

**LADY
BOUNTIFUL**

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Lady Bountiful by George A. Birmingham

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GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

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BY

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

Author of "Spanish Gold," "Innisheeny"
etc., etc.



LONDON
CHRISTOPHERS
22 BERNERS STREET, W. 1.

THE
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CITY OF
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PART I

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I

LADY BOUNTIFUL

SOCIETY in the west of Ireland is beautifully tolerant. A man may do many things there, things frowned on elsewhere, without losing caste. He may, for instance, drink heavily, appearing in public when plainly intoxicated, and no one thinks much the worse of him. He may be in debt up to the verge of bankruptcy and yet retain his position in society. But he may not marry his cook. When old Sir Tony Corless did that, he lost caste. He was a baronet of long descent, being, in fact, the fifth Corless who held the title.

Castle Affey was a fine old place, one of the best houses in the county, but people stopped going there and stopped asking Sir Tony to dinner. They could not stand the cook.

Bridie Malone was her name before she became Lady Corless. She was the daughter of the blacksmith in the village at the gates of Castle Affey, and she was at least forty

years younger than Sir Tony. People shook their heads when they heard of the marriage and said that the old gentleman must be doting.

"It isn't even as if she was a reasonably good-looking girl," said Captain Corless, pathetically. "If she had been a beauty I could have understood it, but—the poor old dad!"

Captain Corless was the son of another, a very different Lady Corless, and some day he in his turn would become Sir Tony. Meanwhile, having suffered a disabling wound early in the war, he had secured a pleasant and fairly well-paid post as inspector under the Irish Government. No one, not even Captain Corless himself, knew exactly what he inspected, but there was no uncertainty about the salary. It was paid quarterly.

Bridie Malone was not good-looking. Captain Corless was perfectly right about that. She was very imperfectly educated. She could sign her name, but the writing of anything except her name was a difficulty to her. She could read, though only if the print were large and the words were not too long.

But she possessed certain qualities not very common in any class. She had, for instance, quite enough common sense to save her from posing as a great lady. Sir Tony lost caste by his marriage. Bridie Malone did not sacrifice a single friend when she