folly,' he says, 'passes my understandin'. What earthly reason have you fer wantin' to marry? On your own showin',' he says, 'neither one on you 's got a cent o' money or any settled way o' gettin' any.'

"'That's jest the very reason,' says Am, 'that's jest the *very reason.* I hain't got nothin', an' Mis' Annis hain't got nothin', an' we figured that we'd jest better git married an' settle down, an' make a good home fer us both,' an' if that ain't good reasonin'," David concluded, "I don't know what is."

"An' be they actially married?" asked Mrs. Bixbee, still incredulous of anything so preposterous.

"So Dick says," was the reply. "He says Am an' Lize come away f'm the dominie's putty down in the mouth, but 'fore long Amri braced up an' allowed that if he had half a dollar he'd try the squire in the mornin', an' Dick let him have it. I says to Dick, 'You're out fifty cents on that deal,' an' he says, slappin' his leg, 'I don't give a dum,' he says; 'I wouldn't 'a' missed it fer double the money.'"

Here David folded his napkin and put it in the ring, and John finished the cup of clear coffee which Aunt Polly, rather under protest, had given him. Coffee without cream and sugar was incomprehensible to Mrs. Bixbee.

CHAPTER XXV.

Two or three days after Christmas John was sitting in his room in the evening when there came a knock at the door, and to his "Come in" there entered Mr. Harum, who was warmly welcomed and entreated to take the big chair, which, after a cursory survey of the apartment and its furnishings, he did, saying, "Wa'al, I thought I'd come in an' see how Polly'd got you fixed; whether the baskit [casket?] was worthy of the jew'l, as I heard a feller say in a theater once."

"I was never more comfortable in my life," said John. "Mrs. Bixbee has been kindness itself, and even permits me to smoke in the room. Let me give you a cigar."

"Heh! You got putty well 'round Polly, I reckon," said David, looking around the room as he lighted the cigar, "an' I'm glad you're comf'table—I reckon 't is a shade better 'n the Eagle," he remarked, with his characteristic chuckle.

"I should say so," said John emphatically, "and I am more obliged than I can tell you."

"All Polly's doin's," asserted David, holding the end of his cigar critically under his nose. "That's a trifle better article 'n I'm in the habit of smokin'," he remarked.

"I think it's my one extravagance," said John

semi-apologetically, "but I don't smoke them exclusively. I am very fond of good tobacco, and——"

"I understand," said David, "an' if I had my life to live over agin, knowin' what I do now, I'd do diff'rent in a number o' ways. I often think," he proceeded, as he took a pull at the cigar and emitted the smoke with a chewing movement of his mouth, "of what Andy Brown used to say. Andy was a curious kind of a customer 't I used to know up to Syrchester. He liked good things, Andy did, an' didn't scrimp himself when they was to be had—that is, when he had the go-an'-fetch-it to git 'em with. He used to say, 'Boys, whenever you git holt of a ten-dollar note you want to git it *into* ye or *onto* ye jest 's quick 's you kin. We're here to-day an' gone to-morrer,' he'd say, 'an' the' ain't no pocket in a shroud,' an' I'm dum'd if I don't think sometimes," declared Mr. Harum, "that he wa'n't very fur off neither. 'T any rate," he added with a philosophy unexpected by his hearer, "'s I look back, it ain't the money 't I've spent fer the good times 't I've had 't I regret; it's the good times 't I might 's well 've had an' didn't. I'm inclined to think," he remarked with an air of having given the matter consideration, "that after Adam an' Eve got bounced out of the gard'n they kicked themselves as much as anythin' fer not havin' cleaned up the hull tree while they was about it."

John laughed and said that that was very likely among their regrets.

"Trouble with me was," said David, "that till I was consid'able older 'n you be I had to scratch grav'l like all possessed, an' it's hard work now sometimes to git the idee out of my head but

what the money's wuth more 'n the things. I guess," he remarked, looking at the ivory-backed brushes and the various toilet knick-knacks of cut-glass and silver which adorned John's bureau, and indicating them with a motion of his hand, "that up to about now you ben in the habit of figurin' the other way mostly."

"Too much so, perhaps," said John; "but yet, after all, I don't think I am sorry. I wouldn't spend the money for those things now, but I am glad I bought them when I did."

"Jess so, jess so," said David appreciatively. He reached over to the table and laid his cigar on the edge of a book, and, reaching for his hip pocket, produced a silver tobacco box, at which he looked contemplatively for a moment, opening and shutting the lid with a snap.

"There," he said, holding it out on his palm, "I was twenty years makin' up my mind to buy that box, an' to this day I can't bring myself to carry it all the time. Yes, sir, I wanted that box fer twenty years. I don't mean to say that I didn't spend the wuth of it foolishly times over an' agin, but I couldn't never make up my mind to put that amount o' money into that pertic'ler thing. I was alwus figurin' that some day I'd have a silver tobacco box, an' I sometimes think the reason it seemed so extrav'gant, an' I put it off so long, was because I wanted it so much. Now I s'pose you couldn't understand that, could ye?"

"Yes," said John, nodding his head thoughtfully, "I think I can understand it perfectly," and indeed it spoke pages of David's biography.

"Yes, sir," said David, "I never spent a small amount o' money but one other time an'

got so much value, only I alwus ben kickin' myself to think I didn't do it sooner."

"Perhaps," suggested John, "you enjoyed it all the more for waiting so long."

"No," said David, "it wa'n't that—I dunno—'t was the feelin' 't I'd got there at last, I guess. Fur 's waitin' fer things is concerned, the' is such a thing as waitin' too long. Your appetite 'll change mebbe. I used to think when I was a youngster that if ever I got where I c'd have all the custard pie I c'd eat that'd be all 't I'd ask fer. I used to imagine bein' baked into one an' eatin' my way out. Nowdays the's a good many things I'd sooner have than custard pie, though," he said with a wink, "I gen'ally do eat two pieces jest to please Polly."

John laughed. "What was the other thing?" he asked.

"Other thing I once bought?" queried David. "Oh, yes, it was the fust hoss I ever owned. I give fifteen dollars fer him, an' if he wa'n't a dandy you needn't pay me a cent. Crowbait wa'n't no name fer him. He was stun blind on the off side, an' couldn't see anythin' in pertic'ler on the nigh side—couldn't get nigh 'nough, I reckon—an' had most ev'rythin' wrong with him that c'd ail a hoss; but I thought he was a thoroughbred. I was 'bout seventeen year old then, an' was helpin' lock-tender on the Erie Canal, an' when the' wa'n't no boat goin' through I put in most o' my time cleanin' that hoss. If he got through 'th less 'n six times a day he got off cheap, an' once I got up an' give him a little attention at night. Yes, sir, if I got big money's wuth out o' that box it was mostly a matter of feelin'; but as fur 's that old plugamore of a hoss

was concerned, I got it both ways, for I got my fust real start out of his old carkiss."

"Yes?" said John encouragingly.

"Yes, sir," affirmed David, "I cleaned him up, an' fed him up, an' almost got 'im so'st he c'd see enough out of his left eye to shy at a load of hay close by; an' fin'ly traded him off fer another record-breaker an' fifteen dollars to boot."

"Were you as enthusiastic over the next one as the first?" asked John, laughing.

"Wa'al," replied David, relighting his temporarily abandoned cigar against a protest and proffer of a fresh one—"wa'al, he didn't lay holt on my affections to quite the same extent. I done my duty by him, but I didn't set up with him nights. You see," he added with a grin, "I'd got some used to bein' a hoss owner, an' the edge had wore off some." He smoked for a minute or two in silence, with as much apparent relish as if the cigar had not been stale.

"Aren't you going on?" asked John at last.

"Wa'al," he replied, pleased with his audience, "I c'd go on, I s'pose, fast enough an' fur enough, but I don't want to tire ye out. I reckon you never had much to do with canals?"

"No," said John, smiling, "I can't say that I have, but I know something about the subject in a general way, and there is no fear of your tiring me out."

"All right," proceeded David. "As I was sayin', I got another equine wonder an' fifteen dollars to boot fer my old plug, an' it wa'n't a great while before I was in the hoss bus'nis to stay. After between two an' three years I had fifty or sixty hosses an' mules, an' took all sorts

of towin' jobs. Then a big towin' concern quit bus'nis, an' I bought their hull stock an' got my money back three four times over, an' by the time I was about twenty-one I had got ahead enough to quit the canal an' all its works fer good, an' go into other things. But there was where I got my livin' after I run away f'm Buxton Hill. Before I got the job of lock-tendin' I had made the trip to Albany an' back twice—' walkin' my passage,' as they used to call it, an' I made one trip helpin' steer, so 't my canal experience was putty thorough, take it all 'round."

"It must have been a pretty hard life," remarked John.

David took out his penknife and proceeded to impale his cigar upon the blade thereof. "No," he said, to John's proffer of the box, "this 'll last quite a spell yet. Wa'al," he resumed after a moment, in reply to John's remark, "viewin' it all by itself, it *was* a hard life. A thing is hard though, I reckon, because it's harder 'n somethin' else, or you think so. Most things go by comparin'. I s'pose if the gen'ral run of trotters never got better 'n three 'n a half that a hoss that c'd do it in three 'd be fast, but we don't call 'em so nowdays. I s'pose if at that same age you'd had to tackle the life you'd 'a' found it hard, an' the' was hard things about it—trampin' all night in the rain, fer instance; sleepin' in barns at times, an' all that; an' once the cap'n o' the boat got mad at somethin' an' pitched me head over heels into the canal. It was about the close of navigation an' the' was a scum of ice. I scrambled out somehow, but he wouldn't 'a' cared if I'd ben drownded. He was an exception, though. The canalers was a rough set in

gen'ral, but they averaged fer disposition 'bout like the ord'nary run o' folks; the' was mean ones an' clever ones; them that would put upon ye, an' them that would treat ye decent. The work was hard an' the grub wasn't alwus much better 'n what you—he, he, he!—what you ben gettin' at the Eagle" (John was now by the way of rather relishing jokes on that subject); "but I hadn't ben raised in the lap o' luxury—not to any consid'able extent—not enough to stick my nose up much. The men I worked fer was rough, an' I got my share of cusses an' cuffs, an' once in a while a kick to keep up my spirit of perseverance; but, on the hull, I think I got more kindness 'n I did at home (leavin' Polly out), an' as fer gen'ral treatment, none on 'em c'd come up to my father, an' wuss yet, my oldest brother 'Lish. The cap'n that throwed me overboard was the wust, but alongside o' 'Lish he was a forty hosspower angil with a hull music store o' harps; an' even my father c'd 'a' given him cards an' spades; an' as fer the victuals" (here David dropped his cigar end and pulled from his pocket the silver tobacco box)—"as fer the victuals," he repeated, "they mostly averaged up putty high after what I'd ben used to. Why, I don't believe I ever tasted a piece of beefsteak or roast beef in my life till after I left home. When we had meat at all it was pork—boiled pork, fried pork, pigs' liver, an' all that, enough to make you 'shamed to look a pig in the face—an' fer the rest, potatoes, an' duff, an' johnny-cake, an' meal mush, an' milk emptins bread that you c'd smell a mile after it got cold. With 'leven folks on a small farm nuthin' c'd afford to be eat that c'd be sold, an' ev'rythin' that couldn't be sold had to be eat. Once in a

while the' 'd be pie of some kind, or gingerbread; but with 'leven to eat 'em I didn't ever git more 'n enough to set me hankerin'."

"I must say that I think I should have liked the canal better," remarked John as David paused. "You were, at any rate, more or less free—that is, comparatively, I should say."

"Yes, sir, I did," said David, "an' I never see the time, no matter how rough things was, that I wished I was back on Buxton Hill. I used to want to see Polly putty bad once in a while, an' used to figure that if I ever growed up to be a man, an' had money enough, I'd buy her a new pair o' shoes an' the stuff fer a dress, an' sometimes my cal'lations went as fur 's a gold breastpin; but I never wanted to see none o' the rest on 'em, an' fer that matter, I never did. Yes, sir, the old ditch was better to me than the place I was borned in, an', as you say, I wa'n't nobody's slave, an' I wa'n't scairt to death the hull time. Some o' the men was rough, but they wa'n't cruel, as a rule, an' as I growed up a little I was putty well able to look out fer myself—wa'al, wa'al (looking at his watch), I guess you must 'a' had enough o' my meemores fer one sittin'."

"No, really," John protested, "don't go yet. I have a little proposal to make to you," and he got up and brought a bottle from the bottom of the washstand.

"Wa'al," said David, "fire it out."

"That you take another cigar and a little of this," holding up the bottle.

"Got any glasses?" asked David with practical mind.

"One and a tooth mug," replied John, laughing. "Glass for you, tooth mug for me. Tastes just as good out of a tooth mug."

"Wa'al," said David, with a comical air of yielding as he took the glass and held it out to John, "under protest, stric'ly under protest—sooner than have my clo'es torn. I shall tell Polly—if I should happen to mention it—that you threatened me with vi'lence. Wa'al, here's lookin' at ye," which toast was drunk with the solemnity which befitted it.