

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 subaltern 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, beaming 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 Whilton, 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 she had been for some time. 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. Dymore 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 confidentially mentioned that afternoon by the bishop of Denham.

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

CHAPTER XX.

The trees at Great Whilton 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.

Leaving 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.

"Well? What do you want to know?" he inquired, certain in his own mind as to the nature of her request.

"The letter you were reading at the breakfast table—I chanced 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. Charles 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. Charles 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," assented 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. Dymore 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. Dymore, and on account of these matters. I'm sorry for Charles, 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 Wilmot. 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 came down from London this morning," he answered, as he took his seat beside her. "When Avon was last in town he invited me to come to him for a day or two. Having nothing particularly on hand just now, I thought the occasion too good to be lost. You are not sorry to see me, Miss Baumgarten?"

"Oh, no, why should I be sorry?" flattered Gertrude. "We must all be glad to see you, for it is dull here. I often wish myself away."

A moment's silence. Then Sir Everard took possession of the hand again, and bent a little forward, his face, slightly agitated, turned to hers.

"I am given to plain speaking, as you may remember, Gertrude; I cannot beat 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. Miss 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 Dymore 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 Dymore I loved, but you? When you refused me, refused even to listen to a word I would have spoken, 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. Wilmot 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. Wilmot, 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 a smile of welcome. Sir Everard nodded to her.

A remembrance 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 impassioned vows of him who alone made a heaven of her life—Gertrude's father, Ryle 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. Dymore. 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.

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

The resemblance was certainly wonderful. Height, figure, 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 more than surprised; I am bewildered. Sit down. How long have you been in England?"

"A few weeks. But most of it has been spent in Paris, not in England. I've been sticking to work like a brick for a long time, and I thought I had earned a holiday; so I came over to the old country, to see you all. When I arrived I found you had all flown in different directions; you gone on circuit, and Berkeley Square shut up."

"They are staying at Great Whilton with Uncle Avon. You should have sent me word that you were coming, Cyrus."

"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—but 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 spoiled?"

"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 Wilmot."

(To be continued.)

Jersey.

The island of Jersey is one of the oldest 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 oldest of farmhouses, the quaintest of fisher and farm folk, the strangest of fish in the St. Heller 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.

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CHAPTER XXI.—(Continued.)

"Everard Wilmot," 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, I fancy. 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 plucking 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 many a day.

"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—forgery! 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, Cy."

"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."

"You have given me little opportunity of knowing it of late," was the reply. "It must be months since you wrote to me, Cyrus."

"I've made your letters to me do duty for both of us," returned the free-and-easy Cyrus; "and have sent you one of our splendid newspapers in return. I have no end of business letters to write now, besides looking after the shipping; so that when the day comes to an end I don't care to set to work again."

"You seem to have taken quite a business turn," remarked Charles, only half believing in his brother's industry.

"I took that a long time ago. It's a positive fact, Charley. They are going to give me a share in the concern."

"And what about this bill, Cyrus?"

"Oh, I'll see to it," said Cyrus, airily. "Don't let it bother your head, lad."

"Have you any more bills out, Cyrus?"

"One more."

"And made payable here?"

Cyrus nodded.

"And what is the amount?"

"Can't remember. A hundred pounds or so. It's a Bond street tailor. I was obliged to have a regular rig-out. Colonial tailors don't do for London."

Charles Baumgarten recalled a rumor he had heard about a month before—that whispered inquiries were being made as to his finances.

"Cyrus, do you want to ruin me?" he cried, in a startled tone. "I must take up these bills if you do not."

"Take up the bills!" echoed Cyrus. "What for? You did not accept them."

"But the people think I did."

"Rubbish! Let them think what they like. I'll go with you to the parties and show myself, and convince them of their error. Charley, lad, what a long face you are drawing! Just as you used to do when we were young boys and I led you into a scrape. Didn't I always get you out of it then? And I'll get you out of this. In fact, you are not in it."

"How will you get me out of it?"

"By paying the bills myself. I'll settle all up before leaving England."

"Why not pay at once?"

"Can't," lightly returned Cyrus. "Money runs away over here; it simply

melts in Paris. I brought about three hundred pounds with me, and it's all gone. I've telegraphed out to old Brice to send me more."

"Why did you not pay the jeweler at the time you bought his goods?"

"The bill came to so much more than I had thought for and I hadn't enough in my pocket. Oh, it's all right, old fellow."

"And, pray, Cyrus, if I may put so bold a question, for whom were all those pretty things bought?"

"For one and another. Some for myself. Some for Gertrude. Some to send out to Wellington."

"Then you will go with me to those people about the bills, Cyrus—the jeweler and the tailor?" resumed Charles, after a pause.

"I'll go now, if you like. I don't want to let you in for annoyance, brother mine."

"You have let me in for a good deal of that already, Cyrus. Were you at the Haymarket two or three nights ago?"

"Yes."

"And 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."

"What a joke!" exclaimed Cyrus. "I knew I was being taken for you, Charley," laughed Cyrus, carelessly. "Some fellows nodded to me, and one or two spoke, and I nodded back again and kept up the jest."

"A sorry jest for me, Cyrus. I was engaged to be married—to Mary Dymore."

"I'm uncommonly glad to hear it," cried Cyrus, stretching out his hand to grasp his brother's. "Mary was the nicest of all the younger girls; as nice as Cyrilla."

"I said I was engaged, Cyrus. It is broken off now. Old Miss Dymore saw me, as she thought, at the Haymarket with some one I had no business to be with; and she went home and told the subaltern. The next time I called in Eaton Place he turned me out of doors, and bade me think no more of his daughter."

CHAPTER XXII.

Cyrus suddenly became serious. "This has gone further than I intended," he cried. "All my life I have been getting myself or others into scrapes, and I suppose I shall do so to the end of the chapter. And the best and the worst of it is that I generally manage to come out in worse colors than I deserve; as on this occasion."

Charles looked up. "Have they been tracing you as well as me?" he asked.

"The lady I treated to the theater was no other than Mrs. Carrington, as good a woman as ever lived, although, as Tony Lumpkin would say, her cheeks are as broad and red as a pulpit cushion. But it is all genuine color, Charley, just as she herself is a genuine woman."

"What brought you there alone with her?" asked Charles.

"That I was with her alone was an accident," answered Cyrus. "I treated them to the Haymarket, and took three of the best seats. At the last moment, just as we were about to start in the cab, Carrington's old father came in to spend the evening, and he had to remain with him."

"I think you were imprudent, to say the least of it," laughed Charles. "The lady was wonderfully got up, I was told."

"Like all born colonists, she is fond of any amount of fans and feathers," returned Cyrus. "It was her first introduction to a London theater, and a great occasion to her, and she put on all her war paint accordingly. But of other paint she had none, Charley; she is too honest and good for that."

"Where are the Carringtons staying?"

"With his brother. He's a widower, and lives at a pretty house, up Chelsea way. Decent, intelligent people, Charley; though, of course, not up to your mark."

"And where are you staying, Cyrus?"

"I'll you may well ask it. Finding no home open to me on landing, the first individual I dropped upon, after leaving the ship at the docks, was Harry Brice. He is in Somerset House, you know; getting on, too; and was bound that morning on some expedition to the customs. He told me you were on circuit; thought the mother and Gertrude were at Avon, and said I must come to them at Norwood. Down I went. But Norwood's out of the way for a fellow who wants to knock about town, and I came back to a hotel. Then I went to Paris with Tom Howard. And here I am back again. And now you know all, Charley."

"Quite enough, too," laughed Charley. "We'll go to White's now." And Cyrus agreed with alacrity.

The jeweler's shop was lighted when they reached it. Mr. White and his assistant were both in it. Charles walked forward; Cyrus held back a moment.

"I hear that bill is protested, Mr. White," began Charles.

"Yes, sir, or about to be," answered the jeweler. "And I must say I am surprised that a gentleman like yourself should allow things to come to such a pass. If it were not convenient to you to pay it now, you might have renewed it."

"I tell you again, as I told you before, that the bill is none of mine," said Charles. "I never bought the articles."

Cyrus walked forward and stood beside his brother.

"Look at this gentleman," said Charles Baumgarten.

The jeweler gazed in amazement, now at one, now at the other. "What does it mean?" he cried at last. "Who are you, sir?" turning to Cyrus.

"Well," cried Cyrus, who looked upon the whole matter as an excellent joke, "don't you know me again?"

"You must be twins!" exclaimed the perplexed man.

"Not at all," said Cyrus. "We are brothers, but not twins. I'm two years older than Mr. Charles Baumgarten."

"Sir," said the jeweler, turning to Charles, "allow me to ask why you do not explain to me that you had a brother who bore to you so remarkable a likeness? It might have solved the mystery."

"Because I never thought of him at all in the matter; I did not know he was in England. Of course, Mr. White, you now exonerate me."

"As if every one did not!" exclaimed Cyrus. "The trouble, Mr. White, has arisen from my careless habits. You colonists are proverbially careless, you know. Making no memorandum of the date, I do not know the bill was due. I have been spending most of the interval in Paris, where time flies, one forgets how quickly it will be all right now, and your bill will get paid without your troubling to protest it."

They next called upon the holders of the bill, the Messrs. Jephson, who in their turn were equally surprised; the elderly cynically remarking they might have had the wit to know that Cyrus was at the bottom of the mischief. And then they went back to Pump Court, when Charles had ordered a substantial supper for Cyrus' benefit.

Then Cyrus grew confidential. He spoke of a certain fair daughter of Mr. Jansen, the second partner of the New Zealand house. She and Cyrus were privately engaged; and he declared that if he could only win her he should throw carelessness to the winds and become as steady as Old Time.

"Her mother, a well born English woman, favors it," observed Cyrus. "She thinks there must be any amount of latent good in a dean's son. Mr. Jansen opposes it; not that he objects to me personally, but on the score of my want of prospects. He told me point-blank that he would give her to me were I able to become a partner in the firm."

"The difficulty is money, I suppose," Cyrus said.

"Just so. Four thousand pounds. They would give me a small share in it for that sum."

"And you have not got it?"

"I have never saved anything."

"And what of the young lady herself?"

"I only wish it rested with her!" answered Cyrus. "She would soon be mine. Ah, Charley, if I could only encompass that partnership, it would steady me for life. If I have to part from her—well, I don't think I should care what went with me, or what the end was—perhaps ruin."

Charles was silent. He remembered how passionately he and Cyrus had loved each other as boys, although Cyrus did put upon him and tyrannize over him; and he asked himself whether he should give up his own marriage for a time, and save his brother. He had about two thousand pounds put by; part of it he had saved by degrees, part had come to him by a recent legacy. If he gave that to Cyrus, his own marriage must be delayed, but he knew Mary