

or 'Harum & Lenox,' jest as you elect. You c'n put in what money you got an' I'll put in as much more, which 'll make cap'tal enough in gen'ral, an' any extry money that's needed—wa'al, up to a certain point, I guess I c'n manage. Now putty much all the new bus'nis has come in through you, an' practically you got the hull thing in your hands. You'll do the work about 's you're doin' now, an' you'll draw the same salary; an' after that's paid we'll go snucks on anythin' that's left—that is," added David with a chuckle, "if you feel that you c'n *stan'* it in Homeville."

"I wish you was married to one of our Homeville girls, though," declared Mr. Harum later on as they drove homeward.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SINCE the whooping-cough and measles of childhood the junior partner of Harum & Company had never to his recollection had a day's illness in his life, and he fought the attack which came upon him about the first week in December with a sort of incredulous disgust, until one morning when he did not appear at breakfast. He spent the next week in bed, and at the end of that time, while he was able to be about, it was in a languid and spiritless fashion, and he was shaken and exasperated by a persistent cough. The season was and had been unusually inclement even for that region, where the thermometer sometimes changes fifty degrees in thirty-six hours; and at the time of his release from his room there was a period of successive changes of temperature from thawing to zero and below, a characteristic of the winter climate of Homeville and its vicinity. Dr. Hayes exhibited the inevitable quinine, iron, and all the tonics in his pharmacopœia, with cough mixtures and sundry, but in vain. Aunt Polly pressed bottles of sovereign decoctions and infusions upon him—which were received with thanks and neglected with the blackest ingratitude—and exhausted not only the markets of Homeville, but her own and Sairy's culinary resources (no mean ones, by the way)

to tempt the appetite which would not respond. One week followed another without any improvement in his condition; and indeed as time went on he fell into a condition of irritable listlessness which filled his partner with concern.

"What's the matter with him, Doc?" said David to the physician. "He don't seem to take no more int'rist than a foundered hoss. Can't ye do nothin' for him?"

"Not much use dosin' him," replied the doctor. "Pull out all right, may be, come warm weather. Big strong fellow, but this cussed influenza, or grip, as they call it, sometimes hits them hardest."

"Wa'al, warm weather 's some way off," remarked Mr. Harum, "an' he coughs enough to tear his head off sometimes."

The doctor nodded. "Ought to clear out somewhere," he said. "Don't like that cough myself."

"What do you mean?" asked David.

"Ought to go 'way for a spell," said the doctor; "quit working, and get a change of climate."

"Have you told him so?" asked Mr. Harum.

"Yes," replied the doctor; "said he couldn't get away."

"H'm'm!" said David thoughtfully, pinching his lower lip between his thumb and finger.

A day or two after the foregoing interview, John came in and laid an open letter in front of David, who was at his desk, and dropped languidly into a chair without speaking. Mr. Harum read the letter, smiled a little, and turning in his chair, took off his glasses and looked

at the young man, who was staring abstractedly at the floor.

"I ben rather expectin' you'd git somethin' like this. What be you goin' to do about it?"

"I don't know," replied John. "I don't like the idea of leasing the property in any case, and certainly not on the terms they offer; but it is lying idle, and I'm paying taxes on it—"

"Wa'al, as I said, I ben expectin' fer some time they'd be after ye in some shape. You got this this mornin'?"

"Yes."

"I expect you'd sell the prop'ty if you got a good chance, wouldn't ye?"

"With the utmost pleasure," said John emphatically.

"Wa'al, I've got a notion they'll buy it of ye," said David, "if it's handled right. I wouldn't lease it if it was mine an' I wanted to sell it, an' yet, in the long run, you might git more out of it—an' then agin you mightn't," he added.

"I don't know anything about it," said John, putting his handkerchief to his mouth in a fit of coughing. David looked at him with a frown.

"I ben aware fer some time that the' was a movement on foot in your direction," he said. "You know I told ye that I'd ben int'ristid in the oil bus'nis once on a time; an' I hain't never quite lost my int'rist, though it hain't ben a very active one lately, an' some fellers down there have kep' me posted some. The' 's ben oil found near where you're located, an' the prospectin' points your way. The hull thing has ben kep' as close as possible, an' the holes has ben plugged, but the oil is there somewhere. Now it's like

this: If you lease on shares an' they strike the oil on your prop'ty, mebbe it'll bring you more money; but they might strike, an' agin they mightn't. Sometimes you git a payin' well an' a dry hole only a few hunderd feet apart. Nevertheless they want to drill your prop'ty. I know who the parties is. These fellers that wrote this letter are simply actin' for 'em."

The speaker was interrupted by another fit of coughing, which left the sufferer very red in the face, and elicited from him the word which is always greeted with laughter in a theater.

"Say," said David, after a moment, in which he looked anxiously at his companion, "I don't like that cough o' your'n."

"I don't thoroughly enjoy it myself," was the rejoinder.

"Seems to be kind o' growin' on ye, don't it?"

"I don't know," said John.

"I was talkin' with Doc Hayes about ye," said David, "an' he allowed you'd ought to have your shoes off an' run loose a spell."

John smiled a little, but did not reply.

"Spoke to you about it, didn't he?" continued David.

"Yes."

"An' you told him you couldn't git away?"

"Yes."

"Didn't tell him you wouldn't go if you could, did ye?"

"I only told him I couldn't go," said John.

David sat for a moment thoughtfully tapping the desk with his eyeglasses, and then said with his characteristic chuckle:

"I had a letter f'm Chet Timson yestidy."

John looked up at him, failing to see the connection.

"Yes," said David, "he's out fer a job, an' the way he writes I guess the dander's putty well out of him. I reckon the' hain't ben nothin' much but hay in *his* manger fer quite a spell," remarked Mr. Harum.

"H'm!" said John, raising his brows, conscious of a humane but very faint interest in Mr. Timson's affairs. Mr. Harum got out a cigar, and, lighting it, gave a puff or two, and continued with what struck the younger man as a perfectly irrelevant question. It really seemed to him as if his senior were making conversation.

"How's Peleg doin' these days?" was the query.

"Very well," was the reply.

"C'n do most anythin' 't's nec'sary, can't he?"

A brief interruption followed upon the entrance of a man, who, after saying good-morning, laid a note on David's desk, asking for the money on it. Mr. Harum handed it back, indicating John with a motion of his thumb.

The latter took it, looked at the face and back, marked his initials on it with a pencil, and the man went out to the counter.

"If you was fixed so 't you could git away fer a spell," said David a moment or two after the customer's departure, "where would you like to go?"

"I have not thought about it," said John rather listlessly.

"Wa'al, s'pose you think about it a little

now, if you hain't got no pressin' engagement. Bus'nis don't seem to be very rushin' this mornin'."

"Why?" said John.

"Because," said David impressively, "you're goin' somewhere right off, quick 's you c'n git ready, an' you may 's well be makin' up your mind where."

John looked up in surprise. "I don't want to go away," he said, "and if I did, how could I leave the office?"

"No," responded Mr. Harum, "you don't want to make a move of any kind that you don't actually have to, an' that's the reason fer makin' one. F'm what the doc said, an' f'm what I c'n see, you got to git out o' this dum'd climate," waving his hand toward the window, against which the sleet was beating, "fer a spell; an' as fur 's the office goes, Chet Timson 'd be tickled to death to come on an' help out while you're away, an' I guess 'mongst us we c'n mosey along some gait. I ain't *quite* to the bone-yard yet myself," he added with a grin.

The younger man sat for a moment or two with brows contracted, and pulling thoughtfully at his moustache.

"There is that matter," he said, pointing to the letter on the desk.

"Wa'al," said David, "the' ain't no tearin' hurry 'bout that; an' anyway, I was goin' to make you a suggestion to put the matter into my hands to some extent."

"Will you take it?" said John quickly. "That is exactly what I should wish in any case."

"If you want I should," replied Mr. Harum. "Would you want to give full power attorney,

or jest have me say 't I was instructed to act for ye?"

"I think a better way would be to put the property in your name altogether," said John. "Don't you think so?"

"Wa'al," said David, thoughtfully, after a moment, "I hadn't thought of that, but mebbe I *could* handle the matter better if you was to do that. I know the parties, an' if the' was any bluffin' to be done either side, mebbe it would be better if they thought I was playin' my own hand."

At that point Peleg appeared and asked Mr. Lenox a question which took the latter to the teller's counter. David sat for some time drumming on his desk with the fingers of both hands. A succession of violent coughs came from the front room. His mouth and brows contracted in a wince, and rising, he put on his coat and hat and went slowly out of the bank.