

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

STORY WITH A MORAL FOR SOCIAL THEORISTS TO ACT UPON.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THRICE HAPPY BOY.

A man of the world at forty-five seldom feels surprised at anything, unless indeed, like Moliere, he encounters virtue in unexpected quarters. This, however, was a thing so extraordinary that Lord Jocelyn gasped.

'Pardon me, Miss Messenger,' he said, recovering himself. 'I was so totally unprepared for this—this discovery.'

'Now that you have made it, Lord Jocelyn, may I ask you most earnestly to reveal it to no one? I mean to no one at all.'

'I understand perfectly. Yes, Miss Messenger, I will keep your secret. Since it is a secret, I will tell it to none. But I would ask a favor in return, if I may.'

'What is that?'

'Take me further into your confidence. Let me know why you have done this most wonderful thing. I hope I am not impertinent in asking this of you.'

'Not impertinent, certainly. And the thing must seem strange to you. And after what you told me some time ago, about—she hesitated a moment, and then turned her clear brown eyes straight upon his face, 'about your ward, perhaps an explanation is due to you.'

'Thank you, beforehand.'

'First, however, call me Miss Kennedy here; pray—pray, do not forget that there is no Miss Messenger nearer than Portman Square.'

'I will try to remember.'

'I came here,' she went on, 'last July, having a certain problem in my mind. I have remained here ever since, working at that problem. It is not nearly worked out yet, nor do I think that in the longest life it could be worked out. It is a most wonderful problem, for one thing leads to another, and great schemes rise out of small, and there are hundreds of plans springing out of one—if I could only carry them out.'

'To assist you in carrying them out, you have secured the services of my ward, I learn.'

'Yes; he has been very good to me.'

'I have never,' said Lord Jocelyn, 'been greatly tempted in the direction of philanthropy. But, pray go on.'

'The first thing I came to establish was an association of dress-makers, myself being one. That is very simple. I have started them with a house free of rent and the necessary furniture—which I know is wrong, because it introduces an unfair advantage—and we divide all the money in certain proportions. That is one thing.'

'But, my dear young lady, could you not have done this from Portman Square?'

'I could, but not so well. To live here as a workwoman among other workwomen is, at least, to avoid the danger of being flattered, deceived, and courted. I was a most insignificant person when I came. I am now so far advanced that a great many employers of women's labor cordially detest me, and would like to see my association ruined.'

'Oh! Lord Jocelyn,' she went on, after a pause, 'you do not know, you can not know the dreadful dangers which a rich woman has to encounter. If I had come here in my own name I should have been besieged by every plausible rogue who could catch my ear for half an hour. I should have all the clergy round me imploring help for their schools and their churches; I should have had every unmarried curate making love to me; I should have paid ten times as much as anybody else; and—worse than all, I should not have made a single friend. My sympathies, whenever I read the parable, are always with Dives, because he must have been so flattered and worshipped before his bride became intolerable.'

'I see. All this you escaped by your assumption of the false name.'

'Yes. I am one of themselves; one of the people; I have got my girls together; I have made them understand my project; they have become my fast and faithful friends. The better to inspire confidence, I even sheltered myself behind myself. I said Miss Messenger was interested in our success. She sends us orders. I went to the West End with things made up for her. Thanks, mainly to her, we are flourishing. We work for shorter hours and for greater pay than other girls; I could already double my staff if I could only, which I shall soon, double the work. We have recreation, too, and we dine together, and in the evening we have singing and dancing. My girls have never before known any happiness; now they have learned the happiness of quiet, at least, with a little of the culture, and some of the things which make rich people happy. Oh! would you have me go away and leave them, when I have taught these things of which they never dreamed before? Should I send them back to the squalid

house and the bare pittance again? Stay and take your luncheon with us when we dine, and ask yourself whether it would not be better for me to live here altogether—never to go back to the West End at all—than to go away and desert my girls?'

She was agitated because she spoke from her heart. She went on without waiting for any reply:

'If you knew the joyless lives, the hopeless days of these girls, if you could see their work-rooms, if you knew what is meant by their long hours and their insufficient food, you would not wonder at my staying here; you would cry shame upon the rich woman so selfish as to spend her substance in idle follies, when she might have spent it upon her unfortunate sisters.'

'I think,' said Lord Jocelyn, 'that you are a very noble girl.'

'Then there is another scheme of mine; a project so great and generous—nay, I am not singing my own praises, believe me—that I can never get it out of my mind. This project, Lord Jocelyn, is due to your ward.'

'Harry was always an ingenious youth. But pray tell me what it is.'

'I can not,' she replied; 'when I put the project into words they seem cold and feeble. They do not express the greatness of it. They would not arouse your enthusiasm. I could not make you understand in any degree the great hopes I have of this enterprise.'

'And it is Harry's invention?'

'Yes—his. All I have done is to find the money to carry it out.'

'That is a good part of any enterprise, however.'

At this point the bell rang.

'That is the first bell,' said Angela; 'now they lay down their work and scamper about—at least the younger ones do—for ten minutes before dinner. Come with me to the dining-room.'

Presently the girls came trooping in, fifteen or so, with bright eyes and healthy cheeks. Some of them were pretty; one, Lord Jocelyn thought of a peculiar graceful and delicate type, though too fragile in appearance. This was Nelly Sorensen. She looked more fragile than usual to-day, and there were black lines under her lustrous eyes. Another, whom Miss Kennedy called Rebekah, was good-looking in a different way, being sturdy, rosy-cheeked, and downright in her manner. Another, who would otherwise have been quite common in appearance, was made beautiful—almost—by the patient look which had followed years of suffering; she was a cripple; all the faces during the last few months had changed for the better; not one among them all bore the expression which is described by the significant words 'bold' and 'common.' Six months of daily drill and practice in good manners had abolished that look, at any rate.

The dinner was perfectly plain and simple, consisting of a piece of meat with plenty of vegetables and bread, and nothing else at all. But the meat was good and well cooked, and the service was on fair white linen. Moreover, Lord Jocelyn, sitting down in strange company, observed that the girls behaved with great propriety. Soon after they began, the door opened, and a man came in. It was one of those to whom Lord Jocelyn had spoken of the green, the man with the bushy sandy eyebrows. He took his seat at the table and began to eat his food ravenously. Once he pushed his plate away as if in a temper, and looked up as if he was going to complain. Then the girl they called Rebekah—she came to dinner on Saturdays, so as to have the same advantages as the rest, though she did not work on that day—held up her forefinger and shook it at him, and he relapsed into silence. He was the only one who behaved badly, and Miss Kennedy made as if she had not seen.

During the dinner the girls talked freely among themselves without any of the giggling and whispering which, in some circles, is considered good manners; they all treated Miss Kennedy with great respect, though she was only one workwoman among the rest. Yet there was a great difference, and the girls knew it; next to her on her left sat the pretty girl whom she called Nelly.

When dinner was over, because it was Saturday there was no more work. Some of the girls went into the drawing-room to rest for an hour and read; Rebekah went home again to attend to the afternoon service; some went into the garden, although it was December, and began to play lawn-tennis on the asphalt; the man with the eyebrows got up and glared moodily around from under those shaggy eyebrows and then vanished. Angela and Lord Jocelyn remained alone.

'You have seen us,' she said; 'what do you think of us?'

'I have nothing to say, and I do not know what to think.'

'Your ward is our right hand. We women want a man to work for us always. It is his business, and his pleasure, too, to help us to amuse ourselves. He finds diversions; he invents all kinds of things for us. Just now he is arranging tableaux and plays for Christmas.'

'Is it—is it—oh!—Miss Kennedy—is it for the girls only?'

'That is dangerous ground,' she replied, but not severely. 'Do you think we had better discuss the subject from that point of view?'

'Poor boy!' said Lord Jocelyn. 'It is the point of view from which I must regard it.'

She blushed again, and her beautiful eyes grew limpid.

'Do you think,' she said, speaking low, 'do you think I do not feel for him? Yet there is a cause—a sentiment, perhaps. The time is not quite come. Lord Jocelyn, be patient with me!'

'You will take pity on him?'

'Oh!' She took the hand he offered her.

'If I can make him happy—'

'If not,' replied Lord Jocelyn, kissing her hand, 'he would be the most ungrateful dog in all the world. If not, he deserves to get nothing but a shilling an hour for the miserable balance of his days. A shilling? No; let him go back to his penance. My dear young lady, you have made me, at all events, the happiest of men! No, do not fear; neither by word nor look shall Harry—shall any one—know what you have been so very, very good, so generous, and so thoughtful as to tell me.'

'He loves me for myself,' she murmured. 'He does not know that I am rich. Think of that, and think of the terrible suspicions which grow up in every rich woman's heart when a man makes love to her. Now I can never, never doubt his honesty. For my sake he has given up so much; for my sake—mine—oh! Why are men so good to women?'

'No,' said Lord Jocelyn. 'Ask what men ever do that they should be rewarded with the love and trust of such a woman as you?'

That is, indeed; a difficult question, seeing in what words the virtuous woman has been described by one who writes as if he ought to have known. As a pendant to the picture 'tis pity, 'tis great pity that we have not the Eulogy of the Virtuous Man. But there never were any, perhaps.

Lord Jocelyn stayed with Angela all the afternoon. They talked of many things: of Harry's boyhood; of his gentle and ready ways; of his many good qualities, and of Angela herself, her hopes, and ambitions; and of their life at Bormalack's. And Angela told Lord Jocelyn about her proteges, the claimants to the Davenant peerage, with the history of the 'Roag in Grane,' Saturday Davenant; and Lord Jocelyn promised to call upon them.

It was five o'clock when she sent him away, with permission to come again. Now this, Lord Jocelyn felt, as he came away, was the most satisfactory, nay the most delightful day, that he had ever spent.

The lucky rascal, Harry! To think of this tremendous stroke of fortune! To fall in love with the richest heiress in England to have that passion returned; to be about to marry the most charming, the most beautiful, the sweetest woman that had ever been made. Happy, thrice happy boy! What wonder, now, that he found tinkering chairs, in company, so to speak, with that incomparable woman, better than the soft divans of his club or the dinners and dances of society? What had he, Lord Jocelyn, to offer the lad, in comparison with the delights of this strange and charming courtship?

CHAPTER XL.

SWEET NELLY.

In every love story there is always, though it is not always told, a secondary plot, the history of the man or woman who might have been left happy but for the wedding-bells which peal for somebody else and end the tale. When these ring out, the hopes and dreams of some one else, for whom they do not ring, turn at last to dust and ashes. We are drawing near the church; we shall soon hear those bells. Let us spare a moment to speak of this tale untold, this dream of the morning, doomed to disappointment.

It is only the dream of a foolish girl; she was young and ignorant; she was brought up in a school of hardship until the time when a gracious lady came to rescue her. She had experienced, outside the haven of rest, where her father was safely sheltered, only the buffets of a hard and cruel world, filled with greedy task-masters who exacted the uttermost farthing in work and paid the humblest farthing for reward. More than this, she knew, and her father knew, that when his time came for exchanging that haven for the cemetery, she would have to fight the hard battle alone, being almost a friendless girl, too shrinking and timid to stand up for herself. Therefore, after her rescue, at first she was in the Seventh Heaven; nor did her gratitude and love to

ward her rescuer ever know any abatement. But there came a time when gratitude was called upon to contend with another feeling.

From the very first Harry's carriage toward Nelly was marked by sympathetic and brotherly affection. He really regarded this pretty creature, with her soft and winning ways, as a girl whom he could call by her Christian name and treat as one treats a sweet and charming child. She was clever at learning—nobody, not even Miss Kennedy, danced better; she was docile; she was sweet-tempered and slow to say or think evil. She possessed naturally, Harry thought—but then he forgot that her father had commanded an East Indianman—a refinement of thought and manner far above the other girls; she caught readily the tone of her patron; she became in a few weeks, this young dress-maker, the faithful effigy of a lady under the instruction of Miss Kennedy, whom she watched and studied day by day. It was unfortunate that Harry continued to treat her as a child, because she was already a woman.

Presently she began to think of him, to watch for him, to note his manner toward herself.

Then she began to compare and to watch his manner toward Miss Kennedy.

Then she began to wonder if he was paying attention to Miss Kennedy, if they were engaged, if they had an understanding.

She could find none. Miss Kennedy was always friendly toward him, but never more. He was always at her call, her faithful servant, like the rest of them, but no more.

Remember that the respect and worship with which she regarded Miss Kennedy were unbounded. But Harry she did not regard as on the same level. No one was good enough for Miss Kennedy. And Harry, clever and bright and good as he seemed, was not too good for herself.

They were a great deal together. All Nelly's evenings were spent in the drawing-room; Harry was there every night; they read together; they talked and danced and sung together. And though the young man said no single word of love, he was always thoughtful for her in ways that she had never experienced before. Below a certain level, men are not thoughtful for women. The cheapeners of women's labor at the East End are not by any means thoughtful toward them. No one had ever considered Nelly at all, except her father.

Need one say more? Need one explain how tender flowers of hope sprang up in this girl's heart, and became her secret joy?

This made her watchful, even jealous. And when a change came in Miss Kennedy's manner—it was after her first talk with Lord Jocelyn—when Nelly saw her color heighten and her eyes grow brighter when Harry appeared, a dreadful pain seized upon her, and she knew, without a word being spoken, that all was over for her. For what was she compared with this glorious woman, beautiful as the day, sweet as a rose in June, full of accomplishments? How could any man regard her beside Miss Kennedy? How could any man think of any other woman when such a goddess had smiled upon him?

In some stories, a girl who has to beat down and crush the young blossoms of love, goes through a great variety of performances, always in the same order. The despair of love demands that this order shall be obeyed. She turns white; she throws herself on her bed, and weeps by herself, and miserably owns that she loves him; she tells the transparent fib to her sister or mother; she has received a blow from which she never will recover; if she is religious, it brings her nearer to Heaven—all this we have read over and over again. Poor little Nelly knew nothing about her grander sisters in misfortune; she knew nothing of what is due to self-respect under similar circumstances; she only perceived that she had been foolish, and tried to show as if that was not so. It was a make-believe of rather a sorry kind. When she was alone she reproached herself; when she was with Miss Kennedy she reproached herself; when she was with Harry she reproached herself. Always herself to blame, no one else, and the immediate result was that her great limpid eyes were surrounded by dark rings and her cheeks grew thin.

Perhaps there is no misfortune more common among women—especially among women of the better class—than that of disappointed hope. Girls who are hard worked in shops have no time, as a rule, to think of love at all. Love, like other gracious influences, does not come in their way. It is when leisure is arrived at, with sufficiency of food and comfort, and comfort of shelter and good clothing, that love begins.

To most of Angela's girls, Harry Goslett was a creature far above their hopes or thoughts. It was pleasant to dance with him; to hear him play, to hear him talk; but he did not belong to them. It was not for nothing that their brothers called him 'Gentleman Jack.' They were, in fact, 'common girls,' although Angela, by the quiet and steady force of example, was introducing such innovations in the dressing of the hair, the carriage of the person, and the style of garments, that they were rapidly

becoming uncommon girls. But she occupied a position lower than that of Nelly, who was the daughter of a ship's captain now in the asylum; or of Rebekah, who was the daughter of a minister, and had the key to all Truth.

To Nelly, therefore, there came for a brief space this dream of love. It lasted, indeed, so brief a space—it had such slender foundations of reality—that when it vanished she ought to have let it go without a sigh, and have soon felt as if it never had come to her at all. This is difficult of accomplishment, even for women of strong nerves and good physique; but Nelly tried it and partially succeeded. That is, no one knew her secret except Angela, who divined it—having special reason for this insight; and Rebekah, who, perhaps, had also her own reasons; but she was a self-contained woman, who kept her own secret.

'She can not,' said Rebekah, watching Angela and Harry, who were walking together on the green, 'she can not marry anybody else. It is impossible.'

'But why,' said Nelly, 'why do they not tell us, if they are to be married?'

'There are many things,' said Rebekah, 'which Miss Kennedy does not tell us. She has never told us who she is or where she came from, or how she gets command of money; or how she knows Miss Messenger—or what she was before she came to us. Because, Nelly, you may be sure of one thing—that Miss Kennedy is a lady born and bred. Not that I want to know more than she chooses to tell, and I am as certain of her goodness as I am certain of anything. And what this place will do for the girls if it succeeds, no one can tell. Miss Kennedy will tell us, perhaps, some day, why she has come among us, pretending to be a dress-maker.'

'Oh!' said Nelly, 'what a thing for us that she did pretend! And oh, Rebekah, what a thing it would be if she were to leave off pretending! But she would never desert us—never.'

'No, she never would.'

Rebekah continued to watch them.

'You see, Nelly, if she is a lady, he is a gentleman,' Nelly blushed, and then blushed again for very shame at having blushed at all. 'Some gentlemen, I am told, take delight in turning girls' heads. He doesn't do that. Has he ever said a word to you that he shouldn't?'

'No,' said Nelly, 'never.'

'Well, and he hasn't to me; though, as for you, he goes about saying everywhere that you are the prettiest girl in Stepney, next to Miss Kennedy. And, as for me and the rest, he has always been like a brother; and a good deal better than most brothers are to their sisters. Being a gentleman, I mean he is no match for you and me, who are real workgirls. And there is nobody in the parish except Miss Kennedy for him.'

'Yet he works for money.'

'So does she. My dear, I don't understand it—I never could understand it. Perhaps some day we shall know what it all means. There they are, making believe. They go on making believe and pretending, and they seem to enjoy it. Then they walk about together, and play in words with each other—one pretending not to understand, and so on. Miss Kennedy says, 'But then I speak from hearsay, for I am only a dress-maker.' And he says, 'So I read, because, of course, a cabinet-maker can know nothing of these things.' Mr. Bunker who ought to be made to learn the Epistle of St. James by heart, says dreadful things of both of them, and one his nephew; but what does he know?—nothing.'

'But, Rebekah, Mr. Goslett can not be a very great gentleman, if he is Mr. Bunker's nephew; his father was a sergeant in the army.'

'He is a gentleman by education and training. Well, some day we shall learn more. Meantime I, for one, am contented that they should marry. Are you, Nelly?'

'I, too,' she replied, 'am contented, if it will make Miss Kennedy happy.'

'He is not convinced of the truth,' said Rebekah, making her little sectarian reservation; 'but any woman who would want a better husband must be a fool. As for you and me, now, after knowing these two, it would be best for us never to marry rather than to marry one of the drinking, tobacco-smoking workmen who would have us.'

'Yes,' said Nelly, 'much best. I shall never marry anybody.'

Certainly it was not likely that more young gentlemen would come their way. One Sunday evening, the girl being alone with Miss Kennedy, took courage and dared to speak to her.

In fact, it was Angela herself who began the talk.

(To be Continued.)

Over 4,000 men in the building trade in Cardiff are on strike for increase of wages.

Thirty thousand strikers at Lods, Poland have made many attacks on Jews there, and several persons have been killed.

Official denial is made of a report that the Sultan of Turkey is suffering from a serious nervous illness.