

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

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

CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

There should have been a great function when the foundation stone was laid, with a procession of the clergy in white surplices and college caps, perhaps a bishop, Miss Messenger herself, with her friends, a lord or two, the officers of the nearest Masonic Lodge, a few Forresters, Odd Fellows, Buffaloes, Druids, and Shepherds, a flag, the charity children, a dozen policemen, and Venetian masts, with a prayer, a hymn, a speech, and a breakfast—nothing short of this should have satisfied the founder. Yet she let the opportunity slip, and nothing was done at all; the great building, destined to change the character of the gloomy city into a City of Sunshine, was begun with no pomp or outward demonstration. Gangs of workmen cleared away the ignoble bricks; the little tenements vanished; a broad space bristling with little garden walls gaped where they had stood; then the wall vanished; and nothing at all was left but holes where cellars had been; then they raised a boarding round the whole, and began to dig out the foundation. After the boarding was put up, nothing more, for a long time, was visible. Angela used to prowling round it in the morning, when the girls were all at work, but fearful lest the architect might come and recognize her.

As she saw her Palace begin to grow into existence, she became anxious about its success. The first beatific vision, the rapture of imagination, was over, and would come no more; she had now to face the hard fact of an unsympathetic people who perhaps would not desire any pleasure—or if any, then the pleasure of a 'spre' with plenty of beer. How could the thing be worked if the people themselves would not work it? How many could she reckon upon as her friends? Perhaps two or three at most. Oh! the Herculean task, for one woman, with two or three disciples, to revolutionize the City of East London!

With this upon her mind, her conversations with the intelligent young cabinet-maker became more than usually grave and earnest. He was himself more serious than of old, because he now occupied so responsible a position in the Brewery. Their relations remained unchanged. They walked together, they talked and they devised things in the drawing-room. 'I think that we should never think or talk of workingmen in the lump, any more than we think of rich men in a lump. All sorts and conditions of men are pretty much alike, and what moves one moves all. We are all tempted in the same way; we can all be led in the same way.'

'Yes, but I do not see how that fact helps.' They were talking, as Angela loved to do, of the schemes of the Palace.

'If the Palace were built, we should offer the people of Stepney, without prejudice to Whitechapel, Mile End, Bow, or even Cable Street, a great many things which at present they can not get and do not desire. Yet they have always proved extremely attractive. We offer the society of the young for the young, with dancing, singing, music, acting, entertainments—everything except, which is an enormous exception, feasting; we offer them all for nothing; we tell them, in fact, to do everything for themselves: to be the actors, singers, dancers, and musicians.'

'And they can not do anything.'

'A few can; the rest will come in. You forget, Miss Kennedy, the honor and glory of acting, singing, and performing in public. Can there be a greater reward than the applause of one's friends?'

'It could never be so nice,' said Nelly, to dance in a great hall among a lot of people as to dance up here, all by ourselves.'

The Palace was not, in these days, very greatly in the young man's mind. He was occupied with other things: his own work and position; the wisdom of his choice; the prospects of the future. For surely, if he had exchanged the old life and got nothing in return but work at a lathe all day at tenpence an hour, the change was a bad one. Nothing more had been said to him by Miss Kennedy about the great things he was to do, with her, for her, among his people. Was he, then, supposed to find out for himself these great things? And he made no more way with his wooing. That was stopped, apparently, altogether.

Always kind to him; always well pleased to see him; always receiving him with the same sweet and gracious smile; always frank and open with him; but nothing more.

Of late he had observed that her mind was greatly occupied; she was brooding over something; he feared that it might be something to do with the Associated Dress-makers' financial position. She did not communicate her anxieties to him, but always, when they were alone, wanted to go back to their vision of the Palace. Harry

possessed a ready sympathy; he fell easily and at once into the direction suggested by another's words. Therefore, when Angela talked about the Palace, he took up the thread of invention, and made believe with her as if it were a thing possible, a thing of brick and mortar.

'I see,' he went on this evening, warming to the work, halls are furnished and lighted up; the dancing-room is ready; the theatre is completed and the electric lights are lighted; the concert-rooms are ready with their music-stands and their seats. The doors are open. Then a wonderful thing happens.'

'What is that?' asked Angela.

'Nobody comes.'

'Oh!'

'The vast chambers echo with the footsteps of yourself, Miss Kennedy, and of Nelly, who makes no more noise than a demure kitten. Captain Sorensen and I make as much trampling as we can, to produce the effect of a crowd. But it hardly seems to succeed. Then come the girls, and we try to get up a dance; but as Nelly says, it is not quite the same as your drawing-room. Presently two men, with pipes in their mouths, come in and look about them. I explain that the stage is ready for them, if they like to act; or the concert-room, if they will sing; or the dancing-room, should they wish to shake a leg. They stare and they go away. Then we shut up the doors and go away and cry.'

'Oh, Mr. Goslett, have you no other comfort for me?'

'Plenty of comfort. While we are all crying, somebody has a happy thought. I think it is Nelly.'

She blushed a pretty rosy red. 'I am sure I could never suggest anything.'

'Nelly suggests that we shall offer prizes, a quantity of prizes, for competition in everything, the audience of spectators to be judges; and then the palace will be filled and the universal reign of joy will begin.'

'Can we afford prizes?' asked Angela, the practical.

'Miss Kennedy,' said Harry, severely, 'permit me to remind you that, in carrying out this project, money, for the first time in the world's history, is to be of no value.'

If Newham does not teach women to originate—which a thousand Newhams will never do—it teaches them to catch at an idea and develop it. The young workman suggested her Palace; but his first rough idea was a poor thing compared with Angela's finished structure—a wigwam beside a castle, a tabernacle beside a cathedral. Angela was devising an experiment, the like of which has never yet been tried upon restless and dissatisfied mankind. She was going, in short, to say to them: 'Life is full, crammed full, overflowing with all kinds of delights. It is a mistake to suppose that only rich people can enjoy these things. They may buy them, but everybody may create them; they cost nothing. You can learn music, and forthwith all the world will be transformed for you; you shall learn to paint, to carve, to model, to design, and the day shall be too short to contain the happiness you will get out of it. You shall learn to dance, and know the rapture of the waltz. You shall learn the greater art of acting, and give each other the pleasure which rich men buy. You shall even learn the great art of writing, and learn the magic of a charmed phrase. All these things which make the life of rich people happy shall be yours; and they shall cost you nothing. What the heart of man can desire shall be yours, and for nothing. I will give you a house to shelter you, and rooms in which to play; you have only to find the rest. Enter in, my friends; forget the squalid past; here are great halls and lovely corridors—they are yours. Fill them with sweet echoes of dropping music; let the walls be covered with your works of art; let the girls laugh and the boys be happy within these walls. I give you the shell, the empty carcass; fill it with the Spirit of Content and Happiness.'

Would they, to begin with, 'behave according?' It was easy to bring together half a dozen dress-makers: girls always like behaving nicely; would the young men be equally amenable? And would the policemen be inevitable, as in the corridors of a theatre? The police, however, would have to be voluntary, like every other part of the Institution, and the guardians of the peace must, like the performers in the entertainments, give their services for nothing. For which end, Harry suggested, it would be highly proper to have a professor of the noble art of self-defense, with others of fencing, single-stick, quarter-staff, and other kindred objects.

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK THE RADICAL.

In the early days of winter, the walls of the palace being now already well above the boarding, Angela made another important convert. This was no other than Dick Coppin, cousin of whom mention has been already made.

'I will bring him to your drawing-room,' said Harry. 'That is, if he will come. He does not know much about drawing-rooms, but he is a great man at the Stepney Advanced Club. He is a redder of red-hot Rads, and the most advanced of Republicans. I do not think he would himself go a-murdering of kings and priests, but I fancy he regards these things as accidents naturally rising out of a pardonable enthusiasm. His manners are better than you will generally find, because he belongs to my own gongle craft. You shall tame him, Miss Kennedy.'

Angela said she would try.

'He shall learn to waltz,' Harry went on.

'This will convert him from a fierce Republican to a merely enthusiastic Radical. Then he shall learn to sing in parts: this will drop him down into advanced Liberalism. And if you can persuade him to attend your evenings, talk with the girls, or engage in some Art, say painting, he will become, quite naturally, a mere Conservative.'

With some difficulty Harry persuaded his cousin to come with him. Dick Coppin was not, he said of himself, a dangler after girls' apron-strings, having something else to think of; nor was he attracted by the promise, held out by his cousin, of music and singing. But he came under protest, because music seemed to him an idle thing while the House of Lords remained undestroyed, and because this cousin of his could somehow make him do pretty nearly what he pleased.

He was a man of Harry's own age; a short man, with somewhat rough and rugged features—strong, and not without the beauty of strength. His forehead was broad; he had thick eyebrows, the thick lips of one who speaks much in public, and a straight chin—the chin of obstinacy. His eyes were bright and full; his hair was black; his face was oval; his expression was masterful; it was altogether the face of a man who interested one. Angela thought of his brother, the Captain in the Salvation Army: this man, she felt, had all the courage of the other, with more common sense; yet one who, too, might become a fanatic, who might be dangerous if he took the wrong side. She shook hands with him and welcomed him. Then she said that she wanted dancing men for her evenings, and hoped that he could dance. It was the first time in his life that Mr. Coppin had been asked that question, and also the first time that he had thought it possible that any man in his senses, except a sailor, should be expected to dance. Of course he could not, and said so bluntly, sticking his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, which is a gesture peculiar to the trade, if you care to notice so small a fact.

'Your cousin,' said Angela, 'will teach you. Mr. Goslett, please give Mr. Coppin a lesson in a quadrille. Nelly, will you be his partner. Now, if you will make up the set, I will play.'

An elderly bishop of Calvinistic principles could not have been more astonished than was this young workman. He had not the presence of mind to refuse. Before he realized his position, he was standing beside his partner: in front of him stood his cousin, also with a partner: four girls made up the set. Then the music began, and he was dragged, pushed, hustled, and pulled this way and that. He would have resented this treatment but that the girls took such pains to set right, and evidently regarded the lesson as one of the greatest importance. Nor did they cease until he had discerned what the mathematician called the Law of the Quadrille, and could tread the measure with some approach to accuracy.

'We shall not be satisfied, Mr. Coppin,' said Angela, when the quadrille was finished, 'until we have taught everybody to dance.'

'What is the good of dancing?' he asked, good-humoredly, but a good deal humiliated by the struggle.

'Dancing is graceful: dancing is a good exercise: dancing should be natural to young people: dancing is delightful. See—I will play a waltz; now watch the girls.'

She played. Instantly the girls caught each other by the waist and whirled round the room with brightened eyes and parted lips. Harry took Nelly in the close embrace which accompanies the German dance, and swiftly, easily, gracefully, danced round and round the room.

'Is it not happiness that you are witnessing, Mr. Coppin?' asked Angela. 'Tell me, did you ever see dress makers happy before? You, too, shall learn to waltz, I will teach you, but not to-night.'

Then they left off dancing and sat down, talking and laughing. Harry took his violin and discoursed sweet music, to which they listened or not as they listed. Only

the girl who was lame looked on with rapt and eager face.

'See her!' said Angela, pointing her out. 'She has found what her soul was ignorantly desiring. She has found music. Tell me, Mr. Coppin, if it were not for the music and this room, what would that poor child be?'

He made no reply. Never before had he witnessed, never had he suspected, such an evening. There were the girls whom he despised, who laughed and jested with the lads in the street, who talked loud and were foolish. Why, they were changed. What did it mean? And who was this young woman, who looked and spoke as no other woman he had ever met, yet was only a dress-maker?

'I have heard of you, Mr. Coppin,' this young person said, in her queen-like manner, 'and I am glad that you have come. We shall expect you, now, every Saturday evening. I hear that you are a political student.'

'I am a Republican,' he replied. 'That's about what I am.' Again he stuck his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets.

'Yes. You do not perhaps quite understand what it is that we are doing here, do you? In a small way—it is quite a little thing—it may interest even a political student like yourself. The interests of milliners and dress-makers are very small compared with the House of Lords Still—your sisters and cousins—'

'It seems pleasant,' he replied, 'if you don't all get set up with high notions. As for me, I am for root-and-branch Reform.'

'Yes; but all improvement in Government means improvement of the people, does it not? Else I see no reason for trying to improve a Government.'

He made no reply. He was so much accustomed to the vague denunciations and cheap rhetoric of his class, that a small practical point was strange to him.

'Now,' said Angela, 'I asked your cousin to bring you here, because I learn that you are a man of great mental activity, and likely, if you are properly directed, to be of great use to us.'

He stared again. Who was this dress-maker who spoke about directing him? The same uncomfortable feeling came over him, a cold doubt about himself, which he often felt when in the company of his cousin. No man likes to feel that he is not perfectly and entirely right, and that he must be set right.

'We are a society,' she went on, 'of girls who want to work for ourselves: we all of us belong to your class: we therefore look to you for sympathy and assistance. Yet you hold aloof from us. We have had some support here already, but none from the people who ought most to sympathize with us. Very well, then. While your cousin is amusing those girls, I will tell you about our Association.'

'Now you understand, Mr. Coppin. You men have long since organized yourselves—it is our turn now; and we look to you for help. We are not going to work any longer for a master: we are not going to work long hours any longer: and we are going to get time every day for fresh air, exercise, and amusement. You are continually occupied, I believe, at your Club, denouncing the pleasures of the rich. But we are actually going to enjoy all those pleasures ourselves, and they will cost us nothing. Look round this room—we have a piano lent to us: there is your cousin with his fiddle, and Captain Sorensen with his: we are learning part-songs, which cost us three halfpence each: we dance: we play: we read—a subscription to Smith's is only three guineas a year: we have games which are cheap: the whole expense of our evenings is the fire in winter and the gas. On Saturday evenings we have some cake and lemonade, which one of the girls make for us. What can rich people have more than society, lights, music, singing, and dancing?'

He was silent, wondering at this thing.

'Don't you see, Mr. Coppin, that if we are successful we shall be the cause of many more such Associations? Don't you see that if we could get our principle established, we should accomplish a greater revolution than the overthrow of the Lords and the Church, and one far more beneficial?'

'You can't succeed,' he said. 'It's been tried before.'

'Yes; by men: I know it. And it has always broken down because the leaders were false to their principles and betrayed the cause.'

'Where are the girls to get the money to start with?'

'We are fortunate,' Angela replied, 'We have this house and furniture given to us by a lady interested in us. That, I own, is a great thing. But other rich people will be found to do as much. Why, how much better it is than leaving money to hospitals!'

'Rich people!' he echoed, with contempt.

'Yes; rich people, of whom you know so little, Mr. Coppin, that I think you ought to be very careful how you speak of them. But think of us—look at the girls. Do they not look happier than they used to look?'

He replied untruthfully, because he was

not going to give in to a woman all of a sudden, that he did not remember how they used to look, but that undoubtedly they now looked very well. He did not say—which he felt—that they were behaving more quietly and modestly than he had ever known them to behave.

'You,' Angela went on, with a little emphasis on the pronoun which made her speech a delicate flattery—'you, Mr. Coppin, can not fail to observe how the evening's relaxation helps to raise the whole tone of the girls. The music which they hear sinks into their hearts and lifts them above the little cares of their lives: the dancing makes them merry: the social life, the talk among ourselves, the books they read, all help to maintain a pure and elevated tone of thought—I declare, Mr. Coppin, I no longer know these girls. And then they bring their friends, and so their influence spreads. They will not, I hope, remain in the work-rooms all their lives. A woman should be married, do not you think so, Mr. Coppin?'

He was too much astonished at the whole conversation to make any coherent reply.

'I think you have perhaps turned your attention too much to politics, have you not? Yet practical questions ought to interest you.'

'They say, at the Club,' he answered, 'that this place is a sham and a humbug.'

'Will you bring your friends here to show them that it is not?'

'Harry stood up for you the other night. He's plucky, and they like him for all he looks a swell.'

'Does he speak at your Club?'

'Sometimes—not to say speak. He gets up after the speech, and says so and so is wrong. Yet they like him—because he isn't afraid to say what he thinks. They call him Gentleman Jack.'

'I thought he was a brave man,' said Angela, looking at Harry, who was rehearsing some story to the delight of Nelly and the girls.

'Yes—the other night they were talking about you, and one said one thing, and one said another, and a chap said he thought he'd seen you in a West End music-hall and he didn't believe you were any better than you should be.'

'Oh!' she shrunk as if she had been struck some blow.

'He didn't say it twice. After he'd knocked him down, Harry invited that chap to stand up and have it out. But he wouldn't.'

It was a great misfortune for Harry that he lost the soft and glowing look of gratitude and admiration which was quite wasted upon him. For he was at the very point, the critical point, of the story.

Angela had made another convert. The Dick Coppin went home that night, he was humbled but pensive. Here was a thing of which he had never thought—and here was a woman the like of whom he had never imagined. The House of Lords, the Church, the Land Laws, presented no attraction that night for his thoughts. For the first time in his life he felt the influence of a woman.

(To be Continued.)

Construing an Order.

A London judge has issued an order that all attorneys appearing in his court should wear black coat and trousers. His Honor, with frowning visage, accosted a disobedient attorney:

Mr. Pettigrew, do you know, sir, that you are transgressing a most positive order of this court?

In what way, may it please your Honor? The order says you shall wear black coat and trousers, yelled the judge.

I have on black coat and trousers, replied the wit.

But, roared the judge, the order means black coat and black trousers.

I don't read it so, replied Pettigrew. It also reads that the sergeant-at-arms should wear a cocked hat and sword.

There was no further comment on the nankeens.

The Practical Use of a Coffin.

A writer in a church magazine once found in a collier's cottage in Staffordshire a coffin used as a bread and cheese cupboard. Notwithstanding his wife's remonstrance, he told the story of the coffin as follows:

Eighteen years ago, he said, I ordered that coffin. The wife and me used to have a good many words. One day she said: 'I'll never be content till I see thee in thy coffin. Well, lass, I said, if that'll content thee it'll soon be done. Next day I gave directions to have the thing made. In a few days it came home, to the wife's horror. I got into it and asked: Now, lass, art thee content? She began to cry and wanted the horrid thing taken away. But that I wouldn't allow. In the end she got accustomed to seein' it and, as we wanted to turn it to some use, we had some shelves put in and made it into a bread and cheese cupboard. We have never quarreled since it came.