

## CHAPTER XIV.

## IN PRISON.

WHAT should he do? John Caldigate, as he walked out of the inn-yard, had to decide for himself what he would do at once. His first impulse was to go to the mayor and ask for assistance. He had a right to the custody of his wife. Her father had no right to make her a prisoner. She was entitled to go whither she pleased, so long as she had his sanction; and should she be separated from him by the action of the law, she would be entitled to go whither she pleased without sanction from any one. Whether married or unmarried she was not subject to her father. The husband was sure that he was entitled to the assistance of the police, but he doubted much whether he would be able to get it, and he was most averse to ask for it.

And yet what other step could he take? With no purpose as yet quite fixed, he went to the bank, thinking that he might best commence his work by expostulating with his wife's father. It was Mr. Bolton's habit to walk every morning into the town, unless he was deterred by heat or wet or ill health; and till lately it had been his habit also to walk

back, his house being a mile and a half distant from the bank; but latterly the double walk had become too much for him, and, when the time for his return came, he would send out for a cab to take him home. His hours were very various. He would generally lunch at the bank, in his own little dingy room; but if things went badly with him, so as to disturb his mind, he would go back early in the day, and generally pass the afternoon asleep. On this occasion he was very much troubled, so that when Caldigate reached the bank, which he did before one, Mr. Bolton was already getting into his cab. "Could I speak a few words to you, sir?" said Caldigate in the street.

"I am not very well to-day," said the banker, hardly looking round, persevering in his effort to get into the vehicle.

"I would not keep you for a minute, sir. I must see you, as you are aware."

There were already half-a-dozen people collected, all of whom had no doubt heard the story of John Caldigate's wife. There was, indeed, no man or woman in Cambridge whose ears it had not reached. In the hearing of these Mr. Bolton was determined not to speak of his daughter, and he was equally determined not to go back into the house. "I have nothing to say," he muttered—"nothing, nothing; drive on." So the cab was driven on, and John Caldigate was left in the street.

The man's anger now produced a fixed purpose, and with a quick step he walked away from the bank to Robert Bolton's office. There he soon found himself in the attorney's room. "Are you aware of what they are doing at the Grange?" he asked, in a voice which was not so guarded as it should have been on such an occasion. Anger and the quickness of his walk had combined to make him short of breath, and he asked the question with that flurried, hasty manner which is common to angry people who are hot rather than malicious in their angers.

"I don't think I am," said the attorney. "But if I were, I doubt whether I should just at present be willing to discuss their doings with you."

"My wife has gone there on a visit."

"I am glad to hear it. It is the best thing that my sister could do."

"And now it seems some difficulty is made about her returning."

"That I think very likely. Her father and mother can hardly wish that she should go back to your house at present. I cannot imagine that she should wish it herself. If you have the feelings of a gentleman or the heart of a man you ought not to wish it."

"I have not come here to be taught what is becoming either to a man or a gentleman."

"If you will allow me to say so, while things

are as they are at present, you ought not to come here at all."

"I should not have done so but for this violence, this breach of all hospitality at your father's house. My wife went there with the understanding that she was to stay for two days."

"And now, you say, they detain her. I am not responsible; but in doing so they have my thorough sympathy and approbation. I do not know that I can help them, or that they will want my help; but I shall help them if I can. The fact is, you had better leave her there."

"Never!"

"I should not have volunteered my advice, but, as you are here, I may perhaps say a word. If you attempt to take her by violence from her father's house you will have all the town, all the county, all England against you."

"I should;—I own it;——unless she wished to come to me. If she chooses to stay, she shall stay."

"It must not be left to her. If she be so infatuated, she must not be allowed to judge for herself. Till this trial be over, she and you must live apart. Then, if that woman does not make good her claim,—if you can prove that the woman is lying,—then you will have back your wife. But if, as everybody I find believes at present, it should be proved that you are the husband of that woman, and

that you have basely betrayed my poor sister by a mock marriage, then she must be left to the care of her father and her mother, and may Heaven help her in her misery." All this he said with much dignity, and in a manner with which even Caldigate could not take personal offence. "You must remember," he added, "that this poor injured one is their daughter and my sister."

"I say that she has been in no wise injured but,—as I also am injured,—by a wicked plot. And I say that she shall come back to me, unless she herself elects to remain with her parents." Then he left the office and went forth again into the streets.

He now took at once the road to Chesterton, trying as he did so to make for himself in his own mind a plan or map of the premises. It would, he thought, be impossible but that his wife would be able to get out of the house and come to him if he could only make her aware of his presence. But then there was the baby, and it would be necessary not only that she should escape herself but that she should bring her child with her. Would they attempt to hold her? Could it be that they should have already locked her up in some room up-stairs? And if she did escape out of some window, even with her baby in her arms, how would it be with them then as they made their way back into the town? . Thinking of this he hurried back to the

inn and told Richard to take the carriage into Chesterton and wait there at the turn of the lane, where the lane leads down from the main road to the Grange. He was to wait there, though it might be all the day, till he heard from or saw his master. The man, who was quite as keen for his master as was the old gardener for his mistress on the other side, promised accurate obedience. Then he retraced his steps and walked as fast as he could to the Grange.

During all this time the mother and the daughter kept their weary seats in the hall, Hester having her baby in her arms. She had quite determined that nothing should induce her again to go up-stairs,—lest the key of the room should be turned upon her. For a long time they sat in silence, and then she declared her purpose.

“I shall remain here, mamma.”

“If so, I must remain too.”

“I shall not go up to my bedroom again, you may be sure of that.”

“You will go up to-night, I hope.”

“Certainly not. Nurse shall take baby up to his cradle. I do not suppose you will be cruel enough to separate me from my child.”

“Cruel! Do you not know that I would do anything for you or your child,—that I would die for you or your child?”

"I suppose you will let them bring me food here. You would not wish him to be starved."

"Hester!"

"Well; what would you have me say? Are you not my jailer?"

"I am your mother. According to my conscience I am acting for you as best I know how. Do you not know that I mean to be good to you?"

"I know you are not good to me. Nobody can be good who tries to separate me from my husband. I shall remain here till he comes and tells me how I am to be taken away." Then Mr. Bolton returned, and made his way into the house with the assistance of the gardener through the kitchen. He found the two women sitting in the hall, each in the high-backed arm-chair, and his daughter with her baby in her arms,—a most piteous sight, the two of them thus together. "Papa," she said, as he came up into the hall from the kitchen, "you are treating me badly, cruelly, unjustly. You have no right to keep me here against my will. I am my husband's wife, and I must go to my husband."

"It is for the best, Hester."

"What is wrong cannot be for the best. Do you suppose that he will let me be kept here in prison? Of course he will come. Why do you not let me go?"

"It is right that you should be here, Hester," he said, as he passed upstairs to his own bedroom. It

was a terrible job of work for which he had no strength whatever himself, and, as to which he was beginning to doubt whether even his wife's strength would suffice. As for her, as for Hester, perhaps it would be well that she should be wearied and broken into submission. But it was fearful to think that his wife should have to sit there the whole day saying nothing, doing nothing, merely watching lest her daughter should attempt to escape through some window.

"It will kill your father, I think," said the mother.

"Why does he not let me go then? I have to think of my husband and my child." Then again there was silence. When they had been seated thus for two hours, all the words that had been spoken between them had not spread themselves over ten minutes, and Mrs. Bolton was looking forward to hour after hour of the same kind. It did not seem to her to be possible that Hester should be forced up into her own room. Even she, with all her hardihood, could not ask the men about the place to take her in their arms and carry her with violence up the stairs. Nor would the men have done it, if so required. Nothing but a policeman's garb will seem to justify the laying of a hand upon a woman, and even that will hardly do it unless the woman be odiously disreputable. Mrs. Bolton saw clearly what was before her. Should Hester be strong in



her purpose to remain seated as at present, she also must remain seated. Weariness and solicitude for her baby might perhaps drive the young mother to bed. Then she also would go to her bed,—and would rest, with one eye ever open, with her ears always on the alert. She was somewhat sure of herself. Her life had not been so soft but that she could endure much,—and of her purpose she was quite sure. Nothing would trouble her conscience if she could succeed in keeping her daughter separated from John Caldigate.

Caldigate in his hot haste walked up to the iron gates and found them chained. It was in vain that he shook them, and in vain that he looked at them. The gates were fully twelve feet high, and spiked at the top. At each side of the gates ran a wall surmounted by iron railings,—extending to the gardener's cottage on the one side, and to the coach-house on the other. The drive up to the house, which swept round a plot of thick shrubs, lay between the various offices,—the stables and coach-house being on one side, and the laundry and gardener's cottage on the other. From the road there was no mode of ingress for him to this enclosure, unless he could get over the railings. This might perhaps have been possible, but it would have been quite impossible for him to bring his wife back by the same way. There was a bell at the gardener's little gate, which he rang loudly; but no one would

come to him. At last he made his way round into the kitchen-garden by a corner where access was made by climbing a moderately high gate which gave an entrance to the fields. From thence he had no difficulty in making his way on to the lawn at the back of the house, and up by half-a-dozen stone steps to the terrace which ran along under the windows. Here he found that the lower shutters were barred on the inside throughout, so that he could not look into any of the rooms. But he could rap at the windows, which he did loudly, and it was in his power to break them if he pleased. He rapped very loudly; but poor Hester, who sat at the front hall, heard nothing of the noise.

He knew that from the back-garden he could make his way to the front, with more or less of violence. Between the gardener's cottage and the laundry there was a covered passage leading to the front, the buildings above being continuous, but leaving a way through for the convenience of the servants. This, however, was guarded by a trellis-work gate. But even on this gate the gardener had managed to fix a lock. When Caldigate reached the spot the man was standing, idle and observant, at his own cottage door. "You had better open this gate," said Caldigate, "or I shall kick it open."

"You mustn't do that, Mr. Caldigate. It's master's orders as it's to be locked. It's master's

orders as you ain't to be in here at all." Then Caldigate raised his foot, and the trellis-work gate was very soon despatched. "Very well," said the man;—"very well, Mr. Caldigate. That'll have to come agin you when the other things come. It's my belief as it's burglorious." Then Caldigate went up before the house windows, and the gardener followed him.

The front door was approached by half-a-dozen stone steps, which were guarded on each side by a curved iron rail. Along the whole front of the house, passing under the steps, there ran a narrow, shallow area, contrived simply to give light to the kitchen and offices in the basement storey. But this area was, again, guarded by an iron rail, which was so constructed as to make it impossible that any one less expert than a practised house-breaker should get in or out of any of the windows looking that way. From the hall there were no less than four windows looking to the front; but they were all equally unapproachable.

The moment that Caldigate appeared coming round the curve of the gravel road Hester saw him. Jumping up from her chair with her baby, she rushed to the window, and called to him aloud, tapping at the window as she did so, "John, I am here! Come to me! come to me! Take me out! They have shut me in, and will not let me come to you." Then she held up the baby. "Mamma, let

him in, so that he come to his own baby. You dare not keep the father away from his own child." At this time the nurse was in the hall, as was also the cook. But the front door was locked as well as chained, and the key was in Mrs. Bolton's own pocket. She sat perfectly silent, rigid, without a motion. She had known that he would come and show himself; and she had determined that she would be rigid, silent, and motionless. She would not move or speak unless Hester should endeavour to make her way down into the kitchen. But just in the passage which led to the top of the kitchen stairs stood the cook,—strong, solid, almost twice the weight of Hester,—a pious, determined woman, on whom her mistress could depend that she would remain there impervious.

They could talk to each other now, Hester and Caldigate, each explaining or suggesting what had been done or should be done; but they could converse only so that their enemies around them should hear every word that was spoken. "No, John, no; I will not stay," she said, when her husband told her that he would leave the decision to her. "Unless it be to do your bidding, I will not stay here willingly. And, John, I will not move upstairs. I will remain here; and if they choose to give me food they may bring it to me. Unless they carry me I will not go to my bedroom. And they shall tear me to pieces before I will let them carry me.

Poor baby! poor baby! I know he will be ill," she said, moaning, but still so that he, standing beyond the railings, should hear her through the window. "I know he will be ill; but what can I do? They do not care for my baby. If he should die it will be nothing to them." During all this Mrs. Bolton kept her resolve, and sat there rigid, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, speaking no word, apparently paying no attention to the scene around her. Her back was turned to the front door, so that she could not see John Caldigate. Nor would she attempt to look at him. He could not get in, nor could the other get out. If that were so she would endeavour to bear it all. In the meantime the old man was sitting in his arm-chair up in his bedroom, reduced almost to inanity of mind by the horror of the occasion. When he could think of it all he would tell himself that he must let her go. He could not keep the mother and her baby a prisoner in such a condition as this.

Then there came dinner. Let misfortunes be what they may, dinner will come. The old man crawled down-stairs, and Hester was invited into the dining-room. "No," she said. "If you choose to send it to me here, because of baby, I will eat." Then, neither would Mrs. Bolton go to her husband; but both of them, seated in their high-backed arm-chairs, ate their food with their plates upon their laps.

During this time Caldigate still remained outside, but in vain. As circumstances were at present, he had no means of approaching his wife. He could kick down a slight trellis-work gate; but he could bring no adequate force to bear against the stout front door. At last, when the dusk of evening came on he took his departure, assuring his wife that he would be there again on the following morning.

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