THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY

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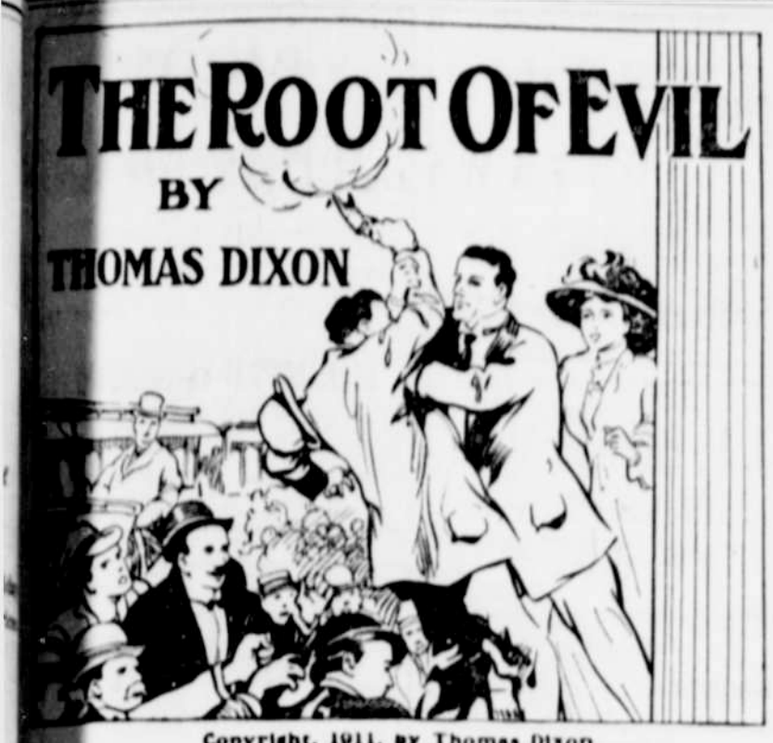

...urs come without protest. He ...d alone and the shadows were ...ly.

...stepped inside, touched a bell and ...d a cocktail. He placed the glass ...the little table by his side and ...at it. What an asinine act, this ...g of poison into the stomach to ...a malady of the soul! He smiled ...lly and suddenly recalled some... the doctor was fond of repeating. ...y boy, I'm rich so long as there ...illions of people in the world ... than I am."

...aps there was an antidote bet... this poison. If he could lift ...rtain for a single moment in an... life more hopeless and wretched ...his? It was worth trying.

...rose, left the liquor untouched ...a few minutes was treading his ...through the throngs of the lower ...de. When he reached the house ...ashington square he found Har...ding in the library.

..., Jim, dear! Where on earth ...you been for nearly two days?" ...ried. "I haven't seen you since ...edding"—

...n't you sing for me?" he broke in. ...right"— She paused and sud... clapped her hands. "I'll get my ...olin. You've never heard me ...that, have you? I've learned ...Down on the Swannee Ribber'... I know you'll like it."

...rt listened to her, entranced. ...ad heard that old song of the

...l me what you are thinking about, Jim."

...h a hundred times. But she was ...ng it tonight with a stange, new ...r. The girl leaned forward at ...and laid her friendly hand on his. ...had a trick of leaning forward like ... when talking to him that had al... amused Stuart.

...ell me what you are thinking ...t, Jim," she said, a smile flitting ...nd her tender, expressive eyes.

... was seeing a vision, little pal," ...egan slowly, "the vision of a gala ...t of grand opera. Broadway ...d with light, and I was fighting ...way through the throng at the en...ce to hear a great singer whose ... had begun to thrill the world. ...st, amid a hush of intense silence, ... came before the footlights, saw ... conquered. The crowd went mad ... enthusiasm. I lifted my hat and ...ed it on high until she saw. A ...tiful smile lighted her face, and ...ight over the heads of the people ...blew me a kiss."

...e tiniest frown clouded the girl's ...

..."Who was she, Jim?"

..."One who shall yet sing before kings ... princes. I call her 'Sunshine.' ... name is Harriet Woodman."

..."But, Jim, suppose I'm not ambi...s? Suppose I'm just a silly little ...ebody, who only wishes to be ...d? How old do you think a girl ...t be to really and deeply and truly ..., Jim?"

...uart's brow contracted, and he took ... hand in his, stroked it tenderly and ...led the beautiful lines as they ...ed from the firmly shaped wrist ... the rounded arm and gracefully ...ded body.

..."I'm afraid you've asked a bigger ...stion than I can answer, dear," he ..., with serious accent. "I've been ...dering lately whether the world hasn't lost the secret of happy mating and marrying. A more beautiful even life I have never seen than the one in the home of my childhood. Yet my mother was only fourteen and my father twenty-one when they were married. Now folks only allow themselves to marry in cold blood, calculating with accuracy their bank accounts. My mother had been married six months at your age, and yet here I sit on a pedestal and have the impudence to talk to you as a child"—

"But you're not impudent, Jim," she broke in eagerly, "and I understand."

"I'm beginning to wonder," Stuart continued, "whether nature made a mistake when she made woman as she is. I once knew a girl of fifteen to whom I believe life was the deepest tragedy or the highest joy of which her heart will ever be capable. Else why did the blood come and go so quickly in her cheeks?"

A sudden flush mantled Harriet's face, and she turned away that he might not see. Stuart's head bent low and rested between his hands.

"I loved such a little girl once, dear."

Harriet's face suddenly flushed with joy. It was too wonderful to be true, but it was true! And he had chosen this curious way to tell her. Her voice sank to the softest whisper as she bent closer:

"And you love her still, Jim?"

His head drooped lower as he sighed:

"I loved and lost her, little pal! She was married two days ago. She came to the great city, learned its ways and sold herself for gold."

The color had slowly returned to the little freckled face with its crown of golden hair, and the deep brown eyes overflowed with tears for just a moment. She brushed them away before he raised his head, so that he never knew.

"I'm so sorry, Jim," she said simply. "I understand now."

"It's very sweet to have you share this ugly secret of my life, little pal. It will help me."

"And you are sorry you ever knew her, Jim?"

"No, I'm not sorry. I've grown to see that there's just one thing in the world that's really big—big as God is big—the man who has attained a character. I haven't lived at all yet. I'm just beginning to see what it means to live. Until now I've thought only of myself. A new light has illumined the way. Now—I'm going to live for others. From today I shall ask nothing for myself, and I can never be disappointed again."

Harriet looked up quickly.

"Would it please you, Jim, if I should make a great singer?"

"More than I can tell you, dear. Your voice is a divine gift. I envy you its power."

Her eyes were shining with a great purpose.

"I know that it means years and years of patient work, but I'll do it," she cried.

When the last echo of his footstep in the hall above died away and his door had closed the little golden head bowed low in a passionate tender prayer:

"God help me to keep my secret and yet to love and help him always!"

CHAPTER VII.

An Old Perfume.

FOR nine years Stuart had refused to see or speak to Nan. He met Bivens as a matter of course, but always downtown during business hours or at one of his clubs. For the first year Nan had resented his attitude in angry pride and remained silent. And then she began to do a curious thing which had grown to be a part of his inmost life. For the past eight years she had written a brief daily diary recording her doings, thoughts and memories which she mailed to him every Sunday night. She asked no reply and he gave none. No names appeared in its story and no name was signed to the dainty sheets of paper which always bore the perfume of wild strawberries. But the man who read them in silence knew and understood.

The letter from her he held today was not an unsigned sheet of her diary. It was a direct, personal appeal, tender and beautiful in its sincerity. She begged him to forget the past because she needed his friendship and advice, and asked that he come to see her at once.

This letter was his first temptation to break the resolution by which he had lived for years.

He rose and paced the room with fury as he began to realize now desperate was his desire to go.

"Have I fought all these years for nothing?" he cried.

The thing that drew him with all but resistless power was the deeper meaning between the lines. He knew that each day the incompleteness of her life had been borne in upon her with crushing force. And yet he felt, by an instinct deeper than reason, that the day he returned from his exile and touched her hand would mark the beginning of a tragedy for both.

In the past nine years he had thrown his life away only to find it in greater power. The first year which he had given of unselfish devotion to the service of the people had been a failure, but at the end of four years he was nominated for district attorney and was swept into office by a large majority. The enforcement of justice ceased to be a joke and became a living faith.

His work had stirred the state to a nobler and cleaner civic life. During the past year he had become one of the foremost figures in American Democracy—the best loved and the most hated and feared man in public life in New York. He asked no favors; he sought no preferment.

The work on which he had just entered was an investigation before an unusually intelligent grand jury of the criminal acts of a group of the most daring and powerful financiers of the world. When he realized the magnitude of the task he had undertaken he at once put his house in order for the supreme effort. It was necessary that he give up every outside interest that might distract his attention from the greater task.

The one matter of grave importance to which he was giving his time outside his office was his position as advisory counsel to Dr. Woodman in his suit for damages against the chemical trust, which had been dragging its course through the courts for years. To his amazement he had just received an offer from Bivens' attorneys to compromise this suit for $100,000. He would of course advise the doctor to accept it immediately. He had never believed he could win a penny.

What could be Bivens' motive in making such an offer? It was impossible that the shrewd little president of the American Chemical company had anything to fear personally from this attack. His fortune now could not be less than $40,000,000, and the issue of such a suit as the one Woodman had brought and on which he had spent so much of his time and money was to Bivens a mere bagatelle.

It might be Nan—it must be! Her letter surely made the explanation reasonable. She knew this suit was an obstacle in the way of their meeting.

During the past winter she had become the sensation of the metropolis. Her wealth, her beauty, her palaces and her entertainments had made her the subject of endless comment. She had set a pace for extravagance which made the old leaders stand aghast. Her worldly wise mother had been dead for the past five years.

He was waiting the arrival of Woodman for a conference over Bivens' offer of compromise, and he dreaded the ordeal.

"So the little weasel has offered to compromise my suit for half the sum we named, eh?" the doctor asked in triumph.

"I assure you that if the case comes to its final test you are certain to lose."

"So you have said again and again, my boy," was the good natured reply, "but his sudden terror and this offer show that we have won already, and he knows it. Bivens has seen the handwriting on the wall. When the American people are once aroused their wrath will sweep the trusts into the bottomless pit."

"Bivens isn't worrying about the people or their wrath."

"Then it's time he began!" the doctor cried. "Mark my word, the day of the common people has dawned. This mud sill of the world has learned to read and write and begun to think. He will never be content again until he turns the world upside down."

"But you must consider this offer. You have too much at stake. Your factory has been closed for five years. Your store has been sold, your business ruined, and you are fighting to pay the interest on your debts. I've seen you growing poorer daily until you have turned your home into a lodging house and filled it with strangers."

"I've enjoyed knowing them. My sympathies have been made larger."

"But is this battle yours alone, doctor? You are but one among millions. You are trying to bear the burden of all. Have you counted the cost? Harriet's course in music will continue two years longer. The last year she must spend abroad. Her expenses will be great. This settlement is a generous one, no matter what Bivens' motive."

"I can't compromise with a man who has crushed my business by a conspiracy of organized blackmail."

"Oh, come, come, doctor, talk common sense! You were not ruined by blackmail. You were crushed by a law of progress as resistless as the law of gravity."

"If the law of gravity is unjust it will be abolished. I can't compromise with Bivens. I refuse his generosity. I'll take only what the last tribunal of the people shall give me—justice."

"The last tribunal of the people will give you nothing," the lawyer said emphatically.

"I'll stand or fall with it. I make common cause with the people. I know that Bivens is a power now. He chooses judges, defies the law, bribes legislatures and city councils and imagines that he rules the nation. But the Napoleons of finance today will be wearing stripes in Sing Sing tomorrow. A despotism of money cannot be fastened on the people of America. Only a few years ago a great millionaire who lived in a palace on Fifth avenue boldly said to a newspaper reporter, 'The public be d—d!' Times have changed. The millionaires have begun to buy the newspapers and beg for public favor. We are walking on the crust of a volcano of public wrath. I am content to live and fight for the right, win or lose, and play my little part in this mighty drama."

"I had hoped you were tired of fighting a losing battle."

"I'll fight this battle to a finish and I'll win. If God lives I'll win—I'm so sure of it, my boy."

The doctor paused and his eyes flashed.

"I'm so sure of it that I'm not only going to refuse this bribe from Bivens, but my answer will be a harder blow. I'm going to begin another bigger and more important suit for the dissolution of the American chemical trust."

Stuart slipped his arm around the older man with a movement of instinctive tenderness.

"Look here, doctor, I've lived in your home for fourteen years and I've grown to love you as my own father. You must listen to me now. I can give no time to your suit. I am just entering on a great struggle for the people. Tremendous issues are at stake."

"You'll go down a wreck if you fail."

"Perhaps, but it's my duty."

"Good boy!" the older man cried, seizing Stuart's hand. "You can't fail. That's why I'm going to risk all in my fight."

"But the cases are not the same."

"No, I'm old and played out—my life's sands are nearly run. I haven't much to risk—but such as I have I offer it freely to God and my country. I envy you the opportunity to make a greater sacrifice—and you advise me to compromise for a paltry sum of money a righteous cause merely to save my own skin. I'm proud of you—proud that you live in my house, proud that I've known and loved you, and tried to teach you the joy and the foolishness of throwing your life away!"

With a wave of his hand the stalwart figure of the old man passed out and left him brooding in sorrowful silence.

He seized his pen at last, set his face like flint and resolutely wrote his answer:

Dear Nan—Your letter is very kind. I'll be honest and tell you that it has stirred memories I've tried to kill and can't. I hate to say no, but I must. Sincerely,

JIM.

On the night following Stuart worked late in his office developing his great case. He was disappointed in the final showing of the evidence to be presented to the grand jury. His facts were not as strong as he expected to make them.

At 10 o'clock he quit work and hurried home to refresh his tired spirit with Harriet's music. As he hurried up the steps he nearly collided with a handsome young fellow just emerging from the door. He was dressed well, and he had evidently been calling on some one—perhaps on Harriet!

Stuart let himself in softly and started at the sight of Harriet's smiling face in the parlor doorway. His worst fears were confirmed. She was dressed in a dainty evening gown and had evidently enjoyed her visitor.

Stuart pretended not to notice the fact and asked her to play. As he sat dreaming and watching the rhythmic movement of her delicate hands he began to realize at last that his little pal, stub nosed, red haired and freckled, had silently and mysteriously grown into a charming woman. She was twenty-four now, in the pride and glory of perfect young womanhood, and yet she had no lovers. He wondered why. Her music, of course. It had been the one absorbing passion of life. And her eyes had always sparkled with deep joy at his slightest word of praise. For the first time it had occurred to him as an immediate possibility that she might marry and their lives drift apart.

A sweet comradeship had grown between them. He resented the idea of a break in their relations. Yet why should he? What rights had he over her life? Absolutely none, of course. Who was that fellow? Where had he met him before?

He rose with a sudden frown. Sure as fate—the very boy—the tall, dreamy looking youngster who danced with her so many times that night ten years ago at her birthday party! She said he was too frail—that her prince must be strong. Well, confound him, he had got strong.

Stuart said, with a studied indifference:

"Tell me, little pal, who was that tall young fellow I ran into on the steps?"

"Why, don't you remember my frail young admirer of long ago?"

"Do you love him, girlie?"

"When I was very, very young, I thought I did. It makes me laugh now. It's wonderful how much we can outgrow, isn't it?"

"I just don't like him, and I don't want you to like him. You see, little pal, I'm your guardian."

"Are you?"

"Yes. And I'm giving you due legal notice that you have no right to marry without my consent—you promise to make me your confidant?"

A soft laugh, full of tenderness and joy, came from the girl as she turned her eyes upward for the first time:

"All right, guardie, I'll confer with you on that occasion."

(To be Continued)

After a man passes 50 he would rather gossip about wickedness than engage in it.

Believing foolish lies is almost as bad as telling them.