

***BOOTH
TARKINGTON***



THE TURMOIL

Booth Tarkington

The Turmoil

A Novel

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To Laurel.

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CHAPTER I

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There is a midland city in the heart of fair, open country, a dirty and wonderful city nesting dingily in the fog of its own smoke. The stranger must feel the dirt before he feels the wonder, for the dirt will be upon him instantly. It will be upon him and within him, since he must breathe it, and he may care for no further proof that wealth is here better loved than cleanliness; but whether he cares or not, the negligently tended streets incessantly press home the point, and so do the flecked and grimy citizens. At a breeze he must smother in the whirlpools of dust, and if he should decline at any time to inhale the smoke he has the meager alternative of suicide.

The smoke is like the bad breath of a giant panting for more and more riches. He gets them and pants the fiercer, smelling and swelling prodigiously. He has a voice, a hoarse voice, hot and rapacious trained to one tune: "Wealth! I will get Wealth! I will make Wealth! I will sell Wealth for more Wealth! My house shall be dirty, my garment shall be dirty, and I will foul my neighbor so that he cannot be clean—but I will get Wealth! There shall be no clean thing about me: my wife shall be dirty and my child shall be dirty, but I will get Wealth!" And yet it is not wealth that he is so greedy for: what the giant really wants is hasty riches. To get these he squanders wealth upon the four winds, for wealth is in the smoke.

Not so long ago as a generation, there was no panting giant here, no heaving, grimy city; there was but a pleasant

big town of neighborly people who had understanding of one another, being, on the whole, much of the same type. It was a leisurely and kindly place—"homelike," it was called—and when the visitor had been taken through the State Asylum for the Insane and made to appreciate the view of the cemetery from a little hill, his host's duty as Baedeker was done. The good burghers were given to jogging comfortably about in phaetons or in surreys for a family drive on Sunday. No one was very rich; few were very poor; the air was clean, and there was time to live.

But there was a spirit abroad in the land, and it was strong here as elsewhere—a spirit that had moved in the depths of the American soil and labored there, sweating, till it stirred the surface, rove the mountains, and emerged, tangible and monstrous, the god of all good American hearts—Bigness. And that god wrought the panting giant.

In the souls of the burghers there had always been the profound longing for size. Year by year the longing increased until it became an accumulated force: We must Grow! We must be Big! We must be Bigger! Bigness means Money! And the thing began to happen; their longing became a mighty Will. We must be Bigger! Bigger! Bigger! Get people here! Coax them here! Bribe them! Swindle them into coming, if you must, but get them! Shout them into coming! Deafen them into coming! Any kind of people; all kinds of people! We must be Bigger! Blow! Boost! Brag! Kill the fault-finder! Scream and bellow to the Most High: Bigness is patriotism and honor! Bigness is love and life and happiness! Bigness is Money! We want Bigness!

They got it. From all the states the people came; thinly at first, and slowly, but faster and faster in thicker and thicker swarms as the quick years went by. White people came, and black people and brown people and yellow people; the negroes came from the South by the thousands and thousands, multiplying by other thousands and thousands faster than they could die. From the four quarters of the earth the people came, the broken and the unbroken, the tame and the wild—Germans, Irish, Italians, Hungarians, Scotch, Welsh, English, French, Swiss, Swedes, Norwegians, Greeks, Poles, Russian Jews, Dalmatians, Armenians, Rumanians, Servians, Persians, Syrians, Japanese, Chinese, Turks, and every hybrid that these could propagate. And if there were no Eskimos nor Patagonians, what other human strain that earth might furnish failed to swim and bubble in this crucible?

With Bigness came the new machinery and the rush; the streets began to roar and rattle, the houses to tremble; the pavements were worn under the tread of hurrying multitudes. The old, leisurely, quizzical look of the faces was lost in something harder and warier; and a cockney type began to emerge discernibly—a cynical young mongrel barbaric of feature, muscular and cunning; dressed in good fabrics fashioned apparently in imitation of the sketches drawn by newspaper comedians. The female of his kind came with him—a pale girl, shoddy and a little rouged; and they communicated in a nasal argot, mainly insolences and elisions. Nay, the common speech of the people showed change: in place of the old midland vernacular, irregular but clean, and not unwholesomely drawling, a jerky dialect of

coined metaphors began to be heard, held together by GUNNAS and GOTTAS and much fostered by the public journals.

The city piled itself high in the center, tower on tower for a nucleus, and spread itself out over the plain, mile after mile; and in its vitals, like benevolent bacilli contending with malevolent in the body of a man, missions and refuges offered what resistance they might to the saloons and all the hells that cities house and shelter. Temptation and ruin were ready commodities on the market for purchase by the venturesome; highwaymen walked the streets at night and sometimes killed; snatching thieves were busy everywhere in the dusk; while house-breakers were a common apprehension and frequent reality. Life itself was somewhat safer from intentional destruction than it was in medieval Rome during a faction war—though the Roman murderer was more like to pay for his deed—but death or mutilation beneath the wheels lay in ambush at every crossing.

The politicians let the people make all the laws they liked; it did not matter much, and the taxes went up, which is good for politicians. Law-making was a pastime of the people; nothing pleased them more. Singular fermentation of their humor, they even had laws forbidding dangerous speed. More marvelous still, they had a law forbidding smoke! They forbade chimneys to smoke and they forbade cigarettes to smoke. They made laws for all things and forgot them immediately; though sometimes they would remember after a while, and hurry to make new laws that the old laws should be enforced—and then forget both new and old. Wherever enforcement threatened Money or Votes

—or wherever it was too much to bother—it became a joke.
Influence was the law.

So the place grew. And it grew strong.

Straightway when he came, each man fell to the same
worship:

Give me of thyself, O Bigness:

Power to get more power!

Riches to get more riches!

Give me of thy sweat that I may sweat more!

Give me Bigness to get more Bigness to myself,

O Bigness, for Thine is the Power and the Glory! And
there is no end but Bigness, ever and for ever!

CHAPTER II

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The Sheridan Building was the biggest skyscraper; the Sheridan Trust Company was the biggest of its kind, and Sheridan himself had been the biggest builder and breaker and truster and buster under the smoke. He had come from a country cross-roads, at the beginning of the growth, and he had gone up and down in the booms and relapses of that period; but each time he went down he rebounded a little higher, until finally, after a year of overwork and anxiety—the latter not decreased by a chance, remote but possible, of recuperation from the former in the penitentiary—he found himself on top, with solid substance under his feet; and thereafter “played it safe.” But his hunger to get was unabated, for it was in the very bones of him and grew fiercer.

He was the city incarnate. He loved it, calling it God's country, as he called the smoke Prosperity, breathing the dingy cloud with relish. And when soot fell upon his cuff he chuckled; he could have kissed it. “It's good! It's good!” he said, and smacked his lips in gusto. “Good, clean soot; it's our life-blood, God bless it!” The smoke was one of his great enthusiasms; he laughed at a committee of plaintive housewives who called to beg his aid against it. “Smoke's what brings your husbands' money home on Saturday night,” he told them, jovially. “Smoke may hurt your little shrubberies in the front yard some, but it's the catarrhal climate and the adenoids that starts your chulderm coughing. Smoke makes the climate better. Smoke means

good health: it makes the people wash more. They have to wash so much they wash off the microbes. You go home and ask your husbands what smoke puts in their pockets out o' the pay-roll—and you'll come around next time to get me to turn out more smoke instead o' chokin' it off!”

It was Narcissism in him to love the city so well; he saw his reflection in it; and, like it, he was grimy, big, careless, rich, strong, and unquenchably optimistic. From the deepest of his inside all the way out he believed it was the finest city in the world. “Finest” was his word. He thought of it as his city as he thought of his family as his family; and just as profoundly believed his city to be the finest city in the world, so did he believe his family to be—in spite of his son Bibbs—the finest family in the world. As a matter of fact, he knew nothing worth knowing about either.

Bibbs Sheridan was a musing sort of boy, poor in health, and considered the failure—the “odd one”—of the family. Born during that most dangerous and anxious of the early years, when the mother fretted and the father took his chance, he was an ill-nourished baby, and grew meagerly, only lengthwise, through a feeble childhood. At his christening he was committed for life to “Bibbs” mainly through lack of imagination on his mother's part, for though it was her maiden name, she had no strong affection for it; but it was “her turn” to name the baby, and, as she explained later, she “couldn't think of anything else she liked AT ALL!” She offered this explanation one day when the sickly boy was nine and after a long fit of brooding had demanded some reason for his name's being Bibbs. He requested then with unwonted vehemence to be allowed to

exchange names with his older brother, Roscoe Conkling Sheridan, or with the oldest, James Sheridan, Junior, and upon being refused went down into the cellar and remained there the rest of that day. And the cook, descending toward dusk, reported that he had vanished; but a search revealed that he was in the coal-pile, completely covered and still burrowing. Removed by force and carried upstairs, he maintained a cryptic demeanor, refusing to utter a syllable of explanation, even under the lash. This obvious thing was wholly a mystery to both parents; the mother was nonplussed, failed to trace and connect; and the father regarded his son as a stubborn and mysterious fool, an impression not effaced as the years went by.

At twenty-two, Bibbs was physically no more than the outer scaffolding of a man, waiting for the building to begin inside—a long-shanked, long-faced, rickety youth, sallow and hollow and haggard, dark-haired and dark-eyed, with a peculiar expression of countenance; indeed, at first sight of Bibbs Sheridan a stranger might well be solicitous, for he seemed upon the point of tears. But to a slightly longer gaze, not grief, but mirth, was revealed as his emotion; while a more searching scrutiny was proportionately more puzzling—he seemed about to burst out crying or to burst out laughing, one or the other, inevitably, but it was impossible to decide which. And Bibbs never, on any occasion of his life, either laughed aloud or wept.

He was a “disappointment” to his father. At least that was the parent's word—a confirmed and established word after his first attempt to make a “business man” of the boy. He sent Bibbs to “begin at the bottom and learn from the

ground up” in the machine-shop of the Sheridan Automatic Pump Works, and at the end of six months the family physician sent Bibbs to begin at the bottom and learn from the ground up in a sanitarium.

“You needn't worry, mamma,” Sheridan told his wife. “There's nothin' the matter with Bibbs except he hates work so much it makes him sick. I put him in the machine-shop, and I guess I know what I'm doin' about as well as the next man. Ole Doc Gurney always was one o' them nutty alarmists. Does he think I'd do anything 'd be bad for my own flesh and blood? He makes me tired!”

Anything except perfectly definite health or perfectly definite disease was incomprehensible to Sheridan. He had a genuine conviction that lack of physical persistence in any task involving money must be due to some subtle weakness of character itself, to some profound shiftlessness or slyness. He understood typhoid fever, pneumonia, and appendicitis—one had them, and either died or got over them and went back to work—but when the word “nervous” appeared in a diagnosis he became honestly suspicious: he had the feeling that there was something contemptible about it, that there was a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere.

“Look at me,” he said. “Look at what I did at his age! Why, when I was twenty years old, wasn't I up every morning at four o'clock choppin' wood—yes! and out in the dark and the snow—to build a fire in a country grocery store? And here Bibbs has to go and have a DOCTOR because he can't—Pho! it makes me tired! If he'd gone at it like a man he wouldn't be sick.”

He paced the bedroom—the usual setting for such parental discussions—in his nightgown, shaking his big, grizzled head and gesticulating to his bedded spouse. “My Lord!” he said. “If a little, teeny bit o’ work like this is too much for him, why, he ain’t fit for anything! It’s nine-tenths imagination, and the rest of it—well, I won’t say it’s deliberate, but I WOULD like to know just how much of it’s put on!”

“Bibbs didn’t want the doctor,” said Mrs. Sheridan. “It was when he was here to dinner that night, and noticed how he couldn’t eat anything. Honey, you better come to bed.”

“Eat!” he snorted. “Eat! It’s work that makes men eat! And it’s imagination that keeps people from eatin’. Busy men don’t get time for that kind of imagination; and there’s another thing you’ll notice about good health, if you’ll take the trouble to look around you Mrs. Sheridan: busy men haven’t got time to be sick and they don’t GET sick. You just think it over and you’ll find that ninety-nine per cent. of the sick people you know are either women or loafers. Yes, ma’am!”

“Honey,” she said again, drowsily, “you better come to bed.”

“Look at the other boys,” her husband bade her. “Look at Jim and Roscoe. Look at how THEY work! There isn’t a shiftless bone in their bodies. Work never made Jim or Roscoe sick. Jim takes half the load off my shoulders already. Right now there isn’t a harder-workin’, brighter business man in this city than Jim. I’ve pushed him, but he give me something to push AGAINST. You can’t push ‘nervous dyspepsia’! And look at Roscoe; just LOOK at what that boy’s

done for himself, and barely twenty-seven years old—married, got a fine wife, and ready to build for himself with his own money, when I put up the New House for you and Edie.”

“Papa, you'll catch cold in your bare feet,” she murmured. “You better come to bed.”

“And I'm just as proud of Edie, for a girl,” he continued, emphatically, “as I am of Jim and Roscoe for boys. She'll make some man a mighty good wife when the time comes. She's the prettiest and talentedest girl in the United States! Look at that poem she wrote when she was in school and took the prize with; it's the best poem I ever read in my life, and she'd never even tried to write one before. It's the finest thing I ever read, and R. T. Bloss said so, too; and I guess he's a good enough literary judge for me—turns out more advertisin' liter'cher than any man in the city. I tell you she's smart! Look at the way she worked me to get me to promise the New House—and I guess you had your finger in that, too, mamma! This old shack's good enough for me, but you and little Edie 'll have to have your way. I'll get behind her and push her the same as I will Jim and Roscoe. I tell you I'm mighty proud o' them three chulderen! But Bibbs—” He paused, shaking his head. “Honest, mamma, when I talk to men that got ALL their boys doin' well and worth their salt, why, I have to keep my mind on Jim and Roscoe and forget about Bibbs.”

Mrs. Sheridan tossed her head fretfully upon the pillow. “You did the best you could, papa,” she said, impatiently, “so come to bed and quit reproachin' yourself for it.”

He glared at her indignantly. "Reproachin' myself!" he snorted. "I ain't doin' anything of the kind! What in the name o' goodness would I want to reproach myself for? And it wasn't the 'best I could,' either. It was the best ANYBODY could! I was givin' him a chance to show what was in him and make a man of himself—and here he goes and gets 'nervous dyspepsia' on me!"

He went to the old-fashioned gas-fixtue, turned out the light, and muttered his way morosely into bed.

"What?" said his wife, crossly, bothered by a subsequent mumbling.

"More like hook-worm, I said," he explained, speaking louder. "I don't know what to do with him!"

CHAPTER III

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Beginning at the beginning and learning from the ground up was a long course for Bibbs at the sanitarium, with milk and “zwieback” as the basis of instruction; and the months were many and tiresome before he was considered near enough graduation to go for a walk leaning on a nurse and a cane. These and subsequent months saw the planning, the building, and the completion of the New House; and it was to that abode of Bigness that Bibbs was brought when the cane, without the nurse, was found sufficient to his support.

Edith met him at the station. “Well, well, Bibbs!” she said, as he came slowly through the gates, the last of all the travelers from that train. She gave his hand a brisk little shake, averting her eyes after a quick glance at him, and turning at once toward the passage to the street. “Do you think they ought to've let you come? You certainly don't look well!”

“But I certainly do look better,” he returned, in a voice as slow as his gait; a drawl that was a necessity, for when Bibbs tried to speak quickly he stammered. “Up to about a month ago it took two people to see me. They had to get me in a line between 'em!”

Edith did not turn her eyes directly toward him again, after her first quick glance; and her expression, in spite of her, showed a faint, troubled distaste, the look of a healthy person pressed by some obligation of business to visit a “bad” ward in a hospital. She was nineteen, fair and slim, with small, unequal features, but a prettiness of color and a

brilliancy of eyes that created a total impression close upon beauty. Her movements were eager and restless: there was something about her, as kind old ladies say, that was very sweet; and there was something that was hurried and breathless. This was new to Bibbs; it was a perceptible change since he had last seen her, and he bent upon her a steady, whimsical scrutiny as they stood at the curb, waiting for an automobile across the street to disengage itself from the traffic.

"That's the new car," she said. "Everything's new. We've got four now, besides Jim's. Roscoe's got two."

"Edith, you look—" he began, and paused.

"Oh, WE're all well," she said, briskly; and then, as if something in his tone had caught her as significant, "Well, HOW do I look, Bibbs?"

"You look—" He paused again, taking in the full length of her—her trim brown shoes, her scant, tapering, rough skirt, and her coat of brown and green, her long green tippet and her mad little rough hat in the mad mode—all suited to the October day.

"How do I look?" she insisted.

"You look," he answered, as his examination ended upon an incrustated watch of platinum and enamel at her wrist, "you look—expensive!" That was a substitute for what he intended to say, for her constraint and preoccupation, manifested particularly in her keeping her direct glance away from him, did not seem to grant the privilege of impulsive intimacies.

"I expect I am!" she laughed, and sidelong caught the direction of his glance. "Of course I oughtn't to wear it in the

daytime—it's an evening thing, for the theater—but my day wrist-watch is out of gear. Bobby Lamhorn broke it yesterday; he's a regular rowdy sometimes. Do you want Claus to help you in?"

"Oh no," said Bibbs. "I'm alive." And after a fit of panting subsequent to his climbing into the car unaided, he added, "Of course, I have to TELL people!"

"We only got your telegram this morning," she said, as they began to move rapidly through the "wholesale district" neighboring the station. "Mother said she'd hardly expected you this month."

"They seemed to be through with me up there in the country," he explained, gently. "At least they said they were, and they wouldn't keep me any longer, because so many really sick people wanted to get in. They told me to go home—and I didn't have any place else to go. It'll be all right, Edith; I'll sit in the woodshed until after dark every day."

"Pshaw!" She laughed nervously. "Of course we're all of us glad to have you back."

"Yes?" he said. "Father?"

"Of course! Didn't he write and tell you to come home?" She did not turn to him with the question. All the while she rode with her face directly forward.

"No," he said; "father hasn't written."

She flushed a little. "I expect I ought to've written sometime, or one of the boys—"

"Oh no; that was all right."

"You can't think how busy we've all been this year, Bibbs. I often planned to write—and then, just as I was going to, something would turn up. And I'm sure it's been just the

same way with Jim and Roscoe. Of course we knew mamma was writing often and—”

“Of course!” he said, readily. “There's a chunk of coal fallen on your glove, Edith. Better flick it off before it smears. My word! I'd almost forgotten how sooty it is here.”

“We've been having very bright weather this month—for us.” She blew the flake of soot into the air, seeming relieved.

He looked up at the dingy sky, wherein hung the disconsolate sun like a cold tin pan nailed up in a smoke-house by some lunatic, for a decoration. “Yes,” said Bibbs. “It's very gay.” A few moments later, as they passed a corner, “Aren't we going home?” he asked.

“Why, yes! Did you want to go somewhere else first?”

“No. Your new driver's taking us out of the way, isn't he?”

“No. This is right. We're going straight home.”

“But we've passed the corner. We always turned—”

“Good gracious!” she cried. “Didn't you know we'd moved? Didn't you know we were in the New House?”

“Why, no!” said Bibbs. “Are you?”

“We've been there a month! Good gracious! Didn't you know—” She broke off, flushing again, and then went on hastily: “Of course, mamma's never been so busy in her life; we ALL haven't had time to do anything but keep on the hop. Mamma couldn't even come to the station to-day. Papa's got some of his business friends and people from around the OLD-house neighborhood coming to-night for a big dinner and 'house-warming'—dreadful kind of people—but mamma's got it all on her hands. She's never sat down

a MINUTE; and if she did, papa would have her up again before—”

“Of course,” said Bibbs. “Do you like the new place, Edith?”

“I don't like some of the things father WOULD have in it, but it's the finest house in town, and that ought to be good enough for me! Papa bought one thing I like—a view of the Bay of Naples in oil that's perfectly beautiful; it's the first thing you see as you come in the front hall, and it's eleven feet long. But he would have that old fruit picture we had in the Murphy Street house hung up in the new dining-room. You remember it—a table and a watermelon sliced open, and a lot of rouged-looking apples and some shiny lemons, with two dead prairie-chickens on a chair? He bought it at a furniture-store years and years ago, and he claims it's a finer picture than any they saw in the museums, that time he took mamma to Europe. But it's horribly out of date to have those things in dining-rooms, and I caught Bobby Lamhorn giggling at it; and Sibyl made fun of it, too, with Bobby, and then told papa she agreed with him about its being such a fine thing, and said he did just right to insist on having it where he wanted it. She makes me tired! Sibyl!”

Edith's first constraint with her brother, amounting almost to awkwardness, vanished with this theme, though she still kept her full gaze always to the front, even in the extreme ardor of her denunciation of her sister-in-law.

“SIBYL!” she repeated, with such heat and vigor that the name seemed to strike fire on her lips. “I'd like to know why Roscoe couldn't have married somebody from HERE that would have done us some good! He could have got in with

Bobby Lamhorn years ago just as well as now, and Bobby'd have introduced him to the nicest girls in town, but instead of that he had to go and pick up this Sibyl Rink! I met some awfully nice people from her town when mamma and I were at Atlantic City, last spring, and not one had ever heard of the Rinks! Not even HEARD of 'em!"

"I thought you were great friends with Sibyl," Bibbs said.

"Up to the time I found her out!" the sister returned, with continuing vehemence. "I've found out some things about Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan lately—"

"It's only lately?"

"Well—" Edith hesitated, her lips setting primly. "Of course, I always did see that she never cared the snap of her little finger about ROSCOE!"

"It seems," said Bibbs, in laconic protest, "that she married him."

The sister emitted a shrill cry, to be interpreted as contemptuous laughter, and, in her emotion, spoke too impulsively: "Why, she'd have married YOU!"

"No, no," he said; "she couldn't be that bad!"

"I didn't mean—" she began, distressed. "I only meant—I didn't mean—"

"Never mind, Edith," he consoled her. "You see, she couldn't have married me, because I didn't know her; and besides, if she's as mercenary as all that she'd have been too clever. The head doctor even had to lend me the money for my ticket home."

"I didn't mean anything unpleasant about YOU," Edith babbled. "I only meant I thought she was the kind of girl

who was so simply crazy to marry somebody she'd have married anybody that asked her."

"Yes, yes," said Bibbs, "it's all straight." And, perceiving that his sister's expression was that of a person whose adroitness has set matters perfectly to rights, he chuckled silently.

"Roscoe's perfectly lovely to her," she continued, a moment later. "Too lovely! If he'd wake up a little and lay down the law, some day, like a MAN, I guess she'd respect him more and learn to behave herself!"

"'Behave'?"

"Oh, well, I mean she's so insincere," said Edith, characteristically evasive when it came to stating the very point to which she had led, and in this not unique of her sex.

Bibbs contented himself with a non-committal gesture. "Business is crawling up the old streets," he said, his long, tremulous hand indicating a vasty structure in course of erection. "The boarding-houses come first and then the—"

"That isn't for shops," she informed him. "That's a new investment of papa's—the 'Sheridan Apartments.'"

"Well, well," he murmured. "I supposed 'Sheridan' was almost well enough known here already."

"Oh, we're well enough known ABOUT!" she said, impatiently. "I guess there isn't a man, woman, child, or nigger baby in town that doesn't know who we are. But we aren't in with the right people."

"No!" he exclaimed. "Who's all that?"

"Who's all what?"

"The 'right people.'"

“You know what I mean: the best people, the old families—the people that have the real social position in this town and that know they've got it.”

Bibbs indulged in his silent chuckle again; he seemed greatly amused. “I thought that the people who actually had the real what-you-may-call-it didn't know it,” he said. “I've always understood that it was very unsatisfactory, because if you thought about it you didn't have it, and if you had it you didn't know it.”

“That's just bosh,” she retorted. “They know it in this town, all right! I found out a lot of things, long before we began to think of building out in this direction. The right people in this town aren't always the society-column ones, and they mix around with outsiders, and they don't all belong to any one club—they're taken in all sorts into all their clubs—but they're a clan, just the same; and they have the clan feeling and they're just as much We, Us and Company as any crowd you read about anywhere in the world. Most of 'em were here long before papa came, and the grandfathers of the girls of my age knew each other, and—”

“I see,” Bibbs interrupted, gravely. “Their ancestors fled together from many a stricken field, and Crusaders' blood flows in their veins. I always understood the first house was built by an old party of the name of Vertrees who couldn't get along with Dan'l Boone, and hurried away to these parts because Dan'l wanted him to give back a gun he'd lent him.”

Edith gave a little ejaculation of alarm. “You mustn't repeat that story, Bibbs, even if it's true. The Vertreeses are

THE best family, and of course the very oldest here; they were an old family even before Mary Vertrees's great-great-grandfather came west and founded this settlement. He came from Lynn, Massachusetts, and they have relatives there YET—some of the best people in Lynn!”

“No!” exclaimed Bibbs, incredulously.

“And there are other old families like the Vertreeses,” she went on, not heeding him; “the Lamhorns and the Kittersbys and the J. Palmerston Smiths—”

“Strange names to me,” he interrupted. “Poor things! None of them have my acquaintance.”

“No, that's just it!” she cried. “And papa had never even heard the name of Vertrees! Mrs. Vertrees went with some anti-smoke committee to see him, and he told her that smoke was what made her husband bring home his wages from the pay-roll on Saturday night! HE told us about it, and I thought I just couldn't live through the night, I was so ashamed! Mr. Vertrees has always lived on his income, and papa didn't know him, of course. They're the stiffest, most elegant people in the whole town. And to crown it all, papa went and bought the next lot to the old Vertrees country mansion—it's in the very heart of the best new residence district now, and that's where the New House is, right next door to them—and I must say it makes their place look rather shabby! I met Mary Vertrees when I joined the Mission Service Helpers, but she never did any more than just barely bow to me, and since papa's break I doubt if she'll do that! They haven't called.”

“And you think if I spread this gossip about Vertrees the First stealing Dan'l Boone's gun, the chances that they WILL

call—”

“Papa knows what a break he made with Mrs. Vertrees. I made him understand that,” said Edith, demurely, “and he's promised to try and meet Mr. Vertrees and be nice to him. It's just this way: if we don't know THEM, it's practically no use in our having build the New House; and if we DO know them and they're decent to us, we're right with the right people. They can do the whole thing for us. Bobby Lamhorn told Sibyl he was going to bring his mother to call on her and on mamma, but it was weeks ago, and I notice he hasn't done it; and if Mrs. Vertrees decides not to know us, I'm darn sure Mrs Lamhorn'll never come. That's ONE thing Sibyl didn't manage! She SAID Bobby offered to bring his mother—”

“You say he is a friend of Roscoe's?” Bibbs asked.

“Oh, he's a friend of the whole family,” she returned, with a petulance which she made an effort to disguise. “Roscoe and he got acquainted somewhere, and they take him to the theater about every other night. Sibyl has him to lunch, too, and keeps—” She broke off with an angry little jerk of the head. “We can see the New House from the second corner ahead. Roscoe has built straight across the street from us, you know. Honestly, Sibyl makes me think of a snake, sometimes—the way she pulls the wool over people's eyes! She honeys up to papa and gets anything in the world she wants out of him, and then makes fun of him behind his back—yes, and to his face, but HE can't see it! She got him to give her a twelve-thousand-dollar porch for their house after it was—”

“Good heavens!” said Bibbs, staring ahead as they reached the corner and the car swung to the right, following a bend in the street. “Is that the New House?”

“Yes. What do you think of it?”

“Well,” he drawled, “I’m pretty sure the sanitarium’s about half a size bigger; I can’t be certain till I measure.”

And a moment later, as they entered the driveway, he added, seriously: “But it’s beautiful!”

CHAPTER IV

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It was gray stone, with long roofs of thick green slate. An architect who loved the milder “Gothic motives” had built what he liked: it was to be seen at once that he had been left unhampered, and he had wrought a picture out of his head into a noble and exultant reality. At the same time a landscape-designer had played so good a second, with ready-made accessories of screen, approach and vista, that already whatever look of newness remained upon the place was to its advantage, as showing at least one thing yet clean under the grimy sky. For, though the smoke was thinner in this direction, and at this long distance from the heart of the town, it was not absent, and under tutelage of wind and weather could be malignant even here, where cows had wandered in the meadows and corn had been growing not ten years gone.

Altogether, the New House was a success. It was one of those architects' successes which leave the owners veiled in privacy; it revealed nothing of the people who lived in it save that they were rich. There are houses that cannot be detached from their own people without protesting: every inch of mortar seems to mourn the separation, and such a house—no matter what be done to it—is ever murmurous with regret, whispering the old name sadly to itself unceasingly. But the New House was of a kind to change hands without emotion. In our swelling cities, great places of its type are useful as financial gauges of the business tides; rich families, one after another, take title and occupy such

houses as fortunes rise and fall—they mark the high tide. It was impossible to imagine a child's toy wagon left upon a walk or driveway of the New House, and yet it was—as Bibbs rightly called it—“beautiful.”

What the architect thought of the “Golfo di Napoli,” which hung in its vast gold revel of rococo frame against the gray wood of the hall, is to be conjectured—perhaps he had not seen it.

“Edith, did you say only eleven feet?” Bibbs panted, staring at it, as the white-jacketed twin of a Pullman porter helped him to get out of his overcoat.

“Eleven without the frame,” she explained. “It's splendid, don't you think? It lightens things up so. The hall was kind of gloomy before.”

“No gloom now!” said Bibbs.

“This statue in the corner is pretty, too,” she remarked. “Mamma and I bought that.” And Bibbs turned at her direction to behold, amid a grove of tubbed palms, a “life-size,” black-bearded Moor, of a plastic composition painted with unappeasable gloss and brilliancy. Upon his chocolate head he wore a gold turban; in his hand he held a gold-tipped spear; and for the rest, he was red and yellow and black and silver.

“Hallelujah!” was the sole comment of the returned wanderer, and Edith, saying she would “find mamma,” left him blinking at the Moor. Presently, after she had disappeared, he turned to the colored man who stood waiting, Bibbs's traveling-bag in his hand. “What do YOU think of it?” Bibbs asked, solemnly.