

CHAPTER XVIII

The spring, when they traveled back to the north, was so perceptibly nearer that the fugitive soft days strayed in advance at intervals that were briefer. They chose one for their journey, and its clear sunshine and hints at faint greenness were so exhilarating to Miss Alicia that she was a companion to make any journey an affair to rank with holidays and adventures. The strange luxury of traveling in a reserved first-class carriage, of being made timid by no sense of unfitness of dress or luggage, would have filled her with grateful rapture; but Rose, journeying with Pearson a few coaches behind, appeared at the carriage window at every important station to say, "Is there anything I may do for you, ma'am?" And there really never was anything she could do, because Mr. Temple Barholm remembered everything which could make her comfort perfect. In the moods of one who searches the prospect for suggestions as to pleasure he can give to himself by delighting a dear child, he had found and bought for her a most elegant little dressing-bag, with the neatest of plain-gold fittings beautifully initialed. It reposed upon the cushioned seat near her, and made her heart beat every time she caught sight of it anew. How wonderful it would be if poor dear, darling mama could look down and see everything and really know what happiness had been vouchsafed to her unworthy child!

Having a vivid recollection of the journey made with Mr. Palford,

Tembarom felt that his whole world had changed for him. The landscape had altered its aspect. Miss Alicia pointed out bits of freshening grass, was sure of the breaking of brown leaf-buds, and more than once breathlessly suspected a primrose in a sheltered hedge corner. A country-bred woman, with country-bred keenness of eye and a country-bred sense of the seasons' change, she saw so much that he had never known that she began to make him see also. Bare trees would be thick-leaved nesting-places, hedges would be white with hawthorn, and hold blue eggs and chirps and songs. Skylarks would spring out of the fields and soar into the sky, dropping crystal chains of joyous trills. The cottage gardens would be full of flowers, there would be poppies gleaming scarlet in the corn, and in buttercup-time all the green grass would be a sheet of shining gold.

"When it all happens I shall be like a little East-Sider taken for a day in the country. I shall be asking questions at every step," Tembarom said. "Temple Barholm must be pretty fine then."

"It is so lovely," said Miss Alicia, turning to him almost solemnly, "that sometimes it makes one really lose one's breath."

He looked out of the window with sudden wistfulness.

"I wish Ann--" he began and then, seeing the repressed question in her eyes, made up his mind.

He told her about Little Ann. He did not use very many words, but she knew a great deal when he had finished. And her spinster soul was thrilled. Neither she nor poor Emily had ever had an admirer, and it was not considered refined for unsought females to discuss "such subjects." Domestic delirium over the joy of an engagement in families in which daughters were a drug she had seen. It was indeed inevitable that there should be more rejoicing over one Miss Timson who had strayed from the fold into the haven of marriage than over the ninety-nine Misses Timson who remained behind. But she had never known intimately any one who was in love-- really in love. Mr. Temple Barholm must be. When he spoke of Little Ann he flushed shyly and his eyes looked so touching and nice. His voice sounded different, and though of course his odd New York expressions were always rather puzzling, she felt as though she saw things she had had no previous knowledge of--things which thrilled her.

"She must be a very--very nice girl," she ventured at length. "I am afraid I have never been into old Mrs. Hutchinson's cottage. She is quite comfortably off in her way, and does not need parish care. I wish I had seen Miss Hutchinson."

"I wish she had seen you," was Tembarom's answer.

Miss Alicia reflected.

"She must be very clever to have such--sensible views," she remarked.

If he had remained in New York, and there had been no question of his inheriting Temple Barholm, the marriage would have been most suitable. But however "superior" she might be, a vision of old Mrs. Hutchinson's granddaughter as the wife of Mr. Temple Barholm, and of noisy old Mr. Hutchinson as his father-in-law was a staggering thing.

"You think they were sensible?" asked Tembarom. "Well, she never did anything that wasn't. So I guess they were. And what she says GOES. I wanted you to know, anyhow. I wouldn't like you not to know. I'm too fond of you, Miss Alicia." And he put his hand round her neat glove and squeezed it. The tears of course came into her tender eyes. Emotion of any sort always expressed itself in her in this early-Victorian manner.

"This Lady Joan girl," he said suddenly not long afterward, "isn't she the kind that I'm to get used to--the kind in the pictorial magazine Ann talked about? I bought one at the news-stand at the depot before we started. I wanted to get on to the pictures and see what they did to me."

He found the paper among his belongings and regarded it with the expression of a serious explorer. It opened at a page of illustrations of slim goddesses in court dresses. By actual measurement, if regarded according to scale, each was about ten feet high; but their long lines, combining themselves with court trains, waving plumes, and

falling veils, produced an awe-inspiring effect. Tembarom gazed at them in absorbed silence.

"Is she something like any of these?" he inquired finally.

Miss Alicia looked through her glasses.

"Far more beautiful, I believe," she answered. "These are only fashion-plates, and I have heard that she is a most striking girl."

"A beaut' from Beautsville!" he said. "So that's what I'm up against! I wonder how much use that kind of a girl would have for me."

He gave a good deal of attention to the paper before he laid it aside. As she watched him, Miss Alicia became gradually aware of the existence of a certain hint of determined squareness in his boyish jaw. It was perhaps not much more than a hint, but it really was there, though she had not noticed it before. In fact, it usually hid itself behind his slangy youthfulness and his readiness for any good cheer.

One may as well admit that it sustained him during his novitiate and aided him to pass through it without ignominy or disaster. He was strengthened also by a private resolve to bear himself in such a manner as would at least do decent credit to Little Ann and her superior knowledge. With the curious eyes of servants, villagers, and

secretly outraged neighborhood upon him, he was shrewd enough to know that he might easily become a perennial fount of grotesque anecdote, to be used as a legitimate source of entertainment in cottages over the consumption of beans and bacon, as well as at great houses when dinner-table talk threatened to become dull if not enlivened by some spice. He would not have thought of this or been disturbed by it but for Ann. She knew, and he was not going to let her be met on her return from America with what he called "a lot of funny dope" about him.

"No girl would like it," he said to himself. "And the way she said she 'cared too much' just put it up to me to see that the fellow she cares for doesn't let himself get laughed at."

Though he still continued to be jocular on subjects which to his valet seemed almost sacred, Pearson was relieved to find that his employer gradually gave himself into his hands in a manner quite amenable. In the touching way in which nine out of ten nice, domesticated American males obey the behests of the women they are fond of, he had followed Ann's directions to the letter. Guided by the adept Pearson, he had gone to the best places in London and purchased the correct things, returning to Temple Barholm with a wardrobe to which any gentleman might turn at any moment without a question.

"He's got good shoulders, though he does slouch a bit," Pearson said to Rose. "And a gentleman's shoulders are more than half the battle."

What Tembarom himself felt cheered by was the certainty that if Ann saw him walking about the park or the village, or driving out with Miss Alicia in the big landau, or taking her in to dinner every evening, or even going to church with her, she would not have occasion to flush at sight of him.

The going to church was one of the duties of his position he found out. Miss Alicia "put him on" to that. It seemed that he had to present himself to the villagers "as an example." If the Temple Barholm pews were empty, the villagers, not being incited to devotional exercise by his exalted presence, would feel at liberty to remain at home, and in the irreligious undress of shirt-sleeves sit and smoke their pipes, or, worse still, gather at "the Hare and Hounds" and drink beer. Also, it would not be "at all proper" not to go to church.

Pearson produced a special cut of costume for this ceremony, and Tembarom walked with Miss Alicia across the park to the square-towered Norman church.

In a position of dignity the Temple Barholm pews over-looked the congregation. There was the great square pew for the family, with two others for servants. Footmen and house-maids gazed reverentially at prayer-books. Pearson, making every preparation respectfully to declare himself a "miserable sinner" when the proper moment arrived,

could scarcely re- strain a rapid side glance as the correctly cut and fitted and entirely "suitable" work of his hands opened the pew-door for Miss Alicia, followed her in, and took his place.

Let not the fact that he had never been to church before be counted against him. There was nothing very extraordinary in the fact. He had felt no antipathy to church-going, but he had not by chance fallen under proselyting influence, and it had certainly never occurred to him that he had any place among the well- dressed, comfortable-looking people he had seen flocking into places of worship in New York. As far as religious observances were concerned, he was an unadulterated heathen, and was all the more to be congratulated on being a heathen of genial tendencies.

The very large pew, under the stone floor of which his ancestors had slept undisturbedly for centuries, interested him greatly. A recumbent marble crusader in armor, with feet crossed in the customary manner, fitted into a sort of niche in one side of the wall. There were carved tablets and many inscriptions in Latin wheresoever one glanced. The place was like a room. A heavy, round table, on which lay prayer-books, Bibles, and hymn-books, occupied the middle. About it were arranged beautiful old chairs, with hassocks to kneel on. Toward a specially imposing chair with arms Miss Alicia directed, him with a glance. It was apparently his place. He was going to sit down when he saw Miss Alicia gently push forward a hassock with her foot, and kneel on it, covering her face with her hands as she bent her head. He

hastily drew forth his hassock and followed her example.

That was it, was it? It wasn't only a matter of listening to a sermon; you had to do things. He had better watch out and see that he didn't miss anything. She didn't know it was his first time, and it might worry her to the limit if he didn't put it over all right. One of the things he had noticed in her was her fear of attracting attention by failing to do exactly the "proper thing." If he made a fool of himself by kneeling down when he ought to stand up, or lying down when he ought to sit, she'd get hot all over, thinking what the villagers or the other people would say. Well, Ann hadn't wanted him to look different from other fellows or to make breaks. He'd look out from start to finish. He directed a watchful eye at Miss Alicia through his fingers. She remained kneeling a few moments, and then very quietly got up. He rose with her, and took his big chair when she sat down. He breathed more freely when they had got that far. That was the first round.

It was not a large church, but a gray and solemn impression of dignity brooded over it. It was dim with light, which fell through stained-glass memorial windows set deep in the thick stone walls. The silence which reigned throughout its spaces seemed to Tembarom of a new kind, different from the silence of the big house. The occasional subdued rustle of turned prayer-book leaves seemed to accentuate it; the most careful movement could not conceal itself; a slight cough was a startling thing. The way, Tembarom thought, they could get things

dead-still in English places!

The chimes, which had been ringing their last summons to the tardy, slackened their final warning notes, became still slower, stopped. There was a slight stir in the benches occupied by the infant school. It suggested that something new was going to happen. From some unseen place came the sound of singing voices-- boyish voices and the voices of men. Tembarom involuntarily turned his head. Out of the unseen place came a procession in white robes. Great Scott! every one was standing up! He must stand up, too. The boys and men in white garments filed into their seats. An elderly man, also in white robes, separated himself from them, and, going into his special place, kneeled down. Then he rose and began to read:

"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness--"

Tembarom took the open book which Miss Alicia had very delicately pushed toward him. He read the first words,--that was plain sailing,-- then he seemed to lose his place. Miss Alicia turned a leaf. He turned one also.

"Dearly beloved brethren--"

There you were. This was once more plain sailing. He could follow it. What was the matter with Miss Alicia? She was kneeling again, everybody was kneeling. Where was the hassock? He went down upon his

knees, hoping Miss Alicia had not seen that he wasn't going to kneel at all. Then when the minister said "Amen," the congregation said it, too, and he came in too late, so that his voice sounded out alone. He must watch that. Then the minister knelt, and all the people prayed aloud with him. With the book before him he managed to get in after the first few words; but he was not ready with the responses, and in the middle of them everybody stood up again. And then the organ played, and every one sang. He couldn't sing, anyhow, and he knew he couldn't catch on to the kind of thing they were doing. He hoped Miss Alicia wouldn't mind his standing up and holding his book and doing nothing. He could not help seeing that eyes continually turned toward him. They'd notice every darned break he made, and Miss Alicia would know they did. He felt quite hot more than once. He watched Miss Alicia like a hawk; he sat down and listened to reading, he stood up and listened to singing; he kneeled, he tried to chime in with "Amens" and to keep up with Miss Alicia's bending of head and knee. But the creed, with its sudden turn toward the altar, caught him unawares, he lost himself wholly in the psalms, the collects left him in deep water, hopeless of ever finding his place again, and the litany baffled him, when he was beginning to feel safe, by changing from "miserable sinners" to "Spare us Good Lord" and "We beseech thee to hear us." If he could just have found the place he would have been all right, but an honest anxiety to be right excited him, and the fear of embarrassing Miss Alicia by going wrong made the morning a strenuous thing. He was so relieved to find he might sit still when the sermon began that he gave the minister an attention which might have marked

him, to the chance beholder, as a religious enthusiast.

By the time the service had come to an end the stately peace of the place had seemed to sink into his being and become part of himself. The voice of the minister bestowing his blessing, the voices of the white-clothed choir floating up into the vaulted roof, stirred him to a remote pleasure. He liked it, or he knew he would like it when he knew what to do. The filing out of the choristers, the silent final prayer, the soft rustle of people rising gently from their knees, somehow actually moved him by its suggestion of something before unknown. He was a heathen still, but a heathen vaguely stirred.

He was very quiet as he walked home across the park with Miss Alicia.

"How did you enjoy the sermon?" she asked with much sweetness.

"I'm not used to sermons, but it seemed all right to me," he answered. "What I've got to get on to is knowing when to stand up and when to sit down. I wasn't much of a winner at it this morning. I guess you noticed that."

But his outward bearing had been much more composed than his inward anxiety had allowed him to believe. His hesitations had not produced the noticeable effect he had feared.

"Do you mean you are not quite familiar with the service?" she said.

Poor dear boy! he had perhaps not been able to go to church regularly at all.

"I'm not familiar with any service," he answered without prejudice. "I never went to church before."

She slightly started and then smiled.

"Oh, you mean you have never been to the Church of England," she said.

Then he saw that, if he told her the exact truth, she would be frightened and shocked. She would not know what to say or what to think. To her unsophisticated mind only murderers and thieves and criminals NEVER went to church. She just didn't know. Why should she? So he smiled also.

"No, I've never been to the Church of England," he said.