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Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambroch Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Hanrieder Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma Verne Hägele Hauff Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauptmann Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Baudelaire
Damaschke Descartes Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Rilke George
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Bebel Proust
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Herodot
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Chamberlain Langbein Gryphius
Brentano Claudius Schiller Lafontaine Kralik Iffland Sokrates
Strachwitz Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Schilling Kraus
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
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Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelnatz
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A Fool There Was

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Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Porter Emerson Browne

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-5108-9

www.tredition.com

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A FOOL THERE WAS

BY

PORTER EMERSON BROWNE

"A Fool there was and he made his prayer –
 (Even as you and I.)
 To a rag and a bone and a hank of hair –
(We called her the woman who did not care)
 But the fool he called her his lady fair –
 (Even as you and I.)"

ILLUSTRATED

BY

EDMUND MAGRATH AND W. W. FAWCETT

1909

TO ROBERT HILLIARD.

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

"Beautiful, gloriously beautiful in her strange, weird dark beauty"

"Bye little sweetheart"

"I do forgive – forgive and understand"

"Can't you find in that dead thing you call a heart just one shred of pity?"

CHAPTER ONE.

OF CERTAIN PEOPLE.

To begin a story of this kind at the beginning is hard; for when the beginning may have been, no man knows. Perhaps it was a hundred years ago—perhaps a thousand—perhaps ten thousand; and it may well be, yet longer ago, even, than that. Yet it can be told that John Schuyler came from a long line of clean-bodied, clean-souled, clear-eyed, clear-headed ancestors; and from these he had inherited cleanness of body and of soul, clearness of eye and of head. They had given him all that lay in their power to give, had these honest, impassive Dutchmen and—women—these broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped English; they had amalgamated for him their virtues, and they had eradicated for him their vices; they had cultivated for him those things of theirs that it were well to cultivate; and they had plucked ruthlessly from the gardens of heredity the weeds and tares that might have grown to check his growth. And, doing this, they had died, one after another, knowing not what they had done—knowing not why they had done it—knowing not what the result would be—doing that which they did because it was in them to do it; and for no other reason save that. For so it is of this world.

First, then, it is for you to know these things that I have told. Secondly, it is for you to realize that there are things in this world of which we know but little; that there are other things of which we may sometime learn; that there are infinitely more things that not even the wisest of us may ever begin to understand. God chooses to tell us nothing of that which comes after; and of that which comes therein He lets us learn just enough that we may know how much more there is.

And knowing and realizing these things, we may but go back as far toward the beginning as it is in our power to see.

* * * * *

Before the restless, never-ebbing of the tides of business had overwhelmed it with a seething flood of watered stocks and liquid dollars, there stood on a corner of Fifth Avenue and one of its lower tributaries, a stern, heavy-portalled mansion of brownstone. It was a house not forbidding, but dignified. Its broad, plate-glass windows gazed out in silent, impassive tolerance upon the streams of social life that passed it of pleasant afternoons in Spring and Fall—on sleet-swept nights of winter when 'bus and brougham brought from theatre and opera their little groups and pairs of fur-clad women and high-hatted men. It was a big house—big in size—big in atmosphere—big in manner.

At its left there was another big house, much like the one that I have already described. It was possibly a bit more homelike—a bit less dignified; for, possibly, its windows were a trifle more narrow, and its portal a little less imposing. And across from that there lay a smaller house—a house of brick; and this was much more inviting than either of the others; for one might step from the very sidewalk within the broad hall, hung with two very, very old portraits and lighted warmly with shades of dull yellow, and of pink.

In the first of the big houses there lived a boy; and in the second there lived another boy; and across, in the little house of brick, there lived a girl. Of course, in these houses there dwelt, as well, other people.

Of these was John Stuyvesant Schuyler, who, with his wife Gretchen, lived in the big house on the corner, was a man silent, serious. He lived intent, honest, upright. He seldom laughed; though when he did, there came at the corners of mouth and eye, tiny, tell-tale lines which showed that beneath seriousness and silence, lay a fund of humor unharmed by continual drain. He was a tall man, broad-shouldered, straight-backed. And to that which had been left him, he added, in health, in mind, and in money, and he added wisely and well, and never at unjust expense to anyone.

His wife was much as he in trait and habit. She, too, was silent, serious, intent. Of her time, of her effort, of herself, she gave freely wherein it were well to give. In her youth, she had been a beautiful girl; as a woman, she was still beautiful; and her husband and her

son were very proud of her, though the one was fifty-five, and the other but twelve.

In the big house next door, there lived Thomas Cathcart Blake. He, too, had a wife, and one child—a boy. And of John Stuyvesant Schuyler he was very fond—even as Mrs. Thomas Cathcart Blake was fond of Mrs. John Stuyvesant Schuyler; and even as Tom Blake, the son of the one, was fond of Jack Schuyler, the son of the other. Blake, the elder, was a man rotund of figure, ruddy of complexion, great of heart. He laughed much; for he enjoyed much. He gave away much more than he could make; and he laughed about it. His wife laughed with him. And really it made no difference; for they had more for themselves than they could ever use. Of course, you know, it is true that many people have more than they can ever use; but few ever think so.

In the little, warm house of red brick, across the street, lived Kathryn Blair, and with her another Kathryn Blair, who was as much like the other as it is possible for six to be like thirty. They both had wide, violet eyes and sensitive, red lips, and very white teeth and lithe, slender bodies. And they were both loved very much by everyone; and everyone said what a shame it was that he or she hadn't put his or her foot down *hard* and made Jimmy Blair stay at home instead of letting him go down into that unpronounceable Central American place and get killed in an opera bouffe revolution with which he had absolutely nothing to do except that he couldn't stand idly by and see women and little children shot. Still, it was such a blessing to Kate that she had little Kate to help her bear it all. And she had enough money, too; no one seemed to know how; for Jimmy Blair was a reckless giver and a poor business man. But John Stuyvesant Schuyler and Thomas Cathcart Blake had been executors. And that explained much to those who knew; for once every two or three months, these two men, so different and yet so alike, would stalk solemnly, side by side, across the street and, still solemnly, still side by side, would inform the violet-eyed widow of Jimmy Blair that the investments that her husband had made for her had been very fortunate and that there was in the bank for her the sum of many more hundreds of dollars than poor Jimmy himself could have made in as many years. And she, deifying the man who had been her husband, endowing him with the abilities of a Mor-

gan, a Root and a Rothschild, would believe all that they said; and she would tell the neighbors; and they, being good neighbors, would nod, seriously, unsmilingly. "Jimmy Blair was a wonderful, wonderful man," they would say. And the violet eyes would grow soft and dim, and the sensitive lips tremble a little, and the prettily-poised head would sink forward upon the rounded breast. And she was less unhappy; for when others love the one you love, even though that one be gone, it makes the pain far, far less. Also, it is a great blessing to have about one those who know enough not to know too much.

So it was of the three houses, and of those who lived therein.

[Illustration]

CHAPTER TWO.

OF CERTAIN OTHER PEOPLE.

In the littleness of things, it so happened that at a time when John Stuyvesant Schuyler and Thomas Cathcart Blake, serious, solemn, side-by-side, were telling the widow of Jimmy Blair that the Tidewater Southern Railroad, in which her husband had largely interested himself before his death, had declared an extra dividend that had enabled them that day to deposit to her credit in the bank the sum of four thousand two hundred and eighty-one dollars and seventy-three cents, in a little hut on the black Breton coast a woman lay dying.

It was a bare hut, and noisome. In it it were perhaps better to die than to live; and yet that one might not say. From before it one might gaze upon league upon league of sullen sea, stretching to where, far in the dim distance, lay the curve of the horizon upbearing the gray dome of the sky.

Inside the hovel there was a smoke-stained fireplace beside which was strewn an armful of faggots. There was before it a number of broken and greasy dishes, filled with fragments of food. And all about on the floor lay the litter of the sick-room.

The dying woman was stretched inert, moveless, upon a rough bed of rope and rush. Perhaps she had been pretty once, in an animal way. She was not now. Lips that doubtless had been red were white and drawn in pain; and there was blood upon them, where white, even teeth had bitten in the way that those who suffer have of trying to hide a greater suffering beneath a lesser. The eyes, deep and dark, were dull and half-hidden by their blue, transparent lids. And the cheeks were sunken, and ghastly—touched by the hand of death.

A heavy, course-featured woman, thin hair streaked with gray, flat-backed, flat-breasted, sat beside the rude bed, silent, motionless, awaiting an end that she had so often watched in the sullen ferocity that is of beast rather than of man. And on her lap lay a little, pink, puling thing that whimpered and twisted weakly—a little, naked, thing half covered by roughly-cast sacking.

The tiny, twisting thing whimpered. The woman beside the bed held it, waiting. The woman on the bed moaned a little, and the glaze upon the eyes grew more thick. And that was all.

There came to the ears that were not too new come or too far gone to hear, the sound of hoof beats upon the turf. They came nearer.... They stopped. Came the sound of spurred heels striking upon the trodden dirt without the door.... There stood in the opening the figure of a man. He was tall, and well-proportioned, though if anything a bit too slender—a bit too graceful; and he was, if anything, a bit too well groomed. He had light hair, and moustache. He had cold eyes that smiled; cold lips that smiled. He stood in the doorway, trying to accustom his eyes to the gloom within, the while playing a deft tattoo upon his booted calf with light crop that he carried in his right hand.

"Well?" he said, at length, in the French that is of Paris. "Well? ... What is all this?"

The tiny thing whimpered. The woman upon the bed moaned a little, weakly. She, who sat beside it, looked up, eyes aflame. She said no word.

The man in the doorway took a step forward, entering. He was still smiling. He looked about him; and then he continued:

"Sick, eh? ... Dying? ... And that thing that you have in your — *Ma foi!* A baby, eh?" He laughed, aloud. The broken peals came back to him from the sodden, smoke-stained rafters. "Strange that I should have come to-day.... A baby!" He laughed again, modulatedly. And then, with an air of sympathetic commiseration he said to the gray-haired old woman with the eyes of fire:

"Too bad that your daughter is not married—since she, I presume, is the mother! ... And the happy father?—he is—?" He stopped, waiting, smilingly.

The fierce, blazing eyes were set full upon his own. She said, in the patois that was of her and hers:

"You ask that? ... You?"

He answered, evenly.

"Yes. I ask that. Even I."

Quickly, with the agility of the brute, she thrust toward him the little, puling thing that lay upon her lap.

"Look, then," she said, in deep, grating tones.

He leaned forward, crossing his hands behind him, and looked. The crop, held in his right hand, tapped lightly against his booted left leg. The woman waited. At length he stood erect. He shook his head and smiled.

"Babies are all alike," he remarked, easily. "Red, dirty, unformed, no hair.... This is a little redder, a little more dirty, a little more unformed; it has a little less hair.... Beyond that, *quoi?*"

The shrunken lips of the old woman set tightly; the eyes flared.

"You dare—!" she began. And then: "It is your mouth—your chin. The nose is yours. The eyes they shall be hers." She nodded her

head in the direction of the dying mother upon the bed. "And perhaps, some day—" She did not finish. She settled the baby back again upon her knees and sat, waiting.

The man, still smiling, gazed up the woman on the bed.

"Dead?" he queried, with a lift of the brows.

She did not answer. He bent over the prostrate form; then again stood erect. He shrugged his shoulders.

He turned again to the shrivelled woman on the chair.

"You have named it?" he asked. "You have named—our child?"

Still she did not answer.

"It were not improper," he continued, smilingly, half-musingly, "for a father to venture a suggestion anent a name.... *Eh bien*, then. I should wish that the baby be known as" he stopped for a moment, thinking, the while lightly tapping booted leg with the tip of his crop. "I should suggest," he repeated, "calling her Rien. It is an appropriate name, Rien. It is not a bad name; in fact, it is rather a pretty name.... Rien.... Rien.... Rien...." He repeated it several times. "Yes, it seems to me that that is an excellent name.... We will, then, consider her name Rien." He laughed once more.

"Because of certain reasons," he went on, "I'm afraid that my paternal duties must cease with the naming of our child."

He turned to the dying woman upon the bed.

"Bon voyage, mam'selle—eh, pardon, madame," he said. He lifted his hat, bowing. To the old woman he turned.

"To you—" he began; she interrupted.

"Her eyes, they will be her mother's," she mumbled, sullenly.

"Which will be well," he smiled. "Her mother had beautiful eyes—wonderful eyes."

"More wonderful than you knew," muttered the old woman. "Had you come a day sooner—"

Still he smiled.

"But I didn't," he replied; and then nodding toward the whimpering thing that the woman held:

"You should guard it well. There is of the best blood of France in its veins." His lips curled, whimsically. "'Tis strange, that, *n'es-ce pas?* In that small piece of carrion which you hold there upon your knees runs the blood of three kings." Again he laughed, musically. He turned.

He had not seen her stoop. The long-bladed knife struck him in the arm, piercing flesh and vein and sinew, sticking there. Slowly he plucked it forth, and turned to her, still smiling.

"You are old, madame. Do not apologize; it was not your fault."

He took the knife delicately by the tip and with a little flip sent it spinning through the air and over the edge of the cliff. And he was gone.

The woman, shrivelled, gray-haired, sinking back in her chair, sat silent. The puling thing upon her knees whimpered. The dying woman upon the rude bed of rope and rush moaned. And that was all.

[Illustration]

CHAPTER THREE.

TWO BOYS AND A GIRL.

To the budding mind of young Jack Schuyler, life was a very pleasant affair. It began each morning at six thirty; and from then on until eight at night, there was something to fill each moment. He didn't care for school, particularly; still, it wasn't difficult enough to cause much discomfort. The natal pains of study were not by any means unbearable inasmuch as he was quick to see and to understand; and furthermore, he was possessed of a retentive memory. In his classes he assumed a position of about eighth from the fore; and