T. Tembarom

By

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CHAPTER I:

The boys at the Brooklyn public school which he attended did not know what the "T." stood for. He would never tell them. All he said in reply to questions was: "It don't stand for nothin'. You've gotter have a' 'nitial, ain't you?" His name was, in fact, an almost inevitable school-boy modification of one felt to be absurd and pretentious. His Christian name was Temple, which became "Temp." His surname was Barom, so he was at once "Temp Barom." In the natural tendency to avoid waste of time it was pronounced as one word, and the letter p being superfluous and cumbersome, it easily settled itself into "Tembarom," and there remained. By much less inevitable processes have surnames evolved themselves as centuries rolled by. Tembarom liked it, and soon almost forgot he had ever been called anything else.

His education really began when he was ten years old. At that time his mother died of pneumonia, contracted by going out to sew, at seventy-five cents a day, in shoes almost entirely without soles, when the remains of a blizzard were melting in the streets. As, after her funeral, there remained only twenty-five cents in the shabby bureau which was one of the few articles furnishing the room in the tenement in which they lived together, Tembarom sleeping on a cot, the world spread itself before him as a place to explore in search of at least one meal a day. There was nothing to do but to explore it to

the best of his ten-year-old ability.

His father had died two years before his mother, and Tembarom had vaguely felt it a relief. He had been a resentful, domestically tyrannical immigrant Englishman, who held in contempt every American trait and institution. He had come over to better himself, detesting England and the English because there was "no chance for a man there," and, transferring his dislikes and resentments from one country to another, had met with no better luck than he had left behind him. This he felt to be the fault of America, and his family, which was represented solely by Tembarom and his mother, heard a good deal about it, and also, rather contradictorily, a good deal about the advantages and superiority of England, to which in the course of six months he became gloomily loyal. It was necessary, in fact, for him to have something with which to compare the United States unfavorably. The effect he produced on Tembarom was that of causing him, when he entered the public school round the corner, to conceal with determination verging on duplicity the humiliating fact that if he had not been born in Brooklyn he might have been born in England. England was not popular among the boys in the school. History had represented the country to them in all its tyrannical rapacity and bloodthirsty oppression of the humble free-born. The manly and admirable attitude was to say, "Give me liberty or give me death"-- and there was the Fourth of July.

Though Tembarom and his mother had been poor enough while his father

lived, when he died the returns from his irregular odd jobs no longer came in to supplement his wife's sewing, and add an occasional day or two of fuller meals, in consequence of which they were oftener than ever hungry and cold, and in desperate trouble about the rent of their room. Tembarom, who was a wiry, enterprising little fellow, sometimes found an odd job himself. He carried notes and parcels when any one would trust him with them, he split old boxes into kindling-wood, more than once he "minded" a baby when its mother left its perambulator outside a store. But at eight or nine years of age one's pay is in proportion to one's size. Tembarom, however, had neither his father's bitter eye nor his mother's discouraged one. Something different from either had been reincarnated in him from some more cheerful past. He had an alluring grin instead--a grin which curled up his mouth and showed his sound, healthy, young teeth,--a lot of them,--and people liked to see them.

At the beginning of the world it is only recently reasonable to suppose human beings were made with healthy bodies and healthy minds. That of course was the original scheme of the race. It would not have been worth while to create a lot of things aimlessly ill made. A journeyman carpenter would not waste his time in doing it, if he knew any better. Given the power to make a man, even an amateur would make him as straight as he could, inside and out. Decent vanity would compel him to do it. He would be ashamed to show the thing and admit he had done it, much less people a world with millions of like proofs of incompetence. Logically considered, the race was built straight

and clean and healthy and happy. How, since then, it has developed in multitudinous less sane directions, and lost its normal straightness and proportions, I am, singularly enough, not entirely competent to explain with any degree of satisfactory detail. But it cannot be truthfully denied that this has rather generally happened. There are human beings who are not beautiful, there are those who are not healthy, there are those who hate people and things with much waste of physical and mental energy, there are people who are not unwilling to do others an ill turn by word or deed, and there are those who do not believe that the original scheme of the race was ever a decent one.

This is all abnormal and unintelligent, even the not being beautiful, and sometimes one finds oneself called upon passionately to resist a temptation to listen to an internal hint that the whole thing is aimless. Upon this tendency one may as well put one's foot firmly, as it leads nowhere. At such times it is supporting to call to mind a certain undeniable fact which ought to loom up much larger in our philosophical calculations. No one has ever made a collection of statistics regarding the enormous number of perfectly sane, kind, friendly, decent creatures who form a large proportion of any mass of human beings anywhere and everywhere--people who are not vicious or cruel or depraved, not as a result of continual self-control, but simply because they do not want to be, because it is more natural and agreeable to be exactly the opposite things; people who do not tell lies because they could not do it with any pleasure, and would, on

the contrary, find the exertion an annoyance and a bore; people whose manners and morals are good because their natural preference lies in that direction. There are millions of them who in most essays on life and living are virtually ignored because they do none of the things which call forth eloquent condemnation or brilliant cynicism. It has not yet become the fashion to record them. When one reads a daily newspaper filled with dramatic elaborations of crimes and unpleasantness, one sometimes wishes attention might be called to them --to their numbers, to their decencies, to their normal lack of any desire to do violence and their equally normal disposition to lend a hand. One is inclined to feel that the majority of persons do not believe in their existence. But if an accident occurs in the street, there are always several of them who appear to spring out of the earth to give human sympathy and assistance; if a national calamity, physical or social, takes place, the world suddenly seems full of them. They are the thousands of Browns, Joneses, and Robinsons who, massed together, send food to famine-stricken countries, sustenance to earthquake-devastated regions, aid to wounded soldiers or miners or flood-swept homelessness. They are the ones who have happened naturally to continue to grow straight and carry out the First Intention. They really form the majority; if they did not, the people of the earth would have eaten one another alive centuries ago. But though this is surely true, a happy cynicism totally disbelieves in their existence. When a combination of circumstances sufficiently dramatic brings one of them into prominence, he is either called an angel or a fool. He is neither. He

is only a human creature who is normal.

After this manner Tembarom was wholly normal. He liked work and rejoiced in good cheer, when he found it, however attenuated its form. He was a good companion, and even at ten years old a practical person. He took his loose coppers from the old bureau drawer, and remembering that he had several times helped Jake Hutchins to sell his newspapers, he went forth into the world to find and consult him as to the investment of his capital.

"Where are you goin', Tem?" a woman who lived in the next room said when she met him on the stairs. "What you goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to sell newspapers if I can get some with this," he replied, opening his hand to show her the extent of his resources.

She was almost as poor as he was, but not quite. She looked him over curiously for a moment, and then fumbled in her pocket. She drew out two ten-cent pieces and considered them, hesitating. Then she looked again at him. That normal expression in his nice ten-year-old eyes had its suggestive effect.

"You take this," she said, handing him the two pieces. "It'll help you to start."

"I'll bring it back, ma'am," said Tem. "Thank you, Mis' Hullingworth."

In about two weeks' time he did bring it back. That was the beginning. He lived through all the experiences a small boy waif and stray would be likely to come in contact with. The abnormal class treated him ill, and the normal class treated him well. He managed to get enough food to eat to keep him from starvation. Sometimes he slept under a roof and much oftener out-of-doors. He preferred to sleep out-of-doors more than half of the year, and the rest of the time he did what he could. He saw and learned many strange things, but was not undermined by vice because he unconsciously preferred decency. He sold newspapers and annexed any old job which appeared on the horizon. The education the New York streets gave him was a liberal one. He became accustomed to heat and cold and wet weather, but having sound lungs and a tough little body combined with the normal tendencies already mentioned, he suffered no more physical deterioration than a young Indian would suffer. After selling newspapers for two years he got a place as "boy" in a small store. The advance signified by steady employment was inspiring to his energies. He forged ahead, and got a better job and better pay as he grew older. By the time he was fifteen he shared a small bedroom with another boy. In whatsoever quarter he lived, friends seemed sporadic. Other boy's congregated about him. He did not know he had any effect at all, but his effect, in fact, was rather like that of a fire in winter or a cool breeze in summer. It was natural to gather where it prevailed.

There came a time when he went to a night class to learn stenography.

Great excitement had been aroused among the boys he knew best by a rumor that there were "fellows" who could earn a hundred dollars a week "writing short." Boyhood could not resist the florid splendor of the idea. Four of them entered the class confidently looking forward to becoming the recipients of four hundred a month in the course of six weeks. One by one they dropped off, until only Tembarom remained, slowly forging ahead. He had never meant anything else but to get on in the world--to get as far as he could. He kept at his "short," and by the time he was nineteen it helped him to a place in a newspaper office. He took dictation from a nervous and harried editor, who, when he was driven to frenzy by overwork and incompetencies, found that the long-legged, clean youth with the grin never added fuel to the flame of his wrath. He was a common young man, who was not marked by special brilliancy of intelligence, but he had a clear head and a good temper, and a queer aptitude for being able to see himself in the other man's shoes--his difficulties and moods. This ended in his being tried with bits of new work now and then. In an emergency he was once sent out to report the details of a fire. What he brought back was usable, and his elation when he found he had actually "made good" was ingenuous enough to spur Galton, the editor, into trying him again.

To Tembarom this was a magnificent experience. The literary suggestion implied by being "on a newspaper" was more than he had hoped for. If you have sold newspapers, and slept in a barrel or behind a pile of lumber in a wood-yard, to report a fire in a street-

car shed seems a flight of literature. He applied himself to the careful study of newspapers--their points of view, their style of phrasing. He believed them to be perfect. To attain ease in expressing himself in their elevated language he felt to be the summit of lofty ambition. He had no doubts of the exaltation of his ideal. His respect and confidence almost made Galton cry at times, because they recalled to him days when he had been nineteen and had regarded New York journalists with reverence. He liked Tembarom more and more. It actually soothed him to have him about, and he fell into giving him one absurd little chance after another. When he brought in "stuff" which bore too evident marks of utter ignorance, he actually touched it up and used it, giving him an enlightening, ironical hint or so. Tembarom always took the hints with gratitude. He had no mistaken ideas of his own powers. Galton loomed up before him a sort of god, and though the editor was a man with a keen, though wearied, brain and a sense of humor, the situation was one naturally productive of harmonious relations. He was of the many who unknowingly came in out of the cold and stood in the glow of Tembarom's warm fire, or took refuge from the heat in his cool breeze. He did not know of the private, arduous study of journalistic style, and it was not unpleasing to see that the nice young cub was gradually improving. Through pure modest fear or ridicule, Tembarom kept to himself his vaulting ambition. He practised reports of fires, weddings, and accidents in his hall bedroom.

A hall bedroom in a third-rate boarding-house is not a cheerful place,

but when Tembarom vaguely felt this, he recalled the nights spent in empty trucks and behind lumber-piles, and thought he was getting spoiled by luxury. He told himself that he was a fellow who always had luck. He did not know, neither did any one else, that his luck would have followed him if he had lived in a coal-hole. It was the concomitant of his normal build and outlook on life. Mrs. Bowse, his hard-worked landlady, began by being calmed down by his mere bearing when he came to apply for his room and board. She had a touch of grippe, and had just emerged from a heated affray with a dirty cook, and was inclined to battle when he presented himself. In a few minutes she was inclined to battle no longer. She let him have the room. Cantankerous restrictions did not ruffle him.

"Of course what you say GOES," he said, giving her his friendly grin. "Any one that takes boarders has GOT to be careful. You're in for a bad cold, ain't you?"

"I've got grippe again, that's what I've got," she almost snapped.

"Did you ever try Payson's 'G. Destroyer'? G stands for grippe, you know. Catchy name, ain't it? They say the man that invented it got ten thousand dollars for it. 'G. Destroyer.' You feel like you have to find out what it means when you see it up on a boarding. I'm just over grippe myself, and I've got half a bottle in my pocket. You carry it about with you, and swallow one every half-hour. You just try it. It set me right in no time."

He took the bottle out of his waistcoat pocket and handed it to her. She took it and turned it over.

"You're awful good-natured,"--She hesitated,--"but I ain't going to take your medicine. I ought to go and get some for myself. How much does it cost?"

"It's on the bottle; but it's having to get it for yourself that's the matter. You won't have time, and you'll forget it."

"That's true enough," said Mrs. Bowse, looking at him sharply. "I guess you know something about boarding-houses."

"I guess I know something about trying to earn three meals a day--or two of them. It's no merry jest, whichever way you do it."