

BLONDES.

It was while the mania for blondes was at its height as a novelty, that there appeared in Paris a little book which deserves to be remembered as illustrative of a period in social history not yet passed away.

The narrative may be soon disposed of—all, at least, except the denouement, which is naturally reserved for the end—and with this arrangement far be it from me to interfere.

In the first chapter we are introduced to one Maurice de Fregeneuil, a rich young gentleman inhabiting a beautiful estate in Angouleme.

To him comes, with a letter of introduction, one Albert de Revel, another rich young gentleman, who is travelling with an object with which we soon made acquainted.

There is, it appears, a skeleton in the visitor's cupboard, the nature of which he communicates to his new friend on the second day.

Albert is, in order to retain his fortune, marry, within the time so nearly expired, a young lady of a beauty minutely described, and of which the chief characteristics are a skin brilliantly white, and hair of a gold color, long and abundant.

He would have found little difficulty, as his friend suggests, in finding such a person in England or Germany; but the uncle insists that the lady shall be French, and in France beauty of the kind is comparatively rare.

He had met with some who might have suited, but there are always exceptional conditions in the way, and what seems to be more important than all, he did not particularly care about blondes, his tastes inclining rather to brunettes.

Still less, too, does he share certain theories of his uncle on the subject of race, which he truly describes as of very extraordinary character; and in order that Maurice may see that he is not unreasonable, he reads to him a treatise in which the eccentric testator has embodied the said theories for the benefit of his heir.

The basis of this heterodox old gentleman's system is this:—That white people—that is to say, the extremely fair—were the originals of divine creation, and that dark people, in proportion as they are dark, have come from fallen angels.

In his illustrations, however, he applies this theory only to the female sex, believing a blonde woman to be the being most nearly allied to divinity. The blonde, in fact, belongs to the sky, and the brune to the earth.

In support of the principle he ransacks history, both sacred and profane, in order to show that all the most illustrious and lovable ladies, from the earliest period to the present time, have been blonde, while those who have the lesser claims to those distinctions have invariably been brune.

He traces them through the poets of ancient and modern times, and through the most celebrated works of fiction. Beginning at the beginning, he tells us that Eve was blonde, the brune being only an Eve, born out of Eden.

She belongs properly only to the paradise of Mohammed, where the houris are represented with a specialty for black eyes. Carrying the idea through the heathen mythology, he informs us that the Venus Urania—the celestial Venus—was blonde, while the Venus Melania—she of Corinth—was brune, as her name denotes.

According to Pausanias, the statue of Venus Urania was of gold or of ivory, and for her attribute she had at her feet a tortoise, symbol of secluded life; that of Venus Melania was of bronze, sitting on a seat with tilted horns, indicative of adultery.

The sons of those goddesses—Eros and Anteros—had the respective characteristics of their mothers.

blonde Phryne that inspired the two greatest artists of Greece. In Egypt it was the blonde Berenice who, to invoke the favor of the gods on Ptolemy, consecrated her hair to Venus. Passing to Rome, the author cites from Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, and others, numerous examples of the blonde beauties whom they celebrate in their poems.

He admits, however, that their golden tresses were for the most part borrowed—and this homage to the blondes of course delights him the more.

All false adornments—and especially false hair, which was still worn of a blonde color by women—were condemned, the author goes on to say, by the fathers of the Christian Church. But the barbarians who invaded Rome brought flaxen or red hair with them, and so the color became naturalized!

Dantes Beatrice had blonde tresses, as everybody knows, and the great heroine of the "Jerusalem Delivered" was also a blonde. "This portrait of Armida," says the author, after quoting Tasso's description, "was that of Eleonora d'Este. Unhappy Tasso!—happy, perhaps!—it drove him mad!"

Aristotle, he adds, did not lose his head for Angelica, but he would probably have been prepared to stake his life in her cause. It was while the hair was under the influence of these poets that Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgogne, instituted the order of the Toison d'Or, in honor of his blonde mistress.

The champion of the blondes devotes a great deal of laudation to Heloise, as introducing a considerable improvement in her sex. Before her example of devotion to Abelard, no woman, he assures us, had ever loved. He is naturally envious to claim her as his own, but unfortunately he has never been able to find any details of her personal appearance.

That she was beautiful is all that he has been able to ascertain. There is an old engraving in the library in the Rue Richelieu, which is supposed to represent her, but this is not to be depended upon. "I know not, therefore," he adds, "whether Heloise was brune or blonde; but I would wager that she was blonde, or else a brune with blue eyes."

In his next chapter he sets to work to show that from the time when woman ceased to be a slave and became a queen, however brunes and brunettes may have reigned over men's minds, blondes have always reigned over their hearts.

Taking the Troubadours in support of his proposition, he quotes from Raimon, Comte de Solsons (thirteenth century), the lines beginning:—"O belle blonde, o ceur qui m'asme, o Perie du monde, que j'aime tant!"

Hastening on to "the age of love, of pleasure, and something of chivalry, of art, of poetry, of royalty of every kind, in short, of which Francis the First—the gentleman, the gallant, the poet, the chevalier, the artist, was the king"—he says that in that age all France was amorous of green eyes—at least, according to Ronsard:—"Je veul' veul' brun et brun le teint, Quoique l'on vert tout la France adore."

The poet declares himself opposed to the popular taste in favor of Marguerite de Valois, the king's sister, who was brune with blue eyes; but "bon sang ne peut mentir," and another day he said to another mistress:—"A cette jeune Grecque a qui la beauté semble Comme tu fais le nom."—Heleno.

Then we are reminded that in an epithalamium on the marriage of Madeline of France, daughter of Francis, Marot wrote:—"Branette elle est, mais pourtant elle est belle." Among the other "proofs," as the author calls them, of his proposition, we find an allusion to green eyes in connection with blonde hair, and the two are, we believe, always associated.

(Becky Sharp, by-the-way, is an illustration in our own time.) Laboratoire makes the heroine of his "Annie de Cour," a coquette and courtly lady, say:—"Je n'estais point en mon accoutrement, A posément conduire mes yeux c'est, Pleins de douceur, ni peu ni trop ouverts."

From Melin de Saint-Gelais, Joachim DuBellay, Louis Labbe, "la belle cordiere," Remi Belleau, Claude de Pontoux, and others, he quotes verses in praise of blonde beauty, showing its high appreciation among French poets. Then he proceeds to give us some specimens from that curious book called "La Pauleographie"—written in praise of a blonde of Toulouse called "la Belle Paule," by Gabriel Minut, and printed at Lyons in 1587—from which it is evident that the lady in question, unlike the Toulouse ladies in general, had golden locks. The author—who certainly ought, from the enthusiasm with which he writes, to be an authority on the subject—declares, moreover, that it is impossible for any woman to be beautiful except under this condition.

"La Belle Paule," by-the-way, he describes as the most beautiful lady that ever existed, but his definition may be accepted with some reserve, considering that, as the author tells us, "the Superlative was born in Languedoc or its environs, and has never been expatriated; in illustration of which historical fact he tells us a story which, as it is about a white horse, may not be considered out of place.

An officer of Languedoc had lost a horse, and his grief took such a hold upon his southern excitability that he gave forth his lamentations at table in this style:—"My beautiful horse!—You know the white one? So beautifully white—more white than a swan in alabaster! So beautiful—the most beautiful of all Algeria! And young—the most young in the regiment! The most—ah, well! it is dead!"

account, for closing his quotations from the beauty-market of the blondes. But he adds another batch of women of fashion, of rank, of mind, or of beauty, who are to be included in the category. Agnes Sorel was blonde, Diana de Poitiers was blonde, Gabrielle d'Estrees was blonde, and Marie Stuart, "whom the brune and jealous Elizabeth caused to be decapitated," was blonde also.

And then he quotes, from Brantome, a description of the unhappy Queen of Scots' hair, as displayed on the scaffold, forgetting recent researches into history, which declare the same hair to have been a wig. But however this may be, Marie Stuart was undoubtedly a blonde, so he has a right to make her his own. He adds, too, some other illustrations, which I am bound to record. The first wife of Henry IV.—la belle Margot—was, he confesses, brune, but he adds that her ivory arms were one of her great attractions, and also the fact—if it may be so called—that all her pages were blonde, and that she made them shave their heads in order to provide her with tresses of the color most admired.

Among other illustrious ladies he cites Anne d'Autriche, blonde; Henriette d'Entracques, blonde; Marie de Bourbon, Duchesse d'Orleans, blonde; Elizabeth de France, Reine d'Espagne, blonde; Henriette d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orleans, blonde; the Duchesse de Chevreuse, blonde; and blonde, he adds, was the beautiful Duchesse de Longueville, of whom the great Rochefoucauld wrote the well-known verse:—"Four meriter son cour, pour plaire ses beaux yeux, J'ai fait la guerre aux rois, je l'aurais faite aux dieux."

Madlle de Montpensier, painting her own portrait, describes herself as having hair blond et d'un beau cendre, with blue eyes and a vermilion mouth. Of the three races of Mazarin two were brune and the third blonde. And to show how blonde beauty was accepted at the Court of France, it is stated that Madame de Motteville, in her Memoirs, speaking of the Marquis de Soyon, maid of honor to the Duchesse d'Orleans, said that she might have declared, like the Sulamite: "Je suis noire, mais belle?"

Our author does not fail to note that the ladies in the last century in France who were not blonde, wore wigs which made them appear to be so. And he adds that, besides the blondes du perrier, there were others who were blondes by nature—as Madame de Sevigne, who invented a blonde coiffure; Mademoiselle de Lavalniere, who invented another; Madame de la Fayette, who was blonde, and Madam de Maintenon, whose blonde tresses were not the less beautiful because it was celebrated by the Marquise de Chevreuse, her first lover, in somewhat mediocre verse.

Under the Regency—at that epoch of materialism—the brunes were in the ascendant. Such is the cause and effect traced by our author; and he traces the decline of noses—which are always great in great men—to the general decadence of the age. But I will not follow him into his conclusions upon this subject, nor into his profound reflections upon the association of the revolution with physiognomy in general. My business is with the blondes. I should not omit to mention, however, that he notices the assumption of blonde hair during the revolutionary period, and he adds:—"The blondes are the incarnation of poetry; the brunes are the poetry of the flesh."

The eccentric old gentleman who is responsible for all these ideas brings them to a rather alarming conclusion. The human race, he says, whatever its present degree of color, will one day all be black. The dark people have led the way, the light peoples will have to follow them, and the universal negro will be the result. There is no need to trace the theological and scientific causes alleged, as we can credit the conclusion just as well without them. But it is time to tell what happened to the young gentleman to whom the manuscript was committed—whose fortune depends upon his marriage with a miraculous blonde beauty within a certain time.

Albert has been well advanced in his readings, which are resumed from day to day, when he suddenly announces to Maurice that he has seen, during his walks abroad, a young lady of wonderful beauty—blonde, and, as it appears from his description, answering all the conditions prescribed by his uncle. His imagination takes fire at the idea which naturally suggests itself. But Maurice implores him to moderate his transports. The young lady, he says, is Louise de Gerac—the only friend of a cousin of his—and he has himself in love with her. It is true that the cousin—Mademoiselle de Fregeneuil—is an earlier love; that he has been devoted to her from his childhood. But he loves Louise, and cannot choose but abandon himself to his inspiration. He asks, therefore, from Albert a promise, on the honor of a friend, that he will not cross his path. Albert necessarily consents, and meets the two ladies, who are present from time to time at the reading of the manuscript. The addition to the society causes some embarrassment at first to Albert, as Mademoiselle is a brilliant brunette, and is not likely to feel flattered at the theory of the eccentric uncle. But Albert assures her that the argument is to be accepted in a Pickwickian sense, "or words to that effect," as far as the French language will allow, and the young lady takes the reflections of the author in very good part.

As the readings proceed, Albert finds himself taking more and more interest in the young lady, and at last pays her attentions of a marked character. He is in great danger indeed of flying in the face of his uncle's injunctions and ruining himself for Mademoiselle, when his friend steps in to save him. Maurice, it seems, has seen, not without jealousy, the attentions of Albert to Mademoiselle, and at last avows that he has mistaken the nature of his feelings for Louise. He believed that he felt towards her as a lover; but since he has learned to love Albert as a brother he has discovered that it is only as a sister that he loves Louise. It is Mademoiselle, and Mademoiselle alone, whom he owns as the mistress of his heart.

Nothing could be pleasanter than the arrangement suggested by this altered state of affairs. Albert is more than willing to transfer himself to Louise, and Louise is happy to meet him half way. Mademoiselle, too, who has never swerved from her early love, is delighted to secure him. So, after a little mystic talk about affinites and so forth, the book closes with a very proper moral—the blonde gentleman being married to the brune lady, and the blonde lady to the brune gentleman.

As for the theories of the eccentric uncle, not one of the party, you may be sure, cares a straw about them; and the reader who has accompanied me thus far will doubtless agree that they come to a very proper conclusion.

—It seems that the British ship Vasca has been the short trips by sailing vessels from Yokohama to San Francisco. In 1867 the Vasca made the run in twenty-three days. A man in Concord, N. H., on being told last week by his counsel that his wife would probably succeed in her application for a divorce, became insane, and he is now an inmate of the State Asylum.

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