

"THE SECOND GENERATION."*

A BOOK-STUDY.

I. A GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE NOVEL.

THE SECOND GENERATION, David Graham Phillips' latest romance of American life, is in all essential respects his strongest and best novel. It is more finished from an artistic view-point, more comprehensive and definite as a social study, and more satisfying as a romance of life and love than any of his previous works; while its presentation of contrasting views of home life under the egis of plutocracy and of democracy is without question the best thing yet produced in American fiction. It is as strong and almost as realistic or true to life as one of Zola's masterpieces or one of Tolstoi's great romances while it is absolutely free from every suggestion or hint of the sensualism, grossness or coarseness which is the great blot on the works of Zola, and from the asceticism and extreme austerity of the great Russian's writings. It is a romance of present-day conditions in America, throbbing with the life which we know, see and feel, but which only the artist, the poet or the novelist—only the man of imagination, can so picture as to make us feel for the time that the author is dealing with real flesh and blood men and women that he has known and known intimately.

II. THE ART OF THE BOOK.

The Second Generation marks a decided advance in Mr. Phillips' writings when considered from the view-point of literature or as an art work. We have on several occasions noted what we considered to be a real defect in our novelist's writings—the making of one character overshadow or dwarf all other

personalities in the work. Thus in *The Plum-Tree* and *The Deluge*, for example, we have distinctly great or colossal figures that are among the best drawn characters in American fiction. But they are Gullivers among Lilliputians. They absorb the reader's interest and hold his attention so completely that he feels comparatively little interest in the other characters, especially when that interest is not intimately bound up in the fate of the dominating personality. The right relation of the characters is destroyed and the proportions are wanting. The romances lack background.

In this novel Mr. Phillips has overcome these defects in an admirable and artistic manner. True, we have a great dominating personality in the opening chapters of *The Second Generation*. Hiram Ranger is a colossal typical figure and while he is present in his physical person he overshadows all other characters; but almost with our introduction to this true, sincere, and wise American of the old school, we hear the solemn fiat of the learned physician: "Set your house in order," and the hour soon comes when the great man passes from the stage, leaving his children and their companions to fill the boards. Still, such has been the impression of the character of Hiram Ranger made upon the mind of the reader, such the art of the novelist throughout the subsequent chapters, that this colossal figure is ever present, though so subordinated as to let the other characters take their proper places and largely engross the interest of the reader. Here we have a truly artistic treatment. The proportions are preserved. The great spirit permeates the story and broods over the chief characters, and as in the opening chapters, so in the closing lines, Hiram Ranger's personality is dominant. But dur-

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ing the unfoldment of the romance it is present more as a pervasive influence, and so heightens instead of detracts from the interest of the leading characters in the romance.

The author also at all times makes the interest of the reader in his characters a paramount consideration. He gives a vivid and striking picture of certain phases of present-day social and business conditions; he drives home vital truths and impresses great lessons but this is always done in such a way as to add to rather than detract from the interest in the story.

III. AS A SOCIAL STUDY.

Heretofore Mr. Phillips has been content for the most part with revealing in a faithful and graphic manner present-day political, business and social conditions that are inimical to democracy and destructive to the moral integrity of the individual. Thus in *The Plum-Tree* we have the most faithful and realistic picture of present-day political conditions under the mastership of the “interests” or the plutocracy, which owns the political bosses and directly or indirectly manipulates the party machines, that has been written.

In *The Deluge* we have an equally powerful and truthful picture of the methods of the master-spirits of our commercial feudalism, who in Wall street, the citadel of the plutocracy and high finance, operate those colossal and diabolical “confidence games” that are the scandal of the Republic, gambling with stacked cards, and who, through stock-watering, inflation and depression of stocks, and the control of public utilities, are able to plunder the millions of producers and consumers while crushing competition and reaping immense wealth coming and going.

The Plum-Tree and *The Deluge* take us behind the curtains in American politics and the world of high finance, and reveal all the odious practices and secret methods of the plutocracy in its double rôle of master of American politics and of finance.

In *The Cost* we have vivid glimpses of the plutocracy at work, both in politics and in Wall street. In these and most of his other books the author’s master-purpose has been to familiarize the American readers with the facts—the serious and alarming facts—that are threatening the life of the Republic.

In *The Second Generation* Mr. Phillips has gone farther. With the skill of a surgeon he inserts the lance and lays bare one of the great

eating cancers in the body politic; or, to change the figure, he uncovers the *débris* around the reservoir of democratic government and shows one great stream of poison whose influence is contaminating the Republic. Nor does he stop with this. It is important to throw the searchlight on the hidden sins and dark places where the plutocracy works in secret, and show the public the enemies of a democratic republic busily engaged in destroying free institutions for individual advancement and enrichment; it is important to definitely point out the different streams of death that are poisoning the reservoir of democracy; but it is also important to show the demands of the hour, and in the present work our author first pictures in a most striking manner the destructive influence of inherited wealth, in that it injures the moral and frequently both the mental and physical fiber, of those who come into possession of money they do not earn; while its influence tends to create the curse of classes, placing one body of citizens completely out of touch with the millions of wealth-creators and in every way fostering conditions that are inimical to democratic government.

Next he shows that through honest coöperative work and through educational methods that shall make every child pay for his schooling by labor with his hands in some industrial pursuit that shall be productive and useful in character, the right relation of the young in regard to work and to each other will be established and the old order will be reinstated.

Joaquin Miller in his beautiful social vision, *The Building of the City Beautiful*, shows that most of the avoidable misery and social inequality in the world to-day arises from man’s attempt to evade the carrying out of the first great law of God, said to have been uttered as the gates of Eden were closing against the awakened man and woman: “In the sweat of thy face—not in the sweat of the face of another—shalt thou eat bread till thou returnest to the ground.”

Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the greatest living physical scientist of England and one of the most fundamental social philosophers of the age, in his masterly paper in the January *ARENA*, struck a telling blow at the inheritance idea which Mr. Phillips so clearly and forcefully elucidates in this novel. In showing how the railroads should be taken over by the people, Dr. Wallace in *THE ARENA* paper restates a demand which he made fifteen years

ago: that social justice and the requirements of free and equitable government make it imperative that all citizens of the State shall enjoy equality of opportunities; that, to use the great scientist's own words, "some social arrangement must be made by which the individuals may start in life with an approach to equality of opportunities." Dr. Wallace reinforces his position by quoting Herbert Spencer's law of social justice, which is that "each individual ought to receive the benefits and evils of his own nature and consequent conduct, neither being prevented from having whatever good his action normally brings him, nor allowed to shoulder off onto other persons whatever ill is brought upon him by his actions."

Dr. Wallace continues: "For it is quite clear that both Herbert Spencer's formula and my own imply, not only equal opportunities of nurture in infancy and education in youth, but also equal opportunities to earn a livelihood; and this absolutely forbids the inheritance of wealth by individuals. Private bequests, above what is sufficient to give nurture and education, must therefore be abolished, and the surplus used to give all an equal start in life. This economic equality follows from Spencer's law of social justice. For by inheriting exceptional wealth a person receives what is in no way 'due to his own nature and subsequent conduct,' be its results either evil or good. If, therefore, we accept Spencer's law of social justice as being sound in principle or adopt the formula of 'equality of opportunities' as being anything more than empty words, we must advocate the abolition of all unequal inheritance of wealth, since it is now shown to be ethically wrong, inasmuch as it dignifies unearned wealth and a consequent life of idleness and the pursuit of pleasure as one to be admired, respected and sought after."

The method pursued by Mr. Phillips in presenting the two great economic facts—the demoralizing influence of the inheritance of great wealth, and the importance of each man being engaged in some useful and productive work—evinces consummate skill and reveals the fact that the author is not only a fundamental thinker and a democrat after the order of Jefferson and Lincoln, but that he has been a close and painstaking student of social and industrial conditions. The facts which he points out are of great importance to thoughtful and patriotic Americans at the

present time, and happily for the interest of the general reader, they are, as we have before observed, so woven into the web and woof of this story as to enlist the sympathies on the side of the great truths presented and increase rather than detract from the general interest in the romance.

IV. THE NOVEL AS A STORY.

The story opens with a fine pen-picture of one of the truly great Americans of the older day. Hiram Ranger in youth had been denied the benefits of the fine educational advantages that are the lot of most American boys and girls of our time; but he had improved the meager opportunities within his reach and what he lacked in intellectual education he made up in sturdy character, sterling moral worth and in tireless industry. He early mastered the flour-milling business and built up a fine trade in the old days before the railways and the thieving trusts and monopolies joined in their infamous conspiracy to ruthlessly destroy the men who were not in their secret and corrupt rings. When the business became so great as to require a co-operation, Hiram Ranger personally learned all parts of the industry so that he could make a flour barrel as well as the most skilled workman in the shop. He showed his men that he knew the work and that he regarded work as honorable and uplifting.

The opening chapter in the story introduces us to the grand old man whose personality permeates the romance. Hiram Ranger is a typical character, representative of the old American successful business man, who by honorable means, persistent industry and strict regard to business methods rose to a commanding position in the business world. Over against the father is presented the son, Arthur Ranger, who is also a typical figure, representing the newly-rich young man who goes to the great colleges of the East, gets into the society of other young men whose parents are very wealthy, and soon becomes the victim of a poisonous environment, reactionary in nature, inimical to democracy and destructive in its influence upon the moral fiber and essential manhood of its victims.

Hiram has just been repairing a piece of machinery that the men were unable to mend. When he emerges from under the great machine with which he has been working, he suddenly notices his son Arthur standing before him. The youth is dressed in the latest

extreme styles of the city. He is smoking a cigarette, and there is a supercilious smirk on his naturally manly face. The surprise of the father is as great as his disappointment is bitter at seeing his son becoming such a caricature of a man. He supposed Arthur was at college, but the boy explains that he has been “plucked” and so has come home. The truth develops, that the youth has become a member of that set of newly-rich men’s sons who are the curse and disgrace of our great institutions of learning,—the young men who become fast, and with plenty of money are a distinctly demoralizing influence in the colleges of the present time. He has failed in his examinations and so has returned home, and, fearing his father’s anger, he has stopped at Cleveland and brought Adelaide, his sister, home from a fashionable finishing school to be a buffer between him and his father’s anger.

The daughter had always been the very apple of Hiram Ranger’s eye. She had left home a beautiful, innocent and natural girl. She has returned like her brother, with head filled with the false and vicious ideas of the fashionable newly-rich who long for class-distinctions, entertain contempt for the ideals of their parents and for democratic simplicity and sincerity, and who love to patronize those who work and those they are pleased to characterize as “trades people.” Adelaide has brought home with her a pet monkey to amuse herself with.

The astonishment and disappointment of the father with the change that has come over his children is too great for words, and just at this moment a terrible shadow settles over his being, for in lifting the great machines he has strained himself, and from that hour he experiences great pain in his body—pain so great, indeed, that he is led to consult a famous old physician in the city, who after an exhaustive examination frankly tells him that it will be best for him immediately to “set his house in order.”

Mr. Whitney, the partner of Mr. Ranger, has moved east, and in addition to looking after the business of buying grain and lumber and selling the finished products of the mill, he has joined the “high finance” group, becoming one of the “insiders” among the great Wall-street gamblers who systematically play with loaded dice. He has acquired much wealth thus through indirection, in addition to the money which the great flour industry

has earned for him. His wife has developed into a woman of fashion, living an artificial and affected life—a life of pretence, in which she is ceaselessly endeavoring to ape the aristocrats of the Old World. The Whitneys have two children, Ross and Janet, and during the past two or three years these children have become engaged to the Ranger children, much to the satisfaction of their parents.

Hiram Ranger, shortly after he receives the fateful warning from the learned physician, has a slight shock of paralysis, and during his convalescence a neighbor in calling on him points out the fact that all the young people of the town who are waiting for their parents to die that they may inherit fortunes, are becoming worthless or worse than worthless. They are failures in life when regarded from any true standard of measurement; failures, indeed, from even the materialistic view-point of earning money. The one seeming exception, John Dumont, on examination is found to be no exception. He has acquired great wealth by using the wealth inherited from his parents, but he has done this, not by using it in such a way as to earn it legitimately, but by entering Wall street and engaging with the high financiers in rigging and working the market—in other words, in gambling with stacked cards.

These facts set the old man to thinking very seriously, and the frivolity, artificiality and lack of appreciation for sterling worth evinced by his own children leads him to bequeath his fortune to a local college, on condition that it shall be so used that those who are educated shall during their education learn some wealth-creating trade or work their way through college, so as to learn not only to do some useful labor, but also so that the recipients shall feel a real and sympathetic interest and kinship with all the workers and appreciate the essential dignity of labor, as should be the case in a free government,—aye! as must be the case in a genuine democracy. The wife is well provided for during her life, and the daughter receives two thousand dollars a year, but the son is given a lump sum of five thousand dollars and the opportunity to learn his father’s business as his father had learned it, and later the chance to buy the business on favorable terms.

It was only after a desperate struggle that the father brought himself to practically disinherit his children. He wanted to do *the easy thing*, but he had in his being the stern

moral idealism of the old Covenanters, and his reason and conscience told him that the hope of his children lay in his taking the course he settled upon. The reason for his action is thus given:

"I make this disposal of my estate through my love for my children and because I have a firm belief in the soundness of their capacity to do and to be. I feel that they will be better off without the wealth, which will tempt my son to relax his efforts to make a useful man of himself, and would cause my daughter to be sought for her fortune instead of for herself."

When the father dies and the will is read, the two Whitney children, largely under the influence of their frivolous, worldly-wise and spiritually blind mother, break off their engagements with Arthur and Adelaide. The former goes to work as a laborer in his father's mill; the latter marries an old child-sweet-heart who is a teacher in the school which has received Hiram Ranger's bequest. It is with the unfolding of their characters under the healthful stimulus of honest productive labor and the influence of a high-minded and genuinely noble-hearted young man who is a democrat to the core, that the book is chiefly concerned.

Arthur in time comes under the influence of a wonderfully beautiful and intelligent young woman who is a physician. The two grow together and become part each of the other, making an ideal union. The chapters devoted to the courtship of Arthur and Madelene are only less attractive than those that show the gradually expanding life and love of each after marriage, when each is a tower of strength to the other. Indeed, there are few chapters in modern fiction more beautiful or ennobling in influence than those concerned with the unfolding life of these two young people, especially after marriage.

With Adelaide and her husband, Dory Hargrove, the son of the president of the college, the life-story is far different. The girl from her early childhood had deeply respected young Hargrove and she knew he loved her; but she accepted his offer of marriage more through pique at being thrown over by her affianced lover, Ross Whitney, who weds an unattractive and selfish but immensely rich girl, than because of any real love she feels for young Hargrove. The poison-virus of soul-

destroying fashionable and reactionary life, that Adelaide had imbibed in the years at her finishing school, when she associated only with the children of the very rich, and the still more baleful influence of people like Mrs. Whitney and her son, whose only gods were self and gold, have distorted her whole view of life. She is out of key with the sane, true, wholesome and elevating democratic ideals which are the governing impetus in her husband's life. The beautiful-useful has far less charm for her than the beautiful-useless; and so for a time an insuperable barrier seems to stand between the husband and wife, while the temptations so rife in the world of the money-worshippers come to Adelaide during the absence of her husband in Europe. The story of the young wife's blind gropings for the light of happiness—blind, because of the fatal light that had environed her years when away from home—is told in a natural and deeply interesting manner.

Then there is a third love-tale in the work—a beautiful story, but with a sad ending. All these tales are so woven together as to develop and increase the interest on the part of the reader in the great ethical and economic truths impressed with the unfolding art of a young master.

Nor is this all. The contrasts found in the closing chapters are very suggestive. Here we have in bold antithesis the full-orbed happiness of Arthur and Madelene, of Adelaide and Dory,—the fitting fruitage of a union with love blossoming under the democratic ideals of life—the ideal of all for all, and the ghastly hollowness of the life of Ross Whitney and his mother, which is the natural fruitage of gold madness and the exaggerated egoism that is so markedly present in plutocratic circles. Seldom have we read anything more effective as showing the utter hollowness of the materialistic life of the dollar-worshippers, or anything that better illustrates the conscience-destroying and soul-dwarfing influence of an empty and selfish existence—an existence unilluminated by any high, serious and noble purpose, than is found in the death scene of Charles Whitney and the family quarrel between mother and children over the fortune of the dead high financier.

The Second Generation is not only Mr. Phillips' strongest and best novel; it is the most virile and vital romance of the present year.