

INTRODUCTION.

The's as much human nature in some folks as th' is in others, if not more.—David Harum.

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of our contemporary native fiction is an increasing tendency to subordinate plot or story to the bold and realistic portrayal of some of the types of American life and manners. And the reason for this is not far to seek. The extraordinary mixing of races which has been going on here for more than a century has produced an enormously diversified human result; and the products of this "hybridization" have been still further differentiated by an environment that ranges from the Everglades of Florida to the glaciers of Alaska. The existence of these conditions, and the great literary opportunities which they contain, American writers long ago perceived; and, with a generally true appreciation of artistic values, they have created from them a gallery of brilliant *genre* pictures which to-day stand for the highest we have yet attained in the art of fiction.

Thus it is that we have (to mention but a few) studies of Louisiana and her people by Mr. Cable; of Virginia and Georgia by Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris; of New England by Miss Jewett and Miss Wilkins; of the Middle West by Miss French (Octave Thanet); of the great Northwest by Hamlin Garland; of Canada and the land of the *habitans* by Gilbert Parker; and finally, though really first in point of time, the Forty-niners and their successors by Bret Harte. This list might be indefinitely extended, for it is growing daily, but it is long enough as it stands to show that every section of our country has, or soon will have, its own painter and historian, whose works will live and become a permanent part of our literature in just the degree that they are artistically true. Some of these writers have already produced many books, while others have gained general recognition and even fame by the vividness and power of a single study, like Mr. Howe with *The Story of a Country Town*. But each one, it will be noticed, has chosen for his field of work that part of our country wherein he passed the early and

formative years of his life; a natural selection that is, perhaps, an unconscious affirmation of David Harum's aphorism: "Ev'ry hoss c'n do a thing better 'n' spryer if he's ben broke to it as a colt."

In the case of the present volume the conditions are identical with those just mentioned. Most of the scenes are laid in central New York, where the author, Edward Noyes Westcott, was born, September 24, 1847, and where he died of consumption, March 31, 1898. Nearly all his life was passed in his native city of Syracuse, and although banking and not authorship was the occupation of his active years, yet his sensitive and impressionable temperament had become so saturated with the local atmosphere, and his retentive memory so charged with facts, that when at length he took up the pen he was able to create in David Harum a character so original, so true, and so strong, yet withal so delightfully quaint and humorous, that we are at once compelled to admit that here is a new and permanent addition to the long list of American literary portraits.

The book is a novel, and throughout it runs a love story which is characterized by sympathetic treatment and a constantly increasing interest; but the title rôle is taken by the old country banker, David Harum: dry, quaint, somewhat illiterate, no doubt, but possessing an amazing amount of knowledge not found in printed books, and holding fast to the cheerful belief that there is nothing wholly bad or useless in this world. Or, in his own words: "A reasonable amount of fleas is good for a dog—they keep him f'm broodin' on bein' a dog." This horse-trading country banker and reputed Shylock, but real philanthropist, is an accurate portrayal of a type that exists in the rural districts of central New York to-day. Variations of him may be seen daily, driving about in their road wagons or seated in their "bank parlors," shrewd, sharp-tongued, honest as the sunlight from most points of view, but in a horse trade much inclined to follow the rule laid down by Mr. Harum himself for such transactions: "Do unto the other feller the way he'd like to do unto you—an' do it fust."

The genial humor and sunny atmosphere which pervade these pages are in dramatic contrast with the circumstances under which they were written. The book was finished while the author lay upon his deathbed, but, happily for the reader, no trace of his sufferings

appears here. It was not granted that he should live to see his work in its present completed form, a consummation he most earnestly desired; but it seems not unreasonable to hope that the result of his labors will be appreciated, and that David Harum will endure.

Forbes Heermans.

Syracuse, N.Y., *August 20, 1898.*[Pg 1]

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EPILOGUE.

DAVID HARUM.

CHAPTER I.

David poured half of his second cup of tea into his saucer to lower its temperature to the drinking point, and helped himself to a second cut of ham and a third egg. Whatever was on his mind to have kept him unusually silent during the evening meal, and to cause certain wrinkles in his forehead suggestive of perplexity or misgiving, had not impaired his appetite. David was what he called "a good feeder."

Mrs. Bixbee, known to most of those who enjoyed the privilege of her acquaintance as "Aunt Polly," though nieces and nephews of her blood there were none in Homeville, Freeland County, looked curiously at her brother, as, in fact, she had done at intervals during the repast; and concluding at last that further forbearance was uncalled for, relieved the pressure of her curiosity thus:

"Guess ye got somethin' on your mind, hain't ye? You hain't hardly said aye, yes, ner no sence you set down. Anythin' gone 'skew?"

David lifted his saucer, gave the contents a precautionary blow, and emptied it with sundry windy suspirations.[Pg 2]

"No," he said, "nothin' hain't gone exac'ly wrong, 's ye might say — not yet; but I done that thing I was tellin' ye of to-day."

"Done what thing?" she asked perplexedly.

"I telegraphed to New York," he replied, "fer that young feller to come on — the young man General Wolsey wrote me about. I got a letter from him to-day, an' I made up my mind 'the sooner the quicker,' an' I telegraphed him to come 's soon 's he could."

"I forgit what you said his name was," said Aunt Polly.

"There's his letter," said David, handing it across the table. "Read it out 'loud."

"You read it," she said, passing it back after a search in her pocket; "I must 'a' left my specs in the settin'-room."

The letter was as follows:

"Dear Sir: I take the liberty of addressing you at the instance of General Wolsey, who spoke to me of the matter of your communication to him, and was kind enough to say that he would write you in my behalf. My acquaintance with him has been in the nature of a social rather than a business one, and I fancy that he can only recommend me on general grounds. I will say, therefore, that I have had some experience with accounts, but not much practice in them for nearly three years. Nevertheless, unless the work you wish done is of an intricate nature, I think I shall be able to accomplish it with such posting at the outset as most strangers would require. General Wolsey told me that you wanted some one as soon as possible. I have nothing to prevent me from starting at once if you desire to [Pg 3] have me. A telegram addressed to me at the office of the Trust Company will reach me promptly.

"Yours very truly,

"John K. Lenox."

"Wa'al," said David, looking over his glasses at his sister, "what do you think on't?"

"The' ain't much brag in't," she replied thoughtfully.

"No," said David, putting his eyeglasses back in their case, "th' ain't no brag ner no promises; he don't even say he'll do his best, like most fellers would. He seems to have took it fer granted that I'll take it fer granted, an' that's what I like about it. Wa'al," he added, "the thing's done, an' I'll be lookin' fer him to-morrow mornin' or evenin' at latest."

Mrs. Bixbee sat for a moment with her large, light blue, and rather prominent eyes fixed on her brother's face, and then she said, with a slight undertone of anxiety, "Was you cal'latin' to have that young man from New York come here?"

"I hadn't no such idee," he replied, with a slight smile, aware of what was passing in her mind. "What put that in your head?"

"Wa'al," she answered, "you know the' ain't scarcely anybody in the village that takes boarders in the winter, an' I was wonderin' what he would do."

"I s'pose he'll go to the Eagle," said David. "I dunno where else, 'nless it's to the Lake House."

"The Eagil!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "Land sakes! Comin' here from New York! He won't stan' it there a week."

"Wa'al," replied David, "mebbe he will an'[Pg 4] mebbe he won't, but I don't see what else the' is for it, an' I guess 'twon't kill him for a spell. The fact is—" he was proceeding when Mrs. Bixbee interrupted him.

"I guess we'd better adjourn t' the settin'-room an' let Sairy clear off the tea-things," she said, rising and going into the kitchen.

"What was you sayin'?" she asked, as she presently found her brother in the apartment designated, and seated herself with her mending-basket in her lap.

"The fact is, I was sayin'," he resumed, sitting with hand and forearm resting on a round table, in the centre of which was a large kerosene lamp, "that my notion was, fust off, to have him come here, but when I come to think on't I changed my mind. In the fust place, except that he's well recommended, I don't know nothin' about him; an' in the second, you'n I are pretty well set in our ways, an' git along all right just as we be. I may want the young feller to stay, an' then agin I may not—we'll see. It's a good sight easier to git a fishhook in 'n 'tis to git it out. I expect he'll find it putty tough at first, but if he's a feller that c'n be drove out of bus'nis by a spell of the Eagle Tavern, he ain't the feller I'm lookin' fer—though I will allow," he added with a grimace, "that it'll be a putty hard test. But if I want to say to him, after tryin' him a spell, that I guess me an' him don't seem likely to hitch, we'll both take it easier if we ain't livin' in the same house. I guess I'll take a look at the Trybune," said David, unfolding that paper.

Mrs. Bixbee went on with her needlework, with an occasional side glance at her brother, who was immersed in the gospel of his politics.[Pg 5] Twice or thrice she opened her lips as if to address him, but apparently some restraining thought interposed. Finally, the impulse to utter her mind culminated. "Dave," she said, "d' you know what Deakin Perkins is sayin' about ye?"

David opened his paper so as to hide his face, and the corners of his mouth twitched as he asked in return, "Wa'al, what's the deakin sayin' now?"

"He's sayin'," she replied, in a voice mixed of indignation and apprehension, "thet you sold him a balky horse, an' he's goin' to hev the law on ye." David's shoulders shook behind the sheltering page, and his mouth expanded in a grin.

"Wa'al," he replied after a moment, lowering the paper and looking gravely at his companion over his glasses, "next to the deakin's religious experience, them of lawin' an' horse-tradin' air his strong-est p'int, an' he works the hull on 'em to once sometimes."

The evasiveness of this generality was not lost on Mrs. Bixbee, and she pressed the point with, "Did ye? an' will he?"

"Yes, an' no, an' mebbe, an' mebbe not," was the categorical reply.

"Wa'al," she answered with a snap, "mebbe you call that an answer. I s'pose if you don't want to let on you won't, but I do believe you've ben playin' some trick on the deakin, an' won't own up. I do wish," she added, "that if you hed to git rid of a balky horse onto somebody you'd hev picked out somebody else."

"When you got a balker to dispose of," said David gravely, "you can't alwus pick an' choose. Fust come, fust served." Then he went on more seriously: "Now I'll tell ye. Quite a while ago[Pg 6]—in fact, not long after I come to enjoy the priv'lidge of the deakin's acquaintance—we hed a deal. I wasn't jest on my guard, knowin' him to be a deakin an' all that, an' he lied to me so splendid that I was took in, clean over my head, he done me so brown I was burnt in places, an' you c'd smell smoke 'round me fer some time."

"Was it a horse?" asked Mrs. Bixbee gratuitously.

"Wa'al," David replied, "mebbe it *had* ben some time, but at that partic'lar time the only thing to determine that fact was that it wa'n't nothin' else."

"Wa'al, I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Bixbee, wondering not more at the deacon's turpitude than at the lapse in David's acuteness, of which she had an immense opinion, but commenting only on the former. "I'm 'mazed at the deakin."

"Yes'm," said David with a grin, "I'm quite a liar myself when it comes right down to the hoss bus'nis, but the deakin c'n give me both bowers ev'ry hand. He done it so slick that I had to laugh when I come to think it over—an' I had witnesses to the hull confab, too, that he didn't know of, an' I c'd 've showed him up in great shape if I'd had a mind to."

"Why didn't ye?" said Aunt Polly, whose feelings about the deacon were undergoing a revulsion.

"Wa'al, to tell ye the truth, I was so completely skunked that I hadn't a word to say. I got rid o' the thing fer what it was wuth fer hide an' taller, an' stid of squealin' 'round the way you say he's doin', like a stuck pig, I kep' my tongue between my teeth an' laid to git even some time." [Pg 7]

"You ort to 've hed the law on him," declared Mrs. Bixbee, now fully converted. "The old scamp!"

"Wa'al," was the reply, "I gen'all prefer to settle out of court, an' in this partic'lar case, while I might 'a' ben willin' t' admit that I hed ben did up, I didn't feel much like swearin' to it. I reckoned the time 'd come when mebbe I'd git the laugh on the deakin, an' it did, an' we're putty well settled now in full."

"You mean this last pufformance?" asked Mrs. Bixbee. "I wish you'd quit beatin' about the bush, an' tell me the hull story."

"Wa'al, it's like this, then, if you *will* hev it. I was over to Whiteboro a while ago on a little matter of worldly bus'nis, an' I seen a couple of fellers halter-exercisin' a hoss in the tavern yard. I stood 'round a spell watchin' 'em, an' when he come to a standstill I went an' looked him over, an' I liked his looks fust rate.

"'Fer sale?' I says.

"'Wa'al,' says the chap that was leadin' him, 'I never see the hoss that wa'n't if the price was right.'

"'Your'n?' I says.

"'Mine an' his'n,' he says, noddin' his head at the other feller.

"'What ye askin' fer him?' I says.

"'One-fifty,' he says.

"I looked him all over agin putty careful, an' once or twice I kind o' shook my head 's if I didn't quite like what I seen, an' when I got through I sort o' half turned away without sayin' anythin', 's if I'd seen enough.

"The' ain't a scratch ner a pimple on him,' says the feller, kind o' resentin' my looks. 'He's[Pg 8] sound an' kind, an' 'll stand without hitchin', an' a lady c'n drive him 's well 's a man.'

"I ain't got anythin' agin him,' I says, 'an' prob'ly that's all true, ev'ry word on't; but one-fifty's a consid'able price fer a hoss these days. I hain't no pressin' use fer another hoss, an', in fact,' I says, 'I've got one or two fer sale myself.'

"He's wuth two hunderd jest as he stands,' the feller says. 'He hain't had no trainin', an' he c'n draw two men in a road-wagin better'n fifty.'

"Wa'al, the more I looked at him the better I liked him, but I only says, 'Jes' so, jes' so, he may be wuth the money, but jest as I'm fixed now he ain't wuth it to *me*, an' I hain't got that much money with me if he was,' I says. The other feller hadn't said nothin' up to that time, an' he broke in now. 'I s'pose you'd take him fer a gift, wouldn't ye?' he says, kind o' sneerin'.

"Wa'al, yes,' I says, 'I dunno but I would if you'd throw in a pound of tea an' a halter.'

"He kind o' laughed an' says, 'Wa'al, this ain't no gift enterprise, an' I guess we ain't goin' to trade, but I'd like to know,' he says, 'jest as a matter of curios'ty, what you'd say he *was* wuth to ye?'

"Wa'al,' I says, 'I come over this mornin' to see a feller that owed me a trifle o' money. Exceptin' of some loose change, what he paid me 's all I got with me,' I says, takin' out my wallet. 'That wad's got a hunderd an' twenty-five into it, an' if you'd sooner have your hoss an' halter than the wad,' I says, 'why, I'll bid ye good-day.'

"You're offerin' one-twenty-five fer the hoss an' halter?' he says.

"That's what I'm doin',' I says.[Pg 9]

"You've made a trade,' he says, puttin' out his hand fer the money an' handin' the halter over to me."

"An' didn't ye suspicion nuthin' when he took ye up like that?" asked Mrs. Bixbee.

"I did smell woolen some," said David, "but I had the *hoss* an' they had the *money*, an', as fur 's I c'd see, the critter was all right. Howsomever, I says to 'em: 'This here's all right, fur 's it's gone, but you've talked putty strong 'bout this *hoss*. I don't know who you fellers be, but I c'n find out,' I says. Then the fust feller that done the talkin' 'bout the *hoss* put in an' says, 'The' hain't ben one word said to you about this *hoss* that wa'n't gospel truth, not one word.' An' when I come to think on't afterward," said David with a half laugh, "it mebbe wa'n't *gospel* truth, but it was good enough *jury* truth. I guess this ain't over 'n' above interestin' to ye, is it?" he asked after a pause, looking doubtfully at his sister.

"Yes, 'tis," she asserted. "I'm lookin' forrered to where the deakin comes in, but you jest tell it your own way."

"I'll git there all in good time," said David, "but some of the point of the story'll be lost if I don't tell ye what come fust."

"I allow to stan' it 's long 's you can," she said encouragingly, "seein' what work I had gettin' ye started. Did ye find out anythin' 'bout them fellers?"

"I ast the barn man if he knowed who they was, an' he said he never seen 'em till the yestiddy before, an' didn't know 'em f'm Adam. They come along with a couple of hosses, one drivin' an' t'other leadin'—the one I bought. I ast him if[Pg 10] they knowed who I was, an' he said one on 'em ast him, an' he told him. The feller said to him, seein' me drive up: 'That's a putty likely-lookin' *hoss*. Who's drivin' him?' An' he says to the feller: 'That's Dave Harum, f'm over to Homeville. He's a great feller fer hosses,' he says."

"Dave," said Mrs. Bixbee, "them chaps jest laid fer ye, didn't they?"

"I reckon they did," he admitted; "an' they was as slick a pair as was ever drawed to," which expression was lost upon his sister. David rubbed the fringe of yellowish-gray hair which encircled his bald pate for a moment.

"Wa'al," he resumed, "after the talk with the barn man, I smelt woolen stronger'n ever, but I didn't say nothin', an' had the mare hitched an' started back. Old Jinny drives with one hand, an' I c'd watch the new one all right, an' as we come along I begun to think I wa'n't stuck after all. I never see a hoss travel evener an' nicer, an' when we come to a good level place I sent the old mare along the best she knew, an' the new one never broke his gait, an' kep' right up 'ithout 'par'ntly half tryin'; an' Jinny don't take most folks' dust neither. I swan! 'fore I got home I reckoned I'd jest as good as made seventy-five anyway." [Pg 11]

CHAPTER II.

"Then the' wa'n't nothin' the matter with him, after all," commented Mrs. Bixbee in rather a disappointed tone.

"The meanest thing top of the earth was the matter with him," declared David, "but I didn't find it out till the next afternoon, an' then I found it out good. I hitched him to the open buggy an' went 'round by the East road, 'cause that ain't so much travelled. He went along all right till we got a mile or so out of the village, an' then I slowed him down to a walk. Wa'al, sir, scat my — —! He hadn't walked more'n a rod 'fore he come to a dead stan'still. I clucked an' git-app'd, an' finely took the gad to him a little; but he only jest kind o' humped up a little, an' stood like he'd took root."

"Wa'al, now!" exclaimed Mrs. Bixbee.

"Yes'm," said David; "I was stuck in ev'ry sense of the word."

"What d'ye do?"

"Wa'al, I tried all the tricks I knowed — an' I could lead him — but when I was in the buggy he wouldn't stir till he got good an' ready; 'n' then he'd start of his own accord an' go on a spell, an' —"

"Did he keep it up?" Mrs. Bixbee interrupted. [Pg 12]

"Wa'al, I s'd say he did. I finely got home with the critter, but I thought one time I'd either hev to lead him or spend the night on the East road. He balked five sep'rate times, varyin' in length, an' it was dark when we struck the barn."