

The Minister's Wife

By MRS. HENRY WOOD

CHAPTER XVII.

On the following day Sir Everard called at Eaton place. He saw Mary, and they went straight to Dr. Dynevor. There, after shaking hands, he quietly said that differences had arisen between himself and Miss Mary, and they had mutually agreed to part.

Never, perhaps, was a canon so affronted, never did one feel more outraged, and never was one in a greater passion, though he controlled it.

"What was the cause?" he demanded. "The precise cause, he and Miss Mary Dynevor had agreed to keep to themselves," was the answer of the baronet. "It was sufficient to say that they were both fully convinced a union between them would not conduce to their happiness, and they had come to the conclusion not to carry it out."

"I will know the truth," foamed the canon. "Why do you part?"

"Differences," gasped Mary, who had taken her cue from Sir Everard. "Nothing that I can particularly explain. We found that a marriage between us would not lead to happiness, and we parted."

"Won't you speak out?" cried he, bringing down his clerical shoe upon the carpet.

"That is all I have to say," she answered, drooping her head.

"Very well," cried Dr. Dynevor, as he quitted the room and shut himself into his study. This gave Miss Dynevor and the girls an opportunity of inquiring on their own account. Question after question they poured out on the unhappy Mary, but they did not succeed in getting from her any solution to the mystery; which, of course, bore an ill appearance.

"I very much fear it is a case of jilting," groaned Aunt Ann. "If the days of duelling were not past, one of your brothers ought to go out and shoot Everard Wilmot. Dishonorable craven! Your father may enter an action against him."

The possibility of concealment was all over now, as Mary saw; and she dragged herself in fear and sickness to her father's presence. "Is it true that you have done it?" she gasped; and the subdean was at no loss to understand her meaning.

"It soon will be true. The man shall be held up to a spectacle to the world."

"Oh, papa, you must undo it, you must undo it! Do not lose a moment. It was not Sir Everard who broke off the engagement; it was I."

The subdean stared at her through his great, ugly spectacles, for he had been reading a letter when she interrupted him. She laid her arms upon the back of a chair, and seemed to lean her weight upon it; he saw that she was trembling. "The truth, papa, is that I refused Sir Everard; so that if an action might be brought on either side it would be on his. He came home to marry me; but I—I—could not marry him; and he was so kind as to let it appear to you that it was as much his fault as mine."

"You broke it off? Of your own accord? Your reason? You do not stir from my presence till you have given it to me."

"Papa," she breathed, bending her face down upon the arm of the chair, "I—I liked some one else better than Sir Everard."

"You liked—?" The canon stopped; indignation and astonishment overmastered him.

"Who is it?" he demanded, in an awful tone.

She did not answer. What he could see of her face looked as crimson as his own sometimes was. "Who is it, I ask?" he repeated, and shrink and shiver as she would, there was no evading that resolute question.

"Charles Baumgarten."

A curt letter, couched in the highest of terms, reached Charles Baumgarten's chambers in Pump Court, from Dr. Dynevor, forbidding him all further intercourse with the Dynevor family.

"I know the old boy can do the thing in style when he brings his mind to it, but this is super-extra, Charley," remarked Richard Dynevor, who chanced to call soon after the missive was delivered. "Cheer up, lad; things may take a turn."

And a few weeks passed on. Mary Dynevor was not dying, no one said that; but every one did say that she was wasting away. The subdean, haughty, cold and implacable, would not see it; Miss Dynevor had begun to speak of it complacently; Regina and Grace grieved. She had a touch of low fever, and seemed unable to struggle out of it.

Mary chiefly lay upon the sofa; she was too weak to sit up throughout the day. Smarting under the displeasure of her father, obliged to submit to the querulous remarks of her aunt, who rarely ceased to grumble at the rupture of so desirable a marriage, suffering in a less degree from the covert reproaches of her sisters, who felt it as a grievance upon them, Mary had a sad time of it. As to Charles Baumgarten, he had gone on circuit, and seemed to be done with forever. Even Richard never heard from her of him.

"It is of no use, madam, my coming here day after day to see the patient," somewhat testily explained Dr. Lamb, the family physician, one day to Miss Dynevor. "The disorder is on the mind; some trouble, I believe, is weighing upon her. If it cannot be set at rest, I can do no good."

Miss Dynevor, now very uneasy, sat down to write an epistle to the subdean at Oldchurch. It had the effect of bringing Dr. Dynevor to town. Though harsh and stern with his children, he was fond

of them at heart, and he did not like to hear that Mary might be in danger of dying. He traveled up at night, reaching Eaton Place in the morning. Breakfast over, he shut himself in with his sister.

"And now, Ann, what do you mean by writing to me as you did?" began he, in his sternest manner.

"I said to you, Richard, what Dr. Lamb said to me. And I gave you my opinion—that she had better be allowed to marry Charles Baumgarten."

"I dare say," exclaimed the haughty canon.

"There's not a shade of a chance now for Sir Everard Wilmot," went on Miss Dynevor. "It's of no use thinking of him. Of course girls ought not to be given way to under ordinary circumstances. But when it comes to this point, that the girl may be dying, to give way may be nothing less than a duty."

"Let her see him then, and have done with it," spoke the canon sharply.

Miss Dynevor was surprised at the concession, but hastened to repeat it to Mary. It made her pale and agitated.

"I shall write a short epistle to his chambers in Pump Court and let it await him there," said Miss Dynevor. "No doubt he will call here as soon as he reads it."

"Mind, aunt, I must see him alone," said Mary, a strangely heightened color lighting her wan cheek.

"You need not fear that any of us will covet to be present; we are not so fond of him," retorted Miss Dynevor.

She sent the "epistle" to Pump Court. It lay there for some little time. Charles was on the Home Circuit, and when his business was over, he turned to Great Wharton to spend a day or two with his mother and sister, who were staying at Avon House. But he lost no time in obeying the summons, when he was back in London.

Mary received him alone, as she had wished. She sat back upon the large, old-fashioned sofa in the drawing room, her head supported by a pillow. Charles was shocked to observe the change in her, and thought she must be dying.

"No," she said to him after they had spoken for some time. "I am not dying. They think, at least they say, that when once my mind is at rest, when we shall have parted for good, suspense exchanged for certain misery, that I shall begin to get well again. It may be so."

Her head lay passively upon his shoulder; and they had just settled themselves into this most interesting position, when the door opened with a crash, and in marched the subdean. Mary's head started back to its pillow; Charles stood up, folded his arms, and looked fearfully at the intruder.

"So you are here again, sir?"

"By appointment, Dr. Dynevor. And I am grieved to see what I do see. She is surely dying."

"You think so, do you?" cried the canon. "Perhaps you imagine you could save her life?"

"At any rate I would try to save it, if I were allowed. What is your objection to me, sir?" he hastily added, his tone one of sharp demand. "My connections are unexceptionable; and many a briefless barrister has risen in time to the workbench."

"I am glad you have the modesty to acknowledge that you are briefless."

"I did not acknowledge it, and I am not briefless," returned Charles. "I have begun to get on."

Dr. Dynevor looked at his daughter. "Would you patronize this sort of 'getting on'?" asked he.

There was a strange meaning in his tone, which struck on Mary's ear. She rose in agitation, her hands clasped. "Papa, I would risk it. Oh, papa, if you would only let me, I would risk it and trust it."

"If you choose to risk it and trust it you may do so," responded the subdean, coolly; "and that is what I have come in to say. But, recollect, I wash my hands of the consequences. When you shall have gathered all kinds of embarrassments about you," he added, turning to Charles, "don't expect that you are to come to me to help you out of them. If you two wish to make simperons of yourselves and marry, go and do it. But understand that you will do it with your eyes open, Mr. Charles Baumgarten."

The subdean strutted out of the room, and Charles caught the girl to him, for he thought she was fainting.

"How good he is to us!" gasped the young man in the revulsion of feeling which the decision brought him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Charles Baumgarten sat in his chambers enjoying an animated discussion with his friend, Jephson, the great chancery lawyer. About a week had gone by since Charles had come home from the circuit and held that momentous interview with Mary Dynevor which had been broken in upon by the subdean. Mary had now gone, with some friends, to Brighton for change of air, and Charles was, so to say, a bachelor at large again.

The change from despair to hope had so elated him that he had somewhat rashly likened it to Elysium. But now a certain ugly-looking bill for eighty-one pounds, bearing Charles' acceptance, had been presented to him for payment.

Charles declined to pay it, on the ground that he had not accepted it. He repudiated the bill altogether. It was held by that eminent legal firm, Godfrey & Herbert Jephson; the latter of whom had now come to Pump Court in person, bringing the bill with him.

"I never saw it in my life until to-day," protested Charles Baumgarten. "You have been imposed upon."

Mr. Jephson laughed. In days gone by they had been very intimate at the university together, and had there formed a close friendship; though Herbert Jephson was the elder by some years. "Stuff and nonsense!" quoth he, "would you deny your own signature? Look at it." Charles had looked enough at it, but looked again.

"I don't deny that it's a clever imitation, except in one particular. This is signed 'C. Baumgarten.' I always sign 'Charles' in full. Look over my notes to you, Jephson, should you have kept any, and see if I ever signed myself in any other way."

"If you never did it before, that's no reason why you might not have done so on this occasion," was the unanswerable response.

"How do you say it came into your hands, Jephson?" he asked.

"We received it from White, the engraver and jeweler," was the reply. "Some property White is entitled to get thrown into Chancery, and we have been acting for him. The expenses are draining him, and he had some difficulty to pay our last bill of costs. My brother pressed for it; one can't work for nothing; and Mr. White brought this bill of yours, and asked if we would take it in payment. Godfrey did so, and handed White the balance."

"You ought to have doubted how a bill of mine should get into a jeweler's hands."

They came to no satisfactory conclusion. And Mr. Jephson departed, taking the bill with him, declaring to the last, in his idle, joking manner, that the bill was undoubtedly Charles Baumgarten's, and might have been accepted in his sleep.

Charles was busy all day. After snatching his dinner in the evening, he went out to call upon the elder of the two Jephsons; for, in spite of his assertion that he should do nothing, the affair was giving him concern, and he determined to look into it. Godfrey Jephson was in his dining room, but came out of it at once to Mr. Baumgarten.

"It is incomprehensible to me how you can deny the signature," he said, entering upon the matter at once. "If you saw my signature or Herbert's, you would know them. And we in the same way know yours. I recognized it the moment I saw it. White is a respectable man; there's not a more upright tradesman in the city of London; he is not one to say you accepted the bill if you did not. It is most strange that you should disown it, Mr. Baumgarten."

"Did White tell you I had accepted it?"

"He told Herbert. I have not had time to see him."

"Go with me to him now," suggested Charles. "He will not say to my face that I have bought jewelry of him and paid him with a bill. I never saw the man in my life to my knowledge and never was inside his shop."

Godfrey Jephson, his interest and curiosity aroused, agreed to the proposal; and they proceeded in the dusk of the evening to the jeweler's, in one of the leading thoroughfares.

"You go forward first," whispered Charles, "and enter upon it. I should like to watch his countenance. I'll come and confront him at the right time."

A smile that caused Charles to knit his brow crossed Mr. Jephson's face as he advanced to the jeweler. The shop was brilliant with gas. Charles sat down near the entrance, as if to wait for his friend.

"This bill," began Godfrey Jephson, taking it from his pocketbook, "was due to-day, and presented for payment. Mr. Baumgarten refuses to take it up. He says it is a forgery."

"But how can Mr. Baumgarten say that?" returned the jeweler. "He accepted the bill in my presence."

"Mr. Baumgarten says that he does not know you, and that he never was in your shop to his recollection," continued the lawyer.

Charles Baumgarten walked slowly forward, and the jeweler's eyes fell upon him. "Why, that—that is Mr. Baumgarten!" he uttered, though in a tone of hesitation.

"Yes; I am Charles Baumgarten. There's some mistake here, Mr. White, that I cannot understand. How is it that you told Mr. Jephson we have had dealings together?"

"Because we have had them," returned the jeweler. "The question is, how is it that you deny it? I recognize you fully now, sir. You purchased several articles of jewelry of me and paid me with this bill."

"I never bought a shilling's worth of jewelry of you in my life," replied Charles Baumgarten. "But if I had, I should not have been likely to pay you by a bill. If I had bought jewelry, I should pay you in cash for it."

"And that is what you were going to do, sir," returned Mr. White. "You asked me to make the account out, and I did so. You laughed when you looked at the sum total, it was so much more than you had thought for; and you took out your pocketbook and counted the bank notes in it, and then said you had not much more than half enough with you and the shortest way would be to draw a short bill, say at a month's notice. I had no objection. I took a bill stamp from my desk, drew out the bill, and you accepted it at this very counter."

"It's all news to me," replied Charles. "I repeat to you, Mr. White, that I never was in this shop before to-night. I never signed or saw the bill; I never bought any jewelry here whatever."

(To be continued.)

For every ton of genuine ivory imported into Great Britain there are imported three tons of vegetable ivory. The latter comes chiefly from the republic of Colombia, in South America. It is obtained from the seeds of the ivory-nut palm.

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CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

The jeweler appeared mystified. Certainly Charles Baumgarten did not look like a man who would deny his own responsibility; moreover, the young barrister's irreproachable character was well known. Yet Mr. White knew that he had come in and bought the jewelry.

"It is altogether absurd," said Charles. "You must be mistaking me for some one else. Had I bought jewelry, I should have paid for it in cash, I tell you; not by bill."

"What shall you do?" asked Mr. Jephson.

"I shall sleep upon it; and perhaps have a quiet word with a gentleman detective."

As he gained Pump Court, having wished Godfrey Jephson good evening, and turning into it in a brown study, a whistle high up greeted him. Gazing upward, Charles perceived the face and whiskers of a friend of his looking out from the window of some chambers not far from his own.

"Hi, Baumgarten! Come up."

"Can't. Have some work to do."

"Then take the consequences."

A shower of something liquid was in preparation of descent. Charles Baumgarten made a dash, and disappeared up the stairs. Peter Chester—a grandson of that old Mr. Chester who was once rector of Great Wharton, received Charles with a basin of hot soup in his hand.

"You'd have caught it nicely, Charley, basin and all! Just look at the precious stuff she concocts for a fellow. Aying, pretty near, of an inflamed throat! I told her beef tea, and she goes and makes this."

Charley knew of the storm that Peter Chester, who, like himself, lived in his chambers for economy's sake, and his old laundress had together. "Is your throat no better?" he asked.

"Much you care whether it's better or worse?" retorted Peter Chester, a slight young man, with a delicate face and blue eyes. "I'd never go from my word, Baumgarten. You promised to come in and sit with a fellow last night, but deuce a bit came you."

"I added 'if I could,' Peter."

"Well, if you could not—that's to say, as you did not—you might have sent Joe in to tell me so. Just get ill yourself, and see how lively your evenings would be with your throat in flannel, expecting a fellow who never comes!"

"I was coming in at eight o'clock, when old Tompkins called in, and talked over old times. Every quarter of an hour I thought he'd go; instead of which he stuck on till eleven o'clock."

"You'll shine at the bar, Charley, when you can invent a white lie after that rapid fashion, and stare a man in the face as you tell it."

"Tompkins was in my chambers."

"Tompkins might be. But you were not."

"What do you mean, Peter?"

Peter Chester was looking at him, and laughing in a most provoking manner. "I don't see why you should make a mystery of it, Baumgarten," he said. "If you did choose to go out and enjoy yourself, instead of passing the evening with a sick chum, there's no reason why you should not admit it. Only you might have dropped me half a word. Who was the lady? Come, Charley; confession's good for the conscience."

"Tell me what you want me to confess, and perhaps I may do it. I'm all in the dark."

"Oh, of course," mockingly returned Peter Chester. "But a truce to jesting, old fellow," he added in a different tone. "Why need you keep it so quiet? Who was the lady?"

"What lady?"

"That you escorted last night to the Haymarket. Grand tier; first row."

"I was not at the Haymarket last night," returned Charles.

"Oh, but you were," answered Peter Chester, with an emphasis that unmistakably pronounced his own belief in it.

"Hear me a minute, Chester," quietly returned Charles. "I have this evening been pretty nearly persuaded out of my own identity, and I don't care to enter upon another discussion of a similar nature. I have told you that Tompkins was with me last night until eleven o'clock, and I told you the truth. I did not stir out of my chambers, and by a quarter past eleven I was in bed."

When we assert a thing in good faith, it is somewhat annoying to find the assertion received doubtfully. Peter Chester stared at Charles. He knew him to be truthful; but he did not believe him now—and Charles saw he didn't.

Charles stayed with him until ten o'clock, and then went home to his chambers, letting himself in with his latch key.

CHAPTER XIX.

Early the following morning, while Charles was at his breakfast, and before the arrival of his clerk, he was surprised by a visit from the Bishop of Denham.

The bishop opened his business standing, saying he had no time to sit. It appeared that he was trustee for something or other, a very trivial affair, but it touched the rights of the church, as he solemnly worded it, and an action at law was unavoidable; if his young friend felt sufficient confidence in himself to do them justice, he would see that he was appointed leading counsel; it might be a lift to him in his profession.

"Of course all this is sub rosa," remarked the prelate. "You will receive particulars from the solicitors, together with the brief. I'll write down one or

two points, if you will give me pen and ink, to which your attention must be chiefly directed, and then if you think you can master them, I'll mention you to the solicitors."

"If your lordship will be a trouble of sitting to my desk, you will find all you require at hand," said Charles, rising to pilot him to it.

Down sat the bishop, and wrote rapidly for five minutes. "Have you some blotting paper?" he asked.

"The blotting paper is under the paper you are writing upon," explained Charles, and the bishop drew it out.

Bending his head, he stared at it through his spectacles. Then, turning his severe face to Charles, he spoke in a tone that ought to have annihilated him.

"Do you give this to me to use, sir?" Charles advanced quickly, looked and stood confounded with vexation. On the blotting pad, white and clean, for the top sheet must have been taken off, was a fancy drawing in pen and ink, bold, clear and well done, of a half dozen ballet girls in very airy costumes. The color flew to Charles' face; he knew what the bishop was. What, on earth, would he judge, must be his private pastimes, if he could adorn his professional desk with such sketches, and set a bishop down to regale his eyes with them?

Charles tore off the sheet in a heat. "I assure you, my lord, on my word of honor, that I know not how those things came there. Some one must have been here last night unknown to me, and taken the liberty to leave a remembrance behind him."

"Allow me to recommend you to burn it, sir," said the scandalized divine.

"Yes, but I will first of all endeavor to identify the offender," was Charles' answer.

Up rose the bishop, his head erect. Charles attended him downstairs, but his lordship did not shake hands with him. Back tore Charles, two stairs at a time. Joe's mother, who lived near at hand, and came in to attend to the work at stated times, was then removing the breakfast things.

"Were you here last night while Joe was out, Mrs. Tuff?"

"Yes, sir. I had some cleaning—"

"Who came in?" interrupted Charles.

"Nobody came, sir; not a single soul."

"Who has been into this room this morning?" continued Charles.

"Only me, sir, to put it to rights."

"Did you do this, then?" asked Mr. Baumgarten, pushing the sheet of blotting paper under her eyes.

"Me?" cried Mrs. Tuff, who was a sharp-faced little woman in a neat stuff gown and white cap. "You must be joking, sir. When I saw it there in dusting, I thought what odd-looking ladies they was. And I put the writing paper upon 'em to cover 'em up a bit."

Charles reflected. "Joe wouldn't do it?" he remarked.

"Joe!" said Mrs. Tuff in astonishment. "Why, sir, Joe would not care to do such a thing as that. He couldn't, either. Joe haven't no talent that way. When he was a little one, I'd give him a pencil and piece of paper and tell him to draw the cat, but it would come out more like a pump."

"That just brings us round to my argument, that some one else has been in the room," said Charles. "Now I want to find out who that is."

"It must have been done in the daytime yesterday, sir."

The last day, before dinner yesterday evening, after Mr. Clay left, I wrote a note at the table and used this blotting pad," returned Mr. Baumgarten; "and I left it as I used it, much marked with ink. Did Mr. Clay come in last night for any purpose?"

"No, sir. And if he had, he'd not have left them disrespectful things behind him."

That was true enough. But Mr. Clay, joint clerk to Charles and another young barrister, might have let some one in who had so amused himself; some lawyer's clerk with a hasty brief, who possessed more skill than discretion. However, the woman persisted that no person whatever had entered, and Charles Baumgarten thought it a mystery which seemed, for the moment, insuperable of solution.

Sitting down to his desk, he began to look over some papers. A few minutes later, and Charles had occasion to open one of the deep drawers on either side the desk. He took his bunch of keys from his pocket and fitted one into the lock. But it would not open. The lock had evidently been tampered with—and he had left it in perfect condition the previous evening. Mrs. Tuff was called in again.

"Will you believe now that some one has been at mischief in the room?" demanded her master. "They have been at the drawers; I cannot unlock them."

She stood, somewhat incredulous; and Mr. Baumgarten, taking another key, tried the opposite drawer. It opened readily, but he gazed at it as if transfixed. "Look here!" he sharply uttered.

The woman advanced and stood behind his chair. It was full of papers and parchments, all in a mass of inextricable confusion.

"Now, listen, Mrs. Tuff. Yesterday evening, after I had written the note I spoke of, before I sealed it, I opened this drawer to put a parchment in; at that time it was in perfect order, and I locked it and left it so. There is some mystery in all this."

Mrs. Tuff could dispute facts no longer; she had to give in to the evidence of her own eyes. "Sir," she said, "what a good thing it is that I was here last

night instead of young Joe. We might have accused him of doing it for the chief."

"I don't know that it is a good thing, significantly retorted her master. "The fact must be that you dropped asleep last night and let some one get in."

"The woman was indignant at the insinuation. "Sir," returned she, "I'd rather you accused me of doing it myself than say that. I don't think I as much as go down last night, for I thought it a good opportunity to clean out the cupboard, and that's what I was doing the previous evening. Some rogue must have got in last night through your leaving the key in the passage door."

"Through what, do you say?" her master.

"The latch key, sir. You left it in the door when you went out the second time."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Tuff. I did not leave my key in the door last night or any other night."

"Why, yes, sir, you did," was her answer, spoken in a tone of remonstrance. "Else how could I have got in?"

"What are you dreaming of now? You have your own key."

"But you took mine from me last night, sir. Don't you remember?" she added, seeing Mr. Baumgarten appeared not to comprehend. "When I came back, I found the latchkey in the door, and I know you had left it there for me; but I thought it not a safe thing to do, so I'll forgive me for saying it."

Charles Baumgarten looked at the woman in amazement, for not a syllable of what she was saying could he understand. He ordered her to explain.

The woman felt hurt. "I'm frightened, sir, I know that, and my eyes are sometimes at fault; but they are not a bad thing that I could mistake anybody else for my own master."

A silence ensued. Mrs. Tuff sighed and passed it in staring. Charles changed her to retire. An uncomfortable feeling clung to him all day; go where he would, he carried it about with him, even to the courts and into the presence of his judges.

In the evening he went to call at Eaton Place; he had not done so since Mary went to Brighton. Dr. Dynevor was still in town; and, much to Charles' surprise, he found that Mary was also; he saw her had returned that day. Upon being admitted, the maid, who had, as he knew, attended Mary, crossed the hall.

"You are back again, Sarah?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, we came up to-day," the girl answered, and proceeded to explain the reason. The family they were staying with at Brighton received news of the dangerous illness of a relative at Cheltenham, and had to speed thither at once.

Instead of being shown to the drawing room as usual, Charles was marshaled to a small one off the dining room, and Mr. Dynevor came to him. By the force of her hair flame wig, her raised eyebrows and her haughty tones, Charles saw that something was amiss.

"Then it is Mr. Charles Baumgarten," she exclaimed, as if his appearance excited a doubt. "When the latter announced your name, I told him he must be mistaken. May I inquire the purport of your visit, sir?"

Charles laughed. Miss Dynevor was subject to changes of mood and manner; but he did not let them trouble him, more than the boys and girls did. "I came to take tea with you for one of the Miss Dynevors. And Mary has come home, I hear," was the answer.

"Yes; she has returned," stiffly responded Miss Dynevor. "But—you must be aware that it is not convenient to receive your visit this evening."

Charles looked at her; there was something in her voice, her manner, that had never met before, and his pulse quickened with a sense of coming evil.

"Or at any future time," continued the lady, who had not taken a seat, or asked Charles to do so.