

Part III

CHAPTER 36 The Sunday Cab

One morning, as Jerry had just put me into the shafts and was fastening the traces, a gentleman walked into the yard. “Your servant, sir,” said Jerry.

“Good-morning, Mr. Barker,” said the gentleman. “I should be glad to make some arrangements with you for taking Mrs. Briggs regularly to church on Sunday mornings. We go to the New Church now, and that is rather further than she can walk.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Jerry, “but I have only taken out a six-days’ license,* and therefore I could not take a fare on a Sunday; it would not be legal.”

“Oh!” said the other, “I did not know yours was a six-days’ cab; but of course it would be very easy to alter your license. I would see that you did not lose by it; the fact is, Mrs. Briggs very much prefers you to drive her.”

“I should be glad to oblige the lady, sir, but I had a seven-days’ license once, and the work was too hard

* A few years since the annual charge for a cab license was very much reduced, and the difference between the six and seven days’ cabs was abolished.

for me, and too hard for my horses. Year in and year out, not a day’s rest, and never a Sunday with my wife and children; and never able to go to a place of worship, which I had always been used to do before I took to the driving box. So for the last five years I have only taken a six-days’ license, and I find it better all the way round.”

“Well, of course,” replied Mr. Briggs, “it is very proper that every person should have rest, and be able to go to church on Sundays, but I should have thought you would not have minded such a short distance for the horse, and only once a day; you would have all the afternoon and evening for yourself, and we are very good customers, you know.”

“Yes, sir, that is true, and I am grateful for all favors, I am sure; and anything that I could do to oblige you, or the lady, I should be proud and happy to do; but I can’t give up my Sundays, sir, indeed I can’t. I read that God made man, and he made horses and all the other beasts, and as soon as He had made them He made a day of rest, and bade that all should rest one day in seven; and I think, sir, He must have known what was good for them, and I am sure it is good for me; I am stronger and healthier altogether, now that I have a day of rest; the horses are fresh too, and do not wear up nearly so fast. The six-day drivers all tell me the same, and I have laid by more money in the savings bank than ever I did before; and as for the wife and children, sir, why, heart alive! they would not go back to the seven days for all they could see.”

“Oh, very well,” said the gentleman. “Don’t trouble yourself, Mr. Barker, any further. I will inquire somewhere else,” and he walked away.

“Well,” says Jerry to me, “we can’t help it, Jack, old boy; we must have our Sundays.”

“Polly!” he shouted, “Polly! come here.”

She was there in a minute.

“What is it all about, Jerry?”

“Why, my dear, Mr. Briggs wants me to take Mrs. Briggs to church every Sunday morning. I say I have only a six-days’ license. He says, ‘Get a seven-days’ license, and I’ll make it worth your while;’ and you know, Polly, they are very good customers to us. Mrs. Briggs often goes out shopping for hours, or making calls, and then she pays down fair and honorable like a lady; there’s no beating down or making three hours into two hours and a half, as some folks do; and it is easy work for the horses; not like tearing along to catch trains for people that are always a quarter of an hour too late; and if I don’t oblige her in this matter it is very likely we shall lose them altogether. What do you say, little woman?”

“I say, Jerry,” says she, speaking very slowly, “I say, if Mrs. Briggs would give you a sovereign every Sunday morning, I would not have you a seven-days’ cabman again. We have known what it was to have no Sundays, and now we know what it is to call them our own. Thank God, you earn enough to keep us, though it is sometimes close work to pay for all the oats and hay, the license, and the rent besides; but Harry will soon be earning

something, and I would rather struggle on harder than we do than go back to those horrid times when you hardly had a minute to look at your own children, and we never could go to a place of worship together, or have a happy, quiet day. God forbid that we should ever turn back to those times; that’s what I say, Jerry.”

“And that is just what I told Mr. Briggs, my dear,” said Jerry, “and what I mean to stick to. So don’t go and fret yourself, Polly” (for she had begun to cry); “I would not go back to the old times if I earned twice as much, so that is settled, little woman. Now, cheer up, and I’ll be off to the stand.”

Three weeks had passed away after this conversation, and no order had come from Mrs. Briggs; so there was nothing but taking jobs from the stand. Jerry took it to heart a good deal, for of course the work was harder for horse and man. But Polly would always cheer him up, and say, “Never mind, father, never, mind.”

“Do your best,
And leave the rest,
‘Twill all come right
Some day or night.”

It soon became known that Jerry had lost his best customer, and for what reason. Most of the men said he was a fool, but two or three took his part.

“If workingmen don’t stick to their Sunday,” said Truman, “they’ll soon have none left; it is every man’s

right and every beast's right. By God's law we have a day of rest, and by the law of England we have a day of rest; and I say we ought to hold to the rights these laws give us and keep them for our children."

"All very well for you religious chaps to talk so," said Larry; "but I'll turn a shilling when I can. I don't believe in religion, for I don't see that your religious people are any better than the rest."

"If they are not better," put in Jerry, "it is because they are not religious. You might as well say that our country's laws are not good because some people break them. If a man gives way to his temper, and speaks evil of his neighbor, and does not pay his debts, he is not religious, I don't care how much he goes to church. If some men are shams and humbugs, that does not make religion untrue. Real religion is the best and truest thing in the world, and the only thing that can make a man really happy or make the world we live in any better."

"If religion was good for anything," said Jones, "it would prevent your religious people from making us work on Sundays, as you know many of them do, and that's why I say religion is nothing but a sham; why, if it was not for the church and chapel-goers it would be hardly worth while our coming out on a Sunday. But they have their privileges, as they call them, and I go without. I shall expect them to answer for my soul, if I can't get a chance of saving it."

Several of the men applauded this, till Jerry said:

"That may sound well enough, but it won't do; every

man must look after his own soul; you can't lay it down at another man's door like a foundling and expect him to take care of it; and don't you see, if you are always sitting on your box waiting for a fare, they will say, 'If we don't take him some one else will, and he does not look for any Sunday.' Of course, they don't go to the bottom of it, or they would see if they never came for a cab it would be no use your standing there; but people don't always like to go to the bottom of things; it may not be convenient to do it; but if you Sunday drivers would all strike for a day of rest the thing would be done."

"And what would all the good people do if they could not get to their favorite preachers?" said Larry.

"'Tis not for me to lay down plans for other people," said Jerry, "but if they can't walk so far they can go to what is nearer; and if it should rain they can put on their mackintoshes as they do on a week-day. If a thing is right it can be done, and if it is wrong it can be done without; and a good man will find a way. And that is as true for us cabmen as it is for the church-goers."