

LADY BOUNTIFUL.

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

CHAPTER XIII.

ANGELA'S EXPERIMENT.

'No, Constance,' Angela wrote, 'I can not believe that your lectures will be a failure, or that your life's work is destined to be anything short of a brilliant success—an 'epochmaking' episode in the history of Woman's Rise. If your lectures have not yet attracted reading men, it must be because they are not yet known. It is unworthy of faith in your own high mission to suppose that personal appearance or beauty has anything to do with popularity in matters of mind. Who asks—who can ask—whether a woman of genius is lovely or not? And to take lower ground: every woman owns the singular attractiveness of your own face, which has always seemed to me, apart from personal friendship, the face of pure intellect. I do not give up my belief that the men will soon begin to run after your lectures as they did after those of Hypatia, and that you will become in the University as great a teacher of Mathematics as Sir Isaac Newton himself. Meantime, it must be, I own, irksome to lecture on Vulgar Fractions, and the First Book of Euclid, and unsatisfactory to find, after you have made a Research and arrived at what seemed a splendid result, that some man has been before you. Patience, Constance!'

At this point the reader, who was of course Constance Woodcote, paused and smiled bitterly. She was angry because she had advertised a course of lectures on some desperately high mathematical subject and no one came to hear them. Had she been, she reflected, a pink-and-white girl with no forehead and soft eyes, everybody would have rushed to hear her. As it was, Angela no doubt meant well, but she was always disposed to give men credit for qualities which they did not possess. As if you could ever persuade a man to regard a woman from a purely intellectual point of view! After all, she thought, civilization was only just begun: we live in a world of darkness: the reign of woman is as yet afar off. She continued her reading with impatience. Somehow, her friend seemed to have drifted away: their lines were diverging: already the old enthusiasms had given place to the new, and Angela thought less of the great cause which she had once promised to further with her mighty resources.

'As regards the Scholarship which I promised you, I must ask you to wait a little, because my hands are full—so full of important things that even a new scholarship at Newnham seems a small thing. I can not tell you in a letter what my projects are, and how I am trying to do something new with my great wealth. This, at least, I may tell you, partly because I am intoxicated with my own schemes, and, therefore, I must tell everybody I speak to; and partly because you are perfectly certain not to sympathize with me, and therefore you will not trouble to argue the point with me. I have found out, to begin with, a great truth. It is what would-be philanthropists and benefactors and improvers of things have all along been working on a false assumption. They have taught and believed that the people look up to the 'better class'—a phrase invented by the well-to-do in order to show riches and virtue go together—for guidance and advice. My dear, it is the greatest mistake: they do not look up to us at all; they do not want to copy our ways; they are perfectly satisfied with their own ways; they will naturally take as much money as we choose to give them, and as many presents; and they consider the exhortations, preachings, admonitions, words of guidance, and advice as uncomfortable but unavoidable accompaniments of this gift. But we ourselves are neither respected nor copied. Nor do they want our culture.'

'Angela,' said the mathematician, 'is really very prolix.'

'This being so, I am endeavoring to make such people as I can get at discontented as a first step. Without discontent, nothing can be done. I work upon them by showing, practically, and by way of example, better things. This I can do because I am here as simply one of themselves—a work-woman among other work-women. I do not work as much as the others in our newly formed Association because I am supposed to run the machine, and to go to the West End for work. Miss Messenger is one of our customers. So much am I one of them, that I take my wages on Saturday, and am to have the same share, and no more, in the business as my dress-makers. I confess to you that in the foundation of my Dress-makers' Association I have violated most distinctly every precept of political and social economy. I have given them a house rent free for a year; I have fitted it up with all that they want; I have started them with orders from myself; I have resolved to keep them going until they are able to run alone; I give wages, in money and in food,

higher than the market value. I know what you will say. It is all quite true, scientifically. But outside the range of science there is humanity. And only think what a great field my method opens for the employment of the unfortunate rich—the unhappy, useless, heavily burdened rich. They will all follow my example and help the people to help themselves.

'My girls were at first and for the most part uninteresting, until I came to know them individually: every one, when you know her, and can sympathize with her, becomes interesting. Some are, however, more interesting than others; there are two or three, for instance, in whom I feel a special interest. One of them, whom I love for her gentleness and for her loyalty to me, is the daughter of an old ship captain now in an almshouse. She is singularly beautiful, with an air of fragility which one hopes is not real; she is endowed by nature with a keenly sensitive disposition, and has had the advantage, rare in these parts, of a father who learned to be a gentleman before he came to the almshouse. The other is a religious fanatic, a sectarian of the most positive kind. She knows what is truth more certainly than any Professor of Truth we ever encountered; she is my manager, and is good at business. I think she has come to regard me with less contempt, from a business point of view, than she did at first, because in the conduct of the show-room and the trying-on-room she has all her own way.

'My evenings are mostly spent with the girls in the garden and 'drawing-room.' Yes, we have a drawing-room over the work-room. At first we had tea at five and struck work at seven; now we strike work at half past six and take tea with lawn tennis. I assure you my dress-makers are as fond of lawn tennis as the students of Newnham. When it is too dark to play we go upstairs and have music and dancing.' Here followed a word which had been erased. The mathematical lecturer held the letter to the light and fancied the word was 'Harry.' This could hardly be; it must be Hetty, or Kitty, or Lotty, or some such feminine abbreviation. There could be no Harry. She looked again. Strange! It certainly was Harry. She shook her head suspiciously and went on with the letter.

'The girls' friends and sisters have begun to come, and we are learning all kinds of dances. Fortunately my dear old captain from the almshouse can play the fiddle, and likes nothing better than to play for us. We place him in the corner beside the piano and he plays as long as we please, being the best of all old captains. We are not well off for men, having at present to rely principally on a superior young cabinet-maker, who can also play the fiddle on occasion. He dances very well, and perhaps he will fall in love with the captain's daughter.

'What I have attempted is, in short, nothing less than the introduction of a love of what we call culture. Other things will follow, but at present I am contented with an experiment on a very humble scale. If I were to go among the people in my name, most of them would try to borrow or steal from me; as I am only a poor dress-maker, only those who have business with me try to take me in. I do not go on a platform and lecture the people: nor do I open a school to teach them: nor do I circulate tracts. I simply say, 'My dears, I am going to dance and sing, and have a little music, and play lawn tennis; come with me, and we will dance together.' And they come. And they behave well. I think it is a strange thing that young women of the lower class always prefer to behave well when they can, while young men of their own station take so much pleasure in noise and riot. We have no difficulty in our drawing-room, where the girls behave perfectly and enjoy themselves in a surprising manner. I find, already, a great improvement in the girls. They have acquired new interests in life: they are happier: consequently, they chatter like birds in spring and sunshine; and whereas, since I came into these regions, it has been a constant pain to listen to the querulous and angry talk of workgirls in omnibuses and in streets, I rejoice that we have changed all this, and while they are with me my girls can talk without angry snapping of the lips, and without the 'sezi' and 'sezee' and 'seshee' of the omnibuses. This is surely a great gain for them.

'Next, I observe that they are developing a certain amount of pride in their superiority: they are lifted above their neighbors, if only by the nightly drawing-room. I fear they will become unpopular from hauteur; but there is no gain without some loss. If only one felt justified in doubling the number of the girls! But the Stepney ladies have hitherto shown no enthusiasm in the cause of the Association. The feeling in

these parts is, you see, commercial rather than co-operative.

'The dinner is to me the most satisfactory as well as the most unscientific part of the business. I believe I have no right to give them a dinner at all: it is against the custom in dress-makers' shops, where girls bring their own dinners, poor things: it costs quite a shilling a head every day to find the dinner, and Rebekah, my forewoman, tells me that no profits can stand against such a drain: but I must go on with the dinner even if it swallows up all the profits.

'On Sundays the drawing-room is kept open all day long for those who like to come. Some do, because it is quiet. In the evening we have sacred music. One of the young men plays the violin—the reader turned back and referred to a previous passage—yes; she has already mentioned a cabinet-maker in connection with a fiddle—no doubt it must be the same—and we have duets, but I fear the girls do not care much, yet, for classical music.'

Here the reader crumpled up the letter in impatience.

'And this,' she groaned, 'is the result of two years at Newnham! After her course of political economy, after all those lectures, after distinguishing herself and taking a place, this is the end! To play the piano for a lot of workgirls; with a cabinet-maker: and an old sailor: and to be a dress-maker! She actually enjoys being a dress-maker! That is, alas! the very worst feature in the case: she evidently likes it; she has no wish to return to civilization; she has forgotten the science: she is setting mischievous example; and she has forgotten her distinct promise to give us a mathematical scholarship. Oh! Angela!'

She had imagined that the heiress would endow Newnham with great gifts, and she was disappointed. She had imagined this so very strongly that she felt personally aggrieved and injured. What did she care about Stepney workgirls? What have mathematics to do with poor people in an ugly and poor part of town?

Angela's letter did not convey the whole truth because she herself was ignorant of the discussions, gossips, rumors and reports which were flying about in the neighborhood of Stepney Green concerning her venture. There were some, for instance, who demonstrated that such an institution must fail for reasons which they learnedly expounded: among these was Mr. Bunker. There were some who were ready to prove, from the highest authorities, the wickedness of trying to do without a proprietor, master, or boss; there were some who saw in this revolutionary movement the beginning of those troubles which will afflict mankind toward the coming of the end; there were others, among whom was also Mr. Bunker, who asked by what right this young woman had come among them to interfere, where she had got her money, and what were her antecedents? To Bunker's certain knowledge, and no one had better sources of information, hundreds had been spent by Miss Kennedy in starting the Association; while, whether it was true that Miss Messenger supported the place or not, there could never be enough work to get back all that money, pay all the wages, and the rent, and the dinners: and hot dinners every day! There was even talk of getting up a memorial praying Miss Messenger not to interfere with the trade of the place, and pointing out that there were many most respectable dress-makers where the work could be quite as well done as by Miss Kennedy's girls, no doubt cheaper, and the profit would go to the rightful claimant of it, not to be divided among the work-women.

As for the privileges bestowed upon the girls, there was in certain circles but one opinion—they were ridiculous. Recreation time, free dinner of meat and vegetables, short hours, reading aloud, and a club-room or drawing-room for the evening: what more could their betters have? For it is a fixed article of belief, one of the Twenty-Nine Articles in certain strata of society, that people 'below them' have no right to the enjoyment of anything. They do not mean to be cruel, but they have always associated poverty with dirt, discomfort, disagreeable companions, and the absence of pleasantness; for a poor person to be happy is either to them an impossibility, or it is a flying in the face of Providence. But then, these people know nothing of the joys which can be had without money. Now, when the world discovers and realizes how many these are and how great they are, the reign of the almighty dollar is at an end. Whatever the Stepney folk thought, however diverse their judgment, they were all extremely curious: and after the place had been open a few weeks and began to get known, all the ladies from Whitechapel Church to Bow Church began with one consent to call. They were received by a young person of grave face and graver manners, who showed them all they wanted to see, answered all their questions, and allowed them to visit the work-rooms and the show-rooms, the dining-room and the drawing-room; they also saw most beautiful dresses which were being made for Miss Messenger; those who went there in

the morning might see with their own eyes dress-maker girls actually playing lawn tennis, if in the afternoon they might see an old gentleman reading aloud while the girls worked; they might also observe that there were flowers in the room; it was perfectly certain that there was a piano upstairs, because it had been seen by many, and the person in the show-room made no secret at all that there was dancing in the evening, with songs, and reading of books, and other diversions.

The contemplation of these things mostly sent the visitors away in sorrow. They did not dance or sing or play, they never wanted to dance or sing, lawn tennis was not played by their daughters, they did not have brightly-colored books to read; what did it mean, giving these things to dress-maker girls? Some of them not only resolved not to send their custom to the Association, but directed tracts to the house.

They came, however, after a time, and had their dresses made there, for a reason which will appear in the sequel. But at the outset they held aloof.

Far different was the reception given to the institution by the people for whose benefit it was designed. When they had quite got over their natural suspicion of a strange thing, when the girls were found to bring home their pay regularly on a Saturday, when the dinner proved a real thing and the hours continued to be merciful, when the girls reported continuously kind treatment, when the evenings spent in the drawing room were found to be delightful, and when other doubts and whisperings about Miss Kennedy's motives, intentions and secret character gradually died away, the Association became popular, and all the needle-girls of the place would fain have joined Miss Kennedy. The thing which did the most to create the popularity was the permission for the girls to bring some of their friends and people on the Saturday evening. They received 'on Saturday evening: they were at home; they entertained their guests on that night; and, though the entertainment cost nothing but the lights, it soon became an honor and a pleasure to receive an invitation. Most of those who came at first were other girls; they were shy and stood about all arms; then they learned their steps; then they danced; then the weariness wore out of their eyes and the roses came back to their cheeks: they forgot the naggings of the work-room, and felt, for the first time the joy of their youth. Some of them were inclined at first to be rough and bold, but the atmosphere calmed them; they either came no more, or if they came they were quiet; some of them affected a superior and contemptuous air, not uncommon with 'young persons' when they are jealous or envious, but this is a mood easily cured; some of them were frivolous, but these were also easily subdued. For always with them was Miss Kennedy herself, a Juno, their queen, whose manner was so kind, whose smile was so sweet, whose voice was so soft, whose greeting was so warm and yet—yet—who could not be resisted, even by the boldest of the most frivolous. The first step was not to be afraid of Miss Kennedy: at no subsequent stage of their acquaintance did they cease to respect her.

As for Rebekah, she would not come on Saturday evening, as it was part of her Sabbath; but Nelly proved of the greatest use in maintaining the decorum and in promoting the spirit of the evenings, which wanted, it is true, a leader.

Sometimes the girls' mothers would come, especially those who had not too many babies; they sat with folded hands and wondering eyes, while their daughters danced, while Miss Kennedy sang, and Mr. Goslett played the fiddle. Angela went among them, talking in her sympathetic way, and won their confidence, so that they presently responded and told her all their troubles and woe. Or sometimes the fathers would be brought, but very seldom came twice. Now and then a brother would appear, but it was many weeks before the brothers began to come regularly; when they did, it became apparent that there was something in the place more attractive than brotherly duty or the love of dancing. Of course, sweethearts were bound to come whether they liked it or not. There were, at first, many little hitches, disagreeable incidents, rebellious exhibitions of temper, bad behaviour, mistakes, social sins, and other things of which the chronicler must be mute, because the general result is all that we desire to record. And this was satisfactory. For the first time the girls learned that there were joys in life, joys even within their reach, with a little help, poor as they were; joys which cost them nothing. Among them were girls of the very humblest, who had the greatest difficulty in presenting a decent appearance, who lived in crowded lodgings or in poor houses with their numerous brothers and sisters; pale-faced girls: heavy-hearted girls: joyless maidens, loveless maidens: girls who from long hours of work, and from want of open air and good food, stooped their shoulders and dragged their limbs—when Angela saw them first, she wished that she was a man to use strong language

against their employers. How she violated all principles of social economy, giving clothes, secretly lending money, visiting mothers, paying rent, and all without any regard to supply and demand, marketable value, prices current, worth of labor, wages rate, averages, percentages, interest, capital, commercial rules, theory of trade, encouragement of overpopulation, would be too disgraceful to narrate; indeed, she blushed when she thought of the beautiful and heart-warming science in which she had so greatly distinguished herself, and on which she trampled daily. Yet if, on the one side, there stood cold science, and, on the other, a suffering girl, it is ridiculous to acknowledge that the girl always won the day.

Among the girls was one who interested Angela greatly, not because she was pretty, for she was not pretty at all, but plain to look upon, and lame, but because she bore a very hard lot with patience and courage very beautiful to see. She had a sister who was crippled and had a weak back, so that she could not sit up long, nor earn much. She had a mother who was growing old and weak of sight, so that she could not earn much. She had a young brother who lived like the sparrows, that is to say, he ran wild in the streets and stole his daily bread, and was rapidly rising to the dignity and rank of an habitual criminal. He seldom, however, came home, except to borrow or beg for money. She had a father, whose name was never mentioned, so that he was certainly an undesirable father, a bad bargain of a father, a father impossible, viewed in connection with the Fifth Commandment. This was the girl who burst into tears when she saw the roast of beef for the first time. Her tears were caused by a number of reasons: first, because she was hungry and her condition was low; secondly, because roasted beef to a hungry girl is a thing too beautiful; thirdly, because while she was feasting, her sister and mother were starving. The crippled sister presently came to the house and remained in it all day. What special arrangements were made with Rebekah, the Spirit of Commerce, as regards her pay, I know not; but she came, did a little work, sat or lay down in the drawing-room most of the time; and presently, under Miss Kennedy's instruction, began to practice on the piano. A workgirl, actually a workgirl, if you please, playing scales, with a one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four, just as if she was a lady living in the Mile End Road and the daughter of a clerk in the brewery!

Yes; the girls who had formerly worked in unhealthy rooms till half past eight now worked in well-ventilated rooms till half past six: they had time to rest and run about: they had good food: they had cheerful talk: they were encouraged: Captain Sorensen came to read to them: in the evening they had a delightful room to sit in, where they could read and talk, or dance, or listen. While they read the books which Miss Kennedy laid on the table for them, she would play and sing. First, she chose the simple songs and simple pieces; and as their taste for music grew, so her music improved; and every day found the drawing-room more attractive, and the girls were loath to go home. She watched her experiment with the keenest interest; the girls were certainly growing more refined in manner and in thought. Even Rebekah was softening daily; she looked on at the dance without a shudder, even when the handsome young workman clasped Nelly Sorensen by the waist and whirled her round the room; and she owned that there was music in the world, outside her little chapel, far sweeter than anything they had within it. As for Nelly, she simply worshipped. Whatever Miss Kennedy did was right and beautiful and perfect in her eyes; nor, in her ignorance of the world, did she ponder any more over that first difficulty of hers, why a lady, and such a lady, had come to Stepney Green to be a dress-maker.

(To be Continued.)

Halligan (of Canajoharie)—Did the foire disturb you lasht night? Tim Crough (same place)—It did. Devil a wink did I get all night for the bells. Halligan—They used t' bother me the same way. Crough—Hn' don't they now? Halligan—Not a bit. I jined the volunteer foire department four years ago an' haven't heard a foire alarm since.

Musical Prodigy—A teacher in one of the Englewood schools was drilling the children in music. What does it mean when you see the letter 'f' over a bar or staff? she asked. Forte, answered one of the pupils. And what does the character 'ff' mean? There was a short period of thoughtfulness on the part of the children, and then one of them shouted triumphantly: Eighty.

The London Society Times tells a story of a certain old clergyman who did not exactly hit it off with his congregation, and so at last applied for and received the appointment of chaplain to a large penitentiary. He preached a farewell sermon, not a word of which could any one object to, except the singularly inappropriate text, which gave great offence. It was: I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I am ye may be also.