

"I don't think your mother is proud of him, my dear."

"Poor mamma!"

"I hope he'll go when he's told to do so."

"John! Of course he'll go if I ask him. There's nothing he wouldn't do to make me happy. But really when I talk to him about it at all, I am ashamed of myself. Poor mamma!" The result of this visit was, however, very comforting. Mrs. Daniel had seen Mrs. Bolton, and had herself been witness to the fact that Mrs. Bolton had mitigated the sternness of her denial when asked to receive her son-in-law at Puritan Grange. It was, said Mrs. Daniel, the settled opinion of the Bolton family generally that, in the course of another month or so, the woman would be induced to give way under the pressure put upon her by the family generally.

CHAPTER III.

NEWS FROM THE GOLD MINES.

It was said at the beginning of the last chapter that things had gone on smoothly, or with apparent smoothness, at Folking since the return of the Caldigates from their wedding tour; but there had in truth been a small cloud in the Folking heavens over and beyond that Babington haze which was

now vanishing, and the storm at Chesterton as to which hopes were entertained that it would clear itself away. It will perhaps be remembered that Caldigate's offer for the sale of his interest in the Polyeuka mine had been suddenly accepted by certain enterprising persons in Australia, and that the money itself had been absolutely forthcoming. This had been in every way fortunate, as he had been saved from the trouble of another journey in the colony; and his money matters had been put on such a footing as to make him altogether comfortable. But just when he heard that the money had been lodged to his account,—and when the money actually had been so paid, he received a telegram from Mr. Crinkett, begging that the matter might be for a time postponed. This, of course, was out of the question. His terms had been accepted,—which might have gone for very little had not the money been forthcoming. But the cash was positively in his hands. Who ever heard of a man "postponing" an arrangement in such circumstances? Let them do what they might with Polyeuka, he was safe! He telegraphed back to say that there could be no postponement. As far as he was concerned the whole thing was settled. Then there came a multiplicity of telegrams, very costly to the Crinkett interest;—costly also and troublesome to himself; for he, though the matter was so pleasantly settled as far as he was concerned, could not altogether

ignore the complaints that were made to him. Then there came very long letters, long and loud; letters not only from Crinkett, but from others telling him that the Polyeuka gold had come to an end, the lode disappearing altogether, as lodes sometimes do disappear. The fact was that the Crinkett Company asked to have back half its money, offering him the Polyeuka mine in its entirety if he chose to accept it.

John Caldigate, though in England he could be and was a liberal gentleman, had been long enough in Australia to know that if he meant to hold his own among such men as Mr. Crinkett, he must make the best of such turns of fortune as chance might give him. Under no circumstances would Crinkett have been generous to him. Had Polyeuka suddenly become more prolific in the precious metal than any mine in the colony the Crinkett Company would have laughed at any claim made by him for further payment. When a bargain has been fairly made, the parties must make the best of it. He was therefore very decided in his refusal to make restitution, though he was at the same time profuse in his expressions of sorrow.

Then there came a threat,—not from Crinkett, but from Mrs. Euphemia Smith. And the letter was not signed Euphemia Smith,—but Euphemia Caldigate. And the letter was as follows:—

“In spite of all your treachery to me I do not wish to ruin you, or to destroy your young wife, by proving myself in England to have been married to you at Ahalala. But I will do so unless you assent to the terms which Crinkett has proposed. He and I are in partnership in the matter with two or three others, and are willing to let all that has gone before be forgotten if we have means given us to make another start. You cannot feel that the money you have received is fairly yours, and I can hardly think you would wish to become rich by taking from me all that I have earned after so many hardships. If you will do as I propose, you had better send out an agent. On paying us the money he shall not only have the marriage-certificate, but shall stand by and see me married to Crinkett, who is now a widower. After that, of course, I can make no claim to you. If you will not do this, both I and Crinkett, and the other man who was present at our marriage, and Anne Young, who has been with me ever since, will go at once to England, and the law must take its course.

“I have no scruple in demanding this as you owe me so much more.

“Allan, the Wesleyan who married us, has gone out of the colony, no one knows where,—but I send you the copy of the certificate; and all the four of us who were there are still together. And there were others who were at Ahalala at the time, and

who remember the marriage well. Dick Shand was not in the chapel, but Dick knew all about it. There is quite plenty of evidence.

“Send back by the wire word what you will do, and let your agent come over as soon as possible.

“EUPHEMIA CALDIGATE.”

However true or however false the allegations made in the above letter may have been, for a time it stunned him greatly. This letter reached him about a month before the birth of his son, and for a day or two it disturbed him greatly. He did not show it to his wife, but wandered about the place alone thinking whether he would take any notice of it, and what notice. At last he resolved that he would take the letter to his brother-in-law Robert, and ask the attorney's advice. “How much of it is true?” demanded Robert, when he read the letter twice from beginning to end.

“A good deal,” said Caldigate,—“as much as may be, with the exception that I was never married to the woman.”

“I suppose not that.” Robert Bolton as he spoke was very grave, but did not at first seem disposed to be angry. “Had you not better tell me everything, do you think?”

“It is for that purpose that I have come and brought you the letter. You understand about the money.”

"I suppose so."

"There can be no reason why I should return a penny of it?"

"Certainly not now. You certainly must not return it under a threat,—even though the woman should be starving. There can be no circumstances—" and as he spoke he dashed his hand down upon the table,—“no circumstances in which a man should allow money to be extorted from him by a threat. For Hester's sake you must not do that."

"No;—no; I must not do that, of course."

"And now tell me what is true?" There was something of authority in the tone of his voice, something perhaps of censure, something too of doubt, which went much against the grain with Caldigate. He had determined to tell his story, feeling that counsel was necessary to him, but he wished so to tell it as to subject himself to no criticism and to admit no fault. He wanted assistance, but he wanted it on friendly and sympathetic terms. He had a great dislike to being—"blown up," as he would probably have expressed it himself, and he already thought that he saw in his companion's eye a tendency that way. Turning all this in his mind, he paused a moment before he began to tell his tale. "You say that a good deal in this woman's letter is true. Had you not better tell me what is true?"

"I was very intimate with her."

"Did she ever live with you?"

"Yes, she did."

"As your wife?"

"Well; yes. It is of course best that you should know all." Then he gave a tolerably true account of all that had happened between himself and Mrs. Smith up to the time at which, as the reader knows, he found her performing at the Sydney theatre.

"You had made her a distinct promise of marriage on board the ship?"

"I think I had."

"You think?"

"Yes. I think I did. Can you not understand that a man may be in great doubt as to the exact words that he may have spoken at such a time?"

"Hardly."

"Then I don't think you realise the man's position. I wish to let you know the truth as exactly as I can. You had better take it for granted that I did make such a promise, though probably no such promise was absolutely uttered. But I did tell her afterwards that I would marry her."

"Afterwards?"

"Yes, when she followed me up to Ahalala."

"Did Richard Shand know her?"

"Of course he did,—on board the ship;—and he was with me when she came to Ahalala."

"And she lived with you?"

"Yes."

"And you promised to marry her?"

"Yes."

"And that was all?"

"I did not marry her of course," said Caldigate.

"Who heard the promise?"

"It was declared by her in the presence of that Wesleyan minister she speaks of. He went to her to rebuke her, and she told him of the promise. Then he asked me, and I did not deny it. At the moment when he taxed me with it I was almost minded to do as I had promised."

"You repeated your promise then to him?"

"Nothing of the kind. I did not deny it, and I told him at last to mind his own business. Life up there was a little rough at that time."

"So it seems, indeed. And then after that?"

"I had given her money and she had some claims in a gold mine. When she was successful for a time she became so keen about her money that I fancy she hardly wished to get herself married. Then we had some words, and so we parted."

"Did she call herself—Mrs. Caldigate?"

"I never called her so."

"Did she herself assume the name?"

"It was a wild kind of life up there, Robert, and this was apparent in nothing more than in the names people used. I daresay some of the people

did call her Mrs. Caldigate. But they knew she was not my wife."

"And this man Crinkett?"

"He knew all about it."

"He had a wife. Did his wife know her?"

"He had quarrelled with his wife at that time and had sent her away from Nobble. Mrs. Smith was then living at Nobble, and Crinkett knew more about her than I did. She was mad after gold, and it was with Crinkett she was working. I gave her a lot of shares in another mine to leave me."

"What mine?"

"The Old Stick-in-the-Mud they called it. I had been in partnership with Crinkett and wanted to get out of the thing, and go in altogether for Polyeuka. At that time the woman cared little for husbands or lovers. She had been bitten with the fury of gold-gambling and, like so many of them, filled her mind with an idea of unlimited wealth. And she had a turn of luck. I suppose she was worth at one time eight or ten thousand pounds."

"But she did not keep it?"

"I knew but little of her afterwards. I kept out of her way; and though I had dealings with Crinkett, I dropped them as soon as I could." Then he paused;—but Robert Bolton held his peace with anything but a satisfied countenance. "Now I think you know all about it."

"It is a most distressing story."

"All attempts at robbery and imposition are of course distressing."

"There is so much in it that is—disgraceful."

"I deny it altogether,—if you mean disgraceful to me."

"If it had all been known as it is known now,—as it is known even by your own telling, do you think that I should have consented to your marriage with my sister?"

"Why not?" Robert Bolton shrugged his shoulders. "And I think, moreover, that had you refused your consent I should have married your sister just the same."

"Then you know very little about the matter."

"I don't think there can be any good in going into that. It is at any rate the fact that your sister is my wife. As this demand has been made upon me it was natural that I should wish to discuss it with some one whom I can trust. I tell you all the facts, but I am not going to listen to any fault-finding as to my past life."

"Poor Hester!"

"Why is she poor? She does not think herself so."

"Because there is a world of sorrow and trouble before her; and because all that you have told to me must probably be made known to her."

"She knows it already;—that is she knows what you mean. I have not told her of the woman's lie,

nor of this demand for money. But I shall when she is strong enough to hear it and to talk of it. You are very much mistaken if you think that there are secrets between me and Hester."

"I don't suppose you will be pleased to hear the story of such a life told in all the public papers."

"Certainly not;—but it will be an annoyance which I can bear. You or any one else would be very much mistaken who would suppose that life out in those places can go on in the same regular way that it does here. Gold beneath the ground is a dangerous thing to touch, and few who have had to do with it have come out much freer from misfortune than myself. As for the people, I don't suppose that I shall hear from them again. I shall send them both word that not a shilling is to be expected from me."

There was after this a long discussion as to the nature of the messages to be sent. There was no absolute quarrel between the two men, and the attorney acknowledged to himself that it was now his duty to give the best advice in his power to his brother-in-law; but their manner to each other was changed. It was evident that Robert did not quite believe all that Caldigate told him, and evident also that Caldigate resented this want of confidence. But still each knew that he could not do without the other. Their connection was too firm and too close to be shaken off. And, therefore, though their tones

were hardly friendly, still they consulted as to what should be done. It was at last decided that two messages should be sent by Caldigate, one to Crinkett and the other to Mrs. Smith, and each in the same words. "No money will be sent you on behalf of the Polyeuka mine," and that this should be all. Any letter, Robert Bolton thought, would be inexpedient. Then they parted, and the two messages were at once sent.

After a day or two Caldigate recovered his spirits. We all probably know how some trouble will come upon us and for a period seem to quell all that is joyous in our life, and that then by quick degrees the weight of the trouble will grow less, till the natural spring and vivacity of the mind will recover itself, and make little or nothing of that which a few hours ago was felt to be so grievous a burden. So it had been with John Caldigate. He had been man enough to hold up his head when telling his story to Robert Bolton, and to declare that the annoyance would be one that he could bear easily;—but still for some hours after that he had been unhappy. If by sacrificing some considerable sum of money,—even a large sum of money, say ten thousand pounds,—he could at that moment have insured the silence of Crinkett and the woman, he would have paid his money. He knew the world well enough to be aware that he could insure nothing by any such sacrifice. He must defy these claimants;

—and then if they chose to come to England with their story, he must bear it as best he could. Those who saw him did not know that aught ailed him, and Robert Bolton spoke no word of the matter to any one at Cambridge.

But Robert Bolton thought very much of it,—so much that on the following day he ran up to London on purpose to discuss the matter with his brother William. How would it be with them, and what would be his duty, if the statement made by the woman should turn out to be true? What security had they after the story told by Caldigate himself that there had been no marriage? By his own showing he had lived with the woman, had promised to marry her, had acknowledged his promise in the hearing of a clergyman, and had been aware that she had called herself by his name. Then he had given her money to go away. This had been his own story. “Do you believe him?” he said to his brother William.

“Yes; I do. In the first place, though I can understand from his antecedents and from his surroundings at the time, that he should have lived a loose sort of life when he was out there, I don’t think that he is a rascal or even a liar.”

“One wouldn’t wish to think so.”

“I do not think so. He doesn’t look like it, or talk like it, or act like it.”

“How many cases do we know in which some

abominable unexpected villany has destroyed the happiness and respectability of a family?"

"But what would you do?" asked the barrister. "She is married to him. You cannot separate them if you would."

"No,—poor girl. If it be so, her misery is accomplished; but if it be so she should at once be taken away from him. What a triumph it would be to her mother!"

"That is a dreadful thing to say, Robert."

"But nevertheless true. Think of her warnings and refusals, and of my persistence! But if it be so, not the less must we all insist upon—destroying him. If it be so, he must be punished to the extent of the law."

William Bolton, however, would not admit that it could be so, and Robert declared that though he suspected,—though in such a case he found himself bound to suspect,—he did not in truth believe that Caldigate had been guilty of so terrible a crime. All probability was against it;—but still it was possible. Then, after much deliberation, it was decided that an agent should be sent out by them to New South Wales, to learn the truth, as far as it could be learned, and to bring back whatever evidence might be collected without making too much noise in the collection of it. Then there arose the question whether Caldigate should be told of this;—but it was decided that it should be

done at the joint expense of the two brothers without the knowledge of Hester's husband.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BABY'S SPONSORS.

"Is there anything wrong between you and Robert?" Hester asked this question of her husband, one morning in January, as he was sitting by the side of her sofa in their bedroom. The baby was in her arms, and at that moment there was a question as to the godfathers and godmother for the baby.

The letter from Mrs. Smith had arrived on the last day of October, nearly two months before the birth of the baby, and the telegrams refusing to send the money demanded had been despatched on the 1st November,—so that, at this time, Caldigate's mind was accustomed to the burden of the idea. From that day to this he had not often spoken of the matter to Robert Bolton,—nor indeed had there been much conversation between them on other matters. Robert had asked him two or three times whether he had received any reply by the wires. No such message had come; and of course he answered his brother-in-law's questions accordingly;—but he had answered them almost