

sooner was it out of sight, than Lem was under the toll-gate house, searching for the file of which his respected partner had spoken. He heard a rustling in the underbrush, and started out guiltily, but it was only Mr. Binkle, who said :

"Meet us here, Lem, say, on the morning after day after to-morrow—we may catch our man, and then you'd be useful. Get plenty of sleep between now an' then if you can—it may come in handy."

Mr. Binkle rode away, and Lem plunged into the bushes beside the road to Friendlytown, where Hixton was confined.

CHAPTER XIX.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

On a cool Autumn evening, Mr. William Hixton lay on the uninviting bed of the only cell in Friendlytown jail, and indulged in bitter reflections. He should have been asleep; other people slept. There was not even a streak of light visible under the door of any liquor-shop in town. A volunteer orchestra of owls and other night-birds, assisted by a chorus of frogs, dogs and mosquitos, was emitting chords discordant enough to drive one to sleep in pure self-defence. But Mr. Hixton failed to sleep, from any cause whatever. He soliloquised and he swore; the latter operation is unworthy of repetition, but the results of the former conveyed a certain amount of information which the reader may possibly find available.

"Court'll sit—let's see—day after to-morrow, as sure as I'm alive, and there ain't a lawyer on the circuit that's smart enough to get me off, even if the Regulators don't snatch me out and string me up to a tree before that. If Binkle's little game works, all right; it it should hang fire, I'd be worse off than I am now. Darn it, it *would* be tough to string me up, if I *am* a—dealer in hoss-flesh. Queer how things go in this world; I've never done anything but make off with a few horses, and yet I'm in jail, while there's Binkle, that's made a hundred times as much money in a way that ain't any better, has never been caught at it yet. There's something wrong in the way this world is managed. Hello! what's that?"

Mr. Hixton's soliloquy had been interrupted by a sharp, low whistle. The prisoner put under the cell window a stool, upon which he sprang, and stood on tip-toe.

"I don't know that whistle," said he, after scanning the jail-yard intently for some minutes. "Confound it, the world's so dishonest that nobody knows who to trust. Mebbe Binkle's sent some green man

—mebbe, again, it's some of them infernal Regulators. If they come, I wonder how many there'll be of 'em? Them two revolvers that Binkle left me would clean out a common crowd—I can't believe anybody else in this God-forsaken country has got a revolver, or knows what one is. And my knife—oh, I guess I could get out, but then there'd be the job of hidin'. Dog-gone it, why *can't* they let business-men alone?"

Again the horse-thief heard the whistle, and at the same moment there was a shadow at his cell window, and something fell with a sharp metallic ring upon the floor.

"A file, bless the Lord!" exclaimed the thief, groping on the floor with his hands. Suddenly a slight rustling and another metallic jingle was heard, and the file was snatched up to and out of the grating again. The horse-thief let slip a violent exclamation, and sprang upon his stool beneath the grating. At the same time another face appeared outside the grating. The two shadows confronted each other, and indulged in the following dialogue :

"You know what that was? 'Twas a file—yon could cut your way out with that in an hour or two."

"I know it. Why the —— didn't you leave it there after you got it in?"

"'Cos I want to talk to you fust. If I help you get out what are you goin' to do?"

"Goin' to do?—I'm goin' to get out of this neighbourhood as soon as I can, and *stay* out of it."

"What are you goin' to do for a livin'?" That's what I mean.

"Do what I always done, I s'pose."

"You musn't—it ain't right. There's folks—smart folks, that ought to know—that say you're good for something better."

"I wish they'd give me a chance at it, then."

"Will you use it if you get it?"

"Yes, I will."

"What'll you do?"

"Go to Texas and raise stock."

"Have you got any family?"

"Yes—I've got a—curse you, I believe you're an officer."

"No I ain't."

"You're tryin' the friendly dodge to get information out of me to use against me. You needn't come any of your infernal high moral tricks on me—I'm up to trap."

"You needn't be afraid of me. I'll stick tighter to you than any friend you've got, if you'll only not hurt me after you get out by goin' back to—to—"

"Hoss-stealin'?"

"I s'pose that's the only name for it. Mebbe if I get you out I'll get caught, an' be sent to State's prison. An' I'm willin'. Only—have you got any family?"