

## CHAPTER XXX.

WHICH GIVES THE HISTORY OF AN ANNIVERSARY,  
PRESENTS A TABLEAU, AND DROPS THE CURTAIN.

THREE months after Mr. Belcher's escape, the great world hardly remembered that such a man as he had ever lived. Other rascals took his place, and absorbed the public attention, having failed to learn—that even their betters were slow to apprehend—that every strong, active, bad man is systematically engaged in creating and shaping the instruments for his own destruction. Men continued to be dazzled by their own success, until they could see neither the truth and right that lay along their way, nor the tragic end that awaited them.

The execution in satisfaction of the judgment obtained against Mr. Belcher was promptly issued and levied; claimants and creditors of various sorts took all that the execution left; Mrs. Belcher and her children went to their friends in the country; the Sevenoaks property was bought for Mr. Benedict; and a thousand lives were adjusted to the new circumstances; but narrative palls when its details are anticipated. Let us pass them, regarding them simply as memories coming up—sometimes faintly, sometimes freshly—from the swiftly retiring years, and close the book, as we began it, with a picture.

Sevenoaks looks, in its main features, as it looked when the reader first saw it. The river rolls through it with the old song that the dwellers upon its banks have heard through all these changing years. The workmen and workwomen come and go in the mill, in their daily round of duty, as they did when Phipps, and the gray trotters, and the great proprietor were daily visions of the streets. The little tailoress returns twice a year

with her thrifty husband, to revisit her old friends; and she brings at last a little one, which she shows with great pride. Sevenoaks has become a summer thoroughfare to the woods, where Jim receives the city-folk in incredible numbers.

We look in upon the village on a certain summer evening, at five years' remove from the first occupation of the Belcher mansion by Mr. Benedict. The mist above the falls cools the air and bathes the trees as it did when Robert Belcher looked upon it as the incense which rose to his lordly enterprise. The nestling cottages, the busy shops, the fresh-looking spires, the distant woods, the more distant mountain, the old Seven Oaks upon the western plateau and the beautiful residence behind them, are the same to-day that they were when we first looked upon them; but a new life and a new influence inform them all. Nature holds her unvarying frame, but the life upon the canvas is what we paint from year to year. The river sings to vice as it sings to virtue. The birds carol the same, whether selfishness or love be listening. The great mountains rejoice in the sun, or drape their brows in clouds, irrespective of the eyes that regard them.

This one fact remains good in Sevenoaks, and the world over. The man who holds the financial power and the social throne of a town, makes that town, in a good degree, what he is. If he is virtuous, noble, unselfish, good, the elements beneath him shape themselves, consciously or unconsciously, to his character. Vice shrinks into disgrace, or flies to more congenial haunts. The greed for gold which grasps and overreaches, becomes ashamed, or changes to neighborly helpfulness. The discontent that springs up in the shadow of an unprincipled and boastful worldly success, dies; and men become happy in the toil that wins a comfortable shelter and daily bread, when he to whom



all look up, looks down upon them with friendly and sympathetic eyes, and holds his wealth and power in service of their good.

Paul Benedict is now the proprietor of Sevenoaks; and from the happy day in which he, with his sister and child, came to the occupation of the mansion which his old persecutor had built for himself, the fortunes and character of the town have mended. Even the poor-house has grown more comfortable in its apartments and administration, while year by year its population has decreased. Through these first years, the quiet man has moved around his mill and his garden, his mind teeming with suggestions, and filling with new interest in their work the dull brains that had been worn deep and dry with routine. All eyes turn upon him with affection. He is their brother as well as their master.

In the great house, there is a happy woman. She has found something to love and something to do. These were all she needed to make her supremely self-respectful, happy, and, in the best degree, womanly. Wilful, ambitious, sacrificing her young affections to gold at the first, and wasting years in idleness and unworthy intrigue, for the lack of affection and the absence of motive to usefulness and industry, she has found, at last, the secret of her woman's life, and has accepted it with genuine gratitude. In ministering to her brother and her brother's child, now a stalwart lad, in watching with untiring eyes and helping with ready wit the unused proprietor in his new circumstances, and in assisting the poor around her, she finds her days full of toil and significance, and her nights brief with grateful sleep. She is the great lady of the village, holding high consideration from her relationship to the proprietor, and bestowing importance upon him by her revelation of his origin and his city associations.

The special summer evening to which we allude is one

which has long been looked forward to by all the people in whom our story has made the reader sympathetically interested. It is an anniversary—the fifth since the new family took up their residence in the grand house. Mr. and Mrs. Balfour with their boy are there. Sam Yates is there—now the agent of the mill—a trusty, prosperous man; and by a process of which we have had no opportunity to note the details, he has transformed Miss Snow into Mrs. Yates. The matter was concluded some years ago, and they seem quite wonted to each other. The Rev. Mr. Snow, grown thinner and grayer, and a great deal happier, is there with his wife and his two unmarried daughters. He finds it easier to “take things as they air,” than formerly, and, by his old bridge, holds them against all comers. And who is this, and who are these? Jim Fenton, very much smoothed exteriorly, but jolly, acute, outspoken, peculiar as ever. He walks around the garden with a boy on his shoulder. The “little feller” that originally appeared in Mr. Benedict's plans of the new hotel is now in his hands—veritable flesh and blood; and “the little woman,” sitting with Mrs. Snow, while Mrs. Dillingham directs the arrangement of the banquet that is being spread in the pagoda, watches the pair, and exclaims: “Look at them! now isn't it ridiculous?”

The warm sun hides himself behind the western hill, though still an hour above his setting. The roar of the falling river rises to their ears, the sound of the factory bell echoes among the hills, and the crowd of grimy workmen and workwomen pours forth, darkening the one street that leads from the mill, and dissipating itself among the waiting cottages. All is tranquillity and beauty, while the party gather to their out-door feast.

It is hardly a merry company, though a very happy one. It is the latest issue of a tragedy in which all have borne more or less important parts. The most thought-



less of them cannot but feel that a more powerful hand than their own has shaped their lives and determined their destinies.

The boys are called in, and the company gather to their banquet, amid conversation and laughter.

Mr. Balfour turns to Jim and says: "How does this compare with Number Nine, Jim? Isn't this better than the woods?"

Jim has been surveying the preparations with a critical and professional eye, for professional purposes. The hotel-keeper keeps himself constantly open to suggestions, and the table before him suggests so much, that his own establishment seems very humble and imperfect.

"I be'n thinkin' about it," Jim responds. "When a man has got all he wants, he's brung up standin' at the end of his road. If thar ain't comfort then, then there ain't no comfort. When he's got more nor he wants, then he's got by comfort, and runnin' away from it. I hearn the women talk about churnin' by, so that the butter never comes, an' a man as has more money nor he wants churns by his comfort, an' spends his life swashin' with his dasher, and wonderin' where his butter is. Old Belcher's butter never come, but he worked away till his churn blowed up, an' he went up with it."

"So you think our good friend Mr. Benedict has got so much that he has left comfort behind," says Mr. Balfour with a laugh.

"I should be afeard he had, if he could realize it was all his'n, but he can't. He hain't got no more comfort here, no way, nor he used to have in the woods." Then Jim leans over to Mr. Balfour's ear, and says: "It's the woman as does it. It's purty to look at, but it's too pertickler for comfort."

Mr. Balfour sees that he and Jim are observed, and so speaks louder. "There is one thing," he says, "that I have learned in the course of this business. It does

not lie very deep, but it is at least worth speaking of. I have learned how infinitely more interesting and picturesque vulgar poverty is than vulgar riches. One can find more poetry in a log cabin than in all that wealth ever crowded into Palgrave's Folly. If poor men and poor women, honest and patient workers, could only apprehend the poetical aspects of their own lives and conditions, instead of imagining that wealth holds a monopoly of the poetry of life, they would see that they have the best of it, and are really enviable people."

Jim knows, of course, that his old cabin in the woods is in Mr. Balfour's mind, and feels himself called upon to say something in response. "If so be as ye're 'ludin' at me," says he, "I'm much obleeged to ye, but I prefer a hotel to a log cabin, pertickler with a little woman and a little feller in it, Paul B. by name."

"That's all right, Jim," says Mr. Balfour, "but I don't call that vulgar wealth which is won slowly, by honest industry. A man who has more money than he has brains, and makes his surroundings the advertisement of his possessions, rather than the expression of his culture, is a vulgar man, or a man of vulgar wealth."

"Did ye ever think," says Jim, "that riches rots or keeps accordin' to their natur'—rots or keeps," he goes on, "accordin' to what goes into 'em when a man is gitten' 'em together? Blood isn't a purty thing to mix with money, an' I prefer mine dry. A golden sweetin' grows quick an' makes a big show, but ye can't keep it through the winter."

"That's true, Jim," responds Mr. Balfour. "Wealth takes into itself the qualities by which it is won. Gathered by crime or fraud, and gathered in haste, it becomes a curse to those who hold it, and falls into ruin by its own corruptions. Acquired by honest toil, manly frugality, patient endurance, and patient waiting, it is full of good, and holds together by a force within itself."



"Poor Mrs. Belcher!" exclaims Mrs. Dillingham, as the reflection comes to her that that amiable lady was once the mistress of the beautiful establishment over which she has been called upon to preside.

"They say she is living nicely," says Mr. Snow, "and that somebody sends her money, though she does not know where it comes from. It is supposed that her husband saved something, and keeps himself out of sight, while he looks after his family."

Mr. Benedict and Mrs. Dillingham exchange significant glances. Jim is a witness of the act, and knows what it means. He leans over to Mr. Benedict, and says: "When I seen sheet-lightnin', I know there's a shower where it comes from. Ye can't fool me about ma'am Belcher's money."

"You will not tell anybody, Jim," says Mr. Benedict, in a low tone.

"Nobody but the little woman," responds Jim; and then, seeing that his "little feller," in the distance, is draining a cup with more than becoming leisure, he shouts down the table: "Paul B. ! Paul B. ! Ye can't git that mug on to yer head with the brim in yer mouth. It isn't yer size, an' it doesn't look purty on ye."

"I should like to know where the old rascal is," says Mrs. Snow, going back to the suggestion that Mr. Belcher was supplying his family with money.

"Well, I can tell ye," replies Jim. "I've been a keepin' it in for this very meetin'."

"Oh Jim!" exclaim half a dozen voices, which means: "we are dying to hear all about it."

"Well," says Jim, "there was a feller as come to my hotel a month ago, and says he: 'Jim, did ye ever know what had become of old Belcher?' 'No,' says I, 'I only knowed he cut a big stick, an' slid.' 'Well,' says he, 'I seen 'im a month ago, with whiskers enough on 'is ugly face to set up a barberry-bush.' Says I,

'Where did ye seen 'im?' 'Where do ye guess?' says he. 'Swoppin' a blind hoss,' says I, 'fur a decent one, an' gettin' boot.' 'No,' says he, 'guess ag'in.' 'Preachin' at a camp-meetin',' says I, 'an' passin' round a hat arter it.' 'No,' says he, 'I seen 'im jest where he belonged. He was tendin' a little bar, on a S'n' Lor'nce steamboat. He was settin' on a big stool in the middle of 'is bottles, where he could reach 'em all without droppin' from his roost, an' when his customers was out he was a peekin' into a little lookin'-glass, as stood aside of 'im, an' a combin' out his baird.' 'That settles it,' says I, 'you've seen 'im, an' no mistake.' 'Then,' says he, 'I called 'im "General," an' he looked kind a skeered, an' says 'e to me, "Mum's the word! Crooked Valley an' Air Line is played out, an' I'm workin' up a corner in Salt River"—laughin', an' offerin' to treat.'"

"I wonder how he came in such a place as that," says Mrs. Snow.

"That's the funniest part on't," responds Jim. "He found an old friend on the boat, as was much of a gentleman—an old friend as was dressed within an inch of his life, an' sold the tickets."

"Phipps!" "Phipps!" shout half a dozen voices, and a boisterous laugh goes around the group.

"Ye've guessed right the fust time," Jim continues, "an' the gentlemanlest clerk, an' the poplarest man as ever writ names in a book, an' made change on a counter, with no end o' rings an' hankercher-pins, an' presents of silver mugs, an' rampin' resoolutions of admirin' passingers. An' there the two fellers be, a sailin' up an' down the S'n' Lor'nce, as happy as two clams in high water, workin' up corners in their wages, an' playin' into one another's hands like a pair of pickpockets; and what do ye think old Belcher said about Phipps?"

"What did he say?" comes from every side.



"Well, I can't tell percisely," responds Jim. "Fust he said it was proverdential as Phipps run away when he did; an' then he put in somethin' that sounded as if it come from a book—somethin' about tunin' the wind to the sheared ram."

Jim is very doubtful about his quotation, and actually blushes scarlet under the fire of laughter that greets him from every quarter.

"I'm glad if it 'muses ye," says Jim, "but it wasn't anything better nor that, considerin' the man as took it to himself."

"Jim, you'll be obliged to read up," says "the little woman," who still stands by her early resolutions to take her husband for what he is, and enjoy his peculiarities with her neighbors.

"I be as I be," he responds. "I can keep a hotel, an' make money on it, an' pervide for my own, but when it comes to books ye can trip me with a feather."

The little banquet draws to a close, and now two or three inquire together for Mr. Yates. He has mysteriously disappeared! The children have already left the table, and Paul B. is romping with a great show of equine spirit about the garden paths, astride of a stick. Jim is looking at him in undisguised admiration. "I do believe," he exclaims, "that the little feller thinks he's a hoss, with a neck more nor three feet long. See 'im bend it over agin the check-rein he's got in his mind! Hear 'im squeal! Now look out for his heels!"

At this moment, there rises upon the still evening air a confused murmur of many voices. All but the children pause and listen. "What is coming?" "Who is coming?" "What is it?" break from the lips of the listeners. Only Mrs. Yates looks intelligent, and she holds her tongue, and keeps her seat. The sound comes nearer, and breaks into greater confusion. It is laughter, and merry conversation, and the jar of tramp-

ing feet. Mr. Benedict suspects what it is, and goes off among his vines, in a state of painful unconcern! The boys run out to the brow of the hill, and come back in great excitement, to announce that the whole town is thronging up toward the house. Then all, as if apprehending the nature of the visit, gather about their table again, that being the place where their visitors will expect to find them.

At length, Sam Yates comes in sight, around the corner of the mansion, followed closely by all the operatives of the mill, dressed in their holiday attire. Mrs. Dillingham has found her brother, and with her hand upon his arm she goes out to meet his visitors. They have come to crown the feast, and signalize the anniversary, by bringing their congratulations to the proprietor, and the beautiful lady who presides over his house. There is a great deal of awkwardness among the young men, and tittering and blushing among the young women, with side play of jest and coquetry, as they form themselves in a line, preparatory to something formal, which presently appears.

Mr. Yates, the agent of the mill, who has consented to be the spokesman of the occasion, stands in front, and faces Mr. Benedict and Mrs. Dillingham.

"Mr. Benedict," says he, "this demonstration in your honor is not one originated by myself, but, in some way, these good people who serve you learned that you were to have a formal celebration of this anniversary, and they have asked me to assist them in expressing the honor in which they hold you, and the sympathy with which they enter into your rejoicing. We all know your history. Many of those who now stand before you, remember your wrongs and your misfortunes; and there is not one who does not rejoice that you have received that which your own genius won in the hands of another. There is not one who does not rejoice that the evil in-



fluence of this house is departed, and that one now occupies it who thoroughly respects and honors the manhood and womanhood that labor in his service. We are glad to acknowledge you as our master, because we know that we can regard you as our friend. Your predecessor despised poverty—even the poverty into which he was born—and forgot, in the first moment of his success, that he had ever been poor, while your own bitter experiences have made you brotherly. On behalf of all those who now stand before you, let me thank you for your sympathy, for your practical efforts to give us a share in the results of your prosperity, and for the purifying influences which go out from this dwelling into all our humble homes. We give you our congratulations on this anniversary, and hope for happy returns of the day, until, among the inevitable changes of the future, we all yield our places to those who are to succeed us.”

Mr. Benedict's eyes are full of tears. He does not turn, however, to Mr. Balfour, for help. The consciousness of power, and, more than this, the consciousness of universal sympathy, give him self-possession and the power of expression.

“Mr. Yates,” says Mr. Benedict, “when you call me master, you give me pain. When you speak of me as your brother, and the brother of all those whom you represent, you pay me the most grateful compliment that I have ever received. It is impossible for me to regard myself as anything but the creature and the instrument of a loving Providence. It is by no power of my own, no skill of my own, no providence of my own, that I have been carried through the startling changes of my life. The power that has placed me where I am, is the power in which, during all my years of adversity, I firmly trusted. It was that power which brought me my friends—friends to whose good-will and efficient service I owe my wealth and my ability to make life profit-

able and pleasant to you. Fully believing this, I can in no way regard myself as my own, or indulge in pride and vain-glory. You are all my brothers and sisters, and the dear Father of us all has placed the power in my hands to do you good. In the patient and persistent execution of this stewardship lies the duty of my life. I thank you all for your good-will. I thank you all for this opportunity to meet you, and to say to you the words which have for five years been in my heart, waiting to be spoken. Come to me always with your troubles. Tell me always what I can do for you, to make your way easier. Help me to make this village a prosperous, virtuous, and happy one—a model for all its neighbors. And now I wish to take you all by the hand, in pledge of our mutual friendship and of our devotion to each other.”

Mr. Benedict steps forward with Mrs. Dillingham, and both shake hands with Mr. Yates. One after another—some shyly, some confidently—the operatives come up and repeat the process, until all have pressed the proprietor's hand, and have received a pleasant greeting and a cordial word from his sister, of whom the girls are strangely afraid. There is a moment of awkward delay, as they start on their homeward way, and then they gather in a group upon the brow of the hill, and the evening air resounds with “three cheers” for Mr. Benedict. The hum of voices begins again, the tramp of a hundred feet passes down the hill, and our little party are left to themselves.

They do not linger long. The Snows take their leave. Mr. and Mrs. Yates retire, with a lingering “good-night,” but the Balfours and the Fentons are guests of the house. They go in, and the lamps are lighted, while the “little feller—Paul B. by name”—is carried on his happy father's shoulder to his bed upstairs.



Finally, Jim comes down, having seen his pet asleep, and finds the company talking about Talbot. He and his pretty, worldly wife, finding themselves somewhat too intimately associated with the bad fame of Robert Belcher, had retired to a country-seat on the Hudson—a nest which they feathered well with the profits of the old connection.

And now, as they take leave of each other for the night, and shake hands in token of their good-will, and their satisfaction with the pleasures of the evening, Jim says: "Mr. Benedict, that was a good speech o' yourn. It struck me favorble an' s'prised me some considerable. I'd no idee ye could spread so afore folks. I shouldn't wonder if ye was right about Providence. It seems kind o' queer that somebody or somethin' should be takin' keer o' you an' me, but I vow I don't see how it's all be'n did, if so be as nobody nor nothin' has took keer o' me, an' you too. It seems reasomble that somethin's be'n to work all the time that I hain't seed. The trouble with me is that I can't understand how a bein' as turns out worlds as if they was nothin' more nor snow-balls, would think o' stoppin' to pay 'tention to sech a feller as Jim Fenton."

"You are larger than a sparrow, Jim," says Mr. Benedict with a smile.

"That's so."

"Larger than a hair."

Jim puts up his hand, brushes down the stiff crop that crowns his head, and responds with a comical smile, "I don' know 'bout that."

Jim pauses as if about to make some further remark, thinks better of it, and then, putting his big arm around his little wife, leads her off, upstairs.

The lights of the great house go out one after another, the cataracts sing the inmates to sleep, the summer moon witches with the mist, the great, sweet heaven

bends over the dreaming town, and there we leave our friends at rest, to take up the burden of their lives again upon the happy morrow, beyond our feeble following, but still under the loving eye and guiding hand to which we confidently and gratefully commit them.

THE END.