

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

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

CHAPTER XXXVI.
WHAT WILL BE THE END.

The end of the year drew near—the end of the year '81, which, whatever its shortcomings, its burning heat of July, and its wretched rain of August, went out in sweet and gracious sunshine, and a December like unto the April of a post.

For six months Angela had been living among her girls. The place was become home-like to her. The workwomen were now her friends—her trusted friends. The voice of calumny about her antecedents was silent, unless it was the voice of Bunker. The Palace of Delight (whose meaning was, as yet unknown and unsuspected) was rising rapidly, and indeed was nearly complete—a shell which had to be filled with things beautiful and delightful, of which Angela did not trust herself to speak. She had a great deal to think of in those last days of the year '81. The dressmaking was nothing—that went on. There was some local custom, and more was promised. It seemed as if (on the soundest principles of economy) it would actually pay. There was a very large acquaintance made at odd times among the small streets and mean houses of Stepney. It was necessary to visit these people and to talk with them.

Angela had nothing to do with the ordinary channels of charity. She would help neither curate nor Sister of Mercy nor Bible-woman. Why, she said, did not the people stand shoulder to shoulder and help themselves? To be sure, she had the great advantage over professional visitors that she was herself only a workwoman, and was not paid for any services; and, as if there was not already enough to make her anxious, there was that lover of hers.

Were she and Harry keeping company? Dick Coppin asked this question: and Angela (not altogether truthfully) said that they were not. What else were they doing, indeed? No word of love now. Had he not promised to abstain? Yet she knew his past—she knew what he had given up for her sake, believing her only a poor dress-maker; all for love of her, and she could not choose but let her heart go forth to so loyal and true a lover. Many ladies, in many tales of chivalry, have demanded strange services from their lovers—none so strange as that asked by Angela when she ordered her lover not only to pretend to be a cabinet-maker and a joiner, but to work at his trade and to live by it. Partly in self-reproach—partly in admiration—she watched him going and coming to and from the Brewery, where he now earned (thanks to Lord Jocelyn's intervention) the sum of a whole shilling an hour. For there was nothing in his bearing or his talk to show that he repented his decision. He was always cheerful, always of good courage—more, he was always in attendance on her. It was he who thought for her—invented plans to make her evenings attractive—brought raw lads (recruits in the army of culture) from the Advanced Club and elsewhere, and set them an example of good manners, and was her prime minister, her aid-de-camp, her chief vizier.

And the end of it all—nay, the thing itself being so pleasant—why hasten the end? And, if there was to be an end, could it not be connected with the opening of the palace? Yes. When the palace was ready to open its gates then would Angela open her arms.

For the moment it was the sweet twilight of love—the half hour before the dawn. The sweet uncertainty, when all was certainty. And, as yet, the palace was only just receiving its roof. The fittings and decorations, the organ and the statues, and all, had still to be put in. When everything was ready, then—then—Angela would somehow, perhaps, find words to bid her lover be happy, if she could make him happy.

There could be but one end.

Angela came to Whitechapel incognito—a princess disguised as a milk-maid: partly out of curiosity, partly to try her little experiment for the good of workgirls, with the gayety and light heart of youth—thinking that before long she would return to her old place, just as she had left it. But she could not. Her old views of life were changed, and a man had changed them. More than that—a man whose society, whose strength, whose counsel, had become necessary to her.

'Who,' she asked herself, 'would have thought of the palace except him? Could I, could any woman? I could have given away money—that is all. I could have been robbed and cheated; but such an idea—so grand, so simple; it is a man's, not a woman's. When the palace is completed; when all is ready for the opening, then—And the air became musical with the clang and clash of wedding-bells—up the scale, down the scale; in thirds, in fifths; with triple bob-majors and the shouts of the peo-

ple, and the triumphant strains of a wedding-march.

How could there be any end but one?—seeing that not only did this young man present himself nearly every evening at the drawing-room, where he was recognized as the director of ceremonies or the leader of the cotillion or deviser of sports, from an active Proverb to a madrigal; but that latter the custom was firmly established that he and Angela should spend their Sundays together. When it rained, they went to church together, and had readings in the drawing-room in the afternoon, with, perhaps, a little concert in the evening, of sacred music, to which some of the girls would come. If the day was sunny and bright, there were many places where they might go—for the East is richer than the West in pretty and accessible country places. They would take the tram along the Mile End Road, past the delightful old Church of Bow, to Staring Stratford, with its fine town hall and its round dozen of churches, and chapels; a town of fifty thousand people, and quite a genteel place, whose residents preserve the primitive custom of fetching the dinner-beer themselves from its native public-houses on Sunday, after Church. At Stratford there are a good many ways open if you are a good walker, as Angela was.

You may take the Romford Road, and presently turn to the left and find yourself in a grand old forest (only there is not much of it left) called Hainault Forest. When you have crossed the Forest you get to Chigwell; and then, if you are wise, you will take another six miles (as Angela and Harry generally did) and get to Epping, where the toothsome steak may be found, or happily the simple cold beef—not to be despised after a fifteen miles' walk—and so home by train. Or you may take the Northern Road at Stratford, and walk through Leytonstone and Woodford; and, leaving Epping Forest on the right, walk along the bank of the River Lea till you come to Waltham Abbey, where there is a church to be seen, and a cross and other marvels. Or you may go still further afield and take train all the way to Ware, and walk through country roads and pleasant lanes, if you have a map, to stately Hatfield, and on to St. Albans; but do not try to dine there, even you are only one-and-twenty, and a girl.

All these walks and many more were taken by Angela with her companion on that blessed day, which should be spent for good of body as well as soul. They are walks which are beautiful in the winter as well as in the summer—though the trees are leafless, there is an underwood faintly colored with its winter tint of purple; and there are stretches of springy turf and bushes hung with catkins; and above all, there was nobody in the Forest or on the roads except Angela and Harry. Sometimes night fell on them when they were three or four miles from Epping. Then, as they walked in the twilight, the trees on either hand silently glided past them like ghosts, and the mist rose and made things look shadowy and large; and the sense of an endless pilgrimage fell upon them—as if they would always go on like this, side by side. Then their hearts would glow within them, and they would talk; and the girl would think it no shame to reveal the secret thoughts of her heart, although the man with her was not her accepted lover.

As for her reputation, where was it? Not gone, indeed, because no one among her old friends knew of these walks and this companionship, but in grievous peril.

Or, when the day was the city. I declare there is no place which contains more delightful walks for a cloudy Sunday forenoon, when the clang of the bells had finished, and the sooty worshippers were in their places, and the sleepy sextons have shut the doors, than the streets and lanes of the old city.

You must go as Harry did, provided with something of ancient lore, otherwise the most beautiful places will quite certainly be thrown away and lost for you. Take that riverside walk from Billingsgate to Blackfriars. Why, here were the quays, the ports, the whole commerce of the city in the good old days. Here was Cold Herbergh, that great many-gabled house, where Harry, Prince of Wales, 'carried on' with Falstaff and his merry crew. Here was Queen Hithe—here Dowgate with Walbrook. Here Baynard's Castle, and close by the Tower of Montfichet; also, a little to the north, a thousand places dear to the antiquarian—even though they have pulled down so much. There is Tower Royal, where Richard II. lodged his mother. There is the Church of Whittington, close by the place where his college stood. There are the precincts of Paul's, and the famous street of Chepe. Do people ever think what things have been

done in Crepe? There is Austin Friars, with its grand old church now given to the Dutch, and its quiet city square, where only a few years ago lived Lettice Langton (of whom some of us have heard). There is Towe Hill, on which was the residence of Alderman Medlycott, guardian of Nelly Carellis; and west of Paul's there is the place where once stood the house of Dr. Gregory Shovel, who received the orphan Kitty Pleydell. But indeed, there is no end to the histories and associations of the city; and a man may give his life profitably to the mastery and mystery of its winding streets.

Here they would wander in the quiet Sunday forenoon, while their footsteps echoed in the deserted street, and they would walk fearlessly in the middle of the road, while they talked of the great town, and its million dwellers, who come like the birds in the morning, and vanish like the birds in the evening.

Or they could cross the river and wander up and down the quaint old town of Rotherhithe or visit Southwark, the town of hops and malt, and all kinds of strange things; or Depford, the deserted, or even Greenwich; and if it was rainy they would go to church. There are a great many places of worship about Whitechapel, and many forms of creed, from the Baptist to the man with the bretta; and it would be difficult to select one which is more confident than another of possessing the real Philosopher's Stone—the thing for which we are always searching, the Whole Truth. And everywhere church and chapel filled with the well-to-do and the respectable, and a sprinkling of the very poor; but of the workmen—none. 'Why have they given up religion?' asked Angela. 'Why should the workmen all over the world feel no need of religion—if it were only the religious emotion?'

Harry, who had answers ready for many questions, could find none for this. He asked his cousin Dick, but he could not tell. Personally, he said, he had something else to do; but if the women wanted to go to church they might. And so long as the parsons and priests did not meddle with him, he should not meddle with them.

But these statements hardly seemed an answer to the question. Perhaps in Berlin or in Paris they could explain more clearly how this strange thing has come to pass.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TRUTH WITH FAITHFULNESS.

To possess pure truth—and to know it—is a thing which affects people in two ways, both of them uncomfortable to their fellow-creatures. It impels some to go pointing out the purity of truth to the world at large, insisting upon it, dragging unwilling people along the road which leads to it, and dwelling upon the dangers which attend the neglect of so great a chance. Others it affects with a calm and comfortable sense of superiority. The latter was Rebekah's state of mind. To be a Seventh Day Independent was only one degree removed from belonging to the Chosen People, to begin with; and that there is but one chapel in all England where the Truth reposes for a space as the Ark of the Covenant reposed in Shiloh, 'in curtains,' is, if you please, a thing to be proud of! It brings with it elevation of soul.

There is at present, whatever there may once have been, no proselytizing zeal about the Seventh Day Independents; they are, in fact, a torpid body; they are contented with the conviction—a very comforting one, and possessed by other creeds besides their own—that sooner or later the whole world will embrace their faith. Perhaps the Jews look forward to a day when, in addition to the Restoration, which they profess to desire, all mankind will become proselytes in the Court of the Gentiles; it is something little short of this that the congregation of Seventh Day Independents expect in the dim future. What a splendid, what a magnificent field for glory—call it not vain glory—does this conviction present to the humble believer! There are, again, so very few of them, that each one may feel himself a visible pillar of the Catholic Church, bearing on his shoulders a perceptible and measurable quantity of weight. Each is an Atlas. It is, moreover, pleasing to read the Holy Scriptures, especially the books of the Prophets, as written especially for a Connection which numbers just one chapel in great Britain and seven in the United States. How grand is the name of Catholic applied to just one church! Catholicity is as yet all to come, and exists only as a germ, or seedling! The Early Christians may have experienced the same delight.

Rebekah, best and most careful of shop-women and accountants, showed her religious superiority more by the science of contempt than by zeal for conversion. When Captain Tom Coppin, for instance, was preaching to the girls, she went on with her fingers, casting up, ruling in red ink, carrying forward in methodical fashion, as if his words could not possibly have any concern with her; and when a church bell rang, or

any words were spoken about other forms of worship, she became suddenly deaf and blind and cold. But she entreated Angela to attend their services. 'We want everybody to come,' she said; 'we only ask for a single hearing; come and hear my father preach.'

She believed in the faith of the Seventh Day. As for her father—when a man is paid to advocate the cause of an eccentric or a ridiculous form of belief; when he has to plead that cause week by week to the same slender following, to prop up the limp, and to keep together his small body of believers; when he has to maintain a show of hopefulness, to strengthen the wavering, to confirm the strong, to encourage his sheep in confidence, when he gets too old for anything else, and his daily bread depends upon his creed and no other—who shall say what, after awhile, that man believes or does not believe? Red-hot words fall from his lips, but they fall equally red-hot each week; his arguments are conclusive, but they were equally conclusive last week; his logic is irresistible; his encouragement is warm and glowing; but logic and encouragement alike are those of last week and many weeks ago. Surely, surely, there is no worse fate possible for any man than to preach week by week, any form whatever of dogmatic belief, and to live by it; surely, nothing can be more deadly than to stimulate zeal, to suppress doubt, to pretend certainty. But this is dangerous ground, because others besides Seventh Day Independents may feel that they are upon it, and that beneath them are quagmires.

'Come,' said Rebekah. 'We want nothing but a fair hearing.'

Their chapel was endowed, which doubtless helped the flock to keep together. It had a hundred and ten pounds a year belonging to it, and a little house for the minister, and there were scanty pew rents, which almost paid for the maintenance of the fabric and the old woman who cleaned the windows and dusted the pews. If the Rev. Percival Hermitage gave up that chapel he would have no means of subsistence at all. Let us not impute motives. No doubt he firmly believed what he taught; but his words, like his creed, were stereotyped; they had long ceased to be persuasive; they now served only to preserve.

If Angela had accepted that invitation for any given day there would have been, she knew very well, a sermon for the occasion, conceived, written, and argued out expressly for herself. And this she did not want. Therefore, she said nothing at all of her intentions, but chose one Saturday when there was little doing and she could spare a forenoon for her visit.

The chapel of the Seventh Day Independents stands at Redman's Lane, close to the Advance Club House. It is a structure extremely plain and modest in design. It was built by an architect who entertained humble views—perhaps he was a Churchman—concerning the possible extension of the Connection, because the whole chapel if quite filled would not hold more than two hundred people. The front, or facade, is flat, consisting of a surface of gray brick wall, with a door in the middle and two circular windows, one on each side. Over the door there are two dates—one of erection, the other of restoration. The chapel within is a well proportioned room, with a neat gallery running round three sides, resting on low pillars, and painted a warm and cheerful drab; the pews are painted of the same color. At the back are two windows with semicircular arches, and between the windows stands a small raised platform with the reading-desk upon it for the minister. Beside it are high seats with cushions for elders, or other ministers if there should be any. But these seats have never been occupied in the memory of man. The pews are ranged in front of the platform, and they are of the old and high-backed kind. It is a wonderful—a truly wonderful—thing that clergymen, priests, ministers, padres, rabbis, and church architects, with church-wardens, sidesmen, vergers, bishops, and chapel-keepers of all persuasions, are agreed, whatever their other differences, in the unalterable conviction that it is impossible to be religious, that is, to attend services in a proper frame of mind, unless one is uncomfortable. Therefore we are offered a choice. We may sit in high-backed, narrow-seated pews, or we may sit on low backed, narrow-seated benches; but sit in comfort we may not. The Seventh Day people have got the high-backed pew, which catches you on the shoulder-blade and tries the back-bone, and affects the brain, causing softening in the long run, and the narrow seat, which drags the muscles and brings on premature paralysis of the lower limbs. The equally narrow, low-backed bench produces injurious effects of a different kind, but similarly pernicious. How would it be to furnish one aisle, at least, of a church with broad, low, and comfortable chairs having arms? They could be reserved for the poor who have so few easy chairs of their own. Rightly managed and properly advertised, they might help toward a revival of religion among the working classes.

Above the reading platform in the little chapel they have caused to be painted on the wall the Ten Commandments—the fourth emphasized in red—with a text or two, bearing on their distinctive doctrine; and in the corner is a little door leading to a little vestry; but, as there are no vestments, its use is not apparent.

As for the position taken by these people, it is perfectly logical, and, in fact, impregnable. There is no answer to it. They say, 'Here is the Fourth Commandment. All the rest you continue to observe. Why not this? When was it repealed? And by whom?' If you put these questions to Bishop or Presbyter, he has no reply. Because that Law has never been repealed. Yet, as the people of the Connection complain, though they have reason and logic on their side, the outside world will not listen, and go on breaking the Commandment with a light and unthinking heart. It is a dreadful responsibility—albeit a grand thing—to be in possession of so simple a truth of such vast importance; and yet to get nobody ever to listen. The case is worse even than that of Daniel Fagg.

Angela noted all these things as she entered the little chapel a short time after the service had commenced. It was bewildering to step out of the noisy streets, where the current of Saturday morning was at flood, into this quiet room with its strange service and its strange flock of Non-conformists. The thing, at first, felt like a dream; the people seemed like the ghosts of an unquiet mind.

There were very few worshippers; she counted them all; four elderly men, two elderly women, three young men, two girls, one of whom was Rebekah, and five boys. Sixteen in all. And standing on the platform was their leader.

Rebekah's father, the Rev. Percival Armitage, was a shepherd who from choice led his flock gently along peaceful meadows and in shady quiet places; he had no prophetic fire; he had evidently long since acquiesced in a certain fact that under him, at least, whatever it might do under others, the Connection would not increase. Perhaps he did not himself desire an increase, which would give him more work. Perhaps he never had much enthusiasm. By the simple accident of birth he was a Seventh Day Christian; being of a bookish and unambitious turn, and of an indolent habit of body, mentally and physically unfitted for the life of a shop, he entered the ministry; in course of time he got this chapel, where he remained, tolerably satisfied with his lot in life, a simple, self-educated, mildly pious person, equipped with the phrases of his craft, and comforted with the consciousness of superiority and separation. Angela took her seat amid the wondering looks of the people, and the minister went on in a perfunctory way with his prayers and his hymns and his exposition. His sermon was neither better nor worse than may be heard any day in church or chapel; nor was there anything in it to distinguish it from the sermons of any other body of Christians.

At the departure of the people Rebekah hurried out first, and waited in the doorway to greet Angela.

'I knew you would come some day,' she said, 'but oh! I wish you had told me when you were coming, so that father might have given one of his doctrine sermons. What we had to-day was one of the comfortable discourses to the professed members of the church which we all loved so much. I am so sorry. Oh! he would convince you in ten minutes.'

'But, Rebekah,' said Angela, 'I should be sorry to have seen your service otherwise than usual. Tell me, does the congregation to-day represent all your strength?'

Rebekah colored. She could not deny that they were, numerically, a feeble flock.

'We rely,' she said, 'on the strength of our cause—and some day—oh! some day—the world will rally round us. See, Miss Kennedy, here is father; when he had said good-bye to the people—he was talking to a lady in sealskin—he will come and speak to us.'

'I suppose,' said Angela, 'that this lady is a member of your chapel?'

'Yes,' Rebekah whispered. 'Oh! they are quite rich people—the only rich people we have. They live at Leytonstone; they made their money in the book-binding, and are ardent Christians. Father—for at this moment Mr. Hermitage left his rich followers in the porch—this is Miss Kennedy, of whom you have heard so much.'

Mr. Hermitage took her hand with a weary smile, and asked Rebekah if Miss Kennedy would come home with her. They lived in a small house next door to the chapel. It was so small that there was but one sitting-room, and this was filled with books.

The good man welcomed Angela and said some simple words of gratitude about her reception of his daughter. He had a good face, but he wore an anxious expression as if something was always on his mind; and he sighed when he sat down at his table.

Angela stayed for half an hour, but the minister said nothing more to her, only when she rose to go he murmured with another heavy sigh, 'there's an afternoon service at three.'

It is quite impossible to say whether he intended this announcement as an invitation to Angela or whether it was a complaint, wrung from a heavy heart, of a trouble almost intolerable.

(To be Continued.)