

CHAPTER XXVII.

"PEOPLE don't dress for dinner in Homeville, as a rule, then," John said, smiling.

"No," said Mr. Harum, "when they dress fer breakfast that does 'em fer all three meals. I've wore them things two three times when I've ben down to the city, but I never had 'em on but once up here."

"No?" said John.

"No," said David, "I put 'em on *once* to show to Polly how city folks dressed—he, he, he, he!—an' when I come into the room she set forwud on her chair an' stared at me over her specs. 'What on airth!' she says.

"'I bought these clo'es,' I says, 'to wear when bein' ent'tained by the fust fam'lies. How do I look?' I says.

"'Turn 'round,' she says. 'You look f'm behind,' she says, 'like a red-headed snappin' bug, an' in front,' she says, as I turned agin, 'like a reg'lar slinkum. I'll bet,' she says, 'that you hain't throwed away less 'n twenty dollars on that foolishness.' Polly's a very conserv'tive person," remarked her brother, "and don't never imagine a vain thing, as the Bible says, not when she *knows* it, an' I thought it wa'n't wuth while to argue the point with her."

John laughed and said, "Do you recall that

memorable interview between the governors of the two Carolinas?"

"Nothin' in the historical lit'rature of our great an' glorious country," replied Mr. Harum reverently, "sticks closter to my mind—like a burr to a cow's tail," he added, by way of illustration. "Thank you, jest a mouthful."

"How about the dinner?" John asked after a little interlude. "Was it pleasant?"

"Fust rate," declared David. "The young folks was out somewhere else, all but one o' Price's girls. The' was twelve at the table all told. I was int'duced to all of 'em in the parlor, an' putty soon in come one of the fellers an' said somethin' to Mis' Price that meant dinner was ready, an' the girl come up to me an' took holt of my arm. 'You're goin' to take me out,' she says, an' we formed a procession an' marched out to the dinin' room. 'You're to sit by mammer,' she says, showin' me, an' there was my name on a card, sure enough. Wa'al, sir, that table was a show! I couldn't begin to describe it to ye. The' was a hull flower garden in the middle, an' a worked tablecloth; four five glasses of all colors an' sizes at ev'ry plate, an' a nosegay, an' five six diff'rent forks an' a lot o' knives, though fer that matter," remarked the speaker, "the' wa'n't but one knife in the lot that amounted to anythin', the rest on 'em wouldn't hold nothin'; an' the' was three four sort of chiney slates with what they call—the—you 'n me——"

"Menu," suggested John.

"I guess that's it," said David, "but that wa'n't the way it was spelt. Wa'al, I set down an' tucked my napkin into my neck, an' though I noticed none o' the rest on 'em seemed to care,

I allowed that 't wa'n't *my* shirt, an' mebbe Price might want to wear it agin 'fore 't was washed."

John put his handkerchief over his face and coughed violently. David looked at him sharply. "Subject to them spells?" he asked.

"Sometimes," said John when he recovered his voice, and then, with as clear an expression of innocence as he could command, but somewhat irrelevantly, asked, "How did you get on with Mrs. Price?"

"Oh," said David, "nicer 'n a cotton hat. She appeared to be a quiet sort of woman that might 'a' lived anywhere, but she was dressed to kill—an' so was the rest on 'em, fer that matter," he remarked with a laugh. "I tried to tell Polly about 'em afterwuds, an'—he, he, he!—she shut me up mighty quick, an' I thought myself at the time, thinks I, it's a good thing it's warm weather, I says to myself. Oh, yes, Mis' Price made me feel quite to home, but I didn't talk much the fust part of dinner, an' I s'pose she was more or less took up with havin' so many folks at table; but fin'ly she says to me, 'Mr. Price was so annoyed about your breakfast, Mr. Harum.'

"'Was he?' I says. 'I was afraid you'd be the one that 'd be vexed at me.'

"'Vexed with you? I don't understand,' she says.

"'Bout the napkin I sp'iled,' I says. 'Mebbe not actually sp'iled,' I says, 'but it'll have to go into the wash 'fore it c'n be used agin.' She kind o' smiled, an' says, 'Really, Mr. Harum, I don't know what you are talkin' about.'

"'Hain't nobody told ye?' I says. 'Well, if they hain't they will, an' I may 's well make a

clean breast on't. I'm awful sorry,' I says, 'but this mornin' when I come to the egg I didn't see no way to eat it 'cept to peel it, an' fust I knew it kind of exploded and daubed ev'rythin' all over creation. Yes'm,' I says, 'it went off, 's ye might say, like old Elder Maybee's powder.' I guess," said David, "that I must 'a' ben talkin' ruther louder 'n I thought, fer I looked up an' noticed that putty much ev'ry one on 'em was lookin' our way, an' kind o' laughin', an' Price in pertic'ler was grinnin' straight at me.

"'What's that,' he says, 'about Elder Maybee's powder?'

"'Oh, nuthin' much,' I says, 'jest a little supprise party the elder had up to his house.'

"'Tell us about it,' says Price. 'Oh, yes, do tell us about it,' says Mis' Price.

"'Wa'al,' I says, 'the' ain't much to it in the way of a story, but seein' dinner must be most through,' I says, 'I'll tell ye all the' was of it. The elder had a small farm 'bout two miles out of the village,' I says, 'an' he was great on raisin' chickens an' turkeys. He was a slow, putterin' kind of an ole fozzle, but on the hull a putty decent citizen. Wa'al,' I says, 'one year when the poultry was comin' along, a family o' skunks moved onto the premises an' done so well that putty soon, as the elder said, it seemed to him that it was comin' to be a ch'ice between the chicken bus'nis an' the skunk bus'nis, an' though he said he'd heard the' was money in it, if it was done on a big enough scale, he hadn't ben educated to it, he said, and didn't take to it *any* ways. So,' I says, 'he scratched 'round an' got a lot o' traps an' set 'em, an' the very next mornin' he went out an' found he'd ketched an ole he-one—

president of the comp'ny. So he went to git his gun to shoot the critter, an' found he hadn't got no powder. The boys had used it all up on woodchucks, an' the' wa'n't nothin' fer it but to git some more down to the village, an', as he had some more things to git, he hitched up 'long in the forenoon an' drove down.' At this," said David, "one of the ladies, wife to the judge, name o' Pomfort, spoke up an' says, 'Did he leave that poor creature to suffer all that time? Couldn't it have been put out of it's misery some other way?'

" 'Wa'al marm,' I says, 'I never happened to know but one feller that set out to kill one o' them things with a club, an' he put in most o' his time fer a week or two up in the woods *hatin'* himself,' I says. 'He didn't mingle in gen'ral soci'ty, an' in fact,' I says, 'he had the hull road to himself, as ye might say, fer a putty consid'able spell.' "

John threw back his head and laughed. "Did she say any more?" he asked.

"No," said David with a chuckle. "All the men set up a great laugh, an' she colored up in a kind of huff at fust, an' then she begun to laugh too, an' then one o' the waiter fellers put some-thin' down in front of me an' I went eatin' agin. But putty soon Price, he says, 'Come,' he says, 'Harum, ain't you goin' on? How about that powder?'

" 'Wa'al,' I says, 'mebbe we had ought to put that critter out of his misery. The elder went down an' bought a pound o' powder an' had it done up in a brown paper bundle, an' put it with his other stuff in the bottom of his dem'crat wagin; but it come on to rain some while he was

ridin' back, an' the stuff got more or less wet, an' so when he got home he spread it out in a dishpan an' put it under the kitchen stove to dry, an' thinkin' that it wa'n't dryin' fast enough, I s'pose, made out to assist Nature, as the sayin' is, by stirrin' on't up with the kitchin poker. Wa'al,' I says, 'I don't jest know how it happened, an' the elder cert'inly didn't, fer after they'd got him untangled f'm under what was left of the woodshed an' the kitchin stove, an' tied him up in cotton battin', an' set his leg, an' put out the house, an' a few things like that, bom-by he come round a little, an' the fust thing he says was, "Wa'al, wa'al, wa'al!" "What is it, pa?" says Mis' Maybee, bendin' down over him. "That peowder," he says, in almost no voice, "that peowder! I was jest stirrin' on't a little, an' it went *o-f-f*, it went *o-f-f*," he says, "*seemin'ly—in-a-minute!*" an' that,' I says to Mis' Price, 'was what that egg done.'

" 'We'll have to forgive you that egg,' she says, laughin' like ev'rything, 'for Elder Maybee's sake'; an' in fact," said David, "they all laughed except one feller. He was an Englishman—I fergit his name. When I got through he looked kind o' puzzled an' says" (Mr. Harum imitated his style as well as he could), "'But ra'-ally, Mr. Harum, you kneow that's the way powdah always geoes off, don't you kneow,' an' then," said David, "they laughed harder 'n ever, an' the Englishman got redder 'n a beet."

"What did you say?" asked John.

"Nuthin'," said David. "They was all laughin' so't I couldn't git in a word, an' then the waiter brought me another plateful of somethin'. Scat my —!" he exclaimed, "I thought that

dinner 'd go on till kingdom come. An' wine! Wa'al! I begun to feel somethin' like the old feller did that swallered a full tumbler of white whisky, thinkin' it was water. The old feller was temp'rance, an' the boys put up a job on him one hot day at gen'ral trainin'. Somebody ast him afterwuds how it made him feel, an' he said he felt as if he was sittin' straddle the meetin' house, an' ev'ry shingle was a Jew's-harp. So I kep' mum fer a while. But jest before we fin'ly got through, an' I hadn't said nothin' fer a spell, Mis' Price turned to me an' says, 'Did you have a pleasant drive this afternoon?'

"Yes'm," I says, 'I seen the hull show, putty much. I guess poor folks must be 't a premium 'round here. I reckon,' I says, 'that if they'd club together, the folks your husband p'inted out to me to-day could *almost* satisfy the requirements of the 'Merican Soci'ty fer For'n Missions.' Mis' Price laughed, an' looked over at her husband. 'Yes,' says Price, 'I told Mr. Harum about some of the people we saw this afternoon, an' I must say he didn't appear to be as much impressed as I thought he would. How's that, Harum?' he says to me.

"Wa'al," says I, 'I was thinkin' 't I'd like to bet you two dollars to a last year's bird's nest,' I says, 'that if all them fellers we seen this afternoon, that air over fifty, c'd be got together, an' some one was suddinly to holler "LOW BRIDGE!" that nineteen out o' twenty 'd *duck their heads*.'"

"And then?" queried John.

"Wa'al," said David, "all on 'em laughed some, but Price—he jest lay back an' roared, and I found out afterwuds," added David, "that

ev'ry man at the table, except the Englis'man, know'd what 'low bridge' meant from actial experience. Wa'al, scat my —!" he exclaimed, as he looked at his watch, "it ain't hardly wuth while undressin'," and started for the door. As he was halfway through it, he turned and said, "Say, I s'pose *you'd* 'a' known what to do with that egg," but he did not wait for a reply.