

# A Scourge of Doubt.

OR.....

## THE ERROR OF LADY BLUNDEN.

### CHAPTER XVII.

Meantime Kitty, who is still sore at heart, has successfully eluded her husband throughout the day, much to that careless man's bewilderment. Feigning headache in the morning, he escapes breakfast, and is dead to all the tender messages of condolence conveyed to her through her maid. Yet withal she suffers more from this self-enforced severance than she does, and grows sadder if not wiser as the hours pass without bringing about a reconciliation.

About four a longing to see some one of whose affection she may count herself assured induces her to drive to Gretchen's, where she finds Kenneth on a sofa, with "little Tom Scarlett" and two or three other men around him, laughing and talking as he has not done for many a day. Gretchen at a distance—looking sweeter and more girlish than ever—is pouring out tea, and making much of Dandy, who has just come off second best in a wordy war with Brandy, who is also present.

"My dear girl, how glad I am you have come! I hardly hoped to see you to-day—I don't know why," Gretchen says, flushing with unmistakable pleasure, as Kitty, tall and stately, sweeps up the pretty room. "Neither do I," returns Kitty, laughing, "considering I generally find my way here five days out of the week. I always say—sinking into a chair, with a little sigh that has something in it resembling envy—"this is the pleasantest house in town."

"You are going to the opera to-night, are you not, Kitty?" asks Kenneth, presently, from his sofa.

"Yes, dear."

"Make Gretchen go with you. She wants to hear Tassalle, and won't go by herself."

"Why not come to our box?" says Kitty, persuasively, turning to her sister. "Brandy will bring you, and I myself will see you home with—"

"With Jack?"

"May I count on you, Brandy?" asks Gretchen, addressing that ingenious youth, who is standing in one of the windows, apparently lost in thought, though in reality he is only meditating on some final remark that shall help to smash beyond all recognition his quondam friend.

"I should be charmed, my dear, but I really am not at liberty," he says, being under the delusion that Mrs. Charteris is to be present to-night at a "small and early" given in Berkeley Square: whereas she has refused that invitation, and is going to the opera, and nowhere else after on. "Please don't compel me, Gretchen. I would do anything to oblige you,—really anything, from playing pitch-and-throw up to manslaughter, if it would afford you the smallest gratification; but I confess the opera to-night is out of my head."

Gretchen shrugs her shoulders.

"Then you will take me, Dandy?" she says, turning to Mr. Dimmont.

"Thanks awfully," replies he, speaking with unconcealed alacrity. "It is very good of you to have me. I hate my own society, and I was bound to put in an appearance at the Italian house to-night."

"I didn't know you were going," says Brandy, with sudden suspicion, trying to examine his friend's infantile features. Dandy has also had an invitation to that dance in Berkeley Square. Why is he not going? He may be going later on, certainly; but it is unlike the careful Dimmont to be late on the field.

"You said nothing of it."

"No?"—innocently, but maliciously. "I don't care about those Stanleys, so I sha'n't go to the Square; and, besides, yesterday Mrs. Charteris made rather a point of seeing me at the opera to-night,—as a commission or something for me to execute, and asked me to come to her box some time during the evening, that she might tell me about it."

"Ah!" says Brandy. For an instant he suffers defeat,—only for an instant; then he rallies and comes to the front boldly.

Going up to Gretchen, he leans over her chair, and pushes back tenderly a little bit of her pretty hair behind her ears.

"Though I have behaved badly to you, Meg," he says, caressingly, "will you do something for me?"

"It depends upon what it is," replies Meg, with a sweet smile.

"Will you forget what I said just now, and let me take you to the opera?"

"But Dandy has promised to take care of me; and, besides, I thought you said you had a pressing engagement that prevented you escorting your poor little sister. How is that, Master Brandy?"

"It is the simplest thing in the world," says Mr. Tremaine, unabashed; "I have changed my mind. The fact is, Mrs. Charteris gave me a fan to get mended for her, and, as I believed she would be at the Stanley's to-night, I meant to go there to return it to her; but (as Dimmont has kindly informed me) she is going to the opera. I should like to go there too."

"How flattering, says Gretchen, laughing. "It seems to be all Mrs. Charteris. I wonder in what part of the play I make my appearance? However, I am not greedy, nor do I bear malice. You shall both escort me, if you will."

"There is safety in a multitude," says Kenneth.

"It depends upon the kind of rable," says Kitty. "I think it rather rash your trusting yourself alone to two such incompetent people. Why, they can't even take care of themselves."—giving Brandy's ear a little pinch.

"Better accept me as a guard of honor," says Danvers. "Never court danger if you can decently avoid it."

"No,—thanks; I shall keep to my bargain. I am sure 'our boys' will behave very prettily to me," returns Gretchen, smiling.

"I accept defeat," says Danvers, falling back again upon Kenneth; and, Gretchen crossing the room to a distant davenport to show Kitty some important missive received from their mother that morning, Brandy and Dandy find themselves virtually alone.

Brandy hastens to break the dis-

mal silence consequent on Gretchen's retreat.

"What was that you said just now," he asks, with unconcealed scorn and a tendency towards gibing in his tone, "about Mrs. Charteris and her making a point to see you to-night? I like that."

"I'm glad you do. It speaks well for you. Truth is so seldom palatable," retorts Mr. Dimmont, with a maddening smile.

"At times, as it seems to me, your absurd infatuation for Mrs. Charteris rather leads you astray,—makes your intellect totter on its throne. Frail things as a rule do totter," says Tremaine, with a short laugh. "I'd propose to her if I were you."

"So I shall, the first available opportunity,"—with immovable calm.

"You've pluck, but I doubt her giving you that available opportunity."

"Then I shall make one for myself,"—stoutly.

"Then so shall I," declares Brandy, in a furious though suppressed tone, now thoroughly incensed.

"Yes, I suppose I have as good a chance as you have. You never

knew her until I introduced you; and as I" (heavily accentuated) "am not the one to do things in an underhand fashion, I tell you I too shall propose to her as soon as occasion offers, and so I warn you."

"Warn me, sir! What do you mean? Do you imagine I fear you as a rival? I beg you will try to master the fact that I fear no man,—you least of all,—with withering contempt. "You can propose to her, or to the Princess Beatrice, or to any one else your madness suggests, with, I should say, quite the same result in all cases."

"You mean Mrs. Charteris will refuse me,—struck by your superior charms, no doubt? I flatter myself I'm better looking than you, anyway."

"You may be,"—with imperturbable nonchalance,— "and better bred your manners prove you! But you're not richer; and money makes the man, according to Byron."

"The Tremaine property is as good as the Dimmont's any day,"—with intense disgust. "You can do as you like, however. A refusal will be good for you, and take you down a bit."

"I shall thank you not to address me again on any subject," says Dandy, with sudden wrath.

Brandy laughs sardonically.

"It isn't a friendly act," he says, "to sit silent and watch a fellow make an ass of himself without uttering a word of expostulation."

At this Dandy exhibits his best sneer.

"Your affecting concern for my welfare touches me deeply," he is beginning, when a movement among the other occupants of the room checks him. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine where this charming discussion might have led the belligerents did not Kitty, coming up at this point, say good-bye to Dimmont and carry Brandy away with her.

One by one the others too depart, and evening falls very silently, and the lamps are lit in the square outside, and the cries of the vendors grow less, and the music of the wheels grows louder, and the people hurry madly to and fro, as though the last moment for action has indeed come.

Gretchen, standing at the window, looking down upon the pavements and the flickering jets of gas, and humming softly to herself, marks a little child standing half bare and wholly lonely against a lamp-post.

Hunger sits upon his brow; and want, and worse than want, have made hollows in the cheeks that should be rounded and flushed with childish grace and beauty.

"How absorbed you are!" says Kenneth from his sofa.

"Yes, I am watching a little boy—such a pretty child, but so thin and miserable, poor little fellow. I wonder where his mother is? See! he is looking up. Oh! I must give him something,"—turning impulsively to the door, as though bent on embracing the picturesque gamin then and there.

"Tell Jacobs to give him something, darling, and don't worry yourself," says Kenneth.

"I don't think servants give things nicely, do you, Ken?" asks she, wistfully. "And he is such a pretty boy. No, I shall run down and see to him myself."

"So she runs out of the room, and I dare say, makes that boy blissfully happy for an hour or so, and presently returns, bringing Jack Blunden in her train, who has looked in idly on his way home, almost hoping to find Kitty here. He is more upset about this quarrel with his wife than he is himself quite aware of, and he is in unmistakably low spirits.

"Ah, Blunden," says Kenneth, who likes Jack better than most people, "what lucky wind has blown you here this evening?"

"A desire to see you both, Gretchen especially. She is the one restful thing, I think, in all this great Babylon—the one green spot in the wilderness."

"My dear Ken, if you allow this sort of thing to go on you will be the sufferer," says Gretchen, laughing. "I shall become arrogant and overbearing, and all my amiability—now so much admired—will die a natural death. Kitty was here, Jack, about an hour ago. Did you know?"

"No; I haven't seen her for some hours," returns Sir John, in a constrained and rather bored tone. "She is going to hear Patti to-night."

"And you? You are going?"

"I'm not sure. Kitty said some-

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thing about going to the Stanleys afterwards, and I hate that kind of affair, and Mrs. Stanley in particular. I can't endure gushing women, and I like a little moderation in the use of rouge. The fact is, Mrs. Stanley and I don't love each other 'dear.' Are you going?"

"No."

"Not even to the opera?"

"Yes, I shall go there, certainly," says Gretchen, who is playing a symphony, with variations,—many variations,—on her husband's head.

Thinking she is going to her own box, he says nothing more on this subject, but passes on to another.

"I shall never forget the astonishment I felt to-night," he says, smiling. "Fancy walking up to any respectable house and finding the mistress of it indulging in a lengthened and apparently cheerful conversation with a very filthy little boy, who couldn't understand a word she was saying, because she was unable to speak his native language, which is slang!"

"Nonsense! He was the dearest boy. And so grateful! I told him he should have his breakfast here every morning, and I made him promise to come and tell me whenever he is hungry."

"Ah!" says Sir John, mildly. "You didn't order a camp-stool for him on the door step, did you? Because I should rather fancy, after your noble offer of assistance, it is there he will take his 'lonely stand' for the term of his natural existence. You're in awful luck to get a pretty boy; it will be so much more ornamental than an ugly one."

"Poor Kitty," says Gretchen, making a little grimace; "I can't help pitying her when I think what a goose she has married."

But at the mention of his wife's name Sir John grows grave again and goes back to common-place subjects.

"Do you still like that new man,—Blunt?" he asks, turning to Dugdale.

"Very much," Gretchen returns, eagerly, answering for Kenneth. "He is so gentle, and I am sure, clever. When I see him I believe in him, he looks so strong, so able. And then there is that successful case of his,—Letty Norman's brother."

He was considered almost hopeless, and is now nearly well. And Ken is much better. Are you not, Ken?"

"Yes, I really think I am," says Kenneth, who would have said just the same to please her were it the blackest untruth. "And really Norman's case, you know, was one in a thousand."

"One likes to hear that," says Blunden, heartily. "Hearing of a new man, one likes to know something positive about his genius before going into ecstasies over him. You have faith in him yourself?"

"Well, yes, I think so."

"That's right; that's half the battle,"—cheerfully. "I always think, you know, one ought to believe in a fellow when he is doing all he can for one. It's only decently grateful, you know. And really you are looking better. I suppose the change from the country to this pure air—"

"That will do; you may draw the line there," says Kenneth, laughing; and Jack rises to go.

"So glad we shall see you to-night," he says to Gretchen. "Kitty"—with a slightly dejected air—"is never so happy with any one else as with you."

"What a modest speech!" says Gretchen. "Except myself, you ought to have added."

"Well, I'm not sure, do you know?" says Jack, simply, almost wistfully; and then he bids them good-bye and goes home to his dinner.

(To Be Continued.)

### SEVERAL DINNER DON'T'S

MEALTIME HABITS THAT MAKE US OLD.

Various Hints on How to Keep Your Digestion Good and Be Happy.

If you don't want to see your health and digestive powers give way years before they ought to, never leave your place and move about in the course of a meal. The number of people who leave their seats to get a piece of bread, or fetch something forgotten, is enormous; and when, afterwards they are as irritable as a bear with well-deserved indigestion, they put it down to anything but the getting-up habit. See that everything is ready, and sit still till the meal is over. Then give yourself a quarter of an hour's rest after it. Getting up upsets the system, small a matter as it is, and whatever you eat after it—supposing you have already begun—will certainly disagree more or less with you. This habit will shorten the period during which you should have a sound digestion by some five or six years.

Assuming that you do not want to poison yourself, you should never, in the same meal, eat two otherwise wholesome and everyday things—cornflour and mushroom ketchup. These are harmless by themselves, and with most other things, but when they meet they form a strong irritant poison, through the action set up by two different matters in the materials. This is one of half a dozen chance mixtures that are dangerous, and cornflour and ketchup—especially to a weak person or a child—has been fatal more than once, and, in any case, is dangerous to even.

#### THE STRONGEST PERSON.

The remedy is brandy freely administered; but this is a combination which ought to be carefully kept out of any dinner, for the effects are sudden and the pain severe.

Another dangerous chance mixture, which every housekeeper ought to avoid, is that of almonds or almond-paste and shellfish of any kind—especially if the shellfish are tinned. They would not, of course, be eaten together; but if they occur in the same meal there is a big risk of severe poisoning, for the principal agents of these two foods combine to form a strong poison, which, if it takes good hold of the victim, is likely to cause death. In any case, the effects are worth any trouble to avoid. There are several combinations of this kind, which are rare but possible, and now and then a case occurs of a whole dinner assembly being taken ill in a mysterious way, when all the food served proves to have been in perfectly good condition.

One of the worst dinner habits, for its effect on the time your health ought to be sound, is that of drinking just before the meal begins. Whether it is water or anything else, this gives your digestion no chance at all, and, if persisted in, will ruin your powers of enjoying food for good and all. The best thing is not to drink till the end of the meal, but at any rate, not till you have laid in a foundation. If you drink first, you may prepare yourself to a certainty for that heavy, tempering feeling that so many people feel after dinner, but the cause of which is a deep mystery to them.

A habit that will play havoc with you as far as your dinners are concerned is

#### READING AT MEALS.

This is worse for the digestion than reading in bed is for the eyesight, and will bring all sorts of trouble to you. The nerves and brain don't want to do anything but attend to the business of eating when you are at meals, and if you distract them by reading habitually your eating powers will go by the board long before you are forty. Arguing at table is just as bad.

Another habit that will cost you years of misery and much money spent on quack medicines is that of lying down after a meal. This is one of the worst. Finally, don't dine with anybody who grumbles at his meal; he will ruin your digestion as well as his own. No companion at all is better than a gloomy one, and many modern doctors prescribe for the wealthy dyspeptics, among other things, the hiring of an entertaining or comic guest as a regular companion at mealtimes.—London Answers.

Respecting the Barotse King Lewanika, whose desire to see the "Great White King" was gratified the other day, a contemporary states that when this potentate first encountered civilization pellets were his only wear, and worn succinct. But when, only a few years later, Major St. Hill Gibbons paid him a visit, he found the Lewanika that then was arrayed in a light coat, a patterned waistcoat, tweed combinations, and an ambitious pair of boots. He has made further progress since in sartorial and other respects. He is more than usually intelligent and more than commonly tall. He is of athletic proportions and has a frock coat well. He has a pendulous lower lip and the eyes of Browning's Legate, "loosely floating in his head." And he will have his niche in the temple of fame as the only King who attended the Coronation, private visit to Westminster Abbey.

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