The TURMOIL

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

Eugenic scientists say like produces like, and that while environment has an influence in the development of a child it does not materially alter inherited temperament. Old Man Sheridan and Mrs. Sheridan lived entirely in the material world. Bibbs, their youngest son, is a dreamer.

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. At a breeze he must smother in whirlpools of dust, and if he should decline at any time to inhale the smoke he has the meager alternative of suicide.

Not quite so long ago as a generation there was here no heaving, grimy city; there was but a pleasant big town of neighborly people who had understanding of one another.

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 so the place grew. And it grew strong.

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 crossroads, 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. 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. "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!"

He Called the Smoke Prosperity.

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. Just as he 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, 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. One day when the sickly boy was nine, he requested with unwonted vehemence to be allowed to exchange names with his older brother, Roscoe Conkling Sheridan, or with the oldest, James Sheridan, Jr., 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 nonplused, 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 he seemed upon the point of tears. To a slightly longer gaze, not grief, but mirth, was revealed as his emotion; but Bibbs never, on any occasion in 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.

"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 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 night gown, shaking his big, grizzled head and gesticulating to his bedded spouse. "My Lord!" he said. "If the 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 I 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 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 99 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. 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'd 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! I tell you I'm mighty proud o' them three children! 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 fixture, turned out the light, and muttered his way morosely into bed.

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

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

CHAPTER II.

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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. "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. 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. There was something about her, as kind old ladies say, that was very sweet; and there was something that was hurried and breathless. Bibbs 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—trim, brown shoes, scant, rough skirt, coat of brown and green, 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 incrusted watch of platinum and enamel at her wrist, "you look—expensive!"

"I expect I am!" she laughed. "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 dark every day."

"Pshaw!" She laughed nervously.

"I Didn't Have Any Place Else to Go."

"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 something, or one of the boys—"

"Oh, no; that was all right."

"You can't think how busy we've all been this year, Bibbs. 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 smokehouse 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. "Your new driver is taking us out of the way, isn't he?"

"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 today. Papa's got some of his business friends and people from around the old-house neighborhood coming tonight 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. 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, instead of 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 even 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 a 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 noncommittal 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?"

"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 engaged in his silent chuckle again; he seemed highly amused. "I thought that the people who actually had the real what-do-you-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, but they're a clan, just the same; and they have the clan feeling. 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' 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 antismoke 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

"Papa Had Never Even Heard of the Name of Vertrees."

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. 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.

How will Edith use Bibbs in her efforts to "get thick" with the aristocratic old families? Do you think Bibbs will be drawn into the "social swim?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF A GREAT CITY BLACK WITH THE SMOKE AND FILLED WITH THE TURMOIL OF MANUFACTURING, MR. TARKINGTON HAS DRAWN FOR US THE PORTRAITS OF A MAN AND HIS SON WHO STAND OUT BOLDLY AS DISTINCT AMERICAN TYPES AND MAKE THIS STORY WHAT IT IS—NOT ONLY A STORY OF BIGNESS, BUT THE BIGGEST STORY OF TODAY.