

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

BY KERON HALE.

Illustrated by W. A. Borving.



A CALM winter's night beneath the Southern stars. A clear night, glittering with planet jewels, and blue-white, with the shining of a full moon. Motionless toi-toi grass and flax bushes shed sharp-cut cameo shadows on the frozen earth, and the plain, stretching eastward to the horizon, held pale, uncanny reflections in every icy pool and puddle.

Under the shoulder of a white-headed mountain lay a lake. Pukaki and wild duck haunted it in summer time, but on this night the hill-echoes flung back to it the ring of skate, and the laughter of the ordinary human biped.

Neil Fraser, buckling his last skate strap with numbed fingers, stamped, once or twice, to make sure that all was firm, and looked across the lake with much satisfaction. A small and excited crowd, inspired by a concertina, performed extraordinary evolutions in the moonlight; and a slim girlish figure stood apart, shaded by a cabbage-tree. Neil shot away from the clayey bank in the direction of the cabbage-tree, and Joan Kestiven's face grew rosy as he pulled up beside her.

"What are they doing?" he asked. "Is it a haka, or puss in the corner?"

"Kitchen lancers," with a little quaint shrug of depreciation.

"Ye gods! Some people would play a Jew's harp on the last day. Come down to the far end, will you?"

She put her hands in his, and they skated northward in silence, for the loneliness

breathed by the great plain and the majesty of the sentinel mountains made ordinary conversation appear too paltry. To Joan Kestiven the world was full of the witchery of many things, newly realised, and she laughed softly out of sheer joy.

"This is a glorious world," she said; "never tell me that it's old, and growning with sorrow and pain under these very stars, for I won't believe it! Trouble is merely an hallucination."

Neil smiled grimly, and swung her aside from a black totara stump gripped in the ice.

"How does that illustrate your theory? A fair world to look at, but full of half hidden snags to catch one unawares."

"And full of people ready to save, witness the present! There are always plenty of danger signals if you only keep your eyes open."

"It would be a good deal more comfortable to keep 'em shut, sometimes," he said ambiguously, watching the double moon-shadow sliding lazily alongside. "All the good things of this world are ticketed 'don't touch.'"

"That's what makes them good. Didn't you know? But be content with reading the labels, and—listen to the concertina. Won't you join the dance?"

Neil looked at her irresolutely. In the distance the dancers were waking unholy echoes with coon songs, but here, in the bush-shade, was silence and the sweet pungent scent of flax and fern. Even the double shadow had deserted them, and the passing of that silent witness loosed, for Neil, something which he had been holding