

"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."

Yates looked at the chest and hesitated.

"It ain't powder," said Jim, "but it'll blow ye worse nor powder, if ye don't tell the truth."

Yates sat down. He had not appreciated the anxiety of Benedict to escape discovery, or he would not have been so silly as to bruit his knowledge until he had left the woods. He felt ashamed of his indiscretion, but, as he knew that his motives were good, he could not but feel that he had been outraged.

"Jim, you have abused me," said he. "You have misunderstood me, and that is the only apology that you can make for your discourtesy. I was a fool to tell you what I knew, but you had no right to serve me as you have served me."

"P'raps I hadn't," responded Jim, doubtfully.

Yates went on :

"I have never intended to play you a trick. It may be a base thing for me to do, but I intended to deceive Mr. Belcher. He is a man to whom I owe no good-will. He has always treated me like a dog, and he will continue the treatment so long as I have anything to do with him ; but he found me when I was very low, and he has furnished me with the money that has made it possible for me to redeem myself. Believe me, the finding of Mr. Benedict was the most unwelcome discovery I ever made."

"Ye talk reasomble," said Jim ; "but how be I goin' to know that ye're tellin' the truth?"

"You cannot know," replied Yates. "The circumstances are all against me, but you will be obliged to trust me. You are not going to kill me ; you are not going to harm me ; for you would gain nothing by getting my ill-will. I forgive your indignities, for it was natural for you to be provoked, and I provoked you needlessly—childishly, in fact ; but after what I have said, anything further in that line will not be borne."

"I've a good mind to lick ye now," said Jim, on hearing himself defied.

"You would be a fool to undertake it," said Yates.

"Well, what be ye goin' to tell old Belcher, anyway?" inquired Jim.

"I doubt whether I shall tell him anything. I have no intention of telling him that Mr. Benedict is here, and I do not wish to tell him a lie. I have intended to tell him that in all my journey to Sevenoaks I did not find the object of my search, and that Jim Fenton declared that but one pauper had ever come into the woods and died there."

"That's the truth," said Jim. "Benedict ain't no pauper, nor hain't been since he left the poor-house."

"If he knows about old Tilden," said Yates, "and I'm afraid he does, he'll know that I'm on the wrong scent. If he doesn't know about him, he'll naturally conclude that the dead man was Mr. Benedict. That will answer his purpose."

"Old Belcher ain't no fool," said Jim.

"Well," said Yates, "why doesn't Mr. Benedict come out like a man and claim his rights? That would relieve me, and settle all the difficulties of the case."

Benedict had nothing to say for this, for there was what he felt to be a just reproach in it.

"It's the way he's made," replied Jim—"leastways, partly. When a man's be'n hauled through hell by the har, it takes 'im a few days to git over bein' dizzy an' find his legs ag'in ; an' when a man sells himself to old Belcher, he mustn't squawk an' try to git another feller to help 'im out of 'is bargain. Ye got into't, an' ye must git out on't the best way ye can."

"What would you have me do?" inquired Yates.

"I want to have ye sw'ar, an' sign a Happy David."

"A what?"

"A Happy David. Ye ain't no lawyer if ye don't know what a Happy David is, and can't make one."

Yates recognized, with a smile, the nature of the instrument disguised in Jim's pronunciation and conception, and inquired :

"What would you have me to swear to?"

"To what I tell ye."

"Very well. I have pen and paper with me, and am ready to write. Whether I will sign the paper will depend upon its contents."

"Be ye ready?"

"Yes."

"Here ye have it, then. 'I solem-ny sw'ar, s'welp me! that I hain't seen no pauper, in no woods, with his name as Benedict.'"

Jim paused, and Yates, having completed the sentence, waited. Then Jim muttered to himself :

"With his name *as* Benedict—with his name *is* Benedict—with his name *was* Benedict."

Then with a puzzled look, he said :

"Yates, can't ye doctor that a little?"

"Whose name was Benedict," suggested Yates.

"Whose name was Benedict," continued Jim. "Now read it over, as fur as ye've got."

"I solemnly swear that I have seen no pauper in the woods whose name was Benedict."

"Now look a-here, Sam Yates! That sort o' thing won't do. Stop them tricks. Ye don't know me, an' ye don't know whar ye're settin', if you think that'll go down."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I telled ye that Benedict was no pauper, an' ye say that ye've seen no pauper whose name was Benedict. That's jest tellin' that he's here. Oh, ye can't come that game! Now begin ag'in, an' write jest as I give it to ye. 'I solem-ny sw'ar, s'welp me! that I hain't seen no pauper, in no woods, whose name was Benedict.'"

"Done," said Yates, "but it isn't grammar."

"Hang the grammar!" responded Jim; "what I want is sense. Now jine this on: 'An' I solem-ny sw'ar, s'welp me! that I won't blow on Benedict, as isn't a pauper—no more nor Jim Fenton is—an' if so be as I do blow on Benedict—I give Jim Fenton free liberty, out and out—to lick me—without goin' to lor—but takin' the privlidge of self-defence.'"

Jim thought a moment. He had wrought out a large phrase.

"I guess," said he, "that covers the thing. Ye understand, don't ye, Yates, about the privlidge of self-defence?"

"You mean that I may defend myself if I can, don't you?"

"Yes. With the privlidge of self-defence. That's fair, an' I'd give it to a painter. Now read it all over."

Jim put his head down between his knees, the better to measure every word, while Yates read the complete document. Then Jim took the paper, and, handing it to Benedict, requested him to see if it had been read correctly. Assured that it was all right, Jim turned his eyes severely on Yates, and said :

"Sam Yates, do ye s'pose ye've any idee what it is to be licked by Jim Fenton? Do ye know what ye're sw'arin' to? Do ye reelize that I wouldn't leave enough on ye to pay for havin' a funeral?"

Yates laughed, and said that he believed he understood the nature of an oath.

"Then sign yer Happy David," said Jim.

Yates wrote his name, and passed the paper into Jim's hands.

"Now," said Jim, with an expression of triumph on his face, "I s'pose ye don't know that ye've been settin' on a Bible; but it's right under ye, in that chest, an it's hearn and seen the whole thing. If ye don't stand by yer Happy David, there'll be somethin' worse nor Jim

Fenton arter ye, an' when that comes, ye can jest shet yer eyes, and gi'en it up."

This was too much for both Yates and Benedict. They looked into each other's eyes, and burst into a laugh. But Jim was in earnest, and not a smile crossed his rough face.

"Now," said he, "I want to do a little sw'arin' myself, and I want ye to write it."

Yates resumed his pen, and declared himself to be in readiness.

"I solem-ny sw'ar," Jim began, "s'welp me! that I will lick Sam Yates—as is a lawyer—with the privlidge of self-defence—if he ever blows on Benedict—as is not a pauper—no more nor Jim Fenton is—an' I solem-ny sw'ar, s'welp me! that I'll foller 'im till I find 'im, an' lick 'im—with the privlidge of self-defence."

Jim would have been glad to work in the last phrase again, but he seemed to have covered the whole ground, and so inquired whether Yates had got it all down.

Yates replied that he had.

"I'm a-goin' to sign that, an' ye can take it along with ye. Swap seats."

Yates rose, and Jim seated himself upon the chest.

"I'm a-goin' to sign this, settin' over the Bible. I ain't goin' to take no advantage on ye. Now we're squar'," said he, as he blazoned the document with his coarse and clumsy sign-manual. "Put that in yer pocket, an' keep it for five year."

"Is the business all settled?" inquired Yates.

"Clean," replied Jim.

"When am I to have the liberty to go out of the woods?"

"Ye ain't goin' out o' the woods for a fortnight. Ye're a-goin' to stay here, an' have the best fishin' ye ever had in yer life. It'll do ye good, an' ye can go out when yer man comes arter ye. Ye can stay to the raisin', an'

gi'en us a little lift with the other fellers that's comin' Ye'll be as strong as a hoss when ye go out."

An announcement more welcome than this could not have been made to Sam Yates; and now that there was no secrecy between them, and confidence was restored, he looked forward to a fortnight of enjoyment. He laid aside his coat, and, as far as possible, reduced his dress to the requirements of camp life. Jim and Mr. Benedict were very busy, so that he was obliged to find his way alone, but Jim lent him his fishing-tackle, and taught him how to use it; and, as he was an apt pupil, he was soon able to furnish more fish to the camp than could be used.

Yates had many a long talk with Benedict, and the two men found many points of sympathy, around which they cemented a lasting friendship. Both, though in different ways, had been very low down in the valley of helpless misfortune; both had been the subjects of Mr. Belcher's brutal will; and both had the promise of a better life before them, which it would be necessary to achieve in opposition to that will. Benedict was strengthened by this sympathy, and became able to entertain plans for the assertion and maintenance of his rights.

When Yates had been at the camp for a week, and had taken on the color and the manner of a woodsman, there came one night to Number Nine a dozen men, to assist in the raising of Jim's hotel. They were from the mill where he had purchased his lumber, and numbered several neighbors besides, including Mike Conlin. They came up the old "tote-road" by the river side, and a herd of buffaloes on a stampede could hardly have made more noise. They were a rough, merry set, and Jim had all he could do to feed them. Luckily, trout were in abundant supply, and they supped like kings, and slept on the ground. The following day was one of the severest labor, but when it closed, the heaviest part of

the timber had been brought and put up, and when the second day ended, all the timbers were in their place, including those which defined the outlines of Jim's "cupalo."

When the frame was at last complete, the weary men retired to a convenient distance to look it over; and then they emphasized their approval of the structure by three rousing cheers.

"Be gorry, Jim, ye must make us a spache," said Mike Conlin. "Ye've plenty iv blarney; now out wid it."

But Jim was sober. He was awed by the magnitude of his enterprise. There was the building in open outline. There was no going back. For better or for worse, it held his destiny, and not only his, but that of one other—perhaps of others still.

"A speech! a speech!" came from a dozen tongues.

"Boys," said Jim, "there's no more talk in me now nor there is in one o' them chips. I don't seem to have no vent. I'm full, but it don't run. If I could stick a gimblet in somewhere, as if I was a cider-barrel, I could gi'en ye enough; but I ain't no barrel, an' a gimblet ain't no use. There's a man here as can talk. That's his trade, an' if he'll say what I ought to say, I shall be obleeged to 'im. Yates is a lawyer, an' it's his business to talk for other folks, an' I hope he'll talk for me."

"Yates! Yates!" arose on all sides.

Yates was at home in any performance of this kind, and, mounting a low stump, said:

"Boys, Jim wants me to thank you for the great service you've rendered him. You have come a long distance to do a neighborly deed, and that deed has been generously completed. Here, in these forest shades, you have reared a monument to human civilization. In these old woods you have built a temple to the American household gods. The savage beasts of the wilderness

will fly from it, and the birds will gather around it. The winter will be the warmer for the fire that will burn within it, and the spring will come earlier in prospect of a better welcome. The river that washes its feet will be more musical in its flow, because finer ears will be listening. The denizens of the great city will come here, year after year, to renew their wasted strength, and they will carry back with them the sweetest memories of these pure solitudes.

"To build a human home, where woman lives and little children open their eyes upon life, and grow up and marry and die—a home full of love and toil, of pleasure and hope and hospitality, is to do the finest thing that a man can do. I congratulate you on what you have done for Jim, and what so nobly you have done for yourselves. Your whole life will be sweeter for this service, and when you think of a lovely woman presiding over this house, and of all the comfort it will be to the gentle folk that will fill it full, you will be glad that you have had a hand in it."

Yates made his bow and stepped down. His auditors all stood for a moment, under an impression that they were in church and had heard a sermon. Their work had been so idealized for them—it had been endowed with so much meaning—it seemed so different from an ordinary "raising"—that they lost, momentarily, the consciousness of their own roughness and the homeliness of their surroundings.

"Be gorry!" exclaimed Mike, who was the first to break the silence, "I'd 'a' gi'en a dollar if me owld woman could 'a' heard that. Divil a bit does she know what I've done for her. I didn't know mesilf what a purty thing it was whin I built me house. It's betther nor goin' to the church, bedad."

Three cheers were then given to Yates and three to Jim, and, the spell once dissolved, they went noisily back to the cabin and their supper.

That evening Jim was very silent. When they were about lying down for the night, he took his blankets, reached into the chest, and withdrew something that he found there and immediately hid from sight, and said that he was going to sleep in his house. The moon was rising from behind the trees when he emerged from his cabin. He looked up at the tall skeleton of his future home, then approached it, and swinging himself from beam to beam, did not pause until he had reached the cupola. Boards had been placed across it for the convenience of the framers, and on these Jim threw his blankets. Under the little package that was to serve as his pillow he laid his Bible, and then, with his eyes upon the stars, his heart tender with the thoughts of the woman for whom he was rearing a home, and his mind oppressed with the greatness of his undertaking, he lay a long time in a waking dream. "If so be He cares," said Jim to himself—"if so be He cares for a little buildin' as don't make no show 'longside o' His doin's up thar an' down here, I hope He sees that I've got this Bible under my head, an' knows what I mean by it. I hope the thing'll strike 'im favorable, an' that He knows, if He cares, that I'm obleeged to 'im."

At last, slumber came to Jim—the slumber of the toiler, and early the next morning he was busy in feeding his helpers, who had a long day's walk before them. When at last they were all ferried over the river, and had started on their homeward way, Jim ascended to the cupola again, and waved his bandanna in farewell.

Two days afterward, Sam Yates left his host, and rowed himself down to the landing in the same canoe by which he had reached Number Nine. He found his conveyance waiting, according to arrangement, and before night was housed among his friends at Sevenoaks.

While he had been absent in the woods, there had been a conference among his relatives and the principal

men of the town, which had resulted in the determination to keep him in Sevenoaks, if possible, in the practice of his profession.

To Yates, the proposition was the opening of a door into safety and peace. To be among those who loved him, and had a certain pride in him; to be released from his service to Mr. Belcher, which he felt could go no farther without involving him in crime and dishonor; to be sustained in his good resolutions by the sympathy of friends, and the absence of his city companions and temptations, gave him the promise of perfect reformation, and a life of modest prosperity and genuine self-respect.

He took but little time in coming to his conclusion, and his first business was to report to Mr. Belcher by letter. He informed that gentleman that he had concluded to remain in Sevenoaks; reported all his investigations on his way thither from New York; inclosed Jim's statement concerning the death of a pauper in the woods; gave an account of the disinterment of the pauper's bones in his presence; inclosed the money unused in expenses and wages, and, with thanks for what Mr. Belcher had done in helping him to a reform, closed hismissive in such a manner as to give the impression that he expected and desired no further communication.

Great was Mr. Belcher's indignation when he received this letter. He had not finished with Yates. He had anticipated exactly this result from the investigations. He knew about old Tilden, for Buffum had told him; and he did not doubt that Jim had exhibited to Yates the old man's bones. He believed that Benedict was dead, but he did not know. It would be necessary, therefore, to prepare a document that would be good in any event.

If the reader remembers the opening chapter of this story, he will recall the statement of Miss Butterworth, that Mr. Belcher had followed Benedict to the asylum ta

procure his signature to a paper. This paper, drawn up in legal form, had been preserved, for Mr. Belcher was a methodical, business man; and when he had finished reading Yates's letter, and had exhausted his expletives after his usual manner, he opened a drawer, and, extracting a paper, read it through. It was more than six years old, and bore its date, and the marks of its age. All it needed was the proper signatures.

He knew that he could trust Yates no longer. He knew, too, that he could not forward his own ends by appearing to be displeased. The reply which Yates received was one that astonished him by its mildness, its expression of satisfaction with his faithful labor, and its record of good wishes. Now that he was upon the spot, Mr. Yates could still serve him, both in a friendly and in a professional way. The first service he could render him was to forward to him autograph letters from the hands of two men deceased. He wished to verify the signatures of these men, he said, but as they were both dead, he, of course, could not apply to them.

Yates did not doubt that there was mischief in this request. He guessed what it was, and he kept the letter; but after a few days he secured the desired autographs, and forwarded them to Mr. Belcher, who filed them away with the document above referred to. After that, the great proprietor, as a relief from the severe pursuits of his life, amused himself by experiments with inks and pens and pencils, and with writing in a hand not his own, the names of "Nicholas Johnson" and "James Ramsey."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH MRS. DILLINGHAM MAKES SOME IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES, BUT FAILS TO REVEAL THEM TO THE READER.

MRS. DILLINGHAM was walking back and forth alone through her long drawing-room. She was revolving in her mind a compliment, breathed into her ear by her friend Mrs. Talbot that day. Mrs. Talbot had heard from the mouth of one of Mrs. Dillingham's admirers the statement, confirmed with a hearty, good-natured oath, that he considered the fascinating widow "the best groomed woman in New York."

The compliment conveyed a certain intimation which was not pleasant for her to entertain. She was indebted to her skill in self-"grooming" for the preservation of her youthful appearance. She had been conscious of this, but it was not pleasant to have the fact detected by her friends. Neither was it pleasant to have it bruited in society, and reported to her by one who rejoiced in the delicacy of the arrow which, feathered by friendship, she had been able to plant in the widow's breast.

She walked to her mirror and looked at herself. There were the fine, familiar outlines of face and figure; there were the same splendid eyes; but a certain charm beyond the power of "grooming" to restore was gone. An incipient, almost invisible, brood of wrinkles was gathering about her eyes; there was a loss of freshness of complexion, and an expression of weariness and age, which, in the repose of reflection and inquisition, almost startled her.

Her youth was gone, and, with it, the most potent charms of her person. She was hated and suspected by her own sex, and sought by men for no reason honora-