

CHAPTER XIII.

VIOLENCE.

It had been arranged at Folking, before Hester had started, that Caldigate himself should drive the waggonette into Cambridge to take her back on the Wednesday, but that he would bring a servant with him who should drive the carriage up to the Grange, so that he, personally, should not have to appear at the door of the house. He would remain at Mr. Seely's, and then the waggonette should pick him up. This had been explained to Mrs. Bolton. "John will remain in town, because he has so much to do with Mr. Seely," Hester had said; "and Richard will call here at about twelve." All her plans had thus been made known, and Mrs. Bolton was aware at what hour the bolts must be drawn and the things removed.

But, as the time drew nearer, her dislike to a sudden commencement of absolute hostilities became stronger,—to hostilities which would seem to have no sanction from Mr. Bolton himself, because he would then be absent. And he too, though as he lay awake through the dreary hours of the long night he said no word about the plan, felt, and felt

more strongly as the dawn was breaking, that it would be mean to leave his daughter with a farewell kiss, knowing as he would do that he was leaving her within prison-bars, leaving her to the charge of jailers. The farewell kiss would be given as though he and she were to meet no more in her old home till this terrible trial should be over, and some word appropriate to such a parting would then be spoken. But any such parting word would be false, and the falsehood would be against his own child! "Does she expect it?" he said, in a low voice, when his wife came up to him as he was dressing.

"She expects nothing. I am thinking that perhaps you would tell her that she could not go to-day."

"I could not say 'to-day.' If I tell her anything, I must tell her all."

"Will not that be best?" Then the old man thought it all over. It would be very much the best for him not to say anything about it if he could reconcile it to his conscience to leave the house without doing so. And he knew well that his wife was more powerful than he,—gifted with greater persistence, more capable of enduring a shower of tears or a storm of anger. The success of the plan would be more probable if the conduct of it were left entirely to his wife, but his conscience was sore within him.

"You will come with me to the gate," he said to his daughter, after their silent breakfast.

"Oh yes;—to say good-bye."

Then he took his hat, and his gloves, and his umbrella, very slowly, lingering in the hall as he did so, while his wife kept her seat firm and square at the breakfast table. Hester had her hat and shawl with her; but Mrs. Bolton did not suspect that she would endeavour to escape now without returning for her child. Therefore she sat firm and square, waiting to hear from Hester herself what her father might bring himself to communicate to her. "Hester," he said, as he slowly walked round the sweep in front of the house, "Hester," he said, "you would do your duty best to God and man,—best to John Caldigate and to your child,—by re-remaining here."

"How can I unless he tells me?"

"You have your father's authority."

"You surrendered it when you gave me to him as his wife. It is not that I would rebel against you, papa, but that I must obey him. Does not St. Paul say, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord'?"

"Certainly; and you cannot suppose that in any ordinary case I would interfere between you and him. It is not that I am anxious to take anything from him that belongs to him." Then, as they were approaching the gate, he stood still. "But

now, in such an emergency as this, when a question has risen as to his power of making you his wife——”

“I will not hear of that. I am his wife.”

“Then it may become my duty and your mother’s to—to—to provide you with a home till the law shall have decided.”

“I cannot leave his home unless he bids me.”

“I am telling you of my duty—of my duty and your mother’s.” Then he passed out through the gate, thus having saved his conscience from the shame of a false farewell; and she slowly made her way back to the house, after standing for a moment to look after him as he went. She was almost sure now that something was intended. He would not have spoken in that way of his duty unless he had meant her to suppose that he intended to perform it. “My duty,” he had said, “my duty and your mother’s!” Of course something was intended, something was to be done or said more than had been done or said already. During the breakfast she had seen in the curves of her mother’s mouth the signs of some resolute purpose. During the very prayers she had heard in her mother’s voice a sound as of a settled determination. She knew,—she knew that something was to be done, and with that knowledge she went back into her mother’s room, and sat herself down firmly and squarely at the table. She had left her cup partly full, and

began again to drink her tea. "What did your papa say to you?" asked her mother.

"Papa bade me stay here, but I told him that most certainly I should go home to Folking." Then Mrs. Bolton also became aware of fixed will and resolute purpose on her daughter's part.

"Does his word go for nothing?"

"How can two persons' words go for anything when obedience is concerned? It is like God and Mammon."

"Hester!"

"If two people tell one differently, it must be right to cling to one and leave the other. No man can serve two masters. I have got to obey my husband. Even were I to say that I would stay, he could come and take me away."

"He could not do that."

"I shall not be so disobedient as to make it necessary. The carriage will be here at twelve, and I shall go. I had better go and help nurse to put the things up." So saying she left the room, but Mrs. Bolton remained there a while, sitting square and firm at the table.

It was not yet ten when she slowly followed her daughter up-stairs. She first went into her own room for a moment, to collect her thoughts over again, and then she walked across the passage to her daughter's chamber. She knocked at the door, but entered as she knocked. "Nurse," she said,

"will you go into my room for a minute or two, I wish to speak to your mistress. May she take the baby, Hester?" The baby was taken, and then the two were alone. "Do not pack up your things to-day, Hester."

"Why not?"

"You are not going to-day."

"I am going to-day, mamma."

"That I should seem to be cruel to you,—only seem,—cuts me to the heart. But you cannot go back to Folking to-day."

"When am I to go?"

"Ah, Hester!"

"Tell me what you mean, mamma. Is it that I am to be a prisoner?"

"If you would be gentle I would explain it."

"I will not be gentle. You mean to keep me,—by violence; but I mean to go; my husband will come. I will not be kept. Oh, mamma, you would not desire me to quarrel with you openly, before the servants, before all the world! I will not be kept. I will certainly go back to Folking. Would I not go back though I had to get through the windows, to walk the whole way, to call upon the policemen even to help me?"

"No one will help you, Hester. Every one will know that for the present this should be your home."

“It never shall be my home again,” said Hester, bursting into tears, and rushing after her baby.

Then there were two hours of intense misery in that house,—of misery to all who were concerned. The servants, down to the girl in the scullery and the boy who cleaned the boots, were made aware that master and mistress were both determined to keep their married daughter a prisoner in the house. The servants of the house sided with their mistress generally, having all of them been induced to regard John Caldigate with horror. Hester’s nurse, of course, sympathised with her and her baby. During these two hours the packing was completed, but Hester found that her strong walking-boots and her bonnet had been abstracted. Did they really think that at such a time as this boots and bonnets would be anything to her? They could know nothing of her nature. They could not understand the sort of combat she would carry on if an attempt were made to take from her her liberty,—an attempt made by those who had by law no right to control her! When once she had learned what was being done she would not condescend to leave her room till the carriage should have come. That that would come punctually at twelve she was sure. Then she would go down without her bonnet and without her boots, and see whether any one would dare to stand in her way, as with her baby in her arms she would attempt to walk forth through the front door.

But it had not occurred to her that other steps might be taken. Just before twelve the gardener stationed himself on the road before the house,—a road which was half lane and half street, belonging to the suburban village of Chesterton,—and there awaited the carriage at a spot some yards away from the gate. It was well that he was early, because Richard was there a few minutes before the time appointed. “She ain’t a-going back to-day,” said the gardener, laying his hands gently on the horse’s back.

“Who ain’t not a-going back?” asked the coachman.

“Miss Hester ain’t.”

“Mrs. John ain’t a-going home?”

“No;—I was to come out and tell you, as master don’t like wheels on the gravel if it can be helped. We ain’t got none of our own.”

“Missus ain’t a-going home? Why, master expects her for certain!”

“I was to say she ain’t a-going to-day.”

The man who was driving passed the reins into his whip-hand, and raising his hat, began to scratch his head with the other. He knew at once that there was something wrong,—that this prolonged staying away from home was not merely a pleasantly lengthened visit. His master had been very urgent with him as to punctuality, and was evidently intent upon the return of his wife. All the facts

of the accusation were known to the man, and the fact also that his master's present wife was entirely in accord with his master. It could not be that she should have determined to prolong her visit, and then have sent him back to her husband with such a message as this! "If you'll hold the hosses just a minute," he said, "I'll go in and see my missus."

But the Grange gardener was quite as intent on his side of the question as was the Folking coachman on the other. To him the horrors of bigamy were manifest. He was quite of opinion that "Miss Hester,"—who never ought to have been married in that way at all,—should now be kept a prisoner in her father's house. "It ain't no use your going in,—and you can't," said the gardener. "I ain't a going to hold the horses, and there's nobody as will."

"What's up, mate?"

"I don't know as I'm mate to you, nor yet to no one like you. And as to what's up, I've told you all as I'm bade to tell you; and I ain't a-going to tell you no more. You can't turn your horses there. You'd better drive round into the village, and there you'll get the high-road back to Cambridge." Then the gardener retreated within a little gate of his own which led from the lane into the precincts close to his own cottage. The man was an honest, loyal old fanatic, who would scruple at nothing in carry-

ing out the orders of his mistress in so good a cause. And personally his feelings had been acerbated in that he had been called "mate" by a man not half his age.

The coachman did as he was bid, seeing before him no other possible course. He could not leave his horses. But when he was in front of the iron gates he stopped and examined the premises. The gates were old, and were opened and closed at ordinary times by an ordinary ancient lock. But now there was a chain passed in and out with a padlock, —evidently placed there to prevent him from entering in opposition to the gardener's instructions. There was clearly no course open to him but to drive the carriage back to his master.

At a quarter before twelve Hester left her own room,—which looked backwards into the garden, as did all the pleasanter rooms of the house,—with the intention of seating herself in a spare room looking out to the front, from which she could have seen the carriage as it entered the gate. Had she so seen it she would certainly have called to the man from the window when he was standing in the road. But the door of that front room was locked against her; and when she tried the other she found that all the front rooms were locked. She knew the house, of course, as well as did her mother, and she rushed up to the attics where the servants occupied the rooms looking out to the road. But they, too,

were locked against her. Then it flashed upon her that the attempt to make her a prisoner was to be carried out through every possible detail.

What should she do? Her husband would come of course; but what if he were unable to force an entrance? And how could he force it? Would the police help him? Would the magistrates help him? She knew that the law was on her side, and on his,—that the law would declare him to be her lord and owner till the law should have separated them. But would the law allow itself to be used readily for this purpose? She, too, could understand that the feeling of the community would be against her, and that in such a case the law might allow itself to become slow, lethargic, and perhaps inoperative, yielding to the popular feeling. She saw the points which were strong against her as clearly as William and Robert Bolton had seen those which were strong on their side. But——! As she stood there beating her foot angrily on the floor of the passage, she made up her mind that there should be more than one “but” in his favour. If they kept her, they should have to lock her up as in a dungeon; they and all the neighbourhood should hear her voice. They should be driven to do such things that the feeling of the community would be no longer on their side.

Various ideas passed through her mind. She thought for a moment that she would refuse to take

any nourishment in that house. Her mother would surely not see her die; and would thus have to see her die or else send her forth to be fed. But that thought stayed with her but for a moment. It was not only for herself that she must eat and drink, but for her baby. Then, finding that she could not get to the front windows, and seeing that the time had come in which the carriage should have been there, she went down into the hall, where she found her mother seated on a high-backed old oak arm-chair. The windows of the hall looked out on to the sweep before the house; but she was well aware that from these lower windows the plot of shrubs in the centre of the space hindered any view of the gate. Without speaking to her mother she put her hand upon the lock of the door as though to walk forth, but found it barred. "Am I a prisoner?" she said.

"Yes, Hester; yes. If you will use such a word as to your father's house, you are a prisoner."

"I will not remain so. You will have to chain me, and to gag me, and to kill me. Oh, my baby, — oh my child! Nurse, nurse, bring me my boy." Then with her baby in her arms, she sat down in another high-backed oak arm-chair, looking at the hall-door. There she would sit till her husband should come. He surely would come. He would make his way up to those windows, and there she

could at any rate hear his commands. If he came for her, surely she would be able to escape."

The coachman drove back to the town very quickly, and went to the inn at which his horses were generally put up, thinking it better to go to his master thence on foot. But there he found John Caldigate, who had come across from Mr. Seely's office. "Where is Mrs. Caldigate?" he said, as the man drove the empty carriage down the entrance to the yard. The man, touching his hat, and with a motion of his hand which was intended to check his master's impetuosity, drove on; and then, when he had freed himself from the charge of his horses, told his story with many whispers.

"The gardener said she wasn't to come!"

"Just that, sir. There's something up more than you think, sir; there is indeed. He was that fractious that he wouldn't hold the hosses for me, not for a minute, till I could go in and see, and then——"

"Well?"

"The gates was chained, sir."

"Chained?"

"A chain was round the bars, and a padlock. I never see such a thing on a gentleman's gate in my life before. Chained; as nobody wasn't to go in, nor yet nobody wasn't to come out!" The man as he said this wore that air of dignity which is always

imparted by the possession of great tidings the truth of which will certainly not be doubted.

The tidings were great. The very thing which his father had suggested, and which he had declared to be impossible, was being done. The old banker himself would not, he thought, have dared to propose and carry out such a project. The whole Bolton family had conspired together to keep his wife from him, and had allured her away by the false promise of a friendly visit! He knew, too, that the law was on his side; but he knew also that he might find it very difficult to make use of the law. If the world of Cambridge chose to think that Hester was not his wife, the world of Cambridge would probably support the Boltons by their opinion. But if she, if his Hester, were true to him, and she certainly would be true to him—and if she were as courageous as he believed her to be,—then, as he thought, no house in Chesterton would be able to hold her.

He stood for a moment turning in his mind what he had better do. Then he gave his orders to the man in a clear natural voice. "Take the horses out, Richard, and feed them. You had better get your dinner here, so that I may be sure to find you here the moment I want you."

"I won't stir a step from the place," said the man.
