

THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS

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The magnificent Ambersons by Booth Tarkington

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BOOTH TARKINGTON

**THE MAGNIFICENT
AMBERSONS**

The Magnificent Ambersons

Books by Booth Tarkington

The Gentleman from Indiana
Monsieur Beaucaire
Cherry
The Conquest of Canaan
The Guardian *(with Harry Leon Wilson)*
The Man from Home *(with Harry Leon Wilson)*
Penrod
Penrod and Sam
Seventeen
The Country Cousin *(with Julian Street)*
Clarence
The Gibson Upright *(with Harry Leon Wilson)*
Alice Adams
The Wren
Gentle Julia
The Collector's Whatnot
The Midlander
Looking Forward and Others
The Plutocrat
The World Does Move
Claire Ambler
Mirthful Heaven
Mary's Neck
Little Orvie
The Lorenzo Bunch
Some Old Portraits

The Magnificent Ambersons

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

GLOUCESTER, MASS.

PETER SMITH

1967

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The Magnificent Ambersons, the chronicle of three generations of a leading Indiana family, won the Pulitzer prize in 1918, and became both a critical and popular success. Booth Tarkington wrote it as the middle book of a Trilogy which he titled *Growth*. The other works, *The Turmoil* (1915) and *The Midlander* (1923) were connected only in that they dealt with Midwestern life, and of the three, *The Magnificent Ambersons* presented the picture that has lived, and with *Alice Adams* (1921), another Pulitzer prize winner, is considered to be his best writing for adults.

Tarkington was born in Indiana in 1869, won his first popular success with *Monsieur Beaucaire* in 1900, and is remembered also for his immortal juvenile characters Penrod and Sam. He died in 1946.

Major Amberson had "made a fortune" in 1873, when other people were losing fortunes, and the magnificence of the Ambersons began then. Magnificence, like the size of a fortune, is always comparative, as even Magnificent Lorenzo may now perceive, if he has happened to haunt New York in 1916; and the Ambersons were magnificent in their day and place. Their splendour lasted throughout all the years that saw their Midland town spread and darken into a city, but reached its topmost during the period when every prosperous family with children kept a Newfoundland dog.

In that town, in those days, all the women who wore silk or velvet knew all the other women who wore silk or velvet, and when there was a new purchase of sealskin, sick people were got to windows to see it go by. Trotters were out, in the winter afternoons, racing light sleighs on National Avenue and Tennessee Street; everybody recognized both the trotters and the drivers; and again knew them as well on summer evenings, when slim buggies whizzed by in renewals of the snow-time rivalry. For that matter, everybody knew everybody else's family horse-and-carriage, could identify such a silhouette half a mile down the street, and thereby was sure who was going to market, or to a reception, or coming home from office or store to noon dinner or evening supper.

During the earlier years of this period, elegance of personal appearance was believed to rest more upon the texture of garments than upon their shaping. A silk dress needed no remodeling when it was a year or so old; it remained distinguished by merely remaining silk. Old men and governors wore broadcloth; "full dress" was broadcloth with "doeskin" trousers; and there were seen men of all ages to whom a hat meant only that rigid, tall silk thing known to impudence as a "stove-pipe." In town and country these men would wear no other hat, and, without self-consciousness, they went rowing in such hats.