

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

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

CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.

In the happy family of boarders, none of whom pretended to take the least interest in each other, nobody ever spoke to Mr. Maliphant, and nobody listened when he spoke, except Mrs. Bormalack, who was bound by rules of politeness, or took the least notice of his coming on his going; nobody knew how he lived or what he paid for his board and lodging, or anything else about him. Once, it was certain, he had been in the mercantile marine. Now he had a 'yard'; he went to his yard every day; it was rumored that in this yard he carved figureheads all day for large sums of money; he came home in the evening in time for supper; a fragrance, as of rum and water, generally accompanied him at that time; and after a pipe and a little more grog, and a few reminiscences chopped up in bits and addressed to the room at large, the old fellow would retire for the night. A perfectly cheerful and harmless old man, yet not companionable.

'Did you know my father, Mr. Maliphant?' asked Harry, by way of opening up the conversation. 'He was a sergeant, you know, in the army.'

Mr. Maliphant started and looked bewildered; he had been, in imagination, somewhere off Cape Horn, and he could not get back at a moment's notice. It irritated him to have to leave his old friends.

'Your father, young gentleman?' he asked, in a vexed and trembling quaver. 'Did I know your father? Pray, sir, how am I to know that you ever had a father?'

'You said the other day that you did. Think again. My father, you know, married Caroline Coppin.'

'Ay, ay—Caroline Coppin—I remember Caroline Coppin. Oh! yes, sister she was, to Rob—when Rob was third mate of an East Indianman; a devil of a fellow was Bob, though but a boy, and if living now, which I much misdoubt, would be but sixty or thereabouts. Everybody, young man, knew Bob Coppin—here he relaxed into silence. When he spoke again, he carried on aloud the subject of his thoughts—'Below he did his duty. Such a man, sir, was Bob Coppin.'

'Thank you, Mr. Maliphant. I seem to know Bob quite well from your description. And now he's gone aloft, hasn't he? And when the word comes to pass all hands, there will be Bob with a hitch of his trousers and a kick of the left leg. But about my mother.'

'Young gentleman, how am I to know that you were born with a mother? Law! law! One might as well—here his voice dropped again, and he finished the sentence with the silent motion of his lips.

'Caroline Coppin, you know; your old friend.'

He shook his head. 'No, oh! no. I knew her when she was as high as that table. My young friend, not my old friend, she was. How could she be my old friend? She married Sergeant Goslett, and he went out to India and—something happened there. Perhaps he was cast away. As many get cast away in those seas.'

'Is that all you can remember about her?'

'I can remember,' said the old man, 'a wonderful lot of things at times. You mustn't ask a man to remember all at once. Not at his best, you mustn't, and I doubt I am hardly at what you may call my tip-top ripeness—yet. Wait a bit, young man; wait a bit. I've been to a many ports and carved figureheads for many a ships, and they got cast away, one after the other, but dear to memory still, and paid for. Like Sergeant Goslett. A handsome man he was, with curly brown hair, like yours, young gentleman. I remember how he sung a song in this very house when Caroline—or was it her sister?—had it, and I forget whether it was Bunker married her sister or after Caroline's baby was born, which was when the child's father was dead. A beautiful evening we had.'

Caroline's baby, Harry surmised, was himself.

'Where was Caroline's baby born?' Harry asked.

'Where should he be? Why, o' course, in his mother's own house.'

'Why should he be born in his mother's own house? I did not know that his mother had a house.'

The old man looked at him with pity.

'Young man,' he said, 'you know nothing. Your ignorance is shameful.'

'But why?'

'Enough said, young gentleman,' replied Mr. Maliphant, with dignity. 'Enough said; youth should not sport with age; it doth not become gray hairs to—'

He did not finish the sentence, except to himself, but what he did say was some-

thing emphatic and improving, because he shook his head a good deal over it.

Presently he got up and left the room. Harry watched him getting his hat and tying his muffler about his neck. When things were quite adjusted the old man feebly tottered down the steps. Harry took his hat and followed him.

'May I walk with you, sir?' he asked.

'Surely, Surely!' Mr. Maliphant was surprised. 'It is an unusual thing for me to have a companion. Formerly they came—ah—all the way from Rotherhithe to—singing and drink with me.'

'Will you take my arm?' Harry asked.

The little old man, who wore black trousers and a dress coat out of respect of the day, but, although the month was December, no great-coat—in fact he had never worn a great-coat in all his life—was tottering along with steps which showed weakness but manifest intention. Harry wondered where he meant to go. He took the proffered arm, however, and seemed to get on better for the support.

'Are you going to church, sir?' asked Harry, when they came opposite the good old church of Stepney, with its vast acres of dead men, and heard the bells ringing.

'No, young gentleman; no, certainly not. I have more important business to look after.'

He quickened his steps, and they left the church behind them.

'Church?' repeated Mr. Maliphant, with severity. 'When there's property to look after the bells may ring as loud as they please. Church is good for paupers and church-wardens. Where would the property be, do you think, if I were not on the spot to protect it?'

He turned off the High street into a short street of small houses, neither better nor worse than the thousands of houses around; it was a cul-de-sac, and ended in a high brick wall, with a large gate-way in the middle, and square stone pillars, and a ponderous pair of wooden gates, iron-bound, as if they guarded things of the greatest value. There was also a small wicket beside it, which the old man carefully unlocked and opened, looking round to see that no burglars followed.

Harry saw within a tolerably large yard, in the middle of which was a little house of one room. The house was a most wonderful structure; it was built apparently of packing-cases nailed on four of eight square posts; it was furnished with a door, a window, and a chimney, all complete; it was exactly like a doll's house, only that it was rather larger, being at least six feet high and eight feet square. The house was painted green; the roof was painted red; the door blue; there was also a brass knocker; so that in other respects it was like a doll's house.

'Aha!' cried the old man, rubbing his hands and pointing to the house. 'I built it, young man. That is my house, that is; I laid the foundations; I put up the walls; I painted it. And I very well remember when it was. Let me see. Mr. Messenger, who was a younger man than me by four years, married in that year, or lost his son—I forget which, his voice lowered, and he went on talking to himself—'Caroline's grandfather went bankrupt in the building trade; or her father, perhaps, who afterward made money and left houses. And here I am still. This is my Property, young gentleman, and I come here every day to execute orders. Oh! yes—he looked about him in mild kind of doubt—'I execute orders. Perhaps the orders don't come in so thick as they did. But here I am—ready for work—always ready, and I see my old friends, too, aha! They come as thick as ever, bless you, if the orders don't. Quite a gathering in here, some days. Harry shuddered, thinking who these old friends might be. 'Sundays and all I come here, and they come too. A merry company!'

The garrulous old man opened the door of the little house. Harry saw that it contained a cupboard with some simple cooking utensils, and a fire-place, where the proprietor began to make a fire, and one chair, and a little table, and a rack with tools; there were also one or two pipes and a tobacco jar. He looked about the yard. A strange place, indeed! It was adorned, or rather furnished, with great ships' figureheads, carved in wood, standing in rows and circles, some complete, some half finished, some just begun; so that here was a Lively Peggy with rudimentary features just emerging from her native wood, and here a Saucy Sal of Wapping still clothed in oak up to her waist; and here a Neptune, his crowned head only as yet indicated, though the weather-beaten appearance of his wood showed that the time was long since he was begun; or a Father Thames, his god-like face as yet showing, like a blurred dream. Or there were finished and perfect heads, painted and gilded, waiting for the purchaser

who never came. They stood, or sat—whichever a head and shoulder can be said to do—with so much pride, each so rejoicing in himself, and so disdainful of his neighbor, in so haughty a silence, that they seemed human and belonging to the first circles of Stepney; Harry thought, too, that they eyed him curiously, as if he might be the long-expected ship-owner come to buy a figurehead.

'Here is property, young man!' cried the old man; he had lighted his fire now and came to the door, craning forward and spreading his hands. 'Look at the beauties! There's truth! There's expression! Mine, young man, all mine. Hundreds—thousands of pounds here, to be protected.'

'Do you come here every day?' Harry asked.

'Every day. The property must be looked after.'

'And do you sit here all day by yourself?'

'Why, who else should I sit with? And a man like me never sits alone. Bless your heart, young gentleman, of a morning when I sit before the fire, and smoke a pipe, this room gets full of people. They crowd in they do. Dead people, I mean, of course. I know more dead men than living. They're the best company, after all. Bob Coppin comes, for one.'

Harry began to look about, wondering whether the ghost of Bob might suddenly appear at the door. On the whole he envied the old man his company of departed friends.

'So you talk,' he said, 'you and the dead people?' By this time the old man had got into his chair and Harry stood in the doorway, for there really was not room for more than one in the house at the same time, to say nothing of inconveniencing and crowding the merry company of ghosts.

'You wouldn't believe,' said the old man, 'the talks we have nor the yarns we spin, when we're together.'

'It must be a jovial time,' said Harry.

'Do they drink?'

Mr. Maliphant screwed up his lips and shook his head mysteriously.

'Not of a morning,' he replied, as if in the evening the old rollicking customs were still kept up.

'And you talk about old times—eh?'

'There's nothing else to talk about, as I know.'

'Certainly not. Sometime's you talk about my—about Caroline Coppin's father, I suppose. I mean the one who made money, not the one who went bankrupt.'

'Houses,' said Mr. Maliphant; 'houses it was.'

'Oh!'

'Twelve houses there were, all his own. Two sons and two daughters to divide among them. Bob Coppin sold his at once—Bunker bought 'em—and we drank up the money down Polar way, him and me and a few friends together, in a friendly and comfortable spirit. A fine time we had, I remember Jack Coppin was in his father's trade and he lost his money; speculated, he did Builders are a believin' people. Bunker go his houses, too.'

'Jack was my cousin Dick's father, I suppose,' said Harry. 'Go ahead, old boy. The family history is reeling out beautifully. Where did the other houses go?'

But the old man had gone off on another tack. 'There were more Coppins,' he said.

'When I was a boy, to be a Coppin of Stepney was a thing of pride. Joseph's father was church-warden, and held up his head.'

'Did he really?'

'If I hadn't the Property to look after, I would show you his tombstone in Stepney Church-yard.'

'That,' said Harry, 'would be a great happiness for me. As for Caroline Coppin, now—'

'She was a pretty maid, she was,' the old man went on. 'I saw her born and brought up. And she married a sojer.'

'I know, and her three houses were lost, too, I suppose.'

'Why should her houses be lost, young man?' Mr. Maliphant asked, with severity. 'Houses don't run away. This Property doesn't run away. When she died, she left a baby, she did, and when the baby was took—or was stolen—or something—Bunker said those houses were his. But not lost. You can't lose a house. You may lose a figurehead; he got up and looked outside, to see if his were safe. Or a big drum. But not a house.'

'Oh! Harry started. 'Bunker said the houses were his, did he?'

'Of course he did.'

'And if the baby had not died, those houses would still be the property of that baby, I suppose.'

But Mr. Maliphant made no reply. He was now in the full enjoyment of the intoxication produced by his morning pipe, and was sitting in his arm-chair with his feet on the fender, disposed, apparently, for silence. Presently he began to talk, as usual, to himself. Nor could he be induced, by any leading questions, to remember any more of the things which Harry wanted him to remember. But he let his imagination wander. Gradually the room became filled with dead people, and he was talking with

them. Nor did he seem to know that Harry was with him at all.

Harry slipped quietly away, shutting the door after him, so that the old man might be left quite alone with the ghosts.

The yard, littered with wood, crowded with the figureheads, all of which seemed turning inquiring and jealous eyes upon the stranger, was silent and ghostly. Thither came the old man every day, to sit before the fire in his little red and green doll's house, to cook his own beefsteak for himself, to drink his glass of grog after dinner to potter about among his carved heads, to talk to his friends the ghosts, to guard his Property, and to execute the orders which never came. For the ship-builders who had employed old Mr. Maliphant were all dead and gone, and nobody knew of his yard any more, and he had it all to himself. The tide of time had carried away all his friends and left him alone; the memory of him among active men was gone; no one took any more interest in him; and he had ceased to care for anything; to look back was his only pleasure. No one likes to die at any time, but who would wish to grow so old?

And those houses. Why, if the old man's memory was right, then Bunker had simply appropriated his property. Was that, Harry asked, the price for which he traded the child away?

He went straight away to his cousin Dick, who, mindful of the recent speech at the Club, was a little disposed to be resentful. It fortunately takes two to make a quarrel, however, and one of those two had no intention of a family row.

'Never mind, Dick,' he said, in answer to an allusion to the speech. 'Hang the Club. I want to ask you about something else. Now, then. Tell me about your grandfather.'

'I can not. He died before I can remember. He was a builder.'

'Did he leave property?'

'There were some houses, I believe. My father lost his share, I know. Speculated it away.'

'Your uncle Bob. What became of his share?'

'Bob was a worthless chap. He drank everything, so of course he drank up his houses.'

'Then we come to the two daughters. Bunker married one, and of course he got his wife's share. What became of my mother's share?'

'Indeed, Harry, I do not know.'

'Who would know?'

'Bunker ought to be able to tell you all about it. Of course he knows.'

'Dick,' said Harry, 'should you be astonished to learn that the respectable Uncle Bunker is a mighty great rogue? But say nothing, Dick, say nothing. Let me consider how to bring the thing home to him.'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PROFESSOR'S PROPOSAL.

When the professor called upon Angela that same Sunday morning and requested an interview, she perceived that something serious was intended. He had on, as if for an occasion, a new coat with a flower in the button-hole, a chrysanthemum. His face was extremely solemn, and his fingers, which always seemed restless and dissatisfied unless they were making things disappear and come again, were quite still.

Certainly he had something on his mind. The drawing-room had one or two girls in it, who were reading and talking, though they ought to have been in church—Angela left their religious duties to their own consciences. But the dining-room was empty and the interview was held there.

The professor had certainly made up in his own mind exactly what was going to be said; he had dramatized the situation; a very good plan if you are quite sure of the replies; otherwise you are apt to be put out.

'Miss Kennedy,' he began, with a low voice, 'allow me first of all to thank you for your great kindness during a late season of depression.'

'I am glad it is a late season,' said Angela; 'that means, I presume, that the depression has passed away.'

'Quite, I am glad to say; in fact,' the professor laughed cheerfully, 'I have got engagements from now to nearly the end of April, in the country, and am in treaty for a West End engagement in May. Industry and application, not to speak of talent, will make their way in the long run. But I hope I am none the less grateful to you for your loan—let me call it a loan—when things were tight. I assure you, Miss Kennedy, that the run into the country, after those parish registers, was as good as a week's engagement, simple as it looked, and as for that Saturday night for your girls—'

'Oh, professor, we were agreed that it should appear to be given by you for nothing.'

'Never mind what it was agreed. You know very well what was paid for it. Now, if it hadn't been for that night's performance and that little trip into the country, I verily believe they would have had to send for a nice long box for me, a box that can't be palmed, and I should have gone of in it

to a country where perhaps they don't care for conjuring.'

'In that case, professor, I am very glad to have been of help.'

'And so,' he went on—following the programme he had laid down in his own mind—and so I came here to-day, to ask if your interest in conjuring could be stimulated to a professional height.'

'Really, I do not know—professional? You mean—'

'Anybody can see that you've showed an interest in the subject beyond what is expected or found in women. What I came here to-day for is to ask you whether you like the conjurer well enough to take to conjuring?'

Angela laughed and was astonished, after being told by Daniel Fagg that he would honor her by making her his wife, but for certain reasons of age. Now, having become hardened, it seems but a small thing to receive the offer of a conjurer, and the proposal to join the profession.

'I think it must be the science, professor,' she said; 'yes; it must be the science that I like so much. Not the man who exhibits his skill in the science. Yes, I think of your admirable science.'

'Ah,' he heaved a deep sigh, 'you are quite right, miss; science is better than love. Love! what sort of a thing is that, when you get tired of it in a month? But science fills up all your life—people are always learning—always.'

'I am so glad, professor, that I can agree with you entirely.'

'Which makes me bolder,' he said, 'because we could be useful to each other, without pretending to be in love, or any nonsense of that sort.'

'Indeed. Now I shall be very pleased to be useful to you without, as you say, any foolish pretense or nonsense.'

'The way is this; you can play, can't you?'

'Yes.'

'And sing?'

'Yes.'

'Did you ever dance in tights?'

'No, I never did that.'

'Ah, well—it's a pity—but one can't expect everything. And no doubt you'd take to it easy. They all do. Did you ever sing on the stage, at a music-hall, I mean?'

'No, I never did.'

'There was a chap—but I suppose he was a liar—said you used to sing under an electric light at the Canterbury, with a character dance, and a topical song, and a kick-up at the finish.'

'Yes, professor. I think that 'chap' must certainly be written down a liar. But go on.'

'I told him he was, and he offered to fight me for half a crown. When I said I'd do it, and, willing, for a bob, he went away. I think he's the fellow Harry Goslett knocked down one night. Bunker put him up to it. Bunker doesn't like you. Never mind him. Look here now.'

'I am looking as hard as I can.'

'There's some things that bring the money in, and some things that don't. Dress-making don't; conjuring does.'

'Yet you yourself, professor—'

'Why,' he asked, 'because I am only four-and-twenty, and not much known as yet. Give me time; wait. Lord! to see the clumsy things done by the men who've got a name. And how they go down; and a child would spot the dodge! Now, mark my word—if you go in with me, there's a fortune in it.'

'For your sake, I am glad to hear it; but it must be without me.'

'It is for your sake that I tell you of it.'

He was not in love at all. Love and science have never yet really composed their differences; and there was not the least dropping of his voice, or any sign of passion in his speech.

'For your sake,' he repeated. 'Because, if you can be got to see your way as I see it, there's a fortune for both of us.'

'Oh!'

'Yes; now, miss, listen. Conjuring, like most things, is makin' believe, and deceivin'. What we do is, to show you one thing and to do another. The only thing is, to do it so quick that it sha'n't be seen even by the few men who know how it is done. No woman yet was ever able to be a conjurer, which is a rum thing, because their fingers do pretty for music, and lace-work, and such. But for conjuring, they haven't the mind. You want a man's brain for such work.'

'I have always,' said Angela, 'felt what poor, weak things we are, compared with men.'

(To be Continued.)

Westbromwic Albion defeated Notts Forest on the third attempt in the semifinal for the English football cup, leaving the struggle for final honors between Albion and Aston Villa.

Lord Sheffield's cricketers will close their Australian tour with the third match against All-Australia, which begins at Adelaide on Friday. The two previous matches have resulted in defeat for the Englishmen.