Complete Story.

Pamela's Mistakes.

By BEATRICE HERON-MAXWELL.

"We all of us make mistakes—even the youngest of us," said Bobby, making his quotation as sententiously as though it were an original remark.

"Quite true, Bobby," said Pamela; "and the worst is, we don't realise them until it is too late."

"I should think you hadn't made many," said Bobby generously, "although you are young enough, Pamela."

For, case-hardened middy as he is in respect of feminine wiles, he had fallen a victim, like all the rest of us, to the charm of this fresh-faced, fresh-natured American girl, whom Providence had sent down to enliven the rather dull Christmas-tide of a country rector's family.

Molly, our show-daughter—and really very decent-looking, though I, her eldest brother, say it "as shouldn't"—had met Pamela Broughton in a brief visit to London, had been smitten with heroine-worship in its most acute form, and had never rested until she induced the pretty Bostonian to come down and dazzle the eyes and hearts of Wycester.

It had been a case of "she came, she was seen, and she conquered." We were a trifle supercilious about Mollie's geese-like swans and about Americans in general before Miss Broughton arrived, but half an hour of her first day saw that stage out.

By that time she was Pamela to all of us, and Pamela spelt perfection.

"Confession is good for the soul," continued Bobby. "Tell us the worst mistake you ever made in your life, and we'll tell you how much wiser we should have been under the same circumstances. Make it as glaring as you can, Pamela."

"Perhaps Miss Pamela is not accustomed to public confession," interposed old Sorby.

It had been a brilliant idea of mine to have old Sorby down at the same time as Pamela.

"The governor says he must come to stay sooner or later," I observed, when the question of old Sorby was mooted, "because their fathers were school friends. Sorby is American, so is Miss Broughton. Let's have them together, and get it over."

So, after indignant protest from Molly, it was arranged; and old Sorby certainly made as good a foil to Pamela as she could possibly desire.

"I can't say I have tried it often," said Pamela gaily; "but if you'll help me, Mr Sorby, I'll make the attempt in the public interest."

"Fire away," said Bobby, audaciously sitting on the arm of the chair, "and do it 'on your own.' Mr Sorby can have next turn."

The rivalry between these two showed itself in a polite difference of opinion on every subject.

Pamela leant her head on her hand, and stared at the fire for a moment, as though she were forming a picture in her mind.

She made a very charming picture herself as she sat in the rector's own chair, her white dress and her aureole of bronze hair gleaming in the firelight against the background of faded dark green moreen, her dark eyelashes throwing soft shadows on the may blossom of her cheeks.

If I had not felt so certain—though I had nothing but intuition to go upon—that Pamela's heart was in some way forestalled and not for competition I should have had a try for it; but—well, anyhow, she was pleasant to look on as she sat there, her profile turned towards me, her sweet eyes glancing across to me now and then.

"It was three years ago," she began softly, "three years, so I was rather young, Bobby, and you must be lenient with me. I was coming over here from home, for the first time. I told father I must travel over Europe to complete my education, so he let me come away."

"What, all by your lone?" said Bobby, in scandalised accents.

"I had propriety with me in the form of Maria, the most immaculate lady help that ever crossed the Atlantic. Maria at least has, I am quite certain, never made a mistake."

"Never mind Maria," said Bobby, seeing that Pamela was beginning to gaze into the fire once more. "She is too plain to be interesting. Go on with yourself."

"It was at Geneva that it began," said Pamela. "I had been to see the junction of the rivers—you know it's the proper thing to do—and when I was walking home I lost my way. So I asked a nice looking tourist kind of man, and he offered to show me the way, and we walked—well, quite half a mile together."

"H'm!" said Bobby, encouragingly, after a moment's pause. "It wasn't strictly correct, perhaps, but I don't know that you can actually call it a mistake."

"Oh, the mistake was not asking his name when we parted, at least that was the first mistake."

"It would be unusual, surely," pronounced old Sorby, "to ask a young man's name because he had the civility to show you the road, especially if he were not a gentleman."

"But he was a gentleman," said Pamela, "and good looking and—all that, and if we had never met again it would not have mattered, of course."

"So you did meet again," exclaimed Bobby, "by accident on purpose. I suppose?"

"Quite by accident," Pamela replied, with dignity. "In fact, he does not know it to this day. It was on the steamer crossing from Calais to Dover. There had been a storm for two days, and the boats had stopped running. Then they started again, because of the mails, but no passengers would cross, excepting three—I and the most unwilling Maria and a man. It was too dark and blowing too hard to see his face, and I only knew that he was there by being blown up against him a few minutes after the boat started."

Bobby muttered something under his breath that sounded like:

"I wish I had been there! Lucky dog!"

"It was an awful storm," continued Pamela, "and when at last we reached Dover Maria was an absolute wreck. I had to look after all the small packages myself. It was so dark, and the ship was rolling so, and there was such a noise, that I could not find anyone to help me; and I was staggering along laden with a dressing bag and a hold-all and all kinds of odds and ends, when the boat gave a violent lurch and everything went flying. I called out in dismay and someone came to my assistance, collected my belongings and carried them across the gangway for me. I was very grateful, and I did not trouble to notice who it was. In fact, I made sure it was a porter, or a sailor, and I held out a florin to him. He did not seem to see it and turned away, so I called out rather impatiently to him and he came back slowly. The light of the lamp fell full on his face and I recognised him just as I pushed the florin into his hand. He said 'No, thank you,' and I never answered a word or took the coin, but just ran up the steps to the train, Maria stumbling after me.

"We were half way to London before I noticed something glinting just inside the strap of the hold-all, and when I picked it out it was— I'll fetch it and show it to you," she concluded, starting up suddenly and going out of the room.

"Odd coincidence," said Bobby, with an air of profound wisdom, as Pamela returned, "that chap turning up again on the boat. Looks queer. I expect he recognised you."

"Don't say so!" she exclaimed. "I have always hoped he didn't. Look!"

She held out a Russian leather card-case with silver corners.

"Anything inside?" I asked, and stopped, surprised at the expression on old Sorby's face. He was staring at the card-case intently.

"That is the worst of it!" said Pamela. "There is something inside."

She drew out a note for 100 dollars, wrapped inside a slip of paper and read the words inscribed thereon:

"A parting gift to my graceless nephew. If you return at the end of the year with this doubled I will add 5000 dollars to it. If you squander it and come back penniless you shall never have another dollar from me as long as you live."

I thought old Sorby's eyes would have started out of his head while Pamela was reading.

"It is the young man's whole fortune, past, present and future," said Pamela, wretchedly, "and I, in my selfishness, have ruined his career. If I had asked his name the first time I met him—if I had not been too absorbed to recognise him on the boat, or too stupid and ungrateful to run after him and then apologise for my mistake, everything would have been all right. None of you can possibly blame me more than I blame myself!"

There was a gleam of tears in her eyes, and she was genuinely distressed. If anyone had attempted to blame her, the others would have rent that person, metaphorically, limb from limb.

"That 100-dollar bill has cost me," said Pamela, her voice sinking to tragedy, "about £500. I employed detectives for a year to trace that young man; I advertised in almost every English and American paper; I even went back to Geneva, and tried to get on his track there by inquiring at every hotel for a tourist answering to his description. I have followed up no end of false trails; I have corresponded with innumerable claimants, who turned out to be friends; and I have been obliged at last to own myself beaten, for not a single trace have I ever found of the man whose life I have wrecked."

There was a murmur of sympathy from everyone except old Sorby, whose condition now attracted universal attention. He seemed to be suffering from a severe mental shock, and Pamela turned quite pale when she looked at him.

"What's the matter, Mr Sorby?" she demanded. "Don't tell me there's a new misfortune tacked on to this wretched cardcase!"

He had stretched out a shaking hand for it, and when she handed it to him he nodded his head speechlessly as though words were beyond him.

"You know the owner?" she cried excitedly. "Quick! tell me who he is?"

He still stared stonily at her; but his lips uttered two words, and they fell amongst us like a bombshell:

"My nephew!"

"Your nephew!" echoed Pamela. "And it was you who wrote that—that deplorable message!"

She was stammering with emotion, and old Sorby was shrinking for very shame before her.

"I don't believe he was graceless," continued Pamela. "I don't believe he would have squandered. I believe he was just a kind-hearted, open-handed fellow; and I expect he felt he would rather be independent and poor than take what you grudged him. Do you know where he is?"

Old Sorby was quite crushed. An American woman can take the starch out of anything or anyone if she chooses to.

"I'm not sure," he said slowly. "I haven't seen him for two years. He came back with 100 dollars in his pocket at the end of the year, and I asked him when the second 100 was. 'This is the second,' he said. 'I have lost the first.'"

"Well, that was quite true," interrupted Pamela.

"'Lost it! Spent it, you mean!' I said," went on old Sorby. 'No,' he answered, 'lost it, and in a good cause, too.' 'Then you have lost £5000 with it,' I answered, 'and your place in my will besides. I don't believe you, and I'll have no more to do with you! You can go!' So he went."

"And you had the heart to send him away like that!" said Pamela sternly. "Had he anyone to go to—any friends—anywhere?"

"No one. He and I are the last of our race."

"Is his name Sorby?" asked Pamela—a little wistfully, I thought.

"No; his name is Gervoise Lambart. He is my sister's boy!"

There was a dead silence for a moment. The suddenness of this strange sequel had deprived even Bobby of speech.

He was the first, however, to recover himself.

"I tell you what it is," he said, "Gervoise Lambert has got to be found. We don't want him, any of us; we could get on better without him, in fact; but she does, and that's enough."

"I heard," said old Sorby mildly, "that he had gone back to New York."

"We'll have him out of it!" said Bobby. "I'll guarantee to produce him by—let's see. What's to-night? Two days to Christmas. Well, by New Year's Day. But on one condition"—he looked solemnly at Sorby—"that you apologise to him and put him back in your will, sir!"

"It's the least you can do," I put in, "after doubting his word and treating him so badly all round."

"Oh, Bobby!" said Pamela, "how can you possibly find him? I'm afraid it's too good to be true. I should feel as if I had a new lease of life if the weight of this card-case were taken off me. I'll give you anything you ask if you keep your word."

Bobby extended his hand.

"Shake on that!" he said. "I mean going through with this."

His plan was very simple, really. Bobby never troubled his head with elaborate details. He sent a cable addressed Gervoise Lambart, New York, or elsewhere, and containing this message:

"Found card-case. Apply personally, this year, to Bobby Chisholme, Rectory, Wycester, England."

His method deserved success, and it seemed as though it were going to meet with its merits; but Fate had not quite finished with Mr Gervoise Lambart. It had another mischance for him up its sleeve.

When the answer to the cable ar-