

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

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

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

'What is the matter with him?' asked the Chief Accountant.

The young workman laughed. 'I believe,' he replied, 'that my uncle expected the check.'

'Well, well!' the Chief Accountant waived his hand. 'There is nothing more to be said. You will find your shop; one of the porters will take you to it; you will have all the broken things that used to be sent out, kept for you to mend, and—and—all that. What we want a cabinet-maker for in the Brewery, I do not understand. That will do. Stay—you seem a rather superior kind of workman.'

'I have had an education,' said Harry, blushing.

'Good; so long as it has not made you discontented. Remember that we want sober and steady men in this place, and good work.'

'I am not certain yet,' said Harry, 'that I shall be able to take the place.'

'Not take the place? Not take a place in Messenger's Brewery? Do you know that everybody who conducts himself well here is booked for life? Do you know what you are throwing away? Not take the place? Why, you may be a cabinet-maker for the Brewery till they actually pension you off.'

'I am—I am a little uncertain in my designs for the future. I must ask for a day to consider.'

'Take a day. If to-morrow you do not present yourself in the work-shop prepared for you, I shall tell Miss Messenger that you have refused her offer.'

Harry walked away with a quickened pulse. So far, he had been posturing only as a cabinet-maker. At the outset, he had no intention of doing more than posture for awhile, and then go back to civilized life with no more difference than that caused by the revelation of his parentage. As for doing work, or taking a wage, that was very, very far from his mind. Yet now he must either accept the place, with the pay, or he must stand confessed a humbug. There remained but one other way, which was a worse way than the other two. He might, that is to say, refuse the work without assigning any reason. He would then appear in the character of a lazy and worthless workman—an idle apprentice, indeed; one who would do no work while there was money in the locker for another day of sloth. With that face could he stand before Miss Kennedy, revealed in these—his true colors?

It was an excellent opportunity for flight. That occurred to him. But flight—and after that last talk with the woman whose voice, whose face, whose graciousness had so filled his head and inflamed his imagination.

He walked away, considering.

When a man is very much perplexed, he often does a great many little odd things. Thus, Harry began by looking into the office where his cousin sat.

Josephus's desk was in the warmest part of the room, near the fire—so much promotion he had received. He sat among half a dozen lads of seventeen or twenty years of age, who did the mechanical work of making entries in the books. This he did, too, and had done every day for forty years. Beside him stood a great iron safe where the books were put away at night. The door was open. Harry looked in, caught the eye of his cousin, nodded encouragingly, and went on his way, his hands in his pockets.

When he came to Mrs. Bormalack's, he went in there, too, and found Lord Davenant anxiously waiting for the conduct of the Case to be resumed, in order that he might put up his feet and take his morning nap.

'This is my last morning,' Harry said. 'As for your Case, old boy, it is as complete as I can make it, and we had better send it in as soon as we can, unless you can find any more evidence.'

'No—no,' said his lordship, who found this familiarity a relief after the stately enjoyment of the title, 'there will be no more evidence. Well, if there's nothing more to be done, Mr. Goslett, I think I will—here he lifted his feet—and if you see Clara Martha, tell her that—that—'

Here he fell asleep.

It was against the rules to visit the Dress-makers' Association in the morning or afternoon. Harry therefore went to the room where he had fitted his lathe, and began to occupy himself with the beautiful cabinet he was making for Miss Kennedy. But he was restless; he was on the eve of a very important step. To take a place, to be actually paid for piece-work, is, if you please, a very different thing from pretending to have a trade.

Was he prepared to give up a life of culture?

He sat down and thought what such a surrender would mean.

First, there would be no club; none of the pleasant dinners at the little tables with one or two of his own friends; no easy chair in the smoking-room for a wet afternoon; none of the talk with men who are actually in the ring—political, literary, artistic, and dramatic; none of the pleasant consciousness that you are behind the scenes, which is enjoyed by so many young fellows who belong to good clubs. The club in itself would be a great thing to surrender.

Next, there would be no society.

He was at that age when society means the presence of beautiful girls; therefore, he loved society, whether in the form of a dance, or a dinner, or an at-home, or an afternoon, or a garden-party, or any other gathering where young people meet and exchange those ideas which they fondly imagine to be original. Well, he must never think any more of society. That was closed to him.

Next, he must give up most of the accomplishments, graces, arts, and skill which he had acquired by dint of great assiduity and much practice. Billiards, at which he could hold his own against most; fencing, at which he was capable of becoming a professor; shooting, in which he was ready to challenge any American; riding; the talking of different languages; what would it help him now to be a master in these arts? They must all go; for the future he would have to work nine hours a day for tenpence an hour, which is two pounds a week, allowing for Saturday afternoon. There would simply be no time for practicing any single one of these things, even if he could afford the purchase of the instruments required.

Again, he would have to grieve and disappoint the kindest man in the whole world—Lord Jocelyn.

I think it speaks well for this young man that one thing did not trouble him—the question of eating and drinking. He would dine no more; working-men do not dine, they stoke. He would drink no more wine; well, Harry found beer a most excellent and delicious beverage, particularly when you get it unadulterated.

Could he give up all these things? He could not conceive it possible, you see, that a man should go and become a workman, receiving a wage and obeying orders, and afterward resume his old place among gentlemen, as if nothing had happened. Indeed, it would require a vast amount of explanation.

Then he began to consider what he would get if he remained.

One thing only would reward him. He was so far gone in love, that for this girl's sake he would renounce everything and become a workman indeed.

He could not work; the quiet of the room oppressed him; he must be up and moving while the struggle went on.

Then he thought of his uncle Bunker and laughed, remembering his discomfiture and wrath. While he was laughing the door opened, and the very man appeared.

He had lost his purple hue, and was now, in fact, rather pale, and his cheeks looked flabby.

'Nephew,' he said, huskily, 'I want to talk to you about this thing; give over sniggering, and talk serious now.'

'Let us be serious.'

'This is a most dreadful mistake of Miss Messenger's; you know at first I thought it must be a joke. That is why I went away; men of my age and respectability don't like jokes. But it was no joke. I see now it is just a mere dreadful mistake, which you can set right.'

'How can I set it right?'

'To be sure, I could do it myself, very easily. I have only got to write to her, and tell her that you've got no character, and nobody knows if you know your trade.'

'I don't think that would do, because I might write as well—'

'The best plan would be for you to refuse the situation and go away. Look here, boy; you come from no one knows where; you live no one knows how; you don't do any work; my impression is you don't want any, and you've only come to see what you can borrow or steal. That's my opinion. Now, don't let's argue, but just listen. If you'll go away quietly, without any fuss, just telling them at the Brewery that you've got to go, I'll give you—yes—I'll give you—twenty pounds down! There!'

'Very liberal indeed! But I am afraid—'

'I'll make it twenty-five. A man of spirit can do anything with twenty-five pounds down. Why, he might go to the other end of the world. If I were you I'd go there. Large openings there for a lad of spirit—large openings! Twenty-five pounds down, on the nail.'

'It seems a generous offer, still—'

'Nothing,' Mr. Bunker went on, 'has gone well since you came. There's this dreadful mistake of Miss Messenger's; then that Miss Kennedy's job, I didn't make anything out of that compared with what I might, and there's the—' He stopped because he was thinking of the houses.

'I want you to go,' he added, almost plaintively.

'And that, very much, is one of the reasons why I want to stay. Because, you see, you have not yet answered a question of mine. What did you get for me when you traded me away?'

For the second time his question produced a very remarkable effect upon the good man.

When he had gone, slamming the door behind him, Harry smiled sweetly.

'I know,' he said, 'that he has done something,' as they call it. Bunker is afraid. And I—yes—I shall find it out and terrify him still more. But, in order to find it out, I must stay. And if I stay, I must be a workman. And wear an apron! And a brown-paper cap! No. I draw the line above aprons. No consideration shall induce me to wear an apron. Not even—not if she were to make the apron a condition of marriage.'

CHAPTER XVI.

HARRY'S DECISION.

He spent the afternoon wandering about the streets of Steppney, full of the new thought that here might be his future home. This reflection made him regard the place from quite a novel point of view. As a mere outsider, he had looked upon the place critically, with amusement, with pity, with horror (in rainy weather), with wonder (in sunny days). He was a spectator, while before his eyes were played as many little comedies, comediettas, or tragedies or melodramas as there were inhabitants. But no farces, he remarked, and no burlesques. The Life of Industry contains no elements of farce or of burlesque. But if he took this decisive step he would have to look upon the East End from an inside point of view; he would be himself one of the actors, he would play his own little comedy. Therefore he must introduce the emotion of sympathy, and suppress the critical attitude altogether.

There was once an earl who went away and became a sailor before the mast; he seems to have enjoyed sailing better than legislating, but was, by accident, ingloriously drowned while so engaged. There was also the Honorable Timothy Clitheroe Davenant, who was also supposed to be drowned, but in reality exercised until his death, and apparently with happiness, the craft of wheelwright. There was another unfortunate nobleman, well known to fame, who became a butcher in a colony, and liked it. Precedents enough of voluntary descent and eclipse, to say nothing of the involuntarily obscurations, as when an emigre had to teach dancing, or the son of a royal duke was fain to become a village school-master. These historical parallels pleased Harry's fancy until he recollected that he was himself only a son of the people, and not of noble descent, so that they really did not bear upon his case, and could find not one single precedent in the whole history parallel with himself.

'Mine,' he said, formulating the thing, 'is a very remarkable and unusual case. Here is a man brought up to believe himself of gentle birth, and educated as a gentleman, so that there is nothing in the most liberal training of a gentleman that he has not learned, and no accomplishment which becomes a gentleman that he has not acquired. Then he learns that he is not a gentleman by birth, and that he is a pauper; wherefore, why not honest work? Work is noble, to be sure, especially if you get the kind of work you like, and please yourself about the time of doing it; nothing could be a more noble spectacle than that of myself working at the lathe for nothing, in the old days; would it be quite as noble at the Brewery, doing piece-work?'

These reflections, this putting of the case to himself, this grand dubiety, occupied the whole afternoon. When the evening came, and it was time to present himself in the drawing-room, he was no further advanced toward a decision.

The room looked bright and restful; wherever Angela went, she was accompanied and surrounded by an atmosphere of refinement. Those who conversed with her became infected with her culture; therefore, the place was like any drawing-room at the West End, save for the furniture, which was simple. Ladies would have noticed, even in such little things, in the way in which the girls sat and carried themselves, a note of difference. To Harry these minutiae were unknown, and he saw only a room full of girls quietly happy and apparently well-bred; some were reading; some were talking; one or two were 'making something for themselves, though their busy fingers were at work all day. Nelly and Miss Kennedy were listening to the captain, who was telling a yarn of his old

East Indianman. The three made a pretty group, Miss Kennedy seated on a low stool, at the captain's knee, while the old man leaned forward in his arm-chair, his daughter beside him watching, in her affectionate and pretty way, the face of her patron.

The quiet, peaceful air of the room, the happy and contented faces which before had been so harassed and worn, struck the young man's heart. Part of this had been his doing; could he go away and leave the brave girl who headed the little enterprise to the tender mercies of a Bunker? The thought of what he was throwing up—the club life, the art life, the literary life, the holiday time, the delightful roving in foreign lands which he should enjoy no more—all seemed insignificant considered beside this haven of rest and peace in the troubled waters of the East End. He was no philanthropist; the cant of platforms was intolerable to him; yet he was thinking of a step which meant giving up his own happiness for that of others; with, of course, the constant society of the woman he loved. Without that compensation the sacrifice would be impossible.

Miss Kennedy looked up and nodded to him kindly, motioning him not to interrupt the story, which the captain presently finished.

Then they had a little music and a little playing, and there was a little dancing—all just as usual; a quiet, pleasant evening; and they went away.

'You are silent to-night, Mr. Goslett,' said Angela, as they took their customary walk in the quiet little garden called Steppney Green.

'Yes. I am like the parrot—I think the more.'

'What is in your mind?'

'This: I have had an offer—an offer of work—from the Brewery. Miss Messenger herself sent the offer, which I am to accept, or to refuse, to-morrow morning.'

'An offer of work? I congratulate you. Of course you will accept?'

She looked at him sharply, even suspiciously.

'I do not know.'

'You have forgotten,' she said—in other girls the words and the tone of her voice would have sounded like an encouragement—'you have forgotten what you said only last Sunday evening.'

'No, I have not forgotten. What I said last Sunday evening only increases my embarrassment. I did not expect then—I did not think it possible that any work here would be offered to me.'

'Is the pay insufficient?'

'No; the pay is to be at the usual market rate.'

'Are the hours too long?'

'I am to please myself. It seems as if the young lady had done her best to make me as independent as a man who works for money can be.'

'Yet you hesitate. Why?'

He was silent, thinking what he should tell her. The whole truth would have been best; but then, one so seldom tells the whole truth about anything, far less about one's self. He could not tell her that he had been masquerading all the time, after so many protestations of being a real workman.

'Is it that you do not make friends among the East End workmen?'

'No.' He could not answer this with truth. 'It is not that. The workmen here are better than I expected to find them. They are more sensible, more self-reliant, and less dangerous. To be sure, they profess to entertain an unreasoning dislike for rich people, and, I believe, think that their lives are entirely spent over oranges and skittles. I wish they had more knowledge of books, and could be got to think in some elemental fashion about Art. I wish they had a better sense of beauty, and I wish they could be got to cultivate some of the graces of life. You shall teach them, Miss Kennedy. Also, I wish that tobacco was not their only solace. I am very much interested in them. That is not the reason.'

'If you please to tell me—' she said.

'Well, then—' he would tell that fatal half-truth—the reason is this: you know I have had an education above what Fortune intended for me when she made me the son of Sergeant Goslett.'

'I know,' she replied. 'It was my case, as well; we are companions in this great happiness.'

'The man who conferred this benefit upon me, the best and kindest-hearted man in the world, to whom I am indebted for more than I can tell you, is willing to do more for me. If I please, I may live with him, in idleness.'

'You may live in idleness? That must be, indeed, a tempting offer!'

'Idleness,' he replied, a little hurt at her contempt for what certainly was a temptation for him, 'does not always mean doing nothing.'

'What would you do, then?'

'There is the life of culture and art—'

'Oh, no!' she replied. 'Would you, really, like to become one of those poor creatures who think they lead lives devoted to art? Would you like to grow silly over blue china, to quarrel about color, to wor-

ship Form in poetry, to judge everything by the narrow rules of the latest pendantic fashion?'

'You know this art world, then!'

'I know something of it; I have heard of it. Never mind me, think of yourself. You would not, you could not, condemn yourself to such a life.'

'Not to such a life as your picture. But, consider, I am offered a life of freedom instead of servitude.'

'Servitude! Why, we are all servants one of the other. Society is like the human body, in which all the limbs belong to each other. There must be rich and poor, idlers and workers; we depend one upon the other; if the rich do not work with and for the poor, retribution falls upon them. The poor must work for the rich, or they will starve; poor or rich, I think it is better to be poor; idler or worker, I know it is better to be worker.'

He thought of Lord Jocelyn; of the pleasant chambers in Piccadilly; of the clubs; of his own friends; of society; of little dinners; of stalls at the theatre; of suppers among actors and actresses; of artists and their smoking-parties; of the men who write, and the men who talk, and the men who know everybody, and are full of stories; of his riding, and hunting, and shooting; of his fencing, and billiards, and cards.

All these things passed through his brain swiftly, in a moment. And then he thought of the beautiful woman beside him, whose voice was the sweetest music to him that he had ever heard.

'You must take the offer,' she went on, and her words fell upon his ear like the words of an oracle of a Greek in doubt. 'Work at the Brewery is not hard. You will have no task master set over you; you are free to go and come, to choose your own time; there will be in so great a place, there must be, work, quite enough to occupy your time. Give up yearning after an idle life, and work in patience.'

'Is there anything,' he said, 'to which you could not persuade me?'

'Oh, not for me!' she replied, impatiently. 'It is for yourself. You have your life before you, to throw away or to use. Tell me,' she hesitated a little; 'you have come back to your own kith and kin, after many years. They were strange to you at first, all these people of the East End—your own people. Now that you know them, should you like to go away from them, altogether away and forget them? Could you desert them? You know, if you go, that you will desert them, for between this end of London and the other there is a great gulf fixed, across which no one ever passes. You will leave us altogether if you leave us now.'

At this point Harry felt the very strongest desire to make it clear that what concerned him most was the leaving her, but he repressed the temptation, and merely remarked that if he did desert his kith and kin, they would not regret him. His Uncle Bunker, he explained, had even offered him five-and-twenty pounds to go.

'It is not that you have done anything, you know, except to help us in our little experiment,' said Angela. 'But it is what you may do, what you shall do, if you remain.'

'What can I do?'

'You have knowledge; you have a voice; you have a quick eye and a ready tongue; you could lead, you could preside. Oh! what a career you might have before you!'

'You think too well of me, Miss Kennedy. I am a very lazy and worthless kind of man.'

'No.' She shook her head and smiled superior. 'I know you better than you know yourself. I have watched you for these months. And then, we must not forget, there is our Palace of Delight.'

'Are we millionaires?'

'Why, we have already begun it. There is our drawing-room; it is only a few weeks old, yet see what a difference there is already. The girls are happy; their finer tastes are awakened; their natural yearning after things delightful are partly satisfied; they laugh and sing now; they run about and play. There is already something of our dreams realized. Stay with us, and we shall see the rest.'

He made an effort and again restrained himself.

'I stay, then,' he said, 'for your sake—because you command me to stay.'

Had she done well? She asked herself the question in the shelter of her bedroom, with great doubt and anxiety. This young workman, who might if he chose be a—well—yes—a gentleman—quite as good a gentleman as most of the men who pretend to the title—was going to give up whatever prospects he had in the world, at her bidding, and for her sake. For her sake! Yet, what he wished was impossible.

What reward, then, had she to offer him that would satisfy him? Nothing. Stay, he was only a man. One pretty face was as good as another; he was struck with hers for the moment. She would put him in the way of being attracted by another. Yes; that would do. This settled in her own mind, she put the matter aside, and as she was very sleepy, she only murmured to herself, as her eyes closed, 'Nelly Sorensen.'

(To be Continued)