

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

At last, Frank Sargent began to think that if he was to become the husband of Mary Kilgore, he must be something more than a clerk, and have more than a clerk's income. Both he and Mary supposed that the old man knew, or suspected, their attachment for each other; and furthermore believed, from his cordiality to the young man, that he looked upon the matter with favour. So Frank Sargent, on one occasion, proposed to Mr. Kilgore the subject of going into business on his own account. The old gentleman expressed surprise and regret, but would not interfere. He knew that the young man's personal popularity would take custom from his own house, but he was too proud to admit, for an instant, that anybody was essential to the house of the Kilgore Brothers but himself.

Frank Sargent then set up for himself, and made a good beginning. Mr. Kilgore's old customers, many of them, came to him, and he had the good-will of all his associates. But his love matters would have to come to a crisis sooner or later, and so it was agreed between the lovers that he should make to the father of the young woman a formal proposition for her hand. Great was the surprise, and greater the wrath, of the great Kilgore, when the audacious young bookseller submitted his confession of love, and his request for the bestowal of its object upon him by its nominal owner. The old man was at first thunderstruck, then indignant, then angry. He drove him out of his counting-room, forbade him his house, and, from that moment, was his enemy; losing no opportunity to injure him in his business, and striving by all allowable means to crush him.

The rest of this long story is sufficiently in the reader's possession. Mutual friends contrived meetings for the lovers, and at last, after a painful scene between father and daughter, the latter fled, leaving only the letter which Frank Sargent had perused every day for three years before he received another from the same hand.

Bright and early on the morning succeeding the events in the young publisher's counting-room, that gentleman, having passed a sleepless night, stepped on board the good steamer *Bunker Hill*, and set out on his journey to Crampton.

Alas! for the impatient feet that trod the deck of the industriously-toiling steamer! If Frank Sargent could have increased her speed by the application of that fraction of a one-horse power that was in him, he would contentedly have laboured at the crank all the way. When, at last, he landed, and commenced the passage up the valley as "a deck passenger" of the slow coach—for he always rode where he could see the horses, and talk with the driver—it seemed as if the long miles had surpassed the statute to a criminal degree. But all journeys have an end, and, still sleepless, he found himself at length seated with Cheek upon the box of the little Crampton coach.

Frank Sargent could not have fallen in with any one better informed than Cheek, of the points upon which he needed light. So, by a process which a thoroughbred New Yorker understands in an eminent degree, he "pumped" him all the way; praised his horses, and managed to get out of him Mary's history since he had known her. He learned also of the presence of Mr. Kilgore in Crampton, of the dangerous sickness he had survived at the house of Dr. Gilbert, and of the rumour, current in the village, that father and daughter had "made up," and that "the whole thing had been straightened."

"I tell you," said Cheek, with emphasis, as a general summing up of his revelations, "that any man who takes Mary Kilgore out of Crampton against her will, will kick up the greatest row that ever was started in this place."

Now it did not occur to Cheek at all that the lively gentleman who sat upon the box with him, and begged the privilege of driving his horses, was Mary's lover; so, after Frank Sargent had succeeded in getting all the information he wanted from the driver, the latter undertook to obtain fitting repayment. "I reckon, perhaps, you know Mary Hammett, as we used to call her, pretty well, don't you?" said Cheek.

"Know her? I think I do," responded the passenger.

"Brother, perhaps?"

"No."

"Cousin, may be?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Some sort of relation, I s'pose?"

"Well, no—not exactly."

"Neighbour?"

"Yes, neighbour—old neighbour—old friend—knew her years ago—known her ever so long."

"Well, I guess she'll be glad to see you now. You don't know the fellow she's engaged to, do you?"

"Oh, yes; I know him very well; he's a particular friend of mine."

"I vow! I should like to see him," said Cheek; "he's punkins, ain't he?"

"Some," replied Frank Sargent, with a laugh he could not repress. Then he added: "What kind of a man do you suppose he is? How do you think he looks?"

"Well, I don't know," replied the driver. "My mind's always running on one thing and another when I'm driving along, and I've thought him up a good many times. I reckon I should know him if I should see him."

"Just describe him, then. I can tell you whether you are right or not."

"Well, I reckon," said Cheek, squinting across the top of a tall pine tree they were passing, "that he's a tall feller, with black whiskers and black clothes, and an eye that kind o' looks into you. It don't seem to me that he ever says much, but he has an easy swing, that makes people think he knows everything, and isn't afraid. I've always had a notion, too, that he wears a thundering big gold watch chain, and a seal with a kind of red stone in it. I ain't certain

about the stone, but it's red or yellow, I'll bet my head." Then Cheek scratched the head that he was so willing to risk, and added, "I don't know—you can't tell about these women. Sometimes the best of 'em will take a shine to a little, flirtn, fiddlin', snip, and be so tickled with him, they don't know nothing what to do with themselves."

Frank Sargent laughed with a "haw-haw," that made the woods ring. "Capital hit," said he, "Capital hit." Then he laughed again.

"What are you laughing at?" inquired Cheek, dubiously.

"Oh, nothing. I—I was wondering whether I could guess as nearly the appearance of a girl in Crampton, or on the road, that swears by the driver of this coach."

"Well, go in," said Cheek, taking a squint across the top of a maple.

Mr. Frank Sargent very good-naturedly "went in," in these words: "She's a long girl, with blue eyes, about a head taller than you are; sings in the choir without opening her teeth; writes verses about flowers and clouds, and children that die with the measles, and works samplers."

"Now, what's the use of running a feller?" said Cheek. "You know you ain't within gun-shot."

"Well, tell me all about her, then," said the publisher, who was willing to do anything to pass away the time.

"She's no such kind of a bird as you've been talking about, I tell you. She's right—she is. You can't hardly tally how she's coming out, because she isn't exactly a woman yet. She's kind o' betwixt hay and grass, you know—got on long dresses, but looks odd in 'em."

"She must be very young," remarked Cheek's much-amused auditor.

"Young, but not green," said Cheek. "She's got an eye that snaps like that," and he illustrated her visual peculiarity by cracking his whip in the immediate vicinity of his horse's ears. "She's waiting for me, you know," continued the communicative lover, "and I'm beavering her round, and sort o' bringing her up. If I hadn't taken her young, I never should do anything with her in the world. It's just with women as it is with colts. You want to halter-break 'em when they're little, and get them kind o' wonted to the feel of the harness, and then, when they're grown up they're all ready to drive. She's one of them high-strung creatures—all full of fuss and steel springs—that'll take a taut rein, I tell you, when her blood's up. She's just like her mother."

"Got a smart mother, has she?"

"Yes, sir. No mistake about that. Oh! she's just as full of *jasm*!"

Frank Sargent laughed again. "You've got the start of me," said he. "Now tell me what 'jasm' is."

"Well, that's a sort of word, I guess, that made itself," said Cheek. "It's a good one, though—*jasm* is. If you'll take thunder and lightning, and a steamboat and a buzz saw and mix 'em up, and put 'em into a woman, that's *jasm*. Now my girl is just like her mother, and it's a real providence that I got hold of her as I did, for if she'd run five years longer without any halter, she'd have been too much for me—yes, sir."

At this point of the conversation the spire of the Crampton church came boldly into sight, and the laugh that rose to the young publisher's lips died away, as if his mouth had been smitten. A great crisis in his life was doubtless before him. A great question was to be decided. He was to meet again one whom he loved almost idolatrously—one whom circumstances had hidden from his vision and withheld from his embrace with threats of eternal separation. He felt his heart thumping heavily against its walls, and trembled with excitement.

"Stop at the hotel?" inquired Cheek, who had been struck with his passenger's sudden silence.

"Take my baggage there, and me to Dr. Gilbert's," was the reply.

Then Cheek took from his pocket the little horn which daily proclaimed to the people of Crampton that the mail was in, or coming in, and blew a most ingenious refrain—the instrument leaping out into various angular flourishes, as if a fish-horn had got above its business, and were ambitious of the reputation of a key-bugle.

"That's Dr. Gilbert's house," said Cheek, putting his horses into a run. Mr. Frank Sargent was pale. He looked at the house. He saw the door partly open, and caught a glimpse of a woman's face and form. The horses were pulled up at the gate with a grand flourish, and the passenger leaped from the box; but before he had advanced a rod Mary was on her way to meet him. They rushed into each other's arms, and stood for a minute weeping; without a thought of the eyes that were upon them. Aunt Catharine was at the window, crying like a child. Fanny was wild with excitement, and ran down the walk to meet the lovers.

During all this scene the Crampton coach stood very still, and its driver's eyes were very wide open. He sat and watched all parties until they entered the house; then, turning to his horses, and reining them homeward, he gave vent to his astonishment by the double-shotted exclamation—"Christopher Jerusalem!"

CHAPTER XX.—WHICH CONTAINS A VERY PLEASANT WEDDING AND A VERY SAD ACCIDENT.

After Mr. Frank Sargent had been introduced to the Gilbert family, and had renewed his acquaintance with Dr. Gilbert by the most extravagant demonstrations of cordiality, the reunited lovers were left for a whole blessed hour in one another's society. In that hour a great deal of talking was accomplished, and a great deal of happiness experienced. Mary communicated to her lover the outlines of her own story, already narrated, and informed him concerning the condition of her father. Since his reconciliation to her she had hardly left his bedside, and had had the satisfaction to see him daily mending under her assiduous nursing and her loving ministrations. That afternoon she had informed him of the expected arrival of her lover, and, though the matter was painful to him, she was sure that his mind was decided upon it, and that he would interpose no further obstacles to

their union. He was still very weak, and would be unable to see his old clerk for some days, and probably would not be strong enough to leave Crampton for a fortnight.

After tea Mary insisted that Frank should leave her, and get the sleep which he needed. He had never been more wide awake than at this time, but he loyally obeyed, and taking his leave, crossed over to the Crampton Hotel, and selected his lodgings. The little yellow-breasted piazza was full of people when he arrived, not one of whom was not aware of his relations to the schoolmistress. In fact, all the village was gossiping about his arrival, and everybody was most anxious to get a look at him.

The next day he spent, of course, at the Gilbert mansion; and if he had been a resident of it for a twelvemonth, he could not have been more at home. He first elected Fanny to be his sister by a "unanimous vote." Then he conciliated Fred by giving him a ride upon his shoulders, and telling him half-a-dozen funny stories; and wound up the achievements of the day by kissing Aunt Catharine, who pretended to be terribly offended, but who finally acknowledged to Mary that he was an excellent fellow, though a "perfect witch-cat." It was very pleasant and amusing to see how quietly Mary took all these demonstrations. Confident in the good heart that shone through his extravagances, and confident in the power of others to see it, she gave herself up to the entertainment as if he were a stranger to her. Sometimes, indeed, she checked him with a good-natured "Frank!" and established herself as a kind of regulator, to indicate when the mill was going too fast.

Dr. Gilbert was amused, but Frank Sargent had other entertainment for him; and long and very interesting were his communications upon various matters of public interest. He talked of politics, of business, of religion, of literature; and added more to the doctor's stock of current information than he could have gathered from all his newspapers. On the whole, the family were much pleased with the lover of their friend Mary. He brought life into so many departments of their life, and adapted himself so readily to their tastes and temperaments, that they felt his presence to be a sudden accession to their wealth. Mary relinquished him to them in the kindness of her heart. He was hers for a lifetime. She would lend him to them while she could.

The following day was the Sabbath—always a welcome day to Frank Sargent, because it was usually a day of very agreeable business. At home, besides attending to his own charge as superintendent of a Sabbath school, he was usually out at one or more mission schools during the day, and joined with others in seeking for the neglected and uninstructed. These things gave him an opportunity to talk, and to one who was always full, this was a great privilege.

It was customary with the superintendent of the Crampton school to invite every stranger who made his appearance to address the children. The gift of public speech was rare in Crampton, and a talking stranger was a Godsend. Accordingly, when Frank Sargent remained after the benediction was pronounced at noon, and stood up, smiling pleasantly upon the children as they gathered into the pews, the superintendent came to him, and having been introduced by Dr. Gilbert, requested him to open the school with some "remarks."

Very memorable were those "remarks," made with rare and racy freedom, for they awakened many smiles, and were the occasion of many tears. He told the school about the poor children in New York—how he had found them in rags, and filth, and wretchedness, and washed their faces with his own hands, and taught them to read. He told how a sweet little girl had been taught to love her Saviour, and how, afterwards, she had died in her little garret, and said she was going home to her Father in heaven, where they had beautiful carpets on the floor, and red curtains at the windows, and chairs as soft as the grass.

Then he told them about a good little boy who said he was one of Jesus Christ's little lambs, and when he went to heaven he was going to have a bell on his neck. The first story made the children cry, and the second one made them smile; and then Mr. Frank Sargent said that all the little children were Jesus Christ's lambs, at which one little boy giggled. Then the speaker asked the boy what he was laughing at, and the boy told him he laughed because his name was Charley Mutton, and all the other little boys called him Charley Lamb. Then Mr. Frank Sargent smiled, and the doctor and Fanny smiled, and all the school came as nearly up to an outburst of mirth as they dared to.

Then the speaker told them how so much had been accomplished for the poor children in New York. It was done by co-operation. Everybody interested in the work did something; and, to show them what miracles could be wrought by co-operation, he told them a story of a man who had no legs forming a partnership with a man who had no arms, and both together taking and carrying on a farm. The man who had no legs got upon the shoulders of the man who had no arms, and the man who had legs carried the man who had arms all about, the latter sowing the grain and hoeing the vegetables, and picking fruit from the trees. Neither could do anything alone, but co-operating, they were able to carry on a large business, and made a pile of money. The vivid colours in which the speaker painted this brace of farmers made a decided impression, and awoke many smiles. But these were banished by his closing words, which were solemn, earnest and touching. The children had never heard such talk before, and were very much impressed.

At the conclusion of his "remarks," he was invited to instruct a class of young women, and here he became so much interested and absorbed, that he talked loudly enough to be heard in all parts of the house, and talked quite beyond the tinkling of the little bell that announced the close of the hour.

On Fanny's return, she gave a glowing account of Frank's hit as a speaker to Mary, who had remained with her father. Mary received the announcement of his success with the same quiet smile with which she regarded all his performances. Knowing that he did strange and often ludicrous things, she also knew that his heart was right, his