

"Is there any such thing as a virtuous devil, I wonder," he muttered to himself, as he mounted his steps. "I doubt it; I doubt it."

The next day was icy. Men went slipping along upon the sidewalks as carefully as if they were trying to follow a guide through the galleries of Versailles. And in the afternoon a beautiful woman called a boy to her, and begged him to give her his shoulder and help her home. The request was so sweetly made, she expressed her obligations so courteously, she smiled upon him so beautifully, she praised him so ingenuously, she shook his hand at parting so heartily, that he went home all aglow from his heart to his fingers' ends.

Mrs. Dillingham had made Harry Benedict's acquaintance, which she managed to keep alive by bows in the street and bows from the window—managed to keep alive until the lad worshipped her as a sort of divinity, and, to win her smiling recognition, would go out of his way a dozen blocks on any errand about the city.

He recognized her—knew her as the beautiful woman he had seen in the great house across the street before Mr. Belcher arrived in town. Recognizing her as such, he kept the secret of his devotion to himself, for fear that it would be frowned upon by his good friends the Balfours. Mr. Belcher, however, knew all about it, rejoiced in it, and counted upon it as a possible means in the accomplishment of his ends.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHICH GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF A VOLUNTARY AND AN INVOLUNTARY VISIT OF SAM YATES TO NUMBER NINE.

MR. BELCHER followed up the acquaintance which he had so happily made on New Year's Day with many of the leading operators of Wall Street, during the remainder of the winter, and, by the careful and skilful manipulation of the minor stocks of the market, not only added to his wealth by sure and steady degrees, but built up a reputation for sagacity and boldness. He struck at them with a strong hand, and gradually became a recognized power on 'Change. He knew that he would not be invited into any combinations until he had demonstrated his ability to stand alone. He understood that he could not win a leading position in any of the great financial enterprises until he had shown that he had the skill to manage them. He was playing for two stakes—present profit and future power and glory; and he played with brave adroitness.

During the same winter the work at Number Nine went on according to contract. Mike Conlin found his second horse and the requisite sled, and, the river freezing solidly and continuously, he was enabled not only to draw the lumber to the river, but up to the very point where it was to be used, and where Jim and Mr. Benedict were hewing and framing their timber, and pursuing their trapping with unflinching industry. Number Ten was transformed into a stable, where Mike kept his horses on the nights of his arrival. Two trips a week were all that he could accomplish, but the winter was so long, and he was so industrious, that before the ice broke up, everything for the construction of the house

had been delivered, even to the bricks for the chimney, the lime for the plastering, and the last clapboard and shingle. The planning, the chaffing, the merry stories of which Number Nine was the scene that winter, the grand, absorbing interest in the enterprise in which these three men were engaged, it would be pleasant to recount, but they may safely be left to the reader's imagination. What was Sam Yates doing?

He lived up to the letter of his instructions. Finding himself in the possession of an assured livelihood, respectably dressed and engaged in steady employment, his appetite for drink loosened its cruel hold upon him, and he was once more in possession of himself. All the week long he was busy in visiting hospitals, almshouses and lunatic asylums, and in examining their records and the mortuary records of the city. Sometimes he presented himself at the doors of public institutions as a philanthropist, preparing, by personal inspection, for writing some book, or getting statistics, or establishing an institution on behalf of a public benefactor. Sometimes he went in the character of a lawyer, in search of a man who had fallen heir to a fortune. He had always a plausible story to tell, and found no difficulty in obtaining an entrance at all the doors to which his inquisition led him. He was treated everywhere so courteously that his self-respect was wonderfully nourished, and he began to feel as if it were possible for him to become a man again.

On every Saturday night, according to Mr. Belcher's command, he made his appearance in the little basement-room of the grand residence, where he was first presented to the reader. On these occasions he always brought a clean record of what he had done during the week, which he read to Mr. Belcher, and then passed into that gentleman's hands, to be filed away and preserved. On every visit, too, he was made to feel that

he was a slave. As his self-respect rose from week to week, the coarse and brutal treatment of the proprietor was increased. Mr. Belcher feared that the man was getting above his business, and that, as the time approached when he might need something very different from these harmless investigations, his instrument might become too fine for use.

Besides the ministry to his self-respect which his labors rendered, there was another influence upon Sam Yates that tended to confirm its effects. He had in his investigations come into intimate contact with the results of all forms of vice. Idiocy, insanity, poverty, moral debasement, disease in a thousand repulsive forms, all these had frightened and disgusted him. On the direct road to one of these terrible goals he had been travelling. He knew it, and, with a shudder many times repeated, felt it. He had been arrested in the downward road, and, God helping him, he would never resume it. He had witnessed brutal cruelties and neglect among officials that maddened him. The professional indifference of keepers and nurses toward those who, if vicious, were still unfortunate and helpless, offended and outraged all of manhood there was left in him.

One evening, early in the spring, he made his customary call upon Mr. Belcher, bringing his usual report. He had completed the canvas of the city and its environs, and had found no testimony to the death or recent presence of Mr. Benedict. He hoped that Mr. Belcher was done with him, for he saw that his brutal will was the greatest obstacle to his reform. If he could get away from his master, he could begin life anew; for his professional brothers, who well remembered his better days, were ready to throw business into his hands, now that he had become himself again.

"I suppose this ends it," said Yates, as he read his report, and passed it over into Mr. Belcher's hands.

"Oh, you do!"

"I do not see how I can be of further use to you."

"Oh, you don't!"

"I have certainly reason to be grateful for your assistance, but I have no desire to be a burden upon your hands. I think I can get a living now in my profession."

"Then we've found that we have a profession, have we? We've become highly respectable."

"I really don't see what occasion you have to taunt me. I have done my duty faithfully, and taken no more than my just pay for the labor I have performed."

"Sam Yates, I took you out of the gutter. Do you know that?"

"I do, sir."

"Did you ever hear of my doing such a thing as that before?"

"I never did."

"What do you suppose I did it for?"

"To serve yourself."

"You are right; and now let me tell you that I am not done with you yet, and I shall not be done with you until I have in my hands a certificate of the death of Paul Benedict, and an instrument drawn up in legal form, making over to me all his right, title, and interest in every patented invention of his which I am now using in my manufactures. Do you hear that?"

"I do."

"What have you to say to it? Are you going to live up to your pledge, or are you going to break with me?"

"If I could furnish such an instrument honorably, I would do it."

"H'm! I tell you, Sam Yates, this sort of thing won't do."

Then Mr. Belcher left the room, and soon returned with a glass and a bottle of brandy. Setting them upon the table, he took the key from the outside of the door,

inserted it upon the inside, turned it, and then withdrew it, and put it in his pocket. Yates rose and watched him, his face pale, and his heart thumping at his side like a tilt-hammer.

"Sam Yates," said Mr. Belcher, "you are getting altogether too virtuous. Nothing will cure you but a good, old-fashioned drunk. Dip in, now, and take your fill. You can lie here all night if you wish to."

Mr. Belcher drew the cork, and poured out a tumblerful of the choice old liquid. Its fragrance filled the little room. It reached the nostrils of the poor slave, who shivered as if an ague had smitten him. He hesitated, advanced toward the table, retreated, looked at Mr. Belcher, then at the brandy, then walked the room, then paused before Mr. Belcher, who had coolly watched the struggle from his chair. The victim of this passion was in the supreme of torment. His old thirst was roused to fury. The good resolutions of the preceding weeks, the moral strength he had won, the motives that had come to life within him, the promise of a better future, sank away into blank nothingness. A patch of fire burned on either cheek. His eyes were bloodshot.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" he exclaimed, and buried his face in his hands.

"Fudge!" said Mr. Belcher. "What do you make an ass of yourself for?"

"If you'll take these things out of the room, and see that I drink nothing to-night, I'll do anything. They are hell and damnation to me. Don't you see? Have you no pity on me? Take them away!"

Mr. Belcher was surprised, but he had secured the promise he was after, and so he coolly rose and removed the offensive temptation.

Yates sat down as limp as if he had had a sunstroke. After sitting a long time in silence, he looked up, and begged for the privilege of sleeping in the house. He

did not dare to trust himself in the street until sleep had calmed and strengthened him.

There was a lounge in the room, and, calling a servant, Mr. Belcher ordered blankets to be brought down. "You can sleep here to-night, and I will see you in the morning," said he, rising, and leaving him without even the common courtesy of a "good-night."

Poor Sam Yates had a very bad night indeed. He was humiliated by the proof of his weakness, and maddened by the outrage which had been attempted upon him and his good resolutions. In the morning he met Mr. Belcher, feeble and unrefreshed, and with seeming acquiescence received his directions for future work.

"I want you to take the road from here to Sevenoaks, stopping at every town on the way. You can be sure of this: he is not near Sevenoaks. The whole county, and in fact the adjoining counties, were all ransacked to find him. He cannot have found asylum there; so he must be either between here and Sevenoaks, or must have gone into the woods beyond. There's a trapper there, one Jim Fenton. He may have come across him in the woods, alive or dead, and I want you to go to his camp and find out whether he knows anything. My impression is that he knew Benedict well, and that Benedict used to hunt with him. When you come back to me, after a faithful search, with the report that you can find nothing of him, or with the report of his death, we shall be ready for decisive operations. Write me when you have anything to write, and if you find it necessary to spend money to secure any very desirable end, spend it."

Then Mr. Belcher put into the hands of his agent a roll of bank-notes, and armed him with a check that might be used in case of emergency, and sent him off.

It took Yates six long weeks to reach Sevenoaks. He labored daily with the same faithfulness that had characterized his operations in the city, and, reaching Seven-

oaks, he found himself for a few days free from care, and at liberty to resume the acquaintance with his early home, where he and Robert Belcher had been boys together.

The people of Sevenoaks had long before heard of the fall of Sam Yates from his early rectitude. They had once been proud of him, and when he left them for the city, they expected to hear great things of him. So when they learned that, after entering upon his profession with brilliant promise, he had ruined himself with drink, they bemoaned him for a while, and at last forgot him. His relatives never mentioned him, and when, well dressed, dignified, self-respectful, he appeared among them again, it was like receiving one from the dead. The rejoicing of his relatives, the cordiality of his old friends and companions, the reviving influences of the scenes of his boyhood, all tended to build up his self-respect, reinforce his strength, and fix his determination for a new life.

Of course he did not make known his business, and of course he heard a thousand inquiries about Mr. Belcher, and listened to the stories of the proprietor's foul dealings with the people of his native town. His own relatives had been straitened or impoverished by the man's rascalities, and the fact was not calculated to strengthen his loyalty to his employer. He heard also the whole story of the connection of Mr. Belcher with Benedict's insanity, of the escape of the latter from the poor-house, and of the long and unsuccessful search that had been made for him.

He spent a delightful week among his friends in the old village, learned about Jim Fenton and the way to reach him, and on a beautiful spring morning, armed with fishing-tackle, started from Sevenoaks for a fortnight's absence in the woods. The horses were fresh, the air sparkling, and at mid-afternoon he found himself stand-

ing by the river-side, with a row of ten miles before him in a birch canoe, whose hiding-place Mike Conlin had revealed to him during a brief call at his house. To his unused muscles it was a serious task to undertake, but he was not a novice, and it was entered upon deliberately and with a prudent husbandry of his power of endurance. Great was the surprise of Jim and Mr. Benedict, as they sat eating their late supper, to hear the sound of the paddle down the river, and to see approaching them a city gentleman, who, greeting them courteously, drew up in front of their cabin, took out his luggage, and presented himself.

"Where's Jim Fenton?" said Yates.

"That's me. Them as likes me calls me Jim, and them as don't like me—wall, they don't call."

"Well, I've called, and I call you Jim."

"All right; let's see yer tackle," said Jim.

Jim took the rod that Yates handed to him, looked it over, and then said: "When ye come to Sevenoaks ye didn't think o' goin' a fishin'. This 'ere tackle wasn't brung from the city, and ye ain't no old fisherman. This is the sort they keep down to Sevenoaks."

"No," said Yates, flushing; "I thought I should find near you the tackle used here, so I didn't burden myself."

"That seems' reasomble," said Jim, "but it ain't. A trout's a trout anywhere, an' ye hain't got no reel. Ye never fished with anything but a white birch pole in yer life."

Yates was amused, and laughed. Jim did not laugh. He was just as sure that Yates had come on some errand, for which his fishing-tackle was a cover, as that he had come at all. He could think of but one motive that would bring the man into the woods, unless he came for sport, and for sport he did not believe his visitor had come at all. He was not dressed for it. None but old

sportsmen, with nothing else to do, ever came into the woods at that season.

"Jim, introduce me to your friend," said Yates, turning to Mr. Benedict, who had dropped his knife and fork, and sat uneasily witnessing the meeting, and listening to the conversation.

"Well, I call 'im Number Ten. His name's Williams; an' now if ye ain't too tired, perhaps ye'll tell us what they call ye to home."

"Well, I'm Number Eleven, and my name's Williams, too."

"Then, if yer name's Williams, an' ye're Number 'leven, ye want some supper. Set down an' help yerself."

Before taking his seat, Yates turned laughingly to Mr. Benedict, shook his hand, and "hoped for a better acquaintance."

Jim was puzzled. The man was no ordinary man; he was good-natured; he was not easily perturbed; he was there with a purpose, and that purpose had nothing to do with sport.

After Yates had satisfied his appetite with the coarse food before him, and had lighted his cigar, Jim drove directly at business.

"What brung ye here?" said he.

"A pair of horses and a birch canoe."

"Oh! I didn't know but 'twas a mule and a bandanner hankercher," said Jim; "and whar be ye goin' to sleep to-night?"

"In the canoe, I suppose, if some hospitable man doesn't invite me to sleep in his cabin."

"An' if ye sleep in his cabin, what be ye goin' to do to-morrer?"

"Get up."

"An' clear out?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Well, I love to see folks make themselves to home;

but ye don't sleep in no cabin o' mine till I know who ye be, an' what ye're arter."

"Jim, did you ever hear of entertaining angels unaware?" and Yates looked laughingly into his face.

"No, but I've hearn of angels entertainin' theirselves on tin-ware, an' I've had 'em here."

"Do you have tin peddlers here?" inquired Yates, looking around him.

"No, but we have paupers sometimes," and Jim looked Yates directly in the eye.

"What paupers?"

"From Sevenoaks."

"And do they bring tin-ware?"

"Sartin they do; leastways, one on 'em did, an' I never seen but one in the woods, an' he come here one night tootin' on a tin horn, an' blowin' about bein' the angel Gabr'el. Do you see my har?"

"Rather bushy, Jim."

"Well, that's the time it come up, an' it's never been tired enough to lay down sence."

"What became of Gabriel?"

"I skeered 'im, and he went off into the woods pretendin' he was tryin' to catch a bullet. That's the kind o' ball I allers use when I have a little game with a rovin' angel that comes kadoodlin' round me."

"Did you ever see him afterward?" inquired Yates.

"Yes, I seen him. He laid down one night under a tree, an' he wasn't called to breakfast, an' he never woke up. So I made up my mind he'd gone to play angel somewheres else, an' I dug a hole an' put 'im into it, an' he hain't never riz, if so be he wasn't Number 'leven, an' his name was Williams."

Yates did not laugh, but manifested the most eager interest.

"Jim," said he, "can you show me his bones, and swear to your belief that he was an escaped pauper?"

"Easy."

"Was there a man lost from the poor-house about that time?"

"Yes, an' there was a row about it, an' arterward old Buffum was took with knowin' less than he ever knowed afore. He always did make a fuss about breathin', so he give it up."

"Well, the man you buried is the man I'm after."

"Yes, an' old Belcher sent ye. I knowed it. I smelt the old feller when I heern yer paddle. When a feller works for the devil it ain't hard to guess what sort of an angel *he* is. Ye must feel mighty proud o' yer belongin's."

"Jim, I'm a lawyer; it's my business. I do what I'm hired to do."

"Well," responded Jim, "I don't know nothin' about lawyers, but I'd rather be a natural born cuss nor a hired one."

Yates laughed, but Jim was entirely sober. The lawyer saw that he was unwelcome, and that the sooner he was out of Jim's way, the better that freely speaking person would like it. So he said quietly:

"Jim, I see that I am not welcome, but I bear you no ill-will. Keep me to-night, and to-morrow show me this man's bones, and sign a certificate of the statements you have made to me, and I will leave you at once."

The woodsman made no more objection, and the next morning, after breakfast, the three men went together and found the place of the pauper's burial. It took but a few minutes to disinter the skeleton, and, after a silent look at it, it was again buried, and all returned to the cabin. Then the lawyer, after asking further questions, drew up a paper certifying to all the essential facts in the case, and Jim signed it.

"Now, how be ye goin' to get back to Sevenoaks?" inquired Jim.

"I don't know. The man who brought me in is not to come for me for a fortnight."

"Then ye've got to huff it," responded Jim.

"It's a long way."

"Ye can do it as fur as Mike's, an' he'll be glad to git back some o' the hundred dollars that old Belcher got out of him."

"The row and the walk will be too much."

"I'll take ye to the landing," said Jim.

"I shall be glad to pay you for the job," responded Yates.

"An' ef ye do," said Jim, "there'll be an accident, an' two men'll get wet, an' one on 'em'll stan' a chance to be drowned."

"Well, have your own way," said Yates.

It was not yet noon, and Jim hurried off his visitor. Yates bade good-by to Benedict, jumped into Jim's boat, and was soon out of sight down the stream. The boat fairly leaped through the water under Jim's strong and steady strokes, and it seemed that only an hour had passed when the landing was discovered.

They made the whole distance in silence. Jim, sitting at his oars, with Yates in the stern, had watched the lawyer with a puzzled expression. He could not read him. The man had not said a word about Benedict. He had not once pronounced his name. He was evidently amused with something, and had great difficulty in suppressing a smile. Again and again the amused expression suffused the lawyer's face, and still, by an effort of will, it was smothered. Jim was in torture. The man seemed to be in possession of some great secret, and looked as if he only waited an opportunity beyond observation to burst into a laugh.

"What the devil be ye thinkin' on?" inquired Jim at last.

Yates looked him in the eyes, and replied coolly :

"I was thinking how well Benedict is looking."

Jim stopped rowing, holding his oars in the air. He was dumb. His face grew almost livid, and his hair seemed to rise and stand straight all over his head. His first impulse was to spring upon the man and throttle him, but a moment's reflection determined him upon another course. He let his oars drop into the water, and then took up the rifle, which he always carried at his side. Raising it to his eye, he said :

"Now, Number 'leven, come an' take my seat. Ef ye make any fuss, I'll tip ye into the river, or blow yer brains out. Any man that plays traitor with Jim Fenton, gits traitor's fare."

Yates saw that he had made a fatal mistake, and that it was too late to correct it. He saw that Jim was dangerously excited, and that it would not do to excite him further. He therefore rose, and with feigned pleasantries said he should be very glad to row to the landing.

Jim passed him and took a seat in the stern of the boat. Then, as Yates took up the oars, Jim raised his rifle, and, pointing it directly at the lawyer's breast, said :

"Now, Sam Yates, turn this boat round."

Yates was surprised in turn, bit his lips, and hesitated.

"Turn this boat round, or I'll fix ye so't I can see through ye plainer nor I do now."

"Surely, Jim, you don't mean to have me row back I haven't harmed you."

"Turn this boat round, quicker nor lightnin'."

"There, it's turned," said Yates, assuming a smile.

"Now row back to Number Nine."

"Come, Jim," said Yates, growing pale with vexation and apprehension, "this fooling has gone far enough."

"Not by ten mile," said Jim.

"You surely don't mean to take me back. You have no right to do it. I can prosecute you for this."

"Not if I put a bullet through ye, or drown ye."

"Do you mean to have me row back to Number Nine?"

"I mean to have you row back to Number Nine, or go to the bottom leakin'," responded Jim.

Yates thought a moment, looked angrily at the determined man before him, as if he were meditating some rash experiment, and then dipped his oars and rowed up stream.

Great was the surprise of Mr. Benedict late in the afternoon to see Yates slowly rowing toward the cabin, and landing under cover of Jim's rifle, and the blackest face that he had ever seen above his good friend's shoulders.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH JIM CONSTRUCTS TWO HAPPY DAVIDS,
RAISES HIS HOTEL, AND DISMISSES SAM YATES.

WHEN the boat touched the bank, Jim, still with his rifle pointed at the breast of Sam Yates, said:

"Now git out, an' take a bee line for the shanty, an' see how many paces ye make on't."

Yates was badly blown by his row of ten miles on the river, and could hardly stir from his seat; but Mr. Benedict helped him up the bank, and then Jim followed him on shore.

Benedict looked from one to the other with mingled surprise and consternation, and then said:

"Jim, what does this mean?"

"It means," replied Jim, "that Number 'leven, an' his name is Williams, forgot to 'tend to his feelin's over old Tilden's grave, an' I've axed 'im to come back an' use up his clean hankers. He was took with a fit o

knowin' somethin', too, an' I'm goin' to see if I can cure 'im. It's a new sort o' sickness for him, an' it may floor 'im."

"I suppose there is no use in carrying on this farce any longer," said Yates. "I knew you, Mr. Benedict, soon after arriving here, and it seems that you recognized me; and now, here is my hand. I never meant you ill, and I did not expect to find you alive. I have tried my best to make you out a dead man, and so to report you; but Jim has compelled me to come back and make sure that you are alive."

"No, I didn't," responded Jim. "I wanted to let ye know that I'm alive, and that I don't 'low no hired cusses to come snoopin' round my camp, an' goin' off with a haw-haw buttoned up in their jackets, without a thrashin'."

Benedict, of course, stood thunderstruck and irresolute. He was discovered by the very man whom his old persecutor had sent for the purpose. He had felt that the discovery would be made sooner or later—intended, indeed, that it should be made—but he was not ready.

They all walked to the cabin in moody silence. Jim felt that he had been hasty, and was very strongly inclined to believe in the sincerity of Yates; but he knew it was safe to be on his guard with any man who was in the employ of Mr. Belcher. Turk saw there was trouble, and whined around his master, as if inquiring whether there was anything that he could do to bring matters to an adjustment.

"No, Turk; he's my game," said Jim. "Ye couldn't eat 'im no more nor ye could a muss-rat."

There were just three seats in the cabin—two campstools and a chest.

"That's the seat for ye," said Jim to Yates, pointing to the chest. "Jest plant yerself thar. Thar's somethin' in that 'ere chest as'll make ye tell the truth."