## CHAPTER XV

To employ the figure of Burrill, Tembarom was indeed "as pleased as Punch." He was one of the large number of men who, apart from all sentimental relations, are made particularly happy by the kindly society of women; who expand with quite unconscious rejoicing when a woman begins to take care of them in one way or another. The unconsciousness is a touching part of the condition. The feminine nearness supplies a primeval human need. The most complete of men, as well as the weaklings, feel it. It is a survival of days when warm arms held and protected, warm hands served, and affectionate voices soothed. An accomplished male servant may perform every domestic service perfectly, but the fact that he cannot be a woman leaves a sense of lack. An accustomed feminine warmth in the surrounding daily atmosphere has caused many a man to marry his housekeeper or even his cook, as circumstances prompted.

Tembarom had known no woman well until he had met Little Ann. His feeling for Mrs. Bowse herself had verged on affection, because he would have been fond of any woman of decent temper and kindliness, especially if she gave him opportunities to do friendly service.
Little Ann had seemed the apotheosis of the feminine, the warmly helpful, the subtly supporting, the kind. She had been to him an amazement and a revelation. She had continually surprised him by revealing new characteristics which seemed to him nicer things than he

had ever known before, but which, if he had been aware of it, were not really surprising at all. They were only the characteristics of a very nice young feminine creature.

The presence of Miss Alicia, with the long-belated fashion of her ringlets and her little cap, was delightful to him. He felt as though he would like to take her in his arms and hug her. He thought perhaps it was partly because she was a little like Ann, and kept repeating his name in Ann's formal little way. Her delicate terror of presuming or intruding he felt in its every shade. Mentally she touched him enormously. He wanted to make her feel that she need not be afraid of him in the least, that he liked her, that in his opinion she had more right in the house than he had. He was a little frightened lest through ignorance he should say things the wrong way, as he had said that thing about wanting to know what she expected him to do. What he ought to have said was, "You're not expecting me to let that sort of thing go on." It had made him sick when he saw what a break he'd made and that she thought he was sort of insulting her. The room seemed all right now that she was in it. Small and unassuming as she was, she seemed to make it less over-sized. He didn't so much mind the loftiness of the ceiling, the depth and size of the windows, and the walls covered with thousands of books he knew nothing whatever about. The innumerable books had been an oppressing feature. If he had been one of those "college guys" who never could get enough of books, what a "cinch" the place would have been for him--good as the Astor Library! He hadn't a word to say against books,--good Lord! no;--but

even if he'd had the education and the time to read, he didn't believe he was naturally that kind, anyhow. You had to be "that kind" to know about books. He didn't suppose she-- meaning Miss Alicia--was learned enough to make you throw a fit. She didn't look that way, and he was mighty glad of it, because perhaps she wouldn't like him much if she was. It would worry her when she tried to talk to him and found out he didn't know a darned thing he ought to.

They'd get on together easier if they could just chin about common sort of every-day things. But though she didn't look like the Vassar sort, he guessed that she was not like himself: she had lived in libraries before, and books didn't frighten her. She'd been born among people who read lots of them and maybe could talk about them. That was why she somehow seemed to fit into the room. He was aware that, timid as she was and shabby as her neat dress looked, she fitted into the whole place, as he did not. She'd been a poor relative and had been afraid to death of old Temple Barholm, but she'd not been afraid of him because she wasn't his sort. She was a lady; that was what was the matter with her. It was what made things harder for her, too. It was what made her voice tremble when she'd tried to seem so contented and polite when she'd talked about going into one of those "decayed alms-houses." As if the old ladies were vegetables that had gone wrong, by gee! he thought.

He liked her little, modest, delicate old face and her curls and her little cap with the ribbons so much that he smiled with a twinkling

eye every time he looked at her. He wanted to suggest something he thought would be mighty comfortable, but he was half afraid he might be asking her to do something which wasn't "her job," and it might hurt her feelings. But he ventured to hint at it.

"Has Burrill got to come back and pour that out?" he asked, with an awkward gesture toward the tea-tray. "Has he just GOT to?"

"Oh, no, unless you wish it," she answered. "Shall--may I give it to you?"

"Will you?" he exclaimed delightedly. "That would be fine. I shall feel like a regular Clarence."

She was going to sit at the table in a straight-backed chair, but he sprang at her.

"This big one is more comfortable," he said, and he dragged it forward and made her sit in it. "You ought to have a footstool," he added, and he got one and put it under her feet. "There, that's all right."

A footstool, as though she were a royal personage and he were a gentleman in waiting, only probably gentlemen in waiting did not jump about and look so pleased. The cheerful content of his boyish face when he himself sat down near the table was delightful.

"Now," he said, "we can ring up for the first act."

She filled the tea-pot and held it for a moment, and then set it down as though her feelings were too much for her.

"I feel as if I were in a dream," she quavered happily. "I do indeed."

"But it's a nice one, ain't it? " he answered. "I feel as if I was in two. Sitting here in this big room with all these fine things about me, and having afternoon tea with a relation! It just about suits me. It didn't feel like this yesterday, you bet your life!"

"Does it seem--nicer than yesterday?" she ventured. "Really, Mr. Temple Barholm?"

"Nicer!" he ejaculated. "It's got yesterday beaten to a frazzle."

It was beyond all belief. He was speaking as though the advantage, the relief, the happiness, were all on his side. She longed to enlighten him.

"But you can't realize what it is to me," she said gratefully, "to sit here, not terrified and homeless and--a beggar any more, with your kind face before me. Do forgive me for saying it. You have such a kind young face, Mr. Temple Barholm. And to have an easy-chair and cushions, and actually a buffet brought for my feet! " She suddenly

recollected herself. "Oh, I mustn't let your tea get cold," she added, taking up the tea-pot apologetically. "Do you take cream and sugar, and is it to be one lump or two?"

"I take everything in sight," he replied joyously, "and two lumps, please."

She prepared the cup of tea with as delicate a care as though it had been a sacramental chalice, and when she handed it to him she smiled wistfully.

"No one but you ever thought of such a thing as bringing a buffet for my feet--no one except poor little Jem," she said, and her voice was wistful as well as her smile.

She was obviously unaware that she was introducing an entirely new acquaintance to him. Poor little Jem was supposed to be some one whose whole history he knew.

"Jem?" he repeated, carefully transferring a piece of hot buttered crumpet to his plate.

"Jem Temple Barholm," she answered. "I say little Jem because I remember him only as a child. I never saw him after he was eleven years old."

"Who was he?" he asked. The tone of her voice, and her manner of speaking made him feel that he wanted to hear something more.

She looked rather startled by his ignorance. "Have you-- have you never heard of him?" she inquired.

"No. Is he another distant relation?"

Her hesitation caused him to neglect his crumpet, to look up at her. He saw at once that she wore the air of a sensitive and beautifully mannered elderly lady who was afraid she had made a mistake and said something awkward.

"I am so sorry," she apologized. "Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned him."

"Why shouldn't he be mentioned?"

She was embarrassed. She evidently wished she had not spoken, but breeding demanded that she should ignore the awkwardness of the situation, if awkwardness existed.

"Of course--I hope your tea is quite as you like it--of course there is no real reason. But--shall I give you some more cream? No? You see, if he hadn't died, he--he would have inherited Temple Barholm."

Now he was interested. This was the other chap.

"Instead of me?" he asked, to make sure. She endeavored not to show embarrassment and told herself it didn't really matter--to a thoroughly nice person. But--

"He was the next of kin--before you. I'm so sorry I didn't know you hadn't heard of him. It seemed natural that Mr. Palford should have mentioned him."

"He did say that there was a young fellow who had died, but he didn't tell me about him. I guess I didn't ask. There were such a lot of other things. I'd like to hear about him. You say you knew him?"

"Only when he was a little fellow. Never after he grew up. Something happened which displeased my father. I'm afraid papa was very easily displeased. Mr. Temple Barholm disliked him, too. He would not have him at Temple Barholm."

"He hadn't much luck with his folks, had he?" remarked Tembarom.

"He had no luck with any one. I seemed to be the only person who was fond of him, and of course I didn't count."

"I bet you counted with him," said Tembarom.

"I do think I did. Both his parents died quite soon after he was born, and people who ought to have cared for him were rather jealous because he stood so near to Temple Barholm. If Mr. Temple Barholm had not been so eccentric and bitter, everything would have been done for him; but as it was, he seemed to belong to no one. When he came to the vicarage it used to make me so happy. He used to call me Aunt Alicia, and he had such pretty ways." She hesitated and looked quite tenderly at the tea-pot, a sort of shyness in her face. "I am sure," she burst forth, "I feel quite sure that you will understand and won't think it indelicate; but I had thought so often that I should like to have a little boy--if I had married," she added in hasty tribute to propriety.

Tembarom's eyes rested on her in a thoughtfulness openly touched with affection. He put out his hand and patted hers two or three times in encouraging sympathy.

"Say," he said frankly, "I just believe every woman that's the real thing'd like to have a little boy--or a little girl--or a little something or other. That's why pet cats and dogs have such a cinch of it. And there's men that's the same way. It's sort of nature."

"He had such a high spirit and such pretty ways," she said again. "One of his pretty ways was remembering to do little things to make one comfortable, like thinking of giving one a cushion or a buffet for one's feet. I noticed it so much because I had never seen boys or men

wait upon women. My own dear papa was used to having women wait upon him--bring his slippers, you know, and give him the best chair. He didn't like Jem's ways. He said he liked a boy who was a boy and not an affected nincompoop. He wasn't really quite just." She paused regretfully and sighed as she looked back into a past doubtlessly enriched with many similar memories of "dear papa." "Poor Jem! Poor Jem!" she breathed softly.

Tembarom thought that she must have felt the boy's loss very much, almost as much as though she had really been his mother; perhaps more pathetically because she had not been his mother or anybody's mother. He could see what a good little mother she would have made, looking after her children and doing everything on earth to make them happy and comfortable, just the kind of mother Ann would make, though she had not Ann's steady wonder of a little head or her shrewd farsightedness. Jem would have been in luck if he had been her son. It was a darned pity he hadn't been. If he had, perhaps he would not have died young.

"Yes," he answered sympathetically, "it's hard for a young fellow to die. How old was he, anyhow? I don't know."

"Not much older than you are now. It was seven years ago. And if he had only died, poor dear! There are things so much worse than death."

"Worse!"

"Awful disgrace is worse," she faltered. She was plainly trying to keep moisture out of her eyes.

"Did he get into some bad mix-up, poor fellow?" If there had been anything like that, no wonder it broke her up to think of him.

It surely did break her up. She flushed emotionally.

"The cruel thing was that he didn't really do what he was accused of," she said.

"He didn't?"

"No; but he was a ruined man, and he went away to the Klondike because he could not stay in England. And he was killed--killed, poor boy! And afterward it was found out that he was innocent--too late."

"Gee!" Tembarom gasped, feeling hot and cold. "Could you beat that for rotten luck! What was he accused of?"

Miss Alicia leaned forward and spoke in a whisper. It was too dreadful to speak of aloud.

"Cheating at cards--a gentleman playing with gentlemen. You know what that means."

Tembarom grew hotter and colder. No wonder she looked that way, poor little thing!

"But,"--he hesitated before he spoke,--"but he wasn't that kind, was he? Of course he wasn't."

"No, no. But, you see,"--she hesitated herself here,--"everything looked so much against him. He had been rather wild." She dropped her voice even lower in making the admission.

Tembarom wondered how much she meant by that.

"He was so much in debt. He knew he was to be rich in the future, and he was poor just in those reckless young days when it seemed unfair. And he had played a great deal and had been very lucky. He was so lucky that sometimes his luck seemed uncanny. Men who had played with him were horrible about it afterward."

"They would be," put in Tembarom. " They'd be sore about it, and bring it up."

They both forgot their tea. Miss Alicia forgot everything as she poured forth her story in the manner of a woman who had been forced to keep silent and was glad to put her case into words. It was her case. To tell the truth of this forgotten wrong was again to offer

justification of poor handsome Jem whom everybody seemed to have dropped talk of, and even preferred not to hear mentioned.

"There were such piteously cruel things about it," she went on. "He had fallen very much in love, and he meant to marry and settle down. Though we had not seen each other for years, he actually wrote to me and told me about it. His letter made me cry. He said I would understand and care about the thing which seemed to have changed everything and made him a new man. He was so sorry that he had not been better and more careful. He was going to try all over again. He was not going to play at all after this one evening when he was obliged to keep an engagement he had made months before to give his revenge to a man he had won a great deal of money from. The very night the awful thing happened he had told Lady Joan, before he went into the card-room, that this was to be his last game."

Tembarom had looked deeply interested from the first, but at her last words a new alertness added itself.

"Did you say Lady Joan? " he asked. " Who was Lady Joan?"

"She was the girl he was so much in love with. Her name was Lady Joan Fayre."

"Was she the daughter of the Countess of Mallowe?"

"Yes. Have you heard of her?"

He recalled Ann's reflective consideration of him before she had said, "She'll come after you." He replied now: "Some one spoke of her to me this morning. They say she's a beauty and as proud as Lucifer."

"She was, and she is yet, I believe. Poor Lady Joan--as well as poor Jem!"

"She didn't believe it, did she?" he put in hastily. "She didn't throw him down?"

"No one knew what happened between them afterward. She was in the card-room, looking on, when the awful thing took place."

She stopped, as though to go on was almost unbearable. She had been so overwhelmed by the past shame of it that even after the passing of years the anguish was a living thing. Her small hands clung hard together as they rested on the edge of the table. Tembarom waited in thrilled suspense. She spoke in a whisper again:

"He won a great deal of money--a great deal. He had that uncanny luck again, and of course people in the other rooms heard what was going on, and a number drifted in to look on. The man he had promised to give his revenge to almost showed signs of having to make an effort to conceal his irritation and disappointment. Of course, as he was a

gentleman, he was as cool as possible; but just at the most exciting moment, the height of the game, Jem made a quick movement, and--and something fell out of his sleeve."

"Something," gasped Tembarom, "fell out of his sleeve!"

Miss Alicia's eyes overflowed as she nodded her beribboned little cap.

"It"--her voice was a sob of woe--"it was a marked card. The man he was playing against snatched it and held it up. And he laughed out loud."

"Holy cats! " burst from Tembarom; but the remarkable exclamation was one of genuine horror, and he turned pale, got up from his seat, and took two or three strides across the room, as though he could not sit still.

"Yes, he laughed--quite loudly," repeated Miss Alicia, "as if he had guessed it all the time. Papa heard the whole story from some one who was present."

Tembarom came back to her rather breathless.

"What in thunder did he do--Jem?" he asked.

She actually wrung her poor little hands.

"What could he do? There was a dead silence. People moved just a little nearer to the table and stood and stared, merely waiting. They say it was awful to see his face--awful. He sprang up and stood still, and slowly became as white as if he were dying before their eyes. Some one thought Lady Joan Fayre took a step toward him, but no one was quite sure. He never uttered one word, but walked out of the room and down the stairs and out of the house."

"But didn't he speak to the girl?"

"He didn't even look at her. He passed her by as if she were stone."

"What happened next?"

"He disappeared. No one knew where at first, and then there was a rumor that he had gone to the Klondike and had been killed there. And a year later--only a year! Oh, if he had only waited in England!--a worthless villain of a valet he had discharged for stealing met with an accident, and because he thought he was going to die, got horribly frightened, and confessed to the clergyman that he had tucked the card in poor Jem's sleeve himself just to pay him off. He said he did it on the chance that it would drop out where some one would see it, and a marked card dropping out of a man's sleeve anywhere would look black enough, whether he was playing or not. But poor Jem was in his grave, and no one seemed to care, though every one had been interested enough

in the scandal. People talked about that for weeks."

Tembarom pulled at his collar excitedly.

"It makes me sort of strangle," he said. "You've got to stand your own bad luck, but to hear of a chap that's had to lie down and take the worst that could come to him and know it wasn't his--just KNOW it! And die before he's cleared! That knocks me out."

Almost every sentence he uttered had a mystical sound to Miss Alicia, but she knew how he was taking it, with what hot, young human sympathy and indignation. She loved the way he took it, and she loved the feeling in his next words

"And the girl--good Lord!--the girl?"

"I never met her, and I know very little of her; but she has never married."

"I'm glad of that," he said. "I'm darned glad of it. How could she?" Ann wouldn't, he knew. Ann would have gone to her grave unmarried. But she would have done things first to clear her man's name. Somehow she would have cleared him, if she'd had to fight tooth and nail till she was eighty.

"They say she has grown very bitter and haughty in her manner. I'm

afraid Lady Mallowe is a very worldly woman. One hears they don't get on together, and that she is bitterly disappointed because her daughter has not made a good match. It appears that she might have made several, but she is so hard and cynical that men are afraid of her. I wish I had known her a little--if she really loved Jem."

Tembarom had thrust his hands into his pockets, and was standing deep in thought, looking at the huge bank of red coals in the fire-grate. Miss Alicia hastily wiped her eyes.

"Do excuse me," she said.

"I'll excuse you all right," he replied, still looking into the coals. "I guess I shouldn't excuse you as much if you didn't" He let her cry in her gentle way while he stared, lost in reflection.

"And if he hadn't fired that valet chap, he would be here with you now--instead of me. Instead of me," he repeated.

And Miss Alicia did not know what to say in reply. There seemed to be nothing which, with propriety and natural feeling, one could say.

"It makes me feel just fine to know I'm not going to have my dinner all by myself," he said to her before she left the library.

She had a way of blushing about things he noticed, when she was shy or

moved or didn't know exactly what to say. Though she must have been sixty, she did it as though she were sixteen. And she did it when he said this, and looked as though suddenly she was in some sort of trouble.

"You are going to have dinner with me," he said, seeing that she hesitated--"dinner and breakfast and lunch and tea and supper and every old thing that goes. You can't turn me down after me staking out that claim."

"I'm afraid--" she said. "You see, I have lived such a secluded life. I scarcely ever left my rooms except to take a walk. I'm sure you understand. It would not have been necessary even if I could have afforded it, which I really couldn't--I'm afraid I have nothing--quite suitable--for evening wear."

"You haven't!" he exclaimed gleefully. "I don't know what is suitable for evening wear, but I haven't got it either. Pearson told me so with tears in his eyes. It never was necessary for me either. I've got to get some things to quiet Pearson down, but until I do I've got to eat my dinner in a tweed cutaway; and what I've caught on to is that it's unsuitable enough to throw a man into jail. That little black dress you've got on and that little cap are just 'way out of sight, they're so becoming. Come down just like you are."

She felt a little as Pearson had felt when confronting his new

employer's entire cheerfulness in face of a situation as exotically hopeless as the tweed cutaway, and nothing else by way of resource. But there was something so nice about him, something which was almost as though he was actually a gentleman, something which absolutely, if one could go so far, stood in the place of his being a gentleman. It was impossible to help liking him more and more at every queer speech he made. Still, there were of course things he did not realize, and perhaps one ought in kindness to give him a delicate hint.

"I'm afraid," she began quite apologetically. "I'm afraid that the servants, Burrill and the footmen, you know, will be--will think--"

"Say," he took her up, " let's give Burrill and the footmen the Willies out and out. If they can't stand it, they can write home to their mothers and tell 'em they've got to take 'em away. Burrill and the footmen needn't worry. They're suitable enough, and it's none of their funeral, anyhow."

He wasn't upset in the least. Miss Alicia, who, as a timid dependent either upon "poor dear papa" or Mr. Temple Barholm, had been secretly, in her sensitive, ladylike little way, afraid of superior servants all her life, knowing that they realized her utterly insignificant helplessness, and resented giving her attention because she was not able to show her appreciation of their services in the proper manner--Miss Alicia saw that it had not occurred to him to endeavor to propitiate them in the least, because somehow it all seemed a joke to

him, and he didn't care. After the first moment of being startled, she regarded him with a novel feeling, almost a kind of admiration. Tentatively she dared to wonder if there was not something even rather--rather ARISTOCRATIC in his utter indifference.

If be had been a duke, he would not have regarded the servants' point of view; it wouldn't have mattered what they thought. Perhaps, she hastily decided, he was like this because, though he was not a duke, boot-blacking in New York notwithstanding he was a Temple Barholm. There were few dukes as old of blood as a Temple Barholm. That must be it. She was relieved.

Whatsoever lay at the root of his being what he was and as he was, he somehow changed the aspect of things for her, and without doing anything but be himself, cleared the atmosphere of her dread of the surprise and mental reservations of the footmen and Burrill when she came down to dinner in her high-necked, much-cleaned, and much-repaired black silk, and with no more distinguishing change in her toilet than a white lace cap instead of a black one, and with "poor dear mamma's" hair bracelet with the gold clasp on her wrist, and a weeping-willow made of "poor dear papa's" hair in a brooch at her collar.

It was so curious, though still "nice," but he did not offer her his arm when they were going into the dining-room, and he took hold of hers with his hand and affectionately half led, half pushed, her along

with him as they went. And he himself drew back her chair for her at the end of the table opposite his own. He did not let a footman do it, and he stood behind it, talking in his cheerful way all the time, and he moved it to exactly the right place, and then actually bent down and looked under the table.

"Here," he said to the nearest man-servant, "where's there a footstool? Get one, please," in that odd, simple, almost aristocratic way. It was not a rude dictatorial way, but a casual way, as though he knew the man was there to do things, and he didn't expect any time to be wasted.

And it was he himself who arranged the footstool, making it comfortable for her, and then he went to his own chair at the head of the table and sat down, smiling at her joyfully across the glass and silver and flowers.

"Push that thing in the middle on one side, Burrill," he said. "It's too high. I can't see Miss Alicia."

Burrill found it difficult to believe the evidence of his hearing.

"The epergne, sir? " he inquired.

"Is that what it's called, an apern? That's a new one on me. Yes, that's what I mean. Push the apern over."

"Shall I remove it from the table, sir?" Burrill steeled himself to exact civility. Of what use to behave otherwise? There always remained the liberty to give notice if the worst came to the worst, though what the worst might eventually prove to be it required a lurid imagination to depict. The epergne was a beautiful thing of crystal and gold, a celebrated work of art, regarded as an exquisite possession. It was almost remarkable that Mr. Temple Barholm had not said, "Shove it on one side," but Burrill had been spared the poignant indignity of being required to "shove."

"Yes, suppose you do. It's a fine enough thing when it isn't in the way, but I've got to see you while I talk, Miss Alicia," said Mr. Temple Barholm. The episode of the epergne-- Burrill's expression, and the rigidly restrained mouths of Henry and James as the decoration was removed, leaving a painfully blank space of table-cloth until Burrill silently filled it with flowers in a low bowl--these things temporarily flurried Miss Alicia somewhat, but the pleased smile at the head of the table calmed even that trying moment.

Then what a delightful meal it was, to be sure! How entertaining and cheerful and full of interesting conversation! Miss Alicia had always admired what she reverently termed "conversation." She had read of the houses of brilliant people where they had it at table, at dinner and supper parties, and in drawing-rooms. The French, especially the French ladies, were brilliant conversationalists. They held "salons"

in which the conversation was wonderful--Mme. de Stael and Mme. Roland, for instance; and in England, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Sydney Smith, and Horace Walpole, and surely Miss Fanny Burney, and no doubt L. E. L., whose real name was Miss Letitia Elizabeth Landon--what conversation they must have delighted their friends with and how instructive it must have been even to sit in the most obscure corner and listen!

Such gifted persons seemed to have been chosen by Providence to delight and inspire every one privileged to hear them. Such privileges had been omitted from the scheme of Miss Alicia's existence. She did not know, she would have felt it sacrilegious to admit it even if the fact had dawned upon her, that "dear papa" had been a heartlessly arrogant, utterly selfish, and tyrannical old blackguard of the most pronounced type. He had been of an absolute morality as far as social laws were concerned. He had written and delivered a denunciatory sermon a week, and had made unbearable by his ministrations the suffering hours and the last moments of his parishioners during the long years of his pastorate. When Miss Alicia, in reading records of the helpful relationship of the male progenitors of the Brontes, Jane Austen, Fanny Burney, and Mrs. Browning, was frequently reminded of him, she revealed a perception of which she was not aware. He had combined the virile qualities of all of them. Consequently, brilliancy of conversation at table had not been the attractive habit of the household; "poor dear papa" had confined himself to scathing criticism of the incompetence of females who could not teach their menials to

"cook a dinner which was not a disgrace to any decent household." When not virulently aspersing the mutton, he was expressing his opinion of muddle-headed weakness which would permit household bills to mount in a manner which could only bring ruin and disaster upon a minister of the gospel who throughout a protracted career of usefulness had sapped his intellectual manhood in the useless effort to support in silly idleness a family of brainless and maddening fools. Miss Alicia had heard her character, her unsuccessful physical appearance, her mind, and her pitiful efforts at table-talk, described in detail with a choice of adjective and adverb which had broken into terrified fragments every atom of courage and will with which she had been sparsely dowered.

So, not having herself been gifted with conversational powers to begin with, and never having enjoyed the exhibition of such powers in others, her ideals had been high. She was not sure that Mr. Temple Barholm's fluent and cheerful talk could be with exactness termed "conversation." It was perhaps not sufficiently lofty and intellectual, and did not confine itself rigorously to one exalted subject. But how it did raise one's spirits and open up curious vistas! And how good tempered and humorous it was, even though sometimes the humor was a little bewildering! During the whole dinner there never occurred even one of those dreadful pauses in which dead silence fell, and one tried, like a frightened hen flying from side to side of a coop, to think of something to say which would not sound silly, but perhaps might divert attention from dangerous topics. She

had often thought it would be so interesting to hear a Spaniard or a native Hindu talk about himself and his own country in English. Tembarom talked about New York and its people and atmosphere, and he did not know how foreign it all was. He described the streets--Fifth Avenue and Broadway and Sixth Avenue--and the street-cars and the elevated railroad, and the way "fellows" had to "hustle" "to put it over." He spoke of a boarding-house kept by a certain Mrs. Bowse, and a presidential campaign, and the election of a mayor, and a quick-lunch counter, and when President Garfield had been assassinated, and a department store; and the electric lights, and the way he had of making a sort of picture of everything was really instructive and, well, fascinating. She felt as though she had been taken about the city in one of the vehicles the conductor of which described things through a megaphone.

Not that Mr. Temple Barholm suggested a megaphone, whatsoever that might be, but he merely made you feel as if you had seen things. Never had she been so entertained and enlightened. If she had been a beautiful girl, he could not have seemed more as though in amusing her he was also really pleasing himself. He was so very funny sometimes that she could not help laughing in a way which was almost unladylike, because she could not stop, and was obliged to put her handkerchief up to her face and wipe away actual tears of mirth.

Fancy laughing until you cried, and the servants looking on!

Once Burrill himself was obliged to turn hastily away, and twice she heard him severely reprove an overpowered young footman in a rapid undertone.

Tembarom at least felt that the unlifting heaviness of atmosphere which had surrounded him while enjoying the companionship of Mr. Palford was a thing of the past.

The thrilled interest, the surprise and delight of Miss Alicia would have stimulated a man in a comatose condition, it seemed to him. The little thing just loved every bit of it--she just "eat it up." She asked question after question, sometimes questions which would have made him shout with laughter if he had not been afraid of hurting her feelings. She knew as little of New York as he knew of Temple Barholm, and was, it made him grin to see, allured by it as by some illicit fascination. She did not know what to make of it, and sometimes she was obliged hastily to conceal a fear that it was a sort of Sodom and Gomorrah; but she wanted to hear more about it, and still more.

And she brightened up until she actually did not look frightened, and ate her dinner with an excellent appetite.

"I really never enjoyed a dinner so much in my life," she said when they went into the drawing-room to have their coffee. "It was the conversation which made it so delightful. Conversation is such a stimulating thing!"

She had almost decided that it was "conversation," or at least a wonderful substitute.

When she said good night to him and went beaming to bed, looking forward immensely to breakfast next morning, he watched her go up the staircase, feeling wonderfully normal and happy.

"Some of these nights, when she's used to me," he said as he stuffed tobacco into his last pipe in the library--"some of these nights I'm darned if I sha'n't catch hold of the sweet, little old thing and hug her in spite of myself. I sha'n't be able to help it." He lit his pipe, and puffed it even excitedly. "Lord!" he said, "there's some blame' fool going about the world right now that might have married her. And he'll never know what a break he made when he didn't."