CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH JIM FENTON APPLIES FOR LODGINGS AT TOM BUFFUM'S BOARDING-HOUSE, AND FINDS HIS OLD FRIEND.

As Jim walked up to the door of the building occupied by Tom Buffum's family, he met the head of the family coming out; and as hitherto that personage has escaped description, it will be well for the reader to make his acquaintance. The first suggestion conveyed by his rotund figure was, that however scantily he furnished his boarders, he never stinted himself in the matter of food. He had the sluggish, clumsy look of a heavy eater. His face was large, his almost colorless eyes were small, and, if one might judge by the general expression of his features, his favorite viand was pork. Indeed, if the swine into which the devils once entered had left any descendants, it would be legitimate to suppose that the breed still thrived in the most respectable sty connected with his establishment. He was always hoarse, and spoke either in a whisper or a wheeze. For this or for some other reason not apparent, he was a silent man, rarely speaking except when addressed by a question, and never making conversation with anybody. From the time he first started independently in the world, he had been in some public office. Men with dirty work to do had found him wonderfully serviceable, and, by ways which it would be hard to define to the ordinary mind, he had so managed that every town and county office, in which there was any money, had been by turns in his hands.

"Well, Mr. Buffum, how fare ye?" said Jim, walking heartily up to him, and shaking his hand, his face glowing with good-nature.

Mr. Buffum's attempt to respond to this address ended in a wheeze and a cough.

"Have ye got room for another boarder to-night? Faith, I never expected to come to the poor-house, but here I am. I'll take entertainment for man or beast. Which is the best, and which do you charge the most for? Somebody's got to keep me to-night, and ye're the man to bid low."

Buffum made no reply, but stooped down, took a sliver from a log, and began to pick his teeth. Jim watched him with quiet amusement. The more Mr. Buffum thought, the more furious he grew with his toothpick.

"Pretty tough old beef, wasn't it?" said Jim, with a hearty laugh.

"You go in and see the women," said Mr. Buffum, in a wheezy whisper.

This, to Jim, was equivalent to an honorable reception. He had no doubt of his ability to make his way with "the women," who, he was fully aware, had been watching him all the time from the window.

To the women of Tom Buffum's household a visitor was a godsend. Socially, they had lived all their lives in a state of starvation. They knew all about Jim Fenton, and had exchanged many a saucy word with him, as he had passed their house on his journeys to and from Sevenoaks.

"If you can take up with what we've got," said Mrs. Buffum, suggestively.

"In course," responded Jim, "an' I can take up with what ye haven't got."

"Our accommodations is very crowded," said Mrs. Buffum.

"So is mine to home," responded Jim. "I allers sleep hangin' on a gambrel, between two slabs."

While Mr. Tom Buffum's "women" were laughing, Jim lifted off his pack, placed his rifle in the corner of

the room, and sat down in front of the fire, running on with his easy-going tongue through preposterous stories, and sundry flattering allusions to the beauty and attractiveness of the women to whose hospitalities he had committed himself.

After supper, to which he did full justice, the family drew around the evening fire, and while Mr. Buffum went, or seemed to go, to sleep, in his chair, his guest did his best to entertain the minor members of the group.

"This hollerin' ye have here reminds me," said Jim, "of Number Nine. Ther's some pretty tall hollerin' thar nights. Do you see how my ha'r sticks up? I can't keep it down. It riz one night jest about where you see it now, and it's mostly been thar ever sence. Combin' don't do no good. Taller don't do no good. Nothin' don't do no good. I s'pose if Mr. Buffum, a-snorin' jest as hard as he does now, should set on it for a fortnight, it would spring right up like a staddle, with a b'ar ketched at the eend of it, jest as quick as he let up on me." At this there was a slight rumble in Mr. Buffum's throat.

"Why, what made it rise so?" inquired the most interested and eldest Miss Buffum.

"Now, ain't your purty eyes wide open?" said Jim.

"You're jest fooling; you know you are," responded Miss Buffum, blushing.

"Do ye see the ha'r on the back of my hand?" said Jim, patting one of those ample instruments with the other. "That stands up jest as it does on my head. I'm a regular hedgehog. It all happened then."

"Now, Jim Fenton, you shall go along and tell your story, and not keep us on tenter-hooks all night," said Miss Buffum sharply.

"I don't want to scare the dear little heart out o' ye," said Jim, with a killing look of his eyes, "but if ye will hear it, I s'pose I must tell ye. Ye see I'm alone purty much all the time up thar. I don't have no such times

as I'm havin' here to-night, with purty gals 'round me. Well, one night I hearn a loon, or thought I hearn one. It sounded 'way off on the lake, and bimeby it come nigher, and then I thought it was a painter, but it didn't sound 'zactly like a painter. My dog Turk he don't mind such things, but he knowed it warn't a loon and warn't a painter. So he got up and went to the door, and then the yell come agin, and he set up the most un-'arthly howl I ever hearn. I flung one o' my boots at 'im, but he didn't mind anything more about it than if it had been a feather. Well, ye see, I couldn't sleep, and the skeeters was purty busy, and I thought I'd get up. So I went to my cabin door and flung it open. The moon was shinin', and the woods was still, but Turk, he rushed out, and growled and barked like mad. Bimeby he got tired, and come back lookin' kind o' skeered, and says I: 'Ye're a purty dog, ain't ye?' Jest then I hearn the thing nigher, and I begun to hear the brush crack. I knowed I'd got to meet some new sort of a creetur', and I jest stepped back and took my rifle. When I stood in the door agin, I seen somethin' comin'. It was a walkin' on two legs like a man, and it was a man, or somethin' that looked like one. He come toward the cabin, and stopped about three rod off. He had long white hair that looked jest like silk under the moon, and his robes was white, and he had somethin' in his hand that shined like silver. I jest drew up my rifle, and says I: 'Whosomever you be, stop, or I'll plug ye.' What do ye s'pose he did? He jest took that shinin' thing and swung it round and round his head, and I begun to feel the ha'r start, and up it come all over me. Then he put suthin' to his mouth, and then I knowed it was a trumpet, and he jest blowed till all the woods rung, and rung, and rung agin, and I hearn it comin' back from the mountain, louder nor it was itself. And then says I to myself: 'There's another one, and Jim Fenton's a goner;'

but I didn't let on that I was skeered, and says I to him: 'That's a good deal of a toot; who be ye callin' to dinner?' And says he: 'It's the last day! Come to jedgment! I'm the Angel Gabr'el!' 'Well,' says I, 'if ye're the Angel Gabr'el, cold lead won't hurt ye, so mind yer eyes!' At that I drew a bead on 'im, and if ye'll b'lieve it, I knocked a tin horn out of his hands and picked it up the next mornin', and he went off into the woods like a streak o' lightnin'. But my ha'r hain't never come down."

Jim stroked the refractory locks toward his forehead with his huge hand, and they rose behind it like a wheat-field behind a summer wind. As he finished the manipulation, Mr. Buffum gave symptoms of life. Like a volcano under premonitory signs of an eruption, a wheezy chuckle seemed to begin somewhere in the region of his boots, and rise, growing more and more audible, until it burst into a full demonstration, that was half laugh and half cough.

"Why, what are you laughing at, father?" exclaimed Miss Buffum.

The truth was that Mr. Buffum had not slept at all. The simulation of sleep had been indulged in simply to escape the necessity of talking.

"It was old Tilden," said Mr. Buffum, and then went off into another fit of coughing and laughing that nearly strangled him.

"I wonder if it was!" seemed to come simultaneously from the lips of the mother and her daughters.

"Did you ever see him again?" inquired Mr. Buffum.

"I seen 'im oncet, in the spring, I s'pose," said Jim, "what there was left of 'im. There wasn't much left but an old shirt and some bones, an' I guess he wa'n't no great shakes of an angel. I buried 'im where I found 'im, and said nothin' to nobody."

"That's right," wheezed Mr. Buffum. "It's just as well."

"The truth is," said Mrs. Buffum, "that folks made a great fuss about his gettin' away from here and never bein' found. I thought 'twas a good riddance myself, but people seem to think that these crazy critturs are just as much consequence as anybody, when they don't know a thing. He was always arter our dinner-horn, and blowin', and thinkin' he was the Angel Gabriel. Well, it's a comfort to know he's buried, and isn't no more expense."

"I sh'd like to see some of these crazy people," said Jim. "They must be a jolly set. My ha'r can't stand any straighter nor it does now, and when you feed the animals in the mornin', I'd kind o' like to go round with ye."

The women insisted that he ought not to do it. Only those who understood them, and were used to them, ought to see them.

"You see, we can't give 'em much furnitur'," said Mrs. Buffum. "They break it, and they tear their beds to pieces, and all we can do is to jest keep them alive. As for keepin' their bodies and souls together, I don't s'pose they've got any souls. They are nothin' but animils, as you say, and I don't see why anybody should treat an animil like a human bein'. They hav'n't no sense of what you do for 'em."

"Oh, ye needn't be afraid o' my blowin'. I never blowed about old Tilden, as you call 'im, an' I never expect to," said Jim.

"That's right," wheezed Mr. Buffum. "It's just as well."

"Well, I s'pose the Doctor'll be up in the mornin'," said Mrs. Buffum, "and we shall clean up a little, and put in new straw, and p'r'aps you can go round with him?"

Mr. Buffum nodded his assent, and after an evening spent in story-telling and chaffing, Jim went to bed upon

the shake-down in an upper room to which he was conducted.

Long before he was on his feet in the morning, the paupers of the establishment had been fed, and things had been put in order for the medical inspector. Soon after breakfast, the Doctor's crazy little gig was seen ascending the hill, and Mr. Buffum and Jim were at the door when he drove up. Buffum took the Doctor aside, and told him of Jim's desire to make the rounds with him. Nothing could have delighted the little man more than a proposition of this kind, because it gave him an opportunity to talk. Jim had measured his man when he heard him speak the previous day, and as they crossed the road together, he said: "Doctor, they didn't treat ye very well down there yesterday. I said to myself: 'Jim Fenton, what would ye done if ye had knowed as much as that doctor, an' had worked as hard as he had, and then be'n jest as good as stomped on by a set o' fellows that didn't know a hole in the ground when they seen it?' and, says I, answerin' myself, 'Ye'd 'a' made the fur fly, and spilt blood.'"

"Ah," responded the Doctor, "violence resteth in the bosom of fools."

"Well, it wouldn't 'a' rested in my bosom long. I'd 'a' made a young 'arthquake there in two minutes."

The Doctor smiled, and said with a sigh:

"The vulgar mind does not comprehend science."

"Now, jest tell me what science is," said Jim. "I hearn a great deal about science, but I live up in the woods, and I can't read very much, and ye see I ain't edicated, and I made up my mind if I ever found a man as knowed what science was, I'd ask him."

"Science, sir, is the sum of organized and systematized knowledge," replied the Doctor.

"Now, that seems reasomble," said Jim, "but what is it like? What do they do with it? Can a feller get a livin' by it?"

"Not in Sevenoaks," replied the Doctor, with a bitter smile.

"Then, what's the use of it?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Fenton," replied the Doctor. "You'll excuse me, when I tell you that you have not arrived at that mental altitude—that intellectual plane—"

"No," said Jim, "I live on a sort of a medder."

The case being hopeless, the Doctor went on and opened the door into what he was pleased to call the "insane ward." As Jim put his head into the door, he uttered a "Phew!" and then said:

"This is worser nor the town-meetin'."

The moment Jim's eyes beheld the misery that groaned out its days and nights within the stingy cells, his great heart melted with pity. For the first moments, his disposition to jest passed away, and all his soul rose up in indignation. If profane words came to his lips, they came from genuine commiseration, and a sense of the outrage that had been committed upon those who had been stamped with the image of the Almighty.

"This is a case of Shakespearean madness," said Dr. Radcliffe, pausing before the barred and grated cell that held a half-nude woman. It was a little box of a place, with a rude bedstead in one corner, filthy beyond the power of water to cleanse. The occupant sat on a little bench in another corner, with her eyes rolled up to Jim's in a tragic expression which would make the fortune of an actress. He felt of his hair, impulsively.

"How are ye now? How do ye feel?" inquired Jim, tenderly.

She gave him no answer, but glared at him as if she would search the very depths of his heart.

"If ye'll look t'other way, ye'll obleege me," said Jim.

But the woman gazed on, speechless, as if all the soul that had left her brain had taken up its residence in her large, black eyes.

"Is she tryin' to look me out o' countenance, Doctor?" inquired Jim; "'cause if she is, I'll stand here and let 'er try it on; but if she ain't I'll take the next one."

"Oh, she doesn't know what she's about, but it's a very curious form of insanity, and has almost a romantic interest attached to it from the fact that it did not escape the notice of the great bard."

"I notice, myself," said Jim, "that she's grated and barred."

The Doctor looked at his visitor inquisitively, but the woodman's face was as innocent as that of a child. Then they passed on to the next cell, and there they found another woman sitting quietly in the corner, among the straw.

"How fare ye, this mornin'?" inquired Jim, with a voice full of kindness.

"I'm just on the verge of eternity," replied the woman.

"Don't ye be so sure o' that, now," responded Jim. "Ye're good for ten year yit."

"No," said the woman, "I shall die in a minute."

"Does she mean that?" inquired Jim, turning to the Doctor.

"Yes, and she has been just on the verge of eternity for fifteen years," replied the Doctor, coolly. "That's rather an interesting case, too. I've given it a good deal of study. It's hopeless, of course, but it's a marked case, and full of suggestion to a scientific man."

"Isn't it a pity," responded Jim, "that she isn't a scientific man herself? It might amuse her, you know."

The Doctor laughed, and led him on to the next cell, and here he found the most wretched creature he had ever seen. He greeted her as he had greeted the others, and she looked up to him with surprise, raised herself from the straw, and said:

"You speak like a Christian."

The tears came into Jim's eyes, for he saw in that little sentence the cruelty of the treatment she had received.

"Well, I ain't no Christian, as I knows on," he responded, "an' I don't think they're very plenty in these parts; but I'm right sorry for ye. You look as if you might be a good sort of a woman."

"I should have been if it hadn't been for the pigeons," said the woman. "They flew over a whole day, in flocks, and flocks, and cursed the world. All the people have got the plague, and they don't know it. My children all died of it, and went to hell. Everybody is going to hell, and nothing can save them. Old Buffum'll go first. Robert Belcher'll go next. Dr. Radcliffe will go next."

"Look here, old woman, ye jest leave me out of that calkerlation," said Jim.

"Will you have the kindness to kill me, sir?" said the woman.

"I really can't, this mornin'," he replied, "for I've got a good ways to tramp to-day; but if I ever want to kill anybody I'll come round, p'r'aps, and 'commodate ye."

"Thank you," she responded heartily.

The Doctor turned to Jim, and said:

"Do you see that hole in the wall, beyond her head? Well, that hole was made by Mr. Buffum. She had begged him to kill her so often that he thought he would put her to the test, and he agreed he would do so. So he set her up by that wall, and took a heavy stick from the wood-pile, raised it as high as the room would permit, and then brought it down with great violence, burying the end of the bludgeon in the plastering. I suppose he came within three inches of her head, and she never winked. It was a very interesting experiment, as it illustrated the genuineness of her desire for death. Otherwise the case is much like many others."

"Very interestin'," responded Jim, "very! Didn't you never think of makin' her so easy and comfortable that she wouldn't want anybody to kill her? I sh'd think that would be an interestin' experiment."

Now the Doctor had one resort, which, among the people of Sevenoaks, was infallible, whenever he wished to check argumentation on any subject relating to his profession. Any man who undertook to argue a medical question with him, or make a suggestion relating to medical treatment, he was in the habit of flooring at once, by wisely and almost pityingly shaking his head, and saying: "It's very evident to me, sir, that you've not received a medical education." So, when Jim suggested, in his peculiar way, that the woman ought to be treated better, the Doctor saw the point, and made his usual response.

"Mr. Fenton," said he, "excuse me, sir, but it's very evident that you've not had a medical education."

"There's where you're weak," Jim responded. "I'm a reg'lar M.D., three C's, double X., two I's. That's the year I was born, and that's my perfession. I studied with an Injun, and I know more 'arbs, and roots, and drawin' leaves than any doctor in a hundred mile; and if I can be of any use to ye, Doctor, there's my hand."

And Jim seized the Doctor's hand, and gave it a pressure which raised the little man off the floor.

The Doctor looked at him with eyes equally charged with amusement and amazement. He never had been met in that way before, and was not inclined to leave the field without in some way convincing Jim of his own superiority.

"Mr. Fenton," said he, "did you ever see a medulla oblongata?"

"Well, I seen a good many garters," replied the woodsman, "in the stores, an' I guess they was mostly oblong."

"Did you ever see a solar plexus?" inquired the Doctor, severely.

"Dozens of 'em. I allers pick a few in the fall, but I don't make much use of 'em."

"Perhaps you've seen a pineal gland," suggested the disgusted Doctor.

"I make 'em," responded Jim. "I whittle 'em out evenin's, ye know."

"If you were in one of these cells," said the Doctor, "I should think you were as mad as a March hare."

At this moment the Doctor's attention was called to a few harmless patients who thronged toward him as soon as they learned that he was in the building, begging for medicine; for if there is anything that a pauper takes supreme delight in, it is drugs. Passing along with them to a little lobby, where he could inspect them more conveniently, he left Jim behind, as that personage did not prove to be so interesting and impressible as he had hoped. Jim watched him, as he moved away, with a quiet chuckle, and then turned to pursue his investigations. The next cell he encountered held the man he was looking for. Sitting in the straw, talking to himself or some imaginary companion, he saw his old friend. It took him a full minute to realize that the gentle sportsman, the true Christian, the delicate man, the delightful companion, was there before him, a wreck—cast out from among his fellows, confined in a noisome cell, and hopelessly given over to his vagrant fancies and the tender mercies of Thomas Buffum. When the memory of what Paul Benedict had been to him, at one period of his life, came to Jim, with the full realization of his present misery and degradation, the strong man wept like a child. He drew an old silk handkerchief from his pocket, blew his nose as if it had been a trumpet, and then slipped up to the cell and said, softly: "Paul Benedict, give us your benediction."

"Jim!" said the man, looking up quickly.

"Good God! he knows me," said Jim, whimpering. "Yes, Mr. Benedict, I'm the same rough old fellow. How fare ye?"

"I'm miserable," replied the man.

"Well, ye don't look as ef ye felt fust-rate. How did ye git in here?"

"Oh, I was damned when I died. It's all right, I know; but it's terrible."

"Why, ye don't think ye're in hell, do ye?" inquired Jim.

"Don't you see?" inquired the wretch, looking around him.

"Oh, yes; I see! I guess you're right," said Jim, falling in with his fancy.

"But where did you come from, Jim? I never heard that you were dead."

"Yes; I'm jest as dead as you be."

"Well, what did you come here for?"

"Oh, I thought I'd call round," replied Jim carelessly.

"Did you come from Abraham's bosom?" inquired Mr. Benedict eagerly.

"Straight."

"I can't think why you should come to see me, into such a place as this!" said Benedict, wonderingly.

"Oh, I got kind o' oneasy. Don't have much to do over there, ye know."

"How did you get across the gulf?"

"I jest shoved over in a birch, an' ye must be perlite enough to return the call," replied Jim, in the most matter-of-course manner possible.

Benedict looked down upon his torn and wretched clothing, and then turned his pitiful eyes up to Jim, who saw the thoughts that were passing in the poor man's mind.

"Never mind your clo'es," he said. "I dress jest

the same there as I did in Number Nine, and nobody says a word. The fact is, they don't mind very much about clo'es there, any way. I'll come over and git ye, ye know, an' interjuce ye, and ye shall have jest as good a time as Jim Fenton can give ye."

"Shall I take my rifle along?" inquired Benedict.

"Yes, an' plenty of amanition. There ain't no game to speak on—only a few pa'tridge; but we can shoot at a mark all day, ef we want to."

Benedict tottered to his feet and came to the grated door, with his eyes all alight with hope and expectation. "Jim, you always were a good fellow," said he, dropping his voice to a whisper. "I'll show you my improvements. Belcher mustn't get hold of them. He's after them. I hear him round nights, but he shan't have them. I've got a new tumbler, and——"

"Well, never mind now," replied Jim. "It'll be jest as well when ye come over to spend the day with me. Now ye look a here! Don't you say nothin' about this to nobody. They'll all want to go, and we can't have 'em. You an' I want to git red of the crowd, ye know. We allers did. So when I come arter ye, jest keep mum, and we'll have a high old time."

All the intellect that Benedict could exercise was summoned to comprehend this injunction. He nodded his head; he laid it up in his memory. Hope had touched him, and he had won at least a degree of momentary strength and steadiness from her gracious finger.

"Now jest lay down an' rest, an' keep your thoughts to yerself till I come agin. Don't tell nobody I've be'n here, and don't ask leave of nobody. I'll settle with the old boss if he makes any sort of a row; and ye know when Jim Fenton says he'll stand between ye and all harm he means it, an' nothin' else."

"Yes, Jim."

"An' when I come here—most likely in the night—I'll bring a robe to put on ye, and we'll go out still."

"Yes, Jim."

"Sure you understand?"

"Yes, Jim."

"Well, good-by. Give us your hand. Here's hop in'."

Benedict held himself up by the slats of the door, while Jim went along to rejoin the Doctor. Outside of this door was still a solid one, which had been thrown wide open in the morning for the purpose of admitting the air. In this door Jim discovered a key, which he quietly placed in his pocket, and which he judged, by its size, was fitted to the lock of the inner as well as the outer door. He had already discovered that the door by which he entered the building was bolted upon the outside, the keeper doubtless supposing that no one would wish to enter so foul a place, and trusting thus to keep the inmates in durance.

"Well, Doctor," said Jim, "this sort o' thing is too many for me. I gi'en it up. It's very interestin', I s'pose, but my head begins to spin, an' it seems to me it's gettin' out of order. Do ye see my har, Doctor?" said he, exposing the heavy shock that crowned his head.

"Yes, I see it," replied the Doctor tartly. He thought he had shaken off his unpleasant visitor, and his return disturbed him.

"Well, Doctor, that has all riz sence I come in here."

"Are you sure?" inquired the Doctor, mollified in the presence of a fact that might prove to be of scientific interest.

"I'd jest combed it when you come this mornin'. D'ye ever see anythin' like that? How am I goin' to git it down?"

"Very singular," said the Doctor.

"Yes, an' look here! D'ye see the har on the back o' my hand? That stands up jest the same. Why, Doctor, I feel like a hedgehog! What am I goin' to do?"

"Why, this is really very interesting!" said the Doctor, taking out his note-book. "What is your name?"

"Jim Fenton."

"Age?"

"Thirty or forty—somewhere along there."

"H'm!" exclaimed the Doctor, writing out the whole reply. "Occupation?"

"M.D., three C's, double X., two I's."

"H'm! What do you do?"

"Trap, mostly."

"Religious?"

"When I'm skeered."

"Nativity?"

"Which?"

"What is your parentage? Where were you born?"

"Well, my father was an Englishman, my mother was a Scotchman, I was born in Ireland, raised in Canady, and have lived for ten year in Number Nine."

"How does your head feel now?"

"It feels as if every har was a pin. Do you s'pose it'll strike in?"

The Doctor looked him over as if he were a bullock, and went on with his statistics: "Weight, about two hundred pounds; height, six feet two; temperament, sanguine-bilious."

"Some time when you are in Sevenoaks," said the Doctor, slipping his pencil into its sheath in his note-book, and putting his book in his pocket, "come and see me."

"And stay all night?" inquired Jim, innocently.

"I'd like to see the case again," said Dr. Radcliffe, nodding. "I shall not detain you long. The matter has a certain scientific interest."

"Well, good-by, Doctor," said Jim, holding down his

hair. "I'm off for Number Nine. I'm much obleeged for lettin' me go round with ye; an' I never want to go agin."

Jim went out into the pleasant morning air. The sun had dispelled the light frost of the night, the sky was blue overhead, and the bluebirds, whose first spring notes were as sweet and fresh as the blossoms of the arbutus, were carolling among the maples. Far away to the north he could see the mountain at whose foot his cabin stood, red in the sunshine, save where in the deeper gorges the snow still lingered. Sevenoaks lay at the foot of the hill, on the other hand, and he could see the people passing to and fro along its streets, and, perched upon the hill-side among its trees and gardens, the paradise that wealth had built for Robert Belcher. The first emotion that thrilled him as he emerged from the shadows of misery and mental alienation was that of gratitude. He filled his lungs with the vitalizing air, but expired his long breath with a sigh.

"What bothers me," said Jim to himself, "is, that the Lord lets one set of people that is happy make it so thunderin' rough for another set of people that is onhappy. An' there's another thing that bothers me," he said, continuing his audible cogitations. "How do they 'xpect a feller is goin' to git well, when they put 'im where a well feller'd git sick? I vow I think that poor old creetur that wanted me to kill her is straighter in her brains than anybody I seen on the lot. I couldn't live there a week, an' if I was a hopeless case, an' know'd it, I'd hang myself on a nail."

Jim saw his host across the road, and went over to him. Mr. Buffum had had a hard time with his pipes that morning, and was hoarse and very red in the face.

"Jolly lot you've got over there," said Jim. "If I had sech a family as them, I'd take 'em 'round for a show, and hire Belcher's man to do the talkin'. 'Walk up, gentlemen, walk up, and see how a Christian can treat a feller bein'. Here's a feller that's got sense enough left to think he's in hell. Observe his wickedness, gentlemen, and don't be afraid to use your handkerchers.'"

As Jim talked, he found he was getting angry, and that the refractory hair that covered his poll began to feel hot. It would not do to betray his feelings, so he ended his sally with a huge laugh that had about as much music and heartiness in it as the caw of a crow. Buffum joined him with his wheezy chuckle, but having sense enough to see that Jim had really been pained, he explained that he kept his paupers as well as he could afford to.

"Oh, I know it," said Jim. "If there's anything wrong about it, it don't begin with you, Buffum, nor it don't end with you; but it seems a little rough to a feller like me to see people shut up, an' in the dark, when there's good breathin' an' any amount o' sunshine to be had, free gratis for nothin'."

"Well, they don't know the difference," said Buffum.

"Arter a while, I guess they don't," Jim responded "an', now, what's the damage? for I've got to go 'long."

"I shan't charge you anything," whispered Mr. Buffum. "You haven't said anything about old Tilden, and it's just as well."

Jim winked, nodded, and indicated that he not only understood Mr. Buffum, but would act upon his hint. Then he went into the house, bade good-by to Mr. Buffum's "women," kissed his hand gallantly to the elder Miss Buffum—who declared, in revenge, that she would not help him on with his pack, although she had intended to do so—and, after having gathered his burdens, trudged off northward.

From the time he entered the establishment on the previous evening, he had not caught a glimpse of Harry Benedict. "He's cute," said Jim, "an' jest the little chap for this business." As he came near the stump

over the brow of the hill, behind which the poor-house buildings disappeared, he saw first the brim of an old hat, then one eye, then an eager, laughing face, and then the whole trim little figure. The lad was transformed. Jim thought when he saw him first that he was a pretty boy, but there was something about him now that thrilled the woodsman with admiration.

Jim came up to him with, "Mornin,' Harry!" and the mountain that shone so gloriously in the light before him was not more sunny than Jim's face. He sat down behind the stump without removing his pack, and once more had the little fellow in his arms.

"Harry," said Jim, "I've had ye in my arms all night—a little live thing—an' I've be'n a longin' to git at ye agin. If ye want to, very much, you can put yer arms round my neck, an' hug me like a little bar. Thar, that's right, that's right. I shall feel it till I see ye agin. Ye've been thinkin' 'bout what I telled ye last night?"

"Oh yes!" responded the boy eagerly, "all the time."

"Well, now, do you know the days—Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and the rest of 'em?"

"Yes, sir, all of them."

"Now, remember, to-day is Wednesday. It will be seven days to next Wednesday, then Thursday will be eight, Friday nine, Saturday ten. You always know when Saturday comes, don't ye?"

"Yes, because it's our school holiday," replied Harry.

"Well, then, in ten days—that is, a week from next Saturday—I shall come agin. Saturday night, don't ye go to bed. Leastways, ef ye do, ye must git out of the house afore ten o'clock, and come straight to this old stump. Can ye git away, an' nobody seen ye?"

"Yes, I hope so," replied the boy. "They don't mind anything about us. I could stay out all night, and they wouldn't know where I was."

"Well, that's all right, now. Remember—be jest here with all the clo'es ye've got, at ten o'clock Saturday night—ten days off—cut 'em in a stick every day—the next Saturday after the next one, an' don't git mixed."

The boy assured him that he should make no mistake.

"When I come, I sh'll bring a hoss and wagin. It'll be a stiddy hoss, and I sh'll come here to this stump, an' stop till I seen ye. Then ye'll hold the hoss till I go an' git yer pa, and then we'll wopse 'im up in some blankits, an' make a clean streak for the woods. It'll be late Sunday mornin' afore anybody knows he's gone, and there won't be no people on the road where we are goin', and ef we're druv into cover, I know where the cover is. Jim Fenton's got friends on the road, and they'll be mum as beetles. Did ye ever seen a beetle, Harry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, they work right along and don't say nothin' to nobody, but they keep workin'; an' you an' me has got to be jest like beetles. Remember! an' now git back to Tom Buffum's the best way ye can."

The boy reassured Jim, gave him a kiss, jumped over the fence, and crept along through the bushes toward the house. Jim watched him, wrapped in admiration.

"He's got the ra-al hunter in 'im, jest like his father, but there's more in 'im nor there ever was in his father. I sh'd kinder liked to 'a' knowed his ma," said Jim, as he took up his rifle and started in earnest for his home.

As he plodded along his way, he thought over all the experiences of the morning.

"Any man," said he to himself, "who can string things together in the way Benedict did this mornin' can be cured. Startin' in hell, he was all right, an' everything reasomble. The startin' is the principal p'int, an' if I can git 'im to start from Number Nine, I'll fetch 'im round. He never was so much to home as he was in

the woods, an' when I git 'im thar, and git 'im fishin' and huntin', and sleepin' on hemlock, an' eatin' venison and corn-dodgers, it'll come to 'im that he's been there afore, and he'll look round to find Abram, an' he won't see 'im, and his craze'll kind o' leak out of 'im afore he knows it."

Jim's theory was his own, but it would be difficult for Dr. Radcliffe, and all his fellow-devotees of science, to controvert it. It contented him, at least; and full of plans and hopes, stimulated by the thought that he had a job on hand that would not only occupy his thoughts, but give exercise to the benevolent impulses of his heart, he pressed on, the miles disappearing behind him and shortening before, as if the ground had been charmed.

He stopped at noon at a settler's lonely house, occupied by Mike Conlin, a friendly Irishman. Jim took the man aside and related his plans. Mike entered at once upon the project with interest and sympathy, and Jim knew that he could trust him wholly. It was arranged that Jim should return to Mike the evening before the proposed descent upon Tom Buffum's establishment, and sleep. The following evening Mike's horse would be placed at Jim's disposal, and he and the Benedicts were to drive through during the night to the point on the river where he would leave his boat. Mike was to find his horse there and take him home.

Having accomplished his business, Jim went on, and before the twilight had deepened into night he found himself briskly paddling up the stream, and at ten o'clock he had drawn his little boat up the beach, and embraced Turk, his faithful dog, whom he had left, not only to take care of his cabin, but to provide for himself. He had already eaten his supper, and five minutes after he entered his cabin he and his dog were snoring side by side in a sleep too profound to be disturbed, even by the trumpet of old Tilden.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH JIM ENLARGES HIS ACCOMMODATIONS AND ADOPTS A VIOLENT METHOD OF SECURING BOARDERS.

WHEN Jim Fenton waked from his long and refreshing sleep, after his weary tramp and his row upon the river, the sun was shining brightly, the bluebirds were singing, the partridges were drumming, and a red squirrel, which even Turk would not disturb, was looking for provisions in his cabin, or eyeing him saucily from one of the beams over his head. He lay for a moment, stretching his huge limbs and rubbing his eyes, thinking over what he had undertaken, and exclaiming at last, "Well, Jim, ye've got a big contrack," he jumped up, and, striking a fire, cooked his breakfast.

His first work was to make an addition to his accommodations for lodgers, and he set about it in thorough earnest. Before noon he had stripped bark enough from the trees in his vicinity to cover a building as large as his own. The question with him was whether he should put up an addition to his cabin, or hide a new building somewhere behind the trees in his vicinity. In case of pursuit, his lodgers would need a cover, and this he knew he could not give them in his cabin; for all who were in the habit of visiting the woods were familiar with that structure, and would certainly notice any addition to it, and be curious about it. Twenty rods away there was a thicket of hemlock, and, by removing two or three trees in its centre, he could successfully hide from any but the most inquisitive observation the cabin he proposed to erect. His conclusion was quickly arrived at, and before he slept that night the trees were down, the frame was up, and the bark was