

Hawkes' face brightened, as with heads close together they considered the proposition.

"It's very bold on my part," he said, still undecided.

"There, my dear fellow! I never thought you would acknowledge my generalship."

"I'm but a private, you know. I have to make the charge in this case," returned Hawkes, smiling at his friend's bantering. "We will start on this scheme, and if my courage holds out—"

"Courage! Why, man, she's a very little child!"

"Yes, I know! But I could better stand a repulse from some one older and bigger!"

At the very time Fred's plan was under consideration, our friends, Bob and Bill, teamsters, were drawing out of Market square for the homeward trip. The afternoon being cool, their teams struck a steady trot, and in due course of time they drew up at the Pike house in Linn.

"I shan't hurry down," said Bob, coming to Bill's wagon. "I'll make a call."

"I'll wait for ye," said Bill. "I ain't in any rush. Why don't ye marry the gal?" impatiently. "Ye've ben buzzin' round her long 'nough!"

"Tain't my fault," laughed the bearded giant, as he moved away.

As Bill lounged about the reading room of the Pike house, smoking his pipe, he was accosted by a gentleman who looked at him through gold-bowed spectacles. Bill had surmised that hay was the topic to be discussed, when he was surprised by the stranger saying—

"I beg your pardon. Can you tell me if Mr. Robert Barr is about?"

"He ain't exactly about, but he could be," hesitating. "Howsumever, I'm his partner, 'n' if there's anythin' I kin do fur ye—if there ain't, I'll git Bob."

"I have a friend who would like to go to Rialwich. My name is Kipp. I am well acquainted with Robert."

"Yes, I know it. I'm glad ter meet ye, Mr. Kipp. I've heard Bob speak o' ye. I'll carry yer friend down 'n' welcome. Glad ter serve ye."

"And will you kindly ask Robert from me, if he will look up some good place where my friend can stop while in Rialwich. I am sorry to trouble you, but I am to take a train for Essex in a few minutes."

"No bother at all. I'll ask Bob, 'n' I'll look him up a place myself. Is your friend 'round here?"

"In this way, please."

Bill followed, muttering to himself, "Dam! but he's a perllite one!"

In the ladies' parlor Kipp stopped.

"This is Mr. Hawkes—I beg pardon, I haven't your name."

"My name's Munsey—Bill." The teamster held his hat in his hand, and he wore his most inviting smile.

"I've seen Mr. Hawkes afore," he said. "I left him a load o' hay not long back."

"Why, yes," said Hawkes, "I remember. So you are going to give me a lift?"

"I'm glad ter be able ter," said Bill. "Are ye a goin' down ter try yer luck?"

"That's about it," returned Hawkes, with a lugubrious smile.

"We'll be right off, if yer ready," said Bill. He was determined Bob should have no part in this honor. "Ye can look over my place, 'n' if ye can't find no better, ye're welcome ter put up there while yer down. My wagon ain't no Goddard buggy, but sich 's 'tis ye're welcome."

"Thank you," replied Hawkes. "If I am not in the way I may accept your offer. It will be pleasant to stop with an acquaintance."

Acquaintance! Bill, as he waited beside his team for his distinguished passenger, and perhaps guest, was the proudest teamster that drove over the pike.

"Are ye thinkin' o' stoppin' in Rialwich long?" he queried, as they were rumbling over the road.

"Depends on circumstances," Hawkes answered, "or on luck, as you called it."

"I'd take it kind if ye'd make my place yer home. Tain't no fancy place, but it's comfortable."

"Perhaps I might inconvenience your family," suggested Hawkes.

"I'm all the family there is. I've got a greenhorn gal that washes 'n' cooks 'n' looks 'bout. She ain't no great, but Marie spruces her up most every day."

"Marie's your daughter?" Hawkes was lighting a cigar.

"No; she's a little girl as lives at my partner Bob's house. We own her thirds sort of, Bob 'n' me 'n' Bob's mother. We're prouder o' her 'an we are o' our horses."

"She must be rather exceptional. Certainly your horses are."

"You're a judge o' the last part," Bill said, slapping his knee. "I went over your stables the day I left the hay."

"Won't you smoke with me?" asked Hawkes, who was a little disappointed at the turn the conversation was taking. "I never enjoy my smoke alone."

Bill took the proffered cigar.

"Yes," as the smoke rolled out of his mouth, "I ain't seen no one ter come up ter our Marie."

A few adroit questions drew out Marie's story. The rough, but kind hearted, teamster noted the attention of his listener and spared no detail of her sufferings.

"But she's all right now!" he exclaimed, in conclusion. "When we turn yonder curve we'll come in sight o' the river, 'n' p'raps she'll be out in her boat."

Lord! She handles a boat as neat as a coaster, 'n' she likes it. It's made her strong, pretty's a picter, 'n' happy's a lark. There! That's her! See! half way 'tween here 'n' the island! But p'raps ye can't find her. I'm used ter lookin' fer her, yer know."

Hawkes saw the boat, then began to see his own position in a very uncomfortable light. He commenced plying his companion with questions as to the likelihood of finding lodging farther into the town.

"Don't think o' it!" urged Bill, who, during the pause in the conversation, had been planning how he would exhibit his guest in Bob's parlor that very evening. "It'll par'lyze 'em when they know who 'tis," he had just said to himself.

The little boat had turned in the direction they were taking. Bill stood and waived his hand. In reply a handkerchief fluttered in the breeze, then the boat darted forward.

"Ye'll promise ter stop at my place?" insisted Bill.