

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER XIX.—MR. KILGORE RECOVERS HIS HEALTH, AND HIS DAUGHTER RECOVERS SOMETHING BETTER.

When Fanny returned, full of anxiety and curiosity, from her school at noon, she found the family with disturbed and solemn faces, actively engaged in ministering to their unexpected patient. Mary, intensely excited, was busy with such offices for her father as she could perform without entering his presence, though her caution was unnecessary, for he was unconscious. Dr. Gilbert had bled him after his removal to a bed. This had relieved his more urgent symptoms; but there followed long fits of fainting, and these, in turn, had been succeeded by a violent reaction, accompanied by a hot delirium. He raved about his daughter, alternately cursing her for her disobedience, and piteously pleading with her to return to her home. Much of this incoherent language Mary overheard; and it was the cause of a profound revulsion in her feelings. It called back the old love which she once had cherished for her father, and in her sensitive spirit awakened questions as to the propriety of what she had done. How far was she guiltily responsible for this catastrophe? Had she not been selfish? Had she not been hasty? If her father should die, would not the blame of his death be at her charge?

Her father had seemed to her like an iron man—a man without a heart. She had never dreamed that any event could throw him from his balance—that any excitement that he might feel on her account could proceed to such a crisis as that which had prostrated him. As he lay, helpless and moaning, away from home and friends, a fountain of long frozen and pent up tenderness in her heart gushed forth. The hard, imperious defiant father had repulsed not only herself, but her sympathy and affection; the helpless and friendless father melted her.

It was natural, of course, that, in this hour of her darkness and trial, she should call upon Arthur Blague for assistance. Accordingly, all the time he could spare from his business, he spent at the bedside of the patient, ministering to his wants, and controlling him in the more violent demonstrations of his disease.

Days came and went, Fanny still attending to the duties of the schoolmistress, and the latter doing everything which she could do for her father. The fever and the delirium passed away at last, and they threatened to leave him in the arms of death. Through all these weary days and nights, Mary had wept and prayed—wept for the pain she had caused, and prayed for the forgiveness of all that God had seen of wrong in her treatment of her father—prayed that he might recover, and that then, while his hands were weak, and the eye of the world, which he so much regarded, was removed from him, the great Spirit, which moulds and moves the hearts of men, would turn his heart toward her and the man whom her love had made sacred to her.

On the evening when the fever reached its crisis, Dr. Gilbert came down stairs, and taking his seat in the parlour by Mary, told her that the night would probably decide her father's fate. She gathered from the expression of his face and the tone of his voice, that, in his judgment, the event was problematical. Up to this time she had not consented that his New York friends should be made aware of his illness, and she felt that there was another terrible responsibility upon her. She learned that he was lying in entire unconsciousness, his excitement all gone, and his pulse but feebly fluttering with life. Her reserve was laid aside in a moment. She rose to her feet, struggling to control the convulsions of her grief, ascended the stairs, and, for the first time, entered the chamber where her father lay. Arthur was there, endeavouring to compel the patient to swallow a stimulating draught. She quietly took the cup from his hand, and indicated her wish that he should retire. The moment the door was closed, she sank upon her knees, and, pressing her lips to her father's cold and clammy hand, burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

As the first gust of her sorrow subsided, she began to pray. At the beginning, her words were earnest and importunate whispers; but soon her voice, in the stress of her passion, joined in the utterance, and the very walls of the room seemed to listen to, and drink in, the language of her plaint and her petition. She prayed that God, the All-Loving, the All-Merciful, the All-Powerful, would restore her father to health—and then and there He would reveal Himself to succour and to save. She prayed for her own pardon, and for grace to bear the blow, if her father should be taken from her. She prayed that, if the life which was become so precious to her should be spared, out of this great trial and great danger might spring precious fruits of good to her and all who were dear to her. Often pausing, she kissed the hand she held, and exclaimed: "Alas! that I should be the cause of this!"

At length she rose, and placed her hand upon her father's damp brow, and smoothed back the thin white hair upon the temples, and listened to his breathing. Then she sank upon her knees again, and bathed his hand with tears.

Precious ministry of filial love;—bruised and trodden under feet for many long and cruel months, yet still vigorous at the root, and full of perfume in its broken branches! She felt the feeble pulse, and there was a new thrill in it. She looked upon the impassive face, and the pinched, deathly look had passed away. As she gazed, trembling with excitement and hope, it seemed, to her sharpened apprehensions, as if a voice had whispered to her soul: "Your prayer is answered." So real was the assurance that she exclaimed: "My Heavenly Father, I thank Thee!"

As she watched and wept, and kissed the hand which she still held, and gazed in her father's face, she saw tears form beneath the closed lids, and creep down the pale cheeks, and leave their track of healing where she had not seen tears before for many years. She grasped the hand she held with the fervour of her joy, and with such emphasis that it seemed as if an electric thrill had been shot through the sick man's

frame. "Do you know me?" she exclaimed. "Do you know your Mary?"

The feeble lips tried to utter a reply, but the tide of life had not yet risen to them. A gentle return of the pressure which she had maintained upon his hand was his response.

"And do you—can you—forgive me? Tell me so;" and the hand, as it responded, was covered with kisses.

Then came to the excited and grateful daughter another gust of tears. Why does she weep now? Ah! there is another question which she longs to ask! She hesitates. On that question hang the equivalents of life and death to her. She had become aware that behind the veil of weak and powerless flesh before her, there was a spirit whose eyes and ears had been open during all her presence in the chamber. She knew, when those tears slid out upon her father's cheek, from eyes that seemed asleep, that there was a wakeful soul behind them, in calm consciousness all the while. She knew that he had been touched by her presence and her prayers. She felt that somehow God had made her a minister of life to him. She shaped her question. It was brief, and as she breathed it to her earthly father, her thoughts went upward, far above that powerless form, to Him who was feeding the springs of its returning life, with the prayer for favour.

"And him?"

A shadow of pain gathered upon those pale features—a spasm of distress—indicative of the struggle which that little question caused in his feeble mind. Mary watched him with trembling anxiety, condemning herself for putting him to such a trial in such a condition. A tremor passed over his frame, as if he had summoned himself to a great decision. Mary rose suddenly to her feet in alarm, and bent her face close to his. Slowly the long-sealed eyelids opened, and father and daughter gazed into each other's eyes. The struggle was over, and a feeble smile, full of kindness, lighted for a moment the old man's face, and then the eyes closed again.

To this moment of perfect reconciliation with her father, Mary in after years looked back as the happiest in her life. It translated her at once from the realm of doubts and darkness in which she had walked since she left her home, into the realm of her fondest dreams—from realities of the sternest mould into probabilities of life that seemed impossible of realization from the supernal charm with which her loving imagination had invested them. Broad and bright before her opened the pathway of the future. In a moment her heart had travelled over the distance that interposed between her and him to whom for many weary months she had been lost, in anticipation of the meeting which should repay for all anxiety and all suffering. During the rapid passage of thoughts that crowded through her mind, her thanks went upward all the time to Him to whose overruling providence she traced all the blessedness of the moment, as incense rises heavenward from censers swung by unregarding children.

As the smile faded from her father's lips, she stooped and imprinted a kiss upon them, full of tenderness and gratitude, saying: "Father, you will get well, and we shall be happy, very happy again. Now I must write some letters, and you must sleep. I shall sit with you to-night, and no hand but mine shall nurse you hereafter." She then administered the cordial that Arthur had left, and retired from the room.

As she came again into the presence of the family, her countenance beamed as if she had stood upon the Mount of Transfiguration. She shook the doctor's hand in her joy, and kissed Aunt Catharine and Fanny. "O my friends! I am happier than I can tell you. My father's crisis is past—he will get well—and we are friends." All were glad in her happiness, but their sympathy was accompanied by a pang which all experienced alike. That which brought joy to her separated her from them.

Leaving her to write her letters to her New York friends, informing them of the illness of her father and his apparent amendment, we will pass over two or three days, and look in upon one of these friends.

The hours of business were over in Mr. Frank Sargent's modest establishment, and its enterprising proprietor had withdrawn into his little counting room, and shut to the door. For a while, he thought of his business; and there came to him, strangely, thoughts about Miss Fanny Gilbert's novel. It had not succeeded—would not sell. He must write to the doctor, and claim the fulfilment of that gentleman's pledge to share the loss which the publication of the book had occasioned. He thought of the doctor, and tried to imagine the features of his daughter. He could not get them out of his mind. They and the book haunted him. If his thoughts strayed away, or were forced away into other matters, they came back immediately to them.

He tired of this at last, and, unlocking a little drawer at his side, he drew forth a letter that he had read a thousand times before, but one which always gave him an impetus into reveries that drove business out of his mind. He opened and read:

"MY DEAR FRANK,—This night I take one of the most important steps of my life. My father and I have had a long conversation about you, in which he has endeavoured to make me renounce you, and break my pledge to you. I have reasoned with him, besought him, on my knees begged of him to relent, but all to no purpose. He forbids you the house, and commands me to renounce you for ever, or to renounce him. He was very angry, and is implacable. I have taken the alternative he offers me. I shall leave New York to-night. I leave without seeing you, because I fear an interview would shake my determination; but I am yours—yours now, and yours for ever. I shall go where you will not find me, and, if you love me—ah! Frank, I know you do—you will make no search for me. I shall not write to you, because money will buy the interception and miscarriage of letters, but I shall think of you, and pray for you every day, nay, all the time.

"This may seem strange and unwarrantable to you, but, Frank, be true to me, go into the work of life, and demonstrate to my father and the world the manhood there is in you; and God will take care of the rest. I go, trusting in that Providence which never forsakes the trusting—with a firm faith that out of this great trial will spring the choicest

blessings of our lives. Have no fears for me. If any great trial befall me, you shall know it; and when the time shall come for the realization of our wishes and the redemption of our pledges it will declare itself. Never doubt me. I cannot be untrue to you. Remember that I leave my home for you. We may not marry now. You are not ready for marriage.

"Forgive my seeming coolness, for my heart is bleeding for you. Do not be unhappy. Cast your care upon Him who cares for you. God bless you, Frank, and keep you!"

"Your own, MARY."

The closing words of this letter he read, and read again. The abrupt sentences and the marks of tears, not yet obliterated, showed in what a passion of tenderness they were written. Nearly three years had passed away since that letter was received, and its words were the last he had seen from her hand. Where on the earth's face she wandered or sojourned, he knew not. Whether she were still in the land of the living, he knew not. It had cost him the daily exercise of all his faith in her and in God to maintain his courage and equanimity. Her father had visited him in anger, demanding the hiding-place of his daughter; and when he had stated the substance of this letter, and the fact that he absolutely knew nothing of her, he was told that he lied.

The letter lingered in his hands. It was indued with a new charm. There was a strange vitality in its utterances that took hold of his heart with a fresh power. As he sat regarding it, it seemed as if the spirit of Mary was at his side, looking over his shoulder. In the twilight, he hardly dared to stir; and a superstitious fear crept over him—a fear that his Mary was indeed dead, and was present with him in a form which he could not see.

He was startled from these imaginations at last by the entrance of his errand-boy, with a package of letters from the post-office. The first upon which he laid his hand had upon it the post-mark, "Crampton, N. H." The hand was the same that he had been perusing. He opened it and read:

"DEAR FRANK,—Come!

MARY." He sprang to his feet transformed. The listlessness was gone, and every nerve in his frame thrilled with excitement. The night-boat had left, and, though impatient beyond expression, he was obliged to wait until morning before setting out. In the meantime he had a world of business to attend to. He sent for his principal clerk, told him that he should be absent for several days—how long he could not tell—and gave him all the necessary directions for carrying on the business. He replied to his letters, laid out work for his clerks, and in three hours had transacted more business than an ordinary man would have done in as many days. He looked forward and provided for the payment of his notes; and, arranging for the daily interchange of letters between himself and his establishment, retired to his boarding house to prepare for his journey.

Now that we are to see more of Mr. Frank Sargent, we should know more about him. It will be seen readily enough that he was not a great man. Why did so good and so noble a woman love him? Simply because he was true, and had life in him. Wherever he went, there went gladness and vivacity. Frank Sargent was always wide awake. He only needed the presence of half a dozen people to stimulate him into the most delightful drolleries. People loved to hear him talk, whether he uttered sense or nonsense. He could sit down by the side of an old woman and charm her with his tide of small talk, or frolic with a band of merry children, until his coat tails were in danger. He was a great man in small parties, an indispensable man at picnics, the superintendent of a Sabbath school, a "bloody Whig" in politics as he delighted to call himself, and the most zealous and earnest of his circle in a revival of religion. He was a man who stirred up every circle he entered, and was welcome everywhere except at the house of the elder Kilgore.

The reader has already learned incidentally that he had been a clerk in the house of the Kilgore Brothers. In this house he had made himself very popular, both at home and away, for he had travelled for the house quite extensively. The old man had once greatly delighted in Frank Sargent. When he came back from his long trips, it was the highest entertainment the elder Kilgore had at his command, to invite Frank home to dine with him, and hear him relate his adventures by the way, and tell of his ingenious methods for entrapping "lame ducks," a kind of game which the house, in its large and widely extended operations, had a good deal to do with. Many were the hours which the vivacious traveller helped Mr. Kilgore to pass pleasantly away, and great was Mr. Kilgore's admiration of, and confidence in him. Fertile, volatile, voluble, with a great capacity for business, a thorough devotion to the interests of his employer, and a sense of Christian honour which always manifested itself as the basis of his character, he was, indeed, no mean companion for an old man like Mr. Kilgore.

Still, Mr. Kilgore always regarded him as an inferior—a man to be patronized and encouraged, particularly so long as he was an efficient minister to the prosperity of the house, and aided in the digestion of a good dinner. Frank Sargent knew the old man, and humoured him by always "keeping his place"—going no further than he was led. This, Mr. Kilgore appreciated; and he regarded the young man with great complacency. Of course, when the clerk visited Mr. Kilgore's house, he met Mr. Kilgore's daughter; but Mr. Kilgore's estimate of his own position and that of his family, and his confidence in Frank Sargent as a young man who knew his place, forbade the suspicion that between the young people there could be more than a common interchange of politeness. In fact, he had, on more than one occasion, apologized to his daughter for bringing Mr. Frank Sargent home with him.

After Mr. Kilgore had finished his heavy dinner, and had become too dull to listen to the conversation of his talkative clerk, the young man felt at liberty to devote himself to the daughter, and she, in turn, felt bound to entertain him. We are not aware that there is any philosophy that will satisfactorily account for two people, totally unlike, falling in love with each other. It is a matter of every-day occurrence, as all know. At any rate, Frank Sargent and Mary Kilgore met but a few times in friendly intercourse, before, by steps