

CHAPTER VII

In the course of the interview given to the explaining of business and legal detail which took place between Mr. Palford and his client the following morning, Tembarom's knowledge of his situation extended itself largely, and at the same time added in a proportionate degree to his sense of his own incongruity as connected with it. He sat at a table in Palford's private sitting-room at the respectable, old-fashioned hotel the solicitor had chosen - sat and listened, and answered questions and asked them, until his head began to feel as though it were crammed to bursting with extraordinary detail.

It was all extraordinary to him. He had had no time for reading and no books to read, and therefore knew little of fiction. He was entirely ignorant of all romance but such as the New York papers provided. This was highly colored, but it did not deal with events connected with the possessors of vast English estates and the details of their habits and customs. His geographical knowledge of Great Britain was simple and largely incorrect. Information concerning its usual conditions and aspects had come to him through talk of international marriages and cup races, and had made but little impression upon him. He liked New York - its noise, its streets, its glare, its Sunday newspapers, with their ever-increasing number of sheets, and pictures of everything on earth which could be photographed. His choice, when he could allow himself a fifty-cent seat at the theater, naturally ran to productions

which were farcical or cheerfully musical. He had never reached serious drama, perhaps because he had never had money enough to pay for entrance to anything like half of the "shows" the other fellows recommended. He was totally unprepared for the facing of any kind of drama as connected with himself. The worst of it was that it struck him as being of the nature of farce when regarded from the normal New York point of view. If he had somehow had the luck to come into the possession of money in ways which were familiar to him, - to "strike it rich" in the way of a "big job" or "deal," - he would have been better able to adjust himself to circumstances. He might not have known how to spend his money, but he would have spent it in New York on New York joys. There would have been no foreign remoteness about the thing, howsoever fantastically unexpected such fortune might have been. At any rate, in New York he would have known the names of places and things.

Through a large part of his interview with Palford his elbow rested on the table, and he held his chin with his hand and rubbed it thoughtfully. The last Temple Temple Barholm had been an eccentric and uncompanionable person. He had lived alone and had not married. He had cherished a prejudice against the man who would have succeeded him as next of kin if he had not died young. People had been of the opinion that he had disliked him merely because he did not wish to be reminded that some one else must some day inevitably stand in his shoes, and own the possessions of which he himself was arrogantly fond. There were always more female Temple Barholms than male ones, and the

families were small. The relative who had emigrated to Brooklyn had been a comparatively unknown person. His only intercourse with the head of the house had been confined to a begging letter, written from America when his circumstances were at their worst. It was an ill-mannered and ill-expressed letter, which had been considered presuming, and had been answered chillingly with a mere five-pound note, clearly explained as a final charity. This begging letter, which bitterly contrasted the writer's poverty with his indifferent relative's luxuries, had, by a curious trick of chance which preserved it, quite extraordinarily turned up during an examination of apparently unimportant, forgotten papers, and had furnished a clue in the search for next of kin. The writer had greatly annoyed old Mr. Temple Barholm by telling him that he had called his son by his name - "not that there was ever likely to be anything in it for him." But a waif of the New York streets who was known as "Tem" or "Tembarom" was not a link easily attached to any chain, and the search had been long and rather hopeless. It had, however, at last reached Mrs. Bowse's boarding-house and before Mr. Palford sat Mr. Temple Temple Barholm, a cheap young man in cheap clothes, and speaking New York slang with a nasal accent. Mr. Palford, feeling him appalling and absolutely without the pale, was still aware that he stood in the position of an important client of the firm of Palford & Grimby. There was a section of the offices at Lincoln's Inn devoted to documents representing a lifetime of attention to the affairs of the Temple Barholm estates. It was greatly to be hoped that the crass ignorance and commonness of this young outsider would not cause impossible complications.

"He knows nothing! He knows nothing!" Palford found himself forced to exclaim mentally not once, but a hundred times, in the course of their talk.

There was - this revealed itself as the interview proceeded - just one slight palliation of his impossible benightedness: he was not the kind of young man who, knowing nothing, huffily protects himself by pretending to know everything. He was of an unreserve concerning his ignorance which his solicitor felt sometimes almost struck one in the face. Now and then it quite made one jump. He was singularly free from any vestige of personal vanity. He was also singularly unready to take offense. To the head of the firm of Palford & Grimby, who was not accustomed to lightness of manner, and inclined to the view that a person who made a joke took rather a liberty with him, his tendency to be jocular, even about himself and the estate of Temple Barholm, was irritating and somewhat disrespectful. Mr. Palford did not easily comprehend jokes of any sort; especially was he annoyed by cryptic phraseology and mammoth exaggeration. For instance, he could not in the least compass Mr. Temple Barholm's meaning when he casually remarked that something or other was "all to the merry"; or again, quite as though he believed that he was using reasonable English figures of speech, "The old fellow thought he was the only pebble on the beach." In using the latter expression he had been referring to the late Mr. Temple Barholm; but what on earth was his connection with the sea-shore and pebbles? When confronted with these baffling

absurdities, Mr. Palford either said, "I beg pardon," or stiffened and remained silent.

When Tembarom learned that he was the head of one of the oldest families in England, no aspect of the desirable dignity of his position reached him in the least.

"Well," he remarked, "there's quite a lot of us can go back to Adam and Eve."

When he was told that he was lord of the manor of Temple Barholm, he did not know what a manor was.

"What's a manor, and what happens if you're lord of it?" he asked.

He had not heard of William the Conqueror, and did not appear moved to admiration of him, though he owned that he seemed to have "put it over."

"Why didn't he make a republic of it while he was about it?" he said.

"But I guess that wasn't his kind. He didn't do all that fighting for his health."

His interest was not alone totally dissevered from the events of past centuries; it was as dissevered from those of mere past years. The habits, customs, and points of view of five years before seemed to

have been cast into a vast waste-paper basket as wholly unpractical in connection with present experiences.

"A man that's going to keep up with the procession can't waste time thinking about yesterday. What he's got to do is to keep his eye on what's going to happen the week after next," he summed it up.

Rather to Mr. Palford's surprise, he did not speak lightly, but with a sort of inner seriousness. It suggested that he had not arrived at this conclusion without the aid of sharp experience. Now and then one saw a touch of this profound practical perception in him.

It was not to be denied that he was clear-headed enough where purely practical business detail was concerned. He was at first plainly rather stunned by the proportions presented to him, but his questions were direct and of a common-sense order not to be despised.

"I don't know anything about it yet," he said once. "It's all Dutch to me. I can't calculate in half-crowns and pounds and half pounds, but I'm going to find out. I've got to."

It was extraordinary and annoying to feel that one must explain everything; but this impossible fellow was not an actual fool on all points, and he did not seem to be a weakling. He might learn certain things in time, and at all events one was no further personally responsible for him and his impossibilities than the business concerns

of his estate would oblige any legal firm to be. Clients, whether highly desirable or otherwise, were no more than clients. They were not relatives whom one must introduce to one's friends. Thus Mr. Palford, who was not a specially humane or sympathetic person, mentally decided. He saw no pathos in this raw young man, who would presently find himself floundering unaided in waters utterly unknown to him. There was even a touch of bitter amusement in the solicitor's mind as he glanced toward the future.

He explained with detail the necessity for their immediate departure for the other side of the Atlantic. Certain legal formalities which must at once be attended to demanded their presence in England. Foreseeing this, on the day when he had finally felt himself secure as to the identity of his client he had taken the liberty of engaging optionally certain state-rooms on the *Adriana*, sailing the following Wednesday.

"Subject of course to your approval," he added politely. "But it is imperative that we should be on the spot as early as possible." He did not mention that he himself was abominably tired of his sojourn on alien shores, and wanted to be back in London in his own chambers, with his own club within easy reach.

Tembarom's face changed its expression. He had been looking rather weighted down and fatigued, and he lighted up to eagerness.

"Say," he exclaimed, "why couldn't we go on the Transatlantic on Saturday?"

"It is one of the small, cheap boats," objected Palford.

"The accommodation would be most inferior."

Tembarom leaned forward and touched his sleeve in hasty, boyish appeal.

"I want to go on it," he said; "I want to go steerage."

Palford stared at him.

"You want to go on the Transatlantic! Steerage!" he ejaculated, quite aghast. This was a novel order of madness to reveal itself in the recent inheritor of a great fortune.

Tembarom's appeal grew franker; it took on the note of a too crude young fellow's misplaced confidence.

"You do this for me," he said. "I'd give a farm to go on that boat.

The Hutchinsons are sailing on it - Mr. and Miss Hutchinson, the ones you saw at the house last night."

"I - it is really impossible." Mr. Palford hesitated. "As to steerage,

my dear Mr. Temple Barholm, you - you can't."

Tembarom got up and stood with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. It seemed to be a sort of expression of his sudden hopeful excitement.

"Why not " he said. "If I own about half of England and have money to burn, I guess I can buy a steerage passage on a nine-day steamer."

"You can buy anything you like," Palford answered stiffly. "It is not a matter of buying. But I should not be conducting myself properly toward you if I allowed it. It would not be - becoming."

"Becoming!" cried Tembarom, "Thunder! It's not a spring bat. I tell you I want to go just that way."

Palford saw abnormal breakers ahead. He felt that he would be glad when he had landed his charge safely at Temple Barholm. Once there, his family solicitor was not called upon to live with him and hobnob with his extraordinary intimates.

"As to buying," he said, still with marked lack of enthusiasm, "instead of taking a steerage passage on the Transatlantic yourself, you might no doubt secure first-class state-rooms for Mr. and Miss Hutchinson on the Adriana, though I seriously advise against it."

Tembarom shook his head.

"You don't know them," he said. "They wouldn't let me. Hutchinson's a queer old fellow and he's had the hardest kind of luck, but he's as proud as they make 'em. Me butt in and offer to pay their passage back, as if they were paupers, just because I've suddenly struck it rich! Hully gee! I guess not. A fellow that's been boosted up in the air all in a minute, as I have, has got to lie pretty low to keep folks from wanting to kick him, anyhow. Hutchinson's a darned sight smarter fellow than I am, and he knows it--and he's Lancashire, you bet." He stopped a minute and flushed. "As to Little Ann," he said-- "me make that sort of a break with HER! Well, I should be a fool."

Palford was a cold-blooded and unimaginative person, but a long legal experience had built up within him a certain shrewdness of perception. He had naturally glanced once or twice at the girl sitting still at her mending, and he had observed that she said very little and had a singularly quiet, firm little voice.

"I beg pardon. You are probably right. I had very little conversation with either of them. Miss Hutchinson struck me as having an intelligent face."

"She's a wonder," said Tembarom, devoutly. "She's just a wonder."

"Under the circumstances," suggested Mr. Palford, "it might not be a bad idea to explain to her your idea of the steerage passage. An

intelligent girl can often give excellent advice. You will probably have an opportunity of speaking to her tonight. Did you say they were sailing to-morrow?"

To-morrow! That brought it so near that it gave Tembarom a shock. He had known that they sailed on Saturday, and now Saturday had become to-morrow. Things began to surge through his mind--all sorts of things he had no time to think of clearly, though it was true they had darted vaguely about in the delirious excitement of the night, during which he had scarcely slept at all. His face changed again, and the appeal died out of it. He began to look anxious and restless.

"Yes, they're going to-morrow," he answered.

"You see," argued Mr. Palford, with conviction, "how impossible it would be for us to make any arrangements in so few hours. You will excuse my saying," he added punctiliously, "that I could not make the voyage in the steerage."

Tembarom laughed. He thought he saw him doing it.

"That's so," he said. Then, with renewed hope, he added, "Say, I 'm going to try and get them to wait till Wednesday."

"I do not think--" Mr. Palford began, and then felt it wiser to leave things as they were. "But I'm not qualified to give an opinion. I do

not know Miss Hutchinson at all."

But the statement was by no means frank. He had a private conviction that he did know her to a certain degree. And he did.