

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER dinner John went to his room and David and his sister seated themselves on the "verandy." Mr. Harum lighted a cigar and enjoyed his tobacco for a time in silence, while Mrs. Bixbee perused, with rather perfunctory diligence, the columns of her weekly church paper.

"I seen a sight fer sore eyes this mornin'," quoth David presently.

"What was that?" asked Aunt Polly, looking up over her glasses.

"Claricy Verjoos fer one part on't," said David.

"The Verjooses hev come, hev they? Wa'al, that's good. I hope she'll come up an' see me."

David nodded. "An' the other part on't was," he said, "she an' that young feller of our'n was walkin' together, an' a putty slick pair they made too."

"Ain't she purty?" said Mrs. Bixbee.

"They don't make 'em no puttier," affirmed David; "an' they was a nice pair. I couldn't help thinkin'," he remarked, "what a nice hitch up they'd make."

"Guess the' ain't much chance o' that," she observed.

"No, I guess not either," said David.

"He hain't got anythin' to speak of, I s'pose,

an' though I reckon she'll hev prop'ty some day, all that set o' folks seems to marry money, an' some one's alwus dyin' an' leavin' some on 'em some more. The' ain't nothin' truer in the Bible," declared Mrs. Bixbee with conviction, "'n that sayin' thet them that has gits."

"That's seemin'ly about the way it runs in gen'ral," said David.

"It don't seem right," said Mrs. Bixbee, with her eyes on her brother's face. "Now there was all that money one o' Mis' Elbert Swayne's relations left her last year, an' Lucy Scramm, that's poorer 'n poverty's back kitchin, an' the same relation to him that Mis' Swayne was, only got a thousan' dollars, an' the Swaynes rich already. Not but what the thousan' was a godsend to the Scramms, but he might jest as well 'a' left 'em comftibly off as not, 'stid of pilin' more onto the Swaynes that didn't need it."

"Does seem kind o' tough," David observed, leaning forward to drop his cigar ash clear of the veranda floor, "but that's the way things goes, an' I've often had to notice that a man'll sometimes do the foolishist thing or the meanest thing in his hull life after he's dead."

"You never told me," said Mrs. Bixbee, after a minute or two, in which she appeared to be following up a train of reflection, "much of anythin' about John's matters. Hain't he ever told you anythin' more 'n what you've told me? or don't ye want me to know? Didn't his father leave anythin'?"

"The' was a little money," replied her brother, blowing out a cloud of smoke, "an' a lot of unlikely chances, but nothin' to live on."

"An' the' wa'n't nothin' for 't but he had to come up here?" she queried.

"He'd 'a' had to work on a salary somewhere, I reckon," was the reply. "The' was one thing," added David thoughtfully after a moment, "that'll mebbe come to somethin' some time, but it may be a good while fust, an' don't you ever let on to him nor nobody else 't I ever said anythin' about it."

"I won't open my head to a livin' soul," she declared. "What was it?"

"Wa'al, I don't know 's I ever told ye," he said, "but a good many years ago I took some little hand in the oil bus'nis, but though I didn't git in as deep as I wish now 't I had, I've alwus kept up a kind of int'rist in what goes on in that line."

"No, I guess you never told me," she said. "Where you goin'?" as he got out of his chair.

"Goin' to git my cap," he answered. "Dum the dum things! I don't believe the's a fly in Freeland County that hain't danced the wild kachuky on my head sence we set here. Be I much specked?" he asked, as he bent his bald poll for her inspection.

"Oh, go 'long!" she cried, as she gave him a laughing push.

"Mongst other things," he resumed, when he had returned to his chair and relighted his cigar, "the' was a piece of about ten or twelve hunderd acres of land down in Pennsylvania havin' some coal on it, he told me he understood, but all the timber, ten inch an' over, 'd ben sold off. He told me that his father's head clerk told him that the old gentleman had tried fer a long time to dispose of it; but it called fer too much to de-

velop it, I guess; 't any rate he couldn't, an' John's got it to pay taxes on."

"I shouldn't think it was wuth anythin' to him but jest a bill of expense," observed Mrs. Bixbee.

"Tain't now," said David, "an' mebbe won't be fer a good while; still, it's wuth somethin', an' I advised him to hold onto it on gen'ral principles. I don't know the pertic'ler prop'ty, of course," he continued, "but I do know somethin' of that section of country, fer I done a little prospectin' 'round there myself once on a time. But it wa'n't in the oil territory them days, or wa'n't known to be, anyway."

"But it's eatin' itself up with taxes, ain't it?" objected Mrs. Bixbee.

"Wa'al," he replied, "it's free an' clear, an' the taxes ain't so very much—though they do stick it to an outside owner down there—an' the p'int is here: I've alwus thought they didn't drill deep enough in that section. The' was some little traces of oil the time I told ye of, an' I've heard lately that the's some talk of a move to test the territory agin, an', if anythin' was to be found, the young feller's prop'ty might be wuth somethin', but," he added, "of course the' ain't no tellin'."