

## Choice Literature.

### MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER XIV.—TRISTRAM TREVANION GETS REVIEWED, AND MISS GILBERT GETS DISGUSTED.

When Fanny Gilbert fully realized that she was about to appear before the world as an authoress, the hours were many in which her heart sank within her. When the path to publicity was difficult or doubtful, the goal was crowned with a golden glory. Now that it had become easy and certain, clouds came dubiously down and filled her with fear. She had been at work for fame: what if, instead of fame, she should only win disgrace? What if she should fail to arrest the attention of the world for a moment, and her book should be carelessly kicked into oblivion? Through her conversations with Mary Hammett, she had learned that the world really owed her nothing. She had not written her book from love of the world, or a desire to benefit the world. She was conscious that there was nothing in her motives, or her intentions, upon which she could establish a claim to the world's charitable judgments. She had selfishly laboured all winter for the sole purpose of gathering a harvest of praise, and she knew that if she should fail to reap according to her hope, her labour would be lost without resource. She could not fall back upon her motives and her aims for consolation, nor could she look forward to another generation for appreciation and vindication.

Many times did Miss Gilbert wish that she could be like the careless girls who called upon her—content with the little life they were living. She despised their devotion to dress, and their delight with trifles. She scorned the petty gossip of beaux and belles that busied their tongues; but she doubted whether she were as really happy as they; and sometimes she shrank from the gulf of active life and wearying thought into which she was plunging. She trembled when she thought that she was entering upon a life from which she could never retreat—that never in this world or the next could she be satisfied with the simple fact of being. She looked on, on, on, and there rose before her no high tableland of rest. The labourer passed her window, his hoe upon his shoulder, returning from his work in the fields. She watched him as he approached his dwelling, saw the little ones run out to welcome him, and the humble wife smiling at the door, and felt that in his insignificant life and unambitious aims there was indeed a charm worth sighing for—a charm which she was painfully conscious that she could not even choose to endow her own life with. She had burst the shell that enclosed the world around her, and had caught glimpses of the stars above her, and the great ocean of life that stretched around; and while she looked, her wings had grown, and she could never enter the shell again. Like thousands who lived before her, and millions that will come after her, for the first time conscious of the same condition, she sighed "Alas!" and turned to her work.

As nothing particularly worthy of note occurred at Crampton or the Run during the summer among the other characters engaged in our story, there will be abundant opportunity to tell of Fanny Gilbert's work and its results.

It will be remembered that Mr. Frank Sargent had recommended certain changes to be made in her novel. She had given the subject a good deal of thought, and had finally concluded to act upon Mary Hammett's suggestion—to marry Grace Beaumont to Tristram Trevanion, in order that the public demand for poetic justice should be satisfied, and, further to compass the same end, to secure the violent death of the Jewish dwarf at the hand of her hero. Further than this she would not go. The title of her novel should remain as it was—"Tristram Trevanion; or, the Hounds of the Whippoorwill Hills," for ever!

As she knew her manuscript by rote, it was not necessary for her to procure its return from the publisher, in order to make the proposed changes. So, in the charming sovereignty of authorship, she coolly sat down, and decreed and executed the marriage and the murder. Not only this, but she dressed the bride in exquisite array, and crowned her with orange blossoms, and made a great feast and (shall it be said?) created a family of beautiful children, who filled the hearts of their parents with unalloyed happiness through a very long term of years, and brought honour to the already glorious name of Trevanion. The dwarf died as he had lived—a miscreant; but in his last moments he confessed the justice of his doom, in that he had been the author of various murders in his vicinity, which had hitherto been shrouded in mystery. In consequence of this fact, Trevanion was able to escape all regrets for his violence, and complacently to regard himself as an instrument in the hands of Providence for punishing the guilty.

These alterations having been carefully executed, they were inclosed by mail to the publisher, and Fanny subsided into thoughtful inactivity, to wait for further developments. She did not wait long. At the end of two weeks she received a few sheets of proof—hardly more than specimen pages—to show her how the work would look, but enough to excite her, and bring to her a fresh instalment of dreams of the future. Ah, the first bliss of being in type! Nothing, in the most triumphant career of authorship, equals the exultant happiness of that precious moment. No event but the morning of the resurrection can bring a repetition of that emotion that pervades the soul when one's corruptible manuscript first puts in incorruptible letter-press, and the loose, uncertain mortality of running-hand rises into the immortality of print. Fanny Gilbert's age and temperament were abundantly susceptible to this charming experience, and she enjoyed it keenly. She shut herself into her room, and read, and re-read, the charming pages. She saw that the book was going to be a new one to her. The thoughts were crowded nearer together; their relations became more apparent to herself. She carried them to Mary Hammett, and the two young women read them in company. Dr. Gilbert read them; Aunt Catharine read them; and even little Fred was allowed to share in his sister's happiness.

It was well that the young authoress should be happy for her little moment. It was well that the world should be

transfigured in the light of her new emotions. June, the month of roses, was at flood-tide. As Fanny sat at her window dreaming, she saw the green sea of foliage tossing in billowy unrest, and sparkling with myriad flowers, and foaming in the beds of its uneasy abysses with sheeted bloom. Out upon that beautiful sea all her sensibilities pushed their sails, to dance and float and fly, under the light of the great, slumbrous sun. What rare sea-birds were those that plied their ceaseless wings and sang their marvellous songs among the waves!—orioles, like coals of fire, plunging in, and coming out unquenched; automatic humming-birds, stopping here and there, and sipping and sliding away with a whirr, as if revolving upon, and following, an invisible wire; chimney swallows paying out from imperceptible reels broad nets of music to catch flies with; bobolinks, diving into the swaying mass of green, and coming out with a thousand tough bubbles bursting in their metallic throats; broad-winged hawks, slowly sailing above all, far up to the breathless ether, ripening their feathery silver in the sun, and watching the play beneath! And then what musical spray of insect-life swept through the balmy atmosphere!—bees sprinkling themselves upon the fresh blush-roses at the door, or humming by, loaded with plunder; flies industriously doing nothing; whole generations of motes sliding up and down shadow-piercing sunbeams! Into this beautiful scene, and half-creating it, went Fanny's happy fancy, dreaming, and dreaming, and dreaming, through hours of intoxication.

The proofs came in slowly. There was evidently no haste on the part of the publisher in completing the volume. In fact, he had informed the young authoress that he only aimed to have it in readiness for the fall trade. The time, however, seemed very long; for Fanny could do nothing while the grand event of her life was in expectation. She had done her work, and had no heart for further enterprise until she had received payment for the past. Miss Hammett, too, seemed to be quite as much interested in the receipt of the proofs as if the book were her own, for with each instalment there invariably came a good-natured, sportive letter from the publisher, which she was in the habit of borrowing and reading at her leisure.

The weary summer wore away at last, and September brought the long-wished-for volume, and in its company a most disgusting disappointment. Instead of the massive book which the massive manuscript and the multiplied proofs had prophesied, it was a dwarfed little volume, that indicated equal scarcity of brains and paper. The typographical aspect of the book showed that the printer had spread out into the largest space an incompetent mass of material, and had failed, at last, to make anything of pretentious magnitude. Poor Fanny looked over the books in her father's library, saw what other brains had done, and was driven into self-contempt—almost despair. "Tristram Trevanion" made no show in the world at all! Why, it was no bigger than a Sunday school book; and it seemed to the writer so unaccountable that anybody could ever have spent so much time on a Sunday school book as she had spent on that! What possible object could they have had! How could they have lived through it!

After all the dreams of the summer came a great reaction. The book was born, but it was a very insignificant child indeed, and was made quite ridiculous by the disproportion between its swollen and sonorous name and its gross weight. She conceived a new respect for the gentleman who had suggested "Shucks" as a fitting title, and wondered that he had been so generous as even to think of "Rhododendron." She laid it down upon the table, and looked at it with other books, and even went so far as to wonder whether, if it should secure the praise of the public, she should not be so much disgusted with the public for praising it that the praise would lose its value.

Poor child—for she was but a child—she had not yet learned that an achievement, to him who achieves, is dead—that it is only a block upon which he stands, that he may wreath crowns about the brows of higher deeds. She had not learned that to each great effort of a soul which God has informed with genius there comes an influx of new power, advancing its possibilities so far that all it has done becomes contemptible to itself. She had not learned that the more genius glories in the results of its labour, the more does it show itself impoverished by its labour, and the more does it demonstrate the shallowness of its resources and the weakness of its vitality.

But the book was out. What should be its fate? Dr. Gilbert had his own opinion of the volume, and some very well-founded apprehensions of its destiny. Since its enthusiastic reception by the pastor and his wife, he had thought about it a great deal more than he had ever done before. The reflections to which his visit to New York had given rise had carried him into a juster estimate of his daughter's powers as a writer, and the world's needs and demands, than he had entertained before. In truth, the relations of his daughter's life to the life of the great world had come to look to him very like the relations of Crampton to the great world of production and trade. But he had an interest in the book which Fanny had not. He had agreed to share the loss on its publication in case that publication should be a failure. He was pledged to all proper and practicable efforts, therefore, for its financial success.

A small package of the books had been sent to him for distribution among the local press. He made an errand to Littleton, and left a copy with the editor of the *Littleton Examiner*. He sent a copy by mail to the editor of the *Londonerry Gazette* and another to the *North Yerrington Courier*. More distant members of the great newspaper fraternity were equally favoured. Fanny was aware of these operations, and gradually came out of the condition of half-indifferent disgust into which the completed volume had thrown her into one of painful anxiety. Now that public condemnation or public approval was imminent, her fears quite outweighed her hopes, and she could hardly sleep during the period that she awaited the decision of the local presses to which so peculiarly her fate had been committed. The *Littleton Examiner* had pretensions to literary character very much in advance of its neighbours. Rev. J. Desilver Newman, a young clergyman not altogether unknown in these pages, was supposed to have some mysterious connec-

tion with this press. The editor himself was a profound theorist, and delighted more in speculation than in matters of fact. It was very difficult, indeed, to obtain the news from his sheet except in an incidental manner, for the events of the world were so accustomed to suggest new trains of thought, and to keep him busy among philosophical causes, that he had all he could do to present what he delighted to call "the rationale of current life."

The position of the *Littleton Examiner* was considered by the press of the region very enviable. That sheet was, in fact, quite the standard. All waited, before expressing an opinion, to see what the *Examiner* said. On some subjects they always took the liberty "to differ, with brother Highway of the *Littleton Examiner*," simply because, in all matters of politics and religion, it was expected of them by their subscribers that they should differ with brother Highway. In literary matters, however, it was always delightful for them to add their humble testimony to that of brother Highway, in favour or in condemnation of any man, scheme, or opinion that might be under discussion. Besides, it was an easy way of making a paragraph to say: "We do not agree with brother Highway of the *Examiner*, when he says that," etc., quoting brother Highway's paragraph without the disfiguration of quotation marks; or to say: "Though differing with brother Highway of the *Examiner* on a wide range of subjects discussed in these pages, it always gives us pleasure, when we can do it conscientiously, to bestow upon his sentiments our cordial approval, as we do when he remarks that," etc., quoting a whole article and leaving out the quotation marks of course. In this way, brother Highway was flattered and kept good-natured, and his "valued contemporaries," using his brains and words to fill their pages with, nursed their self-complacency by a dignified censorship of all brother Highway's utterances. So brother Highway wrote paragraphs and leaders and disquisitions for all of them, and all they had to do was, in editorial sovereignty, to approve of, or dissent from, brother Highway.

The *Littleton Examiner* came at last—wet and doubtfully fragrant from the press—and was received from the hand of the weekly post-rider by Fanny herself. She took it privately to her room to read it alone—her heart throbbing violently with apprehension. She opened the important sheet, and read, first, a long advertisement of the *Matchless Sanative*, and, as if this was a fitting preparation for the catalogue of deaths, she then went through the mortuary record of the week. She had, of course, no interest in these things. The notice of her book was the first article that arrested her eye when she opened the paper, but she was not ready for it. Her eye ran around it, and then ran away—came up to it, and dodged—descended upon it like a bird upon a pool, and sprang up again, frightened at sight of its own feathers. At length, by a sort of spiritual endosmosis, the character and quality of the critique made its way into her consciousness, and she came gradually to its literal perusal.

Now brother Highway, of the *Littleton Examiner*, never noticed a book at any length, without giving his theory of the class of books to which the one in hand belonged. After his theory had had exposition, it mattered very little what was said about the book—in fact, it mattered very little whether he had read the book at all. He threw out his theory as that by which the book was to stand or fall; and was often so considerate as to let the public decide whether it could abide the test of the theory or not. In this case, he had sacrificed an unusually extended space to the review, five-sixths of which were devoted to an exposition of his theory of novel-writing, and one-sixth to the book itself. The single paragraph on "Tristram Trevanion" seemed to be written to prove that the author recognized the *Examiner's* theory, and had constructed the book with sole reference to it. Fanny's quick insight immediately detected the fact that the editor had not read her book at all—or, rather, that he had done no more than to dip here and there into its pages. The degree of disgust with which she read the following paragraph relating to her volume can be imagined:

"'Tristram Trevanion,' tried by this test, and made to confront these great fundamental and eternal principles, betrays the ring of the genuine metal. The style of the writer is sparkling without being intense, flowing without looseness, and pure as the mountain brook without the stones and rocks and abysses which obstruct its flow, and throw its bounding waters into inextricable confusion. As we wade, with heart absorbed, through its pellucid pages, in fancy's quickened ear we can hear the baying of the hounds upon the Whippoorwill Hills, the distant winding of the horn of the gallant Trevanion, the frenzied shriek of the perjured Jew, and all the varied music of that great song of life whose notes fall so forcibly upon the appreciative ear. The book is, of course, written by a woman. No man, living or dead, could have dressed Grace Beaumont for her nuptials with Trevanion with such precision and propriety, and we may add, with such gorgeous simplicity, if we may be allowed to use so suggestive a solecism. The writer, if we mistake not, is not altogether unknown in Littleton. We would not invade the secret of the musical masculine pseudonym she has assumed; but in its revelation, if it shall ever be unfolded, we are much mistaken if it is not found to invade the precincts of our stirring little neighbour, Crampton. The book cannot fail to have a million readers, who, we are certain, will bear us out in the assertion that this first offspring of the fair writer's muse must introduce her to a career which will satisfy her most daring ambition."

"And this is the stuff that public praise is made of!" exclaimed Miss Gilbert, as the *Littleton Examiner* fell from her hands to the floor. It was praise, certainly, but it was praise that she despised, and was written that the editor might glorify himself, not her—written to prove that if she had not, by great good fortune, pitched upon the editor's theory of novel-writing as the basis of her work, she must inevitably and disastrously have failed. Aunt Catharine was more easily pleased, and thought Fanny had every reason to be satisfied with it. For her part, she could not see what could have been asked for better than that. Dr. Gilbert was not altogether displeased with it. At least, he thought the effect of it would be to help the sale of the book.

(To be continued.)