

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER V.—DR. GILBERT AND HIS DAUGHTER "COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING."

Dr. Gilbert was a thrifty man. He held petty mortgages on half the farms in town, and carried on a large farm himself. Sometimes, when a sudden death brought forcibly to his mind the uncertain tenure of life, he became uncomfortable with the thought that his affairs were so extended and so complicated, that no one but himself could ever settle them safely and advantageously. At the close of the day on which he held his interview with Arthur Blague, and that young man had determined to enter the mill at Hucklebury Run, he drank his tea, and taking a newspaper in his hand, subsided into a brown study.

The occasion was the sudden revolution that had taken place in Arthur's plans of life in consequence of his father's death. Would his own little boy ever be brought to such a trial? He must not be. He would set apart now, while it was possible, a sum that should be sacredly kept from all danger of loss, so that, in any contingency, little Fred should not miss his education.

Having fully determined upon this, and arranged the plan by which the end should be effected, he called Fred to him, and took him upon his knee. Aunt Catharine was washing the silver, sitting high and trim in her tea-chair, and Fanny sat near the window reading.

"I wonder what we shall make of this little boy," said the doctor, with one big arm around him, and the other fondling roughly his white little hand.

"Oh! I know what I'm going to be," said Fred, with a very wise and positive look, and a tone that indicated that he had never yet divulged his convictions to anybody.

"Tell us all about it, then," said the doctor.

"Oh! I know—I know. You can't guess," responded the boy, with a smack of the lips that showed it must be something very delightful indeed.

"I guess," said the doctor very thoughtfully, "that you're going to be a great lawyer."

"No;" and the boy looked wise, and smacked his lips again, and said it was "something better'n that."

"A minister," suggested Aunt Catharine.

"Something better'n that." (A shake of the head and a wise look out of the window.)

"A doctor," Fanny guessed.

"I hope it's better'n that," said the disgusted young gentleman—"nasty old pills."

"Tut—tut, Freddy! Your father is a doctor," said Dr. Gilbert with mock severity.

"Well, I don't think it would be a good plan to have two Dr. Gilberts. Do you, papa?"

"Why not?"

"Because the people would be always making mistakes, and getting the wrong one."

The doctor joined Aunt Catharine and Fanny in a laugh over Fred's ingenuity, and then said: "Now I can guess what my little boy is going to be. He's going to be a great scholar first; and then, after a while, he is going to be a great man, and go to Congress, and make splendid speeches, and then perhaps he'll be President of the United States. That's it, isn't it?"

The boy was not to be won from his first secret choice by any eloquent description of the glory of scholarship, or the grandeur of political elevation, and so made his old reply, that it was something "better'n that." Then all gave it up, and declared that they could not guess at all. He must tell them, or they should never know.

"I'm going to be a cracker-peddler," said Fred, in a tone of triumph.

"A cracker-peddler!" exclaimed the astonished father. "Dr. Gilbert's little son a cracker-peddler? What could put such nonsense into your foolish little head?"

"Yes, sir, I'm going to be a cracker peddler," persisted the boy. "I'm going to have two splendid horses with long tails, and a cart painted red, and I'm going to stop at the tavern, and have all the baker's gingerbread I want to eat, and give Aunt Catharine and Fanny all they want to eat; and I'm going to have a beautiful whip with my name worked into the handle, and a spotted dog with a brass collar on his neck, to run under the cart; and fur gloves, and a shiny cap, and—"

Here the little boy was interrupted by such a hearty and long-continued laugh from his three fond listeners, that he could proceed no further. As he looked with surprise upon the different members of the group, his sensitive nature took umbrage at the inexplicable merriment, and he turned his face to his father's breast, and burst into a fit of violent weeping. It took many words of tender assurance from all the offending parties to restore the child's composure, and when, at last, the smiles shone out through the tears, Dr. Gilbert was ready to tell him—a baby in years and thought—what he proposed to do with him.

"I wish to have my boy," said Dr. Gilbert, with a new tenderness which the child's tears had engendered, "be the best little scholar in Crampton. He must study very hard, and improve all his time, and learn just as fast as he can. By and by, when he gets a little older, and begins to fit for college, we shall have him recite to Mr. Wilton, and Mr. Wilton will teach him Latin and Greek, and a great many things that he does not know anything about now; and then, after a while, he will go away to college, and be a grand young man, and study very hard, and be the best scholar in his class; and when he has been there four years he will graduate, and deliver the valedictory address, and his papa will be on the platform to hear him, and perhaps Aunt Catharine and Sister Fanny will be there too. Won't that be splendid, now! Won't that be a great deal better than to be a cracker-peddler?"

The boy was sober and thoughtful for a few minutes, and then inquired: "Shall I be in the college alone? Will nobody that I know be there with me? Won't Arthur Blague be there?"

"Arthur Blague will be too old then, my son," said the doctor. "Besides, poor Arthur Blague can't go to college at all. He has lost his father, and has not money enough. Poor Arthur is going to work down at Hucklebury Run, to get money to support his mother and little Jamie."

"Why, father?" exclaimed Miss Fanny Gilbert.

The doctor looked up, struck by the peculiar tone of surprise and pain that characterized his daughter's exclamation. Fanny blushed, then she grew pale, and trembled in every fibre of her frame.

Aunt Catharine's eyes flashed, fire. "I think it's a sin and a shame," said Aunt Catharine, "that the noblest young man in Crampton should be allowed to waste his life in a factory under such a man as old Ruggles, when there are so many here who are able to help him."

"He wouldn't accept help if it were offered to him," said the doctor drily.

"Then I'd make him," said Aunt Catharine, decidedly.

"You'd work miracles, doubtless," responded Dr. Gilbert; and then, the conversation promising to lapse into an uncongenial channel, he put down his little boy, rose from his chair and left the room.

"I think it's the most shameful thing I ever knew your father to consent to," continued Aunt Catharine, addressing herself to Fanny.

Fanny would not trust herself to speak; so, to avoid conversation, she left Fred with his aunt, and ascended to her chamber; and now that we have the young woman alone and cornered, we will talk about her.

It has already appeared in these pages that she was tall and queenly in her carriage, that she was ambitious, that she had been crowded into early development, that she had been moved by public praise, that she had dreamed of a public career. Whatever there was of the strong and masculine in her nature, had, under her father's vigorous policy, been brought into prominence; yet there was another side to both her nature and her character. If she had a masculine head, she had a feminine heart. If she felt inspired by a man's ambition, she was informed by a woman's sensibility. If, in one phase of her character and constitution, she exhibited the power to organize and execute, in what the world would style a manly way, in another phase she betrayed the possession of rare susceptibility to the most delicate emotions, and the sweetest affections and passions. The question as to Miss Gilbert's life was, then, simply a question as to which side of her nature should obtain and retain the predominance. In a woman of positive qualities like hers, this contrariety must inevitably be the basis of many struggles, and, in a world of shifting circumstances and various influences, she would have difficulty in achieving a satisfactory adjustment of herself.

When Fanny Gilbert entered her chamber, she closed the door and locked it. Then she went to her mirror to see what and how much her face had betrayed. The mirror gave her no answer. It only showed her a face in which the colour went and came, and went and came again, and a pair of eyes that would have been blue had they not been gray, or gray had they not been blue. The double nature discovered itself hardly less in her physical than in her mental characteristics.

Fanny Gilbert did not love Arthur Blague. So far as she knew, he did not love her. They had, as neighbours, been early playmates, and, at one time, as schoolmates, been much associated. Her father and Arthur's father had been excellent friends. Her mother and Arthur's mother had been intimately neighbourly. But, though she had never loved him, she admired him; and as he was the superior of any young man of her acquaintance, in manly beauty and all manly qualities, it is not strange that, quite unconsciously, her life's possibilities had yoked themselves with his life's possibilities. One thing was certain: her *beau idéal*—and by this is meant, of course, her ideal beau—had marvelously resembled Arthur Blague; and when that *beau idéal* stepped down from its height of splendid possibilities into actualities of life that were not only prosy but repulsive, she was sadly shocked.

"Humph!" (a fine nasal ejaculation of impatient contempt, accompanied by a decided elevation of the organ used on the occasion.) "What do I care for Arthur Blague?" followed the ejaculation; and her eyes, in which the gray and blue were struggling for the mastery, flashed proudly in the mirror.

Certainly! Of course! What did she care for Arthur Blague? Nobody had accused her of caring anything for him. Besides, how could a girl be in love who was going to have a career? Love meant marriage at some time. Love meant subordination to somebody. So the heart, with its petals all formed and ready to be kissed into bloom (had the kiss been ready), was coolly tied so that it could not bloom at all. The head passed the string around the opening bud, and half pitied the restraint of its throbbing life. The blue eyes looked softly into the mirror no longer; there was no longer any clash of colours; they had changed to gray.

Miss Gilbert, having discarded all thoughts of Arthur as a man whose life sustained any relation to hers, proceeded to think of him simply as a human being of the masculine gender, and an indefinite capacity for improvement. Could one like Arthur Blague become a slave? Arthur was a young man, and should have a young man's will. Would he—could he—bend that will to the will of a mean and sordid man, for bread? She was nothing but a woman, and she would not do it. No: she would starve first. Must there not be something mean and weak in a character that could adapt itself to the shifting exigencies and paltry economies of life? He had always been gentle; now he had become quite a girl. He had consented to become the servant of an inferior—to place himself upon a level with inferiors.

"There's something wrong about Arthur Blague," soliloquized Miss Gilbert, "or he never could do this. Never."

What a wise young woman! How wise all young women are at sixteen!

Having decided that Arthur Blague was nothing to her, and gone still farther, and decided that there was a fatal defect in the young man somewhere, Miss Gilbert sat down in calm self-complacency, and commenced to read some loose leaves of manuscript. They were not old letters; they

were not new letters. They were not even school-girl compositions. They were something of much more interest and importance. Fanny read page after page while the daylight lasted, and then lighted her lamp and read on until she had completed them all.

When she had finished them, she pushed them from her with a sigh, and, burying her face in her hands, subsided into deep thought and a deep chair at the same moment. While she is thinking, a few words about the manuscript. Perhaps a marked passage in a country newspaper which lies on the table before the young woman will the most readily introduce us to the character of these interesting pages in Fanny's own handwriting:

"We trust that we shall be deemed guilty of no indelicate breach of confidence in giving publicity to a statement that by some means has found its way out of the private circle to which it was originally communicated, to the effect that a young lady, *not a hundred miles from the neighbouring village of Crampton*—the highly accomplished daughter of a distinguished physician—is now busily engaged upon a work of fiction. The fair authoress, we are assured, has not yet exhausted the delicious term of "sweet sixteen," though she has already, in another field of effort, demonstrated the possession of those rare gifts and aptitudes which will enable her to succeed abundantly in the arduous career which she has chosen. We shall anticipate the essay of this new candidate for public honours with unusual interest. In the meantime, we beg her pardon and that of her friends, if this early announcement of her intentions should be deemed premature or unwarranted."

So this manuscript was Fanny's new "work of fiction," and so Fanny had chosen a literary career. How the fact that she was engaged in writing ever found its way into the *Littleton Examiner*, she was utterly at a loss to imagine. It was true that she had spoken of the matter to an intimate friend—a young woman who knew another young woman who was very well acquainted with Rev. J. Desilver Newman, who, of course, knew his neighbour, the editor of the *Examiner*, and who, in fact, had the credit of writing the articles for that paper; but it was hardly possible that the news should have got out in that way. One thing was certain: she had been indiscreet. She should have told no one, and then no one would have known anything about it. She should have written all the time with her gray eyes; for the blue eyes sought for sympathy and communion. She had told one friend, because the woman in her demanded that she should tell one friend. Was the public announcement distasteful to her? Fanny Gilbert with blue eyes shrank from it offended, but afterward, when Fanny Gilbert with gray eyes began to think about it, she gloried in it. She would be remarked upon, and pointed out as the young woman who was writing a novel. Admiring and wondering eyes would be upon her whenever she walked through the street, or appeared in a public assembly. A romantic personal interest would attach to her. Ah! yes. Gray-eyed Fanny Gilbert was pleased in spite of herself.

But the work of writing was a very weary and a very peevish work. Sometimes she could not make her characters stand up to be written about. Her life had not been sufficiently varied to afford her a competent range of incidents. With the consciousness of the possession of sufficient power for her work, she had also the consciousness of poverty of materials. It was of this poverty that she was thinking so very deeply in her very deep chair.

It is not to be denied that she was also vexed with the thought that the hero of her story bore a striking resemblance to Arthur Blague, and that, although that young man had ceased to be a hero in her eyes, she could not change him for any other young man she knew. There were other uncomfortable thoughts that came to her with this. She had never communicated her designs to her father and she was not certain that he would regard them with favour.

Her reverie, which had been somewhat protracted, was disturbed at last by the sound of feet upon the stairs, and then by a strong rap at her door. She rose hurriedly, thrust her manuscript into the desk, and then admitted her father and little Fred.

"Fred wishes you to put him to bed," said her father, "and Catharine says you have received a late *Littleton* paper," he added. "Ah! here it is," and the doctor laid his hand upon it.

Fanny put out both her hands in pantomimic deprecation.

"You can have it again, of course," said the doctor; "I only wish to look at the probate notices," saying which, he bade Fred "good-night," and walked downstairs.

There were some very stupid and very tremulous fingers engaged that night in undressing the little boy, and when he said "Our Father, who art in heaven," to her, she was thinking only of her father who was downstairs reading "probate notices," in the *Littleton Examiner*. The sweet little "Amen" was just breathed when she heard her father's steps in the hall, and his voice calling "Fanny," at the foot of the stairs.

Fanny looked in the glass again, and then went slowly downstairs. Every part of her varied nature was awake and on the alert. A gentle, sympathetic word would win her into tenderness and tractableness; while harsh dealing would arouse her to opposition the most positive. She would like, of all things the most, to have her father talk encouragingly and sympathetically of her new enterprise. The woman and the daughter were delicately alive to any gentle word or kind counsel that the strong man and the father might utter; but the ambitious aspirant for public applause was sensitive in an equal degree, and, firmly enthroned, was prepared imperiously to defend her prerogative and pleasures.

(To be continued.)

DEVONSHIRE DISSENTERS.

At first that part of the country seemed, socially speaking, so inactive that we watched with great interest for signs of life and movement among the working people, who, of course, predominated both in numbers and variety. The first noticeable feature was that the majority were dissenters,