

## Choice Literature.

### MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

#### CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Miss Gilbert entered the drawing-room with anything but the air of a child or a culprit—not defiantly, but as if she was prepared for any event, and rather expected the event to be unpleasant.

"Have you seen that paragraph?" inquired the doctor, excitedly, extending the copy of the *Littleton Examiner* to Fanny, with his thumb half covering the familiar lines.

"I have, sir," replied Fanny, coolly.

"What does it mean?" The doctor's eyes flashed, and he spoke loudly and harshly.

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know, eh? I know."

"Perhaps you will tell me, father."

"Fanny, Fanny, this will not do. You must not speak to me with such a look and tone. You know very well that this paragraph can refer only to you. Have you ever given authority to any one to publish such a paragraph as that?"

"I certainly never have," Fanny replied, very decidedly.

"Have you ever," pursued her father, "said to anyone anything from which this impertinent paragraph could be made?"

"I suppose I have, to an intimate friend."

"Were you hoaxing her, or telling her the truth?"

"I told her the truth."

"To an intimate friend, eh? To an intimate friend and not to me, eh? Why not to me?"

"Because I feared that you would not favour my project."

"You are very frank, upon my word. So far as you could guess what my will would be, you would disobey it. What have you been writing?"

Miss Gilbert was angry. She did not look into her father's face, but studied the paper on the wall.

"Fanny, tell me what you have been writing."

Still looking at the wall, Fanny replied: "I have begun to write a novel, and only begun. I have not been without the hope that it would please my father—that it would be a happy surprise to him. I have not been—I have never been—a disobedient daughter. I have followed your wishes all my life, and no being in the world has had so much to do in bringing me to the undertaking of this enterprise as you have. I am ambitious, because you have fostered ambition in me. I have been kept before the public in one way and another ever since I can remember. I have been taught to regard public applause as a very pleasant and precious thing. To excel in study, to shine in examinations and public exhibitions, to win praise for wonderful achievements has been the aim of my life for years, and to this you have always pushed me. You have heard me publicly praised here, in our own church, and you were pleased. I feel now that I can never be content with the common lot of woman, and I declare that I will not accept it. I will not live a humdrum, insignificant life of subordination to the wills and lives of others, save in my own way. I will have a career."

Dr. Gilbert was utterly astonished. He had watched his daughter with painful interest as she revealed herself to him in her first open attempt to cut loose from his will and to assert herself, and when she closed, he could only echo her closing words—"a career!" A woman with "a career" was one thing he could not comprehend at all; or, if he comprehended it, he did not comprehend the motives of his daughter's ambition. That he had ever contributed to this ambition he did not admit for a moment; but he was puzzled as to what course to pursue. He saw that his daughter might be easily exasperated; so the bright thought occurred to him that perhaps this desire for a career might possibly be a sort of mental small-pox or measles, which must run its course, and would then leave her free from the liability to a recurrence of the disease.

"Then you have determined to write this novel?" said Dr. Gilbert.

"It would be the saddest disappointment of my life to be obliged to relinquish it."

"And to publish it?"

"I have no motive for writing a book that is not to be published."

"I did not know," said the doctor, "but you would do it for your own improvement. It would be a very fine diversion, you know, in case you take up German and Hebrew, and the higher mathematics, this winter."

"Must I forever be doing something for my own improvement? Must I be forever studying? I am tired of always taking in; I wish to do something, and to be recognized as a—as a—power in the world." Fanny said this very fervently, but the last words sounded very large, and she knew they seemed ridiculous to her father, who smiled, almost derisively, as the hot blood mounted to her temples.

The half-amused, half-pitying contempt which Fanny saw in her father's face aroused her anger. She rose from her chair impetuously, and stamping one foot on the floor, exclaimed: "I wish to God I were a man! I think it a curse to be a woman."

"Why, Fanny!" exclaimed Dr. Gilbert, greatly shocked.

"I do think it a curse to be a woman. I never knew a woman who was not a slave or a nonentity, nor a man who did not wish to make her one or the other. A woman has no freedom, and no choice of life. She can take no position, and have no power without becoming a scoffing and a by-word. You have been talking to Fred ever since he was in the cradle about a career; you have placed before him the most exciting motives to effort, but you have never dreamed of my being anything more than Dr. Gilbert's very clever daughter; or a tributary to some selfish man's happiness and respectability. I say that I will not accept this lot, and that I do not believe my Maker ever intended I should accept it."

All this Miss Gilbert uttered vehemently, and enforced

with sundry emphatic gestures, and then she turned to leave the room.

"Fanny, sit down!" The doctor's will was rising.

"I can listen without sitting, sir, but I should like to retire."

"Sit down, I say."

Fanny altered the position of her chair very deliberately, placed herself before it very slowly, and settled into her seat very proudly indeed.

"Fanny Gilbert, never speak such words to me again, while you live. I will not allow it; I will not permit you to insult me and disgrace yourself by such language. I am astonished. I am confounded. I am—ah—who has been putting such mischievous, such blasphemous notions into your head?"

"Women never have any notions except such as are put into their heads, I suppose, of course."

"Do you use this tone of irony to me? Hear what I have to say, and do not speak to me—do not speak to me again to-night. You have begun what you call a career, and have begun it just where such an inexperienced girl as you would naturally begin it. I understand your case, I think, and I shall not interfere with your purpose. Nay, it is my will that you go on and satisfy yourself—that you prove the utter hollowness of your notions. I will go further than this. If, when you have finished your book, you will submit it to Mr. Wilton, and he decides that it will not absolutely disgrace you, I will find a publisher for it. But by all means be as diligent as you can with your work. Do with your might what your hands find to do, and do not leave it until it shall be finished. You can go."

Browbeaten, but not subdued, Miss Gilbert rose and sailed out of the room. Her heart was in a tumult. Her eyes were full of tears. Her head ached almost to bursting with the pressure of rebellious blood. The moment she left the presence of the strong will that had roused her, the woman's want of solace and sympathy swept through her whole nature. Meeting Aunt Catharine in the upper hall, she cast herself, sobbing and soft as a child, upon the spinster's bosom, and was led by that good woman into her room. Then Aunt Catharine sat down upon Fanny's bed, and took Fanny's head upon her shoulder, and passed her arm around her waist, and sat in perfect silence with her for half-an-hour, while her niece enjoyed unrestrained the "luxury of grief."

"There, dear, have you got down to where you can pray?" inquired Aunt Catharine, putting off the young head. Fanny smiled faintly, and said: "Thank you, aunt, it has done me so much good," then kissed her affectionately and bade her "good night."

Fanny's prayer was a very broken and unsatisfactory one that night, and the doctor's, it is to be feared, was hardly of his daughter from his presence. At the close of this more consolatory. A long reverie followed the retirement he took up the copy of the *Littleton Examiner*, and reperused the offensive paragraph. It had changed somehow. It did not seem so offensive as it did at first. Then he subsided into another reverie, in which the possibilities of Fanny's career were followed very far—so far that Dr. Gilbert had become a very noted man for having a famous daughter, who had contributed richly to the literature of her country. He began, before he was conscious of it, to sympathize with his daughter's project. Many excellent women had written books, and why not "the highly accomplished daughter of a distinguished physician?"

Ah! if Fanny had possessed more tact, if her eyes had been just a shade bluer, she could have made her peace with her father that night, and sapped the will of the strong man through the weak point of his character, and made him essentially her servant.

#### CHAPTER VI.—THE MISTRESS OF HUCKLEBURY RUN AND HER ACCOMPLISHED DAUGHTER.

On the evening of the accident at the Run, Arthur did not retire to bed until late, anxious to learn from Dr. Gilbert the fate of the proprietor. He called at the house of the doctor several times, but that gentleman had not returned. He knew that the casualty was a serious one, and one that would be likely to have important relations to his future life. It would inevitably thwart all his plans, or modify, in some unlooked-for way, his destiny. His despondent mother felt that it was only a new misfortune added to her already extended list, and declared that she had expected something like it from the first.

At last Arthur relinquished the expectation of seeing the doctor that night, and went to bed. The next morning was dark and rainy. An eastern storm was raging when he rose, and the walk was covered with deciduous foliage. Large trees that had borne into the night abundant wealth of mellow purple and scarlet and gold, greeted the gray light of the morning in shivering and moaning nakedness. The clouds sailed low and fast upon an atmosphere of mist, and tossed overboard their burden in fitful and spiteful showers. The ground was soaked and spongy, and everything, above and below, looked sad and forbidding, as Arthur left his door for the scene of his daily labour.

He had accomplished probably half the distance to the mill, running rather than walking, when his ear caught the sound of wheels; and soon afterward Dr. Gilbert and his gig showed themselves through the misty twilight. Arthur hailed the doctor and inquired for his employer.

"He is at death's door," replied the doctor, "with the bare possibility of being saved. He wants, too, such care as only a man can give him. His family are worse than nothing, and I see no way but for you to become his nurse, and take the charge of him until he either dies or recovers. I have been with him all night, but I cannot be with him to-day. Go directly to the house, and I will be there in the course of a few hours, and give you my directions."

Saying this to Arthur, who was so much impressed by this new turn of events that he could not reply, Dr. Gilbert chirruped to the little black pony, who stood uneasily in the storm, with his ears turned back very savagely, and away rolled the gig into the mist, leaving the young man standing with his face toward Crampton. A moment of indecision was followed by the active resumption of his way to the

Run. Arriving at the mill, he found everything in confusion. The early breakfast had been eaten, and the operatives were assembled in the mill as if there had been no other resort; but the wheel was not in motion. Gathered into knots here and there in the different rooms, some of them were discussing their master's calamity with unbecoming levity, and others, less talkative, were looking solemn and apprehensive.

Why was it that all these men and women regarded Arthur Blague, as he entered the mill, with the expectation of help and direction? He was but a boy, and knew nothing of the duties of the establishment; but they turned to him just as naturally as if he had been their master for years. They were "all alike down to the Run." They were all men and women who had been governed, who had had their wills crushed out of them, who had lived and moved only in cowardly dependence. The bell had controlled them like a flock of sheep. Their employer's presence was their stimulus to labour, and his mind and will were in them all. As soon as that mind and will and presence were withdrawn, they were helpless, because they had long since ceased to govern and direct themselves. There was no leader among them. They had all been conquered—"they were all alike down to the Run."

The moment Arthur stepped into the mill, the knots of men and women were dissolved, and all flocked around him. "Have you heard from old Ruggles?" "Have you seen the doctor?" "What does the doctor think?" were the questions that poured in upon him on every side. Arthur told them what the doctor had said, and asked them what they were going to do. Nobody knew; nobody assumed to speak for the others. All were dumb.

Arthur waited a moment, looking from one to another, when Cheek, standing on a bale of cloth, shouted: "This meeting will please to come to order."

As the meeting happened to be in a very perfect state of order at the instant, it of course immediately went into the disorder of unnecessary laughter.

"I motion," said Cheek, assuming all the active functions of a deliberative assembly, "that Arthur Blague, Esq., be the boss of this mill till somebody gets well, or somebody kicks the bucket. All who are in favour will say 'aye.'"

The "aye" was very unanimous, whatever may have been intended by it.

"All those opposed will shut their clam-shells," continued Cheek, "and forever after hold their peace."

In the midst of much merriment, Cheek handed to Arthur, with a profound bow, an old hat which belonged to the proprietor, and then put his own under his arm in token of his readiness to receive orders.

Arthur was about to decline the honour conferred upon him, and to say that the occasion was hardly one that admitted of levity, when his eye detected among the girls of the group, an earnest face back from which fell the familiar sun-bonnet. The moment the woman caught his eye she beckoned to him. Making his way through the group, he followed her aside, and then she turned on him her full blue eyes, and spoke.

"Mr. Blague," said the young woman, with a low, firm voice, and with an air of good breeding, "these people are in trouble, and do not know what to do. Advise them frankly. Do not be afraid of them because you are a comparative stranger to them. Tell them what to do, and they will do it. Leave me, and act at once."

All this was said rapidly and in a tone that no one heard but he. The words were those of command; the voice was one of respectful entreaty. Arthur turned to the assembly whose eyes had followed him, while his mysterious counsellor took her station at her looms.

"We do not elect our master in this mill," said Arthur, pleasantly. "It is not in accordance with the constitution of Hucklebury Run; therefore, I beg leave to decline the honour you have conferred upon me; but there is one thing we can all do."

"What's that? what's that?" inquired a dozen voices.

"Each person can do his own work, and his own duty, in his own place, and be his own master; and if each one does this, there will be no trouble, and the work will all be done, and done well. If Mr. Ruggles recovers, then his business will suffer no interruption; if he dies, you will have pay for your labour."

The question, so difficult to these people, who had lost the idea of governing themselves, was solved. He had not ceased to speak when a strong hand raised the gate, and the big wheel was in motion. In five minutes the mill was in full operation. A sense of individual responsibility brought self-respect, and awakened a sentiment of honour. They were happier and more faithful in heart and hand to the interests of their employer than they had been in all the history of their connection with the establishment. Arthur looked for the girl who had spoken to him. She met his eye with a smile, bowed slightly, as if acknowledging his service, and turned to her work.

Half-bewildered by the events of the morning, in which he seemed to have played an important part, without comprehending how or why he had done it, and with the strange, low voice of the young woman still lingering in his ears, he turned from the mill to seek the dwelling of his employer in accordance with the wishes of Dr. Gilbert.

Old Ruggles lived in a little dwelling on a hill that overlooked the mill. It was hardly superior in size and architectural pretensions to the tenements occupied by the men among his operatives who had families. Arthur rapped softly at the door, and was admitted by a woman whom he recognized at once as Mrs. Ruggles. She was coarse and vulgar-looking, very fat, with large hands, small, cunning eyes, and floating cap-strings. Everything she wore seemed to float back from her anterior aspect, as if she had stood for a week facing a strong wind. Her cap flew back at the ears, and the strings hung over her shoulders, the ends of her neckerchief were parallel with her cap-strings; her skirts were very scant before, and very full behind, as if, which was the fact, she always moved very fast, and created a vacuum in her passage, which every light article upon her ponderous person strove to reach and fill.