

## CHAPTER XXVI.

THE two men sat for a while smoking in silence, John taking an occasional sip of his grog. Mr. Harum had swallowed his own liquor "raw," as was the custom in Homeville and vicinity, following the potation with a mouthful of water. Presently he settled a little farther down in his chair and his face took on a look of amused recollection.

He looked up and gave a short laugh. "Speakin' of canals," he said, as if the subject had only been casually mentioned, "I was thinkin' of somethin'."

"Yes?" said John.

"E-up," said David. "That old ditch f'm Albany to Buffalo was an almighty big enterprise in them days, an' a great thing fer the prosperity of the State, an' a good many better men 'n I be walked the ole towpath when they was young. Yes, sir, that's a fact. Wa'al, some years ago I had somethin' of a deal on with a New York man by the name of Price. He had a place in Newport where his fam'ly spent the summer, an' where he went as much as he could git away. I was down to New York to see him, an' we hadn't got things quite straightened out, an' he says to me, 'I'm goin' over to Newport, where my wife an' fam'ly is, fer Sunday, an' why

can't you come with me,' he says, 'an' stay over till Monday? an' we c'n have the day to ourselves over this matter?' 'Wa'al,' I says, 'I'm only down here on this bus'nis, an' as I left a hen on, up home, I'm willin' to save the time 'stid of waitin' here fer you to git back, if you don't think,' I says, 'that it'll put Mis' Price out any to bring home a stranger without no notice.'

"'Wa'al,' he says, laughin', 'I guess she c'n manage fer once,' an' so I went along. When we got there the' was a carriage to meet us, an' two men in uniform, one to drive an' one to open the door, an' we got in an' rode up to the house—cottage, he called it, but it was built of stone, an' wa'n't only about two sizes smaller 'n the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Some kind o' doin's was goin' on, fer the house was blazin' with light, an' music was playin'.

"'What's on?' says Price to the feller that let us in.

"'Sir and Lady somebody's dinin' here to-night, sir,' says the man.

"'Damn!' says Price, 'I fergot all about the cussed thing. Have Mr. Harum showed to a room,' he says, 'an' serve dinner in my office in a quarter of an hour, an' have somebody show Mr. Harum there when it's ready.'

"'Wa'al,' pursued David, 'I was showed up to a room. The' was lace coverin's on the bed pillers, an' a silk an' lace spread, an' more dum trinkits an' bottles an' lookin'-glasses 'n you c'd shake a stick at, an' a bathroom, an' Lord knows what; an' I washed up, an' putty soon one o' them fellers come an' showed me down to where Price was waitin'. Wa'al, we had all manner o' things fer supper, an' champagne, an' so on, an' after



we got done, Price says, 'I've got to ask you to excuse me, Harum,' he says. 'I've got to go an' dress an' show up in the drawin'-room,' he says. 'You smoke your cigar in here, an' when you want to go to your room jest ring the bell.'

"All right," I says. 'I'm 'bout ready to turn in anyway.'

The narrator paused for a moment. John was rather wondering what it all had to do with the Erie Canal, but he said nothing.

"Wa'al, next mornin'," David resumed, "I got up an' shaved an' dressed, an' set 'round waitin' fer the breakfast bell to ring till nigh on to half-past nine o'clock. Bom-by the' came a knock at the door, an' I says, 'Come in,' an' in come one o' them fellers. 'Beg pah'din, sir,' he says. 'Did you ring, sir?'

"No," I says, 'I didn't ring. I was waitin' to hear the bell.'

"Thank you, sir," he says. 'An' will you have your breakfast now, sir?'

"Where?" I says.

"Oh," he says, kind o' grinnin', 'I'll bring it up here, sir, d'rec'ly,' he says, an' went off. Putty soon come another knock, an' in come the feller with a silver tray covered with a big napkin, an' on it was a couple of rolls wrapped up in a napkin, a b'iled egg done up in another napkin, a cup an' saucer, a little chiney coffee-pot, a little pitcher of cream, some loaf sugar in a silver dish, a little pancake of butter, a silver knife, two little spoons like what the childern play with, a silver pepper duster an' salt dish, an' an orange. Oh, yes, the' was another contraption—a sort of a chiney wineglass. The feller set down the tray an' says, 'Anythin' else you'd like to have, sir?'

"No," I says, lookin' it over, 'I guess there's enough to last me a day or two,' an' with that he kind o' turned his face away fer a second or two. 'Thank you, sir,' he says. 'The second breakfast is at half-past twelve, sir,' an' out he put. Wa'al," David continued, "the bread an' butter was all right enough, exceptin' they'd fergot the salt in the butter, an' the coffee was all right; but when it come to the egg, dum'd if I wa'n't putty nigh out of the race; but I made up my mind it must be hard-b'iled, an' tackled it on that idee. Seems t' amuse ye," he said with a grin, getting up and helping himself. After swallowing the refreshment, and the palliating mouthful of water, he resumed his seat and his narrative.

"Wa'al, sir," he said, "that dum'd egg was about 's near raw as it was when i' was laid, an' the' was a crack in the shell, an' fust thing I knowed it kind o' c'lapsed, an' I give it a grab, an' it squirtid all over my pants, an' the floor, an' on my coat an' vest, an' up my sleeve, an' all over the tray. Scat my —! I looked gen'ally like an ab'lition orator before the war. You never see such a mess," he added, with an expression of rueful recollection. "I believe that dum'd egg held more 'n a pint."

John fairly succumbed to a paroxysm of laughter.

"Funny, wa'n't it?" said David dryly.

"Forgive me," pleaded John, when he got his breath.

"Oh, that's all right," said David, "but it wa'n't the kind of emotion it kicked up in my breast at the time. I cleaned myself up with a towel well 's I could, an' thought I'd step out an'



take the air before the feller 'd come back to git that tray, an' mebbe rub my nose in't."

"Oh, Lord!" cried John.

"Yes, sir," said David, unheeding, "I allowed 't I'd walk 'round with my mouth open a spell, an' git a little air on my stomech to last me till that second breakfast; an' as I was pokin' 'round the grounds I come to a sort of arbor, an' there was Price, smokin' a cigar.

"'Mornin', Harum; how you feelin'?' he says, gettin' up an' shakin' hands; an' as we passed the time o' day, I noticed him noticin' my coat. You see as they dried out, the egg spots got to showin' agin.

"'Got somethin' on your coat there,' he says.

"'Yes,' I says, tryin' to scratch it out with my finger nail.

"'Have a cigar?' he says, handin' one out.

"'Never smoke on an empty stomach,' I says.

"'What?' he says.

"'Bad fer the ap'tite,' I says, 'an' I'm savin' mine fer that second breakfast o' your'n.'

"'What!' he says, 'haven't you had anythin' to eat?' An' then I told him what I ben tellin' you. Wa'al, sir, fust he looked kind o' mad an' disgusted, an' then he laughed till I thought he'd bust, an' when he quit he says, 'Excuse me, Harum, it's too damned bad; but I couldn't help laughin' to save my soul. An' it's all my fault too,' he says. 'I intended to have you take your breakfast with me, but somethin' happened last night to upset me, an' I woke with it on my mind, an' I fergot. Now you jest come right into the house, an' I'll have somethin' got fer you that'll stay your stomach better 'n air,' he says.

"'No,' I says, 'I've made trouble enough fer one day, I guess,' an' I wouldn't go, though he urged me agin an' agin. 'You don't fall in with the customs of this region?' I says to him.

"'Not in that pertic'ler, at any rate,' he says. 'It's one o' the fool notions that my wife an' the girls brought home f'm Eurup. I have a good solid meal in the mornin', same as I alwus did,' he says."

Mr. Harum stopped talking to relight his cigar, and after a puff or two, "When I started out," he said, "I hadn't no notion of goin' into all the highways an' byways, but when I git begun one thing's apt to lead to another, an' you never c'n tell jest where I *will* fetch up. Now I started off to tell somethin' in about two words, an' I'm putty near as fur off as when I begun."

"Well," said John, "it's Saturday night, and the longer your story is the better I shall like it. I hope the second breakfast was more of a success than the first one," he added with a laugh.

"I managed to average up on the two meals, I guess," David remarked. "Wa'al," he resumed, "Price an' I set 'round talkin' bus'nis an' things till about twelve or a little after, mebbe, an' then he turned to me an' kind o' looked me over an' says, 'You an' me is about of a build, an' if you say so I'll send one of my coats an' vests up to your room an' have the man take yours an' clean 'em.'

"'I guess the' is rather more egg showin' than the law allows,' I says, 'an' mebbe that 'd be a good idee; but the pants caught it the wust,' I says.

"'Mine'll fit ye,' he says.

"'What'll your wife say to seein' me airifyin'?



'round in your git-up?' I says. He gin me a funny kind of look. 'My wife?' he says. 'Lord, she don't know more about my clo'es 'n you do.' That struck me as bein' rather curious," remarked David. "Wouldn't it you?"

"Very," replied John gravely.

"Yes, sir," said David. "Wa'al, when we went into the eatin' room the table was full, mostly young folks, chatterin' an' laughin'. Price int'duced me to his wife, an' I set down by him at the other end of the table. The' wa'n't nothin' wuth mentionin'; nobody paid any attention to me 'cept now an' then a word from Price, an' I wa'n't fer talkin' anyway—I c'd have eat a raw dog. After breakfast, as they called it, Price an' I went out onto the verandy an' had some coffee, an' smoked an' talked fer an hour or so, an' then he got up an' excused himself to write a letter. 'You may like to look at the papers awhile,' he says. 'I've ordered the hosses at five, an' if you like I'll show you 'round a little.'

"'Won't your wife be wantin' 'em?' I says.

"'No, I guess she'll git along,' he says, kind o' smilin'.

"'All right,' I says, 'don't mind me.' An' so at five up come the hosses an' the two fellers in uniform an' all. I was lookin' the hosses over when Price come out. 'Wa'al, what do you think of 'em?' he says.

"'Likely pair,' I says, goin' over an' examin' the nigh one's feet an' legs. 'Sore forr'ed?' I says, lookin' up at the driver.

"'A trifle, sir,' he says, touchin' his hat.

"'What's that?' says Price, comin' up an' examin' the critter's face an' head. 'I don't see

anythin' the matter with his forehead,' he says. I looked up an' give the driver a wink," said David with a chuckle, "an' he give kind of a chokin' gasp, but in a second was lookin' as solemn as ever.

"I can't tell ye jest where we went," the narrator proceeded, "but anyway it was where all the nabobs turned out, an' I seen more style an' git-up in them two hours 'n I ever see in my life, I reckon. The' didn't appear to be no one we run across that, accordin' to Price's tell, was wuth under five million, though we may 'a' passed one without his noticin'; an' the' was a good many that run to fifteen an' twenty an' over, an' most on 'em, it appeared, was f'm New York. Wa'al, fin'ly we got back to the house a little 'fore seven. On the way back Price says, 'The' are goin' to be three four people to dinner to-night in a quiet way, an' the' ain't no reason why you shouldn't stay dressed jest as you are, but if you would feel like puttin' on evenin' clo'es (that's what he called 'em), why I've got an extry suit that'll fit ye to a tee," he says.

"'No,' I says, 'I guess I better not. I reckon I'd better git my grip an' go to the hotel. I sh'd be rather bashful to wear your swallertail, an' all them folks'll be strangers,' I says. But he insisted on't that I sh'd come to dinner anyway, an' fin'ly I gin in, an' thinkin' I might 's well go the hull hog, I allowed I'd wear his clo'es; 'but if I do anythin' or say anythin' 't you don't like,' says I, 'don't say I didn't warn ye.' What would you 'a' done?" Mr. Harum asked.

"Worn the clothes without the slightest hesitation," replied John. "Nobody gave your costume a thought."



"They didn't appear to, fer a fact," said David, "an' I didn't either, after I'd slipped up once or twice on the matter of pockets. The same feller brought 'em up to me that fetched the stuff in the mornin'; an' the rig was complete—coat, vest, pants, shirt, white necktie, an', by gum! shoes an' silk socks, an', sir, scat my ——! the hull outfit fitted me as if it was made fer me. 'Shell I wait on you, sir?' says the man. 'No,' I says, 'I guess I c'n git into the things; but mebbe you might come up in 'bout quarter of an hour an' put on the finishin' touches, an' here,' I says, 'I guess that brand of eggs you give me this mornin' 's wuth about two dollars apiece.'

"'Thank you, sir,' he says, grinnin', 'I'd like to furnish 'em right along at that rate, sir, an' I'll be up as you say, sir.'"

"You found the way to *his* heart," said John, smiling.

"My experience is," said David dryly, "that most men's hearts is located ruther closter to their britchis pockets than they are to their breast pockets."

"I'm afraid that's so," said John.

"But this feller," Mr. Harum continued, "was a putty decent kind of a chap. He come up after I'd got into my togs an' pulled me here, an' pulled me there, an' fixed my necktie, an' hitched me in gen'ral so'st I wa'n't neither too tight nor too free, an' when he got through, 'You'll do now, sir,' he says.

"'Think I will?' says I.

"'Couldn't nobody look more fit, sir,' he says, an' I'm dum'd," said David, with an assertive nod, "when I looked at myself in the lookin'-glass I scurcely knowed myself, an' (with a con-

fidential lowering of the voice) when I got back to New York the very fust hard work I done was to go an' buy the hull rig-out—an'," he added with a grin, "strange as it may appear, it ain't wore out *yit*."