

## CHAPTER VIII.

“JUST BY TELLING ME THAT I AM.”

THE thunderbolt had fallen now. Caldigate, when he left his wife that he might stroll about the place after the dusk had fallen, told himself again and again that the thunderbolt had certainly fallen now. There could be no longer a doubt but that this woman would claim him as her husband. A whole world of remorse and regrets oppressed his conscience and his heart. He looked back and remembered the wise counsels which had been given him on board the ship, when the captain and Mrs. Callender and poor Dick Shand had remonstrated with him, and called to mind his own annoyance when he had bidden them mind their own affairs. And then he remembered how he had determined to break away from the woman at Sydney, and to explain to her, as he might then have done without injustice, that they two could be of no service the one to the other, and that they had better part. It seemed now, as he looked back, to have been so easy for him then to have avoided danger, so easy to have kept a straight course! But now, — now, surely he would be overwhelmed.

And then how easy it would have been, had he been more careful at the beginning of these troubles, to have bought these wretches off! He had been, he now acknowledged, too peremptory in his first refusal to refund a portion of the money to Crinkett. The application had, indeed, been made without those proofs as to the condition of the mine which had since reached him, and he had distrusted Crinkett. Crinkett he had known to be a man not to be trusted. But yet, even after receiving the letter from Euphemia Smith, the matter might have been arranged. When he had first become assured that the new Polyeuka Company had failed, he should have made an offer, even though Euphemia Smith had then commenced her threats. With skill, might he not have done it on this very day? Might he not have made the man understand that if he would base his claim simply on his losses, and make it openly on that ground, then his claim should be considered? But now it was too late, and the thunderbolt had fallen.

What must he do first? Robert Bolton had promised to tell him on the morrow whether he would act for him as his lawyer. He felt sure now that his brother-in-law would not do so; but it would be necessary that he should have an answer, and that necessity would give him an excuse for going into Cambridge and showing himself among the Boltons. Let his sufferings or his fears be what they might,

he would never confess to the world that he suffered or that he was frightened, by shutting himself up. He would be seen about Cambridge, walking openly, as though no reports, no rumours, had been spread about concerning him. He would go to the houses of his wife's relations until he should be told that he was not welcome.

"John," his wife said to him that night, "bear it like a man."

"Am I not bearing it like a man?"

"It is crushing your very heart. I see it in your eyes."

"Can you bear it?" He asked his question with a stern voice; but as he asked it he turned to her and kissed her.

"Yes," she said, "yes. While I have you with me, and baby, I can bear anything. While you will tell me everything that happens, I will bear everything. And, John, when you were out just now, and when I am alone and trying to pray, I told myself that I ought not to be unhappy; for I would sooner have you and baby and all these troubles, than be back at Chesterton—without you."

"I wish you were back there. I wish you had never seen me."

"If you say that, then I shall be crushed."

"For your sake, my darling; for your sake,—for your sake! How shall I comfort you when all

those around you are saying that you are not my wife?"

"By telling me that I am," she said, coming and kneeling at his feet, and looking up into his face. "If you say so, you may be sure that I shall believe no one who says the contrary."

It was thus, and only now, that he began to know the real nature of the woman whom he had succeeded in making his own, and of whom he found now that even her own friends would attempt to rob him. "I will bear it," he said, as he embraced her. "I will bear it, if I can, like a man."

"Oh, ma'am! those men were saying horrid things," her nurse said to her that night.

"Yes; very horrid things. I know it all. It is part of a wicked plot to rob Mr. Caldigate of his money. It is astonishing the wickedness that people will contrive. It is very very sad. I don't know how long it may be before Mr. Caldigate can prove it all."

"But he can prove it all, ma'am?"

"Of course he can. The truth can always be proved at last. I trust there will be no one about the place to doubt him. If there were such a one, I would not speak to him,—though it were my own father; though it were my own mother." Then she took the baby in her arms, as though fearing that the nurse herself might not be loyal.

“I don't think there will be any as knows master, will be wrong enough for that,” said the nurse, understanding what was expected of her. After that, but not quite readily, the baby was once more trusted to her.

On the following morning Caldigate rode into the town, and as he put his horse up at the inn, he felt that the very ostler had heard the story. As he walked along the street, it seemed to him that everyone he met knew all about it. Robert Bolton would, of course, have heard it; but nevertheless he walked boldly into the attorney's office. His fault at the time was in being too bold in manner, in carrying himself somewhat too erect, in assuming too much confidence in his eye and mouth. To act a part perfectly requires a consummate actor; and there are phases in life in which acting is absolutely demanded. A man cannot always be at his ease, but he should never seem to be discomfited. For petty troubles the amount of acting necessary is so common that habit has made it almost natural. But when great sorrows come it is hard not to show them,—and harder still not to seem to hide them.

When he entered the private room he found that the old man was there with his son. He shook hands, of course, with both of them, and then he stood a moment silent to hear how they would address him. But as they also were silent he was

compelled to speak. "I hope you got home all right, sir, yesterday; and Mrs. Bolton."

The old man did not answer, but he turned his face round to his son. "I hear that you had that man Crinkett out at Folking yesterday," said Robert.

"He was there, certainly, to my sorrow."

"And another with him?"

"Yes; and another with him, whom I had also known at Nobble."

"And they were brought in to breakfast?"

"Yes."

"And they afterwards declared that you had married a wife out there in the colony?"

"That also is true."

"They have been with my father this morning."

"I am very, very sorry, sir," said Caldigate, turning to the old man, "that you should have been troubled in so disagreeable a business."

"Now, Caldigate, I will tell you what we propose." It was still the attorney who was speaking, for the old man had not as yet opened his mouth since his son-in-law had entered the room. "There can, I think, be no doubt that this woman intends to bring an accusation of bigamy against you."

"She is threatening to do it. I think it very improbable that she will be fool enough to make the attempt."

"From what I have heard I feel sure that the

attempt will be made. Depositions, in fact, will be made before the magistrates some day this week. Crinkett and the woman have been with the mayor this morning, and have been told the way in which they should proceed." Caldigate, when he heard this, felt that he was trembling, but he looked into the speaker's face without allowing his eyes to turn to the right or left. "I am not going to say anything now about the case itself. Indeed, as I know nothing, I can say nothing. You must provide yourself with a lawyer."

"You will not act for me?"

"Certainly not. I must act for my sister. Now what I propose, and what her father proposes, is this,—that she shall return to her home at Puritan Grange while this question is being decided."

"Certainly not," said the husband.

"She must," said the old man, speaking for the first time.

"We shall compel it," said the attorney.

"Compel! How will you compel it? She is my wife."

"That has to be proved. Public opinion will compel it, if nothing else. You cannot make a prisoner of her."

"Oh, she shall go if she wishes it. You shall have free access to her. Bring her mother. Bring your carriage. She shall dispose of herself as she

pleases. God forbid that I should keep her, though she be my wife, against her will."

"I am sure she will do as her friends shall advise her when she hears the story," said the attorney.

"She has heard the story. She knows it all. And I am sure that she will not stir a foot," said the husband. "You know nothing about her." This he said turning to his wife's half-brother; and then again he turned to the old man. "You, sir, no doubt, are well aware that she can be firm to her purpose. Nothing but death could take her away from me. If you were to carry her by force to Chesterton she would return to Folking on foot before the day was over. She knows what it is to be a wife. I am not a bit afraid of her leaving me." This he was able to say with a high spirit and an assured voice.

"It is quite out of the question that she should stay with you while this is going on."

"Of course she must come away," said the banker, not looking at the man whom he now hated as thoroughly as did his wife.

"Consult your own friends, and let her consult hers. They will all tell you so. Ask Mrs. Babington. Ask your own father."

"I shall ask no one—but her."

"Think what her position will be! All the



world will at least doubt whether she be your wife or not."

"There is one person who will not doubt,—and that is herself."

"Very good. If it be so, that will be a comfort to you, no doubt. But, for her sake, while other people doubt, will it not be better that she should be with her father and mother? Look at it all round."

"I think it would be better that she should be with me," replied Caldigate.

"Even though your former marriage with that other woman were proved?"

"I will not presume that to be possible. Though a jury should so decide, their decision would be wrong. Such an error could not affect us. I will not think of such a thing."

"And you do not perceive that her troubles will be lighter in her father's house than in yours?"

"Certainly not. To be away from her own house would be such a trouble to her that she would not endure it unless restrained by force."

"If you press her, she would go. Cannot you see that it would be better for her name?"

"Her name is my name," he said, clenching his fist in his violence, "and my name is hers. She can have no good name distinct from me,—no name at all. She is part and parcel of my very self, and

under no circumstances will I consent that she shall be torn away from me. No word from any human being shall persuade me to it,—unless it should come from herself.”

“We can make her,” said the old man.

“No doubt we could get an order from the Court,” said the attorney, thinking that anything might be fairly said in such an emergency as this; “but it will be better that she should come of her own accord, or by his direction. Are you aware how probable it is that you may be in prison within a day or two?”

To this Caldigate made no answer, but turned round to leave the room. He paused a moment at the doorway to think whether another word or two might not be said in behalf of his wife. It seemed hard to him, or hard rather upon her, that all the wide-stretching solid support of her family should be taken away from her at such a crisis as the present. He knew their enmity to himself. He could understand both the old enmity and that which had now been newly engendered. Both the one and the other were natural. He had succeeded in getting the girl away from her parents in opposition to both father and mother. And now, almost within the first year of his marriage, she had been brought to this terrible misery by means of disreputable people with whom he had been closely connected! Was it not natural that Robert Bolton

should turn against him? If Hester had been his sister and there had come such an interloper what would he have felt? Was it not his duty to be gentle and to give way, if by any giving way he could lessen the evil which he had occasioned. "I am sorry to have to leave your presence like this," he said, turning back to Mr. Bolton.

"Why did you ever come into my presence?"

"What has been done is done. Even if I would give her back, I cannot. For better or for worse she is mine. We cannot make it otherwise now. But understand this, when you ask that she shall come back to you, I do not refuse it on my own account. Though I should be miserable indeed were she to leave me, I will not even ask her to stay. But I know she will stay. Though I should try to drive her out, she would not go. Good-bye, sir." The old man only shook his head. "Good-bye, Robert."

"Good-bye. You had better get some lawyer as soon as you can. If you know any one in London you should send for him. If not, Mr. Seely here is as good a man as you can have. He is no friend of mine, but he is a careful attorney who understands his business." Then Caldigate left the room with the intention of going at once to Mr. Seely.

But standing patiently at the door, just within the doorway of the house, he met a tall man in dark

plain clothes; whom he at once knew to be a policeman. The man, who was aware that Caldigate was a county magistrate, civilly touched his hat, and then, with a few whispered words, expressed his opinion that our hero had better go with him to the mayor's office. Had he a warrant? Yes, he had a warrant, but he thought that probably it might not be necessary for him to show it. "I will go with you, of course," said Caldigate. "I suppose it is on the allegation of a man named Crinkett."

"A lady, sir, I think," said the policeman.

"One Mrs. Smith."

"She called herself—Caldigate, sir," said the policeman. Then they went together without any further words to the mayor's court, and from thence, before he heard the accusation made against him, he sent both for his father and for Mr. Seely.

He was taken through to a private room, and thither came at once the mayor and another magistrate of the town with whom he was acquainted. "This is a very sad business, Mr. Caldigate," said the mayor.

"Very sad, indeed. I suppose I know all about it. Two men were with me yesterday threatening to indict me for bigamy if I did not give them a considerable sum of money. I can quite understand that they should have been here, as I know the nature of the evidence they can use. The policeman tells me the woman is here too."

"Oh yes;—she is here, and has made her deposition. Indeed, there are two men and another woman who all declare that they were present at her marriage." Then, after some further conversation, the accusers were brought into the room before him, so that their depositions might be read to him. The woman was closely veiled, so that he could not see a feature of her face; but he knew her figure well, and he remembered the other woman who had been half-companion, half-servant to Euphemia Smith when she had come up to the diggings, and who had been with her both at Ahalala and at Nobble. The woman's name, as he now brought to mind, was Anna Young. Crinkett also and Adamson followed them into the room, each of whom had made a deposition on the matter. "Is this the Mr. Caldigate," said the mayor, "whom you claim as your husband?"

"He is my husband," said the woman. "He and I were married at Ahalala in New South Wales."

"It is false," said Caldigate.

"Would you wish to see her face?" asked the mayor.

"No; I know her voice well. She is the woman in whose company I went out to the Colony, and whom I knew while I was there. It is not necessary that I should see her. What does she say?"

"That I am your wife, John Caldigate."

Then the deposition was read to him, which

stated on the part of the woman, that on a certain day she was married to him by the Rev. Mr. Allan, a Wesleyan minister, at Ahalala, that the marriage took place in a tent belonging, as she believed, to Mr. Crinkett, and that Crinkett, Adamson, and Anna Young were all present at the marriage. Then the three persons thus named had taken their oaths and made their depositions to the same effect. And a document was produced, purporting to be a copy of the marriage certificate as made out by Mr. Allan, a copy which she, the woman, stated that she obtained at the time, the register itself, which consisted simply of an entry in a small book, having been carried away by Mr. Allan in his pocket. Crinkett, when asked what had become of Mr. Allan, stated that he knew nothing but that he had left Ahalala. From that day to this none of them had heard of Mr. Allan.

Then the mayor gave Caldigate to understand that he must hold himself as committed to stand his trial for bigamy at the next Assizes for the County.

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