

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"I tell you," said Cheek, recalling the hopeless condition of big Joslyn, "that when a feller gets tied to a wife, and has a lot of chickadees around him, there's no help for him if he gets into old Ruggles's hands."

"How do the girls get along with him?" inquired Arthur. "Well, they witt to it," replied Cheek. "I know every girl in the mill, and they get along a mighty sight better'n the men. Some of 'em will put on their sun-bonnets and cry all day. There are girls there that have regular crying days. I always know when there's a shower coming. A girl sits down to the table in the morning with the corners of her mouth drawn down, eats just a bite of breakfast, then on goes the sun-bonnet, and just as soon as she gets her looms running, and all ready for it, she begins to cry, and cries till the mill stops. I used to kind of pity them at first, but I've got used to it now, and don't mind it so much."

"What do they cry for?" inquired Arthur. "Oh! I don't know. I don't s'pose they do. They feel bad promiseusly, I reckon, and don't know what else to do. They all come out bright enough next day, if nobody says anything to 'em. It's a kind of a fashion at the Run for girls to have crying days. All of 'em cry, but them that have long hair."

"Long hair!" exclaimed Arthur, with a smile, "what has long hair to do with it?"

"Well, they all have to get something to take up their minds, you know—kind of amuse them, you know," pursued Cheek, in explanation. "If a girl has long hair, she takes in a comb regular when she goes to work, and her hair isn't done up all day. She gets her looms going, and then she draws her comb down through her hair, and keeps doing so till there's a bobbin out. Oh! I tell you, combs and sun-bonnets are thick some days; but they work first rate when they cry, for they're always mum then. When old Ruggles comes in and sees the sun-bonnets thick, he knows it's all right for one day, so he just blows his nose and leaves them."

At this instant the young men were interrupted by the accustomed note of warning that their employer was with them. They had not seen where he came from, and did not know how long he had been near them.

"How are you getting along?" said Old Ruggles. "You find Cheek very good company, don't you, Arthur?"

Cheek had no sooner become aware of his master's presence than he began to lay about him with great diligence. Arthur understood the taunt, but replied quietly that Cheek seemed to be a very good fellow, indeed.

Old Ruggles, accustomed to no replies from his workmen, looked up and down Arthur's cool front in astonishment. There was no servile fear in that eye, no nervous apprehension. Failing to look him into activity, he broke into a low, sneering laugh, and said: "Well, that is very fine!"

"You seem amuse'd," said Arthur.

"Amused!" exclaimed Ruggles. "Cheek, look here!" Cheek feared a scene, and came up trembling and afraid.

"Cheek, here's something you never seen afore in your life. It's worth looking at. Here's a young man at work for me in gloves!"

Arthur's face burned for a moment with intense anger, for the words were said in the most insulting way possible. Then he recalled his good resolutions, and checked the hasty response that sprang to his lips.

"My hands are not used to this work," said he, "and they are already blistered. I shall wear gloves as long as they do not interfere with my work." Having said this, he coolly turned his back on his employer, and resumed his labour.

Old Ruggles did not know what to say. In his establishment dependence always walked hand in hand with servility. Somehow the spirit of the young man must be broken, but he could not decide how to undertake the task.

He watched Arthur for a few minutes in silence; then he stepped up, and taking his bush hook out of his hands, he worked actively for a while, and handed the implement back to him with an air that said: "You have done nothing today; work as I do."

Arthur smiled, and said: "You new bushes very well, Mr. Ruggles. You must have had a good deal of practice."

The old man replied not a word, but went off, muttering something about "upstarts." As soon as he was out of sight and hearing, Cheek drooped his head, mounted on a stump, slapped his hands upon his thighs half a dozen times, and crouched like a cock. Then he threw his old cap into the air, and caught it, and then he came up to Arthur and said: "I vow, Blague, give us your hand. You are a trump. There ain't another man at the Run that would dare to do it; but he's after you now. He won't stop until he's got you under his thumb."

"Cheek," said Arthur, coolly, "I shall do for Mr. Ruggles just as well as I can, and I shall never be afraid of him."

That was a tedious day for Arthur Blague. Long before night he was tired and sore; but he laboured on faithfully until after sunset, and then, in company with Cheek, walked back to the mill. The old man was away, and, without waiting for dismissal, he walked home. He was glad that the evening covered him from observation, for he was sad, and almost disheartened. His mother greeted him on his return with a very feeble attempt to smile; but her eyelids were red with weeping. She sat and watched him as he devoured his supper, and wondered at his overflow of spirits. Whatever might be his hardships, he was determined that his mother should know nothing of them; and as she obeyed his wishes, and refrained from asking him any questions, he got along very easily with her.

He went to bed early, and the next morning breakfasted and was off before his mother awoke. He heard old Ruggles ready for him—waiting to see him to work in the mill. He could not help noticing a marked change in the expression of the faces which greeted him on all sides. The truth was

that Cheek had been full of Blague all night. The scene between Ruggles and Arthur in the pasture had been described in Cheek's best style, with all the exaggerations that were necessary to make an impression. The men had all got hold of it, and talked it over. The girls had heard the story, and rehearsed it to one another until they had become surcharged with admiration of the young man. There were none but kind eyes that greeted him among the operatives that morning. All wondered what Ruggles would do to tame him. Cheek's opinion was that Blague would whip the old man in less than five minutes if it ever came to that.

"How are your hands this morning?" inquired Ruggles, as Arthur presented himself before him.

"They are very sore, sir," replied the young man.

"That's too bad, ain't it?" said the master, "because I was going to set you to dyeing, and it might make 'em smart some. Besides, it ain't work where you can wear gloves very well."

"I beg you not to consult the condition of my hands at all," replied Arthur.

"Oh! very well! You can go downstairs, and Cheek will show you what to do."

Arthur went down through the same column of steam out of which Cheek issued the previous morning, and found that young man in a very lively state of mind, and up to his elbows in a dyeing vat. The atmosphere was hot, heavy, almost stifling. The room was full of the noise of heavy gearing, and the constant splash of water in the near wheel-pit. Objects a few feet distant could not be seen in consequence of the steam that rolled out of the vats.

Cheek explained to Arthur the nature of his labour, and set him to work. The moment his hands were bathed in the poisonous liquid they became as painful as if they had been bathed in fire. This was what he anticipated, and he was prepared to endure it. By degrees, however, sensibility was benumbed, and he worked on with tolerable comfort. He was disturbed by the frequent visits of the master, who would stand by him sometimes for several minutes, and tell him how well he took hold of business. "When I want to take the starch out of a man, I always put him in here," said old Ruggles, with a grin.

Arthur took no notice of these taunts, but kept on with his work until the bell rang. The ponderous wheel in the pit stood still, and the snarling, grinding din of the gearing was hushed. The world never seemed so still to Arthur as it did then. The noise of the ever-revolving machinery had seemed to crowd out of his consciousness all the rest of the universe, and when it stopped, it seemed as if the world had ceased to move. Putting on his coat, and taking his dinner basket in his hand, he ascended the stairs, and sought a quiet place in the mill where he could eat his lunch undisturbed. This he had hardly succeeded in doing, when old Ruggles, making a rapid passage through the mill, discovered him. "I've been looking for you, sir," said the master.

"Well, sir," responded Arthur, rising and brushing the crumbs from his lap, "you have found me, and I am at your service."

The old man had really begun to feel very uncomfortable about Arthur. He saw that the young man was determined to do his duty, and to serve him faithfully. He had become indistinctly conscious that there was nothing in Ruggles, the master, to inspire fear in Arthur, the hired workman. He had found a character which he could not overtop nor undermine; and he knew, too, that he was an object of contempt to a young man whose heart was pure and true. He had begun to find that his attempts to wound the young man's feelings reacted unpleasantly upon himself. He was the man whose pride was wounded, and not Arthur.

Therefore, when Arthur rose so readily, and so respectfully, and told him he was at his service, the old man hesitated, and became half ashamed of a trick that he had planned for Arthur's humiliation. Then he stammered and lied. He thought, he said, that perhaps Arthur would like a little relief from his confinement in the basement, and he wanted to have him take his horse and go to the village for him. His object was simply to have him shown up to the village of Crampton as the servant—the errand-boy—of old Ruggles of Hucklebury Run. Arthur told him he would go very willingly (and thereby was guilty of a lie, with such a blending of all the colours of the spectrum of truth in it, that it was white), and inquired what his errand was.

At this moment the bell for the commencement of work sounded, and the men and women came pouring into the mill. Seeing the old man and Arthur in conversation, they paused, as if anxious to overhear what was passing between them.

"You will go first," said the master, in a loud and insolently dictatorial tone, "to the post-office, and get the newspapers, and then go down to old Leach's, and get a barrel of soap."

Arthur smiled.

"Well, sir, what are you laughing about?" inquired the old man, savagely.

"I was only thinking," replied Arthur, "what a suggestive combination newspapers and soap are."

The very dirty audience tittered, and the dirty proprietor looked daggers.

"Do you mean to say that we need newspapers and soap here, sir? Do you mean to insult me and my hands?" and the proprietor grew white with anger.

"I never insulted anybody in my life, Mr. Ruggles. As for the soap and the newspapers, I think the combination an excellent one anywhere, and I suppose you need the articles here, or you wouldn't send for them."

The old man turned angrily round upon the gaping operative, and said: "Go to your work; don't you know the bell has stopped ringing?"

They went off smiling, and exchanging significant looks with each other. Arthur looked out of the window, and seeing the horse and the accustomed truck-wagon waiting for him, he took out his gloves, drew them on over his stained hands, and asked his employer if the soap and the newspapers were all. The old man could hardly speak for anger, and the state of his mind was not improved at all by

the success that Arthur had achieved in covering with gloves the mark of servitude which the dye had left upon his fingers.

"Nothing else," said the old man, answering Arthur's question snappishly. "Go: what I tell you, and be quick about it."

Arthur left the mill, and as he stepped into the wagon was greeted by a voice coming out through the steam that poured from the basement window, with something that sounded like: "Hit 'im ag'in, Blague—I'll hold your moc-casins."

Arthur drove off toward the town, feeling, on the whole, very pleasantly. He comprehended perfectly the trick of his employer, but the two days of his experience at the Run had given him strength. He had not been humiliated. He had not been crushed. On the contrary, he had risen to the point of labouring where God and duty had placed him, without being ashamed of it. He became conscious of a new power in life, and a new power over his destiny. Instead, therefore, of riding through the village of Crampton with a sense of shame and mortified vanity, he rode as self-respectfully and as confidently as if he had been a king. He greeted the old acquaintances whom he met with his accustomed freedom and cordiality, and was greeted in the same hearty way by all. There were some silly people who thought it must be very "trying" to Arthur, "brought up as he had been"; but all the sensible people said that Arthur Blague was a brave, good fellow, and was sure to "work his way in the world."

Arthur visited the post-office and got his newspapers, and then he went to the soap establishment of old Leach, and procured the soap, and turned his horse toward Hucklebury Run. He caught a glimpse of his astonished mother as he drove by her home, and waved his hand to her merrily, when she, poor woman! sank into a chair as despairingly as if she had seen him in his coffin.

Returning to the mill, he delivered his package to the master, without a word, helped to unload the soap, and then went down to his work again among the vats.

Old Ruggles was very busy that afternoon. He was angry, irritable, huffed. Everything went wrong. First he was in the weaving-room, then in the spinning-room, then in the carding-room. He went upstairs three steps at a time; he plunged downstairs three steps at a time; and blew his resonant nose at every landing. If he saw two men or two women talking together, he was at their side in an instant. If he caught a boy out of his place, he led him back by the ear. There was not a sun-bonnet nor a comb in use that afternoon, for the girls, illustrative of the ingenious theory of Cheek, had found something "to take up their minds." He was particularly attentive to the dyeing-room, so that Arthur and Cheek contented themselves with monosyllables, and only spoke when necessary.

The day wore on slowly, and it had become almost late enough for lighting the lamps. Still the old man was omnipresent. Arthur worked diligently, and his thoughts were as busy as the feet and eyes of his employer. The ceaseless noise in his ears wearied him. The constant splash of water in the wheel-pit, the grinding, metallic ring of the gearing, the prevalent sense of motion everywhere—the buzz, the whirl, the clashing overhead, the stifling atmosphere which enveloped him, all tended to oppress him with sensations and emotions utterly strange.

In an instant, every sound was swept from his consciousness by a cry so sharp—so full of fear and agony—that his heart stood still. The steam was around him and he could see nothing, but he noticed that Cheek escaped past him like lightning, and rushed upstairs. In a moment more, the gate of the water-wheel closed with a sudden plunge, and the mill stood still. Another moment, and a dozen men came downstairs with lamps in their hands, and the first one, walking a few steps into the darkness, exclaimed: "It's old Ruggles himself!"

Arthur approached the group as they held their lamps over the prostrate form of the master of Hucklebury Run.

"He's been round that shaft, the Lord knows how many times," exclaimed big Joslyn, casting his eyes upwards.

Not another word was spoken for a minute. All seemed to be stupefied. Arthur had stood back from them, waiting to see what steps they would take, and feeling himself quite too young to assume responsibility among his seniors; but they seemed so thoroughly paralyzed, and so incapable of doing anything without direction, that he pushed through the group, and, kneeling by the old man's side, placed his fingers upon his pulse. The prostrate master presented a sickening aspect. His face was bruised and bleeding, his clothes were nearly torn from his body, his whole frame seemed to be a mass of bruises, and one leg was broken, and fairly doubled upon itself.

"He is not dead," said Arthur; and a gasp and a moan attested the truth of the announcement. "Now, lift him up carefully, carry him to his house, and take care of him till I send the doctor."

The young man waited only long enough to be sure that the master would be carefully looked after, and then he put on his coat, and taking his basket in his hand, ran every step of the mile that lay between the Run and the house of Dr. Gilbert. He found the doctor at home, delivered his errand, watched the little gig as it reeled off toward the mill at the highest speed the little black pony could command, and then, tired and sore, and shocked and sad, entered his own dwelling.

(To be continued.)

THE Rev. Charles Strong was invited by the Mayor of Melbourne to preach at the town hall on Hospital Sunday. Mr. Strong's new church is to cost, with site, \$103,500, of which upward of \$25,000 has been promised.

MR. DICK, elder, introduced a motion at the last meeting of Glasgow South U. P. Presbytery in favour of union with other denominations; but it was defeated by a large majority who thought that the Disestablishment movement would have to triumph before there could be union among the evangelical bodies of Scotland.