

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

A few days passed away after the usual fashion, and then came the anxiously looked-for letter. Dr. Gilbert read it, made no comment, and handed it over to Fanny. Fanny read it, made no comment, and went directly to Miss Hammett's room with it; and there she read it carefully to the schoolmistress. We will look over her shoulder and read it also:

"DR. GILBERT:

"DEAR SIR,—I have carefully read your daughter's manuscript novel, 'Tristram Trevanion,' and find it quite interesting, though I doubt whether it can ever achieve much success. I should say that it is a very young novel—written by one who has seen little of life and much of books. The invention manifested in the incidents is quite extraordinary, and displays genius, though the characters are extravagant. But I do not write to criticise the book. Worse books have found many buyers. I accept it on the terms upon which we settled, as it is; but there are one or two points touching which I wish to make some suggestions. The hero, 'Tristram Trevanion,' does not marry Grace Beaumont, as he ought to do. I think I understand the public mind when I say that it will demand that this marriage take place. It could be done by altering a few pages. Again, I think that the public will demand that the Jewish Dwarf Levi be made in some way to suffer a violent death at the hand of Trevanion. One word about the title. I confess to its music, but it seems to me to be so smooth as to present no points to catch the popular attention. Besides, I find that the 'Hounds of the Whippoorwill Hills' make their appearance but once in the story, and have no claim upon the prominence given them on the title page. Your daughter will think it very strange, no doubt, but I believe that the sale of the book would be increased by making the title rougher—more startling. How does this look to you—'Tristram Trevanion; or, Butter and Cheese and All'; or this—'Tristram Trevanion; or, the Dwarf with the Flaxen Forelock'? There is another course which is probably preferable to this, viz., that of making a title which means nothing and will puzzle people—a title that defines and explains nothing—bestowed in a whim, as we sometimes give a child a name. What would your daughter think of 'Rhododendron' or 'Shucks'? I can imagine the horror with which your 'Everard Everest, Gent.,' will look upon these suggestions; but they are honestly made, with a view to securing the highest success of which the book is capable. You will remember, of course, that I presume to dictate nothing; I only suggest. In regard to the title, I feel less particular than with relation to the marriage of Trevanion and the violent death of the dwarf. The public demands that the issues of a novel shall be poetic justice; and that the devotion of Trevanion and the diabolism of the dwarf deserve the rewards I have indicated the public cannot fail to perceive.

"Awaiting your reply, I am

"Yours very truly,

"FRANK SARGENT."

When Fanny concluded the reading of this epistle it was with a most contemptuous curl of the lip, and a general expression upon her strong and handsome features of disgust. "Did you hear of anything so ridiculous as this in your life, Miss Hammett?" inquired Fanny.

Miss Hammett could do nothing but laugh. She seized the letter, re-read portions of it, and laughed again uncontrollably, almost hysterically. Miss Fanny Gilbert did not know what construction to put upon this merriment. She tried to join with her at first, but the joke would not seem pleasant to her. First came upon her face a shadow of pain, then her eyes filled with tears; and she rose and walked to the window to hide her emotion. Her companion was sober in an instant, and following her, put her arm tenderly around her, and led her back to the sofa. "You know," said Miss Hammett, warmly, "that I would not wound your feelings for the world; but one has fits of laughing sometimes that one cannot account for at all. I don't know what I have been laughing at, I'm sure."

If Fanny had been looking at Miss Hammett, she would have seen that young woman was having the greatest difficulty in restraining herself from a further outburst.

"It seems so mercenary," said Fanny.

"And so professional," said Miss Hammett.

"And so careless of an author's feelings."

"And so ridiculous."

"And so servile to public opinion. As if everybody must be married or killed because the precious public demand it! Who cares what the public demand?"

"Tut, tut, Fanny! Take care!" said Miss Hammett, looking archly into Fanny's face. "Are you sure that you do not condemn yourself in your condemnation of this young publisher? Unless I have misunderstood you, the book was written for fame—for public applause—and Mr. Sargent is only endeavouring to assist you to accomplish your ends."

"But I wish to accomplish my ends in my own way," said Fanny, imperiously.

"But suppose the public will not be pleased with your way?" suggested Miss Hammett. "People who work for public applause are not so independent as you think. What do you care for the marriage of your man or the death of your dwarf if it help you to obtain your object?"

"But the title! Who ever heard of anything so repulsive as 'Rhododendron' or 'Shucks'?"

"Everybody has heard of titles quite as ridiculous as those, adopted for no reason in the world but to catch the public eye. As for the first one suggested, 'Tristram Trevanion, or Butter and Cheese and All,' it seems to me to have a charming mingling of the ideal and the real in its structure."

"Miss Hammett, you are laughing at me," said Fanny, in a tone of vexation.

"Indeed, I am not. Now tell me why you chose the title you did."

"Because it was musical. Because—because—I thought the public would like it," said Fanny, blushing and biting her lips.

Miss Hammett broke into a low, musical laugh. "Ah, Fanny, Fanny," she said, "we are not so much elevated above the motives of our publishers as we might be, are we? Let me advise you to be very just toward Mr. Frank Sargent. You are both labouring for one object—the popularity of 'Tristram Trevanion'; and if you put your heads together—I mean by mail, of course—your hero will make the better headway in the world for it. For my part, I see no objection to the marriage and the murder proposed. As for the title, I think you have the advantage; so you can compromise by keeping that and changing the issues of the story."

"I wish Mr. Frank Sargent could know what an advocate he has here," exclaimed Fanny.

"Fanny," said Miss Hammett, with undisguised alarm, "you must promise me that you will never mention my name or say one word about me in any communication you may make to Mr. Sargent. I am really very much in earnest, as you see."

Fanny did see this, but, with girlish perverseness, said: "I positively cannot allow such disinterested service to go unrewarded. Mr. Sargent must be informed, in some way, of his indebtedness to you."

Miss Hammett grasped Fanny's wrist, and said, almost fiercely: "Fanny Gilbert, if you do not promise me, before you leave this room, that you will never mention my name, nor allude to me in any way in your letters to New York, I will leave Crampton to-morrow."

"Why, Miss Hammett?" exclaimed Fanny.

"Yes, to-morrow; and I shall go where you will never see me again. I beg you to promise me, because I am happier here than I have been for many months, and happier than I can be elsewhere."

"Of course, I promise you," said Fanny; "but it's very strange—very strange."

"Oh, I thank you! I thank you a thousand times," said Miss Hammett; "but you must stop thinking how strange it is. I cannot explain anything to you now; but some time—some time. There, dear, let's talk no more of it. Please do not mention this to your father. By the way, Fanny, leave me that letter for half-an-hour. I wish to look it over, and think it over."

The young women kissed each other, and Fanny took her leave. Miss Hammett accompanied her to the street door, then locked it, then entered her own room and locked herself in, and then she took the business letter of Mr. Frank Sargent in her hands, pressed it to her heart, and walking back and forth in her apartment kissed it a hundred times. It does not become us to linger while she kneels and pours out her thanksgiving and her prayer. Enough for us now that there was something in the letter that touched the deepest springs of her life, and startled its sleeping secrets into intense alarm.

In the interval between Dr. Gilbert's call upon Miss Hammett at her schoolroom, and the reception of the letter from Mr. Frank Sargent, the doctor had seen her more than once, and was glad to find her equanimity quite restored. She treated him in the old frank way, which had always been a way exceedingly charming to him. He found himself more and more attracted to her, and more and more significant did life look to him as he came to associate it with her life. He had very honestly loved the mother of his children, and when she passed away it seemed to him that there was not in his work that could fill the vacant life she left. Now he dreamed of this new, sweet presence in his house, of a wise and sympathetic companion for his daughter, of a mother for little Fred. Aunt Catharine, whose shrewd eyes had read everything, had noticed that he was more careful about his linen, and took more pains with his toilet than usual; and the neighbours thought that the school had never been so closely looked after by the committee before.

"Till, there was this mystery about Miss Hammett. Would it be prudent for him—a man of position and influence—to marry an unknown woman, picked out of so dirty a factory as that at Hucklebury Run? What would the people say? Would it not compromise his respectability? Again and again he recalled the assurance she gave him in her first interview with him: "Only believe this, Dr. Gilbert, that if ever you learn the truth about me by any means, it will bring disgrace neither to me nor to those who may befriend me." He did believe it; yet caution said: "This is what a guilty woman would say quite as readily as an innocent one. Be on your guard, Dr. Gilbert. You are too old a fellow to be taken in by a sweet face and plausible words." Miss Hammett, of course, was entirely unaware of the nature of Dr. Gilbert's feelings and the character of his cogitations. She regarded him almost as a father—at least, as a reliable counsellor and friend—one to whom she might go with all her trials, and one in whose protection she might thoroughly trust. She took great pains to please him and to satisfy all his wishes in the anxious position she had assumed. They held frequent consultations in the school room and at the doctor's own tea-table, at which she was always a welcome guest. In these interviews the young woman's unassuming manners, rare good sense, and charming modesty and vivacity, won more and more upon the doctor's heart, until he found that a day passed without seeing her and hearing her voice was tasteless and meaningless.

A matter like this could not be long in coming to maturity in a mind like that of Dr. Gilbert. To feel that Mary Hammett was desirable and to will the possession of her hand were one, and so soon as he could satisfy himself that Mary Hammett was indeed what she seemed to be. How could he satisfy himself? Alas! there was but one who could inform him, and her lips were sealed, and he, as a man of honour, was bound to respect their silence. For once he was forced to trust to Providence, or chance, and to leave his own action to impulse.

When Fanny returned home, after reading Mr. Frank Sargent's letter to Miss Hammett, her father, who guessed where she had been, inquired what the young woman thought of the publisher's missive. Fanny made a hurried, unsatisfactory reply, and went to her room. This was excuse suf-

ficient for Dr. Gilbert to call upon the schoolmistress and talk over the affair. Accordingly, Miss Hammett had hardly composed herself after the emotions excited by the letter when Mrs. Blague came to her door, and told her that Dr. Gilbert waited for her in the parlour. Hurriedly thrusting Mr. Frank Sargent's letter into her bosom, and giving a glance in the mirror to see if her face were telling forbidden tales or not, she descended, and met her fatherly friend with her usual frankness and cordiality.

"Fanny has been to see you?" said the doctor.

"Yes."

"And read to you Mr. Sargent's letter, I suppose."

"Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

"It seems to me to be the letter of a man who has a sharp eye for business, and a shrewd insight into the popular taste," replied Miss Hammett.

"Hem! I hope you advised Fanny frankly in the matter," said the doctor.

"I can hardly say that I advised her at all."

"Well, I am sorry you did not," responded the doctor.

"Fanny needs womanly counsel. Poor child! Since her mother died she has had little sympathy from her own sex, and has grown up a little untimely, I fear."

"I have been very happy in her society," said the young woman, cordially, "and have always given her such advice as I felt competent to give her."

"Hem! I thank you. It has always been a comfort to me to know that you were together. By the way, how is my little boy getting along with his books?"

"Only too rapidly," replied the schoolmistress. "I sometimes tremble when I see how eagerly the little fellow pursues his tasks, and how frail he is."

The doctor's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he rubbed his hands with satisfaction as he said: "Ah, Freddy is a rare boy—a rare boy! I think we shall be able to make something of him."

"But you must not force him, doctor. I'm afraid he has too much study."

"Well, I suppose," said the doctor, "that I'm unfit to manage him." And then he blushed to think that he had lied. He wanted somehow to say that the boy needed a mother, but he was certainly unable to manage that.

Dr. Gilbert found that the relations which existed between him and Miss Hammett, though intimate and cordial of their kind, formed almost an impassable gulf between him and his wishes. How could the fatherly Dr. Gilbert come to a declaration of his love for a woman who, as she sat before him, seemed never to have dreamed of any other relations as possible? The gulf must be bridged in some way—if not by an artifice, by violence, — by main strength.

Dr. Gilbert cleared his throat again. "I have noticed the intimacy between you and my daughter with great pleasure," said he, "and have been delighted with the manner in which you have managed to secure the affections of my little boy. Of course the thought has naturally been forced upon me, that if this intimacy and affection could be found at home, in one who would bear the name of mother, it would be every way desirable. You will pardon my abruptness, Miss Hammett, when I say to you that you are the first woman I have met since the death of my wife, whom I would be glad to see in her place."

It was out. The gulf was bridged, and the doctor was relieved to think that he had established a basis for negotiations. But what was the impression upon the young woman? As the nature of the declaration gradually found its way into her consciousness she grew deathly pale, and sat speechless, with her eyes upon the floor.

"I have believed," continued the doctor, "that you were not altogether without respect for me, and have hoped that you might come to entertain a more genial sentiment. There is difference of age between us, I grant; but, if I know my own heart, I offer you an honest affection, as I certainly offer you my home, my protection and my position. There are some mysteries connected with your life which I have not, as you will bear me witness, sought to probe. I have trusted you, and of course I trust you still. My proposition, I see, surprises you, and if you wish for time to consider it I will leave you, and take your answer at some other time."

During all this speech, delivered in a low, firm tone of voice, Dr. Gilbert had closely watched the young woman. He saw the pale cheek and lips deepen into crimson. He saw tears forming slowly in her downcast eyes, and then drop unheeded upon her hand. He saw a tremor like a chill pass over her frame, and then, as he concluded, and spoke of a future answer to his proposals, he saw her lift her head, and heard her say: "Do not go."

The temptation to seize her hand and kiss it was irresistible. The doctor grasped it, and bent his head toward it, but instantly Miss Hammett had withdrawn it, and was upon her feet. "Dr. Gilbert," said she, "that hand is sacred. It is not mine. It cannot be yours. I will be your servant. I will do anything for the happiness of those you love that it is consistent for me to do—but I cannot be your wife. I asked you not to go, because my answer was ready."

It was now Dr. Gilbert's turn to be surprised. He could not realize that he—Dr. Gilbert—who had hesitated to offer himself to an unknown woman, should be so peremptorily rejected.

"You are hasty," said he. "I beg you to consider the matter. I have set my heart upon it; it must be so; I—I cannot take my answer."

Miss Hammett stood with her hands folded, and pressed to her heart. "Dr. Gilbert," said she, "I should be entirely unworthy of the place to which you invite me if I were to give one moment's entertainment to your proposition. Were I to consent to be your wife, I should become a perjured wretch, fit only for your loathing and your abhorrence."

"My God," exclaimed the doctor, the veins of his forehead swelling fearfully, "and is my case with you hopeless? Why, woman, it darkens my whole life."

"Dr. Gilbert," said Miss Hammett, with assumed calmness, "if I were my own I could give myself to you, but I am not, and why should we exchange further words? You know that I would rather suffer much than wound you, and