

Choice Literature.

MISS GILBERT'S CAREER.

CHAPTER XXI.—BEING A BRIDGE LONGER THAN THE VICTORIA, AND HAVING ONLY TEN PIERS.

Often, as we move through an interesting landscape, crowded with cypres and rock and forest, and crossed by streams and strips of pasture and till, we catch a glimpse of some green hill in the far distance, and forget the beauty which throngs the passage, in our desire to reach the eminence that overlooks it, and the world of beauty in which it lies. We long to drink, at a single draught, the nectar that hangs on bush and rock, and vine and tree—to embrace in one emotion the effect of that exquisite combination of light and shade, of green and gray, of hill and vale, of stone and stream, that go to form a completed landscape. We tire with details; we seek for results.

As in landscapes, so in stories—we come to points, sometimes when we long to overlook the incidents of the life through which we move, and, planting ourselves upon some sun-crowned year that rises in the distance, survey at a glance the path we have trod. We are in haste for events, and do not care to watch the machinery by which they are evolved.

Precisely at this point has this story now arrived; and in this brief chapter we propose to take a stand upon a green hill-top ten years away, and thence look back upon the life whose characteristics and whose issues have interested us so deeply.

We take the ten-years' flight, and here we are. How easy the imaginary passage, and how soft and bright the landscape, as we turn to gaze upon it! Yet these years have been crowded to their brims, every one, with change, and their contents poured upon the world!

This is Crampton! Would you know it? Ten years have revolutionized it. Within that time, a track of iron has been laid along its border, over which the engine drags its ponderous burdens. Even now, the whistle sounds, and the people, a new and peculiar people—rush to catch the daily papers. Where once stood the little hotel, so distinguishing a feature of the social life of the village, stands now a large brick structure, with a flag run up from its observatory, and a Chinese gong in the hall. Ten years ago, Crampton had but one church; now it has five. The railroad has introduced "the foreign element"; and there is a new structure, with a cross upon the top, as the result. The Methodists and Baptists and Episcopalians have all built churches, for which they are very deeply in debt, and for which "children yet unborn" will be obliged to pay. There are new streets cut in all directions, and there is a flaming row of stores, which financial ruin is imminent, if we may judge by the placards in the windows. One is "selling off to close the concern"; one is "selling off at less than cost"; one advertises "goods to be given away"; and another, after denouncing all its competitors as "slow," declares its determination to undersell them to such a degree as to drive them from the place, the whole of them being, even now, on the verge of suicidal despair.

The smart and smiling young men behind the counters are evidently not fully aware of the fate that awaits them, but that only makes the matter worse.

Hucklebury Run has not been allowed to lie in ruins, but has passed into the hands of a Boston company, and many of the old operatives are back in the old place—the old place made new and comfortable. The widow Ruggles still resides in her little cottage, in the enjoyment of the income from her bank stock, which has been considerably increased by the amount saved from the wreck of the old proprietor's fortune. The enterprising woman has failed in her persistent efforts to secure a man to take the place of her departed "partner," but is by no means discouraged.

Dr. Gilbert and Aunt Catharine are greatly changed. The little black pony died years ago, and the old gig passed out of sight with him. The rheumatism has dealt harshly with the old doctor, but has not so severely injured his feelings as the young physicians, assisted by certain homoeopaths and eclectics, and Thompsonians, and Indian doctors, who cut his practice in a great many pieces, and vex his righteous soul by their innovations. Still he stumps about upon his farm; but his hair is gray, and he carries a cane, not as a matter of habit, but of necessity. He has fought against his calamities bravely, and the children will tell you where he has cut a hole in the ice in the winter, for the bath by which he has tried to rouse his failing constitution into new vigour. As his strength has declined, and his business died away, he has turned his thoughts more and more upon his children, and particularly upon his boy Fred, now a young man and in college. To see him shine as the leader of his class, and the star of his pride, is now his great ambition. Through all his boyhood and young manhood, he has pushed this favourite child to the most exhausting effort, and finds his exceeding great reward in a degree of press that secures the enthusiastic praise of the college faculty. The letters which he receives from the college, he exhibits to his old friends and neighbours, on all occasions, for he carries them in his pocket all the time.

Big Joslyn has become quite bald, and there is no longer any hair to braid upon his temples. His children are grown up around him. One or two are away at school. Others are in the employ of the railroad company. Others still are gone to work upon farms, where they are to remain until twenty-one. Mr. Joslyn himself tends the switches at the Crampton station, and, in his movements among the rails, takes good care never to waken a sleeping locomotive; always rising to his toes at the "sh-h-h" of the hissing steam. Mrs. Joslyn has become a smart and well-dressed woman, and takes care of a snug little house which is the envy of her neighbours. The family generally has been getting thrifty in the world. Mr. Joslyn's wages have improved, the children are earning more than the cost of their living, and a pair of genteel warders occupy a suite of rooms in the modest dwelling. These latter are none other than

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lampson. Mr. Lampson carries a gold watch, with a gold chain, wears upon his bosom a diamond pin, and ornaments the third finger of his left hand with an immense seal-ring. Mr. Lampson is "the popular and gentlemanly conductor of the Crampton and Londonderry Railroad," and was once familiarly known to the reader as "Cheek." Before the dawn of this gentleman's popularity, and importance, the old sobriquet has gradually faded out. The president and superintendent of the road call him "Tom," but few approach him with so much familiarity. Everybody likes him, and everybody admits his claim to the possession of the handsomest wife "on the road." Mrs. Lampson has "ripened" according to his expectations. She is now twenty-five, has been married only two years, and is learning to play upon the piano. She always goes out to the platform when the train comes in, and the passengers ask Mr. Lampson who she is; and he takes a great deal of pride in informing them indefinitely, but very significantly, that she belongs to a man "about his size."

In that neat little dwelling across the common still reside Mrs. Blague and her two sons, Arthur and Jamie. We hesitate to unveil the changes that have occurred there. The widow has become a shadow even of her former self. She takes a degree of pride in Arthur, but leans upon him like a child. His will is her law, and she knows no other—desires to know no other. Ten years of pain and anxiety and watching have broken her to the earth, though they have strengthened and purified her manly son. The sprightly child that sprang from the window when we last saw him, has, by that accident, become a helpless and emaciated creature, without the power to speak a word or move a limb. The neighbours as they pass the door hear the sound of gurgling, painful breathing—hear it at any time in the day, and at any time in the night—hear Arthur's words of cheer and endearment—and they sigh, and say: "Poor boy! Noble man!" But none go in to see the poor boy and help the noble man. The noble man does not wish it, and they shrink from the pain which their sympathy would excite.

Still subordinate, still nursing, still doing woman's work! Still the life of Arthur Blague is devoted to the weak and the suffering. His mates have won their early honours, established themselves in their callings and professions, married their wives, and still he lingers behind, bound by the ties of nature and Christian duty to those he loves. Yet on the basis of this self-sacrifice he has been building, almost unconsciously, a character so sound, so sweet, so symmetrical, that every one who knows him regards him with a tender respect that verges upon veneration. Days and weeks and months and years has he spent with the invalid brother on his knee, and a book in his hand. He has seen no college; but he is educated. He has had no discipline, according to the formularies of the schools; but he has a mind which, slowly compacted in its powers, and trained to labour, by necessity, amid a thousand distractions, is the marvel of all who come into contact with him. The years as they have passed over him have added to his growth. Patiently doing his daily duty, and accomplishing his daily work, he has left results in the hand of his Master, and waited for the mission toward which he has felt for many years that his discipline was leading him.

Since first, under the influence of the good angel whom Providence brought into his mother's dwelling, he devoted himself to Heaven, he has entertained the desire to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the noblest and most glorious function of a consecrated human life. This desire shaped itself as time passed on into determination, and determination was merged at length into definite project. He has seen no theological school; he has won no laurels; he has embraced no system. With him, Christianity is a life. It has grown up in him, it has possessed him. In daily study of the Bible, and daily contact with human want, as seen in his own life and in the life around him, he has learned the secret of religion, and the power of the sacred office he has chosen. He has learned that the power of preaching resides not in the defence of creeds and the maintenance of dogmas, but in the presentation of motives to purity and truth and self-abnegation. He has learned that the office of Christianity is to import divine life into human life; and as a minister of Christianity, he has learned that sympathy with the suffering, and service for the weak, and knowledge and love of the common human life that surrounds him, place him where he can deal out the Bread of Life as it is needed, to hearts that recognize his credentials. With a heart full of charity, and with sympathies that embrace all the forms of humanity around him—sympathies won by participation in their trials—every word that falls from his lips bears the stamp of sincerity, and is redolent of the true life of which it is the issue.

Already is Arthur Blague licensed to preach. Already has he preached in Crampton. Already is he talked about in vacant parishes, as the most promising man of the region. But he still lingers at home. His work is not done there yet; and his first duty is for those who are in his care. The feeble mother is to be supported, and the poor misshapen brother is to be attended to. Day and night he watches, yet when he walks abroad, the smile of a heart at peace with itself, with God and with the world, sits upon his countenance. Up through contumely and suffering and disappointment, this vigorous life has pushed its way, and they have fallen to its feet and fed its growth; and henceforth there is nothing in contumely and suffering and disappointment to do it harm. Whatever of base material this life touches it transforms into nutriment, and assimilates to the elements of its own vitality.

If we look in upon a New York household, situated in the most opulent and fashionable quarter of the city, we shall find in the brown-stone dwelling of Mr. Kilgore not only Mr. Frank Sargent and his wife, but three beautiful children, who cling to their grandfather's knee, or engage in rare frolics with their still boyish father; while the sweet mother, to whom maternity and a satisfied love have only added a broader, deeper and tenderer charm, looks on and smiles in her old delightful way. Nominally, Mr. Kilgore is still at the head of his business. He has the seat of honour in

the counting-room, and to him, in terms of respect, Mr. Frank Sargent, who is his partner as well as his son, always appeals! and Mr. Kilgore imagines that he manages every thing as in the old times, when he tells his son to do just as he thinks best. He walks back and forth to his place of business, when he does not ride, leaning upon Frank Sargent's arm. Not a word about the past has ever been exchanged between them; but gradually, by respectful assiduity, has the young man won upon the old man, until he has become the very staff of his life. The new blood introduced into the firm has increased its business, and all are very prosperous.

In a little recess, apart from these, sits a queenly young woman with a pile of newspapers and periodicals in her lap—Miss Fanny Gilbert—whom ten years have lifted into the grand beauty and maturity of twenty-seven. The broad plaits of dark hair sweep back from her brow, and her full form is rich with the blood of womanhood. She sees nothing of the pleasant family group upon which the young mother is gazing so happily and contentedly. She does not hear the voices of the children; for before her lie the critiques upon her last book, which, in memory of her publisher's old suggestion, she has entitled "Rhododendron." She has mingled with life. She has patiently waited until, in the strength of her powers, she has felt competent to make the trial which should decide her fate as an authoress. She has tried, and has abundantly and gloriously succeeded. She takes up one paper after another, and all are crowded with praise. Beauties are indicated that she has not even suspected. Quotations are made, which, in the light of popular appreciation, glow with new meaning to her. Her long-thirsting heart is surfeited with praise. She is famous—she is a notoriety. She knows that in twenty thousand homes "Rhododendron" is passed impatiently from hand to hand, and that in twenty thousand circles her name is spoken. Every mail brings in applications for her autograph. Parties are made by lion-lovers, where she may be exhibited. She is gazed at in church; she is pointed at in the street; clerks whisper her name to one another whenever she enters a shop; her name and praise are the current change of social life.

Miss Fanny Gilbert gathers her papers and pamphlets in her hand with a sigh; and, bidding the family group a good evening, ascends to her chamber. She throws open the blinds of her window, and looks out upon the street. Carriages with happy freights of men and women are rolling homeward from their twilight drives. Lovers are loitering arm in arm along the sidewalks. She looks abroad over the city, and thinks that in multitudes of dwellings "Rhododendron" is being read—that thousands are speaking her name with praise, and that no one of all those thousands loves her. She feels, in her innermost consciousness, that she has drunk every sweet that popular praise can give her—honest, high-flavoured, redundant praise—yet her heart yearns toward some unattainable good—yearns, and is unsatisfied. The fruit, that shone like gold high up upon the boughs, is plucked at last, but it turns to ashes upon her tongue.

She looks back upon the last ten years of her life, and traces in memory the outlines of her career. She has moved in fashionable circles; has been courted and admired as a brilliant woman; she has clung to the home of her New York friends, and been rather a visitor than a resident of her own; she has sought for admiration, and, with it, has won the ill-will of her own sex; she has imperiously compelled the attentions of men who were afraid of her; she has been received as a belle in gay saloons, and won a multitude of heartless conquests; yet, in all this time, among all favouring circumstances, no honest man has come to her with a modest confession of love, and a manly offer of his hand.

As she thinks of all this, and of the sorry results that attend the perfect triumph of her plans, there come back to her words spoken by Mary Kilgore years and years ago—"Miss Gilbert, the time will come when even one soul will be more than all the world to you—when you would give all the praises of the world's thousand millions—when you would give the sun, moon and stars, if they were yours, to monopolize the admiration, the love and the praise of one man." Then she thinks of those further words—"The great world is fickle, and must be so. It lifts its idols to their pedestals, and worships them for an hour; then kicks them off, and grinds them into ruin, that other and fresher objects of worship may take their places." She sees herself the idol of the hour, and feels in her sad and sickening soul that in a year her name will begin to vanish from the public mind, and another name will be uppermost. The prize so long toiled for and waited for not only fails to content her now, but melts away, even in her hands, and passes to others.

Never in her life has Fanny Gilbert felt so lonely as now. The triumph of her life is the great defeat of her life. She has achieved all she has laboured for, and gained nothing that she really desired. She looks forward and her life is a blank. How can it be filled? What shall she labour for hereafter? Is her life to be a waste? Is this longing for some satisfying good for ever to remain unrealized? Ah! how the gray, fixed eyes grow soft and blue once more! How the woman's nature, kept so long in abeyance, asserts itself! How ambition fades away, and love of freedom dies in the desire for bondage, and self-sufficient independence longs to lean upon, and hide its head, in some great nature! She begins to comprehend the magnitude of a manly soul, and the worth of a permanent, never-dying affection that survives all changes, and blossoms sweetest when the fickle world frowns darkest. She gets a glimpse of that world of the affections in which one heart outgrows a world and outweighs a universe.

The newspapers and reviews fall from her hands. They have ceased, for the time at least, to be of value. She descends the stairs again, and, in her altered mood, the queenly Fanny seats herself upon a bench by the side of Mary, and lays her head upon her lap. She comes back to her whose life has been a daily lesson of satisfied love and Christian duty. The children have gone to bed. Mr. Kilgore has retired to his room, and Mr. Frank Sargent is out