an' puts the dum things int' the fire."

"He done jest right," declared Aunt Polly, "an' you know it, don't ye now?"

"Wa'al," said David, "f'm his standpoint—f'm his standpoint, I guess he did, an'," rubbing

his chin with two fingers of his left hand, "it's a putty dum good standpoint too. I've ben lookin'," he added reflectively, "fer an honest man fer quite a number o' years, an' I guess I've found him; yes'm, I guess I've found him."

"An' be you goin' to let him lose that fifteen dollars?" asked the practical Polly, fixing her brother with her eyes.

"Wa'al," said David, with a short laugh, "what c'n I do with such an obst'nit critter 's he is? He jest backed into the britchin', an' I couldn't do nothin' with him." Aunt Polly sat over her sewing for a minute or two without taking a stitch.

"I'm sorry you done it," she said at last.

"I dunno but I did make ruther a mess of it," admitted Mr. Harum.