

THE FOURTH GENERATION.

[COPYRIGHT.]

By Sir Walter Besant.

Author of "All Sorts and Conditions of Men," "Herr Paulus," "The Master Craftsman," "Armored of Lyons," "The World Went Very Well Then," "All in a Garden Fair," "Children of Gibeon," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TIDE BEGINS TO TURN.

When Leonard was left alone he looked about him as if expecting to see something. He opened the drawer in which the book lay, but mechanically. To his great surprise he was not compelled to take out the book or to read in its accursed pages. Further, the pages of that book no longer floated before his eyes as had been their abominable habit for three weeks. For the moment, at least, he was free of the book. More than this, although the discovery—the horrible discovery—was fresh in his mind, he found himself once more free to think of other things. While he considered this phenomenon a strange weariness fell upon him. He lay down on his couch, closed his eyes, and instantly fell asleep.

It was then noon. When he awoke the room was dark; he got up and turned on the light. It was midnight. Again he felt the heaviness of sleep; he went into his bedroom, undressed, lay down, and again fell fast asleep. He slept till noon next day. He had slept twice round the clock, so great was the relief from the long tension of the last three weeks.

He dressed, expecting the customary summons to the Book and the Case. None came. He took breakfast and opened the paper. For three weeks he had been unable to read the paper at all. Now, to his surprise, he approached it with all his customary interest. Nothing was suggested to his mind as to the book. He went into the study, he even opened the drawer; he was not afraid, though no compulsion obliged him to take out the book; since he was not constrained, as before, to open it, he put it back again. He remarked that the loathing with which he had regarded it only the day before was gone. In fact, he heeded the book no longer; it was like the dead body of a demon which could do no more harm.

He turned to the papers on his writing-table; there were the unfinished sheets of the article for the "Quarterly Review." He took them up with a new-born delight and the anticipation of the pleasure of finishing the thing; he wondered how he had been able to suspend his work for so long. There was a pile of letters, the unopened, unanswered letters of the last three weeks; he hurriedly tore them open; they must be answered without delay.

All this time he was not forgetful of the Discovery. That was now made; it was complete.

He sat down, his mind clear once more, and made out the steps by which the truth had been recovered. To give his thoughts words, "We started with two assumptions, both of which were false; and both made it impossible to find the truth. The first of these was the assumption that the two were fast and firm friends, whereas they were for the moment at variance on some serious affair—so much at variance that on two occasions before the last, one of them had become like a madman in his rage. The second was the assumption that the squire had turned and gone home at the entrance of the wood. Both at the inquest and the trial that had been taken for granted. Now the boy had simply said that they went into the wood together and that one had come out alone.

"In consequence of these two assumptions we were bound to find someone in the wood who must have done the deed. The boy declared that no one was in the wood at half-past five in the morning, and that he saw no one go in till John Dunning went in at noon. The cottage woman said that no one at all had used that path that day. The squire must have seen anybody who was lurking there. If we remove the two assumptions—if we suppose that they entered the wood quarrelling—if we remember

that the evening before one of them had become like a madman for rage—if we give them ten minutes or a quarter of an hour together—if we remember the superior height of one, which alone enabled the blow to fall on the top of the other's head—if we add to all this the subsequent behaviour of the survivor, there is no longer the least room for doubt. The murderer was Algernon Campaigne, Justice of the Peace, Master of Campaigne Park."

All this he reasoned out coldly and clearly. That he could once more reason on any subject gave him so much relief, that the blow and shame of the discovery were greatly lessened. He remembered that the event happened seventy years before; that there could be no further inquiry; and that there was no need to speak of it to any other members of his family.

By this time, what was left of the family honour? He laughed bitterly as he reflected on the blots upon that fair white scutcheon. Suicide—bankruptcy—the mud and mire of dire poverty—forgery—shame and pretence, and at last the culminating crime beyond which one can hardly go—the last crime which was also the first—the slaying of a man by his brother—MURDER!

A knock at the door roused him. Was it more trouble? He sat up instinctively to meet it. But he was quite calm. He did not expect trouble. When it comes one generally feels it beforehand. Now he felt no kind of anticipation. It was in fact only a letter from Constance.

"I write to tell you that the misfortunes of your House are over. There will be no more. I am certain of what I say. Do not ask me how I learned this, because you would not believe. We have been led to the discovery which ends it all."

"Constance."

"The Discovery," he thought, "which is worse than all the rest put together. No more misfortunes? No more consequences, then. What does she mean? Consequences must go on."

You remember how one day there came one who told of trouble, and almost before he had finished speaking there came also another with more trouble, and yet a third with more.

This afternoon the opposite happened. There came three, but they were not messengers of trouble, but of peace and even joy.

"The first was his cousin, Mary Anne. 'I've come,' she said, 'with a message from my brother. Sam is very sorry that he carried on here as he says he did. I don't know how he carried on, but Sam is very nasty sometimes when his temper and his troubles get the better of him.'"

"Pray do not let him be troubled. I have quite forgotten what he said."

"It seems that he brought his precious bill against Granny and showed it to you. He says that he's put it in the fire, and that he didn't mean it, except in the hope that you'd lend him a little money."

"I see. Well, my cousin, is that all?"

"Oh, he begs your pardon humbly. And he says that the builder has got the bank to back him after all, and he'll wait now for his share of the accumulations."

"I am sorry that he still entertains hopes in that direction."

"As for Granny, she's so vexed and put out about his showing you that bill—and so am I—that a grandson of hers should do such things, that we've arranged to part company. Granny will live with me—I can afford it—and mother will go on with Sam. And I do hope, Mr Campaigne, that you will come and see her sometimes. She says have you read the book?"

"Yes, I will go to see her sometimes. Tell her so. And as for the book, I have read it all through."

"And did it do you good to read the book? To me it always makes that old gentleman so grand and good,

finding lawyers for the poor innocent man and all."

"Tell her the book has produced all the effects she desired and more."

While she was still speaking Uncle Fred burst in. Mary Anne retired, making way for the visitor, who, she perceived from the family likeness, was a large and very magnificent specimen of the Campaigne family.

"My boy," he cried, "I am going back again. Barlow Brothers must be saved. Nothing short of a national disaster must be averted."

"Indeed! I am glad. You are now going to make a company of it, I suppose?"

"Perhaps," he replied with decision. "The City has had its chance and has refused its opportunity. I now return to Australia. The firm of Barlow Brothers may rise conspicuous and colossal, or it may continue to be a purveyor of sardines and bottled butter."

At this point his eye fell upon a letter. It was one of the documents in the Case; in fact, it was the letter from Australia, which came with John Dunning's memorandum. By accident it had not been put away with the rest. He read the superscription on the seal—"John Dunning's Sons."

"John Dunning's Sons?" he asked. "John Dunning's Sons?"

"It's an old story. Your grandfather helped John Dunning in early life." Leonard took out the letter. "They write to express the gratitude, a post-mortem gratitude, of the late John Dunning to the family generally. Would you like to read it?"

Uncle Fred read it. His jovial face became grave, even austere in thoughtfulness. He folded the letter and put it in his pocket. "By your leave," he said. "My dear boy, the Dunnings are the richest people in the colony. I am a made man. Their gratitude amply warms my heart. It inspires belief in human nature. With this letter—with this introduction—Barlow Brothers vanish. — the sardine boxes! Fred Campaigne returns to Australia and Fortune smiles. My boy, farewell. With this letter in my pocket I start to-morrow."

There remained one more—Christopher, the speechmaker.

He came with a subdued joy. "They know all, Leonard. I've had a terrible time with the wife and the daughter. But now they know it."

"How do they know?"

"That BEAST called at the house, went upstairs, and told the wife. There was a terrible scene."

"So I should suppose."

"Yes, it's all right, though. I persuaded them, with a good deal of trouble, that the profession was rather more holy than the Church. I produced the facts, especially the income."

"That would be a serious factor in the case."

"Yes. And I pointed out the educational side—the advance of oratory. So they came round little by little, and I clinched the thing by offering to go back to the Bar, in which case we should have to live at Shepherd's Bush, in a £40 a year semi-detached, while Algernon went into the City as a clerk at fifteen shillings a week, which is more than his true value."

"Well, since it did well I congratulate you. The profession will be continued, of course?"

"Of course. But I confess I was surprised at the common sense of Algernon. He will immediately enter at the Bar; he will join me; there will henceforth be two successful lawyers in the family instead of one."

"And what about the threatened exposure?"

"Algernon has gone to see the BEAST. He is to promise him that if a word or a hint is dropped, everybody shall know where he, the BEAST, buys his stories and his poems, and his epigrams, as well as his after-dinner speeches. Algernon has fished it all out."

So with a chuckle of congratulation the weaver of speeches went away.

I don't know what you can do. This telegram—I've just got it. I came up to be governess"—she half hesitated over the word—"at this station, and now, it seems, they don't want me. There has been some mistake, and I—"

Gordon looked at the telegram. "And you've come all the way from Sydney up here, only to find that they've changed their minds. Of course, you can make them pay later on, but I suppose you don't know what to do now, eh?"

"I really don't," she said. "I've spent all my money," she went on, her face crimson, "and I—I really don't know what to do."

Gordon's mind worked quickly. With the most ready smile in the world he turned to the Englishman. "Why," he said, "isn't this an extraordinary thing, Carew? Wasn't I just saying to you yesterday, that I've been looking everywhere for someone to teach my nephews and nieces down at the old station in New South Wales! My mother asked me to look out for some one. Now Miss Harriott, if you are willing to go straight back in the ship, and go up to my mother at the old station, it would be a real godsend to her. Will you go? It will save you a lot of trouble."

She looked at him for a while keenly, but the deep set eyes and motionless features told her nothing. Gordon had the face of a born poker player.

"Do you really mean this?" she said at last.

"Of course I mean it. Ask Carew here if I haven't been hunting all over Sydney to send someone up. Why, it's the best luck I ever heard of. Suits all of us splendidly!"

She looked at the two men again. Women always know instinctively a man that they can trust, and after a moment's hesitation she made up her mind.

"It's very good of you," she said, speaking in a low voice. "But I am quite a stranger to you. I came out here to get my living by teaching, and I'd like you to see some letters I've got, so that you'll know who I am."

"I am quite satisfied about that, Miss Harriott," said Gordon. "You go down and give the work a trial. You'll find my mother very hard to please, and the youngsters you'll have to teach are born imps of Satan, everyone of 'em. You're in for a real hard time. My sister has been teaching 'em and she's struck work—got worn out at it. Now say you'll go, and I'll see to all the arrangements. You'll have to go, in fact—I'll take no denial."

And so it came about that in the space of ten minutes Ellen Harriott became engaged as governess to a family she had never seen by a man who knew nothing of her. Gordon arranged all about her steamer passage, and handed her an envelope which he said contained a cheque for railway and other expenses. He gave her full directions for the journey and said good-bye with quite an air of proprietorship, and left her to face the long journey back to Sydney.

Then our two heroes went up to the little town to arrange about their trip inland. They walked along in silence, meditating on their late experience.

Carew broached the subject first. "Are there any nephews and nieces of yours to teach, eh?" he said. "All humbug, I s'pose. Wanted to pay her passage back, eh?"

"Not at all," said Gordon, very earnestly. "I've got a lot of nephews and nieces at the old station, and my sister teaches 'em, and a band of demons they are. Now that girl can have a try at it, anyhow, and see how she gets on. I'll write to the old lady to tell her she's coming, and I'll put Pincock on to these people that turned her away, and I'll make 'em sorry, I promise you. It's no way to treat a girl like that to be sending her tramping up and down this coast after a lot of hoodlums not fit to black her boots. Come on, now, and see about getting that mountain of baggage of yours into the hotel. We'll have to get 'em to dump it down in the yard and erect a buildin' round it. I expect. Then we'll go back to the ship and see that girl off."

(To be Continued.)

Mick: "Do you think O'm a mug?"
Pat: "A mug, me bhoy? Ye're a regular challenge cup!"