

change it, and was now putting the finishing touch to his toilet. When he caught sight of the occupants of the carriage, he thought to himself, "Thar's a heap on 'em. Nancy'll have to rout the whole gang of niggers, field hands and all, to huntin' hin's nests after eggs enough for dinner."

By this time the gentlemen had alighted, and Mr. Middleton went forward to receive them. "How d'ye do, how d'ye do?" said he, "I'm mighty glad you've come. I wish you'd brought the whole city."

"We came pretty near it, I think," said Mr. Miller, at the same time presenting Mr. Stafford and Mr. Cameron.

Mr. Middleton continued talking as if replying to Mr. Miller's first remark. "No consequence, no consequence, Mr. Stafford, Mr. Cameron, how are you? The more the merrier. I s'pose they've any,—but come in,—the house looks better inside than it does out." "Ho, Luce," continued he, "where the old boy is your mistress? Tell her thar's heaps of folks here, and mind tell Annt Judy to get us up a whalin' dinner."

Here he stopped to take breath a moment, and then proceeded. "You must excuse my rig, gentlemen, or rather, you must excuse what ain't rigged, mebby if I'd known all you city beggars were comin', I'd a kivered my bar feet."

"You go barefoot for comfort, I suppose," said Mr. Miller.

"Why, yes, mainly for that, I suppose," answered Mr. Middleton, "for I've got such fetched big corns on my feet, that I ain't going to be cramped with none of your toggery. My feet happen to be clean, for I washed 'em in the watering trough this mornin'. How d'ye leave my gals?"

"They are well," answered Mr. Miller, "or rather Julia is, and Fanny is improving every day."

"I've often wondered," said Mr. Middleton, "what 'twas ailed Sunshine when she was sick. She didn't seem to have no disease in particular, and I reckon nothin's on her mind, for all's straight between her and Dr. Lacey, as far as I know."

"Dr. Lacey," repeated Frank, without knowing what he said.

"Yes, Dr. Lacey; know him?" asked Mr. Middleton.

"No, sir," answered Frank, and Ashton rejoined, "S'imagin' he wishes Fanny had never known him."

Mr. Middleton turned, and for a moment regarded Frank intently. Frank stood the inspection manfully, and Mr. Middleton said, "You are from New York, hoy? I like New Yorkers, and if Sunshine wasn't done promised to Dr. Lacey and never had seen him, and I liked you, I'd as soon you'd have her as any body."

Mr. Stafford now said that he was acquainted with Dr. Lacey, and proceeded to speak of the pleasant time he had spent with him. This occupied time until the dinner was ready.

"Come, haul up," said Mr. Middleton, "haul up; we didn't expect so many to dinner, but the old table'll stretch, and you must sit clus; but don't none on you step on my corns, for thunder's sake!"

Frank thought if his host kept on talking, he

should not be able to eat for laughing, but the old man was just getting into the merits of the case!

When his guests were seated, he said to Mr. Stafford, "Your white neckcloth looks like you belong to the clergy. If you do, you can say a mighty short prar over the eggs and bacon, but Lord's sake be spry, for I'm blasted hungry!"

But for the remembrance of his promise to Fanny, Mr. Stafford would have screamed. It is needless to say that he declined his host's invitation, and the company began their dinner.

Suddenly Mr. Stafford asked if Mr. Middleton had any brothers.

"Yes,—no, or, that is, I had one once," answered Mr. Middleton, "but he's deader than a door nail afore this, I reckon."

"And what makes you think he is dead?" asked Stafford.

"When our old pap died, something in his will struck crossways in Bill's swaller, and he left college and put out to sea, and I hain't heard from him in fifteen years."

"Did he look like you?" said Raymond.

"He was four years younger than I," answered Mr. Middleton, "but no more like me than Sunshine's pet kitten is like our watch dog Tige." He was soft like in his ways, and took to book larnin' mightily, and I'm,—but every body knows what old Josh is. Hold on thar! Save the pieces!" said he to Frank, who, unable to constrain his mirth, had deluged his plate with coffee.

"Pray excuse me," said Frank, mortified beyond measure at his mishap.

His discomforture was, however, somewhat relieved by his companions, all of whom burst into a fit of laughter, in which Mr. Stafford heartily joined, forgetful of his promise to Fanny. By this time dinner was over, and the company repaired to the porch, where Ashton and Raymond betook themselves to their cigars, while Mr. Middleton puffed away at his old cob pipe.

Mr. Stafford at length resumed the dinner table conversation, by saying, "If I were you, Mr. Middleton, I would not give up my brother yet; 'Hope on, hope ever,' is my motto."

"Hope on," repeated Mr. Middleton. "I have hoped on till I'm tired on't, and yet by spells, I have dreams in which it seems like my brother was alive and had come back, and then my old guard shell of a heart gives a thunderin' thump and fetches me up wide awake. I hate dreams mightily, for it takes me an all fired while to get to sleep all over, and when I do, I hate to be waked up by a dream."

"I hope you'll live to see your brother, though," said Frank.

"No, I shan't," answered Mr. Middleton, again filling his cob pipe. "Every thing that I loved has always died."

"Have you lost many friends?" asked Mr. Stafford.

"Considerable many," said Mr. Middleton. "considerin' how few I ever had. First, thar was mother died, when Bill and I was little boys; I remember how he cried when we stood by her grave, and I was so feared Bill would bust his jacket open, that I whispered to him not to take on so, for I'd be his mother now. And then that night, which was the longest and darkest I ever