

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 I.

A Star Boarder.

At the end of a warm spring day in New York, James Stuart sat in the open window of his room on Washington square building. With a sense of deep joy he watched the trees shake the raindrops from their new emerald robes and the bright clouds that flitted the western sky melt into seas of purple and gold.

A buxom woman turned into Fourth street. "Straw—berries, straw—berries!" And the young lawyer laughed lazily. A host of tender memories stole into his heart from the quiet beds of the south. He had gone hunting with strawberries with Nan Primrose on the hills at home in North Carolina the day he first knew that he loved her.

How beautiful she was that day in the thin blue cotton dress which he had seen upon some figure in perfection. How well he remembered every detail of that remembrance over the red hills—the white sitting on the fence near the spring where they touched, calling to his name. As Nan passed closer on the old stile she saw the little brown bird slip from her nest in a clump of straw. Her head and soft eyes were fixed on it.

"Look!" Nan had whispered excitedly. "There's her nest!" He recalled distinctly his tremor of sympathetic excitement as her warm hand drew him to the spot. With peculiar vividness he remembered the extraordinary moisture of the rain of her hand trembling with eager interest as he counted the eggs—twenty beautiful. Not above all memories stood out one. As he bent close above her he caught for the first time in his life the delicate perfume of her dark rich hair and felt the thrill of its mystery.

"It's their little home, isn't it, Jim?" she exclaimed. "I hope I can build as snug a nest for you some day, Nan," he whispered gravely. And when she stood silent and blushing he made the fatal plunge. Looking straight into her dark eyes he had said:

"I love you, dear Nan!" As she stood very still, looking down in silence, with a throbbing heart and aching tenderness he dared to slip his arm around her waist and kiss the trembling lips. And then he noticed for the first time a deep red strawberry stain in the corner of her mouth. In spite of her struggles he laughingly insisted on kissing it away.

And then as a dreamy smile stole into her face she suddenly threw her arms around his neck in passionate tenderness, returning with interest every kiss he had taken. "Straw—berries!" The man looked up and drew his familiar cry. "Yes, yes," he shouted. "Two boxes. Put them on the stoop—and keep the change!" He threw the man a silver dollar, and the white teeth of the Italian signaled a smile of thanks as he bowed low, lifting his dirty cap in acknowledgment.

Nan was Nan's beauty merely a memory; it was the living presence, the source of the joy that filled his soul to overflowing today, for she had grown more beautiful than ever since her mother had moved to New York. He had always believed that the real woman in the back of Mrs. Primrose's shadow had been the determination to break his engagement and make a more brilliant marriage for Nan. And so when they met he followed.

him unbounded loyalty and admiration, but he had never been deceived. He knew that Mrs. Primrose had as she breathed—politely, but continuously—by her involuntary muscles. Day and night they had reached New York she had schemed for Nan. She had leased a house in the fashionable neighborhood of Gramercy park, and to meet the extraordinary expense she had begun a careful and systematic search for rich young men to whom she could let two floors.

Stuart was sure in his heart that Nan had never joined in those plans of her mother, though he had wished that she might have shown a little more strength in resisting them. Well, he was going to win at last, and the world was full of music! He had the largest surplus of life in store for Nan, something no true woman's heart could resist. He had succeeded after incredible difficulties in securing building a cottage by the sea in Brooklyn. Its lawn sloped to the water's edge, and a trim boat lay in the dock. Neither Mrs. Primrose nor Nan had the faintest suspicion of what he had been doing.

Tomorrow he would lead his sweet-heart into this holy of holies of life, the home love had built. He could see now the smile of tenderness break over her proud face, as he should hand her the keys and ask her to fix the wedding day.

His reveries were broken by a timid knock on the door and a faint call: "Jim?" "Come in!" he cried.

"You're not a bit glad to see me," the soft voice said. "I've been standing out there for ages." "Forgive me, something. I must have been dreaming," Stuart pleaded, leaning from his seat and seizing her hand. "I'm awfully glad to see you!"

"Then don't call me that name again," she pouted. "But isn't it beautiful?" "It would be if my hair wasn't red and I didn't have freckles and was older," she protested, looking away to hide her emotion.

"But your hair isn't quite red, Harry. It's just the color of the gold in honeycomb," he answered, gently touching her dilapidated locks. "Besides, those few little freckles are becoming on your pink and white skin, and you are nearly fifteen. Well, I'll just say, 'little pal,' how's that?" "That's better," she said, with a smile and sigh.

"Oh, Jim, I've been so dreadfully lonely since you were away! I declare, Jim, I'll die if you go away again. I just can't stand it!" Stuart smilingly took her hand.

"Lonely, Miss Chatterbox, when that big father of yours worships the very ground you walk on!" "Yes, I know he does, Jim, and I love him, too, but you've no idea how dreadfully still the house is when you are gone. Oh, say, I want you to be a real boarder and eat with us. Of course you will."

"That would be very nice, dear, but I'm sure your father would draw the line at a real boarder. I'd never have got this beautiful room with that big old-fashioned open fireplace in your home if it hadn't happened that our fathers fought each other in the war and became friends one day on a big battlefield. It's been a second home to me."

"Be our boarder and I'll make it a real home for you, Jim," she pleaded. "Ah—you'll be making a real home some day for one of those boys I saw at your birthday party—the tall, dark one, I think?" "No, He doesn't measure up to my standard."

"What ails him?" "He's a coward. My hero must be brave, for I'm timid." "Then it will be that fat blond fellow with a jolly laugh?" "No; he's a flatter. My prince, when he comes, must be truthful. It's so hard for me always to tell the truth."

"Then it will be that dreamy-looking one of fifteen you danced with twice?" "No, he's too frail. My hero must be strong, for I am weak. And he must have a big, noble ideal of life; for mine is very small—just a little home nest and a baby and the love of one man!"

"I'm not sure about that being such a very small ideal, either." "But, oh, my! I've forgotten what I came running home for. Papa sent me to ask you to please come down to the factory right away. He wants to see you on a very important matter. It

must be awfully important. He looked so worried. I don't think I ever saw him worried before." "I'll go at once," Stuart said.

He strode rapidly across town toward the Bowery, through Fourth street, wondering what could have happened to break the accustomed good humor of the doctor.

The doctor had long since retired from the practice of medicine as a profession and only used it now as his means of ministering to the wants of his neighbors. His neighbors were a large tribe, however, scattered all the way from the waters and dives of Water street to the stables and goat ranges of the upper Harlem. Stuart had never met a man so full of contagious health. He was a born physician. There was healing in the touch of his big hand. Healing light streamed from his brown eyes, and his iron gray beard sparkled with life. His presence in a sickroom seemed to fill it with waves of life, and his influence over the patients to whom he ministered was little short of hypnotic.

Stuart found the doctor standing at the door of his factory, shaking hands and chatting with his employees as they emerged from the building at the close of a day's work. A plain old-fashioned brick structure just off the Bowery was this factory, and across the front ran a weatherbeaten sign which had not been changed for more than fifty years: "Henry Woodman, Manufacturing Chemist."

The doctor's father had established the business fifty-two years ago, and the son, who bore his father's name, had succeeded to its management on his death, which occurred just after the return of the younger man with his victorious regiment from the late campaign with Grant before Petersburg and Appomattox.

He took Stuart's hand in his big, crumpled grip and handed him a letter, which he opened and read hastily: "No. 60 Gramercy Park. To Dr. Henry Woodman: Dear Sir—I must have an answer to the proposition of the American Chemical company before noon tomorrow. After that hour the matter will be definitely closed. JNO. C. CATHOUN RIVERS. APRIL 2, 1908."

Still looking at the letter he asked: "What does it mean?" "An ultimatum from the chemical trust. I'll explain to you when you've seen something of my work tonight. The first hour I want you to put in with me at the dispensary."

Stuart's eye rested on the embossed heading of the letter, "No. 60 Gramercy Park," and he slowly crushed the paper. It was the Primrose house, Nan's home. Her mother had succeeded.

Rivers, the new sensation in high finance, who had established as her star boarder in Stuart's absence; Rivers, the little rascal actor of poor white trash from the south who had suddenly become a millionaire.

His blood boiled with rage. As he turned and followed the doctor he laughed with sudden fierce determination.

The dispensary was Woodman's hobby. The old-fashioned drug store stood on a corner of the Bowery, and to the rear extension, which opened on the side street, he had established what he laughingly called his "life line," a free dispensary, where any man needing medicine or a doctor's advice could have it without charge if unable to pay.

For two hours Stuart saw him minister with patience and skill to the friendless and the poor; for such a cheerful word and the warm grasp of his big hand with the prescription. The young lawyer watched with curious interest the quickened step with which each one left. The medicine had begun to work before the prescription was filled.

When the last applicant had gone Stuart turned to the doctor: "And what is the proposition which the distinguished young head of the chemical trust has made you?" "That I sell my business to them at their own valuation and come into the trust or get off the earth."

"And you wish my advice?" "Yes." "What figure did he name?" "More than its cash value." "Then you will accept, of course?" "I would if there were not some things that can't be reckoned in terms of dollars and cents. If I take stock in the American Chemical company I am a party to their methods, an heir to their funds."

"Yet isn't the old regime of the small manufacturer and the retailer doomed? Isn't combination the new order of modern life? Will it pay you to fight a losing battle? Rivers is not a man of broad culture, but he is a very smart young gentleman."

"He's a contemptible little scamp," snapped the older man. "When I took him into my drug store six years ago he didn't have a change of clothes. Now he's a millionaire. How did he get it? He stole a formula I had used to relieve nervous headaches, mixed it in water with a little poisonous coloring matter, pushed it into the soda fountain trade, made his first half million, organized the American Chemical company and blossomed into a magnate. And now this little soda fountain pip threatens me with ruin unless I join his gang and help him rob my neighbors. My business is to heal the sick, not merely to make money. Thousands of children die at my very door every summer who could be saved by a single prescription if they could get it. That's the thought that grips me when I begin to figure the profits in this trade. I'm making a fair living. I don't want any more out of my neighbors. I've shown you some of them tonight."

"I'll never forget them," Stuart broke in.

"We used to cry over Uncle Tom's cabin," the doctor continued. "And yet there are more than 5,000,000 white people in America today who are the slaves of poverty, cruel and pitiless. The black slave always had food and shelter, clothes and medicine. My business is to heal the sick—mind you, shall I give it up to exploit them?"

"But would you not use your greater wealth for greater good if you joined the trust?" the lawyer asked. "Won't they make drugs more economically than you do and drive you to the wall at last? Isn't this new law of cooperation the law of progress—in brief, the law of God?"

"That remains to be proved. I don't believe it."

"Well, I do, and I think that if you fight it will be against the stars in their courses."

"I'm going to fight," was the firm response. "The law is on my side, isn't it?" "The written law, yes. But you are facing a bigger question than one of statutory law."

"So I am, boy, so I am. That's why I gave you a glimpse tonight of the world in which I live and work and dream."

"Rivers has put up to you a cold-blooded business proposition?" "Exactly. And there are things that can't be bought and sold. I am one of them." The stairway figure rose in simple dignity, and there was a deep tremor in his voice as he paused.

"But I'm keeping you. It's 9 o'clock and somebody's waiting—oh, boy." "Yes," Stuart answered apologetically. "I'm afraid I've not been of much use to you tonight."

The doctor bent closer, smiling: "I understand—of course. The angels are singing in your heart this evening, the old song of life that always makes the world new and young and beautiful. And yet—it couldn't be measured in terms of barter and sale, could it?" The doctor gripped his hand tenderly in parting.

The smile died from the younger man's face, and his answer was scarcely audible: "No."

(Continued next week)

LONG BEACH PUTS BAN ON LIQUOR

LONG BEACH, Nov. 5.—Long Beach voters have adopted what is said to be the most drastic prohibitory amendment in California. The vote was 3533 for and 1812 against. By far the greater number of the ballots in favor of the amendment were cast by women.

Under the new amendment which goes into effect Jan. 1 next, it will be unlawful to possess, sell, give away, distribute or in any manner whatsoever handle intoxicating liquors, except it be by physicians or druggists selling by physician's prescriptions.

The law states that any person taking a drink is equally guilty with the dispenser thereof and shall be subject to a fine of \$500.

One exception allows a householder to have liquor in his own home for his own use, or entertainment of friends, provided he does not sell it, but the next provision prohibits any carrier from bringing liquor into the city.

Hotels, restaurants, cafes, lodges, etc., are absolutely prohibited from selling or having liquor on their premises.

The new law gives officers the right to search without warrant and confiscation of property seized without trial.

Both sides, seemed highly elated that the amendment had carried. Opponents of the law stated it was certain to be declared unconstitutional, while proponents were equally sanguine that its every provision would be upheld.

WOMEN IN SIMPLE LIFE.

LONDON, Nov. 5.—English society women appear to be tending toward the simpler life and are taking a growing interest in domestic science. This movement is strikingly illustrated by an experiment just made by Lady Escher, whose son, the Hon. Oliver Brett, married Miss Heckscher, of New York. Lady Escher has arranged courses in cookery in which society women are eagerly enrolling themselves for daytime classes. In addition, Lady Escher has successfully started a series of first aid and ambulance classes, where many titled women are among the students.

Another phase of the simple life movement is the latest fad to wear the hair loose during the day. Of course it suits only those women whose tresses are naturally luxuriant, but anyway the custom is recommended to those who wish to be up to date, young and healthy. The fad was started by a prominent society hostess residing in Scotland, who not only wore her hair down, but induced every woman in the house party to follow her example.

Among them were two young girls who became engaged during the house party, the betrothals being attributed to their charming natural coiffure. Authorities in hair culture declare that the more loosely the hair is worn the better—'e its condition.

Lieut. and Mrs. Silingsby of Victoria, B. C., have been caught using a substituted male baby to obtain a great English fortune which was due them as soon as a male heir was born. A woman has found it impossible to get a license issued or to find a minister anywhere near San Francisco who will marry her to a Japanese.

Thirty-six soldiers and non-commissioned officers of the Twenty-Seventh, Coast Artillery Corps, at San Francisco, have been fined or disgraced for gambling.

President Taft has issued a proclamation setting forth tolls for the Panama Canal.

LIFEBOAT ORDER IS HYSTERICAL

The United States army transport Thomas passing through Honolulu in November on the way to the coast with only about half her usual complement of cabin and troop passengers, occasioned considerable comment in local shipping circles until it was learned that the new regulation governing the installation of lifeboats was responsible for the transport sailing over several thousand miles of Pacific half-filled with passengers, leaving hundreds behind at either coast of Philippine ports.

From Manila comes a wall with accent on the loud pedal owing to the mandate that compelled the quarter-master department to keep the list of travelers down to the minimum. Many were left behind with the sailing of the Thomas, and among them were short-time men who were going home for discharge. These must now await another transport. Emergency cases, however, and the sick had the right of way, and very justly, from Colonel L. W. Littell, quartermaster, and none were left.

Colonel Littell very naturally declined to be interviewed. But there were officers who expressed their opinions. For example, there was one thoroughly equipped to speak who said:

"This is all hysterics they are going into about this lifeboat business. Navy look at the vessels of the U. S. Navy carrying a crew of 1000 or more. They have no life boats for them. Go down to Cuba with transports full of troops in 1898—why who thought of life boats? If we had life boats, there would have to be at least 40 carrying 50 persons each. Where would be the room for these life boats? Moreover, who would lower them into the water? Who would man them? There are not ten petty officers about the Thomas who could take efficient command in a crisis. It all comes from this Titanic. Why did they not go to the root of the matter, and say no vessel taking this northerly course at such a time of icebergs should take passengers. In order to save 5 hours the Titanic took this chance. There was the trouble, not the life boats. Nine times out of ten even those in the life boats could not have survived in a nasty sea. It just happened to be calm or many more would have perished. In case disaster overtook the Thomas in a rough sea, with plenty of life boats they simply could not be handled expeditiously and efficiently. Yes, it's all hysterics. The chances of trouble are so slight with proper precaution. It's just like stopping people from carrying matches and smoking cigarettes because the great Baltimore fire was started by dropping a lit cigarette through an area grating on the street. But the fires, accidents and explosions are beyond number all on account of matches and cigarettes. Keep the Titanic in their proper paths and all this life boat fever will abate."

Meanwhile, the transports are being gradually filled up with additional life boats. Until they get a number equal to the passenger capacity, they will have to do like the Thomas—go back half full, leaving hundreds behind who might as well have been on their way.

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