

The Minister's Wife

By MRS. HENRY WOOD

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

This evening was but another of those Mr. Baumgarten sometimes spent at Avon House feeding the flame of her ill-starred passion. His manner to women was naturally tender, and to Grace, with her fascinations unconsciously brought to bear upon him, dangerously warm. That he never for one moment had outstepped the bounds of friendly intercourse Grace attributed entirely to the self-restraint imposed by his inferior position; but she did not doubt he loved her in secret.

While at dinner he told them, jokingly, as he had told Edith, that the parish wanted him to marry. Lady Avon remarked, in answer, that he could not do better; parsons and doctors should always be married men.

"Yes, that's very right, very true," he returned in the same jesting tone. "But suppose they have nothing to marry upon?"

"But you have something, Mr. Baumgarten."

"Yes, I have two hundred a year; and no residence."

"The rectory is rather bad, I believe."

"Bad! Well, Lady Avon, you should see it."

"Mr. Dane ought not to have allowed it to get into that state," she remarked, and the subject dropped.

After dinner Mr. Baumgarten stood on the lawn with Grace, watching the glories of the setting sun. Lady Avon, indoors, was beginning to doze; they knew better than to disturb her; this after-dinner sleep, which sometimes did not last more than ten minutes, was of great moment to her, the doctor said.

Mr. Baumgarten had held out his arm to Lady Grace in courtesy as they began to pace the paths, and she took it. They came to a halt near the entrance gate, both gazing at the beautiful sky, their hands partially shading their eyes from the blaze of sunset, when a little man dressed in black with a white necktie was seen approaching.

"Why, here comes Moore!" exclaimed Grace.

He was the clerk at the Great Whitton church. Limping up to the gate, for he was lame with rheumatism, he stood there and looked at Mr. Baumgarten, as if his business lay with him. But Grace withdrawing her arm from her companion, was first at the gate.

"I beg pardon, my lady, I thought it right to come up and inform the countess of the sad news—and I'm glad I did, seeing you here, sir. Mr. Chester is gone, my lady."

"Gone!" exclaimed Grace. "Gone where?"

"He is dead, my lady—he is dead, sir. Departed to that bourne whence no traveler returns," continued the clerk, wishing to be religiously impressive and believing he was quoting from Scripture.

"Surely it cannot be!" said Mr. Baumgarten.

"Ay, but it is, sir, more's the pity. And frightfully sudden. After getting home from afternoon service, he said he felt uncommonly tired, he couldn't think why, and that he'd not have his tea till later in the evening. He went up to his room and sat down in the easy chair there and dropped asleep. A sweet, tranquil sleep it was, to all appearance, and Mrs. Chester shut the door and left him. But after an hour or two, when she sent up to say he had better wake up for his tea, they found him dead. The poor old lady is quite beside herself with the suddenness, and the maids be running about all sixes and sevens."

"I will go down with you at once, Moore," said Mr. Baumgarten.

"But you will come back and tell us—and tell us how Mrs. Chester is?" said Lady Grace, as he was passing through the gate.

"Yes, certainly, if you wish it," he answered, walking away with so fleet a step that the clerk with difficulty kept up with him.

"I fancy it must have been on his mind, sir," said he; "not direct, perhaps, but some inkling like of what was about to happen. This afternoon, when I'd took off his surplice in the vestry I went and put things to rights a bit in the church, and when I got back into the vestry to lock up, I was surprised to see the rector still there, sitting opposite the outer door, which stood open to the churchyard. 'Don't you feel well, sir?' said I. 'Oh, yes, I'm well,' he answered, 'but I'm tired. We must all get to feel tired when the end of our life is at hand, Moore, and mine has been a long one.' 'Yes, it has, sir, and a happy one, too,' I said, 'thank God.' With that he rose up from his chair, and lifted his hands towards Heaven, looking up at the blue sky. 'Thanks be to my merciful God,' he repeated, solemnly, in a hushed sort of tone. 'For that, and all the other blessings of my past life on earth, thanks be unto Him!' With that, he took his hat and stick and walked out to the churchyard," concluded the clerk, "leaving me a bit dazed as 'twere, for I had never heard him talk like that before; he was not the sort of man to do it."

Within an hour Mr. Baumgarten was back at Avon House. Lady Grace was still lingering in the garden, in the summer twilight. He told her in a hushed voice all he had to tell; of the general state of things at the rectory, of poor Mrs. Chester's sad distress.

"Mamma is expecting you," said Grace. "I broke the news to her but she wants to hear more particulars."

They went into the drawing-room by the open doors of the window. Mr. Baumgarten gave the best account he could to Lady Avon; and then drank a cup of tea, standing. Still asking questions, Grace passed out again with him to the open

air, and strolled by his side along the smooth, broad path which led to the entrance gate. When they reached it he held out his hand to bid her good evening. The opal sky was clear and beautiful; a large star shone in it.

"Great Whitton is in my brother's gift," she whispered, as her hand rested in his; "I wish he would give it to you."

A flush rose to the young clergyman's face. To exchange Little Whitton for Great Whitton had now and then made one of the flighty dreams of his ambition—but never really cherished.

"Do not mock me with pleasant visions, Lady Grace. I can have no possible interest with Lord Avon."

"You can marry then," she said, softly, in reference to the conversation at dinner, "and set the parish grumblers at defiance."

"Marry? Yes, I should—I hope—do so," was his reply. His voice was soft as her own; his speech hesitating; he was thinking of Edith Dane.

But how was Lady Grace to divine that? She, alas! gave altogether a different interpretation to the words; and her heart beat with a tender throbbing, and her lips parted with love and hope, and she gazed after him until he disappeared in the shadows of the sweet summer night.

CHAPTER III.

The Countess of Avon, persuaded into it by her daughter—badgered a promise from her son that he would bestow the living of Great Whitton upon the Rev. Ryle Baumgarten.

The Earl did not give an immediate consent; in fact, he demurred to give it at all; and sundry letters passed to and fro between Avon House and Paris—for his lordship happened just then to have taken a run over to the French capital. Great Whitton was too good a thing to be thrown away upon young Baumgarten, who was nobody, he told his mother, and he should like to give it to Eliotson; but Lady Avon, for peace's sake at home, urged her petition strongly, and the Earl at length granted it and gave the promise.

The morning the letter arrived containing the promise, and also the information that his lordship was back at his house in London, Lady Avon was feeling unusually ill. Her head was aching violently, and she bade her maid put the letter aside; she would open it later. This she did in the afternoon when she was sitting up in her dressing room and she then told Grace of the arrival of the unexpected promise.

"Oh, let me see it!" exclaimed Grace, in her incautious excitement, holding out her hand for the letter.

She read it hungrily, with flushing cheeks and trembling fingers. Lady Avon could but note this. It somewhat puzzled her.

"Grace," she said, "I cannot think why you should be so eager. What does it signify to you who gets the living—whether Mr. Baumgarten or another?"

In the evening, when Grace was sauntering listlessly in the rocky walk, wondering whether any one would call that night or not, she saw him. He was coming along the path from the rectory. The old rector had been buried some days now. "I have been sitting with Mrs. Chester, and thought I would just ask, in passing, how Lady Avon is," he remarked, swinging through the gate, as if he would offer an apology for calling. "The last time I was here she seemed so very poorly."

"She is not any better, I am sorry to say; to-day she has not come downstairs at all," replied Grace, meeting his offered hand. "What will you give me for some news I can tell you?" she resumed, standing before him in the full blow of her beauty, her hand not yet withdrawn from him.

He bent his sweet smile upon her, his deep, dark eyes speaking the admiration that he might not utter. Ryle Baumgarten was no more insensible to the charms of a fascinating and beautiful girl than are other men—despite his love for Edith Dane. She was awaiting an answer.

"What may I give?" he said. "Nothing that I could give would be of value to you."

"How do you know that, Mr. Baumgarten?"

With a burning blush, for she had spoken unguardedly, Grace laughed merrily, stepped a few steps backward, and drew a letter from her pocket.

"It is one that came to mamma this morning, and it has a secret in it. What will you give me to read you just one little sentence?"

Mr. Baumgarten, but that Edith and his calling were in the way, would have said a shower of kisses; it is possible that he might in spite of both, had he dared. Whether his looks betrayed him cannot be known. Lady Grace, blushing still, took refuge in the letter. Folding it so that only the signature was visible, she held it out to him. He read the name, "Henry."

"Is it—from—Lord Avon?" he said, with hesitation.

"It is from Lord Avon. He does not sign himself in any other way to us. 'Your affectionate son, Henry,' it always runs to mamma; and it is no unmeaning phrase; he is very fond of her. But now for the secret. Listen."

Mr. Baumgarten, suspecting nothing, listened with a smile.

"I have been dunned with applications since I got home," read Grace, aloud, from Lord Avon's letter, "some of them from personal friends; but as you and Grace make so great a point of it, mother, I promise you that Mr. Baumgarten shall

have Great Whitton." In reading she had left out the words "and Grace." She closed the letter, and then stole a glance at his face. It had turned pale to seriousness.

"I do not quite understand," he said. "No? It means that you are appointed to Great Whitton."

"How can I ever sufficiently thank Lord Avon?" he breathed forth.

"Now, is not the knowing that worth something?" laughed she.

"Oh, Lady Grace! It is worth far more than anything I have to give in return. But—it is not a jest, is it? Can it be really true?"

"A jest! Is that likely? You will be publicly appointed in a day or two, and will, of course, hear from my brother. I am not acquainted, myself, with the formal routine of these things. Mamma is rejoicing; she would rather have you here than any one."

"Lady Avon is too kind," he murmured, abstractedly.

"And what do you think mamma said? Shall I tell you? 'Mr. Baumgarten can marry now.' Those were her words."

Grace spoke with sweet sauciness, secure in the fact that he could not divine her feeling for him—although she believed in his love for her. His answer surprised her.

"Yes, I can marry now," he assented, still half lost in his own thoughts. "I shall do so—soon. I have only waited until some preferment should justify it."

"You are a bold man, Mr. Baumgarten, to make so sure of the lady's consent. Have you asked her?"

"No; where was the use, until I could speak to some purpose? But she has detected my wishes, I am sure of that; and there is no coquetry in Edith."

"Edith? almost shrieked Lady Grace. 'I beg your pardon: I shall not fall.'"

"What have you done? You have hurt yourself!"

They had been walking close to the miniature rocks, and she had seemed to stumble over a projecting corner. "I gave my ankle a twist. The pain was sharp," she moaned.

"Pray lean on me, Lady Grace; pray let me support you; you are as white as death."

He wound his arms gently round her, and laid her pallid face upon his shoulder; he thought she was going to faint. For one single moment she yielded to the fascination of the beloved resting place. Oh! that it could be hers forever! She shivered, raised her head, and drew away from him.

"Thank you," she said, faintly; "the anguish has passed. I must go indoors now."

Mr. Baumgarten held out his arm, but she did not take it, walking alone with rapid steps toward the house. At the entrance of the glass door she turned to him.

"I will wish you good evening now."

He held out his hand, but she did not appear to see it. She ran in, and he turned away to depart, thinking she must be in great pain.

Lady Grace shut herself in the drawing room. For a few moments she rushed about like one possessed, in her torrent of anger. Then she sat down to her writing desk and dashed off a blotted and hasty note to Lord Avon—which would just save the post.

"Give the living to any one you please, Harry, but not to Ryle Baumgarten; bestow it where you will, but not to him. There are reasons why he would be utterly unfit for it. Explanations when we meet."

During this, Mr. Baumgarten was hastening home, the great news surging in his brain. Edith was at the gate, but not looking for him, of course; merely enjoying the air of the summer's night. That's what she said she was doing when he came up. He caught her by the waist and drew her between the trees and began to kiss her. She cried out, and gazed at him in wonder.

"Edith, do you think I am mad? I believe I am—mad with joy, for the time has come that I may ask you to be my wife!"

"Your wife," she stammered, for in truth that prospect had seemed farther off than heaven.

He drew her to him again in the plenitude of his emotion. Her heart beat wildly against his, and he laid her face upon his breast, more fondly than he had laid another's not long before.

"You know how I have loved you; you must have seen it, though I would not speak; but I could not marry while my income was so small. It would not have been right, Edith."

"If you think so—no."

"But, oh, my dearest, I may speak now. Will you be my wife?"

"But—what has happened?" she asked.

"Ah, what! Promotion has come to me, my dear one. I am presented to the living of Great Whitton."

"Of Great Whitton, Ryle?"

"It is quite sure. Lord Avon's mother asked him to give it to me, it seems, and he generously complied. Edith, will you reject me, now I have Great Whitton?"

She hid her face. She felt him lovingly stroking her hair. "I would not have rejected you when you had but Little Whitton, Ryle."

"Yours is not the first fair face which has been there this night, Edith," he said in a laughing whisper. "I had Lady Grace's there but an hour ago."

A shiver seemed to dart through her heart. Her jealousy of Lady Grace had been almost as powerful as her love for Mr. Baumgarten.

"Grace said, in a joking kind of way, that her mother had remarked I could marry, now I had Great Whitton. So I told Grace that I should do so—one word leads to another, you know, Edith, and that I had only waited for preferment to marry you, my best love. As I was speaking she managed somehow to twist her ankle. The pain must have been intense, for she turned as white as death, and I had to hold her to me. But I did not pay myself for my trouble as I am doing now—with kisses. Edith, my whole love is yours."

(To be continued.)

The Great KOEPECK HOAX

All Germany convulsed with laughter over bogus Captain and hood-winked Burgomaster and Town Treasurer.

If the verdict on Wilhelm Voigt, the ex-convict cobbler who captured Koepenck Town Hall and rifled the municipal treasury, could be determined by the votes of the German people, there is no doubt he would be allowed to go scot free by a large majority.

Though a criminal, as the author of the greatest hoax of the age, he is acclaimed a hero throughout Germany. He holds the stage as the world's champion bluffer. He has eclipsed the Kaiser at his best. He has conferred immortality on the town which was the scene of his exploit. He has added a new verb to the dictionary—to koepenick. Except in officialdom, which he so beautifully fooled, the only regret felt in connection with the incident is that he has been caught.

Now that his personality has been revealed to the world, the greater grows the admiration for the colossal audacity which enabled him to carry his plot through successfully. It would be hard to find a man outwardly more ill suited to the role which he played. "Low class" is writ large all over him. It is the fetish of the military uniform which made it possible for such a man to carry out his daring coup. Nowhere else but in Germany could he have succeeded. That is one of the lessons which Germany is taking to heart.

Voigt fully realizes the fame that he has achieved, and not even the prospect of spending the rest of his life in prison lessens his satisfaction. When the idea of his coup first came to him Voigt frequented music halls and other places where military officers resort that he might study them and their ways. The deference with which he observed they were everywhere treated soon convinced him that the uniform counted for vastly more than the man inside of it. He had first thought of raiding one of the Berlin municipalities; but came to the conclusion that in a place where there are so many officers about the risk was a little too great. Then he selected Koepenck, a thriving city of 75,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of the capital, for his exploit.

After donning a discarded uniform of a captain in the First Regiment of Infantry guards, which he purchased in a second hand clothing shop, he strolled calmly along a street in the east of Berlin, awaiting the return of a detachment of grenadier guards from the drilling ground to their barracks. True to his calculations, the detachment appeared, consisting of twenty-four men, each carrying a rifle.

"Your men must follow me," said Voigt, accosting the corporal. "I have the Kaiser's orders to make an important arrest and need your assistance." Grimy and battered though he was, and much too old for a captain, none of the soldiers thought for an instant of challenging the seely uniform of the first guards. They obeyed him like sheep. He marched them to the nearest railway station, whence he took them by train to Koepenck. Arrived at Koepenck he ordered them to fix bayonets and march to the town hall.

Halting at the telephone exchange, Voigt ordered the official in charge to cut off communications with the town hall for the next two hours under penalty of incurring the Kaiser's displeasure. The uniform triumphed again. The trembling official promised implicit obedience.

The chief of the Koepenck police took orders from Voigt without question. The uniform hypnotized him, as it did everybody else. By Voigt's directions he placed a squad of police around the town hall to keep the crowd back, and as proof of his zeal, actually arrested five citizens whose curiosity got the better of their discretion. In his wildest extravaganzas Gilbert never conceived anything more ludicrous than a municipal police force helping a thief to loot the municipal treasury and arresting honest men to make things easier for him.

Now only red tape fettered officialdom which has been held up to ridicule feels sore over the exploit. The fetish of the military uniform has re-

ceived a deadly blow. The day may come when Germany, freed from the tyranny of a military bureaucracy, may recognize that it owes a debt of gratitude to the cobbler who made the whole world laugh.

Voigt's case has called attention to another form of tyranny which needs reforming in Germany. It is the system of police supervision of ex-convicts. That made it impossible for Voigt to make an honest living. It was, he says, because there was no way open to him by which he could make a decent living honestly that he conceived the idea of effecting a coup which he fondly hoped would bring him enough money to enable him to live without any more work, either honest or dishonest, and wed an old sweetheart. That the hoary sinner has some good stuff in him which has survived a score of years spent in jails is shown by the fact, attested by the old folk in whose house he was lodging when caught, that he nursed there, with touching devotion, a young girl who was dying of consumption.

DIFFERENCES OF DIARISTS.

How Two Public Men Differed in Estimate of Bismarck.

Public men who keep diaries should either see that they are destroyed while there is yet time, or get together frequently to compare notes and agree in their versions of incidents, says the Boston Transcript. Either course would save the historian of the future a world of trouble, the nature of which is indicated by the sharp difference between the late Prince Hohenlohe's explanation of Bismarck's policy and that recorded by Crispien. The former, who was one of Bismarck's successors as German chancellor, wrote in his diary, on the authority of the grand duke of Baden, uncle of the Kaiser, that the Imperial distrust of Bismarck was based on a suspicion that he was secretly favoring Russia and laboring to undermine the triple alliance. Crispien, the Italian premier, left a diary, extracts from which the nephew has printed in facsimile to demonstrate that Bismarck was a zealous supporter, not only officially but personally, of the alliance. Crispien wrote while Bismarck's words were fresh in his memory. Bismarck explained that he had endeavored to live in friendship with Russia, but had failed, and urged that in extension of the dreadbund there should be a "grouping" of Austria, Italy and England. Whether we should accept the grand duke's statement, presumably based on the confidences of his nephew, or that of Crispien, in estimating Bismarck, is a puzzle that promises to be prolific of literature.

Bismarck is still an idol with a large proportion of the Germans, who, however, may be deferential enough to the Kaiser to moderate the terms of their defense. Those who have studied him in "a neutral atmosphere" may reconcile the differences between diarists by saying that Bismarck talked one way, with one man, and the opposite with another, and that he was pulling wool over Crispien's eyes as he had pulled it over those of Napoleon III. Bismarck was a lion with a great many fox traits in his make-up. Letters and diaries are of great value to the historian, but their product is often small as compared with the amount of labor necessary to reconcile contradictions and extract the residuum of fact. Without them many historical incidents would be cloudy, and it cannot have escaped detection that some of the richest finds have been made in letters which their writers solemnly pledged the recipients to destroy. One of the most luminous documents in the Paston correspondence has a P. S. reading "Burn this letter."

IS MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN ENGLAND.

This is Lady Beatrice Pole-Carew, the woman to whom King Edward has awarded the palm of beauty of his realm. He recently referred to her as "England's handsomest woman," and that title is expected to cling to her for many years. Lady Beatrice is the wife of General Pole-Carew and daughter of the Marquess of Ormonde.

When a business man writes his advertisement on the back of an old envelope, with an old indelible pencil, the printers swear.

WILLIAM VOIGT.

