

The Magnificent Ambersons

By Booth Tarkington

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THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS: A MAGNIFICENT NOVEL

The literary critics and book reviewers are continually asking, "When shall we have the 'Great American Novel' by the 'Great American Novelist'?" Perhaps never, in the sense in which the question is asked, for this country is too big and its people differ too greatly by localities to make the "Great American Novel" possible.

Nevertheless, "The Magnificent Ambersons" is a great American novel. Booth Tarkington is an American of sturdy native stock. He knows American life and character as only a native American with generations of American forbears can know them. Moreover he has a charm of style and a power of expression which have endeared him to the reading public.

"The Magnificent Ambersons" is so great a novel that Booth Tarkington has been awarded the Joseph Pulitzer prize of \$1,000 "for the American novel published during the year which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American manners and manhood." The judges making the award are Robert Grant, William Morton Payne and William Lyon Phelps.

CHAPTER I.

Major Amberson had "made a fortune" in 1873, when other people were making fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Their splendor lasted all the years that saw the Midland town spread and darken into a city, but reached its topmost point during the period when every prosperous family with children kept a New-England dog.

In that town in those days all the women who wore silk or velvet knew the other women who wore silk or velvet, and when there was a new purchase of sea-silk people were wont to windows to see it go by. Everybody knew everybody else's family, and a carriage could identify such a household as a mile down the street, and thereby was sure who was going to market or to a reception or to a dinner or evening supper.

During the earlier years of this period of elegance of personal appearance was believed to rest more upon the nature of garments than upon their color. A silk dress needed no re-rolling when it was a year or so old, and remained distinguished by merely remaining silk. Old men and gowns were broadcloth; "full dress" was woodstich with "doeskin" trousers; and there were seen men of all ages who wore a hat meant only that rigid, "stovepipe." In town and country men wore no other hat, and, without self-consciousness, they were wearing in such hats.

Dresses with a crease were considered plain; the crease proved that the garment had lain upon a shelf, and was "ready made"; these being trousers were called "hand-me-downs," in allusion to the shelf. In the early eighties, while bangs and wigs were having their way with women, that variation of dandy known as the "dude" was invented; he wore trousers as tight as stockings, dagger-pointed shoes, a spoon "derby," a high-breasted coat called a "Chesterfield," with short flaring skirts, a torse cylindrical collar, laundered to a polish and three inches high, while his neckgear might be a heavy, self-curved or a tiny bow fit for a girl's braids. With evening dress he wore a tan overcoat so short that his back coat hung visible, five inches above the overcoat; but after a season he lengthened his overcoat till it touched his heels, and he passed out in tight trousers into trousers like great bags. Then presently he was seen no more, though the word that had been coined for him remained in the vocabularies of the impertinent.

Scarcely no more is needed to prove that so short a time ago we were living in another age!

At the beginning of the Ambersons' period most of the houses of the Midland town were of a pleasant architecture. They lacked style, but also had a certain homeliness, and whatever they lacked at all has style enough. They stood in commodious yards, well shaded by leftover forest trees, elm and walnut and beech, with here and there a line of tall sycamores where the land had been made by filling in from the creek. The house of the prominent resident, facing Mill-square or National avenue or Tennesse street, was built of brick upon a stone foundation, or of wood upon a stone foundation. Usually it had a "front porch" and a "back porch," and a "side porch," too. There was a "front hall," there was a "side hall," and sometimes a "back hall." From the "front hall" opened three rooms, the "parlor," the "sitting room" and the "library," and the library could have a warrant to its title—for some of these people bought books.

Usually the family sat more in the parlor than in the "sitting room," and the parlors, when they came formally, were kept to the "parlor," a place of formidable polish and discomfort. The upholstery of the library was a little shabby, but the comfortable chairs and sofa of the "parlor" were looked new. For all the wear and tear they got they should have lasted a thousand years.

There were the bedrooms; "mother and father's room" the largest; a smaller room for one or two sons, another for one or two daughters; and of these rooms containing a washstand, a "bureau," a "wardrobe," a little table, a rocking chair, and often a chair or two that had been slightly damaged down years, but not enough to justify either the expense of repair or decline

abandonment in the attic. And there was always a "spare room," for visitors (where the sewing machine usually was kept), and during the seventies there developed an appreciation of the necessity for a bathroom.

At the rear of the house, upstairs, was a bleak little chamber, called "the girl's room," and in the stable there was another bedroom, adjoining the hayloft, and called "the hired man's room." House and stable cost seven or eight thousand dollars to build, and people with that much money to invest in such comforts were classified as the Rich. They paid the inhabitant of "the girl's room" two dollars a week, and, in the latter part of this period, two dollars and a half, and finally three dollars a week. She was Irish ordinarily, or German, or it might be Scandinavian, but never native to the land unless she happened to be a person of color. The man or youth who lived in the stable had like wages, and sometimes, too, was lately a steerage voyager, but much oftener he was colored.

After sunrise on pleasant mornings the alleys behind the stables were gay; laughter and shouting went up and down their dusty lengths, with a lively accompaniment of curycombs knocking against back fences and stable walls, for the darkies loved to curry their horses in the alleys. Darkies always prefer to gossip in shouts instead of whispers, and they feel that profanity, unless it be vociferous, is almost worthless. Horrible phrases were caught by early rising children and carried to older people for definition, sometimes at inopportune moments; while less investigative children would often merely repeat the phrases in some subsequent flurry of agitation, and yet bring about consequences so emphatic as to be recalled with ease in middle life.

They have passed, those darky hired men of the Midland town. The stables have been transformed into other likenesses, or swept away, like the woodsheds where were kept the stovewood and kindling that the "girl" and the "hired man" always quarreled over; who should fetch it.

So with other vanishing things. There were the little bumpy street cars on the long, single track that went its troubled way among the cobblestones. At the rear door of the car there was no platform, but a step where passengers clung in wet clumps when the weather was bad and the car crowded. The patrons—if not too absent-minded—put their fares into a slot; and the conductor paced the heaving floor, but the driver would rap remindingly with his elbow upon the glass of the door to his little open platform if the nickels and the passengers did not appear to coincide in number. A lone mule drew the car, and sometimes drew it off the track, when the passengers would get out and push it on again. They really owed it courtesies like this, for the car was generally accommodating; a lady could whistle to it from an upstairs window, and the car would halt at once and wait for her while she shut the window, put on her hat and cloak, went downstairs, found an umbrella, told the "girl" what to have for dinner, and came forth from the house.

They even had time to dance "square dances," quadrilles and "lancers;" they also danced the "rackette" and schottisches and polkas, and such whims as the "Portland fancy." They pushed back the sliding doors between the "parlor" and the "sitting room," tacked down crash over the carpets, hired a few palms in green tubs, stationed three or four Italian musicians under the stairway in the "front hall"—and had great nights!

"Keeping open house" was a merry custom; it has gone, like the all-day picnic in the woods, and like that prettiest of all vanished customs, the serenade. When a lively girl visited the town she did not long go un serenaded, though a visitor was not indeed needed to excuse a serenade. Of a summer night young men would bring an orchestra under a pretty girl's window—or, it might be, her father's, or that of an ailing maiden aunt—and flute, harp, "cello, cornet and bass viol would pleasantly release to the dulcet stars such melodies as sing through "You'll Remember Me," "I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls," "Silver Threads Among the Gold," "Kathleen Mavourneen," or "The Soldier's Farewell."

Croquet and the mildest archery ever known were the sports of people still young and active enough for so

much exertion; middle age played euchre. There was a theater, next door to the Amberson hotel, and when Edwin Booth came for a night everybody who could afford to buy a ticket was there, and all the "backs" in town were hired. "The Black Crook" also filled the theater, but the audience then was almost entirely of men, who looked uneasy as they left for home when the final curtain fell upon the shocking girls dressed as fairies. But the theater did not often do so well; the people of the town were still too thrifty.

They were thrifty because they were the sons or grandsons of the "early settlers," who had opened the wilderness and had reached it from the East and the South with wagons and axes and guns, but with no money at all. The pioneers were thrifty or they would have perished; they had to store away food for the winter, or goods to trade for food, and they often feared they had not stored enough—they left traces of that fear in their sons and grandsons. In the minds of most of these, indeed, their thrift was next to their religion; to save, even for the sake of saving, was their earliest lesson and discipline. No matter how prosperous they were they could not spend money either upon "art," or upon mere luxury and entertainment, without a sense of sin.

Against so homespun a background the magnificence of the Ambersons was as conspicuous as a brass band at a funeral. Major Amberson bought two hundred acres of land at the end of National avenue; and through this tract he built broad streets and cross-roads; paved them with cedar block, and curbed them with stone. He set up fountains, here and there, where the streets intersected, and at symmetrical intervals placed cast-iron statues, painted white, with their titles clear upon the pedestals; Minerva, Mercury, Hercules, Venus, Gladiator, Emperor Augustus, Fisher Boy, Stag-bound, Mastiff, Greyhound, Fawn, Antelope, Wounded Doe and Wounded Lion. Most of the forest trees had been left to flourish still, and at some distance, or by moonlight, the place was in truth beautiful; but the ardent citizen, loving to see his city grow, wanted neither distance nor moonlight. He had not seen Versailles, but, standing before the fountain of Neptune in Amberson addition, at bright noon, and quoting the favorite comparison of the local newspapers he declared Versailles outdone. All this art showed a profit from the start, for the lots sold well and there was something like a rush to build in the new addition. Its main thoroughfare, an oblique continuation of National avenue, was called Amberson boulevard, and here, at the juncture of the new boulevard and the avenue, Major Amberson reserved four acres for himself and built his new house—the Amberson mansion, of course.

This house was the pride of the town. Faced with stone as far back as the dining-room windows, it was a house of arches and turrets and girding stone porches; it had the first porte cochere seen in that town. There was a central "front hall" with a great black-walnut stairway, and open to a green glass skylight called the "dome," three stories above the ground floor. A ballroom occupied most of the third story, and at one end of it was carved a walnut gallery for the musicians. Citizens told strangers that the cost of all this black walnut and wood carving was sixty thousand dollars. "Sixty thousand dollars for the woodwork alone! Yes, sir, and hardwood floors all over the house! Turkish rugs and no carpets at all, except a Brussels carpet in the front parlor—I hear they call it the 'reception room.' Hot and cold water upstairs and down, and stationary

CHAPTER II.

Another citizen said an eloquent thing about Miss Isabel Amberson's looks. This was Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster, the foremost literary authority and intellectual leader of the community—for both the daily newspapers thus described Mrs. Foster when she founded the Women's Tennyson club; and her word upon art, letters and the drama was accepted more as law than as opinion. Naturally when "Hazel Kirke" finally reached town, after its long triumph in larger places, many people waited to hear what Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster thought of it before they felt warranted in expressing any estimate of the play. In fact, some of them waited in the lobby of the theater as they came out and formed an inquiring group about her. "I didn't see the play," she informed them.

"What! Why, we saw you, right in the middle of the fourth row!" "Yes," she said, smiling, "but I was sitting just behind Isabel Amberson. I couldn't look at anything except her way brown hair and the wonderful back of her neck."

The ineligible young men of the town (they were all ineligible) were unable to content themselves with the view that had so charmed Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster; they spent their time struggling to keep Miss Amberson's face turned toward them. She turned it most often, observers said, toward two: one excelling in the general struggle by his sparkle, and the other by that winning if not winsome old trait, persistence. The sparkling gentleman "led germs" with her, and sent sonnets to her with his bouquets—sonnets lacking neither music nor wit. He was generous, poor, well-dressed, and his amazing persuasiveness was one reason why he was always in debt. No one doubted that he would be able to persuade Isabel, but he unfortunately joined too merry a party one night, and during a moonlight serenade upon the lawn before the Amberson mansion, was easily identified from the windows as the person who stepped through the bass viol and had to be assisted to a waiting carriage. One of Miss Amberson's brothers was among the serenaders, and when the party had dispersed remained propped against the front door in a state of helpless liveliness; the Major going down in a dressing gown and slippers to bring him in, and scolding mildly, while imperfectly concealing strong impulses to laughter. Miss Amberson also laughed at this brother the next day, but for the suitor it was a different matter: she refused to see him when he called to apologize. "You seem to care a great

deal about bass viols!" he wrote her. "I promise never to break another." She made no response to the note, unless it was an answer, two weeks later, when her engagement was announced. She took the persistent one, Wilbur Minafer, no breaker of bass viols or of hearts, no serenader at all. A few people, who always foresaw everything, claimed that they were not surprised, because though Wilbur Minafer "might not be an Apollo, as it were," he was "a steady young business man and a good church goer," and Isabel Amberson was "pretty sensible—for such a showy girl." But the engagement astounded the young people, and most of their fathers and mothers too; and as a topic it supplanted literature at the next meeting of the "Women's Tennyson club."

"Wilbur Minafer!" a member cried, her inflection seeming to imply that Wilbur's crime was explained by his surname. "Wilbur Minafer! It's the queerest thing I ever heard! To think of her taking Wilbur Minafer, just because a man any woman would like a thousand times better was a little wild one night at a serenade!"

"No, that wasn't her reason," said Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster. "If men only knew it—and it's a good thing they don't—a woman doesn't really care much about whether a man's wild or not, if it doesn't affect herself, and Isabel Amberson doesn't care a thing!"

"Mrs. Foster!"

"No, she doesn't. What she minds is his making a clown of himself in her front yard! It made her think he didn't care much about her. She's probably mistaken, but that's what she thinks, and it's too late for her to think anything else now, because she's going to be married right away—the invitations will be out next week. It'll be a big Amberson-style thing, raw oysters floating in scooped-out blocks of ice and a band from out of town—champagne, showy presents; a colossal present from the Major. Then Wilbur will take Isabel on the carefree little wedding trip he can manage, and she'll be a good wife to him, but they'll have the worst spoiled lot of children this town will ever see."

"How on earth do you make that out, Mrs. Foster?"

"She couldn't love Wilbur, could she?" Mrs. Foster demanded, with no challengers. "Well, it will all go to her children, and she'll ruin 'em!"

The prophetic proved to be mistaken in a single detail merely; except for that her foresight was accurate. The wedding was of Ambersonian magnificence, even to the floating oysters; and the Major's colossal present was a set of architect's designs for a house almost as elaborate and impressive as the mansion, the house to be built in Amberson addition by the Major.

At midnight the bride was still being toasted in champagne, though she had departed upon her wedding journey at ten. Four days later the pair had returned to town, which promptness seemed fairly to demonstrate that Wilbur had indeed taken Isabel upon the carefree little trip he could manage. According to every report she was from the start "a good wife to him," but here in a final detail the prophecy proved inaccurate; Wilbur and Isabel did not have children; they had only one.

"Only one," Mrs. Henry Franklin Foster admitted. "But I'd like to know if he isn't spoiled enough for a whole carload!"

Again she found none to challenge her.

At the age of nine George Amberson Minafer, the Major's one grandchild, was a princely terror, dreaded not only in Amberson addition but in many other quarters through which he galloped on his white pony. "By golly, I guess you think you own this town!" an embittered laborer complained one day, as George rode the

pony straight through a pile of snow the man was slewing. "I will when I grow up," the undisturbed child replied. "I guess my grandpa owns it now, you bet?" And the baffled workman, having no means to controvert what seemed a mere exaggeration of the facts, could only mutter, "Oh, pull down your vest!"

"Don't haf to! Doctor says it ain't healthy!" the boy returned promptly. "But I tell you what I'll do: I'll pull down my vest if you'll wipe off your chin!"

This was stock and stentid; the accustomed argot of street language of the period; and in such matters George was an expert. He had no vest to pull down; the incongruous fact was that a fringed sash girdled the juncture of his velvet blouse and

breeches, for the Fauntleroy period had set in, and George's mother had so poor an eye for appropriate things, where George was concerned, that she dressed him according to the doctrine of that school in boy decoration. Except upon the surface (which was not his own work but his mother's) George bore no vivid resemblance to the fabulous little Cedric. The storied boy's famous "Lean on me, grandfather," would have been difficult to imagine upon the lips of George. A month after his ninth birthday anniversary, when the Major gave him his pony, he had already become acquainted with the toughest boys in various distant parts of the town, and had convinced them that the toughness of a rich little boy with long curls might be considered in many respects superior to their own. He fought them, learning how to go bareback at a certain point in a fight, bursting into tears of anger, reaching for rocks, uttering walled threats of murder, and attempting to fulfill them. Fights often led to intimacies, and he acquired the art of saying things more exciting than "Don't haf to!" and "Doctor says it ain't healthy!" Thus on a summer afternoon a strange boy, sitting bored upon the gatepost of the Rev. Malloch Smith, beheld George Amberson Minafer rapidly approaching on his white pony and was impelled by bitterness to shout: "Shoot the ole jackass! Look at the girly curls! Say, bub, where'd you steal your mother's ole sash!"

George Amberson Minafer begins to grow up and meets the beautiful Miss Lucy Morgan.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"NOTHING DOING" IN COTTON

Kitchen Maids of Sultan of Morocco Entitled to Nether Garments of Expensive Stuff.

The sultan of Morocco was always an absolute monarch, and in that capacity the revenues of the country were his. There had never been any distinction between public funds and private funds—all belonged to the sultan. It was therefore no easy task to arrive at an agreement as to which were state and which private debts, so inextricably mixed had they been in the past. There was, for instance, a bill for some hundreds of yards of very expensive and very fine crimson cloth. Naturally the protectorate authorities scheduled this among the private debts. The sultan protested. The cloth, he said, had been purchased for governmental purposes—in fact for the trousers of the imperial kitchen maids; for there are several hundred slave-women employed in preparing the palace food. The protectorate government refused to be responsible for this debt. The ex-sultan drew up a historical treatise to prove that imperial kitchen maids were part and parcel of the state, and passed, like the palace itself, from sultan to sultan. The principle was accepted, but the debt was disallowed on the ground that these good ladies did not require such expensive stuff for their nether garments. A cotton material, they argued, would have equally well served the purpose. The sultan's reply was unanswerable and crushing. "In Europe," he said, "it may be the custom for the imperial kitchen maids to wear cotton trousers, but in Morocco we

have more appreciation of the dignity of their position." There was nothing more to be said. The debt was paid—by the protectorate government.—From "The Liquidation of a Sultanate," by W. B. Harris, in "Asia" magazine.

Human Fraillities.

Our structure, both external and internal, is full of imperfection; yet there is nothing in nature but what is of use, not even inutility itself. There is nothing in this universe which has not some proper place it. Our being is cemented with certain mean qualities; ambition, jealousy, envy, revenge, superstition, despair, have so natural a lodgment in us that the image of them is discerned in the brute beasts; nay cruelty itself, a vice so much out of nature; for even in the midst of compassion we feel within us an unaccountable bitter-sweet titillation of ill-natured pleasure in seeing another suffer; and even children are sensible of it.—Montaigne.

The "Amen Corner."

The phrase "amen corner" is said to have originated in London, where, at the end of Paternoster row, the monks at one time finished their recitation of the "Pater Noster" as they went in procession on Corpus Christi day to St. Paul's cathedral. They began in Paternoster row with the Lord's prayer in Latin, continuing it to the end of the street, and then said "amen" at the corner of the row. As used in this country the phrase described the corner of a church where the elderly members sit and pronounce the word "amen" at intervals.

DIDN'T STAND TEST

Reader's Caustic Criticism of Modern Heroine.

They Lack the "Homey" Qualities of the Characters in the Pages of Dickens, Is One Thing He Has Noticed.

Doctor Pedbury picked up the gayly bound novel that lay on his patient's counterpane.

"Well, Hosen," he inquired, "how's the light literature prescription working? Good story? Mithy pretty girl on the cover, anyhow?"

"Ain't read it and ain't going to," declared Hosen aggressively. "Girl's pretty enough, but no three hundred pages of her doings for me. She don't stand the test. They don't any of 'em. Cover or frontispiece; there's only two sorts of 'em, and I don't like either. I ain't pertickler whether they're tall or short, skinny or dimply, gypsyish or light complected; but I do want 'em a nice, likable-looking sort of humans—and they ain't. You put 'em to the button test, and it downs 'em!"

"The button test? What's that?" asked Doctor Pedbury.

"Oh, I s'pose there's others," admitted Hosen, "but that's the easiest; just s'pose a feller wants a button sewed on—wants it right off. Well, he hangs his coat on his arm and goes to one of those girls. 'Gwendoloh Gertrude,' says he, 'I want to wear this coat, there's a button off. Can you fix it?' Well—'Hosen displayed the imperial beauty on the book cover—'just look at her, doc. You know what she says without me tellin' ye. 'Base slave, bezon' or 'Minton, avamut' or 'Impertinent Rule, go ask your grandmother' or some little thing of that sort. That's the general idee; that's the way Gwendoloh Gertrude looks."

"And there's lots to her—chin up, head back, eyes shut; handsome critter; but she ain't much more use. Just frivolous. Hosen or kintney, one or 'other. 'Elsie Maree, here's a button wants sewin'; s'pose you could do it?' 'Elsie Maree, she laughs pretty and shows nice teeth and says, pleasant, 'Why, yes, of course; only she's got engagements up to the middle of next week, and, anyways, the buttons she sews ain't warranted to stay on more'n an hour or so; so maybe, after all, 'twould be as well to ask somebody else. Well, that's 'Elsie Maree; and she ain't my notion of a lovely heroine, either."

"Heroines were different when I was young. Dickens' heroines now; they was real nice and lovable besides bein' pretty, and their piccers looked it. That little Dot woman with the baby, and that Ruth girl that made that beef-steak puddin'—they'd haf stood the button test all right."

"Goin', doctor? Say, reach me that seed catalogue off the table fust, won't ye; and, say, if ye would stop to the library as ye pass and ask Bill Dickens for a copy of Nicholas Nickleby—nine's such had print ma won't let me read it in bed—and bring it along next visit, I'd appreciate it a lot. Thank you, doctor! I thought you wouldn't mind."—Youth's Companion.

Famous American Clipper Ships.

In the days of the famous clipper ships, the American vessel was second to none, writes Frederick A. Collins in Boys' Life. No other country could build ships at once so staunch and so speedy. Records were established which have never been surpassed by sailing craft and, even with the use of steam, were not bettered for nearly half a century. In 1852 the Sovereign of the Seas sailed 436 miles in a single day. The Lightning crossed the Atlantic in 13 days 20 hours, and the James Blaine of 2,500 tons made the voyage from Boston to Liverpool in 12 days and 6 hours. Although America led the way with the first transatlantic steamship, she allowed the sovereignty of the seas to slip gradually from her. At the beginning of the war most of her tonnage was afloat on the great lakes or engaged in coastwise traffic, and her deep-sea fleet was small.

Joys of Tournament Golf.

Wouldn't it make you mad if you were entered in a golf tournament and you started out shooting the little old pill down the line, better than you ever had and finished the first nine holes in the lowest score you had ever made; slipped a little on the second nine, but still had a chance to make a respectable showing; and then on the eighteen hole in the presence of an admiring throng of friends you proceeded to put the pill into the ditch three times and take eleven strokes where five should have been plenty?

Wouldn't it make you mad? Well, the only consolation we know out of that horrible, catastrophic is that we remembered even in our rage that there were ladies within hearing distance. We came up sniffling out of the ditch, but we sincerely hope the young woman in the pink gown and the big hat who grinned gleefully at us is no mind reader.—Exchange.

Honor for the Cowbell.

Never again can the cowbell be looked upon as something merely bucolic, commonplace and utilitarian, connoting at best for the city man memories of idling away a summer holiday in the country. What the cowbell has meant to the country boy in early rising to do stable chores, and tedious hunting through swampy bottom lands for the heifer who appears to have no homing instinct it is rather difficult to express politely. But now the despised cowbell has achieved its apotheosis, for thanks to the ingenuity of a California composer, a set of them, "covering a chromatic range of an octave and a half," was used in the symphonic music of this year's Bohemian Grove play. This, perhaps, in some small degree makes up for the fearful contemporary misuse of an honorable if lowly instrument by jazz bands.



"You Think You Own This Town!"



"Sixty Thousand Dollars for the Woodwork Alone."