

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER IV.—ARTHUR BLAGUE GETS HIS HAND IN, AND THE PROPRIETOR MEETS WITH AN UNEXPECTED REVOLUTION.

Arthur had still some writing to do in finishing up his father's accounts, and a few weeks were passed in this employment before he was ready to begin work at the Run. In the meantime he had visited Ruggles, and had entered into a formal engagement with him.

On a frosty morning toward the last of October, he rose before daylight, quietly crept down stairs, made a fire in the kitchen, and cooked for himself a simple breakfast. He found his dinner ready snugly packed in a little basket—the timely work of his mother on the previous evening. The daylight had just begun to tinge the sky as he stepped forth from his home, and only here and there in the village rose the smoke from the early kindled fires. The Run was a mile from the village, and only farms and farm-houses lay between. He supposed he should be early at the mill, so, though the air was brisk, he loitered thoughtfully along the uneven highway, recalling the past and revolving the future. Unmindful of the passage of time, he found himself suddenly within sight of the tall chimney of the mill. The buildings were still buried in the valley.

For the first time since he had fully decided on this step of life, his heart sank within him. He shrank from the eyes that would be fixed upon him, the sneers that would reach his ear, and the subjection of his will to that of a man whom, in his inmost soul, he abhorred. At length he discarded these details, and a dull undercurrent of dread took their place, while he endeavoured to engage his mind with the most insignificant observations and incidents. There was a long golden cloud in the east, which only lacked a fin of being a model salmon. He walked under a maple whose foliage frost had changed to amber and dropped aukle-deep upon the ground, and wondered what he should do with those leaves if they were all golden eagles. He picked up an apple in the street, tossed it into the air, caught it in his hand, bit into it, and then threw it at a cat sneaking under a fence.

Lingering in this aimless kind of way, and pausing to hear any sound that struck his ear, he was still a hundred rods from the mill, when the sun rose, fresh and bright, above the eastern hill. The tall chimney was vomiting forth thick masses of black smoke, the hum of machinery with the pulsating din of many looms filled the air, and a few minutes' walk brought him to the brow of the hill, at the foot of which lay the factory and the little hamlet of Hucklebury Run.

Young men and young women, and boys and girls, were pouring out of the door of the large boarding-house; crowding into the mill. Arthur waited until all had disappeared within the black door, and then boldly pushed down the hill. As he entered the yard he became conscious of many eyes at the window. Dirty-looking wenches, with arms bare to the elbows, were tittering behind the dirtier glass. Frowzy-headed men passed him in the yard, and gave him an offensively familiar greeting. What struck the young man with peculiar force was the perverse spirit of old Ruggles in all these people. They acted like him, they looked like him, they all seemed to have sold themselves to him. He understood old Ruggles' remark now: "We are all alike down to the Run."

Uncertain where to look for his employer, he approached the door, and hailed a boy—with no clothes upon him but shirt and trousers—and inquired if he knew where Mr. Ruggles was.

"He ain't very fur off," replied the boy with a grin, and in an undertone that showed that he was afraid to speak louder.

"I wish to see him," said Arthur.

"Stand right where you be, then," said the boy. "That's the quickest way. You can't find him a follerin' him; he's too fast for that. Old Gabriel will blow his horn afore you've stood here five minutes," and the little wretch looked around him carefully and cunningly, to see if he were overheard.

Arthur understood and smiled at the allusion of the boy to his employer's nasal note, and felt that possibly it might announce the day of doom to him.

The boy cocked his eye suddenly, shrugged his shoulders, and was out of sight in an instant. He had detected the signs of the old man's coming, and was hardly in the mill before that individual ran down the stairs at the foot of which Arthur stood, taking three steps at a leap, and blowing his nose at the landing.

"On hand, eh?" was his greeting of the new operative.

"On hand," was the response.

"Little late this morning, but never mind—it's the first day, and we won't be particular to start with."

"Late!" exclaimed Arthur in astonishment, "why I saw the hands just go in."

"Oh! yes, they've just had their breakfast. They work an hour before breakfast, by candlelight, you know." The old man grinned as he said this, and looked at Arthur curiously, to see how he took it.

"Do you expect me to be here an hour before breakfast every morning?" inquired the young man.

"Well," replied old Ruggles, "we'll be as easy with you as we can, you know, but we can't show many favours. I'm here an hour before breakfast myself. That's the way we get our living, and we all are alike down here to the Run. I work just as hard as my hands, and my hands are just as good as I am."

This, by the way, was the method by which the low-bred proprietor of Hucklebury Run settled all the complaints of those in his employ. They worked no more hours and no harder than he; they fared as well as he. This was true, and if a workman was not content with that, he had the alternative of leaving, provided he could raise money enough to get away.

Arthur was not to be frightened away from the Run with-

out a trial; so he said: "Mr. Ruggles, I am ready for work, and will conform myself to your rules so far as I can."

"Well, I really haven't anything for you to do in the mill this morning," responded Ruggles, scratching his head. "Let's see—let's see. What do you say to going out into the pasture and mowing bushes with Cheek?"

"That's what you call the foot of the ladder, I suppose," said Arthur, with poorly-disguised contempt.

"Very well," said old Ruggles. "Stay here, and do my work, and I'll mow bushes. I had rather be out of doors than in."

This, of course, settled the matter. The practicability of Arthur's stepping into the shoes of the manager of the mill, and sending that gentleman out to clean up a scrubby pasture with Cheek, one of his hopeful operatives, was entirely evident to the young man, but he was too polite to avail himself of the offer. So he said: "Set me to work where you will, and let me have a place in the mill as soon as you can."

The old man took down a bush-hook that hung upon a post near the mill, and then called Cheek, who straightway appeared from the basement, coming up the stairs through a cloud of steam that issued from the passage.

"Cheek, you're to mow bushes in the mountain pasture with this new hand to-day. Show him how it's done, and do a better day's work than you did the last time you were up there or I'll show you how it's done. Do you hear?"

Cheek heard, nodded his head a great number of times, took off a very dirty striped apron, rolled down a very dirty pair of shirt-sleeves, put on an old cloth cap with the visor turned up, took down another bush-hook, and said: "Come on."

The young men were of about equal age, though Arthur was much the taller of the two. Old Ruggles stood and watched them as they passed out of sight, with a grin of satisfaction, then blew his nose and plunged into the mill.

As soon as they were out of sight and hearing of the master, Cheek exclaimed: "I vow, Blague, you're the last feller I ever expected to see in this hole."

"This is the last hole I ever expected to be in," responded Arthur; adding: "How did you know my name was Blague?"

"Oh! I heard all about you. The old man has been bragging that he'd got hold of one of the Crampton aristocracy, and was going to put him through a course of sprouts."

"Those that grow in the pasture are the first of the course, I suppose," said Arthur drily.

Cheek laughed, and said that was good. Then he threw down his bush-hook and cried, "Halt! Now, Blague," said he, coming up and laying a hand on each of Arthur's shoulders, "don't you remember me?"

"I think I've seen you before, but I cannot tell when nor where. Possibly, I have seen you in my father's store."

"Not often, but you knew me when I was a shaver" (by which term Cheek meant a very small boy), "and I knew you when you was a shaver. You remember old Bob Lampson—drunken old coot—he was my father. I'm Tom Lampson, and you gave me a pair of shoes once. Do you twig now?"

"Oh! yes, I remember you. What do they call you Cheek for?"

"Look here," said Tom Lampson; and lifting his long hair with one hand, and pulling down his shirt-collar very low with the other, he displayed a cheek very black with gunpowder. "I got blowed up one Fourth of July, and did this; and ever since the boys have called me Cheek. I don't mind it now. I vow I believe I like it better. They never call me Tom Lampson now, but I think of old Bob Lampson—old scamp—my father, you know."

"Don't talk so about your father," said Arthur. "I don't like to hear you."

Cheek shrugged his shoulders, as if the unpleasant memory of his father had got under his jacket. "I guess," said he, "you don't remember him very well. If he had tanned you, and swore your head off, and abused your mother till he used her up, you wouldn't like him any better than I do—old—well, never mind!"

At a motion from Arthur, Cheek resumed his implement, and both moved on toward the pasture. Arthur comprehended the character of Cheek very readily. He was a good-natured fellow, whom no amount of bad treatment could thoroughly demoralize. He was garrulous and shallow, but he had a kind heart and a degree of genuine sensibility. He had always remembered Arthur Blague with affectionate respect. This morning he pitied him because he saw that his mind was troubled, and knew there was sufficient reason for it. He wondered what he could do to make him feel better.

"Blague," said Cheek (and when he called him Blague instead of Arthur, he intended it as the more respectful and pleasant style of address), "Blague, you'll find that you and I ain't exactly like the rest of 'em, and now I want always to be your friend, and you shall always be my friend."

"Certainly, Cheek, we shall always be friends, of course," said Arthur, with a smile.

"Well, I mean," said Cheek, earnestly, "that I will always stick to you, and you shall always stick to me. Give us your hand on that," and Cheek seized Arthur's outstretched hand and shook it violently. The act seemed to give his affectionate nature a great deal of satisfaction, and he burst tenebly into "Away with melancholy," the name of that sombre passion sounding very much in Arthur's ears like "melon-colic."

When the song had subsided, Cheek turned to Arthur and said: "What do you s'pose is the reason you're so much bigger than I am?"

Arthur replied: "I'm sure I don't know."

"It's because," said Cheek, "that you've always had enough to eat, and I haven't. I haven't seen what you've got there, of course (looking at Arthur's dinner basket, and alluding to its contents), but I'll bet a goose I haven't seen so much good wholesome victuals in three months as you've got in your basket there. I'm always hungry

—hungry from one year's end to the other, I'm hungry now—hungry enough to eat a jackass and chase the driver a mile."

Arthur laughed long and loud, which pleased Cheek very much. So he repeated the statement, that Arthur might get more satisfaction from it, if possible, and then added that it was "a true fact, and no mistake."

"You ought to see the boarders skin that table once," continued Cheek, "regular grab game. Everything comes on together, and the pie goes first. Sometimes we put it into our pocket, so's to be sure of it, and eat it when we get ready. You might carry one of them boarding-house pies in your pocket for a year without hurting the pocket any, or the pie either, any more than if it was a whetstone. But you ought to see the old man, when he comes in to weigh the victuals, to see if he isn't feeding us too much."

"But he doesn't do that?" said Arthur, incredulously.

"Don't he, though! I've seen him weigh every mouthful that went on to the table, and sit and look at us, and figure with his little black pencil all dinner-time. Then's the time we put in. Didn't I have a time with him one day? I vow, wasn't that a time!"

Cheek shrugged his shoulders again, as if another very unpleasant memory had got under his jacket.

"Tell me all about it," said Arthur.

"It was when I first went there," said Cheek. "I shouldn't dare to do it now. We all get afraid of the old man after we've been with him a while. You see he came in one day and we all heard a jingle, and knew the steelyards were around. So we all dipped in strong, and said nothing. I saw what they were up to, so I stuck my fork into a chunk of corned beef as big as your two fists. The old man was mad enough, I tell you. 'Cheek,' says he, 'you're a pig to take such a piece of beef as that.' Says I: 'Not as you knows of.' Says he: 'You're a pig.' Says I: 'I ain't a pig'; and I took up the chunk of meat on my fork, and held it where all the boarders could see it, and says I: 'Do you s'pose a pig would eat such a piece of meat as that? Smell of it, Mr. Ruggles!' Everybody at the table looked scared, but I hadn't learned him then. He came straight toward me, and I held out the piece for him to smell of, and just as he got his nose to it I gave it a little dab, and he jumped as if something had hit him. I s'pose it was a little hot. Wasn't he mad? He knocked my fork out of my hand, and then he kicked me clear into the yard. I think I've got a little place somewhere on me that has been numb ever since," and Cheek felt round upon his back to see if he could find it.

"Here's the place," said Cheek at last; and lifting some clumsy bars, he turned Arthur into the field of his day's labour—a barren, rambling pasture, more friendly, apparently, to the growth of scrub-oaks and blackberry bushes than to grass. Arthur soon got the swing of the hook, and laid about him right lustily.

"You'll get sick of it before night," said Cheek, "if that's the way you pitch in." Cheek then illustrated the manner in which he proposed to perform the labour of the day.

"I shall work faithfully, Cheek," replied Arthur; "you will do as you choose, of course."

"Well, you're right, I suppose," said Cheek, "but I can tell you one thing—the more you do for old Ruggles, the more you may do. We old hands all understand it."

Arthur had worked half-an-hour vigorously, when his hands began to feel sore, and drawing on a pair of gloves for their protection, he proceeded. Straightening up, at length, for a little rest, he turned to Cheek, and inquired what he meant by saying that everybody became afraid of the old man after living with him a while.

"Why, you see, he haunts us," replied Cheek, leaning upon his hook. "If three heads get together in the mill, off goes his nose right over their shoulders. If anybody laughs, off goes his nose again. He's always within ten feet of everybody, and—I don't know, we kind o' dread him, and then we get to hating him, and somehow we all settle down at last into being afraid of him. There's big Joslyn—strong enough to lick a regiment of him—he'll swing a hundred-and-sixty-spindled jack like a feather, but he's as afraid of old Ruggles as if he was a tiger. The old man will abuse him up hill and down, and he'll stand and take it as meek as Moses. Somehow or other he gets 'em all."

"What do you mean by gets 'em all?"

"Well, take big Joslyn now. He's got a wife and children, and he doesn't get wages enough for 'em all to live on, so the old man lets him get in debt, and he never lets him get out of debt. There isn't a hand in the mill who isn't in debt in the same way; and when the old fellow gets a chap there, it's all day with him. He never expects to leave Hucklebury Run, unless he cuts stick, or goes out on wheels in a black box that smells of vinegar. Them that have families can't peep, you see, and the old man makes 'em take things out of the store, and pays 'em in all sorts of ways."

"Out of what store?" inquired Arthur, very glad indeed to be placed on his guard.

"Oh! he's got a store up in the mill, and you ought to see it. You see he sells some of his nigger-cloth for goods, so as to accommodate his hands, he says. I bought this old cap there, when it was new" (Cheek touched it with his finger), "and it smelt so strong of codfish that it kept my mouth watering for a month. You see everything goes in together, and the thing that smells the strongest gets the lead. If you've a mind to try it," pursued Cheek, anxious to impress the truth of his assertions upon Arthur, and handing his cap toward him, "I shouldn't wonder if you could find a little codfish about that now."

Arthur laughed, and told him he would take his word for it.

(To be continued.)

WHAT is called the "falsification of alcohol" is very prevalent. Remarkable disclosures have been made by a Parisian doctor which ought to make drinkers pause. The aroma given to brandy is produced by an article excessively injurious to health, and other liquors are similarly adulterated.