

CHAPTER XVIII.

RESTITUTION.

HE had still the whole night to think about it,—and throughout the whole night he was thinking about it. He had fixed a late hour in the afternoon for his appointment in London, so that he might have an hour or two in Cambridge before he started by the mid-day train. It was during his drive into the town that he at last made up his mind that he would not satisfy himself with discussing the matter with Mr. Seely, but that he would endeavour to explain it all to Robert Bolton. No doubt Robert Bolton was now his enemy, as were all the Boltons. But the brother could not but be anxious for his sister's name and his sister's happiness. If a way out of all this misery could be seen, it would be a way out of misery for the Boltons as well as for the Caldigates. If only he could make the attorney believe that Hester was in truth his wife, still, even yet, there might be assistance on that side. But he went to Mr. Seely first, the hour of his appointment requiring that it should be so.

But Mr. Seely was altogether opposed to any arrangement with Mr. Bollum. "No good was ever

done," he said, "by buying off witnesses. The thing itself is disreputable, and would to a certainty be known to every one."

"I should not buy them off. I regard the money as their own. I will give Crinkett the money and let him go or stay as he pleases. When giving him the money, I will tell him that he may do as he pleases."

"You would only throw your money away. You would do much worse than throw it away. Their absence would not prevent the trial. The Boltons will take care of that."

"They cannot want to injure their own side, Mr. Scely."

"They want to punish you, and to take her away. They will take care that the trial shall go on. And when it was proved, as it would be proved, that you had given these people a large sum of money, and had so secured their absence, do you think that the jury would refuse to believe their sworn depositions, and whatever other evidence would remain? The fact of your having paid them money would secure a verdict against you. The thing would, in my mind, be so disreputable that I should have to throw up the case. I could not defend you."

It was clear to him that Bollum had understood his own side of the question in deprecating any reference to an attorney. The money should have been paid and the four witnesses sent away without

a word to any one,—if any attempt in that direction were made at all. Nevertheless he went to Robert Bolton's office and succeeded in obtaining an interview with his wife's brother. But here, as with the other attorney, he failed to make the man understand the state of his own mind. He had failed in the same way even with his wife. If it were fit that the money should be paid, it could not be right that he should retain it because the people to whom it was due had told lies about him. And if this could be explained to the jury, surely the jury would not give a verdict against him on insufficient evidence, simply because he had done his duty in paying the money!

Robert Bolton listened to him with patience and without any quick expression of hot anger; though before the interview was over he had used some very cruel words. "We should think ourselves bound to prevent their going, if possible."

"Of course; I have no idea of going down to Plymouth as the man proposed, or of taking any steps to secure their absence."

"Your money is your own, and you can do what you like with it. It certainly is not for me to advise you. If you tell me that you are going to pay it, I can only say that I shall look very sharp after them."

"Why should you want to ruin your sister?"

"You have ruined her. That is our idea. We

desire now to rescue her as far as we can from further evil. You have opposed us in every endeavour that we have made. When in the performance of a manifest duty we endeavoured to separate you till after the trial, you succeeded in thwarting us by your influence."

"I left it to her."

"Had you been true and honest and upright, you would have known that as long as there was a doubt she ought to have been away from you."

"I should have sent her away?"

"Certainly."

"So as to create a doubt in her mind, so as to disturb her peace, so as to make her think that I, having been found out, was willing to be rid of her? It would have killed her."

"Better so than this."

"And yet I am as truly her husband as you are the husband of your wife. If you would only teach yourself to think that possible, then you would feel differently."

"Not as to a temporary separation."

"If you believed me, you would," said Caldigate.

"But I do not believe you. In a matter like this, as you will come to me, I must be plain. I do not believe you. I think that you have betrayed and seduced my sister. Looking at all the evidence and at your own confession, I can come to no other conclusion. I have discussed the matter with my

brother, who is a clear, cool-headed, most judicious man, and he is of the same opinion. In our own private court we have brought you in guilty,—guilty of an offence against us all which necessarily makes us as bitter against you as one man can be against another. You have destroyed our sister, and now you come here and ask me my advice as to buying off witnesses!”

“It is all untrue. As there is a God above me I am her loyal, loving husband. I will buy off no witness.”

“If I were you I would make no such attempt. It will do no good. I do not think that you have a chance of being acquitted,—not a chance; and then how much worse it will be for Hester when she finds herself still in your house!”

“She will remain there.”

“Even she will feel that to be impossible. Your influence will then probably be removed, and I presume that for a time you will have no home. But we need not discuss that. As you are here, I should not do my duty were I not to assure you that as far as we are concerned,—Hester’s family,—nothing shall be spared either in trouble or money to insure the conviction and punishment of the man whom we believe to have brought upon us so terrible a disgrace.”

Caldigate, when he got out into the street, felt that he was driven almost to despair. At first he

declared to himself, most untruly, that there was no one to believe him,—no, not one. Then he remembered how faithful was his wife; and as he did so, in his misery, he told himself that it might have been better for her had she been less faithful. Looking at it all as he now looked at it, after hearing the words of that hard man, he almost thought that it would have been so. Everybody told him that he would be condemned; and if so, what would be the fate of that poor young mother and her child? It was very well for her to declare, with her arms round his neck, that even should he be dragged away to prison, she would still be his true wife, and that she would wait,—in sorrow indeed and mourning, but still with patience,—till the cruel jailers and the harsh laws had restored him to her. If the law declared him a bigamist, she could not then be his wife. The law must decide,—whether rightly or wrongly, still must decide. And then how could they live together? An evil done must be endured, let it be ever so unendurable. But against fresh evils a man may guard. Was it not his duty, his manifest, his chief duty, to save her, as far as she could be saved, from further suffering and increased disgrace? Perhaps, after all, Robert Bolton was right when he told him that he ought to have allowed Hester to remain at Chesterton.

Whatever he might do when he got to London, he felt it to be his duty to go up and keep his ap-

pointment with Bollum. And he brought with him from home securities and certificates for stock by which he knew that he could raise the sum named at a moment's warning, should he at last decide upon paying the money. When he got into the train, and when he got out of the train, he was still in doubt. Those to whom he had gone for advice had been so hard to him, that he felt himself compelled to put on one side all that they had said. Bollum had suggested, in his graphic manner, that a lawyer and his client stood upon different legs. Caldigate acknowledged to himself that Bollum was right. His own lawyer had been almost as hard to him as his brother-in-law, who was his declared enemy. But what should he do? As to precautions to be taken in reference to the departure of the gang, all that was quite out of the question. They should go to Australia or stay behind, as they pleased. There should be no understanding that they were to go—or even that they were to hold their tongues because the money was paid to them. It should be fully explained to them that the two things were distinct. Then as he was taken to the inn at which he intended to sleep that night, he made up his mind in the cab that he would pay the money to Crinkett.

He got to London just in time to reach the bank before it was closed, and there made his arrangements. He deposited his documents and securities,

and was assured that the necessary sum should be placed to his credit on the following day. Then he walked across a street or two in the City to the place indicated by Bollum for the appointment. It was at the *Jericho Coffee House*, in *Levant Court*,— a silent, secluded spot, lying between Lombard Street and Cornhill. Here he found himself ten minutes before the time, and, asking for a cup of coffee, sat down at a table fixed to the ground in a little separate box. The order was given to a young woman at a bar in the room. Then an ancient waiter hobbled up to him and explained that coffee was not quite ready. In truth, coffee was not often asked for at the *Jericho Coffee House*. The house, said the waiter, was celebrated for its sherry. Would he take half a pint of sherry? So he ordered the sherry, which was afterwards drunk by Bollum.

Bollum came, punctual to the moment, and seated himself at the table with good-humoured alacrity. "Well, Mr. Caldigate, how is it to be? I think you must have seen that what I have proposed will be for the best."

"I will tell you what I mean to do, Mr. Bollum," said Caldigate, very gravely. "It cannot be said that I owe Mr. Crinkett a shilling."

"Certainly not. But it comes very near owing, doesn't it?"

"So near that I mean to pay it."

"That's right."

"So near that I don't like to feel that I have got his money in my pocket. As far as money goes, I have been a fortunate man."

"Wonderful!" said Bollum, enthusiastically.

"And as I was once in partnership with your uncle, I do not like to think that I enriched myself by a bargain which impoverished him."

"It ain't nice, is it,—that you should have it all, and he nothing?"

"Feeling that very strongly," continued Caldigate, merely shaking his head in token of displeasure at Bollum's interruption, "I have determined to repay Mr. Crinkett an amount that seems to me to be fair. He shall have back twenty thousand pounds."

"He's a lucky fellow, and he'll be off like a shot;—like a shot."

"He and others have conspired to rob me of all my happiness, thinking that they might so most probably get this money from me. They have invented a wicked lie,—a wicked damnable lie,—a damnable lie! They are miscreants,—foul miscreants!"

"Come, come, Mr. Caldigate."

"Foul miscreants! But they shall have their money, and you shall hear me tell them when I give it to them,—and they must both be here to take it from my hands,—that I do not at all require their absence. There is to be no bargain between

us. They are free to remain and swear their false oaths against me. Whether they go or whether they stay will be no affair of mine."

"They'll go, of course, Mr. Caldigate."

"Not at my instance. I will take care that that shall be known. They must both come; and into their joint hands will I give the cheque, and they must come prepared with a receipt declaring that they accept the money as restitution of the loss incurred by them in purchasing the Polyeuca mine from me. Do you understand? And I shall bring a witness with me to see them take the money." Bollum, who was considerably depressed by his companion's manner, said that he did understand.

"I suppose I can have a private room here, at noon to-morrow?" asked Caldigate, turning to the woman at the bar.

When that was settled he assured Bollum that a cheque for the amount should be placed in the joint hands of Timothy Crinkett and Euphemia Smith if he, and they with him, would be there at noon on the following morning. Bollum in vain attempted to manage the payment without the personal interview, but at last agreed that the man and the woman should be forthcoming.

That night Caldigate dined at his Club, one of the University Clubs, at which he had been elected just at the time of his marriage. He had seldom been there, but now walked into the dinner-room,

resolving that he would not be ashamed to show himself. He fancied that everybody looked at him, and probably there were some present who knew that he was about to stand his trial for bigamy. But he got his dinner, and smoked his cigar; and before the evening was over he had met an old College friend. He was in want of a friend, and explained his wants. He told something of his immediate story, and then asked the man to be present at the scene on the morrow.

"I must have a witness, Gray," said he, "and you will do me a kindness if you will come." Then Mr. Gray promised to be present on the occasion.

On the following morning he met Gray at the Club, having the cheque ready in his pocket, and together they proceeded to Levant Court. Again he was a little before his time, and the two sat together in the gloomy little room up-stairs. Bollum was the first to come, and when he saw the stranger, was silent,—thinking whether it might not be best to escape and warn Crinkett and the woman that all might not be safe. But the stranger did not look like a detective; and, as he told himself, why should there be danger? So he waited, and in a few minutes Crinkett entered the room, with the woman veiled.

"Well, Caldigate," said Crinkett, "how is it with you?"

"If you please, Mrs. Smith," said Caldigate, "I

must ask you to remove your veil,—so that I may be sure that it is you.”

She removed her veil very slowly, and then stood looking him in the face,—not full in the face, for she could not quite raise her eyes to meet his. And though she made an effort to brazen it out, she could not quite succeed. She attempted to raise her head, and carry herself with pride; but every now and again there was a slight quiver,—slight, but still visible. The effort, too, was visible. But there she stood, looking at him, and to be looked at,—but without a word. During the whole interview she never once opened her lips.

She had lost all her comeliness. It was now nearly seven years since they two had been on the Goldfinder together, and then he had found her very attractive. There was no attraction now. She was much aged; and her face was coarse, as though she had taken to drinking. But there was still about her something of that look of intellect which had captivated him more, perhaps, than her beauty. Since those days she had become a slave to gold,—and such slavery is hardly compatible with good looks in a woman. There she stood,—ready to listen to him, ready to take his money, but determined not to utter a word.

Then he took the cheque out of his pocket, and holding it in his hand, spoke to them as follows: “I have explained to Mr. Bollum, and have explained

to my friend here, Mr. Gray, the reasons which induce me to pay to you, Timothy Crinkett, and to you, Euphemia Smith, the large sum of twenty thousand pounds. The nature of our transactions has been such that I feel bound in honour to repay so much of the price you paid for the Polyeuka mine."

"All right, Caldigate; all right," said Crinkett.

"And I have explained also to both of them that this payment has nothing whatever to do with the base, false, and most wicked charge which you are bringing against me. It is not because that woman, by a vile perjury, claims me as her husband, and because I wish to buy her silence or his, that I make this restitution. I restore the money of my own free will, without any base bargain. You can go on with your perjury or abstain from it, as you may think best."

"We understand, squire," said Crinkett, affecting to laugh. "You hand over the money,—that's all." Then the woman looked round at her companion, and a frown came across her face; but she said nothing, turning her face again upon Caldigate, and endeavouring to keep her eyes stedfastly fixed upon him.

"Have you brought a receipt signed by both of you?" Then Bollum handed him a receipt signed "Timothy Crinkett, for self and partners." But

Caldigate demanded that the woman also should sign it.

"There is a difficulty about the name, you see," said Bollum. There was a difficulty about the name, certainly. It would not be fair, he thought, that he should force her to the use of a name she disowned, and he did not wish to be hindered from what he was doing by her persistency in calling herself by his own name.

"So be it," said he. "There is the cheque. Mr. Gray will see that I put it into both their hands." This he did, each of them reaching out a hand to take it. "And now you can go where you please and act as you please. You have combined to rob me of all that I value most by the basest of lies; but not on that account have I abstained from doing what I believe to be an act of justice." Then he left the room, and paying for the use of it to the woman at the bar, walked off with his friend Gray, leaving Crinkett, Bollum, and the woman still within the house.
