

## Choice Literature.

### MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER VII.—IN WHICH THE CENTRE SCHOOL OF CRAMPTON IS HANDSOMELY PROVIDED FOR.

Arthur divulged his new plan to his mother, kindly bore with her scruples, or very kindly bore them down, and quite inspired her, for the moment, with his own overflowing enthusiasm. That was the initial step in the business; the next was to see Dr. Gilbert.

So he left the mill early one evening for the purpose of making the visit. He rang the bell at the physician's dwelling, and was invited into the parlour. Aunt Catharine was rocking herself very slowly, and knitting very fast, showing thereby a peaceful condition of mind, and, on the whole, a pleasant state of things in the family. Fanny, looking weary and sleepy, was reading a novel. Little Fred sat at his sister's side, his head in her lap, asleep.

Aunt Catharine, who indulged in a great admiration of Arthur, greeted him as if he had been a favourite nephew; and Fanny's face lost its weary look entirely. The doctor, whom Arthur inquired for, was not at home, but was expected every moment.

"How is your mother to-night?" inquired Aunt Catharine, in her crisp way, her needles snapping as if they were letting off sparks of electricity.

"She is as well as usual," replied Arthur, "but you know how it is with her."

"Miserable, I suppose, of course," said Aunt Catharine. "She always is miserable, and I presume she always will be, and it's a blessed thing that it is so. I sometimes think that she is so used to misery that happiness would shock her. I've seen a good deal of her this winter, and it's my candid opinion that misery, if she has a good chance to talk about it, is the only solid comfort she has. I think it would seem so unnatural for her to be comfortable that it would make her—"

"Miserable," suggested Fanny; and the young woman laughed at her aunt's philosophy.

"It's just so," pursued Aunt Catharine, "and you mark my word, Arthur, your mother will live to be an old woman."

"I'm quite delighted," said Arthur.

"As for me, trouble kills me," resumed Aunt Catharine. "Oh, if I could only wilt down like your mother when trouble comes, and get so used to it as not to expect anything better, I could get along; but dear me! I've no doubt that some day will bring along a great tribulation that will break my life off as short as a pipe-stem."

This was altogether the most cheerful view of his mother's case that Arthur had ever seen presented. It was not offensive to him, because he knew that it came from a sympathetic and friendly heart as Crampton contained.

"How have you enjoyed being in Mr. Ruggles' family this winter?" inquired Fanny, archly.

Arthur, poor simpleton, did not know how much there was in this inquiry: so he replied that he had "enjoyed it as well as was possible, under the circumstances"—a very safe and comprehensive answer, that might mean much or little, in either direction.

"Miss Ruggles, I understand, is quite accomplished," said Fanny.

"Is she?"

"Is she, indeed! Is it possible you have been three months in the family, and her mother hasn't told you?"

There was a delicious bit of malice and jealousy in this that would have excited any man but one who was wholly pre-occupied; so, while she hit appeared admirable, he did not understand his own relations to it.

"I've been told she was very expensively educated," pursued Fanny, "really now!"

"So have I."

"You're a sweet pair of slanderers, upon my word," exclaimed Aunt Catharine.

"At least," said Fanny, "she must present a very strong contrast to her father and mother."

"I think she does, very," responded Arthur.

"Oh, you do! I presumed so." Fanny nodded her head and smiled very shrewdly, as if her suspicions were fully confirmed. "Perhaps," she continued, "you will tell Aunt Catharine and me some of the precious particulars of this contrast."

"I should say," replied Arthur, "that her father was not lazy, and that her mother was not extravagant."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Aunt Catharine again. "Arthur Blague, apologize to me this instant for slandering one of my own sex."

"It's the old story," replied Arthur. "The woman tempted me, and I did eat."

"And who tempted the woman, pray?" said Fanny.

"A little serpent with very green eyes," responded Aunt Catharine.

"Aunt Catharine! Aren't you ashamed?" Fanny was vexed, and blushed charmingly.

"Arthur has a right to be just as much pleased with Miss Leonora as he chooses to be, my dear," said Aunt Catharine, in her spier way. "I confess that I do not see what right you have to question him."

"Of course he has," responded Fanny. "I hope you don't imagine that I have any fault to find with any fondness he may have for her."

"Oh! not the least, my dear," Aunt Catharine responded, thoroughly enjoying Fanny's poorly-disguised annoyance; "girls are so generous toward each other!"

Fanny was delighted to hear her father's footsteps at the door, and to have a change in the current of conversation. Dr. Gilbert came into the parlour, greeted Arthur with bluff heartiness, and then, with whip in hand and buffalo coat still unbuttoned, inquired if there had been any calls for him. There had been none. The coat was thrown open, and the doctor sat down before the fire and warmed himself.

There was something in the conversation which preceded his advent that made Arthur shrink from presenting his

rand in the presence of the family; but it seemed quite as hard to ask him for a private audience as to state his wishes in the hearing of Aunt Catharine and Fanny. He felt half guilty, and he knew not of what. His heart beat thickly, and his hands and feet grew cold.

"Well, Arthur," said Dr. Gilbert, still looking into the fire. "How do you and Ruggles get along together?"

"Pretty well," replied Arthur.

"Glad to hear it. The old fellow is not quite so bad as he is represented to be—is he, now?"

"Possibly not, though to tell the truth, he is quite as agreeable to me when he is disagreeable, as he is when agreeable."

"Father, you don't know how absurd these people are to-night," said Fanny, glad to find her tongue again. "Aunt says that Mrs. Blague is never so happy as when she is miserable, and Arthur thinks that Mr. Ruggles is never so agreeable as when he is disagreeable."

"And Fanny has been anxiously inquiring of Arthur about a girl for whom she does not care a straw," responded Aunt Catharine. "Very absurd, indeed!"

Arthur laughed feebly with the rest, but felt desperately pushed to business. Dr. Gilbert removed his overcoat, and hung it with his whip in the hall, and the young man renewed the conversation with "Speaking of Mr. Ruggles—he wishes very much to have me give up boarding at home, and to become more thoroughly a fixture of his establishment. I have so much to do for him that it really seems necessary to be there all the time, and the walking, you know, is very bad now."

"Who is to take care of your mother?" inquired the doctor.

"That is precisely the question which brought me here to-night. I wish to get your advice, and possibly your help."

"What are your plans? Have you any plans?"

The young man fidgeted. He knew Fanny's eyes were upon him, and was half afraid that they read everything that was in his heart.

"Anything definite to propose?" And the doctor wheeled about, and looked him in the face.

"I understand," said Arthur, very clumsily, "that—that the, ah—centre school is soon to be without a teacher."

"Another sad case of matrimony," said Fanny aside to her aunt.

"Yes, there'll be a vacancy at the centre in a week," replied the doctor.

"You are the prudential—prudential—"

"Prudential committee," slipped in the doctor in a hurry. "Of course I am, and have been these twenty years."

"Have you secured anybody to fill the vacancy?" inquired Arthur.

"No, I suppose not," replied the doctor, half spitefully.

"I should be glad to have Fanny take the school, but she is engaged in something that suits her better, I suppose."

"Oh! of course, I haven't anything to say if Fanny wants the school," said Arthur, bowing to the young woman, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that she would take it, and relieve him of his embarrassment at once.

"Father knows that I will never willingly take the school," responded Fanny, her face grown hard with determination.

"I was thinking," said Arthur, trying to assume a business tone, "that perhaps you would be willing to engage some one who would board with my mother, and be society for her in my absence."

Fanny was mystified, but eager. Her quick insight had detected a secret motive in Arthur's strange embarrassment that shaped his policy quite as powerfully as his wish to provide for his mother's comfort.

"Do you know of a teacher whom your mother would like to have in her family?" inquired the doctor.

"She would take any one whom I would recommend," replied Arthur, evasively.

"Then I take it you have some one in mind whom you can recommend," responded the doctor. "Tell us who she is."

"There's a young woman at the Run," replied Arthur, his face glowing with the consciousness that the eyes of Aunt Catharine and Fanny were upon him, "who, I think, would make an excellent teacher of the school, and a very pleasant companion for my mother."

"At the Run? How came she at the Run?"

"I never inquired," Arthur replied.

"Does she work in the mill?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you know about her?" inquired the doctor.

"I know very little," replied the young man, getting hot in the face. "I know she is a lady, that she seems very different from the other girls, that she associates with them but little, that she is intelligent, and that she ought to be somewhere else."

"But where did she come from?"

"I don't know, sir."

"How old is she?"

"She is not old; that is all I know about her age."

"What is her name?"

"Mary Hammett."

"Mary Hammett—Mary Hammett." The doctor pronounced the name two or three times to see if it would recall the face of any one, dead or living, whom he had known. "Mary Hammett. What makes you think she is intelligent?"

"She looks and talks as if she were."

"Does she desire the place?"

"I'm sure I—I don't know," replied Arthur. "I never have spoken to her about it. I should think she would like it very much."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the doctor. "I like this, Arthur, it's excellent." And the doctor laughed again. Then Arthur laughed, though he did not know exactly what he was laughing about; and Aunt Catharine and Fanny laughed, because the doctor and Arthur laughed; and little Fred awoke from his nap, because they all laughed.

"I think Miss Mary-Hammett had better be consulted on the subject before we dispose of her," said the doctor.

"That is precisely what I came to ask you to do," replied Arthur.

"Well, I'll do it. I'll do it to-morrow," said Dr. Gilbert. "I'm quite anxious to see this marvel."

"Now you shall tell us all about her," said Fanny, speaking with that cordial sweetness which a young woman, just a little jealous, can assume when she tries very hard. "Is she beautiful?"

"I think so. She seems so," replied Arthur.

"Hum! seems so! Feeling as you do toward her, she seems so! You are not entirely certain whether she be so or not. Seems so!" (Turning to the doctor, and attempting to laugh.) "Father, this is a dangerous case. Treat it very carefully."

"The green-eyed serpent again," said Aunt Catharine.

"Aunt, you are insufferable. I really feel very much interested in Miss Hammett already. It's quite a romance."

Arthur was embarrassed, and felt very uncomfortable. He called little Fred to him, and took him upon his knee. The little fellow had always been a favourite with Arthur, and had been famous for asking "leading questions." Some further conversation was had; when Fred looked up in Arthur's face and said: "Do you love Miss Hammett better than you do sister Fanny?"

This terminated the conference, and in the midst of much merriment, Arthur rose to take his leave. Aunt Catharine lifted her forefinger to him, and said, in her good-natured, emphatic way: "Arthur Blague, don't you think of getting married before you are thirty—not a day; don't you dream of such a thing!"

When Arthur had retired, and closed the door after him self, Fanny said to her brother: "Why, Fred, don't you know that it is very improper indeed for you to ask such a question of Arthur Blague?"

"I thought you acted as if you wanted to know," replied the boy, "and I wasn't afraid to ask him. He always tells me."

"Well, I think you had better go to bed. You are a very dangerous young man."

"Don't be afraid, Fanny, I won't hurt you," responded Fred.

Dr. Gilbert was thinking, and drumming with his fingers upon the arms of his chair. "How fortunate it would be," said the doctor, "if Miss Hammett should prove to be a good teacher for our little boy here; and he thought on, and drummed till the little boy went to bed."

When Arthur went to his room that night, he felt that he had done a very unwarrantable thing. What would Miss Hammett think of him for daring to propose such a step before consulting her? What was he—what was his mother—that they should presume to dream that so angelic a being as Mary Hammett would deem it a privilege to find a lodging under their humble roof? She would refuse, of course, and that would be the last of his intercourse with her. She would detect all his motives—read the mean record of his selfishness—and despise him for a desire to entrap her.

The purer and the more exalted a young lover's love may be, the more unworthy and insignificant does he become in his own self-estimation. His ideal becomes, with the growth of his passion, a finer ideal, until he stands mean and poor and contemptible in the presence of perfections which his own sublimated imagination has builded. This is one of love's sweet mysteries, and if Arthur did not comprehend it, it must be remembered that he was hardly nineteen, and that he was in love with a woman some years his senior.

He dreamed of Mary Hammett and Dr. Gilbert all night, and awoke at last in the height of a personal altercation with that gentleman, resulting from the doctor's treacherous attempt to secure the consent of the young woman to take the place of Mrs. Dr. Gilbert, deceased.

When it is remembered that up to this time Arthur Blague had never exchanged a word with Miss Hammett upon the subject of his passion; that their interviews had always been brief, hardly extending, in any instance, beyond the simplest and most commonplace courtesies, it will be understood that he got along very fast, and was a great distance in advance of the young woman herself. In truth, she had not the remotest suspicion of the condition of his heart. She understood, respected, nay, admired, his character, and whenever she had mentioned him, she had very freely and frankly praised him, and this was all.

According to his promise, Dr. Gilbert drove to Hucklebury Run the next day. Alighting at the boarding-house, he sent to the mill for Mary Hammett, and was soon in a very interesting conference with her. Half an hour—three quarters—a whole hour—passed away, and still her looks did not start. Old Ruggles, hobbling feebly about, was in a fidget at the end of the first half hour, and in a fever at the end of the second. Arthur saw the little gig standing outside, knew what business was in progress, and cursed his temerity a hundred times within the hour.

At length a messenger came into the mill from the boarding-house, and said that Dr. Gilbert wished to see Arthur Blague. Old Ruggles, even more irritable and exacting than before his sickness, was enraged. He would "teach Dr. Gilbert to let his hands alone"; and that was what "came of having help that had high notions." He did not undertake to interfere with Arthur's immediate response to the doctor's summons, however, for he could not afford to offend him now; but he laid up a grudge against the doctor which he never forgot.

Arthur entered the boarding-house with great trepidation, and found the doctor cosily cornered with Miss Hammett in the large dining hall, and talking as easily with her as if he had known her from childhood. His self-possession in the presence of such divinity was something entirely beyond Arthur's comprehension. The young woman rose as Arthur entered, gave him a pleasant greeting, and pointed him to a chair with as much quiet ease as if she were the accustomed queen of a drawing-room, and were receiving her friends. Arthur returned her greeting with rather an unnatural degree of warmth, the doctor thought; and then the latter said: "We are getting along pretty well, but Miss Hammett declines to close any bargain with me unless you are present."

"You have been kind enough," said Miss Hammett to