

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

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

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Continued.

Then he turned from generalities to particulars, and entertained his audience with anecdotes gleaned, Heaven knows how, from the private histories of many noble families, tending to show the corruption into which the British Aristocracy had fallen. These anecdotes were received with that keenness which always awaits stories which show how wicked other people are, and what are the newest fashions and hitherto unknown forms of vice. Angela marveled, on her part, to hear 'Scandal about Queen Elizabeth' at Stepney.

Then, after an impeachment which lasted for half an hour, he thundered forth an appeal—not at all novel to his hearers, yet still effective, because his voice was like a trumpet—to the men before him to rise in their millions, their majesty, and their might, and to bear the accursed thing down. He sat down, at last, wiping his forehead, and exhausted but triumphant. Never before had he so completely carried his audience with him; never before had he obtained such flow of language, and such mastery over his voice; never before had he realized so fully that he was, he himself, an orator inferior to none. As he sat down, while the men clapped their hands and cheered, a vision of greatness passed before his mind. He would be the Leader of the People; they should look to him as they had never yet looked to any man for guidance. And he would lead them, Whither? But this, in the dream of the moment, mattered nothing.

A cold chill came over him as he saw his cousin Harry leap lightly to the platform and take his place at the table. For he foresaw trouble; and all the more because those of the audience who knew Gentleman Jack laughed in expectation of that trouble. Fickle and fleeting is the breath of popular favor; only a moment before and they were cheering him to the skies; now they laughed because they hoped he was to be made to look a fool. But the orator took heart considering that his facts were undeniable.

When the tumult had subsided, Harry, to everybody's astonishment, laid his hand upon his cousin's shoulder—a gesture of approbation—and looked round the room, and said, quietly, but loud enough to be heard by all:

'My cousin, Dick Coppin, can talk. That was a very good speech of his, wasn't it?' Voices were heard asking if he could better it.

'No,' Harry replied. 'I can't. I wish I could.' He took his place beside the table, and gazed for a few moments at the faces below him. Angela observed that his face was pale, though the carriage of his head was brave. 'I wish,' he repeated, 'that I could. Because after all these fire-works, it is such a tame thing just to tell you that there wasn't a word of sense in the whole speech.'

Here there were signs of wrath, but the general feeling was to let the speaker have his say.

'Do you suppose—any of you—that Dick believes that the Lords go rolling drunk to the House? Of course he doesn't. Do you suppose that he thinks you such fools as to believe it? Of course he doesn't. But then, you see, Dick must have his fire-works. And it was a first-rate speech. Do you suppose he believes the Lords are a worn-out lot? Not he. He knows better. And if any of you feel inclined to think so, go and look at them. You will find them as well set-up as most, and better. You can hear some of them in the House of Commons, where you send them, you electors. Wherever there are Englishmen working, fighting, or sporting, there are some of those families among them. As for their corruption, that's fire-works, too. Dick has told you some beautiful stories which he challenged anybody to dispute. I dare say they are all true. What he forgot to tell you is that he has picked out these stories from the last hundred and fifty years, and expects you to believe that they all happened yesterday. Shall we charge you, members of the Club, with all the crimes of the Whitechapel Road for a hundred years? If you want to upset the House of Lords, go and do it. But don't do it with lies on your lips, and on false pretenses. You know how virtuous and moral you are yourselves. Then just remember that the members of the House of Lords are about as moral as you are, or rather better. Abolish the House of Lords if you like. How much better will you be when it is gone? You can go on abolishing. There is the Church. Get it disestablished. Think how much better you will all be when the churches are pulled down. Yet you couldn't stay away any more than you do. You want the Land Laws reformed. Get them reformed, and think how much land you will get for yourselves out of that reform.'

'Dick Coppin says you have got the Power. So you have. He says the last Reform Bill gave it to you. There he makes a mistake. You have always had the Power there is. It is yours, because you are the people, and what the people want they will have. Your Power is your birthright. You are an irresistible giant, who has only to roar in order to get what he wants.

'Well, why don't you roar? Because you don't know what you do want. Because your leaders don't know any more than yourselves; because they go bawling for things which will do you no good, and don't know what it is you do want.

'You think that by making yourselves into Clubs and calling yourselves Radicals, you are getting forward. You think that by listening to a chap like my cousin Dick, who's a clever chap and a devil for fire-works, you somehow improve your own condition. Did you ever ask yourselves what difference the form of government makes? I have been in America, where, if anywhere, the people have it their own way. Do you think work is more plentiful, wages better, hours shorter, things cheaper in a Republic? Do you think the heels of your boots last any longer? If you do, think so no longer. Whether the House of Lords, or the Church, or the Land Laws stand or fall, that, my friends, makes not the difference of a penny piece to any single man among us. You who agitate for their destruction are generously giving your time and trouble for things which help no man. And yet there are so many things that can help us.

'It comes of your cursed ignorance.'—Harry was warming up.—'I say, your cursed ignorance. You know nothing; you understand nothing of your own country. You do not know how its institutions have grown up; why it is so prosperous; why changes, when they have to be made, should be made slowly, and not before they are necessary; nor how you yourselves may climb up if you will, into a life above you, much happier, much more pleasant. You do not respect the old institutions, because you don't know them; you desire new things because you don't understand the old. Go—learn—make your orators learn, and make them teach you. And then send them to the House of Commons to represent you.

'You think that Governments can do everything for you. You fools! Has any government ever done anything for you? Has it raised your wages—has it shortened your hours? Can it protect you against rogues and adulterers? Will it ever try to better your position? Never, never, never!—because it can not. Does any Government ask what you want—what you ought to want? No. Can it give you what you want? No.

'Listen. You want clean streets and houses in which decent folks can live. The Government has appointed sanitary officers. Yet look about you! Put your heads in the courts of Whitechapel. What has the sanitary officer done? You want strong and well-built houses. There are Government inspectors; yet, look at the lath and plaster houses that a child could kick over. You want honest food—all that you eat and drink is adulterated. How does the Government help you there?

'You have the power—all the power there is. You can not use it, because you don't know how. You expect the Government to use your power—to do your work. My friends, I will tell you the secret. Whatever you want done you must do for yourselves! No one else will do it for you. You must agree that such and shall be done; and then be very sure you will get it done.

'In politics you are used as the counters of a game—each side plays with you. Not for you, mind. You get nothing, whichever side is in—you are the pawns.

'It is something, perhaps, to take even so much part in the game; but, as you get nothing but the honor, I am rather surprised at your going on with it. And, if I might advise, it would be that we give that game over, and play one by ourselves, in which there really is something to be got.

'What we must play for is what we want. What we have got to do is, to remember that when we say we will have a thing—nobody can resist us. Have it we must, because we are the masters.

'Now, then, what do we want? Harry was quite serious by this time, and so were the faces of those who listened—though there was a little angry doubt on some of them. No one replied to the question. Some of the younger men looked as if they might, perhaps, have answered in the words of the sailor—'more rum.' But they refrained, and preserved silence.

'What do we want? Has any one of you what we do want? Let me tell you a few things. I can't think of any; but I know a few that you ought to put first.

'You want your own local government—'

what every little country town has, you have not. You want to elect your own aldermen, mayors, guardians, and school-boards—be yourselves—be yourselves. Get that first, and abolish the House of Lords afterward.

'There is your food! You ought to get your beef from America, at threepence a pound, and you are contented to give a shilling. You ought to have your fish at twopence a pound, and you pay whatever they choose to charge you. You drink bad beer, bad spirits, bad tea, bad cocoa, bad coffee, because you don't know that the things are bad and dear; and because you don't understand that you have only got to resolve in order to get all this changed. It is, you see, your cursed ignorance.

'There are your houses! The rich people—having more knowledge than you, and more determination—have found out how to build houses so as to prevent fevers. You live in houses built to catch fever—fever traps! When you find out what you want, you will refuse to live in such houses. You will come out of them—you will have them pulled down.

'When it comes to building up better houses, you will remember that paid inspectors are squared by the builders—so that the cement is mud and sand; and the bricks are crumbling clay; and the walls crack, and the floors are shaky. Therefore you will be your own inspectors.

'The Government makes us send our children to board-schools to be educated. That would be very noble of the Government if they had first considered—which nobody has—what sort of education a workingman wants. As yet they have only got as far as spelling. When a boy can spell they think he is educated. Once it was all Kings of Israel—now it is all spelling. Is that what we want? Do you think it matters how you spell, so that you know? Are you contented that your children shall know nothing about this great country? Nothing of its wealth and people?—nothing of their duties as citizens?—nothing of their own trade? Shall they not be taught that theirs is the power—that they can do what they like, and have what they like, if they like?

'Do you resolve that the education of your children shall be real, and it will become real; but don't look to Government to do it or it will continue to be spelling. Find out the thing that you want, and send your own men to the school-boards to get that done.

'Another thing that you want is pleasure—men can't do without it. Can Government give you that? They can shut the public-houses at twelve—what more can they do? But you—you do not know how to enjoy yourselves. You don't know what to do. You can't play music, nor sing, nor paint, nor dance—you can do nothing. You get no pleasure out of life, and you won't get it—even by abolishing everything.

'Take that simple question of a holiday. We take ours, like the fools we are, all in droves, by thousands and millions on bank holidays. Why do we do that? Why do we not insist on having our holidays at different times in the year, without these monstrous crowds which render enjoyment impossible? And why do we not demand—what is granted to every little quill driving clerk in the city—our fortnight every year with nothing to do, and drawing full pay? That is one of your wants, and you don't know it. The reform of the Land Laws, my brothers, will not bring you one inch nearer getting this want.'

At this point the chairman nodded his head approvingly. Perhaps he had never before realized how all his life he had neglected the substance and swallowed the shadow. The old man sat listening patiently with his head in his hands. Never before had any workman, any one of his own class, spoken like this young fellow, who talked and looked like a swell—though they knew him for what he was. Pleasure! Yes—he had never considered that life might have its delights. Yet, what delights?

'There is another thing, and the blackest of all'—Harry paused a moment; but the men were listening, and now in earnest.

'I mean the treatment of our girls—your sisters and your daughters! Men, who have combined together and made your unions for yourselves—you have forced upon your employers terms which nothing but combination would have compelled them to accept. You are paid twice what you received twenty years ago. You go in broadcloth—you are well fed. You have money in your pocket. But you have clean forgotten the girls.

'Think of the girls.

'They have no protection but a Government Act, forbidding more than ten hours' work. Who care for a Government Act?—it is defied daily. Those who frame these Acts know very well that they are powerless to maintain them; because, my friends, the power is with the people—you. If you resolve that an Act shall become a law, you make it so. Everything, in the end, is by the people and through the people.

'You have done nothing for your girls—you leave them to the mercies of employers, who have got to cut down expenses to the last farthing. They are paid starvation wages. They are kept in unwholesome

rooms. They are bound to the longest hours. They are oppressed with fines. The girls grow up narrow-chested, stooping, consumptive—they are used up wholesale. And what do you do for them?—nothing. There are girls and women in this hall—can any one of them here get up and say that the workmen have raised a finger for them? The worst charge that any man can bring against you is that you care nothing for your girls.

'Why, it is only the other day that a Dress-makers' Association has been opened among you—you all know where it is. You all know what it tries to do for the girls. Yet, what single man among you has ever had the pluck to stand up for his sisters who are working in it?'

Then Harry stepped right to the edge of the platform and spread out his hands, changing his voice.

'You are good fellows,' he said, 'and you've given me fair play. There isn't a country in the world, except England, where I could have had this fair play. Don't misunderstand me—I tell you, and I don't think you knew it before, that the time has come when the people should leave off caring much about the Government, or expecting any good thing for themselves from any government; because it can't be done in that way. You must find out for yourselves what you want, and then you must have that done. You must combine for these things as you did for wages, and you will get them. And if you spend half the energy in working for yourselves that you have spent in working for things that do you no good you will be happy indeed.

'Your politics, I say again, will do nothing for you—do you heed—nothing at all; but yours is the power. Let us repeat it again and again—all the power is yours. Try what Government can do. Send Dick Coppin into Parliament; he's a clever chap, and tell him to do what he can for you. He will do nothing. Therefore, work for yourselves, and by yourselves. Make out what you want, and resolve to have it—nobody can prevent you. The world is yours to do what you like with. Here in England, as in America, the workingman is master—provided the workingman knows what he wants. The first thing you want, I reckon, is good lodging. The second, is good food. The third, is good drink—good, unadulterated beer, and plenty of it. The fourth, is good and sensible education. The fifth, is holiday and pleasure; and the last, which is also the first, is justice for your girls. But don't be fools. I have been among you in this Club a good many times. It goes to my heart every time I come to see so many clever men and able men wasting their time in grievances which don't hurt them, when they are surrounded by a hundred grievances which they have only to perceive in order to sweep them away.

'I am a Radical, like yourselves; but I am a Social Radical. As for your political Jaw, it plays the game of those who use you. Politics is a game of lying accusations and impossible promises. The accusations make you angry—the promises make you hopeful. But you get nothing in the long run; and you never will. Because—promise what they may—it is not laws or measures that will improve our lot; it is by our own resolution that it shall be improved. Hold out your hands and take the things that are offered you—everything is yours if you like to have it. You are in a beautiful garden filled with fruits, if you care to pick them; but you do not. You lie grubbing in the mud, and crying out for what will do you no good. Voices are calling to you—they offer you such a life as was never yet conceived by the lordliest House of Lords—a life full of work, and full of pleasure. But you don't hear—you are deaf. You are blind—you are ignorant.'

He stopped; a hoarse shout greeted his peroration. Harry wondered for a moment if this was applause or disapproval. It was the former.

Then one man rose and spoke.

'Damn him!' he cried. 'Yet the phrase was used in no condemnatory spirit; as when a mother addresses her boy as a naughty little rogue-pogue. Damn him! He shall be our next member.'

'No,' said Harry, clapping his cousin on the shoulder, 'here is your next member Dick Coppin is your boy. He is clever—he is ambitious. Tell him what you want, and he'll get it for you if any one can. But, oh, men! Find out what you want, and have it. Yours—yours—yours is the power. You are the masters of the world. Leave the humbug of Radicalism, and Liberalism, and Toryism. Let dead politics bury their dead—learn to look after your own interests. You are the kings and lords of humanity. The old kings and lords are no more—they are swept away! They are only shadows of the past. With you are the scepter and the crown. You sit upon the throne, and when you know how to reign, you shall reign as never yet king was known to reign; but first find out what you want.'

He lightly leaped from the platform and stepped down the hall—he had said his say, and was going. The men laughed and shouted—half angry, half pleased, but

wholly astonished; and Dick Coppin, with a burning cheek, sat humiliated yet proud of his cousin.

At the door Harry met Miss Kennedy, with Captain Sorensen and Nelly.

'We heard your speech,' said Angela, with brightened eyes and glowing cheeks. 'Oh, what did I tell you? You can speak, you can persuade; you can lead. What a career!—what a career lies before the man who can persuade and lead!'

CHAPTER XXIX,
THE FIGUREHEADS.

It was Sunday morning, after breakfast, and Harry was sitting in the boarding-house common room, silently contemplating his two fellow-boarders, Josephus and Mr. Maliphant. The circle at Bormalack's was greatly broken up. Not to speak of the loss of the illustrious pair, Daniel Fagg had now taken to live entirely among the dress-makers, except in the evenings, when their music and dancing drove him away; in fact, he regarded the place as his own, and had so far forgotten that he took his meals there by invitation as to criticise the dinners, which were always good, although plain, and to find fault with the beer, which came from Messenger's. Miss Kennedy, too, only slept at the boarding-house, though by singular forgetfulness she always paid the landlady every Saturday morning in advance for a week's board and lodging. Therefore Josephus and the old man for the most part sat in the room alone, and were excellent company, because the ill used junior clerk never wanted to talk with anybody, and the aged carver of figureheads never wanted a listener.

Almost for the first time Harry considered this old man, the rememberer of fag ends and middle bits of anecdotes, with something more than a passing curiosity and a sense of irritation caused by the incongruity of the creature. You know that whenever you seriously address yourself to the study of a person, however insignificant in appearance, that person assumes an importance equal to any lord. A person, you see, is an individual, or an indivisible thing. Wherefore, let us not despise our neighbor. The ancient Mr. Maliphant was a little, thin old man, with a few grey hairs left, but not many; his face was unwrapped, so to speak, in a pair of very high collars, and he wore a black silk stock, not very rusty, for he had been in the reign of the fourth George a dapper young fellow, and possessed a taste in dress beyond the lights of Limehouse. But this was in his nautical days, and before he developed his natural genius for carving ship's figureheads. He had no teeth left, and their absence greatly shortened the space between nose and chin, which produced an odd effect; he was closely shaven; his face was all covered over like an ocean with innumerable wrinkles, crow's-feet, dimples, furrows, valleys, and winding water-courses, which showed like the universal smile of an accurate map. His forehead, when the original thatch was thick, must have been rather low and weak; his eyes were still bright and blue, though they wandered while he talked; when he was silent they had a far-off look; his eyebrows, as often happens with old men, had grown bushy and were joined across the bridge; when his memory failed him, which was frequently the case, they frowned almost as terribly as those of Daniel Fagg; his figure was spare and his legs thin, and he sat on one side of the chair with his feet twisted beneath it; he never did anything, except to smoke one pipe a night; never took the least notice of anybody; when he talked, he addressed the whole company, not any individual; and he was affected by no man's happiness or suffering. He had lived that long that he had no more sympathy left; the world was nothing more to him; he had no further interest in it; he gone beyond it and out of it; he was so old that he had not a friend left who knew him when he was young; he lived apart; he was, perforce, a hermit.

Harry remembered, looking upon this survival, that the old man had once betrayed a knowledge of his father and of the early history of the Coppin and Messenger families. He wondered now why he had not tried to get more out of him. It would be a family chronicle of small beer, but there could be nothing, probably, very disagreeable to learn about the career of the late sergeant, his father, nor anything painful about the Coppins. On this Sunday morning, when the old man looked as if the cares of the week were off his mind, his memory should be fresh—clearer than on a week day.

(To be Continued.)

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