

THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY THOMAS DIXON

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BOOK II—THE ROOT. CHAPTER XVIII.

The Dance of Death.

A flush of excited pleasure overspread Stuart's face as he led his beautiful hostess to the dining room. He paused at the entrance with an exclamation of surprise: "Well, of all the wonders!" "But you can't stop yet!" whispered Nan, drawing him gently on. Apparently on entering the banquet hall they were stepping outdoors into an enchanted pine forest. The walls were completely hidden by painted scenery representing the mountains of North Carolina. Into a forest, trees and shrubbery were melting imperceptibly into the scenery on the walls, and mocking birds were singing in cages hidden high among the boughs of the trees. Stuart gazed at the great panorama painting on the wall, fascinated. "Why, Nan," he gasped, "that's a view of the river hills at home where you and I used to roam."

"Well, if you hadn't recognized it, I should never have forgiven you." "How on earth did your artists get it so perfectly?" "I sent them, of course. He did it in three weeks. There's something else in that picture I thought you'd see, too."

"Isn't it now?" Stuart laughed, as they reached the head of the central table. A boy and girl sitting on a fence looking down at the river in the valley below.

"The very spot we found that quail's nest, you remember. You see I've begun to rebuild your dream-life to-night, Jim?"

"It's marvelous," he answered slowly. "And there in the distance look those ranges of our old mountains until their dim blue peaks are lost in the clouds. These tables seem spread for a picnic in the woods on the hills."

"Are you pleased with my fantasy?" she asked with quiet emotion. "Pleased is not the word for it," he replied quickly. "I'm overwhelmed. I never thought you so sentimental."

"Perhaps I'm not, perhaps I've only done this to please a friend. Do you begin to feel at home in this little spot I've brought back by magic tonight from your youth?"

"I'm afraid I'll wake and find I'm dreaming." "Stuart gazed on the magnificent set table with increasing astonishment. Winding in and out among the solid silver candelabra a tiny stream of crystal water flowed among miniature trees and flowers on its banks. The flowers were all blooming orchids of rarest coloring and weirdly fantastic shapes.

"Those hideous little flowers cost a small fortune," Nan exclaimed. "I'm ashamed to tell you how much—I don't like them myself, I'm frank to say so to you. But they are the rage. I prefer those gorgeous bowers of American beauty roses, the canopies to shade my guests from the rays of my artificial sun shining through the trees. You see how skillfully the artist has lighted the place. It looks exactly like a sunset in a pine forest."

Stuart noted that the service was all made for this occasion, silver, cut glass and china. Each piece had stamped or etched in it the coat of arms of his native state, "Peace and Plenty."

"And you've done all this in six weeks?" "It's incredible." "Money can do anything, Jim," she cried under her breath. "It's the fairy queen of our childhood and the God of our ancient faith come down to earth. You really like my banquet hall?"

"More than I can tell you." "Nan looked at him keenly. "The world will say tomorrow morning that I have given this lavish entertainment for vulgar display. In a sense it's true. I am trying to eclipse your face when you looked at that painting of our old hills. I would have given five times as much at any moment the past ten years to have known that you didn't hate me."

"You know it now." "Yes," she answered tenderly. "You have said so with your lips before, and you mean it. You are your old handsome self tonight."

"Apart from the charm of Nan's presence Stuart found the dinner itself a stupid affair, so solemnly stupid that it became funny. In all the magnificently dressed crowd he looked in vain for a man or woman of real intellectual distinction. He saw only money, money, money! There was one exception—the titled degenerates from the Old World, hovering around the richest and silliest women, their eyes glittering with eager avarice for a chance at their millions. It seemed a joke that any sane American mother could conceive the idea of selling her daughter to these wretches in exchange for the empty sham of a worn-out dishonored title. But Nan's tables, there could be no question about the quality of the dinner set before them. When the Roman empire was staggering to its ruin amid the extravagances of its corrupt emperors, not one of them ever gave a banquet which approximated half the cost of this. The best old Nero ever did with his flowers was to cover

her cheeks flushed, and her lips parted in a tender smile. "Well?" she asked in low tones. "You're a magician, Nan," he answered with enthusiasm. "Come, I'm going to honor you by sitting out the next two dances, and if you're very good, perhaps more."

When she had seated herself by his side under a bower of roses he was very still for a moment. She looked up with a quizzical expression and said: "A penny for your thoughts? Am I very wicked after all?"

Stuart crossed his long legs and looked at her admiringly. "I'll be honest," he said with deliberation. "I don't think I have ever seen anything more dazzlingly beautiful than your banquet and ball, except—"

"Except what?" she interrupted sharply. "Except the woman who conceived and executed it."

"That's better, but you must give the credit to the artists I hired." "In a measure, yes; but their plans were submitted for my approval. I was just wondering whether your imagination was vivid enough to have dreamed half the splendors of such a life when you turned from the little cottage I built for you."

A look of pain clouded the fair face and she lifted her jeweled hand. "Please, Jim, I'd like to forget some things." "And you haven't forgotten?"

She looked straight into his eyes and answered in even tones. "No." He studied the magnificent pearl necklace that circled her throat. Its purchase had made a sensation in New York. The time Bivens had bought it at an auction in Paris, bidding successfully against the agents of the Tzar of Russia. Never had he seen Nan so ravishing. Magnificent gowns, soft laces, and jewelry were made to be worn by such women. There was an eternal fitness in the whole scheme of things in which this glorious creature of the senses lived and moved and had her being.

"I suppose," he began musingly, "I ought, as a patriotic citizen of the Republic, to condemn the enormous waste of wealth you have made here tonight."

"Won't you let me know when your father has seen Mr. Bivens? If this conference doesn't go well I may be of some help."

"All right, I'll let you know." The lights were suddenly turned lower, approaching total darkness. The attendants noiselessly removed the temporary stage and cleared the great room for the dancers.

As the chimes struck the hour of midnight, the skeleton heads slowly began to appear peeping from the shadows of the arched ceiling and from every nook and corner of the huge cornice and pillars. Draperies of filmy crepe flowing gently in the breeze were lighted by sulphurous-hued electric rays from the balconies. Tiny electric lights blinked in every skeleton's sunken eyes and behind each grinning row of teeth.

Again the chatter of fools was suddenly hushed. The orchestra began a weird piece of music that sent the cold chill rippling down Stuart's spine and made him gripped like death. "Heaven!" she whispered. "Did you ever dream of such a nightmare?"

Suddenly two white figures drew aside the heavy curtains in the archway and the dancers marched into the sombre room. The men were dressed as shrouded skeletons, and the women as worms. The men wore a light filmy gray robe on which skull-like artists had painted on four sides in deep colors the picture of a human skeleton.

The women wore a curious light brown and white fabric which was drawn over the entire body and gave to each figure the appearance of a huge caterpillar. From the high perch of a balcony a sepulchral voice cried: "The Dance of Death and the Worm!"

The strange figures began to move slowly across the polished floor to the strains of a ghost-like waltz. From the corners of the high balconies strange lights flashed, developing in hideous outlines the phosphorescent colors of the skeletons and long, funny, exaggerated lines of the accompany-worms. The effect was thrilling. Every sound save the soft swish of the ghostly robes and the delicate footfall of the ghastly feet ceased. Not a whisper from an aged degenerate or a yelp from a silly woman broke the death-like stillness.

Suddenly the music stopped with a crash. Each ghostly couple, skeleton and worm, stood motionless. The silvery note of a trumpet called from the sky. The blinking eyes of the death-heads in the ceiling gazed at the dancers moving uneasily in the shadows. The trumpet pealed a second signal—the darkness fled, and the great room suddenly blazed with ten thousand electric lights. The orchestra struck the first notes of a thrilling waltz, and presto!—in an instant the women appeared in all the splendor of the most gorgeous gowns, their bare arms and necks flashing with priceless jewels and each man, but a moment ago a hideous skeleton, bowed before her in immaculate evening clothes.

Just at the moment each caterpillar threw her attendant a steady glare from the four corners of the vast room. Released thousands of gorgeously tinted butterflies, imported from the tropics for the occasion. As the dancers glided through the dazzling creases these wonderfully colored creatures fluttered about them in myriads, darting and circling in every direction among the flowers and lights until the room seemed a veritable fairyland.

A burst of applause swept the crowded floor of the leader. Stuart nodded and clapped his hands with enthusiasm. "A more marvellous transformation scene could scarcely be imagined."

When Nan had passed he turned to speak to Harriet and she had gone. He felt a moment's pain at the disappointment, but before he could find her the music ceased, the dancers paused and the swaying of the crowd made his search vain.

A soft hand was suddenly laid on his arm, and he turned to confront Nan, her eyes flashing with triumph.

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Miscellaneous Reading.

THE SCHOOL BOOK QUESTION.

Appointive Members of the Board Make Statement to the Public. Statement of the appointive members of the state board of education concerning the adoption of text books: In view of the misunderstanding and erroneous statements that have grown out of the recent protest issued by State Superintendent Swearingin in reference to the late adoption of text books, the undersigned appointive members of the state board of education submit to the people of South Carolina the following statement of the reasons for the adoption of the new books:

The undersigned members of the board have all of them been for many years intimately connected with the schools. Most of them are teachers of many years' experience, ranging through nearly every grade and every kind of school.

Special Preparation for the Adoption. Some of the members of the board have had this adoption in view for some three months before the adoption, the members were called upon to spend most of their time, not given to them by the state, in the examination of books and the discussion of them with agents.

The undersigned members submit, therefore, that with this experience and this study of the books, it is reasonable to assume that our final judgment as to the merits of the books submitted deserves the same consideration, and is just as likely to be correct as that of the members of the board, and that where a majority of them were agreed upon a particular book, it is just as rational, as well as democratic, to assume that the majority opinion was more likely correct than that of Mr. Swearingin or that of any minority which included Mr. Swearingin.

The So-called Secret Ballot. It is unthinkable that Superintendent Swearingin intended in the slightest degree to impugn the integrity of the members of the board, either individually or collectively. Indeed we have his own construction has been put upon his protest and especially upon his reference to a secret ballot. Hence we are surprised to find that the members of the board, either individually or collectively, intended to publish a disclaimer of any such intention.

This ballot, it is to be said, was not secret in the sense that the members of the board were to vote in secret. It was a ballot in the sense that the members of the board were to vote in secret. It was a ballot in the sense that the members of the board were to vote in secret.

On July 13, 1911, the board adopted the following resolution: "Resolved, That the undersigned members of the board do hereby certify that they have examined the books submitted to them and have found them to be the best available for the schools of this state."

Change of Text Books. In reference to the change of text books, it must be remembered that the law itself anticipates the necessity for change in providing for a periodic and economical cost. It will have a stimulating effect upon native enterprise and may make the industry more steadily and profitably and of far more benefit to other industries both at home and abroad. It is much more important that the supply of this material should be increased than that there should sometimes be a large profit to the manufacturer.

A Freshie—The baby across the car caught the eye of the bilubulous individual opposite and let out a shrill yell of alarm. The bilubulous person leaned forward. "Baby attendin' college, ma'am?" he asked.

"No, sir," the mother sharply replied, and the baby yelled again. "Thass ver' funny," said the inebriated one. There's certainly no class to that yell.

Most of those who have made comparisons between the old and new books have fallen into serious and misleading errors. Not only have these books paid their

Primer and Reader.

In the case of the primer, although the one adopted cost 13 cents more than the other, it cost only 6.70 words of reading matter, whereas the old book contains only 1,300. Thus the old primer, pasteboard bound, cheaply and poorly illustrated, gave only 110 words of reading matter for one cent, while the new primer, cloth bound, fully and beautifully illustrated, gives 1,300 words of reading matter for one cent. The judgment of the school world upon this new book may be inferred from the fact that it has been adopted in eleven states. So also, are the readers adopted superior to those discarded.

Reading is the most important subject taught in the school, because the child's progress in all other studies depends upon his ability to read. That such a book should be adopted for the child to gain this power in the shortest possible time is in the end the best and the cheapest. Such a series of binders, however, is the board claim to have adopted.

Geographies. In the comparison between the old and the adopted primary geographies, the new book was found to be 100 per cent more than the old. The old book was thrown out as being confoundedly unsuitable and was not supported by a single member of the board. The board was limited to a choice between the new primary Frye at 40 cents and the new primary Maury at 45 cents—a difference of 5 cents and not of 12 cents, as alleged.

Physiologies. It is equally unfair and misleading to compare the cost of the three books of physiology adopted. The third and added book is to be used as an elective science in one of the high schools. The board's response to the most marked movement of the day—the call for the education of the people in health laws—those adopted are so far ahead of the old books that there is no comparison. The primer of sanitation alone is the best in the home of every man in South Carolina and read and even partly followed would save in one year more money than the adoption will cost.

Arithmetics. The comparison between the old and the new arithmetics is an instance of gross injustice done by the board. The following is the statement given: Cost of old arithmetic, elementary, \$0.22; Cost of new arithmetic, elementary, \$0.40; Total, \$0.62; Cost of the new arithmetic, elementary, \$0.32; Cost of new arithmetic, intermediate, \$0.26; Cost of new arithmetic, advanced, \$0.41; Total, \$1.09.

Making the apparent increase on arithmetics 47 cents. As a matter of fact, the new advanced arithmetic is 10 cents more than the old. The cost of the new arithmetic, elementary, is 50 per cent less than the old. The cost of the new arithmetic, intermediate, is 20 per cent less than the old. The cost of the new arithmetic, advanced, is 10 per cent less than the old.

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price in actual use, but they have an actual value of 50 per cent of their cost when they are used. The alleged loss to \$50,000. If this loss be distributed over a period of five years—a legitimate distribution, inasmuch as the assumed loss covers the period—this makes a so-called loss of \$10,000 a year. This leaves a so-called loss of \$10,000 a year to be distributed among the nine new and more children in the schools, or about 4-2 cents apiece.

Thus, at this slight additional expense of 4-2 cents, each child in the state would be supplied with new and better books. Surely this is gain and not loss. For it is a serious wrong to put into his hands an old, defaced and filthy book to read.

We have gone into these figures on the assumption that the statement that 80 per cent of the books have been discarded is correct. The correctness of the statement we do not admit. Exclusive of copy books and drawing books, the total cost of the books is \$1,300,000. The cost of the books is \$1,300,000. The cost of the books is \$1,300,000.

Have No Apology. The foregoing is a statement of the essential facts of the adoption of the preliminary preparation of the members of the board and of the fair and honest manner in which the cost was involved. The undersigned appointive members have no apology to make for the adoption of the books. They entered upon the task with only one purpose—to further the best interest of the schools of this state. They brought to bear upon this task their best experience, their untiring toil of months, and the best of their judgment. They believe that with due allowance for the fallibility of human judgment they have done their duty.

Condition Below Average. The corn acreage is the largest ever recorded in the history of the crop. It indicates a production of about 5 per cent less than last year's record crop. The condition of the crop is below average. The condition of the crop is below average. The condition of the crop is below average.

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