

The Minister's Wife

By MRS. HENRY WOOD

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

She swept away majestically, leaving Charles to make an ignominious exit from the house. But Charles was not in a hurry to do it. He wanted to explain, yet with whom? The subdean was so hot and peppery, especially in the first blush of an affair, and that an explanation with him generally did more harm than good. Apart from that, what explanation had Charles to give? None. None that would be believed. As he stood thus thinking, the room door was slowly pushed open and Regina appeared.

"She's gone, isn't she, Charley? Was she very dreadful?"

"Very," returned Charley, shutting the door.

"When Aunt Ann has a grievance, no one can come up to her, and it's many a year since she had such a grievance as this one," went on Regina. "Oh, Charley, what fun it was! how did you pluck up the courage? and who was it?"

"Just tell me what you've heard," said he.

"That you were at the Haymarket Theater, in its most conspicuous place, besetting a lady with painted cheeks. We got it all out of Janet, Aunt Ann's maid. You should have heard Aunt Ann in her room last night, old Janet says, and all the names she called you!"

"I suppose this has been told to Mary?"

"Trust Aunt Ann for that. Who was the lady, Charley?"

"I wonder, Regina, whether you'll believe me if I tell you something?"

"Try me. Perhaps you are going to say it was Gertrude?"

"Gertrude is at Great Whitton, you know. I don't know who it was, Regina, for I was not at the theater at all. I was in chambers all the night. I've heard of this already. A friend of Peter Chester's thought he saw me there—just as you describe. It must have been some fellow who bears a resemblance to me. Can't you get Mary to come down to me? Do, Regina. And you will please tell her from me that there's not a word of truth in the tale. I must see her for a minute or two."

"She will have to smuggle herself down the staircase, then! Aunt Ann is sure to be on the watch," returned Regina. "I'll go and see."

Very shortly Mary came stealing in. She was looking pale, but in better health than before she went to Brighton. Charles stood before her in agitation.

"Mary, before I attempt to greet you, let me assure you that the story which they have got up about me is utterly false. You will not believe it?"

"Oh, no, no," she wildly said, as she burst into tears and put her head upon his breast. He was about to clasp her in his arms when the door was flung back and Dr. Dynevor walked in.

To Charles' confused astonishment, he found that all was known. The repudiated bill for jewelry; the lady with painted cheeks on his arm at the theater; the ballet girls on his blotting pad. The last item had been confidently mentioned that afternoon by the bishop of Denham.

The subdean rang the bell. "The door for Mr. Charles Baumgarten," he said to the servant.

CHAPTER XX.

The trees at Great Whitton grew bright with the tender green of Spring, and the hedges were budding into leaf. Gertrude Baumgarten was slowly walking through one of the country lanes toward Avon House, enjoying the freshness of the morning. The sun shone, the skies were blue and unclouded, the air felt warm almost as that of a summer's day, and the birds sang with a rapture that is so exhilarating on these days when all nature is springing into new life and beauty.

Leaning over the small wicket which was placed only a few yards from the large iron gates at Avon House, stood Lord Avon, looking at her as she advanced.

"You are back at last, Gertrude?"

"At last?" she repeated. "Why? Have you wanted me, Uncle Avon?"

"Not at all. But I have been watching for you for an age. What are you carrying in that small parcel?"

"Feminine matters in which you can scarcely be interested," laughed Gertrude. "I've been matching silks in the village for my screen work, and it took me a long time, for I wanted many shades. Then I went on to see old Mrs. Whitaker, who grows more deaf and crotchety day by day. Are you watching for someone else, Uncle Henry?"

"No," replied Lord Avon; "I was only thinking. Gertrude, I am going down to the rectory presently; your mother wants me to ask them to come in to dinner."

"Oh, pray do," said Gertrude. "It will make it less dull for them, and for us—I wish you would tell me something," she continued, after a pause.

"The letter you were reading at the breakfast table—I chance to see the writing, you remember, and said it was from Charles; upon which you put it hastily into your pocket, telling me that I saw too much and too quickly. It was from Charles, was it not?"

"Yes. You are quite right."

"Then why did you rush it away in that fashion, and pretend that I was mistaken, Uncle Henry?"

"Because I wished not to draw your mother's attention to it. I did not altogether understand the letter, and wanted

to go over it again alone. Charley has been getting into a mess. He was seen at the play one night in strange company. Again, the old bishop of Denham, calling at his chambers, found some very unorthodox pen-and-ink sketches on his blotting pad. Charley forthwith went down in his lordship's estimation, and lost some work the bishop had just offered him. I should like to have seen the good man's face," broke off Lord Avon, laughing.

"But is that all?" asked Gertrude. "It does not seem a very terrible affair, if there is nothing more behind it."

"It certainly sounds rather like a case of much ado about nothing," asserted the earl. "But it is not quite all. Charles has been going in largely for jewelry and can't, or won't, pay for it."

"Does he ask you to help him? Is that his reason for writing?"

"Not at all. He distinctly disavows any motive of the kind; does not intend to pay the bill himself, or allow any one else to pay it for him. He says he knows that Dr. Dynevor is about to acquaint me with the whole affair, and wishes to give me first of all his own version of it. Among other changes, the engagement with Mary is broken off."

"But that is serious," exclaimed Gertrude, much troubled. "It will ruin both their lives. Who has done it?"

"Dr. Dynevor, and on account of these matters. I'm sorry for Charley, and suppose I must see into it," concluded the earl, passing at length through the gate.

He walked away. Gertrude went slowly up the garden and crossed to a natural arbor formed by the interlacing trees, and there sat down on a bench overshadowed by the flowering lilac and drooping laburnum.

"If she and Charles should part for good, would Everard return to her?" shyly wondered Gertrude, with flushing cheeks. "He said—Why—who is this?"

She half rose in her astonishment. Strolling down the broad path from the house came Sir Everard Wilmet. Could it be he? Gertrude gazed as one in a dream. Sir Everard walked across the lawn and held out his hand.

"I am so much surprised," she said, as her own hand met his, and her lovely face turned to rose color. "I had not even heard that you were expected."

"I am given to plain speaking, as you may remember, Gertrude; I cannot bear about the bush with fine phrases, as some men can," he said. "My dear, I came here to-day with one sole object—that of asking you to be my wife. Oh, Gertrude! don't say me nay again!"

She bent her head and her changing face. Mis Baumgarten lost all her dignity, and burst into tears. Somehow he did not regard it as a bad omen. Perhaps he was an expert at interpreting signs and tokens. However that might be, he put his arm around her and drew her gently to him.

"My darling!" he whispered with impassioned fervor. "I see that you will not send me away." And Gertrude bent her face still lower as she murmured:

"Perhaps you have not heard—Mary Dynevor and Charles—their engagement is broken off."

"Gertrude, don't you know me better than that?" he rejoined. "Did you not know, did you not see in the past days that it was not Mary Dynevor I loved, but you? When you refused me, refused even to listen to a word I would have said, I turned to Mary in—I fear I must say it—vexation of soul. My dear, why did you treat me so?"

Should she ever be able to tell him? Not yet, at any rate. She had mistaken his frequent visits to the sick daughter of a lady staying in the place, friends of her own and of Lady Grace. A foolish, gossiping woman had whispered to Gertrude that Mr. Wilmet was paying so much attention to this young sick lady that their engagement was an absolute certainty. Gertrude believed it, and became at once so resentfully jealous that when Mr. Wilmet, not long afterward, spoke to her, in her pride she retaliated upon him with indignation. No, she could not tell him all this to-day, or speak of the sore repentance which had ever since laid upon her.

She drew herself to the end of the bench, put her hat on decorously, and essayed to converse upon indifferent topics; the beauty of the day, the scent of the lilac, the song of the birds. "Do you see that laburnum?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she said. "It is my favorite tree; the most beautiful of all trees; the most graceful of all blossoms."

"Yes," he replied, "I almost agree with you. The country people call it 'gold chain' down with us," he added, smiling.

"Down with you?"

"In the country where my home is; the fairest county in the heart of England. Soon to be your home also, I hope, Gertrude. My darling, may the chains that bind our future lives together be as fair and golden as those of your favorite blossom."

"Does Uncle Henry know you are here?" she suddenly asked.

"Why, of course he does. I was with him for half an hour before he went out. I have his best wishes, Gertrude; and your mother's also. Ah, my dear, you can find no excuse for turning from me now."

Gertrude rose. He placed her hand on his arm and they walked together up the path. Lady Grace looked at them from the window with smile of welcome. Sir Everard nodded to her.

A reneembrance rushed into Lady Grace's heart; a flood of tears to her eyes. Just so, in that very garden, in the days long gone by, had she loved and listened. Listened and loved and yielded to the impulsive vows of him who alone made a heaven of her life—Gertrude's father, Kyle Baumgarten.

CHAPTER XXI.

Hand locked in hand, they stood together in the dusk of evening at the chambers in Pump Court, gazing into one another's eyes—Cyrus and Charles Baumgarten.

It was the evening after Charles' ignominious exit from the house of Dr. Dynevor. He had been busy all day; had been in court, the junior counsel in an insignificant case; had made one at a consultation at Lincoln's Inn; had been occupied in other ways. The only personal thing he had found time to do for himself was to write a letter to Lord Avon. And now, the day's work over, and his dinner over, he was mentally deliberating as to whether he should at once apply to the police for counsel in his curious dilemma, or wait and see what the next day or two would bring forth; when he heard the sound of a visitor approaching.

A gentleman of free and easy manners had run up the stairs to the door which bore on it the name of "Mr. Charles Baumgarten."

Knocking with the silver head of his very elegant cane, he had stood humming a tune until the summons was answered by the boy, Joe. "Master in?" he cried, airily, and walked forward without waiting for a reply, as if he knew his way about the chambers, as well as Joe himself did. The boy stared in amazement; he had never seen two people so much alike as this gentleman and his master.

"Charley, lad!" Joe heard him say in salutation.

The resemblance was certainly wonderful. Height, figures, features, even the voices were the same. Only in the expression of the two countenances a difference might be seen. That of Cyrus was gay, light, laughing, as if he had never in his whole life heard of a thing called care; that of Charles was thoughtful and rather sad. And their resemblance to their late father, the dean of Denham, was as great as it was to one another.

"Don't you know me, Charley?"

Intense surprise had struck Charles dumb.

"Yes, I know you, Cyrus, my brother; but I can't believe yet that it is really you."

"There's no mistaking the likeness," laughed Cyrus. "Look at yourself in the glass, and then look at me. Folks might vow we were twins. You are silent with surprise, Charley."

"I am given to plain speaking, as you may remember, Gertrude; I cannot bear about the bush with fine phrases, as some men can," he said. "My dear, I came here to-day with one sole object—that of asking you to be my wife. Oh, Gertrude! don't say me nay again!"

"But there are other things, Cyrus," Charles resumed, "and they are not trifles. You have been forging my name to a bill."

All the mirth in the elder's face gave place to astonishment. "Forged your name to a bill?" he exclaimed. "I declare most solemnly that I have never done anything of the kind, Charley. You may put down as much folly to me as you will; but—forger! You are dreaming, lad."

"You bought a lot of jewelry from a man named White," continued Charles, who, of course, was no longer at any loss to know who had so mysteriously personated him. "You paid him by a bill purporting to be accepted by me. And you?"

"But the bill's not due!" hastily interrupted Cyrus, lifting his head in surprise.

"It was due a day or two ago, and—"

"I made no memorandum of the date. How time flies!"

"But why did you attach my name to it?"

"I signed it with my own name, 'C. Baumgarten.' I made it payable here, for I had no settled address in London, with all of you out of it, north, south, east and west. That bill due! They didn't bring it to you, did they?"

"Of course they brought it to me, believing it was mine. And I disowned it, and it's not paid yet; and there's I don't know what work about it. It was a pretty close imitation of my handwriting, Cyrus."

"It was my own handwriting, and no imitation of any one else's. I wrote my name as I always do, and always have done. As we are alike in person, Charles, so we are in writing. You know it."

"I couldn't. I steamed away from Wellington the very same day that I made up my mind to come over. The fact is, Charley, I—I need not bother you by going into everything," added Cyrus.

"How is the dear mother?"

"Quite well."

"And Gertrude? Is she as pretty as ever? Any chance of her getting spliced?"

"Well, I can't say anything for certain," hesitated Charles. "But I should not very much wonder if we heard of a wedding before very long. It is Everard Wilmet."

(To be continued.)

JERSEY.

The Island of Jersey is one of the oddest corners of King Edward's realm, anchored within sight of France, originally peopled by sturdy Normans, the Jersey folk of to-day present a strange racial mixture, forming a little world where French shrugs are to be seen on English shoulders.

Within Jersey's limited area of but ten miles one way and six in another may be found the most varied coastal scenery, the richest foliage and rarest flowers, the narrowest of picturesque streets or lanes, the quaintest of fisher and farm folk, the strangest of fish in the St. Helier market, and the largest cabbage stalks in the United Kingdom!

Scores of bays, no two alike, indent the coast—some with pebbly beaches; others with white or red sand floors; some bounded by towering cliffs bearing ancient castles on their summits; some shelving gently from the uplands. White lighthouses warn the sailor of the ever-present danger from the sunken rocks lying in wait for their prey. Fair to look upon in a calm sea, the coast of Jersey is yet one of great peril to the mariner.—Four-Track News.

Turtle eggs are highly prized in countries where they are abundant, and though once commonly eaten in America, are now seldom offered.

"Does Uncle Henry know you are here?" she suddenly asked.

"Why, of course he does. I was with him for half an hour before he went out. I have his best wishes, Gertrude; and your mother's also. Ah, my dear, you can find no excuse for turning from me now."

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CHAPTER XXI.

"Everard Wilmet," repeated Cyrus, in surprise. "He was over in Wellington, where I did make his acquaintance. What's more, I was able to render him a service, which I know he has not forgotten to this day."

"What was it?"

"Don't ask me, Charley, for I can't tell you. If Gertrude has chosen him she has done well."

"There's nothing certain about it yet, Cyrus. Only, a hint was whispered to me that—Cyrus!" burst out Charles, as an idea flashed across him. "It was you who came to my rooms here the night before last! It was you who pilfered the key from my old laundress."

Cyrus nodded. "I took the key from her hand, and let myself in with it."

"But you need not have played up Old Harry with them, Cyrus; turned the drawers inside out, and ornamented the blotting pad to the bishop of Denham's pious horror and my own confusion."

"The blotting pad! Oh, I left that as a memento of my visit; I had no card case with me," laughed Cyrus. "And for the drawers, I had only a fancy, Charley, for seeing what you kept in your lockers."

"You know the bishop of Denham?"

"I ought to do so. He used to read me lectures an hour long. I remember he once told my father that he ought to keep over me the severe rod of correction."

"Well, he was here the next morning early, and in all innocence I gave him the blotting pad to use. You may, perhaps, fancy his looks, and his opinion of me, when those sketches met his outraged eyes."

Charles thought his brother never would cease laughing. It was the best joke, he declared, that he had heard for a minute.

"But there you were taken for me. Who was the lady? It was half over London the next day that I had been there in suspicious company."

"Yes."