

THE ERROR OF HER WAYS

By May Austin Low

THE affair began in the little Chambly Church near the syringa trees.

It was a Sunday morning in early June, and the air was so slightly stirred by the breath of the West that there was not a ripple on the lake, that lay clear as a mirror in the sun, reflecting the glory of the green shores and the dark blue mountains in the distance.

There was an unusually large congregation in the little church, accounted for by the beauty of the day and the interest in the new clergyman, who had only the week before taken up his abode in the old red-brick rectory; and last, but not least, by the appearance there of pretty little Mrs. de Freyne who, with her husband, had taken "The Wigwam" by the Rapids for the Summer months. At least half a dozen lorgnettes had discerned her tall figure crossing the old parade ground, and she might have been drilled by the way she carried herself.

Mrs. de Freyne had been shown by the pompous verger into one of the high, old-fashioned pews, and had paid due attention to the prayers and psalms, but when it came to the sermon her thoughts wandered.

The new clergyman was a success as regards earnestness and eloquence. He preached of the joys of Paradise with a heavenly light illuminating his features and the conviction that the truth that came from his soul must enter the hearts of his audience.

There were some young girls stirred to momentary ardor by his address, and the men admired his fire and fervor. The well-dressed women lis-

tened languidly; the Paradise they longed for was one that would restore their lost youth and make them once more attractive to men.

But to Mrs. de Freyne, so vividly conscious of her youth and beauty and the power thereof, the discourse had merely a musical rhythm that made a pleasing accompaniment to her thoughts. She thought of the little cottage by the Rapids, with its broad veranda and swinging hammocks and sweet flowers; of the hedge of roses in the garden, and a volume of Swinburne's poems she had been reading after breakfast. She thought of a new frock of pure white silk with gauze trimmings, which had arrived for her the night before, and in which her husband had said she looked like a water lily—a very nice thing for him to say; men aren't often poetical to their wives.

She was wondering what on earth she should do with herself after a week if there was no one to amuse her, when a man on the other side of the aisle caught her glance. Instantly she was another being.

There was no danger of dulness now, for instantly she knew, with woman's infallible intuition, that he admired her. She wished she hadn't dressed so dowdily—all in black, as if afraid of trusting her discrimination in colors. But then black set off her dead-gold hair, and the crimson poppies in her hat were an effective bit of coloring.

Was he looking at her still? She would just glance at him once again to find out. She was not disappointed.

At that moment the clergyman brought his sermon to a close; the

collection was taken up by the pompous verger, a hymn was sung with much heartiness, the blessing given in solemn tones, and Mrs. de Freyne found herself among the society few that lingered last.

"What did you think of our service?" asked a middle-aged woman with a distinguished air, stepping across the aisle to shake hands with her, while the young man she had noticed followed them closely down the church.

"Quite charming," said Mrs. de Freyne, as if passing a verdict on a new novel. "I enjoyed the sermon greatly, and—and everything."

"You must let me introduce my cousin to you," said Mrs. Wentworth, turning as they reached the steps to the young man in their wake. "It isn't often that he is lured to church, but the new clergyman attracted quite a large congregation."

The young man bowed low, and answered, with a slight smile: "It isn't often one has anything so attractive as—our new clergyman."

"I'll make you a frightful confession," said Mrs. de Freyne, as he followed her through the gate. "I think clergymen the most unattractive of all things created. Why should there be so much strength about a doctor's appearance and so much weakness about the men who preach the Gospel?"

"It's perhaps the way they look at things," said Arthur Wentworth. "Of course, a clergyman is in a hard position. No better, by nature, than other men, he has eternally to think of setting a proper example."

"Men take things so much more seriously than women," she said, reflectively; "I suppose that is why a man is content to appear what he is, while a woman wishes to be considered either better or worse than she may be."

"Which is your desire?" he asked, with a strange smile, looking down at her yellow hair.

"Oh, I pose as a saint, of course. I'm a model wife—I should have been a model mother had nature permitted. As it is, I have a little dog that I adore.

It's quite a case of love me, love my dog; and anyone that Snap doesn't approve of I doubt at once."

"It isn't exactly an encouraging name—to the timid of heart. Was he christened after his character was formed—or from prognostication?"

"Come, now, I thought men were never ill-natured. Wait till you see my little angel, and your conscience will smite you."

"And when may I see him?"

"Your cousin is coming to call on me to-morrow; if you really wish to see Snap—" hesitatingly.

"I might come with her to-morrow—and *afterward*?"

"Oh, that would depend on Snap's approval of you."

She laughed a gay little laugh, without any guile, giving him a glimpse of perfect teeth and a delicious dimple near her mouth.

"You see, I'm never lonely on Sunday, because Samuel is with me—Samuel is my husband," she explained; "but the rest of the week is a dull affair unless people take pity on my loneliness."

"Are you fond of boating? I brought a boat from Montreal."

"I love the water." She came to a standstill between the barracks, where she could see the quiet lake beyond the foaming Rapids. "This is an ideal place for a Summer holiday. Why did I never come here before?"

"Why not, indeed? Before you had Snap—or . . ."

He paused, and she knew as well as did he what he had left unsaid. She took no umbrage, but laughed merrily. The dimple at each corner of her mouth was certainly bewitching.

The man found himself wondering why another man's wife should always be so very attractive—if attractive at all. Was there magic in the marriage service?

He walked with her to the little gate leading to "The Wigwam" and turned to take off his hat a second time as she disappeared across the broad veranda.

Samuel was ensconced in a huge

rattan chair on the side overlooking the Rapids. He was smoking a very good cigar and reading a very bad book.

"Oh, you wicked boy!" exclaimed his wife, alluding to his cigar, for she affected to disapprove of anything stronger than a cigarette.

Her tone pleased him. It is soothing to a man's feelings to be called a boy when he is on the wrong side of forty, just as a woman revels in being addressed as "my dear child" when she has forgotten what it is to feel young.

"You survived the service?" he queried, taking her slender hand in his fat, gigantic palm.

She thought of Arthur Wentworth's hands, which showed clearly an artistic temperament.

"Well—rather! Such an entrancing sermon, and the dearest little church! The leaves rustled outside the open windows and sounded like whispers from heaven."

"The parson said nothing more poetical than that, I'll be bound."

"It didn't strike me that there was anything particularly poetical about *him*," she mused.

"But you said his sermon was entrancing."

"Oh, I was thinking of someone else. I've become acquainted with two members of Chambly society—a Mrs. Wentworth and her cousin, Arthur Wentworth."

"I knew a Chambly Wentworth a very long time ago; his name was Sydney—a fine fellow he was, too—and my father knew his father before him, and his grandfather, too—William and Thomas by baptism." He was somewhat proud of his memory for names as well as faces.

"And Thomas begat William and William begat Sydney and Sydney begat Arthur—and really it seems to me he was worth *begatting*."

"Your frivolity, Aimée, is limitless." He smiled adoringly up into his wife's fair face, for her frivolities were very dear to his stolid soul. "Well, my dear, you can amuse yourself with this boy when I'm not here—"

the old conditions—"but these boys bother me; they are like puppies, always getting in the way."

"We find anyone in the way when we two are alone," she said, in a cooing voice. She pushed a footstool toward his chair and sat at his feet, with her elbows resting on his knees and her face in her hands. "What a bore business is, Samuel, dear! Couldn't you sometimes let it slide?"

"Then where would your pretty frocks come from? No, my dear, we must keep sentiment for Sundays—but by all means let us have it then—"

A bell sounded, and they went in to dinner, hand in hand, like children.

In a country place, with few women and fewer men as inhabitants, there is always more or less gossip over the doings of one's neighbors. Larger places, of course, have their character side-lights, but the focus of a primitive village is far more searching and severe.

The de Freynes had not been in Chambly more than a month before public attention was riveted on the wife's flirtation with Arthur Wentworth. If he walked over to "The Wigwam" and spent the morning on the shady veranda, in the glow and glory of her blue eyes, the fact was sure to be known all over the place before dinner time.

And as he spent many mornings undisturbed, it at last dawned on them that someone in the community ought to interfere. But who? Her rightful protector, if he was aware of the state of affairs, made no sign. Who, then, could be better chosen for such a mission than the paid protector of their souls?

So the little clergyman was interviewed, the case laid before him, and his clerical conscience so disturbed that he ate no breakfast and presented himself at "The Wigwam" gate just at dinner time, as deplorable looking an object of humanity as could be well imagined. Mrs. de Freyne came forward on the veranda and stood awaiting him, looking the

embodiment of health and happiness, her fine figure, in its stainless white frock, outlined against the dark green leaves.

"You have come at last," she said, as if his coming had been hourly longed for, "and at the right time, too. I had just persuaded Mr. Wentworth to partake of my dinner of herbs, and you must join us. Then, at least, we shall be sure of the presence of brotherly love."

"You—er—are very good," he said, feebly. He hadn't come to tell her that; but what a delicious aroma there was of salmon and cucumber! And he had eaten no breakfast.

They went immediately into the dining-room, where dinner was served on fine and faultless damask, and a jardinière full of freshly culled cabbage roses stirred the senses with delight. The two French windows were thrown wide, and not only the sound but the sight of the Recheleu Rapids added to their enjoyment.

"I verily believe I'm greedy!" cried Mrs. de Freyne, gaily, helping the Rev. William Chester to a second slice of salmon.

"Here I am with two men for dinner—and how many cavalierless tables there must be in Chambly to-day! I might have sent over for one of the Westover girls, but Mr. Wentworth declares he doesn't like bread-and-butter misses. As for you, Mr. Chester, I know you have the charity that covers a multitude of—women, and it wouldn't matter to you whether a girl had red hair and a random eye, or—the form of a Hebe."

She looked at him round the cabbage roses with bright and mocking eyes.

"I pride myself on my appreciation of the beautiful," said the Rev. William, with some dignity, having found that salmon is good for the spirit. "I don't maintain that godliness is by nature allied to ugliness, but while the beauty of the body may satisfy the senses, the soul sees deeper beneath the flesh that fails, and is never satisfied until——"

"That's it," interrupted Mrs. de

Freyne; "the soul, they say, is never satisfied, and I'm an example of Carlyle's theory that there is no such thing as a feminine soul; I am always satisfied, and I can't imagine anyone being happier than I when I've a new dress or a new book, or——"

She paused, and Arthur Wentworth said, with a dubious smile:

"A new victim to your charms."

He departed as soon as the dinner was over, and the little clergyman had the field all to himself.

They went out on the veranda, and she made him take the big rattan chair, while she sat at his feet on the edge of the veranda, leaning her head against the tall pillar, with her hands clasped across her knees and a very amused expression in her bright blue eyes.

"Now," she said, "you have a chance of making your enemy your footstool."

Undoubtedly he blushed. Had she already defined what he had to say?

"My dear lady," he said, "do you wish to be my enemy?—or the enemy of anyone?"

"Not yours, perhaps; but really, enemies are interesting, and it's everything—everything to be amused."

"We look at life from a different standpoint. It is everything to be good. I am convinced," he went on, with that clerical contraction of the larynx so irritating to the laity, "that the mistake people make is in not recognizing the danger in little things. The fascinating beginning of a flirtation, for instance, before you go any further——"

"Is it a sermon?" queried Mrs. de Freyne, with a slight arching of her eyebrows and a brilliant smile. "Before you go any further do tell me how you came to know of the fascination of beginnings?"

But the little clergyman was in earnest. He felt the woman's personal magnetism even as he reprimanded her—knew that her subtle feminine wit could outdo him at every turn; and yet he went on, because he had a soul to save and believed in his mission.

"It's quite funny," she said, "and perhaps not quite nice to be told you are not good; it really makes one wish to be—naughtier."

She pulled to pieces a huge Virginia vine leaf as she spoke.

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "You are taking what I have to say quite wrongly. I would only ask you to abstain from the appearance of evil."

"What would you have one do? I do my duty by my husband—even you must admit that. I darn his socks—such big ones I sometimes have to finish them on Sunday—I keep his cupboards tidy, I sort his ties, I cut his papers, I make his coffee and keep his house charming. What more do the soul-savers of this community desire of me?"

"That you do not spend hours alone with a man who is not your husband."

"And I maintain that it is no one's business but my own and my husband's."

"Which means——?"

"That you make a great mistake in preaching out of the pulpit."

Then she came down from her dignity and coldness and gave him a cup of tea sweetened with three lumps of sugar, as an offering of peace, she explained, which he accepted and sipped humbly, though he hadn't had sugar in his tea since he left off bibs and tuckers, and abhorred it.

But when he was leaving he leaned over the little gate and took up the old theme for a brief moment.

"I pray you to consider my words——"

"And I haven't considered *you!* Here I have been allowing you to risk your reputation by spending more than an hour alone with me."

As the little clergyman walked across the Common he thought to himself: "Surely a woman with eyes like hers must have a soul!"

Matters came to a climax one day when Samuel arrived by an earlier train than usual and found "The Wigwam" deserted, save for Snap, who had overturned the pink jardinière in his displeasure at being shut

in the dining-room, and Philomene, the pretty French maid-of-all-work, who had the natural leaning toward excitement innate in her race, and who thought it was time the jealous husband should appear on the scene. So she met her master's inquiries with enough explanation to set his smouldering jealousy ablaze.

Madame had gone out with Monsieur Wentworth soon after dinner. He used to come and be content to sit on the veranda and smoke, but lately they had always gone out. To-day they must have gone on the water, for he carried a paddle over his shoulder. If Monsieur had the opera glass perhaps he could find out. And the next moment Samuel was scanning the water for his recreant wife.

What he saw or did not see was sufficient at least to keep him tramping up and down the veranda till an hour later, when his wife came, with wind-tossed hair and shining eyes, to greet him. But he waved her away, and gave her no chance to vindicate herself by words. So she stood silently by one of the broad pillars, with tightly clasped hands and strange eyes, till he had said what he had to say.

"I'll have an end of this at once. No shilly-shallying now, Aimée. You cut the fellow direct, or—I'll know the reason why. You choose between him and me. You'll have leisure to decide while I'm away, for I'm going back to town now, and shall return tomorrow night." There was a whistle at that moment from the incoming train, and snatching up his handbag he hurried off toward the station. Mrs. de Freyne's mind had been made up from the first moment. She had grown to abhor her husband. A man may have half a dozen flirtations, and yet be more than content with his wife—as his wife; but no woman tolerates her husband when she has a penchant for another man.

Hadn't Arthur said over and over again how he loved her—how he would die for her? Now he should know he had only to live for her.

She enjoyed writing the note to him explaining the state of affairs. It

was a picturesque and intense moment. She wrote eagerly at a little rustic table on the veranda, while the sound of the Rapids filled the air and the perfume of the cabbage roses stole on her senses.

In the morning she sent the note by her maid, who delivered it safely into his hands.

Then she busied herself with preparations for departure. She had told him to meet her at the old Fort at four o'clock that afternoon. No one would think it strange for them to be going for a row at that hour, and how easily they could go across the lake in his boat and take the train at Bel-cœil!

Waiting for him at the old Fort even before the appointed hour she could see him coming in the distance. He wore flannels and carried a fishing basket over his arm.

"How well he dissimulates!" she thought, devouring him with her eyes. Even at that distance the sight of his physical beauty stirred her oddly.

It was only when he had sprung into his boat and pushed from shore that the truth struck her—he was going La Cache fishing. What an answer to her impassioned note!

She cowered in the shadow of the

old Fort wall, that he might not see her; but when at last she retraced her steps homeward she was not unobserved.

A pretty little married woman to amuse one during Summer hours, with dainty dinners served for two within sound of the Recheleu Rapids, and always that husband as the impassable barrier and safe dividing line—was quite different from the pretty little woman as a fixture. And so he had torn her note to pieces and turned his attention to his fishing tackle.

When Samuel got to "The Wigwam" that evening he found a pale and penitent wife awaiting him, who tearfully threw herself into his arms.

"Darling, I've decided—he—he was all very well to—to flirt with—but as a husband you alone are the man I can love," she said.

Samuel kissed her tenderly and lovingly, and his pride in his wife was considerably augmented when a little later they met Arthur Wentworth on the Common, and she gave him the cut direct.

The little clergyman, who was also passing at the moment, offered up a thanksgiving from his heart that she had been brought to see the error of her ways.



NIGHT IN THE CITY

NIGHT, weary raven, worn but watchful still,
Gathers beneath her wings the world of men.
The selfish brood despoils her peace, until
The patient mother flies away again.

FRANK WALCOTT HUTT.



SOCIAL OBLIGATION

LITTLE ELMER—Papa, why is it more blessed to give than to receive?
PROFESSOR BROADHEAD—Because, my son, if you permit yourself to receive you are compelled to give about three times as much in return in order to properly express your gratitude.