

The speakers were Messrs. Binkle and Lodge, the latter acting as interrogator. As Mr. Binkle made the final reply recorded above, he drew from his pocket a roll of bank-notes, which Bill Hixton had paid him in advance for the still-to-be-performed service of securing his escape from jail. Mr. Lodge examined the notes closely, and finally remarked:

"They all seem to be good."

"Of course they're good," replied Mr. Binkle, "you never heard of Bill Hixton playin' a trick in a business transaction, did you?"

Mr. Lodge did not deign to reply, but said, instead:

"Let's put the boy up to it, right away."

"Just the way we agreed on?" asked Binkle.

"I s'pose there's nothin' better," said the non-committal Lodge.

"Here he comes now," said Binkle, "not too quick, now."

Lem appeared from the direction of the town where he had been to forward to his mother his latest accumulations. As was his custom, he seated himself at some distance from his employers, to give them an opportunity to discuss their (supposed) professional duties.

"Come along, Lem—no secrets here to-night," shouted Mr. Binkle. Lem accepted the invitation, and stretched himself upon the ground near the bed of hot coals which the financial operators had cherished. Mr. Binkle was staring into the fire with a most virtuous expression of countenance, while his partner was nursing the bandaged ankle. Both counterfeiters were silent for some moments; then Mr. Binkle groaned, and remarked:

"It's an infernal shame."

"That's so," responded his partner.

"Bill Hixton would make a splendid man; he's got in him the stuff for a lawyer, or even a preacher, if he would just stick to decent ways, and stop making trouble for us—officers of the law."

"What's he up to?" asked Lem, recognizing the name, and showing himself full of interest at once.

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Binkle. "But I dropped into — county jail to-day, to see if anybody else had caught the man we're lookin' for, an' there was Bill. It made me feel bad."

"What d'ye s'pose he'd go at if he got out?" asked Mr. Lodge.

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Binkle, whipping his own pantaloons as he meditated. "I argued with him that he was making a fool of himself, stealin' hosses for a livin', when he was so fit to adorn society,

and he owned up he was ashamed of himself."

"He's a good man," exclaimed Lem. "He done more for me than anybody else ever did, and he never saw me before, either."

"Well," said Mr. Binkle, with a resigned sigh, "if there's any good in him, he'll get a chance to show it out pretty soon—that's my opinion. His cell window is broader and deeper than he is, and it'll be the easiest thing in the world for somebody to pass him in a good flat file, like that one I took from a horse-thief and dropped under the toll-house the other day. If somebody was to give him such a file, and stand outside to help him when he tried to wriggle out, I believe Bill would be where nobody would find him in less than six hours."

"Like enough then he'd go right back to his old ways," said the desponding Mr. Lodge.

"Depends on who lets him out," said Mr. Binkle.

"If it should be one of his old gang, he'd off an' steal a hoss within two hours; if it was a man that really cared for him, an' would give him a little moral lecture, he'd like as not break for some new country an' join the church."

"Well!" groaned Mr. Lodge, again squeezing his bandaged ankle, "I guess there ain't any chance for him. It's too bad, but he ain't the kind of feller that decent men takes a risk on, an' 'tain't the thing for officers of the law to think about as happenin' any way."

"I don't know 'bout that," said Mr. Binkle. "It's so easily done that it's our business as officers to think it over and scare up some new way of makin' prisoners more secure in jail. Suppose, now, that Bill had a friend at Mount Zion, or any other place as near to the jail that he's in. It's about eleven miles; they could go quietly along in the timber by daylight, hang around in the edge of the town till midnight, get Tom out in two hours, hours, and be back home an' in bed 'fore daylight. That ain't the way that jails ought to be—nobody watchin' the roads, or anything."

"It's too bad, anyhow," said Mr. Lodge, "but it isn't business. S'pose we go down the river road for a couple of days an' see if we can't catch our man. I'll give Lem a chance to rest, and he hasn't had one lately."

"It's a game," said Mr. Binkle. "Let's start at once."

Lem did his best to help his employers off. Two of the new horses were saddled, and the third was led. Lem assisted Mr. Lodge into the saddle, and the party started. No