

A Scourge of Doubt.

OR.....

THE ERROR OF LADY BLUNDEN.

CHAPTER II.

Descriptions, like comparisons, are odious. The "mind's eye," though following with willing haste the tongue that speaks, never quite grasps the truth. It sees either too much or too little. You may have the pen of a genius, and may paint your Paul or your Virginia in glowing colors, yet you will never get the uninitiated to understand in the very least what he or she may be like. Nevertheless, a slight sketch of the Tremaines must be given.

They are, to begin with, that most interesting of all things a handsome family. They are all handsome; the Tremaines would have scorned to acknowledge an "ugly duckling." For generations such a thing had not been so much as hinted at among them.

Mrs. Tremaine, though arrived at that age when the question of birthdays is viewed with disfavor, is still very good to look at, and eminently aristocratic. She rejoices in the thin transparent nostrils, the fine lips, the pale blue eyes, and high white brow that are generally supposed to belong by right to blue blood. She rarely laughs, but she has the most charming smile in the world—a lingering, perfect smile, with something in it unwilling, that adds to it but another charm, compelling as it does the companion of the moment to accept it as an irrepressible tribute to his own peculiar powers of pleasing. She also possesses to perfection the calm indifference of manner that goes so far to hide the craving for settlements so undying in the breast of the British matron.

Mr. Tremaine is handsome also, but of a darker type, and is one of those men who are indebted to their wives for their individuality. He is "Mrs. Tremaine's husband," and many people like him the better for that. He is a most estimable man, warm-hearted and affectionate, but I don't think even his best friend could call him brilliant. And when twenty-five years before this story opens, he offered his hand, which was large, and his fortune which was larger, to Miss Lascelles, the spoiled beauty of the year, al, the world—that is, the male portion of it—expressed astonishment at his presumption. None, however, was expressed by Miss Lascelles herself, who accepted both the hand and fortune without hesitation.

The marriage proved a very happy one, which disgusted the world—that is, the female portion of it—extremely. Mrs. Tremaine was fond of life and its good things, and very fond of her own way. Mr. Tremaine (wise man) never thwarted her in anything. The result of their union, therefore, was a most unusual amount of real contentment, and four pretty children.

Brandrum, the eldest—commonly called "Brandy"—is a cheerful, perhaps rather too cheerful, young gentleman of twenty-three. He calls himself a hussar; but as he is generally on leave all the year round, his friends say it doesn't seem to matter much what he calls himself; any other regiment (for all it is likely to see of him) will do just as well. He has curly hair and blue eyes, like all the Tremaines, and a smile like a cherub; and women as a rule pet him more than is good for him.

The second child, Kitty, is exceedingly handsome, tall, and dark, like her father, and an undoubted success. All last season she was caressed and made much of, and had actually been able to refuse an earl, greatly to her mother's chagrin. But when, towards the close of July, she left town with every satisfactory symptom of having made a conquest of Sir John Blunden, Mrs. Tremaine forgave her, and devoutly though secretly thanked her stars that she had been disobedient in the matter of old Lord Sugden, who, though of higher rank than Sir John, was of infinitely shorter rent-roll.

Sir John as yet has not proposed in form, but words have been spok-

en and looks interchanged; and, though nobody enlarges on the subject, everybody hopes he means to do so. Although near neighbors,—Coolmore, the Blunden property, being only eight miles distant from the Court, where the Tremaines live,—he and Kitty had never met until that last memorable occasion in town; and now he has followed her to the country, under the pretense that his fine old house wants renovating, everybody feels that Kitty in effect is Lady Blunden.—Sir John being a young man not addicted to the country except at certain seasons and then very much fonder of other people's houses than his own.

Perhaps Kitty herself is the only one who feels any serious doubt about his ultimate intentions. She knows him to be a careless, easy-going young man, who has held his own successfully through many a hot campaign with managing mothers and who up to this has carefully avoided matrimony as one might the plague or any other misfortune. Young men like Sir John, who have proved themselves over-attentive to various young women year after year and yet have obstinately abstained from bringing their attentions to a satisfactory finish, are generally termed flirts; Kitty has heard Sir John so called, and in her heart has not liked the speaker the better for saying it. A man who flirts systematically is a disgraceful thing,—so she tells herself,—yet she cannot bring herself to think Sir John disgraceful. He has said things to her that have interested her and have a good deal to do with her rejection of Lord Sugden and others,—things that might almost be construed into an offer of marriage; and still she cannot be certain he means to propose to her. In town there had been many opportunities to speak had he so willed it, but he had not seized them. Above all there was that last evening at Lady Brompton's, when the lights burned low in the conservatory, and the flowers slept, and the very stillness breathed love, yet he had not spoken. No one, of course, mentions Sir John to Kitty Tremaine as an acknowledged lover, nor does she ever mention him as anything but a casual acquaintance, even to Gretchen; though in her she would have surely gained a sympathetic listener.

Pretty Gretchen! with her pale



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pure face, and little Grecian nose, and great blue eyes, that remind one of nothing so much as the sweet Czar violet. She is two years younger than Kitty, and smaller and slighter, with an expression calm and unspeakably tender. To think of Gretchen is to think of moonlight or the soft perfume of roses, or faint strains of sweetest music. To see her is to love her. To know her is a "liberal education."

Then there is Flora, the last but by no means the least of the Tremaines,—a tall and very determined person of twelve, who would reject with ignominy the notion that she is still a child. Her eyes are gray, steady, and severe; her small mouth is incorruptible. She is one of those awful people with whom a spade is a spade; and to even hint a harmless falsehood in her presence, and to suddenly find those gray orbs fixed upon you is to lose instant self-control, and to long for the earth to open and swallow you up. She admires Kitty,—though being cognizant of her faults, she does not scruple to tell her of them occasionally; she adores Gretchen, and maintains an undying feud with Brandy, to whom

she is a joy and an everlasting resource.

Kitty, having searched the house diligently for Gretchen, and failed to find her, walks into the school-room as a last chance, and looks anxiously around her; whereupon Flora raises her head from her German in a vain hope that something is going to occur to put an end to her detested lessons; and Brandy, who is smoking a cigar against all rules upon an elderly sofa, asks, inclegantly, "What's the row?"

"Meg, are you here? Where is Gretchen?" asks Kitty, anxiously. "Meg was meek, and Meg was mild, and Bonnie Meg was Nature's child," quotes Flora, gayly, glad of the interruption.

"If it is 'Nature's child' you want," says Brandy, obligingly, sinking back again upon his faded though luxurious cushions, "I am almost sure you will find her in the garden."

This encouraged, Miss Tremaine crossed the room, and, putting her head out of the open window, says, loudly, "are you there, Gretchen?" to the back of the summer-house half overgrown with silvery clematis and the fast reddening Virginia creeper.

A soft voice answers,— "Yes. Do you want me, Kitty?" And Gretchen, emerging from her bower, stands gazing inward, one white hand shielding her eyes from the sun.

"Not I so much as mamma. She wishes you to go visiting with her. Be quick, dearest; the carriage is ordered."

"Coming," says Gretchen, disappearing behind the escalonias and running down the garden walks through borders of glowing flowers.

"I wish, Brandy," says Kitty, drawing in her head, "you would not smoke in the school-room. You know mamma particularly objects to your doing so. And why have a smoking-room if people won't smoke in it?"

"Why, indeed?" returns Brandy, mildly. "I only smoke here, against my better judgment, to oblige Flora, who is never entirely happy except when enveloped in a thick cloud of tobacco."

"You may take your books to my room, Flora," says Miss Tremaine, with gentle dignity. "Don't you mind my smoking there asks Brandy, instantly, in a tone full of innocent surprise.

"You! Don't attempt it," Brandy. I am not speaking of you," exclaims Kitty. "The last time you went into my dressing-room you upset everything in it. You shall never enter it again."

"But, my dear girl, I can't desert Flora. I have undertaken her education, and I must go through with it. Besides, you forget I am lonely down here, and that she is my sole companion. You are too dignified, Gretchen is too ethereal, but Miss Flora Tremaine," says Brandy, with mild enthusiasm, "is my beau-ideal of budding womanhood,—the very acme of perfection."

Flora laughs sardonically and flings a heavy volume of Schiller at him, which he dodges with admirable presence of mind.

"I think you might show your admiration for her in a less objectionable manner," says Kitty; "for instance by throwing that horrid cigar into the grate."

"Such an absurd thought never struck me. Think what a drawback it would be to you in the future, my dear Flora, not to be able to appreciate your husband's cigars. Why positively, unless educated up to the mark you would not know whether he was smoking pure Havannas or Early York."

"Brandy, how can you talk such nonsense to the child?" says Miss Tremaine, who is busily examining the child's exercises.

"It doesn't matter what he says, as I shall never marry," puts in Flora, with conviction; "I wouldn't put up with the caprices of any man; I know too much about them for that!"

"I envy your experience," says Brandy, with a laugh of the richest enjoyment. "Stick to that, dear child, till your hair is gray. But in the meantime, lest some Adonis should induce you to alter your mind, let me give you a hint. Do you know that young women who object to smoking and insist on quenching their husband's pipes invariably drive those poor men to clubs and all sorts of naughtiness, and generally play the mischief all round?"

"I wonder you don't suffer from a

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To Help Throw Off the Impurities That Have Accumulated During the Winter Months—Purgatives Should Not be Used—It Is a Tonic That is Needed.

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sore throat," suggests Miss Flora, with a sneer. "I would suffer anything for your sake. It is the fatherly interest I take in you that induces me to deliver this lecture; and, as I shouldn't like to see you in a hole hereafter, I shall smoke one cigar here daily until you can lay your hand upon your heart and tell me honestly you—"

"Very good; all right. Then I shall do no more German or anything else," with angry resignation. "Read it out loud to me," returns Brandy, drowsily; "it will improve your pronunciation, and you can have the advantage of my knowledge. I don't think anything of that Monsieur of yours. He looks like an impostor, and I am positive he is a Scotchman. I feel deliciously sleepy; so go on,—I am sure a very little more of your German will finish me comfortably."

"Kitty, I shall go with you to your room," says Flora, desperately, gathering up her books and beating an ignominious retreat.

To be Continued.

As he spoke the thunderings of deep toned voices fell upon his ear. The tramping of many feet was heard upon the pavement of the piazza, and ere long a squad of frightened soldiers rushed into the apartment. They had no opportunity to speak, however, for hard upon them followed a crowd of armed men clothed in gorgeous apparel. Strato sank back upon his throne, but the intruders noticed him not. A moment the leader cast his eyes about, and they rested upon Gio.

"The king! the king!" shouted the Egyptian general, and on the instant the newcomers gathered around the towering form of Gio and fell upon their knees. "Up, up, my loyal subjects," cried Gio. "Brought you not your queen?"

"Yes, sire. She comes now," returned the general, as he arose to his feet and made a motion for his followers to stand aside.

As he spoke a purple pavilion was borne into the royal presence, and as the bearers set it down there stepped forth from it a middle-aged, but still beautiful female.

"My daughter! My daughter!" she cried, and as she spoke she tottered to the spot where stood Gio and Esther.

"Oh," she uttered, in startling accents, as she leaned back from her husband's embrace; "you have not deceived me?"

"No, dear Zenobia, she is safe!" Marina started forward. There was a voice in her soul that told her she looked upon the woman that bore her—a voice so strong, so sure, that she knew it spoke the truth, and with a stifled cry she put forth her arms. Zenobia gazed for an instant upon the young Tyrian queen; a flood of joyous light started to her eyes, her bosom heaved with its strong emotion, and on the next moment the mother and child were weeping tears of bliss in each other's embrace.

Kison Ludim raised his eyes to heaven, and thanked God that she whom he had so carefully reared had found a mother.

"Now," said Gio, as he led Marina to the throne and placed her by the side of her husband, "you will look upon me no more in mysterious doubt, for know that I am none other than Gio Amyrtaes, King of Egypt. And you, Strato, if you have not married the daughter of a Tyrian noble have at least gained the heart of one of earth's most noble princesses."

The young monarch sprang from his throne, and bent his knee to the Egyptian king; then those who stood around followed his example, and a prolonged shout of joy rent the air.

"Rise, rise," pronounced Gio, taking young Strato by the hand, and lifting him up; and while a tear of pride and joy trembled upon his dark eyelashes, he continued:

"Now, my son, take your throne, and use it for the good of Tyre. If you want an incentive to duty read the history of earth's kingdoms. It is written in blood, and will afford grave admonition. And you, Marina, must not forget the part you are called upon to act. I leave you both a husband and a father, for though I go from you now, yet I know that Kison Ludim will be all to you that he has ever been. You will both look to the old noble for his counsel and advice, and remember how much of happiness we all owe to him. My own great kingdom now claims my attention, but we shall often meet. Esther shall stay with you yet a while longer to bless you with her sweet presence, and so shall your dear mother. Strato, your subjects are your masters, and they will love and revere you, and faithfully protect you, so far as you see them honorably and justly."

• The End.

FOR EVERY MOTHER.

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