

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER VIII.—MRS. RUGGLES SPREADS HER MOTHERLY WINGS OVER ARTHUR, AND IS UNGRATEFULLY REPULSED.

The proprietor would receive no notice from Miss Hammett, but told her angrily that she could go at once. She accordingly made no delay in exchanging her unpleasant quarters at the Run for the comfortable, quiet and tidy home of Mrs. Blague. Arthur's mother received the new comer very cordially, for Dr. Gilbert had reassured her. As for Aunt Catharine and Fanny, they were in a state of great excitement about her. The doctor had shown more enthusiasm w... relation to Mary Hammett than any woman had excited in him for years. He could not stop talking about her, and could not be stopped even by Aunt Catharine's sharp rallying.

The women can safely be left to make each other's acquaintance, and Miss Hammett to commence her school, while Arthur's first experiences as a regular resident of the Run are el. onised.

The life of Mrs. Ruggles and her daughter Leonora had never been more delightful than during the illness of the husband and father, and Arthur's detention in the family. He had introduced a fresh element of life, and it was in accordance with their desire that old Ruggles had invited him to board in his family. The change would be the same, and the bedding, at least, much more desirable. Arthur shrank from coming in contact with the mother and daughter again; but his duties would be out of the house, and he could shun them pretty effectually, he thought.

Very little did the young man know of the resources of his ingenious landlady. Leonora was always wishing to do a bit of shopping, and Arthur must take her along when he went to the post office; or she wanted very much to attend an evening meeting, and would walk to Crompton, if Arthur would go for her after factory hours; or she was out at a neighbour's house, and the mother, worrying about her, wished that Arthur would walk over and bring her home. Always, when Arthur returned, the mother had retired, and there was a nice fire to be enjoyed by those who might come in out of the chilly air. Mrs. Ruggles said but little when her husband was present; but when he happened to be absent from a meal, the old range of talk was resumed, and often became almost unendurable.

One afternoon Leonora came home from Crompton, whither she had been on a three days' visit to a boarding-school acquaintance, and brought back to her mother her first knowledge of Arthur's agency in the removal of Mary Hammett, and the stories to which it had given rise in the village. The account which she gave of Miss Hammett's sudden popularity, and the attention shown to her by everybody, filled the mother with utter dismay. Something would have to be done, and done at once; but the matter was delicate, and must be delicately managed. It was managed very delicately—in Mrs. Ruggles' opinion.

Mr. Ruggles went to New York—his first visit after his long confinement—and this was Mrs. Ruggles' golden opportunity. She did not often visit the mill now. Time had been when she would go in and weave all day to help her husband along; but she had gradually got above this kind of amusement, socially, and grown too large for it, physically. Occasionally she wandered into the different rooms, when her husband was away, and held long conversations with those whom she knew, and then went away very proudly, her cap-strings, neckerchief points, and a great deal of woollen yarn following her. No sooner was her husband out of sight, and on his way to market beyond the possibility of turning back to look after something which he had forgotten, than the ponderous woman made her appearance before Arthur Blague, who was endeavouring to regulate matters in the store, so that codfish might be made to assume that subordinate position among dry-goods which the nature of the article and good popular usage had designated as legitimate and desirable.

Mrs. Ruggles was very amiable. "Slicking up, eh, Arthur?" said she, with her most amiable and patronizing expression, and looking around upon the shelves in admiration. "I always tell Leonora that I love to see a young man that keeps things slick around him, for, says I to Leonora, a young man that keeps things slick around him, and does not leave hair in his comb, but throws it out of the window, and keeps the dander all off his coat-collar, and scrapes his feet before he comes into the house, always makes a good husband."

"I'm afraid I stand a very poor chance," said Arthur. "You mustn't be so modest," continued Mrs. Ruggles, looking Arthur in the face very encouragingly, and endeavouring to convey a great deal of meaning in her look. "'Now,' says Leonora to me, when I had got through, says she, 'I know who you mean'; says she, 'you are thinking about Arthur Blague.' Dear me, how hot it is in here!" Then Mrs. Ruggles helped herself to a palm leaf fan, and sat down upon a tea-chest that creaked as if it were going straight through the world to the place where it came from.

Arthur had no reply to this talk, and was about to leave her on some plea of necessity, when she said: "I came down to the mill a purpose to ask you to come to supper early to-night, for we are going to have something real good. I want," continued Mrs. Ruggles, "that you should feel yourself to home to our house, because you have always had a mother to look after you, and to provide for you, and, as I tell Leonora, it is my duty to be a mother to you, and to make you feel to home." Mrs. Ruggles looked in Arthur's face with a beaming maternal tenderness that must have won Arthur's heart, if he had trusted himself to look at her.

"Do you love rye flapjacks, Arthur?" inquired the maternal Ruggles, "rye flapjacks, baked in a pile, with the butter and sugar all on?"

Arthur thought he did.

"How much that is like Leonora," resumed the voluble woman. "Says Leonora, says she to me: 'I don't believe but what Arthur Blague loves rye flapjacks, and you shall have some for supper to-night,' says she. 'Arthur shall sit to the head of the table, but you shall cut them up,' says she to me, 'for when you cut them up, your hand is so fat, and the cakes is so fat, that when your knife comes down through, and hits the plate, it sounds good and hearty, like the cluck of a hen.' Says I to Leonora: 'It isn't because my hand is fleshy; it's the eggs; the cluck is in the eggs, my dear.' Oh! you ought to have heard Leonora laugh when I said that. Says Leonora, says she to me: 'Mother, I believe you'll kill me.' How hot you do keep it here!" exclaimed Mrs. Ruggles, wiping her face, "I'm getting real sweaty." Then she rose from the tea-chest, which sprang back with a creak of relief, and giving Arthur a parting injunction to "be to supper in season," she sailed out of his presence and out of the mill with a granueur equal to her gravity.

Arthur did not know what shape the torment of the evening would assume, but he knew very well what its character would be; and he started off to meet the maternal yearnings of Mrs. Ruggles in anything but an amiable frame of mind. On entering the half-kitchen, half-parlour, that served as the Ruggles' dining-room, he found Leonora dressed more elaborately than usual, and wearing upon her tame and tiresome features a sad and injured look that was intended to be very touching.

"You must take your place to the head of the table, Arthur, and preside," said the hearty hostess, overflowing with good-nature and hospitality. She had been pent up within herself so long by the presence of "father," between whom and herself there was no more communion than between the north and south poles, that it was a great treat to be free. Arthur took his seat, and Leonora sat down at his right, but did not bestow upon him a smile—not even a look of gentle patronage.

"Leonora, dear, what makes you so kind of down in the mouth?" inquired the affectionate mother.

"Nothing," replied the young woman, her face inflexibly doleful.

"What ails you dear? Don't you feel well?"

"Feel well enough."

"Well, well, dear, you must chirk up, or you won't enjoy your flapjacks."

"Flapjacks!" exclaimed Leonora, contemptuously, a gust of annoyance escaping from her nostrils, which were always open for the delivery of her miserable emotions.

"I know," said Leonora's mother, sympathetically, "that flapjacks doesn't cure everything."

Arthur could not help smiling at the fancy which sprang in his mind of a very hot flapjack tied over Miss Ruggles' mouth, and another bound upon Miss Ruggles' heart. Miss Ruggles lifted her languid eyes in time to see the smile, and sighed.

"You should remember, dear," suggested the mother, "that you have gentleman's company to-night, and that whatever sufferings you have, you should cover up, so's to make it pleasant. We're making company of Arthur to-night, you know, and you mustn't look on him as a boarder. I've been thinking all the afternoon how pleasant it would be to see you and Arthur eating flapjacks together."

"A good deal Arthur cares for us, I guess," said Miss Ruggles, taking in a large mouthful of the unctuous staple upon her plate.

"Now, my dear, you shall not talk so," declared the mother, emphatically; "it's just like a young girl like you to believe all the stories that's told you. You shan't go down to Crompton again, and get your head full of things to distress you. You see," Mrs. Ruggles explained to Arthur, "Leonora has been down to Crompton village, and she heard all about that Hammett girl's being at your mother's, and she heard that it was you who got her away from father's mill, and what else she heard, I don't know; but she thinks now that you don't think so much of your old friends as you used to. 'Nonsense!' says I to Leonora. 'Do you suppose that Arthur Blague would take up with a poor creature that he don't know nothing about, and that there don't anybody know nothing about? Nonsense,' says I."

"It's very romantic, mother," said Miss Ruggles, whose spirits were improving. "She might be a princess in disguise, you know."

Arthur's "flapjacks" stuck in his throat, and he felt conscious of growing angry. He would not trust himself to speak.

"Leonora," said Mrs. Ruggles in a tone of reprimand, "you are letting your feelings run away with you. Arthur Blague is a sensible young man, and he has feelings; and because he thinks he's called upon to help a poor outcast girl, that hasn't any friends, and is a suspicious character, and wants to take her away from temptations, and give her a chance to get along in the world, it isn't for us who's more favoured to pick flaws with him, or to say: 'Why do ye do so?'"

Human nature, as it existed in Arthur Blague, could stand no more. "Who says that Mary Hammett is a suspicious character?" said he, his eyes burning with anger. "Who dares to breathe a word against her?"

Mrs. Ruggles giggled. "Now you look handsome," said she. "Look at him, Leonora. I never see you when you was mad before. I said to Leonora once, says I: 'Arthur Blague has got it in him, you may depend. Them eyes of his wasn't given to him for nothing,' says I. Have some more flapjacks, won't you? Your cup is out, I declare. Why didn't you pass it? Leonora, you should have seen that Arthur's cup is out, you know my eyes is feeble."

Arthur looked her steadily in the face till she had finished, and then said: "Mrs. Ruggles, the woman of whom you have been speaking is not without friends, and will not want a friend while I live; and I will not sit anywhere quietly and hear her spoken against. A woman's good name is not a thing to be trifled with, especially by a woman; and if you have anything to say against her, I will leave your table."

The maternal brain was puzzled, but the maternal ingenuity was not conquered. "It's a very kind thing in you, Arthur,

to take up for those that ain't in persation to take up for themselves. If there's one thing that I've always stood up for, it's my own seck. I ought to know," continued Mrs. Ruggles, "how easy it is to say things, and how hard it is to prove it; but don't you think that this Hammett girl is—well, I don't mean but what it's all right, you know—but don't you think she is kind of artful? They say Dr. Gilbert is quite took up with her, and that folks think she wouldn't have any objections to being his second wife."

"I say I will not hear Miss Hammett abused," said Arthur, rising from the table in uncontrollable excitement. "She is a noble woman, and no decent man, young or old, can help admiring and respecting her. There is not a woman in Hucklebury Run, or in all Crampton, who is her equal, and if you have anything more to say against her, I will leave the room."

Leonora heard the young man's declaration, and, rising from the table, bounced out of the room. The maternal Ruggles watched her as she retired, with fond and painful solicitude. Then, spreading her handkerchief over her fat palm, she put it to her eyes, and exclaimed: "You've broke her heart; Arthur, you've broke her heart."

"Whose heart?" inquired Arthur.

"Oh! no matter now," sobbed Mrs. Ruggles. "This is the thanks we get for helping poor folks, and making much of them that can't appreciate what's done for them. But the world is full of disappointments. Little did I think, when I took you in, that I was ruining the peace of my own heart's blood."

"What do you mean? What under heaven are you talking about?" said Arthur, excitedly.

"Oh! no matter now! It's too late," continued Mrs. Ruggles, holding her handkerchief over her eyes with one hand, and attending to her nose with the other. "Go on, ruining hopes, and—and—scattering firebrands. It's woman's lot, but I did hope that my own flesh and blood would be spared."

"If you mean to say or intimate," said Arthur, "that I have ever, by thought, word or deed, intended to make your daughter believe that I love her, or wish to marry her, or that she has any legitimate expectation that I shall marry her, you are very much mistaken; for I do not love her, never did love her, and I never will love her."

"Oh! that's always the way, when peace is gone and the heart is broke!" sobbed Mrs. Ruggles.

"Mrs. Ruggles," said Arthur, losing all patience, "I wish you to understand that I consider you and your daughter a pair of fools, and that I always considered you so."

On the announcement of this very decided and uncompromising opinion, the young woman whose heart was broken, and whose peace was ruined reappeared, having so far compromised her determination to retire to her room as to stop upon the opposite side of the dining-room door and listen at the keyhole.

"Pretty talk before ladies, Mr. Arthur Blague, I should think," said Miss Ruggles, resuming her seat at the table.

"These is Crampton manners, I expect, dear," said Mrs. Ruggles, sarcastically, forgetting about her eyes, and dropping her handkerchief in her lap. "Oh, my dear I we've had such an escape—such an escape!"

"I'm sure I wish Miss Hammett much joy," said Miss Ruggles, tartly.

"Help yourself to more flapjacks, dear," urged the mother, "and finish out your supper. We s'posed we had a gentleman to the table, didn't we dear? But we s'posed wrong for once. Some folks is brung up perlitte, and some isn't, and them that isn't we must make allowances for."

Then Leonora giggled, and the mother giggled, and grew amazingly—almost alarmingly—merry. Arthur looked at them in quiet contempt, and rapidly determined upon the course it was best for him to pursue. He knew that he had been hasty, but he could not bring himself to believe that he should not repeat the same indiscretion under the same circumstances.

"I bid you good night," said Arthur, when the laughter of the mother and daughter had subsided sufficiently to allow him to be heard. "I presume it will not be your wish that I remain longer in your house, and I will look out for other lodgings to-night."

"Suit yourself, and you'll suit me," responded the old woman. "The quicker you and your duds are out of this house, the better I shall feel. Young men that takes factory girls out of the mill and keeps them to his home, don't make this house any safer when the head of the family is gone abroad."

The idea of being dangerous society for Mrs. Ruggles and her daughter was so ludicrous to Arthur that he could not help smiling, and turning on his heel, he took his hat, and without more words went to the mill. His first business was to find Cheek, and to reveal to him the necessities of his condition. Cheek scratched his head with great perplexity. "We can feed any quantity of people at the boarding-house, but we can't sleep em," said Cheek. "I sleep," continued he, "with Bob Mullaly, the Irishman, and if I can only get him to take his old hammock under the roof again, you can sleep with me."

This Bob Mullaly was an old sailor, and by no means an unpopular item of the population of Hucklebury Run. He told yarns to the boys, every one of which they believed, and was always trying to deceive himself with the idea that he was on board ship. His mornings he spent in splicing ropes. Sundays he devoted to weaving hammocks, whenever he could provide himself with the necessary twine. Occasionally, a window of the mill directly over the pond would be raised, and out would fly a bucket at a rope's end, which would very certainly go straight into the water, dip itself full, and then Bob Mullaly would haul it in as if he were leaning over a ship's side, and were dipping from the sea. He sang sea-songs in the minor key, and with a very husky voice, a. day while at his work.

"We've been trying to get rid of the old cock this ever so long," said Cheek, "and this is a first-rate chance, because he likes you, and will be glad to do you a good turn."

"Oh! I won't deprive Bob of his bed," said Arthur.

"He might just as well sleep in a hammock," said Cheek,