

children, and heard with great good humor his account of his first collision with his New York servants. When he went out from her inspiring and gracious presence he found his self-complacency restored. He had simply been hungry for her; so his breakfast was complete. He went back to his house with a mingled feeling of jollity and guilt, but the moment he was with his family the face of the boy returned. Where had he seen him? Why did the face give him uneasiness? Why did he permit himself to be puzzled by it? No reasoning, no diversion could drive it from his mind. Wherever he turned during the long day and evening that white, scared face obtruded itself upon him. He had noticed, as the lad lifted his umbrella, that he carried a package of books under his arm, and naturally concluded that, belated by the rain, he was on his way to school. He determined, therefore, to watch him on the following morning, his own eyes reinforced by those of his oldest boy.

The dark day passed away at last, and things were brought into more homelike order by the wife of the house, so that the evening was cozy and comfortable; and when the street lamps were lighted again and the stars came out, and the north wind sounded its trumpet along the avenue, the spirits of the family rose to the influence.

On the following morning, as soon as he had eaten his breakfast, he, with his boy, took a position at one of the windows, to watch for the lad whose face had so impressed and puzzled him. On the other side of the avenue a tall man came out, with a green bag under his arm, stepped into a passing stage, and rolled away. Ten minutes later two lads emerged with their books slung over their shoulders, and crossed toward them.

"That's the boy—the one on the left," said Mr. Belcher. At the same moment the lad looked up, and ap-

parently saw the two faces watching him, for he quickened his pace.

"That's Harry Benedict," exclaimed Mr. Belcher's son and heir. The words were hardly out of his mouth when Mr. Belcher started from his chair, ran down-stairs with all the speed possible within the range of safety, and intercepted the lads at a side door, which opened upon the street along which they were running.

"Stop, Harry, I want to speak to you," said the proprietor, sharply.

Harry stopped, as if frozen to the spot in mortal terror. "Come along," said Thede Balfour, tugging at his hand, "you'll be late at school."

Poor Harry could no more have walked than he could have flown. Mr. Belcher saw the impression he had made upon him, and became soft and insinuating in his manner.

"I'm glad to see you, my boy," said Mr. Belcher. "Come into the house, and see the children. They all remember you, and they are all homesick. They'll be glad to look at anything from Sevenoaks."

Harry was not reassured: he was only more intensely frightened. A giant, endeavoring to entice him into his cave in the woods, would not have terrified him more. At length he found his tongue sufficiently to say that he was going to school, and could not go in.

It was easy for Mr. Belcher to take his hand, limp and trembling with fear, and under the guise of friendliness to lead him up the steps, and take him to his room. Thede watched them until they disappeared, and then ran back to his home, and reported what had taken place. Mrs. Balfour was alone, and could do nothing. She did not believe that Mr. Belcher would dare to treat the lad foully, with the consciousness that his disappearance within his house had been observed, and wisely determined to do nothing but sit down at her window and watch the house.

Placing Harry in a chair, Mr. Belcher sat down opposite to him, and said:

"My boy, I'm very glad to see you. I've wanted to know about you more than any boy in the world. I suppose you've been told that I am a very bad man, but I'll prove to you that I'm not. There, put that ten-dollar gold piece in your pocket. That's what they call an eagle, and I hope you'll have a great many like it when you grow up."

The lad hid his hands behind his back, and shook his head.

"You don't mean to say that you won't take it!" said the proprietor in a wheedling tone.

The boy kept his hands behind him, and shook his head.

"Well, I suppose you are not to blame for disliking me; and now I want you to tell me all about your getting away from the poor-house, and who helped you out, and where your poor, dear father is, and all about it. Come, now, you don't know how much we looked for you, and how we all gave you up for lost. You don't know what a comfort it is to see you again, and to know that you didn't die in the woods."

The boy simply shook his head.

"Do you know who Mr. Belcher is? Do you know he is used to having people mind him? Do you know that you're here in my house, and that you *must* mind me? Do you know what I do to little boys when they disobey me? Now, I want you to answer my questions, and do it straight. Lying won't go down with me. Who helped you and your father to get out of the poor-house?"

Matters had proceeded to a desperate pass with the lad. He had thought very fast, and he had determined that no bribe and no threat should extort a word of information from him. His cheeks grew hot and flushed

his eyes burned, and he straightened himself in his chair as if he expected death or torture, and was prepared to meet either, as he replied:

"I won't tell you."

"Is your father alive? Tell me, you dirty little whelp? Don't say that you won't do what I bid you to do again. I have a great mind to choke you. Tell me—is your father alive?"

"I won't tell you, if you kill me."

The wheedling had failed; the threatening had failed. Then Mr. Belcher assumed the manner of a man whose motives had been misconstrued, and who wished for information that he might do a kind act to the lad's father.

"I should really like to help your father, and if he is poor, money would do him a great deal of good. And here is the little boy who does not love his father well enough to get money for him, when he can have it and welcome? The little boy is taken care of. He has plenty to eat, and good clothes to wear, and lives in a fine house, but his poor father can take care of himself. I think such a boy as that ought to be ashamed of himself. I think he ought to kneel down and say his prayers. If I had a boy who could do that, I should be sorry that he'd ever been born."

Harry was proof against this mode of approach also, and was relieved, because he saw that Mr. Belcher was baffled. His instincts were quick, and they told him that he was the victor. In the meantime Mr. Belcher was getting hot. He had closed the door of his room, while a huge coal fire was burning in the grate. He rose and opened the door. Harry watched the movement, and descried the grand staircase beyond his persecutor, as the door swung back. He had looked into the house while passing, during the previous week, and knew the relations of the staircase to the entrance on the avenue. His determination was instantaneously made,

and Mr. Belcher was conscious of a swift figure that passed under his arm, and was half down the staircase before he could move or say a word. Before he cried "stop him!" Harry's hand was on the fastening of the door, and when he reached the door, the boy was half across the street.

He had calculated on smoothing over the rough places of the interview, and preparing a better report of the visit of the lad's friends on the other side of the avenue, but the matter had literally slipped through his fingers. He closed the door after the retreating boy, and went back to his room without deigning to answer the inquiries that were excited by his loud command to "stop him."

Sitting down, and taking to himself his usual solace, and smoking furiously for a while, he said: "D——n!" Into this one favorite and familiar expletive he poured his anger, his vexation, and his fear. He believed at the moment that the inventor was alive. He believed that if he had been dead his boy would, in some way, have revealed the fact. Was he still insane? Had he powerful friends? It certainly appeared so. Otherwise, how could the lad be where he had discovered him? Was it rational to suppose that he was far from his father? Was it rational to suppose that the lad's friends were not equally the friends of the inventor? How could he know that Robert Belcher himself had not unwittingly come to the precise locality where he would be under constant surveillance? How could he know that a deeply laid plot was not already at work to undermine and circumvent him? The lad's reticence, determined and desperate, showed that he knew the relations that existed between his father and the proprietor, and seemed to show that he had acted under orders.

Something must be done to ascertain the residence of

Paul Benedict, if still alive, or to assure him of his death, if it had occurred. Something must be done to secure the property which he was rapidly accumulating. Already foreign governments were considering the advantages of the Belcher rifle, as an arm for the military service, and negotiations were pending with more than one of them. Already his own Government, then in the first years of its great civil war, had experimented with it, with the most favorable results. The business was never so promising as it then appeared, yet it never had appeared so insecure.

In the midst of his reflections, none of which were pleasant, and in a sort of undefined dread of the consequences of his indiscretions in connection with Harry Benedict, the bell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Talbot were announced. The factor and his gracious lady were in fine spirits, and full of their congratulations over the safe removal of the family to their splendid mansion. Mrs. Talbot was sure that Mrs. Belcher must feel that all the wishes of her heart were gratified. There was really nothing like the magnificence of the mansion. Mrs. Belcher could only say that it was all very fine, but Mr. Belcher, finding himself an object of envy, took great pride in showing his visitors about the house.

Mrs. Talbot, who in some way had ascertained that Mrs. Dillingham had superintended the arrangement of the house, said, in an aside to Mrs. Belcher: "It must have been a little lonely to come here and find no one to receive you—no friend, I mean."

"Mrs. Dillingham was here," remarked Mrs. Belcher, quietly.

"But she was no friend of yours."

"No; Mr. Belcher had met her."

"How strange! How very strange!"

"Do you know her well?"

"I'm afraid I do; but now, really, I hope you won't

permit yourself to be prejudiced against her. I suppose she means well, but she certainly does the most unheard-of things. She's a restless creature—not quite right, you know, but she has been immensely flattered. She's an old friend of mine, and I don't join the hue and cry against her at all, but she does such imprudent things! What did she say to you?"

Mrs. Belcher detected the spice of pique and jealousy in this charitable speech, and said very little in response—noting that a mischief-maker could torture into an offence.

Having worked her private pump until the well whose waters she sought refused to give up its treasures, Mrs. Talbot declared she would no longer embarrass the new house-keeping by her presence. She had only called to bid Mrs. Belcher welcome, and to assure her that if she had no friends in the city, there were hundreds of hospitable hearts that were ready to greet her. Then she and her husband went out, waved their adieus from their snug little coupé, and drove away.

The call had diverted Mr. Belcher from his sombre thoughts, and he summoned his carriage, and drove down town, where he spent his day in securing the revolution in his domestic service already alluded to, in talking business with his factor, and in making acquaintances on 'Change.

"I'm going to be in the middle of this thing, one of those days," said he to Talbot as they strolled back to the counting-room of the latter after a long walk among the brokers and bankers of Wall Street. "If anybody supposes that I've come here to lie still, they don't know me. They'll wake up some fine morning and find a new hand at the bellows."

Twilight found him at home again, where he had the supreme pleasure of turning his very independent servants out of his house into the street, and installing a set

who knew from the beginning the kind of man they had to deal with, and conducted themselves accordingly.

While enjoying his first cigar after dinner, a note was handed to him, which he opened and read. It was dated at the house across the avenue. He had expected and dreaded it, but he did not shrink like a coward from its perusal. It read thus:

"MR. ROBERT BELCHER: I have been informed of the shameful manner in which you treated a member of my family this morning—Master Harry Benedict. The bullying of a small boy is not accounted a dignified business for a man in the city which I learn you have chosen for your home, however it may be regarded in the little town from which you came. I do not propose to tolerate such conduct toward any dependent of mine. I do not ask for your apology, for the explanation was in my hands before the outrage was committed. I perfectly understand your relations to the lad, and trust that the time will come when the law will define them, so that the public will also understand them. Meantime, you will consult your own safety by letting him alone, and never presuming to repeat the scene of this morning.

"Yours,
JAMES BALFOUR,
"Counsellor-at-Law."

"Hum! ha!" exclaimed Mr. Belcher, compressing his lips, and spitefully tearing the letter into small strips and throwing them into the fire. "Thank you, kind sir; I owe you one," said he, rising, and walking his room. "That doesn't look very much as if Paul Benedict were alive. He's a counsellor-at-law, he is; and he has inveigled a boy into his keeping, who, he supposes, has a claim on me; and he proposes to make some money out of it. Sharp game!"

Mr. Belcher was interrupted in his reflections and his soliloquy by the entrance of a servant, with the information that there was a man at the door who wished to see him.

"Show him up."

The servant hesitated, and finally said: "He doesn't smell very well, sir."

"What does he smell of?" inquired Mr. Belcher, laughing.

"Rum, sir, and several things."

"Send him away, then."

"I tried to, sir, but he says he knows you, and wants to see you on particular business."

"Take him into the basement, and tell him I'll be down soon."

Mr. Belcher exhausted his cigar, tossed the stump into the fire, and, muttering to himself, "Who the devil!" went down to meet his caller.

As he entered a sort of lobby in the basement that was used as a servants' parlor, his visitor rose, and stood with great shame-facedness before him. He did not extend his hand, but stood still, in his seedy clothes and his coat buttoned to his chin, to hide his lack of a shirt. The blue look of the cold street had changed to a hot purple under the influence of a softer atmosphere; and over all stood the wreck of a good face, and a head still grand in its outline.

"Well, you look as if you were waiting to be damned," said Mr. Belcher, roughly.

"I am, sir," responded the man solemnly.

"Very well; consider the business done, so far as I am concerned, and clear out."

"I am the most miserable of men, Mr. Belcher."

"I believe you; and you'll excuse me if I say that your appearance corroborates your statement."

"And you don't recognize me? Is it possible?" And the maudlin tears came into the man's rheumy eyes and rolled down his cheeks. "You knew me in better days, sir;" and his voice trembled with weak emotion.

"No; I never saw you before. That game won't work, and now be off."

"And you don't remember Yates?—Sam Yates—and the happy days we spent together in childhood?" And the man wept again, and wiped his eyes with his coat-sleeve.

"Do you pretend to say that you are Sam Yates, the lawyer?"

"The same, at your service."

"What brought you to this?"

"Drink, and bad company, sir."

"And you want money?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the man, with a hiss as fierce as if he were a serpent.

"Do you want to earn money?"

"Anything to get it."

"Anything to get drink, I suppose. You said 'anything.' Did you mean that?"

The man knew Robert Belcher, and he knew that the last question had a great deal more in it than would appear to the ordinary listener.

"Lift me out of the gutter," said he, "and keep me out, and—command me."

"I have a little business on hand," said Mr. Belcher, "that you can do, provided you will let your drink alone—a business that I am willing to pay for. Do you remember a man by the name of Benedict—a shiftless, ingenious dog, who once lived in Sevenoaks?"

"Very well."

"Should you know him again, were you to see him?"

"I think I should."

"Do you know you should? I don't want any thinking about it. Could you swear to him?"

"Yes. I don't think it would trouble me to swear to him."

"If I were to show you some of his handwriting, do you suppose that would help you any?"

"It—might."

"I don't want any 'mights.' Do you know it would?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to sell yourself—body, soul, brains, legal knowledge, everything—for money?"

"I've sold myself already at a smaller price, and I don't mind withdrawing from the contract for a better."

Mr. Belcher summoned a servant, and ordered something to eat for his visitor. While the man eagerly devoured his food, and washed it down with a cup of tea, Mr. Belcher went to his room, and wrote an order on his tailor for a suit of clothes, and a complete respectable outfit for the legal "dead beat" who was feasting himself below. When he descended, he handed him the paper, and gave him money for a bath and a night's lodging.

"To-morrow morning I want you to come here clean, and dressed in the clothes that this paper will give you. If you drink one drop before that time I will strip the clothes from your back. Come to this room and get a decent breakfast. Remember that you can't fool me, and that I'll have none of your nonsense. If you are to serve me, and get any money out of it, you must keep sober."

"I can keep sober—for a while—any way," said the man, hesitatingly and half-despairingly.

"Very well, now be off; and mind, if I ever hear a word of this, or any of our dealings outside, I'll thrash you as I would a dog. If you are true to me I can be of use to you. If you are not, I will kick you into the street."

The man tottered to his feet, and said: "I am ashamed to say that you may command me. I should have scorned it once, but my chance is gone, and I could be loyal to the devil himself—for a consideration."

The next morning Mr. Belcher was informed that Yates had breakfasted, and was awaiting orders. He

descended to the basement, and stood confronted with a respectable-looking gentleman, who greeted him in a courtly way, yet with a deprecating look in his eyes, which said, as plainly as words could express: "Don't humiliate me any more than you can help! Use me, but spare the little pride I have, if you can."

The deprecating look was lost upon Mr. Belcher. "Where did you get your clothes?" he inquired. "Come, now; give me the name of your tailor. I'm green in the city, you see."

The man tried to smile, but the effort was a failure.

"What did you take for a night-cap last night, eh?"

"I give you my word of honor, sir, that I have not taken a drop since I saw you."

"Word of honor! ha! ha! ha! Do you suppose I want your word of honor? Do you suppose I want a man of honor, any way? If you have come here to talk about honor, you are no man for me. That's a sort of nonsense that I have no use for."

"Very well; my word of dishonor," responded the man, desperately.

"Now you talk. There's no use in such a man as you putting on airs, and forgetting that he wears my clothes and fills himself at my table."

"I do not forget it, sir, and I see that I am not likely to."

"Not while you do business with me; and now, sit down and hear me. The first thing you are to do is to ascertain whether Paul Benedict is dead. It isn't necessary that you should know my reasons. You are to search every insane hospital, public and private, in the city, and every almshouse. Put on your big airs and play philanthropist. Find all the records of the past year—the death records of the city—everything that will help to determine that the man is dead, as I believe he is. This will give you all you want to do for the present.

The man's son is in the city, and the boy and the man left the Sevenoaks poor-house together. If the man is alive, he is likely to be near him. If he is dead, he probably died near him. Find out, too, if you can, when his boy came to live at Balfour's over the way, and where he came from. You may stumble upon what I want very soon, or it may take you all winter. If you should fail then, I shall want you to take the road from here to Sevenoaks, and even to Number Nine, looking into all the almshouses on the way. The great point is to find out whether he is alive or dead, and to know, if he is dead, where, and exactly when, he died. In the meantime, come to me every week with a written report of what you have done, and get your pay. Come always after dark, so that none of Balfour's people can see you. Begin the business and carry it on in your own way. You are old and sharp enough not to need any aid from me, and now be off."

The man took a roll of bills that Mr. Belcher handed him, and walked out of the door without a word. As he rose to the sidewalk, Mr. Balfour came out of the door opposite to him, with the evident intention of taking a passing stage. He nodded to Yates, whom he had not only known in other days, but had many times befriended, and the latter sneaked off down the street, while he, standing for a moment as if puzzled, turned, and with his latch-key re-entered his house. Yates saw the movement, and knew exactly what it meant. He only hoped that Mr. Belcher had not seen it, as, indeed, he had not, having been at the moment on his way upstairs.

Yates knew that, with his good clothes on, the keen lawyer would give but one interpretation to the change, and that any hope or direct plan he might have with regard to ascertaining when the boy was received into the family, and where he came from, was nugatory. He would not tell Mr. Belcher this.

Mr. Balfour called his wife to the window, pointed out the retreating form of Yates, gave utterance to his suspicions, and placed her upon her guard. Then he went to his office, as well satisfied that there was a mischievous scheme on foot as if he had overheard the conversation between Mr. Belcher and the man who had consented to be his tool.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH TELLS OF A GREAT PUBLIC MEETING IN SEVENOAKS, THE BURNING IN EFFIGY OF MR. BELCHER, AND THAT GENTLEMAN'S INTERVIEW WITH A REPORTER.

MR. BALFOUR, in his yearly journeys through Sevenoaks, had made several acquaintances among the citizens, and had impressed them as a man of ability and integrity; and, as he was the only New York lawyer of their acquaintance, they very naturally turned to him for information and advice. Without consulting each other, or informing each other of what they had done, at least half a dozen wrote to him the moment Mr. Belcher was out of the village, seeking information concerning the Continental Petroleum Company. They told him frankly about the enormous investments that they and their neighbors had made, and of their fears concerning the results. With a friendly feeling toward the people, he undertook, as far as possible, to get at the bottom of the matter, and sent a man to look up the property, and to find the men who nominally composed the company.

After a month had passed away and no dividend was announced, the people began to talk more freely among