

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

A STORY WITH A MORAL FOR SOCIAL THEORISTS TO ACT UPON.

PROLOGUE.

PART I.

It was the evening of a day in early June. The time was last year and the place was Cambridge. The sun had been visible in the heavens, a gracious presence, actually a whole week—in itself a thing remarkable; the hearts of the most sored, even of landlords and farmers, were coming to believe again in the possibility of fine weather; the clergy were beginning to think that they might this year hold a real Harvest Thanksgiving instead of a sham; the trees at the Backs were in full foliage; the avenues of Trinity and Clare were splendid; beside them the trim lawns sloped to the margin of the Cam, here most glorious and proudest of English rivers, seeing that he laves the meadows of the most ancient and venerable foundations, King's, Trinity, and St. John's, to say nothing of Queen's and Clare and Magdalen; men were lazily floating in canoes, or leaning over the bridges, or strolling about the walks, or lying on the grass; and among them—but not—oh! not with them—walked or rested many of the damsels of learned Newnham, chiefly in pairs, holding sweet converse

On mind and art,
And labor and the changing mart,
And all the framework of the land;

not neglecting the foundations of the Christian faith and other fashionable topics, which ladies nowadays handle with so much learning, originality, dexterity, and power.

We have, however, to do with only one pair, who were sitting together on the banks opposite Trinity. These two were talking about a subject far more interesting than any concerning mind, or art, or philosophy, or the chances of the Senate House, or the future of Newnham; for they were talking about themselves and their own lives, and they were to do each with that one life which happened, by the mere accident of birth, to belong to herself. It must be a curious subject for reflection in extreme old age, when everything has happened that is going to happen, including rheumatism, that, but for this accident, one's life might have been so very different.

'Because, Angela,' said the one who wore spectacles and looked older than she was, by reason of much pondering over books and perhaps too little exercise, 'because, my dear, we have but this one life before us, and if we make mistakes with it, or throw it away, or waste it, or lose our chances, it is such a dreadful pity. Oh, to think of the girls who drift and let every chance go by, and get nothing out of their lives at all—except babies' (she spoke of babies with great contempt). 'Oh! it seems as if every moment were precious: oh! it is a sin to waste an hour of it.'

She gasped and clasped her hands together with a sigh. She was not acting, not at all; this girl was that hitherto rare thing, a girl of study and of books; she was wholly possessed, like the great scholars of old, with the passion for learning.

'Oh! greedy person!' replied the other with a laugh, 'if you read all the books in the University library, and lose the enjoyment of sunshine, what shall it profit you, in the long run?'

This one was a young woman of much finer physique than her friend. She was not short-sighted; but possessed, in fact, a pair of orbs of very remarkable clearness, steadiness, brightness. They were not soft eyes, nor languishing eyes, nor sleepy eyes, nor downcast, shrinking eyes; they were wide-awake, brown, honest eyes, which looked fearlessly upon all things, fair or foul. A girl does not live at Newnham two years for nothing, mind you; when she leaves that seat of learning, she has changed her mind about the model, the perfect, the ideal woman. More than that, she will change the minds of her sisters and her cousins; and there are going to be a great many Newnham's; and the spread of this revolution will be rapid; and the shrinking, obedient, docile, man-reverencing, curate-worshipping maiden of our youth will shortly vanish and be no more seen. And what will the curate do then, poor thing? Wherefore let the bishop look to certain necessary changes in the Marriage Service; and let the young men see that their own ideas change with the times, else there will be no sweethearts for them. More could I prophesy, but refrain.

This young lady owned, besides those mentioned above, many other points which will always be considered desirable at her age, whatever be the growth of feminine education (wherefore, courage, brothers!). In all these points she contrasted favorably with her companion. For her face was sunny, and fair to look upon; one of the younger clerical dons—now a scanty band, almost a Remnant—was reported to have said, after glancing upon that face, that he

now understood, which he had never understood before, what Solomon meant when he compared his love's temples to a piece of pomegranate within her locks. No one asked him what he meant, but he was a mathematical man, and so he must have meant something, if it was only trigonometry. As to her figure, it was what a healthy, naturally dressed, and strong young woman's figure ought to be, and not more slender in the waist than was the figure of Venus or Mother Eve, and her limbs were elastic, so that she seemed when she walked as if she would like to run, jump, and dance, which, indeed, she would have greatly preferred, only at Newnham they 'take it out' at lawn tennis. And whatever might be the course of life marked out by herself, it was quite certain to the intelligent observer that before long Love the invincible—Love that laughs at plots, plans, conspiracies, and designs—would upset them all, and trace out quite another line of life for her, and most probably the most commonplace line of all.

'Your life, Constance,' she went on, 'seems to me the most happy and the most fortunate. How nobly you have vindicated the intellect of women by your degree!'

'No, my dear,' Constance shook her head sadly. 'No; only partly vindicated our intellect; remember I was but fifth Wrangler, and there were four men—men, Angela—above me. I wanted to be Senior.'

'Everybody knows that the fifth is always as good as the first,' Constance, however, shook her head at this daring attempt at consolation. 'At all events, Constance, you will go on to prove it by your original papers when you publish your researches. You will lecture like Hypatia; you will have the undergraduates leaving the men and crowding your theatre. You will become the greatest mathematician in Cambridge; you will be famous forever. You will do better than man himself, even in man's most exalted level of intellectual strength.'

The pale cheek of the student flushed. 'I do not expect to do better than men,' she replied, humbly. 'It will be enough if I do as well. Yes, my dear, all my life, short or long, shall be given to science. I will have no love in it, or marriage, or—or—anything of that kind at all.'

'Nor will I,' said the other, stoutly, yet with apparent effort. 'Marriage spoils a woman's career; we must live our life to its utmost, Constance.'

'We must, Angela. It is the only thing in this world of doubt that is a clear duty. I owe mine to science. You, my dear, to—'

She would have said to 'Political Economy,' but a thought checked her. For a singular thing had happened only the day before. This friend of hers, this Angela Messenger, who had recently illustrated the strength of woman's intellect by passing a really brilliant examination in that particular science, astonished her friends at a little informal meeting in the library by an oration. In this speech she went out of her way to pour contempt upon Political Economy. It was a so-called science, she said, not a science at all: a collection of theories impossible of proof. It treated of men and women as skittles, it ignored the principal motives of action, it had been put together for the most part by doctrinaires who lived apart, and knew nothing about men and less about women, and it was a favorite study, she cruelly declared, of her own sex, because it was the most easily crammed and made the most show. As for herself, she declared that for all the good it had done her, she might just as well have gone through a course of aesthetics or studied the symbols of advanced Ritualism.

Therefore, remembering the oration, Constance Woodcote hesitated. To what Cause (with a capital C) should Angela Messenger devote her life?

'I will tell you presently,' said Angela, 'how I shall begin my life. Where the beginning will lead me, I can not tell.'

Then there was silence for awhile. The sun sunk lower and the setting rays fell upon the foliage, and every leaf showed like a leaf of gold, and the river lay in shadow and became ghostly, and the windows of Trinity library opposite to them glowed, and the New Court of St. John's at their left hand became like unto the palace of Kubla Khan.

'Oh!' sighed the young mathematician. 'I shall never be satisfied till Newnham crosses the river. We must have one of these colleges for ourselves. We must have King's. Yes, King's will be the best. And oh! how differently we shall live from the so-called students who are now smoking tobacco in each other's rooms, or playing billiards, or even cards—the superior sex!'

'As for us, we shall presently go back to our rooms, have a cup of tea and a talk, my dear. Then we shall go to bed. As regards the men, those of your mental level, Con-

stance, do not, I suppose, play billiards; nor do they smoke tobacco. Undergraduates are not all students, remember. Most of them are nothing but mere Pass-men who will become curates.'

Two points in this speech seem to call for remark. First, the singular ignorance of mankind, common to all women, which led the girl to believe that a great man of science is superior to the pleasures of weaker brethren; for they can not understand the delights of fooling. The second point is—that it may be left to those who read as they run.

Then they rose and walked slowly under the grand old trees of Trinity Avenue, facing the setting sun, so that when they came to the end and turned to the left, it seemed as if they plunged into night. And presently they came to the gates of Newnham, the newer Newnham, with its trim garden and Queen Anne mansion. It grates upon one that the beginning of a noble and lasting reform should be housed in a palace built in the conceited fashion of the day. What will they say of it in fifty years, when the fashion has changed and new styles reign?

'Come,' said Angela, 'come into my room. Let my last evening in the dear place be spent with you, Constance.'

Angela's own room was daintily furnished and adorned with as many pictures, pretty things, books, and bric-a-brac as the narrow dimensions of a Newnham cell will allow. In a more advanced Newnham there will be two rooms for each student, and these will be larger.

The girls sat by the open window; the air was soft and sweet. A bunch of cowslips from the Coton meadows perfumed the room; there was the jug-jug of a nightingale in some tree not far off; opposite them were the lights of the other Newnham.

'The last night!' said Angela. 'I can hardly believe that I go down to-morrow.'

Then she was silent again.

'My life,' she went on, speaking softly in the twilight, 'begins to-morrow. What am I to do with it? Your own solution seems so easy because you are clever and you have no money, while I, who am—well, dear, not devoured by thirst for learning—have got so much. To begin with, there is the Brewery. You can not escape from a big Brewery if it belongs to you. You can not hide it away. Messenger, Marsden & Company's Stout, their XXX, their Old and Mild, their Bitter, their Family Ales (that particularly at eight-and-six the nine-gallon cask, if paid for on delivery), their drays, their huge horses, their strong men, whose very appearance advertises the beer, and makes the weak-kneed and the narrow-chested rush to Whitechapel—my dear, these things stare one in the face wherever you go. I am that Brewery, as you know. I am Messenger, Marsden & Company, myself, the sole partner in what my lawyer sweetly calls the Concern. Nobody else is concerned in it. It is—alas!—my own Great Concern, a dreadful responsibility.'

'Why? Your people manage it for you.'

'Yes—oh! yes—they do. And whether they manage it badly or well I do not know; whether they make wholesome beer or bad, whether they treat their clerks and workmen generously or meanly, whether the name of the Company is beloved or hated, I do not know. Perhaps the very making of beer at all is a wickedness.'

'But—Angela,' the other interrupted; 'it is no business of yours. Naturally, wages are regulated by supply and—'

'No, my dear. That is political economy. I prefer the good old English plan. If I employ a man, and he works faithfully, I should like that man to feel that he grows every day worth to me more than his marketable value.'

Constance was silenced.

'Then, besides the Brewery,' Angela went on, 'there is an unconscionable sum of money in the Funds.'

'There, at least,' said her friend, 'you need feel no scruple of conscience.'

'But indeed I do; for how do I know that it is right to keep all this money idle? A hundred pounds saved and put into the Funds means three pounds a year. It is like a perennial stream flowing from a hidden reservoir in the hill-side. But this stream, in my case, does no good at all. It neither fertilizes the soil nor is drunk by man or beast, nor does it turn mills, nor is it a beautiful thing to look upon, nor does its silver current flow by banks of flowers or fall in cascades. It all runs away, and makes another reservoir in another hill-side. My dear, it is a stream of compound interest, which is constantly getting deeper and broader and stronger, and yet is never of the least use, and turns no wheels. Now, what am I to do with this money?'

'Endow Newnham; there, at least, is something practical.'

'I will found some scholarships, if you please, later on, when you have made your own work felt. Again, there are my houses in the East End.'

'Sell them.'

'That is only to shift the responsibility. My dear, I have streets of houses. They all lie about Whitechapel way. My grandfather, John Messenger, bought houses, I

believe, just as other people buy apples, by the peck, or some larger measure, a reduction being made on taking a quantity. There they are, and mostly inhabited.'

'You have agents, I suppose?' said Constance, unsympathizingly. 'It is their duty to see that the houses are well kept.'

'Yes, I have agents. But that can not absolve me from responsibility.'

'Then,' asked Constance, 'what do you mean to do?'

'I am a native of Whitechapel. My grandfather, who succeeded to the Brewery, was born there—his father was also a Brewer: his grandfather is, I believe, prehistoric; he lived there long after his son, my father, was born. When he moved to Bloomsbury Square he thought he was getting into quite a fashionable quarter; and he only went to Portman Square because he desired me to go into society. I am so rich that I shall be quite welcomed into society. But, my dear, Whitechapel and its neighborhood are my proper sphere. Why, my very name! I reek of beer; I am all beer; my blood is beer. Angela Marsden Messenger! What could more plainly declare my connection with Messenger, Marsden & Company? I only wonder that he did not call me Marsden-and-Company Messenger.'

'But—Angela—'

'He would, Constance, if he had thought of it. For, you see, I was the heiress from the beginning, because my father died before my birth. And my grandfather intended me to become the perfect Brewer, if a woman can attain to so high an ideal. Therefore I was educated in the necessary and befitting lines. They taught me the industries of England, the arts and manufactures, mathematics, accounts, the great outlets of trade, book-keeping, mechanics—all those things that are practical. How it happened that I was allowed to learn music I do not know. Then, when I grew up, I was sent here by him, because the very air of Cambridge, he thought, makes people exact; and women are so prone to be inexact. I was to read while I was here all the books about Political and Social Economy. I have also learned for business purposes two or three languages. I am now finished. I know all the theories about people, and I don't believe any of them will work. Therefore, my dear, I shall get to know the people before I apply them.'

'Was your grandfather a student of Political Economy?'

'Not at all. But he had a respect for justice, and he wanted me to be just. It is so difficult, he used to say, for a woman to be just. For either she flies into a rage and punishes with excess, or else she takes pity and forgives. As for himself, he was as hard as nails, and the people knew it.'

'And your project?'

'It is very simple. I efface myself. I vanish. I disappear.'

'What?'

'If anybody asks where I am, no one will know, except you, my dear; and you will not tell.'

'You will be in—'

'In Whitechapel, or thereabouts. Your Angela will be a dress-maker, and she will live by herself and become—what her great-grandmother was—one of the people.'

'You will not like it at all.'

'Perhaps not; but I am weary of theories, facts, statistics. I want flesh and blood. I want to feel myself a part of this striving, eager, anxious humanity, on whose labors I live in comfort, by whom I have been educated, to whom I owe all, and for whom I have done nothing—no, nothing at all, selfish wretch that I am!'

She clasped her hands with a fine gesture of remorse.

'Oh! woman of silence,' she cried; 'you sit upon the heights, and you can disregard—because it is your right—the sorrows and the joys of the world. But I can not. I belong to the People—with a great big P, my dear—I can not bear to go on living by their toil and giving nothing in return. What a dreadful thing is a She-Dives!'

'I confess,' said Constance, coldly, 'that I have always regarded wealth as a means for leading the higher life—the life of study and research—unencumbered by the sordid aims and mean joys of the vulgar herd.'

'It is possible and right for you to live apart, my dear. It is impossible, because it would be wrong, for me.'

'But—alone? You will venture into the dreadful region alone?'

'Quite alone, Constance.'

'And—and—your reputation, Angela?'

Angela laughed merrily.

'As for my reputation, my dear, it may take care of itself. Those of my friends who think I am not to be trusted may transfer their affection to more worthy objects. The first thing in the emancipation of the sex, Constance, is equal education. The next is—'

'What?' for Angela paused.

She drew forth from her pocket a small bright instrument of steel, which glittered in the twilight. Not a revolver, dear readers.

'The next,' she said, brandishing the weapon before Constance's eyes, 'is—the LATCH-KY.'

PART II.

The time was eleven in the forenoon; the season was the month of roses; the place was a room on the first floor at the Park end of Piccadilly—a noisy room, because the windows were open, and there was a great thunder and rattle of cabs, omnibuses, and all kinds of vehicles. When this noise became, as it sometimes did, intolerable, the occupant of the room shut his double windows, and immediately there was a great calm, with a melodious roll of distant wheels like the buzzing of bees about the marigolds on a summer afternoon. With the double window a man may calmly sit down amid even the roar of Charing Cross, or the never-ending cascade of noise at Charing Cross.

The room was furnished with taste; the books on the shelves were well bound, as if the owner took a proper pride in them, as indeed was the case. There were two or three good pictures; there was a girl's head in marble; there were cards and invitations lying on the mantle-shelf and in a rack beside the clock. Everybody could tell at the first look of the room that it was a bachelor's den. Also because nothing was new, and because there were none of the peacockeries, whims and fancies, absurdities, fads and fashions, gimcrackeries—the presence of which does always and infallibly proclaim the chamber of a young man—this room manifestly belonged to a bachelor who was old in the profession. In fact, the owner of the chambers, of which this was the breakfast, morning, and dinner-rooms, whenever he dined at home, was seated in an armchair beside a breakfast-table, looking straight before him, with a face filled with anxiety. An honest, ugly, pleasing, rugged, attractive face, whose features were carved one day when Dame Nature was benevolently disposed, but had a blunt chisel.

'I always told him,' he muttered, 'that he should learn the whole of his family history as soon as he was three-and-twenty years of age. One must keep such promises. Yet it would have been better that he should never know. But then it might have been found out, and that would have been far worse. Yet, how could it have been found out? No; that is ridiculous.'

He mused in silence. In his fingers he held a cigar which he had lighted, but allowed to go out again. The morning paper was lying on the table, unopened.

'How will the boy take it?' he asked; 'will he take it crying? Or will he take it laughing?'

He smiled, picturing to himself the 'boy's' astonishment.

Looking at the man more closely, one became aware that he was really a very pleasant-looking person. He was about five-and-forty years of age, and he wore a full beard and moustache, after the manner of his contemporaries, with whom a beard is still considered a manly ornament to the face. The beard was brown, but it began to show, as wine merchants say of port, the 'appearance of age.' In some light, there was more gray than brown. His dark-brown hair, however, retained its original thickness of thatch, and was as yet untouched by any streak of gray. Seeing that he belonged to one of the oldest and best of English families, one might have expected something of that delicacy of feature which some of us associate with birth. But, as has already been said, his face was rudely chiselled, his complexion was ruddy, and he looked as robust as a plow-boy; yet he had the air of an English gentleman, and that ought to satisfy anybody. And he was the younger son of a duke, being by courtesy Lord Jocelyn Le Breton.

While he was thus meditating, there was a quick step on the stair, and the subject of his thoughts entered the room.

This interesting young man was a much more aristocratic person to look upon than his senior. He paraded so to speak, at every point, the thorough-bred air. His thin and delicate nose, his clear eye, his high though narrow forehead, his well-cut lip, his firm chin, his pale cheek, his oval face, the slim figure, the thin, long fingers, the spring of his walk, the poise of his head—what more could one expect even from the descendant of all the Howards? But this morning the pallor of his cheek was flushed as if with some disquieting news.

'Good-morning, Harry,' said Lord Jocelyn, quietly.

Harry returned the greeting. Then he threw upon the table a small packet of papers.

'There, sir, I have read them; thank you for letting me see them.'

'Sit down, boy, and let us talk; will you have a cigar? No? A cigarette, then? No? You are probably a little upset by this—new—unexpected revelation?'

'A little upset!' repeated the young man, with a short laugh.

'To be sure—to be sure—one could expect nothing else; now sit down, and let us talk over the matter calmly.'

(To be Continued.)

The Quebec revenue authorities have unearthed a whiskey still in a St. Roch's tavern.