

The Turmoil

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

The Story of a Big Man in a Big Town

SYNOPSIS.

The Sheridan family, 'self-made' rich, have moved into a magnificent home in the fashionable part of a Middle West city in order that the womenfolk might get acquainted with the 'best people.'

Once more the forces beyond the power of human control are at work confounding and thwarting the mighty business man and city builder, Sheridan.

Bibbs' father has announced that hereafter Bibbs will be an official in the various Sheridan enterprises and will take up a big business career.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Continued.

Perturbed and distressed, Bibbs rose instinctively; he felt himself at every possible disadvantage. He was a sleeper clinging to a dream—a rough hand stretched to shake him and waken him.

"Go on," said Sheridan, curtly, as Bibbs paused timidly. "It hasn't seemed to get anywhere that I can see," said Bibbs.

"Just one minute!" Sheridan interrupted, adding, with terrible courtesy, "Will you permit me? Have you ever been right about anything?"

"I ask the simple question: Have you ever been right about anything whatever in the course of your life? Have you ever been right upon any subject or question you've thought about or talked about?"

He was flourishing the bandaged hand as he spoke, but Bibbs said only, "If I've always been wrong before, surely there's more chance that I'm right about this. It seems reasonable

to suppose something would be due to bring up my average." "Yes, I thought you wouldn't see the point. And there's another you probably couldn't see, but I'll take the liberty to mention it.

"No," his father interrupted, still dangerously quiet. "You've never had to earn a living. Anybody could tell that by what you say. Now, let me remind you; you're sleepin' in a pretty good bed; you're eatin' pretty fair food; you're wearin' pretty fine clothes.

"I'm earning nine dollars a week," said Bibbs, sturdily. "It's enough. I shouldn't mind at all."

"My work!" Bibbs answered. "And I've done so well on that clipping machine I believe I could work up to fifteen or even twenty a week at another job."

"You better set about learnin' one pretty dam' quick!" But Sheridan struggled with his temper and again was partially successful in controlling it.

Sheridan raised his hands sardonically, as in prayer. "O God," he said, "this boy was crazy enough before he began to earn nine dollars a week, and now his money's gone to his head! Can't you do nothin' for him?"

"Who's payin' you that nine dollars a week?" "My work!" Bibbs answered. "And I've done so well on that clipping machine I believe I could work up to fifteen or even twenty a week at another job."

"There's one little time in the twenty-four hours when I'm not happy. It's now, when I have to say good night. But now's the bad time—and I must go through it, and so—good night."

"Do you?" she said, rising to go to the door with him. But he stood motionless, gazing at her wonderingly.

"Mary! Your eyes are so—" He stopped. "Yes? But she looked quickly away. 'I don't know,' he said. 'I thought just then—'

"What did you think?" "I don't know—it seemed to me that there was something I ought to understand—and didn't."

"Going to church," said Bibbs. "It is going to church when I go with you!" She went to the front door with him; she always went that far. They had formed a little code of leave-taking, by habit, neither of them ever speaking of it; but it was always the same.

Bibbs gave him a queer look. There was something like reproach in it, for once; but there was more than that—he seemed to be startled by his father's last word.

CHAPTER XXV.

There was sleet that evening, with a whooping wind, but neither this storm

nor that other which so imminently threatened him held place in the consciousness of Bibbs Sheridan when he came once more to the presence of Mary. All was right in his world as he sat with her, reading Maurice Maeterlinck's 'Alladine and Palomides.'

"There's something I want to read over. This: You would think I threw a window open on the dawn. . . She has a soul that can be seen around her—that takes you in its arms like an ailing child and without saying anything to you consoles you for everything. . . I shall never understand it all. I do not know how it can all be, but my knees bend in spite of me when I speak of it. . ."

"He stopped and looked at her. 'You boy!' said Mary, not very clearly. 'Oh, yes,' he returned. 'But it's true—especially my knees!'

"You boy!" she murmured again, blushing charmingly. "You might read another line over. The first time I ever saw you, Bibbs, you were looking into a mirror. Do it again. But you needn't read it—I can give it to you: 'A little Greek slave that came from the heart of Arcady!'

"No." She shook her head. "You love and want what's beautiful and delicate and serene; it's really art that you want in your life, and have always wanted. You seemed to me, from the first, the most wishful person I had ever known, and that's what you were wishful for."

Bibbs looked doubtful and more wishful than ever; but after a moment or two the matter seemed to clarify itself to him. "Why, no," he said; "I wanted something else more than that. I wanted you."

"And here I am!" she laughed, completely understanding. "I think we're like those two in 'The Clotter and the Hearth.' I'm just the rough Burgundian crowsaw man, Deby, who followed that gentle Gerard and told everybody that the devil was dead."

"He isn't, though," said Bibbs, as a hoarse little bell in the next room began a series of snappings which proved to be ten, upon count. "He gets into the clock whenever I'm with you." And, sighing deeply, he rose to go.

"You're always very prompt about leaving me." "Sure you will all approve step have taken as was so wretched my health would probably suffer severely Robert and I were married this afternoon thought best have quiet wedding absolutely sure you will understand wisdom of step when you know Robert better am happiest woman in world are leaving for Florida will write address when settled will remain till spring love to all father will like him too when he knows him like I do he is just ideal."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Bibbs, convinced that the mere glimpse of him, just then, would prove nothing less than insufferable for his father, was about to make his escape into the gold-and-brocade room when he heard Sheridan vociferously demanding his presence.

"Tell him to come in here! He's out there. I heard George just tell him in. Now you'll see!" And tear-stained Mrs. Sheridan, looking out into the hall, beckoned to her son.

"There's our little sunshine!" he cried, as Bibbs appeared. "There's the hope of the family—my lifelong pride and joy! I want—" "Keep your hand in that sling," said Gurney, sharply.

Sheridan turned upon him, uttering a sound like a howl. "For God's sake, sing another tune!" he cried. "You said you came as a doctor but stay as a friend," and in that capacity you undertake to sit up and criticize me—" "Oh, talk sense," said the doctor, and yawned intentionally. "What do you want Bibbs to say?"

"You were sittin' up there tellin' me I got hysterical—hysterical, oh Lord! You sat up there and told me I got hysterical over nothin'! You sat up there tellin' me I didn't have as heavy burdens as many another man you knew. I just want you to hear this. Now listen!" He swung toward the quiet figure waiting in the doorway.

"No, father," said Bibbs, gently. Sheridan looked at Gurney and then faced his son once more. "And I'd like the doctor to hear: What'll you do if I decide you're too high-priced a workin' man either to live in my house or work in my shop?"

"Find other work," said Bibbs. "There! You hear him for yourself!" Sheridan cried. "You hear what—" "Keep your hand in that sling! Yes, I hear him."

Sheridan leaned over Gurney and shouted, in a voice that cracked and broke, piping into falsetto: "He thinks of bein' a plumber! He wants to be a plumber so he can think!"

He fell back a step, wiping his forehead with the back of his left hand. "There! That's my son! That's the only son I got now! That's my chance to live," he cried, with a bitterness



"There's Our Little Sunshine!" He Cried.

that seemed to leave ashes in his throat. "That's my one chance to live—that thing you see in the doorway yonder!"

Doctor Gurney thoughtfully regarded the bandage strip he had been winding, and tossed it into the open bag. "What's the matter with giving Bibbs a chance to live?" he said, coolly. "I would if I were you. You've had two that went into business."

"I accuse you of nothing," said the doctor. "But just once I'd like to have it out with you on the question of Bibbs—and while he's here, too." He got up, walked to the fire, and stood warming his hands behind his back and smiling. "Look here, old fellow, let's be reasonable," he said.

"You were bound Bibbs should go to the shop again, and he did go, and he's made good there. Now, see: Isn't that enough? Can't you let him off now? He wants to write, and how do you know that he couldn't do it if you gave him a chance? How do you know he hasn't some message—something to say that might make the world just a little bit happier or wiser? I'm not speaking as doctor now. But I tell you one thing I know: If you take him down there you'll kill something that I feel is in him, and it's finer, I think, than his physical body, and you'll kill it deadlier than a door-nail! And so why not let it live? You've about come to the end of your string, old fellow. Why not stop this perpetual devilish fighting and give Bibbs his chance?"

Sheridan stood looking at him fixedly. "What fighting?" "Yours—with nature," Gurney sustained the daunting gaze of his fierce antagonist equably. "You don't seem to understand that you've been struggling against actual law."

"What law?" "Natural law," said Gurney. "What do you think beat you with Edith? Did Edith, herself, beat you? Didn't she obey without question something powerful that was against you? Edith wasn't against you, and you weren't against her, but you set yourself against the power that had her in its grip, and it shot out a spurt of flame—and won in a walk! What's taken Roscoe from you? Timbers bear just so much strain, old man, but you wanted to send the load across the broken bridge, and you thought you could bully or coax the cracked thing into standing. Well, you couldn't! Now here's Bibbs. There are thousands of men fit for the life you want him to lead—and so is he. It wouldn't take half of Bibbs' brains to be twice as good a business man as Jim and Roscoe put together."

"What?" Sheridan goggled at him like a zany. "Your son Bibbs," said the doctor, composedly. "Bibbs Sheridan has the kind and quantity of 'gray matter' that will make him a success in anything—if he ever wakes up! The thousands of men fit for the life you want him to lead aren't fit to do much with the life he ought to lead. Blindly, he's been fighting for the chance to lead—he's obeying something that begs to stay alive within him; and, blindly, he knows you'll crush it out. You've set your will to do it. Let me tell you something more. You're half mad, with a consuming fury against the very self of the law—the law that took Jim from you. The very self of the law took Roscoe from you and gave Edith the certainty of beating you; and the very self of the law makes Bibbs deny you tonight. The law beats you. But you've set yourself against it, to bend it to your own ends, to wield it and twist it—" "The voice broke from Sheridan's heaving chest in a shout. "Yes! And by God, I will!" "So Ajax defied the lightning," said Gurney. "I've heard that dam' fool story, too," Sheridan retorted, fixedly. "Defied the lightning, did he, the jackass! If he'd been half a man he'd 'a' got away with it. We don't go showin' off defyin' the lightning—we hitch it up and make it work for us like a black steer!"

"Well, what about Bibbs?" said Gurney. "Will you be a really big man now and—" "Gurney, you know a lot about big-ness!" Sheridan began to walk to and fro again, and the doctor returned gloomily to his chair. He had shot his bolt the moment he judged his chance to strike center was best, but the target seemed unaware of the marksman.

"I'm tryin' to make a big man out of that poor truck yonder," Sheridan went on, "and you step in, beggin' me to let him be Lord knows what—I don't! I suppose you figure it out that now I got a son-in-law, I might'n't need a son! Yes, I got a son-in-law now—a spender!"

"Oh, put your hand back!" said Gurney, wearily. There was a bronze inkstand upon the table. Sheridan put his right hand in the sling, but with his left he swept the inkstand from the table and half-way across the room—a comet with a destroying black tail. Mrs. Sheridan shrieked and sprang toward it.

"Let it lay!" he shouted, fiercely. "Let it lay!" And, weeping, she obeyed. "Yes, sir," he went on, in a voice the more ominous for the sudden hush he put upon it. "I got a spender for a son-in-law! It's wonderful where property goes, sometimes. There was ole man Tracy—you remember him Doc—J. R. Tracy, solid banker. He went into the bank as messenger, seventeen years old; he built that bank with his life for forty years more. Gilt edge, that bank? It was diamond edged? He used to eat a bag o' peanuts and an apple for lunch; but he wasn't stingy—he was just livin' in his business. He didn't care for pie or automobiles—he had his bank. It was an institution, and it come pretty near bein' the beatin' heart o' this town in its time. Well, that ole man used to pass one o' these here turned-up-nose and turned-up-pants cigarette boys on the streets. Never spoke to him, Tracy didn't. Speak to him? God! he wouldn't 'a' coughed on him! He wouldn't 'a' let him clean the cuspidors at the bank! Why, if he'd 'a' just seen him standin' in front the bank he'd 'a' had him run off the street. And yet all Tracy was doin' every day of his life was workin' for that cigarette boy! Tracy thought he was givin' his life and his life-blood and the blood of his brain for the bank, but he wasn't. It was every bit—from the time he went in at seventeen till he died in harness at eighty-three—it was every last lick of it just slavin' for a turned-up-nose, turned-up-pants cigarette boy. And Tracy didn't ever know his name! He died not ever havin' heard it, though he chased him off the front steps of his house once. The day after Tracy died his old-maid daughter married the cigarette and there ain't any Tracy bank any more! And now—his voice rose again—"and now I got a cigarette son-in-law!"

Gurney pointed to the flourishing right hand without speaking, and Sheridan once more returned it to the sling. "My son-in-law likes Florida this winter," Sheridan went on. "That's good, and my son-in-law better enjoy it, because I don't think he'll be there next winter. They got twelve thousand dollars to spend, and I hear it can be done in Florida by rich son-in-law. When Roscoe's woman got me to spend that much on a porch for her new house, Edith wouldn't give me a minute's rest till I turned over the same to her. And she's got it besides what I gave her to go east on. It'll be gone long before this time next year, and when she comes home and leaves the cigarette behind—for good—she'll get some more. My name ain't Tracy, and there ain't goin' to be any Tracy business in the Sheridan family. And there ain't goin' to be any college fundin' and endowin' and trusteein', nor God-knows-what to keep my property alive when I'm gone! Edith'll be back, and she'll get a girl's share when she's through with that cigarette, but—"

"Doesn't it appear now that Old Man Sheridan will set about to have Edith's marriage to Lamhorn annulled as soon as she comes to her senses? Would you do so if you were her father?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)