

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WHERE you ben?" asked Mrs. Bixbee of her brother as the three sat at the one o'clock dinner. "I see you drivin' off somewheres."

"Ben up the Lake Road to 'Lizer Howe's," replied David. "He's got a hoss 't I've some notion o' buyin'."

"Ain't the week-days enough," she asked, "to do your horse-tradin' in 'ithout breakin' the Sabbath?"

David threw back his head and lowered a stalk of the last asparagus of the year into his mouth.

"Some o' the best deals I ever made," he said, "was made on a Sunday. Hain't you never heard the sayin', 'The better the day, the better the deal'?"

"Wa'al," declared Mrs. Bixbee, "the' can't be no blessin' on money that's made in that way, an' you'd be better off without it."

"I dunno," remarked her brother, "but Deakin Perkins might ask a blessin' on a hoss trade, but I never heard of it's bein' done, an' I don't know jest how the deakin 'd put it; it'd be two fer the deakin an' one fer the other feller, though, somehow, you c'n bet."

"Humph!" she ejaculated. "I guess nobody ever did; an' I sh'd think you had money enough

an' horses enough an' time enough to keep out o' that bus'nis on Sunday, anyhow."

"Wa'al, wa'al," said David, "mebbe I'll swear off before long, an' anyway the' wa'n't no blessin' needed on this trade, fer if you'll ask 'Lizer he'll tell ye the' wa'n't none made. 'Lizer 's o' your way o' thinkin' on the subject."

"That's to his credit, anyway," she asserted.

"Jes' so," observed her brother; "I've gen'ally noticed that folks who was of your way o' thinkin' never made no mistakes, an' 'Lizer 's a very consistent believer;" whereupon he laughed in a way to arouse both Mrs. Bixbee's curiosity and suspicion.

"I don't see anythin' in that to laugh at," she declared.

"He, he, he, he!" chuckled David.

"Wa'al, you may 's well tell it one time 's another. That's the way," she said, turning to John with a smile trembling on her lips, "'t he picks at me the hull time."

"I've noticed it," said John. "It's shameful."

"I do it hully fer her good," asserted David with a grin. "If it wa'n't fer me she'd git in time as narrer as them seven-day Babtists over to Peeble—they call 'em the 'narrer Babtists.' You've heard on 'em, hain't you, Polly?"

"No," she said, without looking up from her plate, "I never heard on 'em, an' I don't much believe you ever did neither."

"What!" exclaimed David. "You lived here goin' on seventy year an' never heard on 'em?"

"David Harum!" she cried, "I ain't within ten year——"

"Hold on," he protested, "don't throw that teacup. I didn't say you *was*, I only said you was *goin' on*—an' about them people over to Peeble, they've got the name of the 'narrer Bab-tists' because they're so narrer in their views that fourteen on 'em c'n sit, side an' side, in a buggy." This astonishing statement elicited a laugh even from Aunt Polly, but presently she said:

"Wa'al, I'm glad you found one man that would stan' you off on Sunday."

"Yes'm," said her brother, "'Lizer 's jest your kind. I knew 't he'd hurt his foot, an' prob'ly couldn't go to meetin', an' sure enough, he was settin' on the stoop, an' I drove in an' pulled up in the lane alongside. We said good mornin' an' all that, an' I ast after the folks an' how his foot was gettin' 'long, an' so on, an' fin'ly I says, 'I see your boy drivin' a hoss the other day that looked a little—f'm the middle o' the road—as if he might match one I've got, an' I thought I'd drive up this mornin' an' see if we couldn't git up a dicker.' Wa'al, he give a kind of a hitch in his chair as if his foot hurt him, an' then he says, 'I guess I can't deal with ye to-day. I don't never do no bus'nis on Sunday,' he says.

"'I've heard you was putty pertic'ler,' I says, 'but I'm putty busy jest about now, an' I thought that mebbe once in a way, an' seein' that you couldn't go to meetin' anyway, an' that I've come quite a ways an' don't know when I c'n see you agin, an' so on, that mebbe you'd think, under all the circumstances, the' wouldn't be no great harm in't—long 's I don't pay over no money, at cetry,' I says.

"'No,' he says, shakin' his head in a sort o' mournful way, 'I'm glad to see ye, an' I'm sorry you've took all that trouble fer nuthin', but my conscience won't allow me,' he says, 'to do no bus'nis on Sunday.'

"'Wa'al,' I says, 'I don't ask no man to go agin his conscience, but it wouldn't be no very glarin' transgression on your part, would it, if I was to go up to the barn all alone by myself an' look at the hoss?' I c'd see," continued Mr. Harum, "that his face kind o' brightened up at that, but he took his time to answer. 'Wa'al,' he says fin'ly, 'I don't want to lay down no law fer *you*, an' if *you* don't see no harm in't, I guess the' ain't nuthin' to prevent ye.' So I got down an' started fer the barn, an'—he, he, he!—when I'd got about a rod he hollered after me, 'He's in the end stall,' he says.

"'Wa'al,' the narrator proceeded, "I looked the critter over an' made up my mind about what he was wuth to me, an' went back an' got in, an' drove into the yard, an' turned 'round, an' drew up agin 'longside the stoop. 'Lizer looked up at me in an askin' kind of a way, but he didn't say anythin'.

"'I s'pose,' I says, 'that you wouldn't want me to say anythin' more to ye, an' I may 's well jog along back.'

"'Wa'al,' he says, 'I can't very well help hearin' ye, kin I, if you got anythin' to say?'

"'Wa'al,' I says, 'the hoss ain't exac'ly what I expected to find, nor jest what I'm lookin' fer; but I don't say I wouldn't 'a' made a deal with ye if the price had ben right, an' it hadn't ben Sunday.' I reckon," said David with a wink at John, "that that there foot o' his'n must 'a'

give him an extry twinge the way he wriggled in his chair; but I couldn't break his lockjaw yit. So I gathered up the lines an' took out the whip, an' made all the motions to go, an' then I kind o' stopped an' says, 'I don't want you to go agin your principles nor the law an' gosp'l on my account, but the' can't be no harm in s'posin' a case, can the?'. No, he allowed that s'posin' wa'n't jest the same as doin'. 'Wa'al,' says I, 'now s'posin' I'd come up here yestidy as I have to-day, an' looked your hoss over, an' said to you, "What price do you put on him?" what do you s'pose you'd 'a' said?'

"'Wa'al,' he said, 'puttin' it that way, I s'pose I'd 'a' said one-seventy.'

"'Yes,' I says, 'an' then agin, if I'd said that he wa'n't wuth that money to me, not bein' jest what I wanted—an' so he ain't—but that I'd give one-forty, *cash*, what do you s'pose you'd 'a' said?'

"'Wa'al,' he says, givin' a hitch, 'of course I don't know jest what I would have said, but I *guess*,' he says, 't I'd 'a' said if you'll make it one-fifty you c'n have the hoss.'

"'Wa'al, now,' I says, 's'posin' I was to send Dick Larrabee up here in the mornin' with the money, what do you s'pose you'd do?'

"'I s'pose I'd let him go,' says 'Lizer.

"'All right,' I says, an' off I put. That conscience o' 'Lizer's," remarked Mr. Harum in conclusion, "is wuth its weight in gold, *jest about*."

"David Harum," declared Aunt Polly, "you'd ort to be 'shamed o' yourself."

"Wa'al," said David with an air of meekness,

"if I've done anythin' I'm sorry for, I'm willin' to be forgi'n. Now, s'posin'——"

"I've heard enough 'bout s'posin' fer one day," said Mrs. Bixbee decisively, "unless it's s'posin' you finish your dinner so'st Sairy c'n git through her work sometime."