

this experience that lifted his heart upward. He looked up to the stars, and said to himself: "He's somewhere up thar, I s'pose. I can't seen 'im, an' I must look purty small to Him if He can seen me; but I hope He know as I'm obleeged to 'im, more nor I can teli 'im. When He made a good woman, He did the biggest thing out, an' when He started a man to lovin' on her, He set up the best business that was ever did. I hope He likes the 'rangement, and won't put nothin' in the way on't. Amen! I'm goin' to bed."

Jim put his last determination into immediate execution. He found Mr. Benedict in his first nap, from which he felt obliged to rouse him, with the information that it was "all right," and that the quicker the house was finished the better it would be for all concerned.

The next morning, Turk having been substituted for the child in the foreground of the front elevation of the hotel, the two men went up to Miss Butterworth's, and exhibited and talked over the plans. They received many valuable hints from the prospective mistress of the prospective mansion. The stoop was to be made broader for the accommodation of visitors; more room for wardrobes was suggested, with little conveniences for housekeeping, which complicated the plans not a little. Mr. Benedict carefully noted them all, to be wrought out at his leisure.

Jim's love had wrought a miracle in the night. He had said nothing about it to his architect, but it had lifted him above the bare utilities of a house, so that he could see the use of beauty. "Thar's one thing," said he, "as thar hain't none on us thought on; but it come to me last night. There's a place where the two ruffs come together that wants somethin', an' it seems to me it's a cupalo—somethin' to stan' up over the whole thing, and say to them as comes, 'Hallelujer!' We've done a good deal for house-keepin', now let's do somethin'

for glory. It's just like a ribbon on a bonnet, or a blow on a potato-vine. It sets it off, an' makes a kind o' Fourth o' July for it. What do ye say, little woman?"

The "little woman" accepted the suggestion, and admitted that it would at least make the building look more like a hotel.

All the details settled, the two men went away, and poor Benedict had a rough time in getting back to camp. Jim could hardly restrain himself from going through in a single day, so anxious was he to get at his traps and resume work upon the house. There was no fatigue too great for him now. The whole world was bright and full of promise; and he could not have been happier or more excited if he had been sure that at the year's end a palace and a princess were to be the reward of his enterprise.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHICH INTRODUCES SEVERAL RESIDENTS OF SEVEN-OAKS TO THE METROPOLIS AND A NEW CHARACTER TO THE READER.

HARRY BENEDICT was in the great city. When his story was known by Mrs. Balfour—a quiet, motherly woman—and she was fully informed of her husband's plans concerning him, she received him with a cordiality and tenderness which won his heart and made him entirely at home. The wonders of the shops, the wonders of the streets, the wonders of the places of public amusement, the music of the churches, the inspiration of the great tides of life that swept by him on every side, were in such sharp contrast to the mean conditions to which he had been accustomed, that he could hardly sleep. Indeed, the dreams of his unquiet slumbers were formed

of less attractive constituents than the visions of his waking hours. He had entered a new world, which stimulated his imagination, and furnished him with marvellous materials for growth. He had been transformed by the clothing of the lad whose place he had taken into a city boy, difficult to be recognized by those who had previously known him. He hardly knew himself, and suspected his own consciousness of cheating him.

For several days he had amused himself in his leisure hours by watching a huge house opposite to that of the Balfours, into which was pouring a stream of furniture. Huge vans were standing in front of it, or coming and departing, from morning until night. Dressing-cases, book-cases, chairs, mirrors, candelabra, beds, tables—everything necessary and elegant in the furniture of a palace, were unloaded and carried in. All day long, too, he could see through the large windows the active figure and beautiful face of a woman who seemed to direct and control the movements of all who were engaged in the work.

The Balfours had noticed the same thing; but, beyond wondering who was rich or foolish enough to purchase and furnish Palgrave's Folly, they had given the matter no attention. They were rich, of good family, of recognized culture and social importance, and it did not seem to them that any one whom they would care to know would be willing to occupy a house so pronounced in vulgar display. They were people whose society no money could buy. If Robert Belcher had been worth a hundred millions instead of one, the fact would not have been taken into consideration in deciding any social question relating to him.

Finally the furnishing was complete; the windows were polished, the steps were furbished, and nothing seemed to wait but the arrival of the family for which the dwelling had been prepared.

Late one afternoon, before the lamps were lighted in the streets, he could see that the house was illuminated; and just as the darkness came on, a carriage drove up and a family alighted. The doors were thrown open, the beautiful woman stood upon the threshold, and all ran up to enter. She kissed the lady of the house, kissed the children, shook hands cordially with the gentleman of the party, and then the doors were swung to, and they were shut from the sight of the street; but just as the man entered, the light from the hall and the light from the street revealed the flushed face and portly figure of Robert Belcher.

Harry knew him, and ran down-stairs to Mrs. Balfour, pale and agitated as if he had seen a ghost. "It is Mr. Belcher," he said, "and I must go back. I know he'll find me; I must go back to-morrow."

It was a long time before the family could pacify him and assure him of their power to protect him; but they did it at last, though they left him haunted with the thought that he might be exposed at any moment to the new companions of his life as a pauper and the son of a pauper. The great humiliation had been burned into his soul. The petty tyrannies of Tom Buffum had cowed him, so that it would be difficult for him ever to emerge from their influence into a perfectly free boyhood and manhood. Had they been continued long enough, they would have ruined him. Once he had been entirely in the power of adverse circumstances and a brutal will, and he was almost incurably wounded.

The opposite side of the street presented very different scenes. Mrs. Belcher found, through the neighborly services of Mrs. Dillingham, that her home was all prepared for her, even to the selection and engagement of her domestic service. A splendid dinner was ready to be served, for which Mr. Belcher, who had been in constant communication with his convenient and most offi-

cious friend, had brought the silver; and the first business was to dispose of it. Mrs. Dillingham led the mistress of the house to her seat, distributed the children, and amused them all by the accounts she gave them of her efforts to make their entrance and welcome satisfactory. Mrs. Belcher observed her quietly, acknowledged to herself the woman's personal charms—her beauty, her wit, her humor, her sprightliness, and her more than neighborly service; but her quick, womanly instincts detected something which she did not like. She saw that Mr. Belcher was fascinated by her, and that he felt that she had rendered him and the family a service for which great gratitude was due; but she saw that the object of his admiration was selfish—that she loved power, delighted in having things her own way, and, more than all, was determined to place the mistress of the house under obligations to her. It would have been far more agreeable to Mrs. Belcher to find everything in confusion, than to have her house brought into habitable order by a stranger in whom she had no trust, and upon whom she had no claim. Mr. Belcher had bought the house without her knowledge; Mrs. Dillingham had arranged it without her supervision. She seemed to herself to be simply a child, over whose life others had assumed the offices of administration.

Mrs. Belcher was weary, and she would have been delighted to be alone with her family, but here was an intruder whom she could not dispose of. She would have been glad to go over the house alone, and to have had the privilege of discovery, but she must go with one who was bent on showing her everything, and giving her reasons for all that had been done.

Mrs. Dillingham was determined to play her cards well with Mrs. Belcher. She was sympathetic, confidential, most respectful; but she found that lady very quiet. Mr. Belcher followed them from room to room,

with wider eyes for Mrs. Dillingham than for the details of his new home. Now he could see them together—the mother of his children, and the woman who had already won his heart away from her. The shapely lady, with her queenly ways, her vivacity, her graceful adaptiveness to persons and circumstances, was sharply contrasted with the matronly figure, homely manners, and unresponsive mind of his wife. He pitied his wife, he pitied himself, he pitied his children, he almost pitied the dumb walls and the beautiful furniture around him.

Was Mrs. Dillingham conscious of the thoughts which possessed him? Did she know that she was leading him around his house, in her assumed confidential intimacy with his wife, as she would lead a spaniel by a silken cord? Was she aware that, as she moved side by side with Mrs. Belcher, through the grand rooms, she was displaying herself to the best advantage to her admirer, and that, yoked with the wifehood and motherhood of the house, she was dragging, while he held, the plough that was tilling the deep carpets for tares that might be reaped in harvests of unhappiness? Would she have dropped the chain if she had? Not she.

To fascinate, and make a fool of, a man who was strong and cunning in his own sphere; to have a hand—gloved in officious friendship—in other lives, furnished the zest of her unemployed life. She could introduce discord into a family without even acknowledging to herself that she had done it wittingly. She could do it, and weep over the injustice that charged her with it. Her motives were always pure! She had always done her best to serve her friends! and what were her rewards? So the victories which she won by her smiles, she made permanent by her tears. So the woman by whose intrigues the mischief came was transformed into a victim, from whose shapely shoulders the garment of blame slipped off, that society might throw over them the

robes of its respectful commiseration, and thus make her more interesting and lovely than before!

Mrs. Belcher measured very carefully, or apprehended very readily, the kind of woman she had to deal with, and felt at once that she was no match for her. She saw that she could not shake her off, so long as it was her choice to remain. She received from her no direct offence, except the offence of her uninvited presence; but the presence meant service, and so could not be resented. And Mrs. Belcher could be of so much service to her! Her life was so lonely—so meaningless! It would be such a joy to her, in a city full of shams, to have one friend who would take her good offices, and so help to give to her life a modicum of significance!

After a full survey of the rooms, and a discussion of the beauties and elegancies of the establishment, they all descended to the dining-room, and, in response to Mrs. Dillingham's order, were served with tea.

"You really must excuse me, Mrs. Belcher," said the beautiful lady deprecatingly, "but I have been here for a week, and it seems so much like my own home, that I ordered the tea without thinking that I am the guest and you are the mistress."

"Certainly, and I am really very much obliged to you;" and then feeling that she had been a little untrue to herself, Mrs. Belcher added bluntly: "I feel myself in a very awkward situation—obliged to one on whom I have no claim, and one whom I can never repay."

"The reward of a good deed is in the doing, I assure you," said Mrs. Dillingham, sweetly. "All I ask is that you make me serviceable to you. I know all about the city, and all about its ways. You can call upon me for anything; and now let's talk about the house. Isn't it lovely?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Belcher, "too lovely. While so many are poor around us, it seems almost like an insult

to them to live in such a place, and flaunt our wealth in their faces. Mr. Belcher is very generous toward his family, and I have no wish to complain, but I would exchange it all for my little room in Sevenoaks."

Mr. Belcher, who had been silent and had watched with curious and somewhat anxious eyes the introductory passage of this new acquaintance, was rasped by Mrs. Belcher's remark into saying: "That's Mrs. Belcher, all over! that's the woman, through and through! As if a man hadn't a right to do what he chooses with his money! If men are poor, why don't they get rich? They have the same chance I had; and there isn't one of 'em but would be glad to change places with me, and flaunt his wealth in my face. There's a precious lot of humbug about the poor which won't wash with me. We're all alike."

Mrs. Dillingham shook her lovely head.

"You men are so hard," she said; "and Mrs. Belcher has the right feeling; but I'm sure she takes great comfort in helping the poor. What would you do, my dear, if you had no money to help the poor with?"

"That's just what I've asked her a hundred times," said Mr. Belcher. "What would she do? That's something she never thinks of."

Mrs. Belcher shook her head, in return, but made no reply. She knew that the poor would have been better off if Mr. Belcher had never lived, and that the wealth which surrounded her with luxuries was taken from the poor. It was this, at the bottom, that made her sad, and this that had filled her for many years with discontent.

When the tea was disposed of, Mrs. Dillingham rose to go. She lived a few blocks distant, and it was necessary for Mr. Belcher to walk home with her. This he was glad to do, though she assured him that it was entirely unnecessary. When they were in the street,

walking at a slow pace, the lady, in her close, confiding way, said:

"Do you know, I take a great fancy to Mrs. Belcher?"

"Do you, really?"

"Yes, indeed. I think she's lovely; but I'm afraid she doesn't like me. I can read—oh, I can read pretty well. She certainly didn't like it that I had arranged everything, and was there to meet her. But wasn't she tired? Wasn't she very tired? There certainly was something that was wrong."

"I think your imagination had something to do with it," said Mr. Belcher, although he knew that she was right.

"No, I can read;" and Mrs. Dillingham's voice trembled. "If she could only know how honestly I have tried to serve her, and how disappointed I am that my service has not been taken in good part, I am sure that her amiable heart would forgive me."

Mrs. Dillingham took out her handkerchief, near a street lamp, and wiped her eyes.

What could Mr. Belcher do with this beautiful, susceptible, sensitive creature? What could he do but reassure her? Under the influence of her emotion, his wife's offence grew flagrant, and he began by apologizing for her, and ended by blaming her.

"Oh! she was tired—she was very tired. That was all. I've laid up nothing against her; but you know I was disappointed, after I had done so much. I shall be all over it in the morning, and she will see it differently then. I don't know but I should have been troubled to find a stranger in my house. I think I should. Now, you really must promise not to say a word of all this talk to your poor wife. I wouldn't have you do it for the world. If you are my friend (pressing his arm), you will let the matter drop just where it is. Nothing would

induce me to be the occasion of any differences in your home."

So it was a brave, true, magnanimous nature that was leaning so tenderly upon Mr. Belcher's arm! And he felt that no woman who was not either shabbily perverse, or a fool, could misinterpret her. He knew that his wife had been annoyed at finding Mrs. Dillingham in the house. He dimly comprehended, too, that her presence was an indelicate intrusion, but her intentions were so good!

Mrs. Dillingham knew exactly how to manipulate the coarse man at her side, and her relations to him and his wife. Her bad wisdom was not the result of experience, though she had had enough of it, but the product of an instinct which was just as acute, and true, and serviceable, ten years earlier in her life as it was then. She timed the walk to her purpose; and when Mr. Belcher parted with her, he went back leisurely to his great house, more discontented with his wife than he had ever been. To find such beauty, such helpfulness, such sympathy, charity, forbearance, and sensitiveness, all combined in one woman, and that woman kind and confidential toward him, brought back to him the days of his youth, in the excitement of a sentiment which he had supposed was lost beyond recall.

He crossed the street on arriving at his house, and took an evening survey of his grand mansion, whose lights were still flaming through the windows. The passengers jostled him as he looked up at his dwelling, his thoughts wandering back to the woman with whom he had so recently parted.

He knew that his heart was dead toward the woman who awaited his return. He felt that it was almost painfully alive toward the one he had left behind him, and it was with the embarrassment of conscious guilt that he rang the bell at his own door, and stiffened himself to

meet the honest woman who had borne his children. Even the graceless touch of an intriguing woman's power—even the excitement of something like love toward one who was unworthy of his love—had softened him, so that his conscience could move again. He felt that his eyes bore a secret, and he feared that his wife could read it. And yet, who was to blame? Was anybody to blame? Could anything that had happened have been helped or avoided?

He entered, determining to abide by Mrs. Dillingham's injunction of silence. He found the servants extinguishing the lights, and met the information that Mrs. Belcher had retired. His huge pile of trunks had come during his absence, and remained scattered in the hall. The sight offended him, but, beyond a muttered curse, he said nothing, and sought his bed.

Mr. Belcher was not in good humor when he rose the next morning. He found the trunks where he left them on the previous evening; and when he called for the servants to carry them upstairs, he was met by open revolt. They were not porters, and they would not lift boxes; that sort of work was not what they were engaged for. No New York family expected service of that kind from those who were not hired for it.

The proprietor, who had been in the habit of exacting any service from any man or woman in his employ that he desired, was angry. He would have turned every one of them out of the house, if it had not been so inconvenient for him to lose them then. Curses trembled upon his lips, but he curbed them, inwardly determining to have his revenge when the opportunity should arise. The servants saw his eyes, and went back to their work somewhat doubtful as to whether they had made a judicious beginning. They were sure they had not, when, two days afterward, every one of them was turned out of the house, and a new set installed in their places.

He called for Phipps, and Phipps was at the stable. Putting on his hat, he went to bring his faithful servitor of Sevenoaks, and bidding him find a porter in the streets and remove the trunks at Mrs. Belcher's direction, he sat down at the window to watch for a passing newsboy. The children came down, cross and half sick with their long ride and their late dinner. Then it came on to rain in a most dismal fashion, and he saw before him a day of confinement and ennui. Without mental resource—unable to find any satisfaction except in action and intrigue—the prospect was anything but pleasant. The house was large, and, on a dark day, gloomy. His humor was not sweetened by noticing evidences of tears on Mrs. Belcher's face. The breakfast was badly cooked, and he rose from it exasperated. There was no remedy but to go out and call upon Mrs. Dillingham. He took an umbrella, and, telling his wife that he was going out on business, he slammed the door behind him and went down the steps.

As he reached the street, he saw a boy scudding along under an umbrella, with a package under his arm. Taking him for a newsboy, he called: "Here, boy! Give me some papers." The lad had so shielded his face from the rain and the house that he had not seen Mr. Belcher; and when he looked up he turned pale, and simply said: "I'm not a newsboy;" and then he ran away as if he were frightened.

There was something in the look that arrested Mr. Belcher's attention. He was sure he had seen the lad before, but where, he could not remember. The face haunted him—haunted him for hours, even when in the cheerful presence of Mrs. Dillingham, with whom he spent a long and delightful hour. She was rosy, and sweet, and sympathetic in her morning wrapper—more charming, indeed, than he had ever seen her in evening dress. She inquired for Mrs. Belcher and the