



CHAPTER XXVI—Continued. Old Man Sheridan has been storming madly after hearing of his daughter's marriage to Lamhorn, the profligate, in New York. He is trying to bend the will of his son Bibbs.

"By the way," interposed Gurney, "didn't Mrs. Sheridan tell me that Bibbs warned you Edith would marry Lamhorn in New York?" Sheridan went completely to pieces: He swore, while his wife screamed and stopped her ears. And as he swore he pounded the table with his wounded hand, and when the doctor, after storming at him ineffectively, sprang to catch and protect that hand, Sheridan wrenched it away, tearing the bandage. He hammered the table till it leaped.

"Fool!" he panted, choking. "If he's shown gumption enough to guess right the first time in his life, it's enough for me to begin learnin' him on!" And, struggling with the doctor, he leaned toward Bibbs, thrusting forward his convulsed face, which was deathly pale. "My name ain't Tracy, I tell you!" he screamed, hoarsely. "You give in, you stubborn fool! I've had my way with you before, and I'll have my way with you now!" Bibbs' face was as white as his father's. "No. You can't have your way," he said. And then, obeying a significant motion of Gurney's head, he went out quickly, leaving them struggling.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mrs. Sheridan, in a wrapper, noiselessly opened the door of her husband's room at daybreak the next morning, and peered within the darkened chamber. At the "old" house they had shared a room, but the architect had chosen to separate them at the new, and they had not known how to formulate an objection, although to both of them something seemed vaguely reprehensible in the new arrangement. Sheridan did not stir, and she was withdrawing her head from the aperture when he spoke. "Oh, I'm awake! Come in, if you want to, and shut the door." She came and sat by the bed. "I woke up thinkin' about it," she explained. "And the more I thought about it the surer I got I must be



right, and I knew you'd be tormentin' yourself if you was awake, so—well, you got plenty other troubles, but I'm just sure you ain't goin' to have the worry with Bibbs it looks like." "You bet I ain't!" he grunted. "Look how biddable he was about goin' back to the works," she continued. "He's a right good-hearted boy, really, and sometimes I honestly have to say he seems right smart, too. Now and then he'll say something sounds right bright. 'Course, most always it doesn't, and a good deal of the time, when he says things, why, I have to feel glad we haven't got company, because they'd think he didn't have any gumption at all. Yet, look at the way he did when Jim—when Jim got hurt. He took right hold o' things. And Doctor Gurney says he's got brains, and you can't deny but what the doctor's right considerable of a man. He acts sleepy, but that's only because he's got such a large practice—he's a pretty wide-awake kind of a man some ways. Well, what he says last night about Bibbs—that's what I got to thinkin' about. You heard him, papa; he says,

"Bibbs 'll be a bigger business man than what Jim and Roscoe was put together—if he ever wakes up," he says. Wasn't that exactly what he says?"

"I suppose so," said Sheridan, without exhibiting any interest. "Gurney's crazier 'n Bibbs, but if he wasn't—if what he says was true—what of it?" "Listen, papa. Just suppose Bibbs took it into his mind to get married. You know where he goes all the time—"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" Sheridan turned over in the bed, his face to the wall, leaving visible of himself only the thick grizzle of his hair. "You better go back to sleep. He runs over there—every minute she'll let him, I suppose. Go back to bed. There's nothin' in it."

"Why ain't there?" she urged. "I know better—there is, too! You wait and see. There's just one thing in the world that'll wake the sleepiest young man alive up—yes, and make him jump up—and I don't care who he is or how sound asleep it looks like he is. That's when he takes it into his head to pick out some girl and settle down and have a home and children of his own. Then, I guess, he'll go out after the money! You'll see. Now, I don't say that Bibbs has got the idea in his head yet—er else he wouldn't be talkin' that fool-talk about nine dollars a week bein' good enough for him to live on. But it's comin', papa, and he'll jump for whatever you want to hand him out. He will! And I can tell you this much, too; he'll want all the salary and stock he can get hold of, and he'll hustle to keep gettin' more. That girl's the kind that a young husband just goes crazy to give things to! She's pretty and fine-lookin', and things look nice on her, and I guess she'd like to have 'em about as well as the next. And I guess she isn't gettin' many these days, either, and she'll be pretty ready for the change. I saw her with her sleeves rolled up at the kitchen window the other day, and Jackson told me yesterday their cook left two weeks ago, and they haven't tried to hire another one. He says her and her mother been doin' the housework a good while, and now they're doin' the cookin', too. 'Course Bibbs wouldn't know that unless she's told him, and I reckon she wouldn't; she's kind o' stiffish-lookin', and Bibbs is too up in the clouds to notice any-thing like that for himself. They've never asked him to a meal in the house, but he wouldn't notice that, either—he's kind of innocent. Now I was thinkin'—you know, I don't suppose we've hardly mentioned the girl's name at table since Jim went, but it seems to me maybe if—"

Sheridan flung out his arms, uttering a sound half groan, half yawn. "You're barkin' up the wrong tree! Go on back to bed, mamma!" "Why am I?" she demanded, crossly. "Why am I barkin' up the wrong tree?" "Because you are. There's nothin' in it."

"I'll bet you," she said, rising—"I'll bet you he goes to church with her this morning. What you want to bet?" "Go back to bed," he commanded. "I know what I'm talkin' about; there's nothin' in it, I tell you."

She shook her head perplexedly. "Then—do you know something about it that you ain't told me?" "Yes, I do," he grunted. "Now go on. Maybe I can get a little sleep. I ain't had any yet."

"Well—" She went to the door, her expression downcast. "I thought maybe—but—" She coughed prettily. "Oh, papa, something else I wanted to tell you. I was talkin' to Roscoe over the phone last night when the telegram came, so I forgot to tell you, but—well, Sibly wants to come over this afternoon. They expect to get off by the end o' the week, and I reckon she wants to feel she's done what she could to kind o' make up. Anyway, that's what he said. But what I thought was, no use bein' rough with her, papa—I expect she's suffered a good deal—and I don't think we'd ought to be, on Roscoe's account. You'll—you'll be kind o' polite to her, won't you, papa?" He mumbled something which was smothered under the coverlet he had pulled over his head.

"What?" she said, timidly. "I was just sayin' I hoped you'd treat Sibly all right when she comes, this afternoon. You will, won't you, papa?" He threw the coverlet off furiously. "I presume so!" he roared. She departed guiltily. But if he had accepted her proffered wager that Bibbs would go to church with Mary Vertrees that morning, Mrs. Sheridan would have lost. They meant to go to church. But it happened that they were attentively preoccupied in a conversation as they came to the church; and they had gone an incredible number of blocks beyond it before they discovered their error. However, feeling that they might be embarrassingly late if they returned, they de-

cidated that a walk would make them as good. It was a windless winter morning, with an inch of crisp snow over the ground. So they walked, and for the most part they were silent, but on their way home, after they had turned back at noon, they began to be talkative again.

"Yes—when he's in a mood to flatter me. Other times, other names. He has quite a list."

"You mustn't mind," she said, gently. "He's been getting some pretty severe shocks. What you've told me makes me pretty sorry for him, Bibbs. I've always been sure he's very big."

"Yes. Big and—blind. He's like a Hercules without eyes and without any consciousness except that of his strength and of his purpose to grow stronger. Stronger for what? For nothing."

"Are you sure, Bibbs? It can't be for nothing; it must be stronger for something, even though he doesn't know what it is. Perhaps what he and his kind are struggling for is something so great they couldn't see it—so great none of us could see it."

"No, he's just like some blind, unconscious thing heaving underground—" "Till he breaks through and leaps out into the daylight," she finished for him, cheerily.

"Into the smoke," said Bibbs. "Look at the powder of coal-dust already dirtying the decent snow, even though it's Sunday. That's from the little pigs; the big ones aren't so bad, on Sunday! There's a fleck of soot on your cheek. Some pig sent it out into the air; he might as well have thrown it on you. It would have been braver, for then he'd have taken his chance of my whipping him for it if I could."

"Is there soot on my cheek, Bibbs? Is there?" "Is there? There are soot on your cheeks, Mary—a fleck on each. One landed since I mentioned the first."

She halted immediately, giving him her handkerchief, and he succeeded in transferring most of the black from her face to the cambric. They were entirely matter-of-course about it.

An elderly couple, it chanced, had been walking behind Bibbs and Mary for the last block or so, and passed ahead during the removal of the soot. "There!" said the elderly wife. "You're always wrong when you begin guessin' about strangers. Those two young people aren't married for years. A blind man could see that."

"I wish I knew who threw that soot on you," said Bibbs, looking up at the neighboring chimneys, as they went on. "They arrest children for throwin' snowballs at the street cars, but—"

"But they don't arrest street cars for shaking all the pictures in the houses crooked every time they go by. Nor for the uproar they make. I wonder what's the cost in nerves for the noise of the city each year. Yes, we pay the price for living in a 'growing town,' whether we have money to pay or none."

"Who is it gets the pay?" said Bibbs. "Not I!" she laughed. "Nobody gets it. There isn't any pay; there's only money. And only some of the men down town get much of that. That's what my father wants me to get."

"Yes," she said, smiling to him, and nodding. "And you don't want it, and you don't need it."

full of all kinds of happy life; children, and lovers walking, and ladies leaning from windows all down great lengths of street leading to the city walls; and there the gates are wide open, letting in a space of green field and cornfield in harvest; and all round his head a great rain of swirling autumn leaves blowing from a little walled graveyard."

"And if I painted," Bibbs returned, "I'd paint a lady walking in the street of a great city, full of all kinds of uproarious and futile life—children being taught only how to make money, and lovers hurrying to get richer, and ladies who'd given up trying to wash their windows clean, and the gates of the city wide open, letting in slums and slaughter houses and freight yards, and all round this lady's head a great rain of swirling soot—" He paused, adding, thoughtfully: "And yet I believe I'm glad that soot got on your cheek. It was just as if I were your brother—the way you gave me your handkerchief to rub it off for you. Still, Edith never—"

"Didn't she?" said Mary, as he paused again.

"No. And I—" He contented himself with shaking his head instead of offering more definite information. Then he realized that they were passing the new house, and he sighed profoundly. "Mary, our walk's almost over."

She looked at blank. "So it is, Bibbs."

They said no more until they came to her gate. As they drifted slowly to a stop, the door of Roscoe's house opened, and Roscoe came out with



They Were Entirely Matter-of-Course About It.

Sibly, who was startlingly pale. She seemed little enfeebled by her illness, however, walking rather quickly at her husband's side and not taking his arm. The two crossed the street without appearing to see Mary and her companion, and, entering the new house, were lost to sight. Mary gazed after them gravely, but Bibbs, looking at Mary, did not see them.

"Mary," he said, "you seem very serious. Is anything bothering you?" "No, Bibbs." And she gave him a bright, quick look that made him instantly unreasonably happy.

"I know you want to go in—" he began. "No. I don't want to."

"I mustn't keep you standing here, and I mustn't go in with you—but I just wanted to say—I've seemed very stupid to myself this morning, grumbling about soot and all that—while all the time I—Mary, I think it's been the very happiest of all the hours you've given me. I do. And—I don't know just why—but it's seemed to me that it was one I'd always remember. And you," he added, falteringly, "you look so—so beautiful today!"

"It must have been the soot on my cheek, Bibbs."

"Mary, will you tell me something?" he asked. "I think I will."

"It's something I've had a lot of theories about, but none of them ever just fits. You used to wear furs in the fall, but now it's so much colder, you don't—you never wear them at all any more. Why don't you?" Her eyes fell for a moment, and she grew red. Then she looked up gayly. "Bibbs, if I tell you the answer will you promise not to ask any more questions?"

"Yes. Why did you stop wearing them?" "Because I found I'd be warmer without them!" She caught his hand quickly in her own for an instant, laughed into his eyes, and ran into the house.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It is the consoling attribute of up-used books that their decorative warmth will so often make even a readymade library the actual "living room" of a family to whom the shelved volumes are indeed sealed. Thus it was with Sheridan, who read nothing except newspapers, business letters and figures; who looked upon books as he looked upon bric-a-brac or crocheting—when he was at home, and not abed or eating, he was in the library.

His wife came in, and he exhaled a solemnity. His deference to the Sabbath was manifest, as always, in the length of his coat and the closeness of his Saturday-night shave; and his expression, to match this religious pomp, was more than Sabbathical, but the most dismaying of his demonstrations was his keeping his hand in his sling.

Sibly advanced to the middle of the room and halted there, not looking at him, but down at her muff, in which it could be seen, her hands were nervously moving. Roscoe went to a chair in another part of the room. There was a deadly silence.

But Sibly found a shaky voice, after an interval of gulping, though she was unable to lift her eyes, and the darling lids continued to veil them. She spoke hurriedly, like an ungifted child reciting something committed to memory, but her sincerity was none the less evident for that.

"Father Sheridan, you and mother Sheridan have always been so kind to me, and I would hate to have you think I don't appreciate it, from the way I acted. I've come to tell you I am sorry for the way I did that night, and to say I know as well as anybody the way I behaved, and it will never happen again, because it's been a pretty hard lesson; and when we come back, some day, I hope you'll see that you've got a daughter-in-law you never need to be ashamed of again. I want to ask you to excuse me for the way I did, and I can say I haven't any feelings toward Edith now, but only wish her happiness and good in her new life. I thank you for all your kindness to me, and I know I made a poor return for it, but if you can overlook the way I behaved I know I would feel a good deal happier—and I know Roscoe would, too. I wish to promise not to be as foolish in the future, and the same error would never occur again to make us all so unhappy, if you can be charitable enough to excuse it this time."

He looked steadily at her without replying, and she stood before him, never lifting her eyes; motionless, save where the moving fur proved the agitation of her hands within the muff. "All right," he said, at last.

She looked up then with vast relief, though there was a revelation of heavy tears when the eyelids lifted.

"Thank you," she said. "There's something else—about something different—I want to say to you, but I want mother Sheridan to hear it, too."

"She's upstairs in her room," said Sheridan. "Roscoe—"

Sibly interrupted. She had just seen Bibbs pass through the hall and begin to ascend the stairs; and in a flash she instinctively perceived the chance for precisely the effect she wanted.

"No, let me go," she said. "I want to speak to her a minute first, anyway."

And she went away quickly, gaining the top of the stairs in time to see Bibbs enter his room and close the door. Sibly knew that Bibbs, in his room, had overheard her quarrel with Edith in the hall outside; for bitter Edith, thinking the more to shame her, had subsequently informed her of the circumstance. Sibly had just remembered this, and with the recollection there had flashed the thought—out of her own experience—that people are often much more deeply impressed by words they overhear than by words directly addressed to them. Sibly intended to make it impossible for Bibbs not to overhear. She did not hesitate—her heart was hot with the old sore, and she believed wholly in the justice of her cause and in the truth of what she was going to say. Fate was virtuous at times; it had delivered into her hands the girl who had affronted her.

Mrs. Sheridan was in her own room. The approach of Sibly and Roscoe had driven her from the library, for she had miscalculated her husband's mood, and she felt that if he used his injured hand as a mark of emphasis again, in her presence, she would (as she thought of it) "have a fit right there." She heard Sibly's step, and pretended to be putting a touch to her hair before a mirror.

"I was just coming down," she said, as the door opened.

"Yes, he wants you to," said Sibly. "It's all right, mother Sheridan. He's forgiven me."

Mrs. Sheridan sniffed instantly; tears appeared. She kissed her daughter-in-law's cheek; then, in silence, regarded the mirror afresh, wiped her eyes, and applied powder.

"And I hope Edith will be happy," Sibly added, inciting more applications of Mrs. Sheridan's handkerchief and powder.

"Yes, yes," murmured the good woman. "We mustn't make the worst of things."

to do is to tell this so's to keep the family from being made a fool of. I don't want to see the family just made use of and twisted around her finger by somebody that's got no more heart than so much ice, and just as sure to bring troubles in the long run as—as Edith's mistake is. Well, then, this is the way it is. I'll just tell you how it looks to me and see if it don't strike you the same way."

Within the room, Bibbs, much annoyed, tapped his ear with his pencil. He wished they wouldn't stand talking near his door when he was trying to write. He had just taken from his trunk the manuscript of a poem begun the preceding Sunday afternoon, and he had some ideas he wanted to fix upon paper before they maliciously seized the first opportunity to vanish, for they were but gossamer. Bibbs was pleased with the beginnings of his poem, and if he could carry it through he meant to dare greatly with it—he would venture it upon an editor. For he had his plan of life now; his day would be of manual labor and thinking—he could think of his friend and he could think in cadences for poems, to the crashing of the strong machines—and if his father turned him out of home and out of the works, he would work elsewhere and live elsewhere. His father had the right, and it mattered very little to Bibbs—he faced the prospect of a working man's lodging house without trepidation. He could find a washstand to write upon, he thought; and every evening when he left Mary he would write a letter; and he would write on holidays and on Sundays—on Sundays in the afternoon. In a lodging house, at least, he wouldn't be interrupted by his sister-in-law's choosing the immediate vicinity of his door for conversations entirely important to herself, but merely disturbing to him. He frowned plaintively, wishing he could think of one polite way of asking her to go away. But, as she went on, he started violently dropping manuscript and pencil upon the floor.

"I don't know whether you heard it, mother Sheridan," she said, "but this old Vertrees house, next door, has been sold on foreclosure, and all they got out of it was an agreement that lets 'em live there a little longer. Roscoe told me, and he says he heard Mr. Vertrees has been up and down the streets more 'n two years, tryin' to get a job he could call a 'position,' and couldn't land it. You heard anything about it, mother Sheridan?"

"Well, I did know they been doin' their own housework a good while back," said Mrs. Sheridan. "And now they're doin' the cookin', too."

Sibly sent forth a little fitter with a sharp edge. "I hope they find something to cook! She sold her piano mighty quick after Jim died!"

Bibbs jumped up. He was trembling from head to foot and he was dizzy—of all the real things he could never have dreamed in his dream the last would have been what he heard now. He felt that something incredible was happening, and that he was powerless to stop it. It seemed to him that heavy blows were falling upon his head and upon Mary's; it seemed to him that he and Mary were being struck and beaten physically—and that something hideous impended. He wanted to shout to Sibly to be silent, but he could not; he could only stand, swallowing and trembling.

"What I think the whole family ought to understand is just this," said Sibly, sharply. "Those people were so hard up that this Miss Vertrees started after Bibbs before they knew

whether he was insane or not! They'd got a notion he might be, from his being in a sanitarium, and Mrs. Vertrees asked me if he was insane, the very first day Bibbs took the daughter out riding!" She paused a moment, looking at Mrs. Sheridan, but listening intently. There was no sound from within the room.

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheridan. "It's the truth," Sibly declared, loudly. "Oh, of course we were all crazy about that girl at first. We were pretty green when we moved up here, and we thought she'd get us in—but it didn't take me long to read her! Her family were down and out when it came to money—and they had to go after it, one way or another, somehow!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



He Felt That Something Inevitable Was Happening.