

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON a fine Sunday in summer after the close of the service the exit of the congregation of St. James's church presents an animated and inspiring spectacle. A good many well-dressed ladies of various ages, and not quite so many well-dressed men, mostly (as David would have put it) "runnin' a little younger," come from out the sacred edifice with an expression of relief easily changeable to something gayer. A few drive away in handsome equipages, but most prefer to walk, and there is usually a good deal of smiling talk in groups before parting, in which Mr. Euston likes to join. He leaves matters in the vestry to the care of old Barlow, the sexton, and makes, if one may be permitted the expression, "a quick change."

Things had come about very much as David had desired and anticipated, and our friend had met quite a number of the "summer people," having been waylaid at times by the rector—in whose good graces he stood so high that he might have sung anything short of a comic song during the offertory—and presented willy-nilly. On this particular Sunday he had lingered a while in the gallery after service over some matter connected with the music, and when he came out of the church most of the people had made

their way down the front steps and up the street; but standing near the gate was a group of three—the rector and two young women whom John had seen the previous summer, and now recognized as the Misses Verjoos. He raised his hat as he was passing the group, when Mr. Euston detained him: "I want to present you to the Misses Verjoos." A tall girl, dressed in some black material which gave John the impression of lace, recognized his salutation with a slight bow and a rather indifferent survey from a pair of very somber dark eyes, while her sister, in light colors, gave him a smiling glance from a pair of very blue ones, and, rather to his surprise, put out her hand with the usual declaration of pleasure, happiness, or what not.

"We were just speaking of the singing," said the rector, "and I was saying that it was all your doing."

"You really have done wonders," condescended she of the somber eyes. "We have only been here a day or two and this is the first time we have been at church."

The party moved out of the gate and up the street, the rector leading with Miss Verjoos, followed by our friend and the younger sister.

"Indeed you have," said the latter, seconding her sister's remark. "I don't believe even yourself can quite realize what the difference is. My! it is very nice for the rest of us, but it must be a perfect killing bore for you."

"I have found it rather trying at times," said John; "but now—you are so kind—it is beginning to appear to me as the most delightful of pursuits."

"Very pretty," remarked Miss Clara. "Do you say a good deal of that sort of thing?"

"I am rather out of practice," replied John. "I haven't had much opportunity for some time."

"I don't think you need feel discouraged," she returned. "A good method is everything, and I have no doubt you might soon be in form again."

"Thanks for your encouragement," said John, smiling. "I was beginning to feel quite low in my mind about it." She laughed a little.

"I heard quite a good deal about you last year from a very good friend of yours," said Miss Clara after a pause.

John looked at her inquiringly.

"Mrs. Bixbee," she said. "Isn't she an old dear?"

"I have reason to think so, with all my heart," said John stoutly.

"She talked a lot about you to me," said Miss Clara.

"Yes?"

"Yes, and if your ears did not burn you have no sense of gratitude. Isn't Mr. Harum funny?"

"I have sometimes suspected it," said John, laughing. "He once told me rather an amusing thing about a young woman's running off with one of his horses."

"Did he tell you that? Really? I wonder what you must have thought of me?"

"Something of what Mr. Harum did, I fancy," said John.

"What was that?"

"Pardon me," was the reply, "but I have been snubbed once this morning." She gave a little laugh.

"Mr. Harum and I are great 'neetups,' as he says. Is 'neetups' a nice word?" she asked, looking at her companion.

"I should think so if I were in Mr. Harum's place," said John. "It means 'cronies,' I believe, in his dictionary."

They had come to where Freeland Street terminates in the Lake Road, which follows the border of the lake to the north and winds around the foot of it to the south and west.

"Why!" exclaimed Miss Clara, "there comes David. I haven't seen him this summer."

They halted and David drew up, winding the reins about the whipstock and pulling off his buckskin glove.

"How do you do, Mr. Harum?" said the girl, putting her hand in his.

"How air ye, Miss Claricy? Glad to see ye agin," he said. "I'm settin' up a little ev'ry day now, an' you don't look as if you was off your feed much, eh?"

"No," she replied, laughing, "I'm in what you call pretty fair condition, I think."

"Wa'al, I reckon," he said, looking at her smiling face with the frankest admiration. "Guess you come out a little finer ev'ry season, don't ye? Hard work to keep ye out o' the 'freefer-all' class, I guess. How's all the folks?"

"Nicely, thanks," she replied.

"That's right," said David.

"How is Mrs. Bixbee?" she inquired.

"Wa'al," said David with a grin, "I ben a little down in the mouth lately 'bout Polly—seems to be fallin' away some—don't weigh much more 'n I do, I guess;" but Miss Clara only laughed at this gloomy report.

"How is my horse Kirby?" she asked.

"Wa'al, the ole bag-o'-bones is breathin' yet," said David, chuckling, "but he's putty well wore out—has to lean up agin the shed to whicker. Guess I'll have to sell ye another putty soon now. Still, what the' is left of him 's 's good 's ever 't will be, an' I'll send him up in the mornin'." He looked from Miss Clara to John, whose salutation he had acknowledged with the briefest of nods.

"How'd you ketch *him*?" he asked, indicating our friend with a motion of his head. "Had to go after him with a four-quart measure, didn't ye? or did he let ye corner him?"

"Mr. Euston caught him for me," she said, laughing, but coloring perceptibly, while John's face grew very red. "I think I will run on and join my sister, and Mr. Lenox can drive home with you. Good bye, Mr. Harum. I shall be glad to have Kirby whenever it is convenient. We shall be glad to see you at Lakelawn," she said to John cordially, "whenever you can come;" and taking her prayer book and hymnal from him, she sped away.

"Look at her git over the ground," said David, turning to watch her while John got into the buggy. "Ain't that a gait?"

"She is a charming girl," said John as old Jinny started off.

"She's the one I told you about that run off with my hoss," remarked David, "an' I alwus look after him fer her in the winter."

"Yes, I know," said John. "She was laughing about it to-day, and saying that you and she were great friends."

"She was, was she?" said David, highly

pleased. "Yes, sir, that's the girl, an', scat my —! if I was thirty years younger she c'd run off with me jest as easy—an' I dunno but what she could anyway," he added.

"Charming girl," repeated John rather thoughtfully.

"Wa'al," said David, "I don't know as much about girls as I do about some things; my experience hain't laid much in that line, but I wouldn't like to take a contract to match *her* on any *limit*. I guess," he added softly, "that the consideration in that deal 'd have to be 'love an' affection.' Git up, old lady," he exclaimed, and drew the whip along old Jinny's back like a caress. The mare quickened her pace, and in a few minutes they drove into the barn.