CHAPTER XXIX

After this came a pause. Each man sat thinking his own thoughts, which, while marked with difference in form, were doubtless subtly alike in the line they followed. During the silence T. Tembarom looked out at the late afternoon shadows lengthening themselves in darkening velvet across the lawns.

At last he said:

"I never told you that I've been reading some of the 'steen thousand books in the library. I started it about a month ago. And somehow they've got me going."

The slightly lifted eyebrows of his host did not express surprise so much as questioning interest. This man, at least, had discovered that one need find no cause for astonishment in any discovery that he had been doing a thing for some time for some reason or through some prompting of his own, and had said nothing whatever about it until he was what he called "good and ready." When he was "good and ready" he usually revealed himself to the duke, but he was not equally expansive with others.

"No, you have not mentioned it," his grace answered, and laughed a little. "You frequently fail to mention things. When first we knew

each other I used to wonder if you were naturally a secretive fellow; but you are not. You always have a reason for your silences."

"It took about ten years to kick that into me--ten good years, I should say." T. Tembarom looked as if he were looking backward at many episodes as he said it. "Naturally, I guess, I must have been an innocent, blab-mouthed kid. I meant no harm, but I just didn't know. Sometimes it looks as if just not knowing is about the worst disease you can be troubled with. But if you don't get killed first, you find out in time that what you've got to hold on to hard and fast is the trick of 'saying nothing and sawing wood.'"

The duke took out his memorandum-book and began to write hastily. T. Tembarom was quite accustomed to this. He even repeated his axiom for him.

"Say nothing and saw wood," he said. "It's worth writing down. It means 'shut your mouth and keep on working.'"

"Thank you," said the duke. "It is worth writing down. Thank you."

"I did not talk about the books because I wanted to get used to them before I began to talk," Tembarom explained. "I wanted to get somewhere. I'd never read a book through in my life before. Never wanted to. Never had one and never had time. When night came, I was dog-tired and dog-ready to drop down and sleep."

Here was a situation of interest. A young man of odd, direct shrewdness, who had never read a book through in his existence, had plunged suddenly into the extraordinarily varied literary resources of the Temple Barholm library. If he had been a fool or a genius one might have guessed at the impression made on him; being T. Tembarom, one speculated with secret elation. The primitiveness he might reveal, the profundities he might touch the surface of, the unexpected ends he might reach, suggested the opening of vistas.

"I have often thought that if books attracted you the library would help you to get through a good many of the hundred and thirty-six hours a day you've spoken of, and get through them pretty decently," commented the duke.

"That's what's happened," Tembarom answered. "There's not so many now. I can cut 'em off in chunks."

"How did it begin?"

He listened with much pleasure while Tembarom told him how it had begun and how it had gone on.

"I'd been having a pretty bad time one day. Strangeways had been worse--a darned sight worse--just when I thought he was better. I'd been trying to help him to think straight; and suddenly I made a

break, somehow, and must have touched exactly the wrong spring. It seemed as if I set him nearly crazy. I had to leave him to Pearson right away. Then it poured rain steady for about eight hours, and I couldn't get out and `take a walk.' Then I went wandering into the picture-gallery and found Lady Joan there, looking at Miles Hugo. And she ordered me out, or blamed near it."

"You are standing a good deal," said the duke.

"Yes, I am--but so is she." He set his hard young jaw and nursed his knee, staring once more at the velvet shadows. "The girl in the book I picked up--" he began.

"The first book? " his host inquired.

Tembarom nodded.

"The very first. I was smoking my pipe at night, after every one else had gone to bed, and I got up and began to wander about and stare at the names of the things on the shelves. I was thinking over a whole raft of things--a whole raft of them--and I didn't know I was doing it, until something made me stop and read a name again. It was a book called `Good-by, Sweetheart, Good-by,' and it hit me straight. I wondered what it was about, and I wondered where old Temple Barholm had fished up a thing like that. I never heard he was that kind."

"He was a cantankerous old brute," said the Duke of Stone with candor, "but he chanced to be an omnivorous novel-reader. Nothing was too sentimental for him in his later years."

"I took the thing out and read it," Tembarom went on, uneasily, the emotion of his first novel-reading stirring him as he talked. "It kept me up half the night, and I hadn't finished it then. I wanted to know the end."

"Benisons upon the books of which one wants to know the end!" the duke murmured.

Tembarom's interest had plainly not terminated with "the end." Its freshness made it easily revived. There was a hint of emotional indignation in his relation of the plot.

"It was about a couple of fools who were dead stuck on each other--dead. There was no mistake about that. It was all real. But what do they do but work up a fool quarrel about nothing, and break away from each other. There was a lot of stuff about pride. Pride be damned! How's a man going to be proud and put on airs when he loves a woman? How's a woman going to be proud and stick out about things when she loves a man? At least, that's the way it hit me."

"That's the way it hit me--once," remarked his grace.

"There is only once," said Tembarom, doggedly.

"Occasionally," said his host. "Occasionally."

Tembarom knew what he meant.

"The fellow went away, and neither of them would give in. It's queer how real it was when you read it. You were right there looking on, and swallowing hard every few minutes-- though you were as mad as hops. The girl began to die--slow --and lay there day after day, longing for him to come back, and knowing he wouldn't. At the very end, when there was scarcely a breath left in her, a young fellow who was crazy about her himself, and always had been, put out after the hard-headed fool to bring him to her anyhow. The girl had about given in then. And she lay and waited hour after hour, and the youngster came back by himself. He couldn't bring the man he'd gone after. He found him getting married to a nice girl he didn't really care a darn for. He'd sort of set his teeth and done it--just because he was all in and down and out, and a fool. The girl just dropped her head back on the pillow and lay there, dead! What do you think of that?" quite fiercely. "I guess it was sentimental all right, but it got you by the throat."

"'Good-bye, Sweetheart, Good-bye,"' his grace quoted. "First-class title. We are all sentimental. And that was the first, was it?"

"Yes, but it wasn't the last. I began to read the others. I've been

reading them ever since. I tell you, for a fellow that knows nothing it's an easy way of finding out a lot of things. You find out what different kinds of people there are, and what different kinds of ways. If you've lived in one place, and been up against nothing but earning your living, you think that's all there is of it--that it's the whole thing. But it isn't, by gee!" His air became thoughtful. "I've begun to kind of get on to what all this means"--glancing about him--"to you people; and how a fellow like T. T. must look to you. I've always sort of guessed, but reading a few dozen novels has helped me to see WHY it's that way. I've yelled right out laughing over it many a time. That fellow called Thackeray--I can't read his things right straight through-- but he 's an eye-opener."

"You have tried nothing BUT novels?" his enthralled hearer inquired.

"Not yet. I shall come to the others in time. I'm sort of hungry for these things about PEOPLE. It's the ways they're different that gets me going. There was one that stirred me all up--but it wasn't like that first one. It was about a man "--he spoke slowly, as if searching for words and parallels --"well, I guess he was one of the early savages here. It read as if they were like the first Indians in America, only stronger and fiercer. When Palford was explaining things to me he'd jerk in every now and then something about 'coming over with the Conqueror' or being here 'before the Conqueror.' I didn't know what it meant. I found out in this book I'm telling about. It gave me the whole thing so that you SAW it. Here was this little

country, with no one in it but these first savage fellows it'd always belonged to. They thought it was the world." There was a humorous sense of illumination in his half-laugh. "It was their New York, by jings," he put in. "Their little old New York that they'd never been outside of! And then first one lot slams in, and then another, and another, and tries to take it from them. Julius Caesar was the first Mr. Buttinski; and they fought like hell. They were fighters from Fightersville, anyhow. They fought each other, took each other's castles and lands and wives and jewelry--just any old thing they wanted. The only jails were private ones meant for their particular friends. And a man was hung only when one of his neighbors got mad enough at him, and then he had to catch him first and run the risk of being strung up himself, or have his head chopped off and stuck up on a spike somewhere for ornament. But fight! Good Lord! They were at it day and night. Did it for fun, just like folks go to the show. They didn't know what fear was. Never heard of it. They'd go about shouting and bragging and swaggering, with their heads hanging half off. And the one in this book was the bulliest fighter of the lot. I guess I don't know how to pronounce his name. It began with H."

"Was it Hereward the Wake, by chance?" exclaimed his auditor. "Hereward the Last of the English?"

"That's the man," cried Tembarom.

"An engaging ruffian and thief and murderer, and a touching one also,"

commented the duke. "You liked him?" He really wanted to know.

"I like the way he went after what he wanted to get, and the way he fought for his bit of England. By gee! When he went rushing into a fight, shouting and boasting and swinging his sword, I got hot in the collar. It was his England. What was old Bill doing there anyhow, darn him! Those chaps made him swim in their blood before they let him put the thing over. Good business! I'm glad they gave him all that was coming to him--hot and strong."

His sharp face had reddened and his voice rose high and nasal. There was a look of roused blood in him.

"Are you a fighter from Fightersville?" the duke asked, far from unstirred himself. These things had become myths to most people, but here was Broadway in the midst of them unconsciously suggesting that it might not have done ill in the matter of swinging "Brain-Biter" itself. The modern entity slipped back again through the lengthened links of bygone centuries--back until it became T. Tembarom once more-- casual though shrewd; ready and jocular. His eyes resumed their dry New York humor of expression as they fixed themselves on his wholly modern questioner.

"I'll fight," he said, "for what I've got to fight for, but not for a darned thing else. Not a darned thing."

"But you would fight," smiled the duke, grimly. "Did you happen to remember that blood like that has come down to you? It was some drop of it which made you `hot in the collar' over that engaging savage roaring and slashing about him for his `bit of England."'

Tembarom seemed to think it out interestedly.

"No, I did not," he answered. "But I guess that's so. I guess it's so. Great Jakes! Think of me perhaps being sort of kin to fellows just like that. Some way, you couldn't help liking him. He was always making big breaks and bellowing out `The Wake! The Wake!' in season and out of season; but the way he got there--just got there!"

He was oddly in sympathy with "the early savages here," and as understandingly put himself into their places as he had put himself into Galton's. His New York comprehension of their berserker furies was apparently without limit. Strong partizan as he was of the last of the English, however, he admitted that William of Normandy had "got in some good work, though it wasn't square."

"He was a big man," he ended. "If he hadn't been the kind he was I don't know how I should have stood it when the Hereward fellow knelt down before him, and put his hands between his and swore to be his man. That's the way the book said it. I tell you that must have been tough--tough as hell!"

From "Good-bye, Sweetheart" to "Hereward the Last of the English" was a far cry, but he had gathered a curious collection of ideas by the way, and with characteristic everyday reasoning had linked them to his own experiences.

"The women in the Hereward book made me think of Lady Joan," he remarked, suddenly.

"Torfreda? " the duke asked.

He nodded quite seriously.

"She had ways that reminded me of her, and I kept thinking they must both have had the same look in their eyes--sort of fierce and hungry. Torfreda had black hair and was a winner as to looks; but people were afraid of her and called her a witch. Hereward went mad over her and she went mad over him. That part of it was 'way out of sight, it was so fine. She helped him with his fights and told him what to do, and tried to keep him from drinking and bragging. Whatever he did, she never stopped being crazy about him. She mended his men's clothes, and took care of their wounds, and lived in the forest with him when he was driven out."

"That sounds rather like Miss Hutchinson," his host suggested, "though the parallel between a Harlem flat and an English forest in the eleventh century is not exact."

"I thought that, too," Tembarom admitted. "Ann would have done the same things, but she'd have done them in her way. If that fellow had taken his wife's advice, he wouldn't have ended with his head sticking on a spear."

"Another lady, if I remember rightly," said the duke.

"He left her, the fool! " Tembarom answered. "And there's where I couldn't get away from seeing Lady Joan; Jem Temple Barholm didn't go off with another woman, but what Torfreda went through, this one has gone through, and she's going through it yet. She can't dress herself in sackcloth, and cut off her hair, and hide herself away with a bunch of nuns, as the other one did. She has to stay and stick it out, however bad it is. That's a darned sight worse. The day after I'd finished the book, I couldn't keep my eyes off her. I tried to stop it, but it was no use. I kept hearing that Torfreda one screaming out, `Lost! Lost! Lost!' It was all in her face."

"But, my good fellow," protested the duke, despite feeling a touch of the thrill again, "unfortunately, she would not suspect you of looking at her because you were recalling Torfreda and Hereward the Wake. Men stare at her for another reason."

"That's what I know about half as well again as I know anything else," answered Tembarom. He added, with a deliberation holding its own

meaning, "That's what I'm coming to."

The duke waited. What was it he was coming to?

"Reading that novel put me wise to things in a new way. She's been wiping her feet on me hard for a good while, and I sort of made up my mind I'd got to let her until I was sure where I was. I won't say I didn't mind it, but I could stand it. But that night she caught me looking at her, the way she looked back at me made me see all of a sudden that it would be easier for her if I told her straight that she was mistaken."

"That she is mistaken in thinking--?"

"What she does think. She wouldn't have thought it if the old lady hadn't been driving her mad by hammering it in. She'd have hated me all right, and I don't blame her when I think of how poor Jem was treated; but she wouldn't have thought that every time I tried to be decent and friendly to her I was butting in and making a sick fool of myself. She's got to stay where her mother keeps her, and she's got to listen to her. Oh, hell! She's got to be told!"

The duke set the tips of his fingers together.

"How would you do it?" he inquired.

"Just straight," replied T. Tembarom. "There's no other way."

From the old worldling broke forth an involuntary low laugh, which was a sort of cackle. So this was what he was coming to.

"I cannot think of any devious method," he said, "which would make it less than a delicate thing to do. A beautiful young woman, whose host you are, has flouted you furiously for weeks, under the impression that you are offensively in love with her. You propose to tell her that her judgment has betrayed her, and that, as you say, `There's nothing doing.'"

"Not a darned thing, and never has been," said T. Tembarom. He looked quite grave and not at all embarrassed. He plainly did not see it as a situation to be regarded with humor.

"If she will listen--" the duke began.

"Oh, she'll listen," put in Tembarom. "I'll make her."

His was a self-contradicting countenance, the duke reflected, as he took him in with a somewhat long look. One did not usually see a face built up of boyishness and maturity, simpleness which was baffling, and a good nature which could be hard. At the moment, it was both of these last at one and the same time.

"I know something of Lady Joan and I know something of you," he said, "but I don't exactly foresee what will happen. I will not say that I should not like to be present."

"There'll be nobody present but just me and her," Tembarom answered.

CHAPTER XXX

The visits of Lady Mallowe and Captain Palliser had had their features. Neither of the pair had come to one of the most imposing "places" in Lancashire to live a life of hermit-like seclusion and dullness. They had arrived with the intention of availing themselves of all such opportunities for entertainment as could be guided in their direction by the deftness of experience. As a result, there had been hospitalities at Temple Barholm such as it had not beheld during the last generation at least. T. Tembarom had looked on, an interested spectator, as these festivities had been adroitly arranged and managed for him. He had not, however, in the least resented acting as a sort of figurehead in the position of sponsor and host.

"They think I don't know I'm not doing it all myself," was his easy mental summing-up. "They've got the idea that I'm pleased because I believe I'm It. But that's all to the merry. It's what I've set my mind on having going on here, and I couldn't have started it as well