

THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY
THOMAS DIXON



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PROLOGUE.

This remarkable tale, in which each character is sketched from life by a master hand, goes beneath the surface of modern society and lays bare the canker at the root. Like all Mr. Dixon's work, it is a tale of American life, essentially true in the picture it draws and done with a swinging power which brings its dramatic scenes home to us. The splendid strength of the tale lies in the conflict between James Stuart and Nan, in which love and greed of wealth struggle for mastery.

CHAPTER V.

Struggle.

THE longer Stuart wrestled with the problem of Nan's yielding to the lure of Bivens' gold the more hideous and hopeless it became. He began to feel that he had been to blame. Why had he allowed the foolish pride of a lovers' quarrel to keep them apart for two weeks?

When he came downstairs he paused at the door. Harriet was playing and singing again, and the soft tones of her voice were healing. He walked gently to the door of the music room, leaned against the panel and watched and listened.

At last she stopped reluctantly, tipped her golden head sideways in a coquettish little triumphant movement and in the quaintest imitation of a man's voice said:

"I congratulate you, Miss Harriet—I like that very much!"

"Do you, professor? Oh, I'm so glad to please you!"

She shook her curls with genuine delight and played out the little dialogue with vivid imaginary touches.

Stuart laughed.

The girl leaped to her feet, blushing scarlet, rushed to his side and seized his hand.

"Did you see me, Jim? Was I very foolish?"

"Certainly not. I quite agree with the professor. You will see day by day before kings and queens, little girl."

He left her waving and smiling to him from the steps. He walked with new vigor and a deepening sense of gratitude to her. His breath deepened, and his step grew firm and swift. He would fight for his own. He would go straight to Nan and laugh at this announcement. He would compel her to hear him. It was an absurd hour to call, but all the better.

Mrs. Primrose's greeting was so cordial, so genuinely friendly, that for a moment he was puzzled. Could it be possible he had misjudged her?

She pressed his hand warmly and laudingly.

"Oh, Jim, I'm so glad you've come! Why have you stayed away so long? It was so foolish of you. You gave up without a struggle. I'm shocked beyond measure at Nan. I told her that his millions would never bring happiness unless her heart went with them—that her love for you was a thing she couldn't lay aside as a cloak she had worn. I told Nan the day she promised to marry Mr. Bivens that you were worth a dozen such men, no matter how many millions he had. You have always been my choice—you know that."

Stuart could control himself no longer. He rose and faced Mrs. Primrose with a look which brought her eloquence to an abrupt end.

"Mrs. Primrose, for once in my life I am going to tell you the truth. You have always been my bitterest foe. You brought Nan to New York to get her away from me."

The mother's eyes blazed with honest wrath.

"Yes, I did; and I'm glad I did it—you ungrateful wretch!"

"And you have always been busy poisoning her mind against me and corrupting her imagination with dreams of a life of luxury."

"And, thank God, I've succeeded at last in bringing her to her senses in time to save her from throwing herself away on you, Jim Stuart!"

As Mrs. Primrose left Nan quietly entered the room. Her face was set for battle in a proud defiant smile. She was totally unprepared for the way in which Stuart met her.

With a quick step he was at her side, seized both her hands in a grip of fierce tenderness and in low tones of vibrant passion said:

"You know that you love me."

"But I've discovered," she went on, with bantering, half-challenging frankness, "that I love luxury too. I never knew how deeply and passionately before." She paused a moment, looking toward Sea Gate. "Isn't that the anchorage of the Atlantic Yacht club?"

"Yes," he answered impatiently.

"Then that's Mr. Bivens' yacht, the big, ugly black one lying close inshore with steam up. He told me he would send her into drydock today. He was talking last night of a wedding cruise in her to the Mediterranean. I confess, Jim, that I want to shine, to succeed and dazzle and reign. This is perhaps the one chance of my life."

"Do you hold yourself so cheap?"

"You can't realize how much the power of millions means to a woman who chafes at the limitations the world puts on her sex. It's too late!"

"Don't, don't say it, Nan!"

"Why not be frank? This little cot face is a gem, I admit. But I've seen a splendid palace set in flowers and gleaming with subdued light. Soft music steals through its halls mingled with the laughter of throats who love and admire me. Its banquet tables are laden with the costliest delicacies, while liveried servants hurry to and fro with plates and goblets of gold."

Stuart seized her arm with fierce strength that hurt. "You shall not do this hideous thing. You are mine, I tell you, and I am bigger than money. I have the power to think, to create ideas, to create beauty—the power that makes the world. I expect to have all the money we shall need. In the years to come we shall be rich whether we seek it or not. But the sweetest days of all life will be those in which we fight side by side the first battles of life in youth and poverty when we shall count the pennies and save with care for the little ones God may send us."

"But life is short, Jim. I can have things now. He has already promised them—a palace in town, another by the sea, a great estate in the heart of the blue southern mountains we used to watch as children and armies of servants to do my bidding. I can live now."

"And you call these trappings and tinsel life?"

"I want them."

"My God, Nan, haven't you a soul? Haven't the life within no meaning for you? To me such luxury is sheer insanity. The possibilities of personal luxury have been exhausted thousands of years ago. It's commonplace, vulgar and contemptible. If you wish for power why choose the lowest of all its forms? The way you are entering is worn bare by the feet of millions of forgotten fools whose bodies worms have eaten. Not one of them lives today even in a footnote of history."

"And yet, Jim, you know as well as I do that money is the sign of success and power; its absence, of failure and weakness. If you make a mistake in your career you can correct it and begin again. Being a woman, I cannot, for marriage is my only career. A mistake now would be to me fatal."

"And you are making the one tragic mistake no repentance can undo. The deliberate choice of evil, knowing it to be evil. Your heart is mine—mine, I tell you. Do you deny it?"

Again he seized her hand, gripped it fiercely and looked into her eyes with tender, searching gaze.

Nan looked away.

"Oh, Nan, dear, believe me!" he pleaded. "You can't deny this voice within the soul and live. Happiness is inside, not outside, dear."

The lover paused a moment, overcame with his emotion, and he knew by the quick rising and falling of the girl's breast that a battle was raging.

Quick to see his advantage, he drew her gently inside.

"See, Nan, there are no cheap imitations in here, no vulgar ornaments which mean nothing. This home will be a real one because it will have a soul. There can be no coarse or menial tasks within its walls because its work shall be glorified by the off immortal song of love and life."

Stuart leaned close and spoke in a low tense voice:

"And it will always be beautiful, Nan, because it will be penetrated with the touch of your hand. Every piece of furniture will glow with that radiance. Gold and precious stones can have no such luster. See, here I have planned to place your piano. There will be no music on earth like the songs those throbbing strings shall make to my soul when they quiver beneath the touch of your hand."

The lover slipped his arm gently around the girl's yielding form, her head drooped on his shoulder, the great dark eyes blinded with tears. For a moment he held her in silence, broken only by a deep sob. His hand touched her hair with the tenderest gesture as he whispered:

"We can only know a few real friends in this world, dearest. But one great love comes to any human soul, and life is all too short to lose a single day."

"Hush—hush, Jim!" the girl cried in anguish. "Don't say any more, please."

"Tell me that it's all right, dear," he urged. "You know you cannot leave me now. You know that you love me and that your love is a deathless thing."

"Yes, yes; I know," she gasped. "But I'm going to marry him. I can't help it. The spell of his millions is on me, and I can't shake it off."

With a determined effort she drew herself from his embrace and in hard, cold tones continued:

"No, Jim; you must face the truth. I am going to marry this man, and the most horrible thing I can say about myself is that, deeply as I love you, I know I shall be content with the splendid career that will be mine. I shall never regret my marriage."

The lover looked at her in a dazed way, as if unable to grasp the meaning of her words.

"But you can't do this vile thing. Since the world began I know that



"The spell of his millions is on me."

vain, weak, ignorant women have sold themselves to men they could not love for money, rank and luxury. But you are not that breed, Nan. You are the typical American girl. You represent women whose hearts have been pure, whose lives have been clean, who have kept burning in the hearts of men the great faiths of the soul. Respect for women has been one of the foundations of our moral life. The woman who sells herself to buy bread stands higher in the moral world than you"—He hesitated.

"Go on, Jim; say the worst. And still I'm going to do it."

"Knowing full well that no ceremony of church or state, no word of priest or judge, no pealing of organ or pomp or pageantry can make this thing a marriage?"

The lover dropped in silence to the window seat and buried his face in his hands in a paroxysm of emotion beyond control. At length he rose and looked at the girl he loved long and tenderly.

"God in heaven! It's inconceivable when I look into your beautiful face! Have you no pity in your heart?"

The full lips smiled a cruel little smile.

"Men are strong, Jim. They can stand hard blows. You come of fighting stock. I know that you will survive. I'm sorry to hurt you, Jim, but I must; it's fate. The big world I somehow feel I'm akin to is calling me, and I'm going."

"And Bivens is this big world! If you will throw me over for money can't you wait until a real man goes with it? It wouldn't be so bad if I felt you had chosen one who was my equal physically and mentally in culture and breeding—but Bivens?"

"You underestimate his ability. You may hate him, but he is a man of genius."

"He is everything you loathe and yet you are going to marry him. You are giving up too easily. Bivens has only a couple of millions, and he may lose them. Don't hold yourself so cheap. If you were on the block for sale I'd give a million for each dimple in your cheeks. The smile that plays about your lips should bring millions. Your deep dark eyes, I swear, are worth a million each."

"Hush, Jim, dear, we must go now. I can't stand any more. There's a limit."

"Yes, I know. Forgive me."

Without another word he led her from the place, closed the little gate quietly and returned to her home.

Alone inside the parlor they stood in silence a moment, and she took his hand in hers.

"I'm sorry, but it must be goodby. Your love has been a sweet and wonderful thing in my life."

"And you throw it aside as a worthless rag."

"No," she answered, smiling. "It shall be mine always. Goodby."

She raised her lips to his in a cold kiss.

Dazed with anguish, he turned and left. The door closed on his retreating figure, and Nan burst into a flood of passionate tears.

(To Be Continued.)

THE SECRET TERROR.

The haunting fear of sickness and helplessness is the secret terror of the working man. Health is his capital. Kidney diseases sap a man's strength and vitality. They lessen his earning capacity. Foley Kidney Pills bring back health and strength by healing the disease. They are the best medicine made for kidney and bladder troubles. The genuine are in the yellow package. Refuse any substitute. For sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.

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ONE OF NEBRASKA'S WORST BLIZZARD

It Happened 25 Years Ago Today and Is No Doubt Remembered by Many of Our Citizens.

From Wednesday's Daily.

Twenty-five years ago today, on January 8, 1888, the state of Nebraska and the entire west was visited by one of the most severe blizzards that ever swept over this region, and the damage done was untold, especially in the western and northern portions of the state, where many were frozen or injured by the intense cold that prevailed for several days.

The blizzard struck this city about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, coming unexpectedly, as the weather had not been severe up to that hour, and all night and into the next day the storm held full sway. The suffering caused by the blizzard was intense and for days it was impossible to get into communication with many families in the thinly populated sections of the state and the loss of live stock exposed to the fury of the storm was one that is still remembered by the citizens who were compelled to undergo the rigors of the blizzard.

In the country districts many heroic acts were performed by the school teachers in an effort to protect their pupils from the blizzard, and one instance occurred in South Dakota where a teacher, at the cost of freezing herself, drove several miles and delivered the children safely to their homes, but she herself was badly injured by the cold.

This was one of the record-breaking storms and it is vividly recalled by thousands of residents of the state who had the misfortune to be caught in it. The cost of the storm in lives and loss to live stock will really never be fully counted.

"THE BUILDERS" MEET WITH MR. AND MRS. C. C. PARMELE

From Wednesday's Daily.

The young men of the Presbyterian church, known as "The Builders," met at the home of their former teacher, Mrs. C. C. Parmele, last evening. The purpose of the meeting was to reorganize and plan for some religious, educational and social work. Fifteen were present and all felt truly at home with Mr. and Mrs. Parmele. Mr. William Robertson, their present teacher, and Rev. M. W. Lormier, the pastor, were present. After a good time and refreshments the following committees were appointed: On place of meeting in the church, Ralph Larson, Joe Chapman and Rev. Lormier; on study subjects and literature, Reuben Saxon, Sam Windham and W. A. Robertson; on social events, Carl Schmidtman and Marion Dickson. The next meeting will be held at Mr. Robertson's law office next Tuesday evening to hear and consider reports of the committees. All young men who have belonged at any time or wish to join "The Builders" should be present at the next meeting.

FORMER PLATTSMOUTH BOY COMING TO PARMELE SOON

Especially interested will be centered around the performance of "A Bachelor's Honeymoon," at the Parmele theater Tuesday night, January 14, from the fact that V. O. Rankin, a former Plattsmouth boy, is in the cast, playing the part of a very busy man who "has no time to stand on ceremony in matters matrimonial." "Ora," as he is known to his numerous friends in Plattsmouth, is more than "making good," if newspaper criticisms are to be taken as a criterion, and his former associates will no doubt be pleased to see him behind the footlights.

Judgment Is Given.

In county court today, in the case of T. F. Naughton vs. Mrs. Maude Kaspar, seeking to recover judgment for goods sold and delivered, the defendant failed to appear in court and contest the claim and the court accordingly granted the judgment as prayed for.

When ordering flour ask your grocer to send you a sack of Forest Rose Flour—the best flour

Entertains W. R. C.

The W. R. C. held their social meeting yesterday after and were entertained in a most delightful manner by Mesdames Val Burkel and L. B. Egenberger at the home of Mrs. Burkel. This social meeting was not so largely attended as it would have been had the weather not been so bad. Most of the ladies brought their fancy work and spent some very pleasant moments—plying the needle, which was interspersed with other diversions calculated to make the occasion an enjoyable one. The hostesses had prepared an excellent luncheon, and this was served at the proper time. On their departure the ladies voted Mesdames Burkel and Egenberger splendid entertainers and were glad they had braved the storm.

LITTLE BABY IN HOSPITAL GETTING ALONG NICELY

From Wednesday's Daily.

Mrs. William Weber has just returned from South Omaha, where she has been visiting her daughter, Mrs. Frank Schille and family. The little babe of Mr. and Mrs. Schille, which has been in the hospital for some time, is getting along nicely and the prospects are good that the little one will gain the use of its limbs, which were in such bad shape. This news will be pleasing indeed to the friends of the family in this city and vicinity, who have been anxiously awaiting news from the little one. The Schille family have also just moved into their new home in the Magic City and now possess one of the neatest little cottages in that city.

THE BUSY WOMAN'S DAY.

It begins early, ends late, and is full of work. She often has kidney trouble without knowing it. Her back aches, and she is tired and worn out. Sleeps poorly, is nervous, no appetite. Her bladder gives her trouble, too. Foley Kidney Pills will cure all that and make her strong and well. They are the best medicine made for kidney and bladder disorders. For sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.



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