

## From the Pen of Failure.

He sat looking down at the blue envelope in a half retrospective way. He had been editor of the Junior Annual himself when in college, and that is why the words in the upper left hand corner carried him closer to the old days than he had come for some time. Perhaps they wanted him to write something; or, more likely still, they wanted his subscription.

He tore the envelope across the end, and then he read and re-read the type-written words upon the piece of blue paper. The editor of the Quax had said to him:

"MY DEAR MR. WARREN:

We are hoping to make the Annual better this year than it has ever been before, and we are sure all Drake alumni will feel a keen personal interest in our effort. I write to ask if you will prepare for us a sketch of Edward Forrest. I am sure you will agree with us that he has taken a higher place in the world than any man who has thus far gone out from Drake, and we wish to show our appreciation of him as a Drake alumnus. We wrote Mr. Forrest last week, telling him what we proposed to do, and asking his preference as to the writer of the sketch. While modestly protesting against the fitness of such a thing, he said that if anything was to be written he preferred it to be done by you, of whom he spoke as his best Drake friend. May we depend upon you to do this for us, and to have it in our hands by February first? Of course we do not want the conventional biographical sketch. We want an appreciation, the sort of thing that is written by an intimate. And please make it plain above all that we are duly proud that the youngest member of Congress to-day is a graduate of Drake University. I am sure you will see what we want, and I trust you will find time to do it for us.

Hoping to hear from you soon, I am,

Very truly yours,

JOHN FREEMAN."

At last he folded the piece of paper and returned it to its place in the envelope. Then he leaned back in his chair and looked all about the room. He was seeing it all—the worn matting, the smoky stove, the small and not up-to-date library, with new eyes.—seeing it in the light of the fact that back at his old school, back where they had once carried him on their shoulders and shouted his name in great peals of triumph, he was of importance now solely because he had for four years been the room-mate of Ned Forrest. With a kind of sick feeling going through and through him, he recalled how, one night, upon returning from an inter-collegiate debate which he had won for the school, Ned had met him at the door and had called out with a jubilant ring in his voice, "Do you know what they'll say about me ten years hence? They'll say, 'See that fellow over there? Well, that fellow was Fritz Warren's room-mate at college.'" And now, fifteen years had gone by and Ned Forrest was in Congress, looked to as one of the coming

men of the country, while Fritz Warren, the man Drake had believed would carry her name to high places, was sitting in a dingy little law office of one of the country towns of Iowa, using the same things he had bought for himself fifteen years before, doing much the same kind of things, having lost one thing—ambition, and having taken on another—resignation. That is why the smoky stove and the badly worn matting were something more than shabby pieces of furniture, they were the symbols of failure, the things which stood for buried hopes and unfulfilled possibilities, for a life not "made good."

He got up and put some more coal in the little stove; he finished up a petition he was going to file next day, and then stood there by the window looking across at the court house square and thinking of many things—of Ned Forrest, of himself, of the old days, of failure and success.

What was it that made for failure?—and what for success? Not degree of brain power, for he had always stood higher than Ned in things which were a mere matter of brains. In fact Ned had not even been classed with the really great students in the little college world. Ned was a jolly good fellow, a hustler, a pusher, a great old boy: he was many things that are to be desired, but as to usual scholarship, not even professors who loved him most had ever made that claim for him.

No, it was not scholarship, and it was not alone good fellowship. All who were called good fellows did not succeed: to the contrary, that very thing had kept many of them from success. What was it then? Just chance—fate, something or other that could not be defined. That was the way it was in the world; things just happened: it was all unaccountable, freakish. The people who had in them the qualities which should have made for them success ended their lives in the back woods, and the great men of the country reached their positions through a peculiar series of accidents. So what did it matter? Why should one mind failure? Why should one mind anything in a world that was one great game of chance?

And yet, one did mind, or at any rate one thought about it, and wondered. He went back to the office to keep an appointment with a man that night, and after the man had gone he sat there alone thinking of things he could not put from him. Ned was a great man: he was going to be one of the great men of the country: and as to him, he was just the commonplace country lawyer—the man without a future. Those were facts hard to understand: facts not easy to face.

They had parted the day after commencement, and he had come to this little town, which it was thought then was booming, and which, like himself, had not made good. Ned had looked around in several of the Iowa cities, and then one day there had come a letter from him post-marked Chicago. "You'll say I'm crazy," it read: "you'll say I'll starve, and all that, but some way I can't get away from the notion that this is the place for me, and this is where I'm going to hang out my little shingle, and this is where I'm going to make things go."

And in a way which no one, not even Ned himself, pretended to understand, he had made things go. Whether it was getting in on that sensational case, whether it was having a newspaper friend who knew just when and how to say the right thing, whether it was a compelling voice, a persuasive smile, a winning personality—no matter what, he had somehow made things go. He forced the public to take notice of him, and then he did something to it, hypnotized it, likely, and now he was in the House, and Chicago, at least, was eyeing him for the Senate.

He concluded to write the sketch then and there. That would get Ned out of his mind, and break up a gloomy train of thought. It would be easy enough to tell what a fine, lovable fellow he had always been, tell some characteristic things he had done, tell how proud his old friends were of him, and then wind up with some kind of well sounding tribute.

But it was not easy. He made three or four beginnings, only to tear them all up with the first page. He did not like the sound of them: he could feel that they did not ring true. They seemed to reflect the spirit that was upon him, the spirit which had grown out of his conviction that it was a world of chance, that most of the great men of the earth were but the favorite children of something called Fate, and that hidden under the debris of unfavorable circumstances was many a man who had in him the real essence of greatness.

It was after midnight: the fire had gone out, the room was growing cold. He decided to give it up. He rose and put on his coat, but while taking his hat from the peg something came to him with all the force and stimulus of an electric shock. Ned *had* succeeded. No matter why, no matter how: one fact remained: he *had*.

Slowly and almost laboriously he began working it out with himself. He began to see that one must face success as a fact, even as life and death, and other things which could not be understood, must be faced as facts. There had been something in Ned Forrest which made for success, and the fact that it could not be defined could in no sense be used as an argument against its existence. It might be baffling of analysis—elusive, but a thing which had proved itself, was a thing which was there.

What was it then? this strange something which held within it the possibilities of success? What could man say? And, after all, did it matter? It was not mind, not temperament, not personality, not character, not fate, none of those alone—perhaps the rightness of the proportion, but withal something distinctive, something half mystic, some kind of a divine spark which marked a few men for the seats of the mighty.

And Ned Forrest, the good old fellow of his college days, the boy whom he had once outclassed, was one of the men born with this strange genius for success! A wholly new sense of pride in his friend's triumph was coming over him. He had always been glad Ned had done things, but his inability to understand it, his tendency to analyze, had taken some of the sharp edge from his pleasure. It had always seemed chance rather than Ned, but now it was Ned himself, some-

thing in him greater than mind, greater than all else--that elusive something which makes a few men master of many.

He looked all around the room, that room which spoke out its own story. He had failed and Ned had succeeded; these two facts he faced. And it was not that he had been in hard luck and Ned had been fortunate. It was because he, of the greater mind, had lacked a something which Ned had possessed. It is hard to say why it was that the fact of Ned's having succeeded seemed of a sudden to become of more importance than the fact of his having failed. A light was coming into his eyes, and late though it was he sat down at his desk and pulled out some sheets of paper. All alone in the desolate little room the commonplace country lawyer wrote his sketch of Ned Forrest. It was the man who had lost writing of the man who had won, and out of his deep knowledge of failure sprang a true and beautiful appraisal of success.

Was it inspirational? If not, if there be no such thing as the inspirational, from whence came the great deep light in his eyes, and why was he trembling so that when he rose to his feet he must needs lean heavily upon his desk? What was it that Fritz Warren put into that sketch of Ned Forrest? The beautiful-world-wide love of college-boy for college-boy?—the unselfish love of chums?—the spirit of joy in the triumph of a friend?

Perhaps; but back of that which, though beautiful, was altogether human, shown the great white light of Fritz Warren's soul. At rare, rare times in the life of the world a soul has gone into a pen and at such times words destined to immortality have been born. As he slipped the envelope into the postoffice late that night he knew that failure, though a hard master, had led him up toward the heights of truth.

The work of that night did not find final resting-place in the college annual. It made its way into newspapers and literary journals all over the land. It was embodied in many a speech: it illumined many a sermon. It added to the lustre of Ned Forrest's name, and it brought from more than one the query, "Who is this Fred Warren, anyhow?"

A great critic pondered long over the little sketch. His practiced eye saw something behind the words, something behind even the thoughts. He was keen—this great critic, and that is why, after an hour of thought, he penned upon the margin of the clipping: "It is not impossible that the most beautiful thing ever written of success came from the pen of a man who had failed."

SUSAN KEATING GLASPELL, '99.