CHAPTER XX

Dinner at Detchworth Grange was most amusing that evening. One of the chief reasons -- in fact, it would not be too venturesome to say THE chief reason -- for Captain Palliser's frequent presence in very good country houses was that he had a way of making things amusing. His relation of anecdotes, of people and things, was distinguished by a manner which subtly declined to range itself on the side of vulgar gossip. Quietly and with a fine casualness he conveyed the whole picture of the new order at Temple Barholm. He did it with wonderfully light touches, and yet the whole thing was to be seen -- the little old maid in her exquisite clothes, her unmistakable stamp of timid good breeding, her protecting adoration combined with bewilderment; the long, lean, not altogether ill-looking New York bounder, with his slight slouch, his dangerously unsophisticated-looking face, and his American jocularity of slang phrase.

"He's of a class I know nothing about. I own he puzzled me a trifle at first," Palliser said with his cool smile. "I'm not sure that I've 'got on to him' altogether yet. That's an expressive New York phrase of his own. But when we were strolling about together, he made revelations apparently without being in the least aware that they were revelations. He was unbelievable. My fear was that he would not go on."

"But he did go on?" asked Amabel. "One must hear something of the revelations."

Then was given in the best possible form the little drama of the talk in the garden. No shade of Mr. Temple Barholm's characteristics was lost. Palliser gave occasionally an English attempt at the reproduction of his nasal twang, but it was only a touch and not sufficiently persisted in to become undignified.

"I can't do it," he said. "None of us can really do it. When English actors try it on the stage, it is not in the least the real thing. They only drawl through their noses, and it is more than that."

The people of Detchworth Grange were not noisy people, but their laughter was unrestrained before the recital was finished. Nobody had gone so far as either to fear or to hope for anything as undiluted in its nature as this was.

"Then he won't give us a chance, the least chance," cried Lucy and Amabel almost in unison. "We are out of the running."

"You won't get even a look in--because you are not 'ladies,'" said their brother.

"Poor Jem Temple Barholm! What a different thing it would have been if we had had him for a neighbor!" Mr. Grantham fretted.

"We should have had Lady Joan Fayre as well," said his wife.

"At least she's a gentlewoman as well as a 'lady,'" Mr. Grantham said. "She would not have become so bitter if that hideous thing had not occurred."

They wondered if the new man knew anything about Jem. Palliser had not reached that part of his revelation when the laughter had broken into it. He told it forthwith, and the laughter was overcome by a sort of dismayed disgust. This did not accord with the rumors of an almost "nice" good nature.

"There's a vulgar horridness about it," said Lucy.

"What price Lady Mallowe!" said the son. "I'll bet a sovereign she began it."

"She did," remarked Palliser; "but I think one may leave Mr. Temple Barholm safely to Lady Joan." Mr. Grantham laughed as one who knew something of Lady Joan.

"There's an Americanism which I didn't learn from him," Palliser added, "and I remembered it when he was talking her over. It's this: when you dispose of a person finally and forever, you 'wipe up the earth with him.' Lady Joan will 'wipe up the earth' with your new

neighbor."

There was a little shout of laughter. "Wipe up the earth" was entirely new to everybody, though even the country in England was at this time by no means wholly ignorant of American slang.

This led to so many other things both mirth-provoking and serious, even sometimes very serious indeed, that the entire evening at Detchworth was filled with talk of Temple Barholm. Very naturally the talk did not end by confining itself to one household. In due time Captain Palliser's little sketches were known in divers places, and it became a habit to discuss what had happened, and what might possibly happen in the future. There were those who went to the length of calling on the new man because they wanted to see him face to face. People heard new things every few days, but no one realized that it was vaguely through Palliser that there developed a general idea that, crude and self-revealing as he was, there lurked behind the outward candor of the intruder a hint of over-sharpness of the American kind. There seemed no necessity for him to lay schemes beyond those he had betrayed in his inquiries about "ladies," but somehow it became a fixed idea that he was capable of doing shady things if at any time the temptation arose. That was really what his boyish casualness meant. That in truth was Palliser's final secret conclusion. And he wanted very much to find out why exactly little old Miss Temple Barholm had been taken up. If the man wanted introductions, he could have contrived to pick up a smart and enterprising unprofessional

chaperon in London who would have done for him what Miss Temple Barholm would never presume to attempt. And yet he seemed to have chosen her deliberately. He had set her literally at the head of his house. And Palliser, having heard a vague rumor that he had actually settled a decent income upon her, had made adroit inquiries and found it was true.

It was. To arrange the matter had been one of his reasons for going to see Mr. Palford during their stay in London.

"I wanted to fix you--fix you safe," he said when he told Miss Alicia about it. "I guess no one can take it away from you, whatever old thing happens."

"What could happen, dear Mr. Temple Barholm?" said Miss Alicia in the midst of tears of gratitude and tremulous joy. "You are so young and strong and--everything! Don't even speak of such a thing in jest. What could happen?"

"Anything can happen," he answered, "just anything. Happening's the one thing you can't bet on. If I was betting, I'd put my money on the thing I was sure couldn't happen. Look at this Temple Barholm song and dance! Look at T. T. as he was half strangling in the blizzard up at Harlem and thanking his stars little Munsberg didn't kick him out of his confectionery store less than a year ago! So long as I'm all right, you're all right. But I wanted you fixed, anyhow."

He paused and looked at her questioningly for a moment. He wanted to say something and he was not sure he ought. His reverence for her little finenesses and reserves increased instead of wearing away. He was always finding out new things about her.

"Say," he broke forth almost impetuously after his hesitation, "I wish you wouldn't call me Mr. Temple Barholm."

"D-do you?" she fluttered. "But what could I call you?"

"Well," he answered, reddening a shade or so, "I'd give a house and lot if you could just call me Tem."

"But it would sound so unbecoming, so familiar," she protested.

"That's just what I'm asking for," he said--"some one to be familiar with. I'm the familiar kind. That's what's the matter with me. I'd be familiar with Pearson, but he wouldn't let me. I'd frighten him half to death. He'd think that he wasn't doing his duty and earning his wages, and that somehow he'd get fired some day without a character."

He drew nearer to her and coaxed.

"Couldn't you do it?" he asked almost as though he were asking a favor of a girl. "Just Tem? I believe that would come easier to you than T.

T. I get fonder and fonder of you every day, Miss Alicia, honest Injun. And I'd be so grateful to you if you'd just be that unbecomingly familiar."

He looked honestly in earnest; and if he grew fonder and fonder of her, she without doubt had, in the face of everything, given her whole heart to him.

"Might I call you Temple -- to begin with?" she asked. "It touches me so to think of your asking me. I will begin at once. Thank you -- Temple," with a faint gasp. "I might try the other a little later."

It was only a few evenings later that he told her about the flats in Harlem. He had sent to New York for a large bundle of newspapers, and when he opened them he read aloud an advertisement, and showed her a picture of a large building given up entirely to "flats."

He had realized from the first that New York life had a singular attraction for her. The unrelieved dullness of her life -- those few years of youth in which she had stifled vague longings for the joys experienced by other girls; the years of middle age spent in the dreary effort to be "submissive to the will of God," which, honestly translated, signified submission to the exactions and domestic tyrannies of "dear papa" and others like him -- had left her with her capacities for pleasure as freshly sensitive as a child's. The smallest change in the routine of existence thrilled her with

excitement. Tembarom's casual references to his strenuous boyhood caused her eyes to widen with eagerness to hear more. Having seen this, he found keen delight in telling her stories of New York life -- stories of himself or of other lads who had been his companions. She would drop her work and gaze at him almost with bated breath. He was an excellent raconteur when he talked of the things he knew well. He had an unconscious habit of springing from his seat and acting his scenes as he depicted them, laughing and using street-boy phrasing:

"It's just like a tale," Miss Alicia would breathe, enraptured as he jumped from one story to another. "It's exactly like a wonderful tale."

She learned to know the New York streets when they blazed with heat, when they were hard with frozen snow, when they were sloppy with melting slush or bright with springtime sunshine and spring winds blowing, with pretty women hurrying about in beflowered spring hats and dresses and the exhilaration of the world-old springtime joy. She found herself hurrying with them. She sometimes hung with him and his companions on the railing outside dazzling restaurants where scores of gay people ate rich food in the sight of their boyish ravenousness. She darted in and out among horses and vehicles to find carriages after the theater or opera, where everybody was dressed dazzlingly and diamonds glittered.

"Oh, how rich everybody must have seemed to you--how cruelly rich,

poor little boy!"

"They looked rich, right enough," he answered when she said it. "And there seemed a lot of good things to eat all corralled in a few places. And you wished you could be let loose inside. But I don't know as it seemed cruel. That was the way it was, you know, and you couldn't help it. And there were places where they'd give away some of what was left. I tell you, we were in luck then."

There was some spirit in his telling it all--a spirit which had surely been with him through his hardest days, a spirit of young mirth in rags--which made her feel subconsciously that the whole experience had, after all, been somehow of the nature of life's high adventure. He had never been ill or heart-sick, and he laughed when he talked of it, as though the remembrance was not a recalling of disaster.

"Clemmin' or no clemmin'. I wish I'd lived the loife tha's lived," Tummas Hibblethwaite had said.

Her amazement would indeed have been great if she had been told that she secretly shared his feeling.

"It seems as if somehow you had never been dull," was her method of expressing it.

"Dull! Holy cats! no," he grinned. "There wasn't any time for being

anything. You just had to keep going."

She became in time familiar with Mrs. Bowse's boarding-house and boarders. She knew Mrs. Peck and Mr. Jakes and the young lady from the notion counter (those wonderful shops!). Julius and Jem and the hall bedroom and the tilted chairs and cloud of smoke she saw so often that she felt at home with them.

"Poor Mrs. Bowse," she said, "must have been a most respectable, motherly, hard-working creature. Really a nice person of her class." She could not quite visualize the "parlor," but it must have been warm and comfortable. And the pianola--a piano which you could play without even knowing your notes--What a clever invention! America seemed full of the most wonderfully clever things.

Tembarom was actually uplifted in soul when he discovered that she laid transparent little plans for leading him into talk about New York. She wanted him to talk about it, and the Lord knows he wanted to talk about himself. He had been afraid at first. She might have hated it, as Palford did, and it would have hurt him somehow if she hadn't understood. But she did. Without quite realizing the fact, she was beginning to love it, to wish she had seen it. Her Somerset vicarage imagination did not allow of such leaps as would be implied by the daring wish that sometime she might see it.

But Tembarom's imagination was more athletic.

"Jinks! wouldn't it be fine to take her there! The lark in London wouldn't be ace high to it."

The Hutchinsons were not New Yorkers, but they had been part of the atmosphere of Mrs. Bowse's. Mr. Hutchinson would of course be rather a forward and pushing man to be obliged to meet, but Little Ann! She did so like Little Ann! And the dear boy did so want, in his heart of hearts, to talk about her at times. She did not know whether, in the circumstances, she ought to encourage him; but he was so dear, and looked so much dearer when he even said "Little Ann," that she could not help occasionally leading him gently toward the subject.

When he opened the newspapers and found the advertisements of the flats, she saw the engaging, half-awkward humorousness come into his eyes.

"Here's one that would do all right," he said--"four rooms and a bath, eleventh floor, thirty-five dollars a month."

He spread the newspaper on the table and rested on his elbow, gazing at it for a few minutes wholly absorbed. Then he looked up at her and smiled.

"There's a plan of the rooms," he said. "Would you like to look at it? Shall I bring your chair up to the table while we go over it

together?"

He brought the chair, and side by side they went over it thoroughly. To Miss Alicia it had all the interest of a new kind of puzzle. He explained it in every detail. One of his secrets had been that on several days when Galton's manner had made him hopeful he had visited certain flat buildings and gone into their intricacies. He could therefore describe with color their resources--the janitor; the elevator; the dumb-waiters to carry up domestic supplies and carry down ashes and refuse; the refrigerator; the unlimited supply of hot and cold water, the heating plan; the astonishing little kitchen, with stationary wash-tubs; the telephone, if you could afford it,-- all the conveniences which to Miss Alicia, accustomed to the habits of Rowcroft Vicarage, where you lugged cans of water up-stairs and down if you took a bath or even washed your face; seemed luxuries appertaining only to the rich and great.

"How convenient! How wonderful! Dear me! Dear me!" she said again and again, quite flushed with excitement. "It is like a fairy-story. And it's not big at all, is it?"

"You could get most of it into this," he answered, exulting. "You could get all of it into that big white-and gold parlor."

"The white saloon?"

He showed his teeth.

"I guess I ought to remember to call it that," he said, "but it always makes me think of Kid MacMurphy's on Fourth Avenue. He kept what was called a saloon, and he'd had it painted white."

"Did you know him?" Miss Alicia asked.

"Know him! Gee! no! I didn't fly as high as that. He'd have thought me pretty fresh if I'd acted like I knew him. He thought he was one of the Four Hundred. He'd been a prize-fighter. He was the fellow that knocked out Kid Wilkens in four rounds." He broke off and laughed at himself. "Hear me talk to you about a tough like that!" he ended, and he gave her hand the little apologetic, protective pat which always made her heart beat because it was so "nice."

He drew her back to the advertisements, and drew such interesting pictures of what the lives of two people--mother and son or father and daughter or a young married couple who didn't want to put on style--might be in the tiny compartments, that their excitement mounted again.

This could be a bedroom, that could be a bedroom, that could be the living-room, and if you put a bit of bright carpet on the hallway and hung up a picture or so, it would look first-rate. He even went into the matter of measurements, which made it more like putting a puzzle

together than ever, and their relief when they found they could fit a piece of furniture he called "a lounge" into a certain corner was a thing of flushing delight. The "lounge," she found, was a sort of cot with springs. You could buy them for three dollars, and when you put on a mattress and covered it with a "spread," you could sit on it in the daytime and sleep on it at night, if you had to.

From measurements he went into calculations about the cost of things. He had seen unpainted wooden tables you could put mahogany stain on, and they'd look all you'd want. He'd seen a splendid little rocking-chair in Second Avenue for five dollars, one of the padded kind that ladies like. He had seen an arm-chair for a man that was only seven; but there mightn't be room for both, and you'd have to have the rocking-chair. He had once asked the price of a lot of plates and cups and saucers with roses on them, and you could get them for six; and you didn't need a stove because there was the range.

He had once heard Little Ann talking to Mrs. Bowse about the price of frying-pans and kettles, and they seemed to cost next to nothing. He'd looked into store windows and noticed the prices of groceries and vegetables and things like that--sugar, for instance; two people wouldn't use much sugar in a week--and they wouldn't need a ton of tea or flour or coffee. If a fellow had a mother or sister or wife who had a head and knew about things, you could "put it over" on mighty little, and have a splendid time together, too. You'd even be able to work in a cheap seat in a theater every now and then. He laughed and

flushed as he thought of it.

Miss Alicia had never had a doll's house. Rowcroft Vicarage did not run to dolls and their belongings. Her thwarted longing for a doll's house had a sort of parallel in her similarly thwarted longing for "a little boy."

And here was her doll's house so long, so long unpossessed! It was like that, this absorbed contriving and fitting of furniture into corners. She also flushed and laughed. Her eyes were so brightly eager and her cheeks so pink that she looked quite girlish under her lace cap.

"How pretty and cozy it might be made, how dear!" she exclaimed. "And one would be so high up on the eleventh floor, that one would feel like a bird in a nest."

His face lighted. He seemed to like the idea tremendously.

"Why, that's so," he laughed. "That idea suits me down to the ground. A bird in a nest. But there'd have to be two. One would be lonely. Say, Miss Alicia, how would you like to live in a place like that?"

"I am sure any one would like it--if they had some dear relative with them."

He loved her "dear relative," loved it. He knew how much it meant of what had lain hidden unacknowledged, even unknown to her, through a lifetime in her early-Victorian spinster breast.

"Let's go to New York and rent one and live in it together. Would you come?" he said, and though he laughed, he was not jocular in the usual way. "Would you, if we waked up and found this Temple Barholm thing was a dream?"

Something in his manner, she did not know what, puzzled her a little.

"But if it were a dream, you would be quite poor again," she said, smiling.

"No, I wouldn't. I'd get Galton to give me back the page. He'd do it quick--quick," he said, still with a laugh. "Being poor's nothing, anyhow. We'd have the time of our lives. We'd be two birds in a nest. You can look out those eleventh- story windows 'way over to the Bronx, and get bits of the river. And perhaps after a while Ann would do - like she said, and we'd be three birds."

"Oh!" she sighed ecstatically. "How beautiful it would be! We should be a little family!"

"So we should," he exulted. "Think of T. T. with a family!" He drew his paper of calculations toward him again. "Let's make believe we're

going to do it, and work out what it would cost - for three. You know about housekeeping, don't you? Let's write down a list."

If he had warmed to his work before, he warmed still more after this. Miss Alicia was drawn into it again, and followed his fanciful plans with a new fervor. They were like two children who had played at make-believe until they had lost sight of commonplace realities.

Miss Alicia had lived among small economies and could be of great assistance to him. They made lists and added up lines of figures until the fine, huge room and its thousands of volumes melted away. In the great hall, guarded by warriors in armor, the powdered heads of the waiting footmen drooped and nodded while the prices of pounds of butter and sugar and the value of potatoes and flour and nutmegs were balanced with a hectic joy, and the relative significance of dollars and cents and shillings and half-crowns and five-cent pieces caused Miss Alicia a mild delirium.

By the time that she had established the facts that a shilling was something like twenty-five cents, a dollar was four and twopence, and twenty-five dollars was something over five pounds, it was past midnight.

They heard the clock strike the half-hour, and stopped to stare at each other.

Tembarom got up with yet another laugh.

"Say, I mustn't keep you up all night," he said. "But haven't we had a fine time - haven't we? I feel as if I'd been there."

They had been there so entirely that Miss Alicia brought herself back with difficulty.

"I can scarcely believe that we have not," she said. "I feel as if I didn't like to leave it. It was so delightful." She glanced about her. "The room looks huge," she said--"almost too huge to live in."

"Doesn't it?" he answered. "Now you know how I feel." He gathered his scraps of paper together with a feeling touch. "I didn't want to come back myself. When I get a bit of a grouch I shall jerk these out and go back there again."

"Oh, do let me go with you!" she said. "I have so enjoyed it."

"You shall go whenever you like," he said. "We'll keep it up for a sort of game on rainy days. How much is a dollar, Miss Alicia?"

"Four and twopence. And sugar is six cents a pound."

"Go to the head," he answered. "Right again."

The opened roll of newspapers was lying on the table near her. They were copies of The Earth, and the date of one of them by merest chance caught her eye.

"How odd!" she said. "Those are old papers. Did you notice? Is it a mistake? This one is dated" She leaned forward, and her eye caught a word in a head-line.

"The Klondike," she read. "There's something in it about the Klondike." He put his hand out and drew the papers away.

"Don't you read that," he said. "I don't want you to go to bed and dream about the Klondike. You've got to dream about the flat in Harlem."

"Yes," she answered. "I mustn't think about sad things. The flat in Harlem is quite happy. But it startled me to see that word."

"I only sent for them--because I happened to want to look something up," he explained. "How much is a pound, Miss Alicia?"

"Four dollars and eighty-six cents," she replied, recovering herself.

"Go up head again. You're going to stay there."

When she gave him her hand on their parting for the night he held it a

moment. A subtle combination of things made him do it. The calculations, the measurements, the nest from which one could look out over the Bronx, were prevailing elements in its make-up. Ann had been in each room of the Harlem flat, and she always vaguely reminded him of Ann.

"We are relations, ain't we?" he asked.

"I am sure we often seem quite near relations--Temple." She added the name with very pretty kindness.

"We're not distant ones any more, anyhow," he said. "Are we near enough--would you let me kiss you good night, Miss Alicia?"

An emotional flush ran up to her cap ribbons.

"Indeed, my dear boy--indeed, yes."

Holding her hand with a chivalric, if slightly awkward, courtesy, he bent, and kissed her cheek. It was a hearty, affectionately grateful young kiss, which, while it was for herself, remotely included Ann.

"It's the first time I've ever said good night to any one like that," he said. "Thank you for letting me."

He patted her hand again before releasing it. She went up-stairs

blushing and feeling rather as though she had been proposed to, and yet, spinster though she was, somehow quite understanding about the nest and Ann.

CHAPTER XXI

Lady Mallowe and her daughter did not pay their visit to Asshawe Holt, the absolute, though not openly referred to, fact being that they had not been invited. The visit in question had merely floated in the air as a delicate suggestion made by her ladyship in her letter to Mrs. Asshe Shaw, to the effect that she and Joan were going to stay at Temple Barholm, the visit to Asshawe they had partly arranged some time ago might now be fitted in.

The partial arrangement itself, Mrs. Asshe Shaw remarked to her eldest daughter when she received the suggesting note, was so partial as to require slight consideration, since it had been made "by the woman herself, who would push herself and her daughter into any house in England if a back door were left open." In the civilly phrased letter she received in answer to her own, Lady Mallowe read between the lines the point of view taken, and writhed secretly, as she had been made to writhe scores of times in the course of her career. It had happened so often, indeed, that it might have been imagined that she had become used to it; but the woman who acted as maid to herself and Joan always