

Whatever value we may place upon Mr. Theodore Dreiser as a novelist, he is certainly not one whose works may be dismissed lightly. That he is tremendously in earnest, is obvious. That an amount of patient toil and endeavour goes into each and every one of his volumes is evidenced by the crowded detail, the tumultuous activity, the multitudinous sequence of episode, the whole effect of thronging humanity, the ceaseless storm and surge of existence. And yet, in his later books he fails to produce the effects that he secured by far simpler means years ago in *Sister Carrie*. There was no confusion of many characters and many incidents in that volume, no overcrowding of the canvas. It was all quite direct and elemental, and poignantly true. The reader took sides keenly, glowing hot and cold alternately, with the surge of personal sympathy,—because every character in the book was a personality, some one whom we could have loved or hated in real life in a frankly human fashion. The new volumes are vastly more elaborate: one feels that Mr. Dreiser has studied and toiled and striven, before reaching the minute understanding of business and finance, monopoly and graft that makes books like *The Titan* and *The Financier* read like the concentrated extract of a whole world of bribery and corruption. And yet, by the very force of iteration, the wearing action of endless repetition, they deaden their own effect; the sheer volume and extent of the detailed schemes pall upon us and leave us indifferent. In *The Financier*, it will be remembered that Cowperwood, Frank Algernon Cowperwood, having defied gods and men once too often, was borne down under the wreckage of his own vast schemes and landed for some thirteen months in the Eastern District Penitentiary in Philadelphia. *The Titan* takes up his subsequent career from the date of his release, witnesses his achievement of a fresh fortune, his removal to Chicago and his ambitious plans for effecting a consolidation of the city gas companies, with the ulterior design

of controlling the monopoly himself. Incidentally, the volume is a detailed, minute and rather sordid secret life of a modern Don Juan. Cowperwood is not content to divorce his patient, long-suffering first wife and marry his mistress in her stead; but he seems temperamentally unable to look upon any woman without desire. Mr. Dreiser spares us none of his many gallantries. They become wearisome, repellent, almost nauseating from the sheer monotony of their endless sameness. It is all, no doubt, true to the actualities of a certain side of life, although one wonders at times how any one man could always have the luck of such seemingly easy conquests; the law of probabilities would point at least to an occasional rebuff. But, be that as it may, Mr. Dreiser might have been content to give us a few specimen cases and let us conjecture the rest. Infidelity following infidelity, discovery following discovery, husband and wife both hiring detectives to spy out their respective rendezvous, hair-pulling, face-scratching and torrential outpourings of billingsgate invective do not make pleasant reading when extended over upward of five hundred closely printed pages. The reviewer's quarrel is not with the author's method, nor with his outlook upon life, but merely with his sense of proportion and quantity, his tendency to overstate his case so vastly. Cowperwood's first few lapses from virtue compel our attention, but the time comes when we merely say wearily, "What, not another one?" And the only relief from this obsession of women is an equally tiresome obsession of monopoly, Gas Company shares, street-railway shares, bills, ordinances, injunctions, the whole machinery of legal and legislative chicanery. Undeniably, the book has a certain bigness, it is cast on broad, bold lines, and incidentally it strips a human soul bare of its last remnant of covering. But it is not enough to tell the reader the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; it is necessary also to hold his interest,—and to do that, an author must be careful not to try the reader's patience too far nor too long.