JOHN CALDIGATE

By

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Chapter I

Folking

Perhaps it was more the fault of Daniel Caldigate the father than of his

son John Caldigate, that they two could not live together in comfort in

the days of the young man's early youth. And yet it would have been much

for both of them that such comfortable association should have been

possible to them. Wherever the fault lay, or the chief fault--for

probably there was some on both sides--the misfortune was so great as to

bring crushing troubles upon each of them.

There were but the two of which to make a household. When John was

fifteen, and had been about a year at Harrow, he lost his mother and his

two little sisters almost at a blow. The two girls went first, and the

poor mother, who had kept herself alive to see them die, followed them

almost instantly. Then Daniel Caldigate had been alone.

And he was a man who knew how to live alone,--a just, hard,

unsympathetic man,--of whom his neighbours said, with something of

implied reproach, that he bore up strangely when he lost his wife and

girls. This they said, because he was to be seen riding about the

country, and because he was to be heard talking to the farmers and

labourers as though nothing special had happened to him. It was rumoured

of him, too, that he was as constant with his books as before; and he

had been a man always constant with his books; and also that he had

never been seen to shed a tear, or been heard to speak of those who had

been taken from him.

He was, in truth, a stout, self-constraining man, silent unless when he

had something to say. Then he could become loud enough, or perhaps it

might be said, eloquent. To his wife he had been inwardly affectionate,

but outwardly almost stern. To his daughters he had been the

same,--always anxious for every good thing on their behalf, but never

able to make the children conscious of this anxiety. When they were

taken from him, he suffered in silence, as such men do suffer; and he

suffered the more because he knew well how little of gentleness there

had been in his manners with them.

But he had hoped, as he sat alone in his desolate house, that it would

be different with him and his only son,--with his son who was now the

only thing left to him. But the son was a boy, and he had to look

forward to what years might bring him rather than to present happiness

from that source. When the boy came home for his holidays, the father

would sometimes walk with him, and discourse on certain chosen

subjects,--on the politics of the day, in regard to which Mr. Caldigate

was an advanced Liberal, on the abomination of the Game Laws, on the

folly of Protection, on the antiquated absurdity of a State Church;--as

to all which matters his son John lent him a very inattentive ear. Then

the lad would escape and kill rabbits, or rats, or even take birds'

nests, with a zest for such pursuits which was disgusting to the father,

though he would not absolutely forbid them. Then John would be allured

to go to his uncle Babington's house, where there was a pony on which he

could hunt, and fishing-rods, and a lake with a boat, and three fine

bouncing girl-cousins, who made much of him, and called him Jack; so

that he soon preferred his uncle Babington's house, and would spend much

of his holidays at Babington House.

Mr. Caldigate was a country squire with a moderate income, living in a

moderate house called Folking, in the parish of Utterden, about ten

miles from Cambridge. Here he owned nearly the entire parish, and some

portion of Netherden, which lay next to it, having the reputation of an

income of Â£3,000 a-year. It probably amounted to about two-thirds of

that. Early in life he had been a very poor man, owing to the

improvidence of his father; but he had soon quarrelled with his

father,--as he had with almost everyone else,--and had for some ten

years earned his own bread in the metropolis among the magazines and

newspapers. Then, when his father died, the property was his own, with

such encumbrances as the old squire had been able to impose upon it.

Daniel Caldigate had married when he was a poor man, but did not go to

Folking to live till the estate was clear, at which time he was forty

years old. When he was endeavouring to inculcate good Liberal principles

into that son of his, who was burning the while to get off to a battle

of rats among the corn-stacks, he was not yet fifty. There might

therefore be some time left to him for the promised joys of

companionship if he could only convince the boy that politics were

better than rats.

But he did not long make himself any such promise. It seemed to him that

his son's mind was of a nature very different from his own; and much

like to that of his grandfather. The lad could be awakened to no

enthusiasm in the abuse of Conservative leaders. And those Babingtons

were such fools! He despised the whole race of them,--especially those

thick-legged, romping, cherry-cheeked damsels, of whom, no doubt, his

son would marry one. They were all of the earth earthy, without an idea

among them. And yet he did not dare to forbid his son to go to the

house, lest people should say of him that his sternness was unendurable.

Folking is not a place having many attractions of its own, beyond the

rats. It lies in the middle of the Cambridgeshire fens, between St.

Ives, Cambridge, and Ely. In the two parishes of Utterden and Netherden

there is no rise of ground which can by any stretch of complaisance be

called a hill. The property is bisected by an immense straight dike,

which is called the Middle Wash, and which is so sluggish, so straight,

so ugly, and so deep, as to impress the mind of a stranger with the

ideas of suicide. And there are straight roads and straight dikes, with

ugly names on all sides, and passages through the country called droves,

also with ugly appellations of their own, which certainly are not worthy

of the name of roads. The Folking Causeway possesses a bridge across the

Wash, and is said to be the remains of an old Roman Way which ran in a

perfectly direct line from St. Neots to Ely. When you have crossed the

bridge going northward,--or north-westward,--there is a lodge at your

right hand, and a private road running, as straight as a line can be

drawn, through pollard poplars, up to Mr. Caldigate's house. Round the

house there are meadows, and a large old-fashioned kitchen garden, and a

small dark flower-garden, with clipt hedges and straight walks, quite in

the old fashion. The house itself is dark, picturesque, well-built, low,

and uncomfortable. Part of it is as old as the time of Charles II., and

part dates from Queen Anne. Something was added at a later

date,--perhaps early in the Georges; but it was all done with good

materials, and no stint of labour. Shoddy had not been received among

building materials when any portion of Folking was erected. But then

neither had modern ideas of comfort become in vogue. Just behind the

kitchen-garden a great cross ditch, called Foul-water Drain, runs, or

rather creeps, down to the Wash, looking on that side as though it had

been made to act as a moat to the house; and on the other side of the

drain there is Twopenny Drove, at the end of which Twopenny Ferry leads

to Twopenny Hall, a farmhouse across the Wash belonging to Mr.

Caldigate. The fields around are all square and all flat, all mostly

arable, and are often so deep in mud that a stranger wonders that a

plough should be able to be dragged through the soil. The farming is,

however, good of its kind, and the ploughing is mostly done by steam.

Such is and has been for some years the house at Folking in which Mr.

Caldigate has lived quite alone. For five years after his wife's death

he had only on rare occasions received visitors there. Twice his brother

had come to Folking, and had brought a son with him. The brother had

been a fellow of a college at Cambridge, and had taken a living, and

married late in life. The living was far away in Dorsetshire, and the

son, at the time of these visits, was being educated at a private

school. Twice they had both been at Folking together, and the uncle had,

in his silent way, liked the boy. The lad had preferred, or had

pretended to prefer, books to rats; had understood or seemed to

understand, something of the advantages of cheap food for the people,

and had been commended by the father for general good conduct. But when

they had last taken their departure from Folking, no one had entertained

any idea of any peculiar relations between the nephew and the uncle. It

was not till a year or two more had run by, that Mr. Daniel Caldigate

thought of making his nephew George the heir to the property.

The property indeed was entailed upon John, as it had been entailed upon

John's father. There were many institutions of his country which Mr.

Caldigate hated with almost an inhuman hatred; but there were none more

odious to him than that of entails, which institution he was wont to

prove by many arguments to be the source of all the ignorance and all

the poverty and all the troubles by which his country was inflicted. He

had got his own property by an entail, and certainly never would have

had an acre had his father been able to consume more than a

life-interest. But he had denied that the property had done him any

good, and was loud in declaring that the entail had done the property

and those who lived on it very much harm. In his hearts of hearts he did

feel a desire that when he was gone the acres should still belong to a

Caldigate. There was so much in him of the leaven of the old English

squirarchic aristocracy as to create a pride in the fact that the

Caldigates had been at Folking for three hundred years, and a wish that

they might remain there; and no doubt he knew that without repeated

entails they would not have remained there. But still he had hated the

thing, and as years rolled on he came to think that the entail now

existing would do an especial evil.

His son on leaving school spent almost the whole four months between

that time and the beginning of his first term at Cambridge with the

Babingtons. This period included the month of September, and afforded

therefore much partridge shooting,--than which nothing was meaner in the

opinion of the Squire of Folking. When a short visit was made to

Folking, the father was sarcastic and disagreeable; and then, for the

first time, John Caldigate showed himself to be possessed of a power of

reply which was peculiarly disagreeable to the old man. This had the

effect of cutting down the intended allowance of Â£250 to Â£220 per annum,

for which sum the father had been told that his son could live like a

gentleman at the University. This parsimony so disgusted uncle

Babington, who lived on the other side of the county, within the borders

of Suffolk, that he insisted on giving his nephew a hunter, and an

undertaking to bear the expense of the animal as long as John should

remain at the University. No arrangement could have been more foolish.

And that last visit made by John to Babington House for the two days

previous to his Cambridge career was in itself most indiscreet. The

angry father would not take upon himself to forbid it, but was worked up

by it to perilous jealousy. He did not scruple to declare aloud that old

Humphrey Babington was a thick-headed fool; nor did Humphrey Babington,

who, with his ten or twelve thousand a-year, was considerably involved,

scruple to say that he hated such cheese-paring ways. John Caldigate

felt more distaste to the cheese-paring ways than he did to his uncle's

want of literature.

Such was the beginning of the rupture which took place before the time

had come for John to take his degree. When that time came he had a

couple of hunters at Cambridge, played in the Cambridge eleven, and

rowed in one of the Trinity boats. He also owed something over Â£800 to

the regular tradesmen of the University, and a good deal more to other

creditors who were not 'regular.' During the whole of this time his

visits to Folking had been short and few. The old squire had become more

and more angry, and not the less so because he was sensible of a

non-performance of duty on his own part. Though he was close to

Cambridge he never went to see his son; nor would he even press the lad

to come out to Folking. Nor when, on rare occasions, a visit was made,

did he endeavour to make the house pleasant. He was jealous, jealous to

hot anger, at being neglected, but could not bring himself to make

advances to his own son. Then when he heard from his son's tutor that

his son could not pass his degree without the payment of Â£800 for

recognised debts,--then his anger boiled over, and he told John

Caldigate that he was expelled from his father's heart and his father's

house.

The money was paid and the degree was taken: and there arose the

question as to what was to be done. John, of course, took himself to

Babington House, and was condoled with by his uncle and cousins. His

troubles at this time were numerous enough. That Â£800 by no means summed

up his whole indebtedness;--covered indeed but a small part of it. He

had been at Newmarket; and there was a pleasant gentleman, named Davis,

who frequented that place and Cambridge, who had been very civil to him

when he lost a little money, and who now held his acceptances for, alas!

much more than Â£800. Even uncle Babington knew nothing of this when the

degree was taken. And then there came a terrible blow to him. Aunt

Babington,--aunt Polly as she was called,--got him into her own closet

upstairs, where she kept her linen and her jams and favourite liqueurs,

and told him that his cousin Julia was dying in love for him. After all

that had passed, of course it was expected he would engage himself to

his cousin Julia. Now Julia was the eldest, the thickest-ankled, and the

cherry-cheekedest of the lot. To him up to that time the Babington folk

had always been a unit. No one else had been so good-natured to him, had

so petted him, and so freely administered to all his wants. He would

kiss them all round whenever he went to Babington; but he had not kissed

Julia more than her sisters. There were three sons, whom he never

specially liked, and who certainly were fools. One was the heir, and, of

course, did nothing; the second was struggling for a degree at Oxford

with an eye to the family living; the third was in a fair way to become

the family gamekeeper. He certainly did not wish to marry into the

family;--and yet they had all been so kind to him!

'I should have nothing to marry on, aunt Polly,' he said.

Then he was reminded that he was his father's heir, and that his

father's house was sadly in want of a mistress. They could live at

Babington till Folking should be ready. The prospect was awful!

What is a young man to say in such a position? 'I do not love the young

lady after that fashion, and therefore I must decline.' It requires a

hero, and a cold-blooded hero, to do that. And aunt Polly was very much

in earnest, for she brought Julia into the room, and absolutely

delivered her up into the young man's arms.

'I am so much in debt,' he said, 'that I don't care to think of it.'

Aunt Polly declared that such debts did not signify in the least.

Folking was not embarrassed. Folking did not owe a shilling. Every one

knew that. And there was Julia in his arms! He never said that he would

marry her; but when he left the linen-closet the two ladies understood

that the thing was arranged.

Luckily for him aunt Polly had postponed this scene till the moment

before his departure from the house. He was at this time going to

Cambridge, where he was to be the guest, for one night, of a certain Mr.

Bolton, who was one of the very few friends to whom his father was still

attached. Mr. Bolton was a banker, living close to Cambridge, an old man

now, with four sons and one daughter; and to his house John Caldigate

was going in order that he might there discuss with Mr. Bolton certain

propositions which had been made between him and his father respecting

the Folking property. The father had now realised the idea of buying his

son out; and John himself, who had all the world and all his life before

him, and was terribly conscious of the obligations which he owed to his

friend Davis, had got into his head a notion that he would prefer to

face his fortune with a sum of ready money, than to wait in absolute

poverty for the reversion of the family estate. He had his own ideas,

and in furtherance of them he had made certain inquiries. There was gold

being found at this moment among the mountains of New South Wales, in

quantities which captivated his imagination. And this was being done in

a most lovely spot, among circumstances which were in all respects

romantic. His friend, Richard Shand, who was also a Trinity man, was

quite resolved to go out, and he was minded to accompany his friend. In

this way, and, as he thought, in this way only, could a final settlement

be made with that most assiduous of attendants, Mr. Davis. His mind was

fully set upon New South Wales, and his little interview with his

cousin Julia did not tend to bind him more closely to his own country,

or to Babington, or to Folking.

Chapter II

Puritan Grange

Perhaps there had been a little treachery on the part of Mr. Davis, for

he had, in a gently insinuating way, made known to the Squire the fact

of those acceptances, and the additional fact that he was, through

unforeseen circumstances, lamentably in want of ready money. The Squire

became eloquent, and assured Mr. Davis that he would not pay a penny to

save either Mr. Davis or his son from instant imprisonment,--or even

from absolute starvation. Then Mr. Davis shrugged his shoulders, and

whispered the word, 'Post-obits.' The Squire, thereupon threatened to

kick him out of the house, and, on the next day, paid a visit to his

friend Mr. Bolton. There had, after that, been a long correspondence

between the father, the son, and Mr. Bolton, as to which John Caldigate

said not a word to the Babingtons. Had he been more communicative, he

might have perhaps saved himself from that scene in the linen-closet. As

it was, when he started for Cambridge, nothing was known at Babington

either of Mr. Davis or of the New South Wales scheme.

Mr. Bolton lived in a large red-brick house, in the village of

Chesterton, near to Cambridge, which, with a large garden, was

surrounded by an old, high, dark-coloured brick-wall. He rarely saw any

company; and there were probably not many of the more recently imported

inhabitants of the town who had ever been inside the elaborate iron

gates by which the place was to be approached. He had been a banker all

his life, and was still reported to be the senior partner in Bolton's

bank. But the management of the concern had, in truth, been given up to

his two elder sons. His third son was a barrister in London, and a

fourth was settled in Cambridge as a solicitor. These men were all

married, and were doing well in the world, living in houses better than

their father's, and spending a great deal more money. Mr. Bolton had the

name of being a hard man, because, having begun life in small

circumstances, he had never learned to chuck his shillings about easily;

but he had, in a most liberal manner, made over the bulk of his fortune

to his sons; and though he himself could rarely be got to sit at their

tables, he took delight in hearing that they lived bounteously with

their friends. He had been twice married, and there now lived with him

his second wife and a daughter, Hester,--a girl about sixteen years of

age at the period of John Caldigate's visit to Puritan Grange, as Mr.

Bolton's house was called. At this time Puritan Grange was not badly

named; for Mrs. Bolton was a lady of stern life, and Hester Bolton was

brought up with more of seclusion and religious observances than are now

common in our houses.

Mr. Bolton was probably ten years older than the Squire of Folking; but

circumstances had, in early life, made them fast friends. The old Squire

had owed a large sum of money to the bank, and Mr. Bolton had then been

attracted by the manner in which the son had set himself to work, so

that he might not be a burden on the estate. They had been fast friends

for a quarter of a century, and now the arrangement of terms between the

present Squire and his son had been left to Mr. Bolton.

Mr. Bolton had, no doubt, received a very unfavourable account of the

young man. Men, such as was Mr. Bolton, who make their money by lending

it out at recognised rates of interest,--and who are generally very keen

in looking after their principal,--have no mercy whatsoever for the

Davises of creation, and very little for their customers. To have had

dealings with a Davis is condemnation in their eyes. Mr. Bolton would

not, therefore, have opened his gates to this spendthrift had not his

feelings for the father been very strong. He had thought much upon the

matter, and had tried hard to dissuade the Squire. He, the banker, was

not particularly attached to the theory of primogeniture. He had divided

his wealth equally between his own sons. But he had a strong idea as to

property and its rights. The young man's claim to Folking after his

father's death was as valid as the father's claim during his life. No

doubt, the severance of the entail, if made at all, would be made in

accordance with the young man's wishes, and on certain terms which

should be declared to be just by persons able to compute the value of

such rights. No doubt, also,--so Mr. Bolton thought,--the property would

be utterly squandered if left in its present condition. It would be

ruined by incumbrances in the shape of post-obits. All this had been

deeply considered, and at last Mr. Bolton had consented to act between

the father and the son.

When John Caldigate was driven up through the iron gates to Mr. Bolton's

door, his mind was not quite at ease within him. He had seen Mr. Bolton on

two or three occasions during his University career, and had called at

the house; but he had never entered it, and had never seen the ladies;

and now it was necessary that he should discuss his own follies, and own

all his faults. Of course, that which he was going to do would, in the

eyes of the British world, be considered very unwise. The British world

regards the position of heirship to acres as the most desirable which a

young man could hold. That he was about to abandon. But, as he told

himself, without abandoning it he could not rid himself from the horror

of Davis. He was quite prepared to acknowledge his own vice and

childish stupidity in regard to Davis. He had looked all round that now,

and was sure that he would do nothing of the kind again. But how could

he get rid of Davis in any other way than this? And then Folking had no

charms for him. He hated Folking. He was certain that any life would

suit him better than a life to be passed as squire of Folking. And he

was quite alive to the fact that, though there was at home the prospect

of future position and future income, for the present, there would be

nothing. Were he to submit himself humbly to his father, he might

probably be allowed to vegetate at the old family home. But there was no

career for him. No profession had as yet been even proposed. His father

was fifty-five, a very healthy man,--likely to live for the next twenty

years. And then it would be impossible that he should dwell in peace

under the same roof with his father. And Davis! Life would be miserable

to him if he could not free himself from that thraldom. The sum of money

which was to be offered to him, and which was to be raised on the

Folking property, would enable him to pay Davis, and to start upon his

career with plentiful means in his pocket. He would, too, be wise and

not risk all his capital. Shand had a couple of thousand pounds, and he

would start with a like sum of his own. Should he fail in New South

Wales, there would still be something on which to begin again. With his

mind thus fixed, he entered Mr. Bolton's gates.

He was to stay one night at Puritan Grange; and then, if the matter were

arranged, he would go over to Folking for a day or two, and endeavour to

part from his father on friendly terms. In that case he would be able to

pay Davis himself, and there need be no ground for quarrelling on that

score.

Before dinner the matter was settled at the Grange. The stern old man

bade his visitor sit down, and then explained to him at full length that

which it was proposed to do. So much money the Squire had himself put

by; so much more Mr. Bolton himself would advance; the value had been

properly computed; and, should the arrangement be completed, he, John

Caldigate, would sell his inheritance at its proper price. Over and over

again the young man endeavoured to interrupt the speaker, but was told

to postpone his words till the other should have done. Such

interruptions came from the too evident fact that Mr. Bolton thoroughly

despised his guest. Caldigate, though he had been very foolish, though

he had loved to slaughter rats and rabbits, and to romp with the girls

at Babington, was by no means a fool. He was possessed of good natural

abilities, of great activity, and of a high spirit. His appreciation was

quicker than that of the old banker, who, as he soon saw, had altogether

failed to understand him. In every word that the banker spoke, it was

evident that he thought that these thousands would be squandered

instantly. The banker spoke as though this terrible severance was to be

made because the natural heir had shown himself to be irrevocably bad.

What could be expected from a youth who was deep in the books of a Davis

before he had left his college? 'I do not recommend this,' he said at

last. 'I have never recommended it. The disruption is so great as to be

awful. But when your father has asked what better step he could take, I

have been unable to advise him.' It was as though the old man were

telling the young one that he was too bad for hope, and that, therefore,

he must be consigned for ever to perdition.

Caldigate, conscious of the mistake which the banker was making, full of

hope as to himself, intending to acknowledge the follies of which he had

been guilty, and, at the same time, not to promise,--for he would not

condescend so far,--but to profess that they were things of the past,

and impatient of the judgment expressed against him, endeavoured to stop

the old man in his severity, so that the tone in which the business was

being done might be altered. But when he found that he could not do this

without offence, he leaned back in his chair, and heard the indictment

to the end. 'Now, Mr. Bolton,' he said, when at length his time came,

'you shall hear my view of the matter.' And Mr. Bolton did hear him,

listening very patiently. Caldigate first asserted, that in coming

there, to Puritan Grange, his object had been to learn what were the

terms proposed,--as to which he was now willing to give his assent. He

had already quite made up his mind to sell what property he had on the

estate, and therefore, though he was much indebted to Mr. Bolton for his

disinterested and kind friendship, he was hardly in want of counsel on

that matter. Mr. Bolton raised his eyebrows, but still listened

patiently. Caldigate then went on to explain his views as to life,

declaring that under no circumstances--had there been no Davis--would he

have consented to remain at Folking as a deputy-squire, waiting to take

up his position some twenty years hence at his father's death. Nor, even

were Folking his own at this moment, would he live there! He must do

something; and, upon the whole, he thought that gold-mining in the

colonies was the most congenial pursuit to which he could put his hand.

Then he made a frank acknowledgment as to Davis and his gambling

follies, and ended by saying that the matter might be regarded as

settled.

He had certainly been successful in changing the old man's opinion. Mr.

Bolton did not say as much, nor was he a man likely to make such

acknowledgment; but when he led John Caldigate away to be introduced to

his wife in the drawing-room, he felt less of disdain for his guest than

he had done half an hour before. Mr. Bolton was a silent, cautious man,

even in his own family, and had said nothing of this business to his

wife, and nothing, of course, to his daughter. Mrs. Bolton asked after

the Squire, and expressed a hope that her guest would not find the

house very dull for one night. She had heard that John Caldigate was a

fast young man, and of course regarded him as a lost sinner. Hester, who

was with her mother, looked at him with all her young big eyes, but did

not speak a word. It was very seldom that she saw any young man, or

indeed young people of either sex. But when this stranger spoke freely

to her mother about this subject and the other, she listened to him and

was interested.

John Caldigate, without being absolutely handsome, was a youth sure to

find favour in a woman's eyes. He was about five feet ten in height,

strong and very active, with bright dark eyes which were full of life

and intelligence. His forehead was square and showed the angles of his

brow; his hair was dark and thick and cut somewhat short; his mouth was

large, but full of expression and generally, also, of good-humour. His

nose would have been well formed, but that it was a little snubbed at

the end. Altogether his face gave you the idea of will, intellect, and a

kindly nature; but there was in it a promise, too, of occasional anger,

and a physiognomist might perhaps have expected from it that vacillation

in conduct which had hitherto led him from better things into wretched

faults.

As he was talking to Mrs. Bolton he had observed the girl, who sat

apart, with her fingers busy on her work, and who had hardly spoken a

word since his entrance. She was, he thought, the most lovely human

being that he had ever beheld; and yet she was hardly more than a child.

But how different from those girls at Babington! Her bright brown hair

was simply brushed from off her forehead and tied in a knot behind her

head. Her dress was as plain as a child's,--as though it was intended

that she should still be regarded as a child. Her face was very fair,

with large, grey, thoughtful eyes, and a mouth which, though as

Caldigate watched her it was never opened, seemed always as if it was

just about to pour forth words. And he could see that though her eyes

were intent upon her work, from time to time she looked across at him;

and he thought that if only they two were alone together, he could teach

her to speak.

But no such opportunity was given to him now, or during his short

sojourn at the Grange. After a while the old man returned to the room

and took him up to his bed-chamber. It was then about half-past four,

and he was told that they were to dine at six. It was early in

November,--not cold enough for bedroom fires among thrifty people, and

there he was left, apparently to spend an hour with nothing to do.

Rebelling against this, declaring that even at Puritan Grange he would

be master of his own actions, he rushed down into the hall, took his

hat, and walked off into the town. He would go and take one last look at

the old college.

He went in through the great gate and across the yard, and passing by

the well-known buttery-hatches, looked into the old hall for the last

time. The men were all seated at dinner, and he could see the fellows up

at the high table. Three years ago it had been his fixed resolve to earn

for himself the right to sit upon that dais. He had then been sure of

himself,--that he would do well, and take honours, and win a fellowship.

There had been moments in which he had thought that a college life would

suit him till he came into his own property. But how had all that faded

away! Everybody had congratulated him on the ease with which he did his

work,--and the result had been Newmarket, Davis, and a long score in the

ephemeral records of a cricket match. As he stood there, with his

slouched hat over his eyes, one of the college servants recognised him,

and called him by his name. Then he passed on quickly, and made his way

out to the gravel-walk by the river-side. It was not yet closed for the

night, and he went on, that he might take one last turn up and down the

old avenue.

He had certainly made a failure of his life so far. He did acknowledge

to himself that there was something nobler in these classic shades than

in the ore-laden dirt of an Australian gold-gully. He knew as much of

the world as that. He had not hitherto chosen the better part, and now

something of regret, even as to Folking,--poor old Folking,--came upon

him. He was, as it were, being kicked out and repudiated by his own

family as worthless. And what was he to do about Julia Babington? After

that scene in the linen-closet, he could not leave his country without a

word either to Julia or to aunt Polly. But the idea of Julia was doubly

distasteful to him since that lovely vision of young female simplicity

had shone upon him from the corner of Mrs. Bolton's drawing-room.

Romping with the Babington girls was all very well; but if he could only

feel the tips of that girl's fingers come within the grasp of his hand!

Then he thought that it would lend a fine romance to his life if he

could resolve to come back, when he should be laden with gold, and make

Hester Bolton his wife. It should be his romance, and he swore that he

would cling to it.

He turned back, and came down to dinner five minutes after the time. At

ten minutes before dinner-time Mr. Bolton heard that he was gone out and

was offended,--thinking it quite possible that he would not return at

all. What might not be expected from a young man who could so easily

abandon his inheritance! But he was there, only five minutes after the

time, and the dinner was eaten almost in silence. In the evening there

was tea, and the coldest shivering attempt at conversation for half an

hour, during which he could still at moments catch the glance of

Hester's eyes, and see the moving curve of her lips. Then there was a

reading of the Bible, and prayer, and before ten he was in his bed-room.

On the next morning as he took his departure, Mr. Bolton said a word

intended to be gracious. 'I hope you may succeed in your enterprise,

Mr. Caldigate.'

'Why should I not as well as another?' said John, cheerily.

'If you are steady, sober, industrious, self-denying and honest, you

probably will,' replied the banker.

'To promise all that would be to promise too much,' said John. 'But I

mean to make an effort.'

Then at that moment he made one effort which was successful. For an

instant he held Hester's fingers within his hand.

Chapter III

Daniel Caldigate

That piece of business was done. It was one of the disagreeable things

which he had had to do before he could get away to the gold-diggings,

and it was done. Now he had to say farewell to his father, and that

would be a harder task. As the moment was coming in which he must bid

adieu to his father, perhaps for ever, and bid adieu to the old place

which, though he despised it, he still loved, his heart was heavy within

him. He felt sure that his father had no special regard for him;--in

which he was, of course, altogether wrong, and the old man was equally

wrong in supposing that his son was unnaturally deficient in filial

affection. But they had never known each other, and were so different

that neither had understood the other. The son, however, was ready to

confess to himself that the chief fault had been with himself. It was

natural, he thought, that a father's regard should be deadened by such

conduct as his had been, and natural that an old man should not believe

in the quick repentance and improvement of a young one.

He hired a gig and drove himself over from Cambridge to Folking. As he

got near to the place, and passed along the dikes, and looked to the

right and left down the droves, and trotted at last over the Folking

bridge across the Middle Wash, the country did not seem to him to be so

unattractive as of yore; and when he recognised the faces of the

neighbours, when one of the tenants spoke to him kindly, and the girls

dropped a curtsey as he passed, certain soft regrets began to crop up in

his mind. After all, there is a comfort in the feeling of property--not

simply its money comfort, but in the stability and reputation of a

recognised home. Six months ago there had seemed to him to be something

ridiculous in the idea of a permanent connection between the names of

Caldigate and Folking. It was absurd that, with so wild and beautiful a

world around him, he should be called upon to live in a washy fen

because his father and grandfather had been unfortunate enough to do so.

And then, at that time, all sympathy with bricks and mortar, any

affection for special trees or well-known home-haunts, was absurd in his

eyes. And as his father had been harsh to him, and did not like him,

would it not be better that they should be far apart? It was thus that

he had reasoned. But now all that was changed. An unwonted tenderness

had come upon his spirit. The very sallows by the brook seemed to appeal

to him. As he saw the house chimneys through the trees, he remembered

that they had carried smoke from the hearths of many generations of

Caldigates. He remembered, too, that his father would soon be old, and

would be alone. It seemed to himself that his very mind and spirit were

altered.

But all that was too late. He had agreed to the terms proposed; and even

were he now to repudiate them, what could he do with Davis, and how

could he live for the present? Not for a moment did he entertain such an

idea, but he had lost that alacrity of spirit which had been his when he

first found the way out of his difficulties.

His father did not come forth to meet him. He went in across the hall

and through the library, into a little closet beyond, in which Mr.

Caldigate was wont to sit. 'Well, John,' said the old man, 'how have you

and Mr. Bolton got on together?'

There seemed to be something terribly cold in this. It might be better

that they should part,--better even, though the parting should be for

ever. It might be right;--nay, he knew that it was right that he should

be thrust out of the inheritance. He had spent money that was not his

own, and, of course, he must pay the debt. But that his father should

sit there in his chair on his entrance, not even rising to greet him,

and should refer at once to Mr. Bolton and that business arrangement, as

though that, and that alone, need now be discussed, did seem to him to

be almost cruel. Of all that his father had suffered in constraining

himself to this conduct, he understood nothing. 'Mr. Bolton made himself

very plain, sir.'

'He would be sure to do so. He is a man of business and intelligent. But

as to the terms proposed, were they what you had expected?'

'Quite as good as I had expected.'

'Whether good or bad, of course you will understand that I have had

nothing to do with them. The matter has been referred to two gentlemen

conversant with such subjects; and, after due inquiry, they told Mr.

Bolton what was the money value of your rights. It is a question to be

settled as easily as the price of a ton of coals or a joint of beef. But

you must understand that I have not interfered.'

'I am quite aware of that, sir.'

'As for the money, something over a third of it is in my own hands. I

have not been extravagant myself, and have saved so much. The remainder

will come out of Mr. Bolton's bank, and will be lent on mortgage. I

certainly shall not have cause for extravagance now, living here alone;

and shall endeavour to free the estate from the burden by degrees. When

I die, it will, in accordance with my present purpose, go to your cousin

George.' As this was said, John thought he perceived something like a

quiver in his father's voice, which, up to that point, had been hard,

clear, and unshaken. 'As to that, however, I do not intend to pledge

myself,' he continued. 'The estate will now be my own, subject to the

claim from Messrs. Bolton's bank. I don't know that there is anything

else to be said.'

'Not about business, sir.'

'And it is business, I suppose, that has brought you here,--and to

Cambridge. I do not know what little things you have of your own in the

house.'

'Not much, sir.'

'If there be anything that you wish to take, take it. But with you now,

I suppose, money is the only possession that has any value.'

'I should like to have the small portrait of you,--the miniature.'

'The miniature of me,' said the father, almost scoffingly, looking up at

his son's face, suspiciously. And yet, though he would not show it, he

was touched. Only if this were a ruse on the part of the young man, a

mock sentiment, a little got-up theatrical pretence,--then,--then how

disgraced he would be in his own estimation at having been moved by such

mockery!

The son stood square before his father, disdaining any attempt to evince

a supplicating tenderness either by his voice or by his features. 'But,

perhaps, you have a special value for it,' he said.

'No, indeed. It is others, not oneself, that ought to have such

trifles,--that is, if they are of value at all.'

'There is none but myself that can care much for it.'

'There is no one to care at all. No one else that is,' he added, wishing

to avoid any further declaration. 'Take that or anything else you want

in the house. There will be things left, I suppose,--clothes and books

and suchlike.'

'Hardly anything, sir. Going so far, I had better give them away. A few

books I shall take.' Then the conversation was over; and in a few

minutes John Caldigate found himself roaming alone about the place.

It was so probable that he might never see it again! Indeed it seemed to

him now that were he to return to England with a fortune made, he would

hardly come to Folking. Years and years must roll by before that could

be done. If he could only come back to Cambridge and fetch that wife

away with him, then he thought it would be better for him to live far

from England, whether he were rich or whether he were poor. It was quite

evident that his father's heart was turned from him altogether. Of

course he had himself to blame,--himself only; but still it was strange

to him that a father should feel no tenderness at parting with an only

son. While he had been in the room he had constrained himself manfully;

not a drop of moisture had glittered in his eye; not a tone of feeling

had thrilled in his voice; his features had never failed him. There had

always been that look of audacity on his brow joined to a certain

manliness of good-humour in his mouth, as though he had been thoroughly

master of himself and the situation. But now, as he pushed his hat from

off his forehead, he rubbed his hand across his eyes to dash away the

tears. He felt almost inclined to rush back to the house and fall on his

knees before his father, and kiss the old man's hands, and beg the old

man's blessing. But though he was potent for much he was not potent for

that. Such expression of tenderness would have been true; but he knew

that he would so break down in the attempt as to make it seem to be

false.

He got out upon Twopenny Drove and passed over the ferry, meaning to

walk across the farm and so out on to the Causeway, and round home by

the bridge. But on the other side of the Wash he encountered Mr. Ralph

Holt, the occupier of Twopenny farm, whose father also and grandfather

had lived upon the same acres. 'And so thou be'est going away from us,

Mr. John,' said the farmer, with real tenderness, almost with solemnity,

in his voice, although there was at the same time something ridiculous

in the far-fetched sadness of his tone and gait.

'Yes, indeed, Holt, I want to travel and see the world at a distance

from here.'

'If it was no more than that, Mr. John, there would be nothing about it.

Zeeing the world! You young collegers allays does that. But be'est thou

to come back and be Squoire o'Folking?'

'I think not, Holt, I think not. My father, I hope, will be Squire for

many a year.'

'Like enough. And we all hope that, for there aren't nowhere a juster

man nor the Squoire, and he's hale and hearty. But in course of things

his time'll run out. And it be so, Mr. John, that thou be'est going for

ever and allays?'

'I rather think I am.'

'It's wrong, Mr. John. Though maybe I'm making over-free to talk of what

don't concern me. Yet I say it's wrong. Sons should come arter fathers,

specially where there's land. We don't none of us like it;--none of us!

It's worse nor going, any one of ourselves. For what's a lease? But when

a man has a freehold he should stick to it for ever and aye. It's just

as though the old place was a-tumbling about all our ears.' Caldigate

was good-natured with the man, trying to make him understand that

everything was being done for the best. And at last he bade him good-bye

affectionately, shaking hands with him, and going into the farmhouse to

perform the same ceremony with his wife and daughters. But to the last

Ralph Holt was uncomfortable and dismal, foretelling miseries. It was

clear that, to his thinking, the stability of this world was undermined

and destroyed by the very contemplation of such a proceeding as this.

Caldigate pursued his walk, and in the course of it bade farewell to

more than one old friend. None of them were so expressive as Holt, but

he could perceive that he was regarded by all of them as a person who,

by his conduct, was bringing misfortune, not only on himself, but on the

whole parishes of Utterden and Netherden.

At dinner the Squire conversed upon various subjects if not easily to

himself, at least with affected ease. Had he applied himself to subjects

altogether indifferent,--to the state of politics, or the Game Laws, or

the absurdities of a State Church, the unfitness of such matters for the

occasion would have been too apparent. Both he and his son would have

broken down in the attempt. But he could talk about Babington,--abusing

the old family,--and even about himself, and about New South Wales, and

gold, and the coming voyage, without touching points which had been, and

would be, specially painful. Not a word had ever been spoken between

them as to Davis. There had, of course, been letters, very angry

letters; but the usurer's name had never been mentioned. Nor was there

any need that it should be mentioned now. It was John's affair,--not in

any way his. So he asked and listened to much about Richard Shand, and

the mode of gold-finding practised among the diggings in New South

Wales.

When the old butler had gone he was even more free, speaking of things

that were past, not only without anger, but, as far as possible, without

chagrin,--treating his son as a person altogether free from any control

of his. 'I dare say it is all for the best,' he said.

'It is well at any rate to try to think so, sir,' replied John,

conscience-stricken as to his own faults.

'I doubt whether there would have been anything for you to do here,--or

at least anything that you would have done. You would have had too much

ambition to manage this little estate under me, and not enough of

industry, I fear, to carry you to the front in any of the professions. I

used to think of the bar.'

'And so did I.'

'But when I found that the Babingtons had got hold of you, and that you

liked horses and guns, better than words and arguments----'

'I never did, sir.'

'It seemed so.'

'Of course I have been weak.'

'Do not suppose for a moment that I am finding fault. It would be of no

avail, and I would not thus embitter our last hours together. But when I

saw how your tastes seemed to lead you, I began to fear that there could

be no career for you here. On such a property as Babington an eldest son

may vegetate like his father before him, and may succeed to it in due

time, before he has wasted everything, and may die as he had lived,

useless, but having to the end all the enjoyments of a swine.'

'You are severe upon my cousins, sir.'

'I say what I think. But you would not have done that. And though you

are not industrious, you are far too active and too clever for such a

life. Now you are probably in earnest as to the future.'

'Yes, I am certainly in earnest.'

'And though you are going to risk your capital in a precarious business,

you will only be doing what is done daily by enterprising men. I could

wish that your position were more secure;--but that now cannot be

helped.'

'My bed is as I have made it. I quite understand that, sir.'

'Thinking of all this, I have endeavoured to reconcile myself to your

going.' Then he paused a moment, considering what he should next say.

And his son was silent, knowing that something further was to come. 'Had

you remained in England we could hardly have lived together as father

and son should live. You would have been dependent on me, and would have

rebelled against that submission which a state of dependence demands.

There would have been nothing for you but to have waited,--and almost to

have wished, for my death.'

'No, sir; never; never that.'

'It would have been no more than natural. I shall hear from you

sometimes?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'It will give an interest to my life if you will write occasionally.

Whither do you go to-morrow?'

It had certainly been presumed, though never said, that this last visit

to the old home was to be only for one day. The hired gig had been kept;

and in his letter the son had asked whether he could be taken in for

Thursday night. But now the proposition that he should go so soon seemed

to imply a cold-blooded want of feeling on his part. 'I need not be in

such a hurry, sir,' he said.

'Of course, it shall be as you please, but I do not know that you will

do any good by staying. A last month may be pleasant enough, or even a

last week, but a last day is purgatory. The melancholy of the occasion

cannot be shaken off. It is only the prolonged wail of a last farewell.'

All this was said in the old man's ordinary voice, but it seemed to

betoken if not feeling itself, a recognition of feeling which the son

had not expected.

'It is very sad,' said the son.

'Therefore, why prolong it? Stand not upon the order of your going but

go at once,--seeing that it is necessary that you should go. Will you

take any more wine? No? Then let us go into the other room. As they are

making company of you and have lighted another fire, we will do as they

would have us.' Then for the rest of the evening there was some talk

about books, and the father, who was greatly given to reading, explained

to his son what kind of literature would, as he thought, fit in best

with the life of a gold-digger.

After what had passed, Caldigate, of course, took his departure on the

following morning. Good-bye said the old man, as the son grasped his

hand, 'Good-bye.' He made no overture to come even as far as the hall in

making this his final adieu.

'I trust I may return to see you in health.'

'It may be so. As to that we can say nothing. Good-bye.' Then, when the

son had turned his back, the father recalled him, by a murmur rather

than by a word,--but in that moment he had resolved to give way a little

to the demands of nature. Good-bye my son,' he said, in a low voice,

very solemnly; 'May God bless you and preserve you.' Then he turned back

at once to his own closet.

Chapter IV

The Shands

John Caldigate had promised to go direct from Folking to the house of

his friend Richard Shand, or rather, to the house in which lived Richard

Shand's father and family. The two young men had much to arrange

together, and this had been thought to be expedient. When Caldigate,

remembering how affairs were at his own home, had suggested that at so

sad a moment he might be found to be in the way, Shand had assured him

that there would be no sadness at all. 'We are not a sentimental race,'

he had said. 'There are a dozen of us, and the sooner some of us

disperse ourselves, the more room will there be in the nest for the

others.'

Shand had been Caldigate's most intimate friend at college through the

whole period of their residence, and now he was to be his companion in

a still more intimate alliance. And yet, though he liked the man, he

did not altogether approve of him. Shand had also got into debt at

Cambridge, but had not paid his debts; and had dealings also with Davis,

as to which he was now quite indifferent. He had left the University

without taking a degree, and had seemed to bear all these adversities

with perfect equanimity. There had not been hitherto much of veneration

in Caldigate's character, but even he had, on occasions, been almost

shocked at the want of respect evinced by his friend for conventional

rules. All college discipline, all college authorities, all university

traditions had been despised by Shand, who even in his dress had

departed as far from recognised customs and fashions among the men as

from the requisitions of the statutes and the milder requirements of the

dignitaries of the day. Now, though he could not pay his debts,--and

intended, indeed, to run away from them,--he was going to try his

fortune with a certain small capital which his father had agreed to give

him as his share of what there might be of the good things of the world

among the Shands generally. As Shand himself said of both of them, he

was about to go forth as a prodigal son, with a perfect assurance that,

should he come back empty-handed, no calf would be killed for him. But

he was an active man, with a dash of fun, and perhaps a sprinkling of

wit, quick and brave, to whom life was apparently a joke, and who

boasted of himself that, though he was very fond of beef and beer, he

could live on bread and water, if put to it, without complaining.

Caldigate almost feared that the man was a dangerous companion, but

still there was a certain fitness about him for the thing contemplated;

and, for such a venture, where could he find any other companion who

would be fit?

Dr. Shand, the father, was a physician enjoying a considerable amount

of provincial eminence in a small town in Essex. Here he had certainly

been a succesful man; for, with all the weight of such a family on his

back, he had managed to save some money. There had been small legacies

from other Shands, and trifles of portion had come to them from the

Potters, of whom Mrs. Shand had been one,--Shand and Potter having been

wholesale druggists in Smithfield. The young Shands had generally lived

a pleasant life; had gone to school,--the eldest son, as we have seen,

to the university also,--and had had governesses, and ponies to ride,

and had been great at dancing, and had shot arrows, and played

Badminton, and been subject to but little domestic discipline. They had

lived crowded together in a great red-brick house, plenteously, roughly,

quarrelling continually, but very fond of each other in their own way,

and were known throughout that side of the country as a happy family.

The girls had always gloves and shoes for dancing, and the boys had

enjoyed a considerable amount of shooting and hunting without owning

either guns or horses of their own. Now Dick was to go in quest of a

fortune, and all the girls were stitching shirts for him, and were as

happy as possible. Not a word was said about his debts, and no one threw

it in his teeth that he had failed to take a degree. It was known of the

Shands that they always made the best of everything.

When Caldigate got out of the railway carriage at Pollington, he was

still melancholy with the remembrance of all that he had done and all

that he had lost, and he expected to find something of the same feeling

at his friend's house. But before he had been there an hour he was

laughing with the girls as though such an enterprise as theirs was the

best joke in the world. And when a day and a night had passed, Mrs.

Shand was deep among his shirts and socks, and had already given him

much advice about flannel and soft soap. 'I know Maria would like to go

out with you,' said the youngest daughter on the third day, a girl of

twelve years old, who ought to have known better, and who, nevertheless,

knew more than she ought to have done.

'Indeed Maria would like nothing of the kind,' said the young lady in

question.

'Only, Mr. Caldigate, of course you would have to marry her.' Then the

child was cuffed, and Maria declared that the proposed arrangement would

suit neither her nor Mr. Caldigate in the least. The eldest daughter,

Harriet, was engaged to marry a young clergyman in the neighbourhood,

which event, however, was to be postponed till he had got a living; and

the second, Matilda, was under a cloud because she would persist in

being in love with Lieutenant Postlethwaite, of the Dragoons, whose

regiment was quartered in the town. Maria was the third. All these

family secrets were told to him quite openly as well as the fact that

Josh, the third son, was to become a farmer because he could not be got

to learn the multiplication table.

Between Pollington and London, Caldigate remained for six weeks, during

which time he fitted himself out, took his passage, and executed the

necessary deeds as to the estate. It might have been pleasant

enough,--this little interval before his voyage,--as the Shands, though

rough and coarse, were kind to him and good-humoured, had it not been

that a great trouble befell him through over conscientiousness as to a

certain matter. After what had passed at Babington House, it was

expedient that he should, before he started for New South Wales, give

some notice to his relatives there, so that Julia might know that

destiny did not intend her to become Mrs. Caldigate of Folking. Aunt

Polly had, no doubt, been too forward in that matter, and in wishing to

dispose of her daughter had put herself in the way of merited rebuke and

disappointment. It was, however, not the less necessary that she should

be told of the altered circumstances of her wished-for son-in-law. But,

had he been wise, he would so have written his letter that no answer

should reach him before he had left the shores of England. His

conscience, however, pinched him, and before he had even settled the day

on which he would start, he wrote to his aunt a long letter in which he

told her everything,--how he had disposed of his inheritance,--how he

had become so indebted to Davis as to have to seek a new fortune out of

England,--how he had bade farewell to Folking for ever,--and how

impossible it was under all these circumstances that he should aspire to

the hand of his cousin Julia.

It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen among them at Babington. Mr.

Babington himself was certainly not a clever man, but he knew enough of

his own position, as an owner of acres, to be very proud of it, and he

was affectionate enough towards his nephew to feel the full weight of

this terrible disruption It seemed to him that his brother-in-law,

Daniel Caldigate, was doing a very wicked thing, and he hurried across

the country, to Folking, that he might say so. 'You have not sense

enough to understand the matter,' said Daniel Caldigate. 'You have no

heart in your bowels if you can disinherit an only son,' said the big

squire. 'Never mind where I carry my heart,' said the smaller squire;

'but it is a pity you should carry so small an amount of brain.' No good

could be done by such a meeting as that, nor by the journey which aunt

Polly took to Pollington. The Caldigates, both father and son, were

gifted with too strong a will to be turned from their purpose by such

interference. But a great deal of confusion was occasioned; and aunt

Polly among the Shands was regarded as a very wonderful woman indeed.

'Oh, my son, my darling son!' she said, weeping on John Caldigate's

shoulder. Now John Caldigate was certainly not her son, in the usual

acceptation of the word, nor did Maria Shand believe that he was so

even in that limited sense in which a daughter's husband may be so

designated. It was altogether very disagreeable, and made our hero

almost resolve to get on board the ship a week before it started from

the Thames instead of going down to Plymouth and catching it at the last

moment. Of course it would have been necessary that the Babingtons

should know all about it sooner or later, but John very much regretted

that he had not delayed his letter till the day before his departure.

There is something jovial when you are young in preparing for a long

voyage and for totally altered circumstances in life, especially when

the surroundings are in themselves not melancholy. A mother weeping over

a banished child may be sad enough,--going as an exile when there is no

hope of a return, But here among the Shands, with whom sons and

daughters were plentiful, and with whom the feelings were of a useful

kind, and likely to wear well, rather than of a romantic nature, the

bustle, the purchasings, the arrangements, and the packings generally

had in them a pleasantness of activity with no disagreeable

accompaniments.

'I do hope you will wear them, Dick,' the mother said with something

like a sob in her voice; but the tenderness came not from the

approaching departure, but from her fear that the thick woollen drawers

on which she was re-sewing all the buttons, should be neglected,--after

Dick's usual fashion. 'Mr. Caldigate I hope you will see that he wears

them. He looks strong, but indeed he is not.' Our hero who had always

regarded his friend as a bull for strength of constitution generally,

promised that he would be attentive to Dick's drawers.

'You may be sure that I shall wear them,' said Dick; 'but the time will

come when I shall probably wear nothing else, so you had better make the

buttons firm.'

Everything was to be done with strict economy, but yet there was plenty

of money for purchases. There always is at such occasions. The quantity

of clothes got together seemed to be more than any two men could ever

wear; and among it all there were no dress-coats and no dress-trousers:

or, if either of them had such articles, they were smuggled. The two

young men were going out as miners, and took a delight in preparing

themselves to be rough. Caldigate was at first somewhat modest in

submitting his own belongings to the females of the establishment but

that feeling soon wore off, and the markings and mendings, and

buttonings and hemmings went on in a strictly impartial manner as though

he himself were a chick out of the same brood.

'What will you do?' said the doctor, 'if you spend your capital and make

nothing?'

'Work for wages,' said Dick. 'We shall have got, at any rate, enough

experience out of our money to be able to do that. Men are getting 10s.

a-day.'

'But you'd have to go on doing that always,' said the mother.

'Not at all. Of course it's a life of ups and downs. A man working for

wages can put half what he earns into a claim, so that when a thing does

come up trumps at last, he will have his chance. I have read a good deal

about it now. There is plenty to be got if a man only knows how to keep

it.'

'Drinking is the worst,' said the doctor.

'I think I can trust myself for that,' said Dick, whose hand at the

moment was on a bottle of whisky, and who had been by no means averse to

jollifications at Cambridge. 'A miner when he's at work should never

drink.'

'Nor when he's not at work, if he wants to keep what he earns.'

'I'm not going to take the pledge, or anything of that kind,' continued

the son, 'but I think I know enough of it all, not to fall into that

pit.' During this discussion, Caldigate sat silent, for he had already

had various conversations on this subject with his friend. He had

entertained some fears, which were not, perhaps, quite removed by Dick's

manly assurances.

A cabin had been taken for the joint use of the young men on board the

Goldfinder, a large steamer which was running at the time from London to

Melbourne, doing the voyage generally in about two months. But they were

going as second-class passengers and their accommodation therefore was

limited. Dick had insisted on this economy, which was hardly necessary

to Caldigate, and which was not absolutely pressed upon the other. But

Dick had insisted. 'Let us begin as we mean to go on,' he had said; 'of

course we've got to rough it. We shall come across something a good deal

harder than second-class fare before we have made our fortunes, and

worked probably with mates more uncouth than second-class passengers.'

It was impossible to oppose counsel such as this, and therefore

second-class tickets were taken on board the Goldfinder.

A terrible struggle was made during the last fortnight to prevent the

going of John Caldigate. Mr. Babington was so shocked that he did not

cease to stir himself. Allow a son to disinherit himself, merely because

he had fallen into the hands of a money-lending Jew before he had left

college! To have the whole condition of a property changed by such a

simple accident! It was shocking to him; and he moved himself in the

matter with much more energy than old Mr. Caldigate had expected from

him. He wrote heartrending letters to Folking, in spite of the hard

words which had been said to him there. He made a second journey to

Cambridge, and endeavoured to frighten Mr. Bolton. Descent of acres from

father to son was to him so holy a thing, that he was roused to

unexpected energies. He was so far successful that Mr. Daniel Caldigate

did write a long letter to his son, in which he offered to annul the

whole proceeding. 'Your uncle accuses me of injustice,' he said. 'I have

not been unjust. But there is no reason whatever why the arrangement

should stand. Even if the money has been paid to Davis I will bear that

loss rather than you should think that I have taken advantage of you in

your troubles.' But John Caldigate was too firm and too determined for

such retrogression. The money had been paid to Davis, and other monies

had been used in other directions. He was quite contented with the

bargain, and would certainly adhere to it.

Then came the last night before their departure; the evening before the

day on which they were to go from Pollington to London, and from London

to Plymouth. All the heavy packages, and all the clothes had, of course,

been put on board the Goldfinder in the London docks. The pleasant task

of preparation was at an end, and they were now to go forth upon their

hard labours. Caldigate had become so intimate with the family, that it

seemed as though a new life had sprung up for him, and that as he had

parted from all that he then had of a family at Folking, he was now to

break away from new ties under the doctor's roof. They had dined early,

and at ten o'clock there was what Mrs. Shand called a little bit of

supper. They were all of them high in heart, and very happy,--testifying

their affection to the departing ones by helping them to the nicest

bits, and by filling their tumblers the fullest. How it happened, no one

could have said, but it did happen that, before the evening was over,

Maria and Caldigate were together in a little room behind the front

parlour. What still remained of their luggage was collected there, and

this last visit had probably been made in order that the packages might

be once more counted.

'It does seem so odd that you should be going,' she said.

'It is so odd to me that I should ever have come.'

'We had always heard of you since Dick went to Cambridge.'

'I knew that there were so many of you, and that was all. Brothers never

talk of their sisters, I suppose. But I seem to know you now so well!

You have been so kind to me!'

'Because you are Dick's friend.'

'I didn't suppose that it was anything else.'

'That's not nice of you, Mr. Caldigate. You know that we are all very

fond of you. We shall be so anxious to hear. You will be good to him,

won't you?'

'And he to me, I hope.'

'I think you are steadier than he is, and can do more for him than he

can for you. I wonder, shall we ever see each other again, Mr.

Caldigate?'

'Why not?'

'New South Wales is so far, and you will both marry there, and then you

will not want to come back. I hope I may live to see dear Dick again

some day.'

'But only Dick?'

'And you too, if you would care about it.'

'Of course I should care about it,' he said. And as he said so, of

course he put his arm round her waist and kissed her. It did not mean

much. She did not think it meant much. But it gave a little colouring of

romance to that special moment of her life. He, when he went up to his

bed, declared to himself that it meant nothing at all. He still had

those large eyes clear before him, and was still fixed in his resolution

to come back for them when some undefined point of his life should have

passed by.

'Now,' said Dick Shand, as they were seated together in a third-class

railway carriage on the following morning, 'now I feel that I am

beginning life.'

'With proper resolutions, I hope, as to honesty, sobriety, and

industry.'

'With a fixed determination to make a fortune, and come back, and be

\_facile princeps\_ among all the Shands. I have already made up my mind

as to the sum I will give each of the girls, and the way I will start

the two younger boys in business. In the meantime let us light a pipe.'

Chapter V

The Goldfinder

There is no peculiar life more thoroughly apart from life in general,

more unlike our usual life, more completely a life of itself, governed

by its own rules and having its own roughnesses and amenities, than life

on board ship. What tender friendship it produces, and what bitter

enmities! How completely the society has formed itself into separate

sets after the three or four first days! How thoroughly it is

acknowledged that this is the aristocratic set, and that the plebeian!

How determined are the aristocrats to admit no intrusion, and how

anxious are the plebeians to intrude! Then there arises the great

demagogue, who heads a party, having probably been disappointed in early

life,--that is, in his first endeavours on board the ship. And the women

have to acknowledge all their weaknesses, and to exercise all their

strength. It is a bad time for them on board ship if they cannot secure

the attention of the men,--as it is in the other world; but in order

that they may secure it, they assume indifference. They assume

indifference, but are hard at work with their usual weapons. The men can

do very well by themselves. For them there is drinking, smoking, cards,

and various games; but the potency of female spells soon works upon

them, and all who are worth anything are more or less in love by the end

of the first week. Of course it must all come to an end when the port

is reached. That is understood, though there may sometimes be mistakes.

Most pathetic secrets are told with the consciousness that they will be

forgotten as soon as the ship is left. And there is the whole day for

these occupations. No work is required from any one. The lawyer does not

go to his court, nor the merchant to his desk. Pater-familias receives

no bills; mater-familias orders no dinners. The daughter has no

household linen to disturb her. The son is never recalled to his books.

There is no parliament, no municipality, no vestry. There are neither

rates nor taxes nor rents to be paid. The government is the softest

despotism under which subjects were ever allowed to do almost just as

they please. That the captain has a power is known, but hardly felt. He

smiles on all, is responsible for everything, really rules the world

submitted to him, from the setting of the sails down to the frying of

the chops, and makes one fancy that there must be something wrong with

men on shore because first-class nations cannot be governed like

first-class ships.

The Goldfinder had on board her over a hundred first-class passengers,

and nearly as many of the second class. The life among them was much of

the same kind, though in the second class there was less of idleness,

less of pleasure, and something more of an attempt to continue the

ordinary industry of life. The women worked more and the men read more

than their richer neighbours. But the love-making, and the fashion, and

the mutiny against the fashion, were the same in one set as in the

other. Our friends were at first subjected to an inconvenience which is

always felt in such a position. They were known to have had saloon

rather than second-class antecedents. Everybody had heard that they had

been at Cambridge, and therefore they were at first avoided. And as they

themselves were determined not to seek associates among their more

aristocratic neighbours, they were left to themselves and solitary for

some few days. But this was a condition not at all suited to Dick

Shand's temperament, and it was not long before he had made both male

and female acquaintances.

'Have you observed that woman in the brown straw hat?' Dick said to

Caldigate, one morning, as they were leaning together on the forepart of

the vessel against one of the pens in which the fowls were kept. They

were both dressed according to the parts they were acting, and which

they intended to act, as second-class passengers and future working

miners. Any one knowing in such matters would have seen that they were

over-dressed; for the real miner, when he is away from his work, puts on

his best clothes, and endeavours to look as little rough as possible.

And all this had no doubt been seen and felt, and discounted among our

friends' fellow-passengers.

'I have seen her every day, of course,' said Caldigate, 'and have been

looking at her for the last half hour.'

'She is looking at us now.'

'She seems to me to be very attentive to the stocking she is mending.'

'Just a woman's wiles. At this moment she can't hear us, but she knows

pretty nearly what we are saying by the way our lips are going. Have you

spoken to her?'

'I did say a word or two to her yesterday.'

'What did she say?'

'I don't recollect especially. She struck me as talking better than her

gown, if you know what I mean.'

'She talks a great deal better than her gown,' said Dick. 'I don't quite

know what to make of her. She says that she is going out to earn her

bread; but when I asked her how, she either couldn't or wouldn't answer

me. She is a mystery, and mysteries are always worth unravelling. I

shall go to work and unravel her.'

At that moment the female of whom they were speaking got up from her

seat on one of the spars which was bound upon the deck, folded up her

work, and walked away. She was a remarkable woman, and certainly looked

to be better than her gown, which was old and common enough. Caldigate

had observed her frequently, and had been much struck by the word or two

she had spoken to him on the preceding day. 'I should like ship-life

well enough,' she had said, in answer to some ordinary question, 'if it

led to nothing else.'

'You would not remain here for ever?'

'Certainly, if I could. There is plenty to eat, and a bed to sleep on,

and no one to be afraid of. And though nobody knows me, everybody knows

enough of me not to think that I ought to be taken to a police office

because I have not gloves to my hands.'

'Don't you think it wearisome?' he had asked.

'Everything is wearisome; but here I have a proud feeling of having paid

my way. To have settled in advance for your dinner for six weeks to come

is a magnificent thing. If I get too tired of it I can throw myself

overboard. You can't even do that in London without the police being

down upon you. The only horror to me here is that there will so soon be

an end to it.'

At that time he had not even heard her name, or known whether she were

alone or joined to others. Then he had inquired, and a female

fellow-passenger had informed him that she was a Mrs. Smith,--that she

had seen better days, but had been married to a ne'er-do-well husband,

who had drank himself to death within a year of their marriage, and that

she was now going out to the colony, probably,--so the old lady said who

was the informant,--in search of a second husband. She was to some

extent, the old lady said, in charge of a distant relative, who was

then on board, with a respectable husband and children, and who was very

much ashamed of her poor connection. So much John Caldigate had heard.

Though he had heard this he did not feel inclined to tell it all to Dick

Shand. Dick had professed his intention of unravelling the mystery, but

Caldigate almost thought that he would like to unravel it himself. The

woman was so constantly alone! And then, though she was ill-dressed,

untidy, almost unkempt on occasions, still, through it all, there was

something attractive about her. There was a brightness in her eye, and a

courage about her mouth, which had made him think that, in spite of her

appearance, she would be worth his attention--just for the voyage. When

he had been speaking to herself they had been on the deck together, and

it had been dusk and he had not been able to look her in the face; but

while Shand had been speaking to him he had observed that she was very

comely. And this was the more remarkable because it seemed to him to be

so evident that she made the worst rather than the best of herself. She

was quite a young woman;--probably, he thought, not more than three or

four and twenty; and she was there, with many young men round her, and

yet she made no effort to attract attention. When his eye had fallen

upon her she had generally been quite alone, doing some piece of coarse

and ordinary work.

'I have had another conversation with her,' said Shand to him that

night.

'Have you unravelled the mystery?'

'Not quite; but I have got the fact that there is a mystery. She told me

that you and I and she herself ought not to be here. When I asked her

why, she said that you and I ought to be gentlemen and that she ought to

be a lady. I told her that you and I were gentlemen, in spite of our

trousers. "Ah," she said, "there comes the difference; I'm not a lady

any longer!" When I contradicted her she snubbed me, and said that I

hadn't seen enough of the world to know anything about it. But I'll have

it all out of her before I've done.'

For some days after that Caldigate kept himself aloof from Mrs. Smith,

not at all because he had ceased to notice her or to think about her,

but from a feeling of dislike to exhibit rivalry with his friend. Shand

was making himself very particular, and he thought that Shand was a fool

for his pains. He was becoming angry with Shand, and had serious

thoughts of speaking to him with solemn severity. What could such a

woman be to him? But at the bottom of all this there was something akin

to jealousy. The woman was good-looking, and certainly clever, and was

very interesting. Shand, for two or three evenings running, related his

success; how Mrs. Smith had communicated to him the fact that she

utterly despised those Cromptons, who were distant cousins of her late

husband's, and with whom she had come on board; how she preferred to be

alone to having aught to do with them; how she had one or two books with

her, and passed some hours in reading; and how she was poor, very poor,

but still had something on which to live for a few weeks after landing.

But Caldigate fancied that there must be a betrayal of trust in these

revelations, and though he was in truth interested about the woman, did

not give much encouragement to his friend.

'Upon my word,' he said, 'I don't seem to care so very much about Mrs.

Smith's affairs.'

'I do,' said Shand, who was thick-skinned and irrepressible. 'I declared

my intention of unravelling the mystery, and I mean to do it.'

'I hope you are not too inquisitive?'

'Of course she likes to have some one to whom she can talk. And what can

people talk about on board ship except themselves? A woman who has a

mystery always likes to have it unravelled. What else is the good of a

mystery?'

He was thick-skinned and irrepressible, but Caldigate endeavoured to

show his displeasure. He felt that the poor woman was in coarse hands;

and he thought that, had matters gone otherwise, he might have accepted,

in a more delicate manner, so much confidence as she chose to vouchsafe.

So it was when they had been a fortnight at sea. They had left home in

mid-winter; but now they were in the tropics, near the line, and

everything was sultry, sleepy, and warm. Flying-fishes were jumping from

the waves on to the deck, and when the dusk of night was come, the

passengers would stand by the hour together watching the phosphorus on

the water. The Southern Cross had shown itself plainly, and possessed

the heavens in conjunction with the Bear. The thick woollen drawers

which had been so carefully prepared, were no longer in use, and men

were going about in light pantaloons and linen jackets,--those on the

quarter-deck at first beautifully clean and white, while our friends of

the second cabin were less careful. The women, too, had got quit of

their wraps, and lounged about the deck in light attire. During the

bright hours of the day the aristocrats, in the stern, were shrouded

from the sun by a delightful awning; but, forward, the passengers sought

the shade of the loose idle sails, or screened themselves from the

fierce rays as best they might among the hatchways and woodwork But it

was when the burning sun had hidden himself, when the short twilight had

disappeared, and the heavens were alive and alight with stars, that all

the world of the ship would be crowded on the upper deck. There they

would remain, long after the lamps below had been extinguished, some of

them sleeping through the whole night in the comparative coolness of the

air. But it was from eight, when tea would be over, till midnight, that

the hum of voices would be thickest, and the tread of those who walked

for their exercise the most frequent.

At such times Caldigate would be often alone; for though he had made

acquaintances, and had become indeed intimate with some of those around

him, he had never thrust himself into the life of the ship as Shand had

done. Charades were acted in the second cabin, in which Shand always

took part,--and there were penny readings, at which Shand was often the

reader. And he smoked much and drank somewhat with those who smoked and

drank. The awe at first inspired by his university superiority and

supposed rank in the world had faded almost into nothing, but by

Caldigate, unconsciously, much of this had been preserved. I am not sure

that he did not envy his friend, but at any rate he stood aloof. And, in

regard to Mrs. Smith, when he saw her walking one evening with Shand in

the sweetly dim light of the evening, with her hand upon Shand's arm, he

made up his mind that he would think no more about her.

They had been at sea just a fortnight when this happened. And in about a

quarter of an hour after this resolve had been formed Mrs. Smith was

standing by him and talking to him. A ball was being held on the

quarter-deck, or rather, as there was in truth no quarter-deck to the

Goldfinder, on that clean, large, luxurious expanse devoted to the

aristocracy in the after-part of the vessel. From among the second-class

passengers, two fiddlers and a flute player had been procured, who

formed the band. At sea you have always to look for your musicians among

the second-class passengers. And now under the awning young and old were

standing up, and making themselves happy beneath the starlight and the

glimmer of the dozen ship-lamps which had been hung around. On board

ship there are many sources of joy of which the land knows nothing. You

may flirt and dance at sixty; and if you are awkward in the turn of a

valse, you may put it down to the motion of the ship. You need wear no

gloves, and may drink your soda-and-brandy without being ashamed of it.

It was not for John Caldigate to join the mazes of that dance, though he

would have liked it well, and was well fitted by skill and taste for

such exercise. But the ground was hallowed on which they trod, and

forbidden to him; and though there was probably not a girl or a dancing

married woman there who would not have been proud to stand up with Mr.

Caldigate of Folking, there was not one who would have dared to take the

hand of a second-class passenger. So he stood, just within his own

boundary, and looked and longed. Then there was a voice in his ear. 'Do

you dance, Mr. Caldigate?'

It was a very pleasant voice, low, but distinct and silvery, infinitely

better again than the gown; a voice so distinct and well-managed that it

would have been noticed for its peculiar sweetness if coming from any

high-bred lady. He turned round and found her face close to his. Why had

she come to speak to him when she must have perceived that he had

intentionally avoided her.

'I used to be very fond of dancing,' he said, 'but it is one of the

things that have gone away.'

'I, too, was fond of dancing; but, as you say, it has gone away. It will

come back to you, in half-a-dozen years, perhaps. It can never come back

to me. Things do come back to men.'

'Why more than to women?'

'You have a resurrection;--I mean here upon earth. We never have. Though

we live as long as you, the pleasure-seeking years of our lives are much

shorter. We burst out into full flowering early in our spring, but long

before the summer is over, we are no more than huddled leaves and thick

stalks.'

'Are you a thick stalk, Mrs. Smith?'

'Unfortunately, not. My flowers are gone while my stalk is still thin

and sensitive. And then women can't recuperate.'

'I don't quite know what that means.'

'Yes, you do. It is good English enough even for Cambridge by this time.

If you had made a false step, got into debt and ran away, or mistaken

another man's wife for your own, or disappeared altogether under a cloud

for a while, you could retrieve your honour, and, sinking at twenty-five

or thirty, could come up from out of the waters at thirty-five as

capable of enjoyment and almost as fresh as ever. But a woman does not

bear submersion. She is draggled ever afterwards. She must hide

everything by a life of lies, or she will get no admittance anywhere.

The man is rather the better liked because he has sown his wild oats

broadly. Of all these ladies dancing there, which dances the best? There

is not one who really knows how to dance.'

Chapter VI

Mrs. Smith

She had changed the conversation so suddenly, rushing off from that

great question as to the condition of women generally to the very

unimportant matter of the dancing powers of the ladies who were

manoeuvring before them, that Caldigate hardly knew how to travel with

her so quickly. 'They all dance well enough for ship dancing,' he

replied; 'but as to what you were saying about women----'

'No, Mr. Caldigate; they don't dance well enough for ship dancing.

Dancing, wherever it be done, should be graceful. A woman may at any

rate move her feet in accordance with time, and she need not skip, nor

prance, nor jump, even on board ship. Look at that stout lady.'

'Mrs. Callander?'

Everybody by this time knew everybody's name.

'If she is Mrs. Callander?'

Mrs. Smith, no doubt, knew very well that it was Mrs. Callander.

'Does not your ear catch separately the thud of her footfall every time

she comes to the ground?'

'She is fat, fair, and forty.'

'Fat enough;--and what she lacks in fairness may be added on to the

forty; but if she were less ambitious and had a glimmer of taste, she

might do better than that. You see that girl with the green scarf round

her? She is young and good-looking. Why should she spring about like a

bear on a hot iron?'

'You should go and teach them.'

'It is just what I should like; only they would not be taught; and I

should be stern, and tell them the truth.'

'Why don't you go and dance with them yourself?'

'I!'

'Why not? There is one second-class lady there?' This was true. For

though none of the men would have been admitted from the inferior rank

to join the superior, the rule of demarcation had so far been broken

that a pretty girl who was known to some of the first-class passengers

had been invited to come over the line and join the amusements of the

evening. 'She dances about as well as any of them.'

'If you were among them would you dare to come out and ask me to join

them? That is a question which you won't even dare to answer.'

'It is a little personal.'

'"No," you ought to say. "I could not do that because your clothes are

so poor, and because of your ragged old hat, and I am not quite sure

that your shoes are fit to be seen." Is not that what you would say, if

you said what you thought?'

'Perhaps it is.'

'And if you said all that you thought, perhaps you would remind me that

a woman of whom nobody knows anything is always held to be disreputable.

That girl, no doubt, has her decent belongings. I have nobody.'

'You have your friends on board.'

'No, I have not. I have not a single friend on board. Those Cromptons

were very unwillingly persuaded to take a sort of interest in me, though

they really know nothing about me. And I have already lost any good

which might come from their protection. She told me yesterday, that I

ought not to walk about with Mr. Shand.'

'And what did you say?'

'Of course I told her to mind her own business. I had no alternative. A

woman has to show a little spirit or she will be trodden absolutely into

the dirt. It was something to have a woman to speak to, even though I

had not a thought in common with her;--though she was to my feeling as

inferior to myself as I no doubt am thought to be by that fat prancing

woman to herself. Even Mrs. Crompton's countenance was of value. But if

I had yielded she would have taken it out in tyranny. So now we don't

speak.'

'That is a pity.'

'It is a pity. You watch them all and see how they look at me,--the

women, I mean. They know that Mr. Shand speaks to me, and that you and

Mr. Shand are the two gentlemen we have among us. There are, no doubt, a

dozen of them watching me now, somewhere, and denouncing me for the

impropriety of my behaviour.'

'Is it improper?'

'What do you think?'

'Why may we not talk as well as others?'

'Exactly. But there are people who are tabooed. Look at that Miss Green

and the ship doctor.' At that moment the ship's doctor and the young

lady in question came close to them in the dance. 'There is no harm in

Miss Green talking by the hour together with the doctor, because she is

comfortably placed. She has got an old father and mother on board who

don't look after her, and everything is respectable. But if I show any

of the same propensities I ought almost to be put into irons.'

'Has anybody else been harsh to you?'

'The Captain has been making inquiries,--no doubt with the idea that he

may at last be driven to harsh measures. Have you got a sister?'

'No.'

'Or a mother?'

'No.'

'Or a housemaid?'

'Not even a housemaid. I have no female belongings whatever.'

'Don't you know that if you had a sister, and a mother, and a housemaid,

your mother would quite expect that your sister should in time have a

lover, but that she would be horrified at the idea of the housemaid

having a follower?'

'I did not know that. I thought housemaids got married sometimes.'

'Human nature is stronger than tyranny.'

'But what does all this mean? You are not a housemaid, and you have not

got a mistress?'

'Not exactly. But at present;--if I say my outward woman you'll know

what I mean perhaps.'

'I think I shall.'

'Well; my present outward woman stands to me in lieu of the housemaid's

broom, and the united authority of the Captain and Mrs. Crompton make up

the mistress between them. And the worst of it all is, that though I

have to endure the tyranny, I have not got the follower. It is as hard

upon Mr. Shand as it is upon me.'

'Shand, I suppose, can take care of himself.'

'No doubt;--and so in real truth can I. I can stand apart and defy them

all; and as I look at them looking at me, and almost know with what

words they are maligning me, I can tell myself that they are beneath me,

and that I care nothing for them. I shall do nothing which will enable

any one to interfere with me. But it seems hard that all this should be

so because I am a widow,--and because I am alone,--and because I am

poorly clothed.'

As she said this there were tears in her eyes, true ones, and something

of the sound of a broken sob in her voice. And Caldigate was moved. The

woman's condition was to be pitied, whether it had been produced with or

without fault on her own part. To be alone is always sad,--even for a

man; but for a woman, and for a young woman, it is doubly melancholy. Of

a sudden the dancing was done and the lamps were taken away.

'If you do not want to go to bed,' he said, 'let us take a turn.'

'I never go to bed. I mean here, on board ship. I linger up on deck,

half hiding myself about the place, till I see some quartermaster eying

me suspiciously and then I creep down into the little hole which I

occupy with three of Mrs. Crompton's children and then I cry myself to

sleep. But I don't call that going to bed.'

'Take a turn now.'

'I shall feel like the housemaid talking to her follower through the

area-gate. But she is brave, and why should I be a coward?' Then she put

her hand upon his arm. 'And you,' she said, 'why are not you dancing in

the other part of the ship with Mrs. Callander and Miss Green, instead

of picking your way among the hencoops here with me?'

'This suited my pocket best,--and my future prospects.'

'You are making a delightful experiment in roughing it,--as people eat

pic-nic dinners out in the woods occasionally, so that there may be a

break in the monotony of chairs and tables.'

While Shand had been unravelling her mystery, she, perhaps, had been

more successful in unravelling his.

'We intend to be miners.'

'And to return home before long with some vast treasure. I hope you may

be successful.'

'You seem to doubt it.'

'Of course it is doubtful. If not, the thing would be common and hardly

worth the doing. Will Mr. Shand be very persistent as a working miner?'

'I hope so.'

'He seems to me to have great gifts of idleness, which on board ship are

a blessing. How I do envy men when I see them smoking! It seems to me

that nothing is wanting to them. Women have their needlework; but though

they hate it less than idleness, they do hate it. But you really like

your tobacco.'

'I don't like being idle. I read a good deal. Do you read?'

'I have but few books here. I have read more perhaps than most young

women of my age. I came away in such a hurry that I have almost nothing

with me.'

'Can I lend you books?'

'If you will. I will promise to take care of them.'

'I have "The Heartbroken One," by Spratt, you know. It is very absurd,

but full of life from beginning to end. All that Spratt writes is very

lively.'

'I don't think I care for Spratt. He may be lively, but he's not

life-like.'

'And "Michael Bamfold." It is hard work, perhaps but very thoughtful, if

you can digest that sort of thing.'

'I hate thought.'

'What do you say to Miss Bouverie's last;--"Ridden to a Standstill;" a

little loud, perhaps, but very interesting? Or "Green Grow the Rushes

O," by Mrs. Tremaine? None of Mrs. Tremaine's people do anything that

anybody would do, but they all talk well.'

'I hate novels written by women. Their girls are so unlovely, and their

men such absurdly fine fellows!'

'I have William Coxe's "Lock picked at Last," of which I will defy you

to find the secret till you have got to the end of it.'

'I am a great deal too impatient.'

'And Thompson's "Four Marquises." That won't give you any trouble,

because you will know it all from the first chapter.'

'And never have a moment of excitement from the beginning to the end. I

don't think I care very much for novels. Have you nothing else?'

Caldigate had many other books, a Shakespeare, some lighter poetry, and

sundry heavier works of which he did not wish specially to speak, lest

he should seem to be boasting of his own literary taste; but at last it

was settled that on the next morning he should supply her with what

choice he had among the poets. Then at about midnight they parted, and

Caldigate, as he found his way down to his cabin, saw the quartermaster

with his eye fixed upon Mrs. Smith. There is no so stern guardian of

morality and propriety as your old quartermaster on board a first-class

ship.

'You have been having a grand time of it with Mrs. Smith,' said Shand as

soon as Caldigate was in their cabin.

'Pretty well,--as far as fine times go on board ship. Is there anything

against it?'

'Oh, no, not that I know of. I started the hare; if you choose to run it

I have no right to complain, I suppose.'

'I don't know anything about the hare, but you certainly have no right

to complain because I have been talking to Mrs. Smith;--unless indeed

you tell me that you are going to make her Mrs. Shand.'

'You are much more likely to make her Mrs. Caldigate.'

'I don't know that I should have any objection;--that is, if I wanted

a wife. She is good-looking, clever, well-educated, and would be

well-mannered were it not that she bristles up against the ill-usage of

the world too roughly.'

'I didn't know it had gone so far as that,' said Shand, angrily.

'Nor did I, till you suggested it to me. Now I think I'll go to sleep,

if you please, and dream about it.'

He did not go to sleep, but lay awake half thinking and half dreaming.

He certainly liked Mrs. Smith; but then, as he had begun to find out of

himself he liked women's society generally. He was almost jealous of the

doctor, because the doctor was allowed to talk to Miss Green and waltz

with Miss Green, whereas he could not approach her. Then he thought of

Maria Shand and that kiss in the little back parlour,--the kiss which

had not meant much, but which had meant something; and then of Julia

Babington, to whom he was not quite sure that he ought not to feel

himself engaged. But the face that was clearest to him of all,--and

which became the dearer the nearer that he approached to a state of

dozing,--was that of Hester Bolton, whose voice he had hardly heard, who

had barely spoken to him;--the tips of whose fingers he had only just

touched. If there was any one thing fixed on his mind it was that, as

soon as he had put together a large lump of gold, he would go back to

Cambridge and win Hester Bolton to be his wife. But yet what a singular

woman was this Mrs. Smith! As to marrying her, that of course had been a

joke produced by the petulance of his snoring friend. He began to

dislike Shand, because he did snore so loudly, and drank so much bottled

ale, and smelt so strongly of cavendish tobacco. Mrs. Smith was at any

rate much too good for Shand. Surely she must have been a lady, or her

voice would not have been sweet and silvery? And though she did bristle

roughly against the ill-usage of the world, and say strong things, she

was never absolutely indelicate or even loud. And she was certainly very

interesting. How did it come to pass that she was so completely alone,

so poor, so unfriended and yet possessed of such gifts? There certainly

was a mystery, and it would certainly be his fate, and not the fate of

Dick Shand, to unravel it. The puzzle was much too delicate and too

intricate for Dick Shand's rough hands. Then, giving his last waking

thoughts for a moment to Hester Bolton, he went to sleep in spite of the

snoring.

On the next morning, as soon as he was out of bed, he opened a small

portmanteau in which he had put up some volumes the day before he left

Pollington and to which he had not yet had recourse since the beginning

of the voyage. From these he would select one or two for the use of his

new friend. So he dragged out the valise from beneath the berth, while

Shand abused him for the disturbance he made. On the top, lying on the

other volumes, which were as he had placed them, was a little book,

prettily bound, by no means new, which he was sure had never been placed

there by himself. He took it up, and, standing in the centre of the

cabin, between the light of the porthole and Dick's bed, he examined it.

It was a copy of Thomson's 'Seasons', and on the flyleaf was written in

a girl's hand the name of its late owner,--Maria Shand. The truth

flashed upon him at once. She must have gone down on that last night

after he was in bed, and thus have made her little offering in silence,

knowing that it would be hidden from him till he was far away from her.

'What book is that?' said Shand suddenly, emerging with his head and

shoulders from the low berth.

'A book of mine,' said Caldigate, disconcerted for the moment.

'What are you going to do with it?'

'I am looking for something to lend to Mrs. Smith.'

'That is Molly's Thomson's "Seasons,"' said the brother, remembering,

as we are so apt to remember the old thing that had met his eye so often

in the old house. 'Where did you get it?'

'I didn't steal it, Dick.'

'I don't suppose you did; but I'm sure it's the book I say.'

'No doubt it is. If you think it is in bad hands, shall I give it back

to you?'

'I don't want it. If she gave it you, she was a fool for her pains.'

'I don't see that.'

'I would rather, at any rate, that you would not lend a book with my

sister's name in it to Mrs. Smith.'

'I was not thinking of doing so. She wants a Shakespeare that I have got

here, and a volume of Tennyson.' Then Dick retreated back into his

berth, and snored again, while Caldigate dressed himself. When that

operation was completed,--which, including his lavations, occupied about

five minutes,--he went up on the deck with the books for Mrs. Smith in

his hand, and with Thomson's 'Seasons' in his pocket. So the poor girl

had absolutely stolen down-stairs in the middle of the cold night, and

had opened the case and re-fastened it, in order that he, when in

strange lands, might find himself in possession of something that had

been hers!

He had not been alone a minute or two, and was looking about to see if

Mrs. Smith was there, when he was accosted by the Captain. The Captain

was a pleasant-looking, handsome man, about forty-five years of age, who

had the good word of almost everybody on board, but who had not before

spoken specially to Caldigate.

'Good morning, Mr. Caldigate. I hope you find yourself fairly

comfortable where you are.'

'Pretty well, thank you, Captain.'

'If there is anything I can do.'

'We have all that we have a right to expect.'

'I wish, Mr. Caldigate, I could invite you and your friends to come

astern among us sometimes, but it would be contrary to rule.'

'I can quite understand that, Captain.'

'You are doing a bit of roughing,--no doubt for the sake of experience.

If you only knew the sort of roughing I've had in my time!'

'I dare say.'

'Salt pork and hard biscuit, and only half enough of that. You find

yourself among some queer fellow-passengers I dare say, Mr. Caldigate.'

'Everybody is very civil.'

'They're sure to be that to a gentleman. But one has to be careful. The

women are the most dangerous.' Then the Captain laughed, as though it

had only been a joke,--this allusion to the women. But Caldigate knew

that there was more than a joke in it. The Captain had intended to warn

him against Mrs. Smith.

Chapter VII

The Three Attempts

Something more than a month had gone by, and John Caldigate and Mrs.

Smith were very close companions. This had not been effected without

considerable opposition, partly on the part of Shand, and partly by the

ship's inhabitants generally. The inhabitants of the ship were inimical

to Mrs. Smith. She was a woman who had no friends; and the very female

who had first appeared as a friend was now the readiest to say hard

things of her. And Caldigate was a handsome well-mannered young man. By

this time all the ladies in the first-class knew very well who he was,

and some of them had spoken to him. On one or two occasions the stern

law of the vessel had been broken; and he had been absolutely invited

to sit on those august after-benches. He was known to be a gentleman,

and believed, on the evidence of Dick Shand, to be possessed of

considerable means. It was therefore a thing horrible to all of them,

and particularly to Miss Green, that he should allow himself to be

enticed into difficulties by such a creature as that Mrs. Smith. Miss

Green had already been a little cold to the doctor in consequence of a

pleasant half-hour spent by her in Caldigate's company, as they looked

over the side of the vessel at the flying-fish. Mrs. Callander had been

with them, and everything had been quite proper. But what a pity it was

that he should devote so much of his time to that woman! 'Fancy his

condition if he should be induced to marry her!' said Miss Green,

holding up her hands in horror. The idea was so terrible that Mrs.

Callander declared that she would speak to him. 'Nobody ever disliked

interfering so much as I do,' said Mrs. Callander; 'but sometimes a word

from a lady will go so far with a young man!' Mrs. Callander was a most

respectable woman, whose father had begun life as a cattle drover in the

colonies, but had succeeded in amassing a considerable fortune. 'Oh, I

do wish that something may be done to save him!' said Miss Green.

Among the second-class passengers the same feeling existed quite as

strongly. The woman herself had not only been able but had been foolish

enough to show that in spite of her gown she considered herself superior

to them all. When it was found that she was, in truth, handsome to look

upon,--that her words were soft and well chosen,--that she could sit

apart and read,--and that she could trample upon Mrs. Crompton in her

scorn,--then, for a while, there were some who made little efforts to

get into her good graces. She might even have made an ally of

good-natured Mrs. Bones, the wife of the butcher who was going out with

his large family to try his fortune at Melbourne. Mrs. Bones had been

injured, after some ship fashion, by Mrs. Crompton, and would have made

herself pleasant. But Mrs. Smith had despised them all, and had shown

her contempt, and was now as deeply suspected by Mrs. Bones as by Mrs.

Crompton or Mrs. Callander.

But of all the foes to this intimacy Dick Shand was for a time the most

bitter and the most determined No doubt this arose at first from

jealousy. He had declared his purpose of unravelling the mystery; but

the task had been taken out of his hands, and the unravelling was being

done by another. And the more that the woman was abused, and the more

intent were all the people in regard to her wicked determination to be

intimate with Caldigate, the more interesting she became. Dick, who was

himself the very imp of imprudence,--who had never been deterred from

doing anything he fancied by any glimmer of control,--would have been

delighted to be the hero of all the little stories that were being told.

But as that morsel of bread had been taken, as it were, from between his

very teeth by the unjustifiable interference of his friend, he had

become more alive than any one else to the danger of the whole

proceeding. He acknowledged to the Captain that his friend was making a

fool of himself; and, though he was a little afraid of Caldigate, he

resolved upon interfering.

'Don't you think you are making an ass of yourself about this woman?' he

said.

'I daresay I am.'

'Well!'

'All the wise men, from David downwards, have made asses of themselves

about women; and why should I be wiser than the rest?'

'That's nonsense, you know.'

'Very likely.'

'I am trying to talk to you in earnest.'

'You make such a failure of it, old boy, that I am compelled to talk

nonsense in return. The idea of your preaching! Here I am with nothing

special to do, and I like to amuse myself. Ought not that to be enough

for you?'

'But what is to be the end of it?' Dick Shand asked, very solemnly.

'How can I tell? But the absurdity is that such a man as you should talk

about the end of anything. Did you ever look before you leaped in your

life?'

'We are to be together, you know, and it won't do for us to be hampered

with that woman.'

'Won't it? Then let me tell you that, if I choose to hamper myself with

that woman, or with a whole harem of women, and am not deterred by any

consideration for myself, I certainly shall not be deterred by any

consideration for you. Do you understand me?'

'That is not being a true partner,' said Shand.

'I'm quite sure of this,--that I'm likely to be as true as you are. I'm

not aware that I have entered into any terms with you by which I have

bound myself to any special mode of living. I have left England, as I

fancy you have done also, because I desired more conventional freedom

than one can find among the folk at home. And now, on the first outset,

I am to be cautioned and threatened by you because I have made

acquaintance with a young woman. Of all the moral pastors and masters

that one might come across in the world, you, Dick Shand, appear to me

to be the most absurd. But you are so far right as this, that if my

conduct is shocking to you, you had better leave me to my wickedness.'

'You are always so d---- upsetting,' said Dick, 'that no one can speak

to you.' Then Dick turned away, and there was nothing more said about

Mrs. Smith on that occasion.

The next to try her hand was Mrs. Callander. By this time the passengers

had become familiar with the ship, and knew what they might and what

they might not do. The second-class passengers were not often found

intruding across the bar, but the first-class frequently made visits to

their friends amidships. In this way Mrs. Callander had become

acquainted with our two gold-seekers, and often found herself in

conversation with one or the other. Even Miss Green, as has been stated

before, would come and gaze upon the waves from the inferior part of the

deck.

'What a very nice voyage we are having, Mr. Caldigate,' Mrs. Callander

said one afternoon.

'Yes, indeed. It is getting a little cold now, but we shall enjoy that

after all the heat.'

'Quite so; only I suppose it will be very cold when we get quite south.

You still find yourself tolerably comfortable.'

'I shall be glad to have it over,' said Caldigate, who had in truth

become disgusted with Dick's snoring.

'I daresay,--I am sure we shall. My young people are getting very tired

of it. Children, when they are accustomed to every comfort on shore, of

course feel it grievously. I suppose you are rather crowded?'

'Of course we are crowded. One can't have a twenty-foot square room on

board ship.'

'No, indeed. But then you are with your friend, and that is much

pleasanter than a stranger.'

'That would depend on whether the stranger snored, Mrs. Callander.'

'Don't talk of snoring, Mr. Caldigate. If you only heard Mr. Callander!

But, as I was saying, you must have some very queer characters down

there.' She had not been saying anything of the kind, but she found a

difficulty in introducing her subject.

'Take them altogether, they are a very decent, pleasant, well-mannered

set of people, and all of them in earnest about their future lives.'

'Poor creatures! But I dare say they're very good.' Then she paused a

moment, and looked into his face. She had undertaken a duty, and she was

not the woman to shrink from it. So she told herself at that moment. And

yet she was very much afraid of him as she saw the squareness of his

forehead, and the set of his mouth. And there was a frown across his

brow, as though he were preparing himself to fight. 'You must have found

it hard to accommodate yourselves to them, Mr. Caldigate?'

'Not at all.'

'Of course we all know that you are a gentleman.'

'I am much obliged to you; but I do not know any word that requires a

definition so much as that. I am going to work hard to earn my bread;

and I suppose these people are going to do the same.'

'There always will be some danger in such society,' said Mrs. Callander.

'I hope I may escape any great evil.'

'I hope so too, Mr. Caldigate. You probably have had a long roll of

ancestors before you?'

'We all have that;--back to Adam.'

'Ah! but I mean a family roll, of which you ought to be proud;--all

ladies and gentlemen.'

'Upon my word I don't know.'

'So I hear, and I have no doubt it is true.' Then she paused, looking

again into his face. It was very square, and his lips were hard, and

there was a gleam of anger in his eyes. She wished herself back again in

her own part of the ship; but she had boasted to Miss Green that she was

not the woman to give up a duty when she had undertaken it. Though she

was frightened, still she must go on. 'I hope you will excuse me, Mr.

Caldigate.'

'I am sure you will not say anything that I cannot excuse.'

'Don't you think--' Then she paused. She had looked into his face again,

and was so little satisfied that she did not dare to go on. He would not

help her in the least, but stood there looking at her, with something

of a smile stealing over the hardness of his face, but with such an

expression that the smile was even worse than the hardness.

'Were you going to speak to me about another lady, Mrs. Callander?'

'I was. That is what I was going to speak of--'

She was anxious to remonstrate against that word lady, but her courage

failed her.

'Then don't you think that perhaps you had better leave it alone. I am

very much obliged to you, and all that kind of thing; and as to myself,

I really shouldn't care what you said. Any good advice would be taken

most gratefully,--if it didn't affect any one else. But you might say

things of the lady in question which I shouldn't bear patiently.'

'She can't be your equal.'

'I won't hear even that patiently. You know nothing about her, except

that she is a second-class passenger,--in which matter she is exactly my

equal. If you come to that, don't you think that you are degrading

yourself in coming here and talking to me? I am not your equal.'

'But you are.'

'And so is she, then. We shan't arrive at anything, Mrs. Callander, and

so you had better give it up.' Whereupon she did give it up and retreat

to her own part of the ship, but not with a very good grace.

They had certainly become very intimate,--John Caldigate and Mrs. Smith;

and there could be no doubt that, in the ordinary language of the world,

he was making a fool of himself. He did in fact know nothing about her

but what she told herself, and this amounted to little more than three

statements, which might or might not be true,--that she had gone on the

stage in opposition to her friends,--that she had married an actor, who

had treated her with great cruelty,--and that he had died of drink. And

with each of these stories there had been an accompaniment of mystery.

She had not told him her maiden name, nor what had been the condition of

her parents, nor whether they were living, nor at what theatres she and

her husband had acted, nor when he had died. She had expressed a hope

that she might get an engagement in the colonies, but she had not spoken

of any recommendation or letters of introduction. He simply knew of her

that her name was Euphemia Smith.

In that matter of her clothes there had been a great improvement, but

made very gradually. She had laughed at her own precautions, saying,

that in her poverty she had wished to save everything that could be

saved, and that she had only intended to make herself look like others

in the same class. 'And I had wanted to avoid all attention,--at first,'

she said, smiling, as she looked up at him.

'In which you have been altogether unsuccessful he replied, 'as you are

certainly more talked about than any one in the ship.'

'Has it been my fault?' she asked.

Then he comforted her, saying that it certainly had not been her fault;

that she had been reticent and reserved till she had been either

provoked or invited to come forth; and, in fact, that her conduct had

been in all respects feminine, pretty, and decorous;--as to all which

he was not perhaps the best judge in the world.

But she was certainly much pleasanter to look at, and even to talk to,

now that she had put on a small, clean, black felt hat instead of the

broken straw, and had got out from her trunks a pretty warm shawl, and

placed a ribbon or two about her in some indescribable manner, and was

no longer ashamed of showing her shoes as she sat about upon the deck.

There could be no doubt, as she was seen now, that she was the most

attractive female on board the ship; but it may be doubted whether the

anger of the Mrs. Cromptons, Mrs. Callanders, and Miss Greens was

mitigated by the change. The battle against her became stronger, and the

duty of rescuing that infatuated young man from her sorceries was more

clear than ever;--if only anything could be done to rescue him!

What could be done? Mrs. Smith could not be locked up. No one,--not even

the Captain,--could send her down to her own wretched little cabin

because she would talk with a gentleman. Talking is allowed on board

ship, and even flirting, to a certain extent. Mrs. Smith's conduct with

Mr. Caldigate was not more peculiar than that of Miss Green and the

doctor. Only it pleased certain people to think that Miss Green might be

fond of the doctor if she chose, and that Mrs. Smith had no right to be

fond of any man. There was a stubbornness about both the sinners which

resolved to set public opinion at defiance. The very fact that others

wished to interfere with him made Caldigate determined to resent all

interference; and the woman, with perhaps a deeper insight into her own

advantages, was brave enough to be able to set opposition at defiance.

They were about a week from their port when the captain,--Captain

Munday,--was induced to take the matter into his own hands. It is hardly

too much to say that he was pressed to do so by the united efforts of

the first-class passengers. It was dreadful to think that this

unfortunate young man should go on shore merely to become the prey of

such a woman as that. So Captain Munday, who at heart was not afraid of

his passenger,--but who persisted in saying that no good could be done,

and who had, as may be remembered, already made a slight attempt,--was

induced to take the matter in hand. He came up to Caldigate on the deck

one afternoon, and without any preface began his business. 'Mr.

Caldigate,' he said, 'I am afraid you are getting into a scrape with one

of your fellow-passengers.'

'What do you call a scrape, Captain Munday?'

'I should call it a scrape if a young gentleman of your position and

your prospects were to find himself engaged on board ship to marry a

woman he knew nothing about.'

'Do you know anything about my position and prospects, Captain Munday?'

'I know you are a gentleman.'

'And I think you know less about the lady.'

'I know nothing;--but I will tell you what I hear.'

'I really would rather that you did not. Of course, Captain Munday, on

board your own ship you are a despot, and I must say that you have made

everything very pleasant for us. But I don't think even your position

entitles you to talk to me about my private affairs,--or about hers. You

say you know nothing. Is it manly to repeat what one hears about a poor

forlorn woman?' Then the Captain retreated without another word, owning

to himself that he was beaten. If this foolish young man chose to make

for himself a bed of that kind he must lie upon it. Captain Munday went

away shrugging his shoulders, and spoke no further word to John

Caldigate on that or any other subject during the voyage.

Caldigate had driven off his persecutors valiantly, and had taught them

all to think that he was resolute in his purposes in regard to Mrs.

Smith, let those purposes be what they might; but nothing could be

further from the truth; for he had no purposes and was, within his own

mind, conscious of his lack of all purpose, and very conscious of his

folly. And though he could repel Mrs. Callander and the Captain,--as he

had always repelled those who had attempted to control him,--still he

knew that they had been right. Such an intimacy as this could not be

wise, and its want of wisdom became the more strongly impressed upon him

the nearer he got to shore, and the more he felt that when he had got

ashore he should not know how to act in regard to her.

The intimacy had certainly become very close. He had expressed his

great admiration, and she had replied that, 'had things not been as they

were,' she could have returned the feeling. But she did not say what the

things were which might have been otherwise. Nor did she seem to attempt

to lead him on to further and more definite proposals. And she never

spoke of any joint action between them when on shore, though she gave

herself up to his society here on board the ship. She seemed to think

that they were then to part, as though one would be going one way, and

one the other;--but he felt that after so close an intimacy they could

not part like that.

Chapter VIII

Reaching Melbourne

Things went on in the same way till the night before the morning on

which they were to enter Hobson's Bay. Hobson's Bay, as every one knows,

is the inlet of the sea into which the little river runs on which

Melbourne is built. After leaving the tropics they had gone down south,

and had encountered showers and wind, and cold weather, but now they had

come up again into warm latitudes and fine autumn weather,--for it was

the beginning of March, and the world out there is upside down. Before

that evening nothing had been said between Mrs Smith and John Caldigate

as to any future; not a word to indicate that when the journey should be

over, there would or that there would not be further intercourse between

them. She had purposely avoided any reference to a world after this world

of the ship, even refusing, in her half-sad but half-joking manner,

to discuss matters so far ahead. But he felt that he could not leave

her on board, as he would the other passengers, without a word spoken

as to some future meeting. There will arrive on occasions a certain pitch

of intimacy,--which cannot be defined as may a degree of cousinship,

but which is perfectly understood by the persons concerned;--so close

as to forbid such mere shaking of the hands. There are many men, and

perhaps more women, cautious enough and wise enough to think of this

beforehand, and, thinking of it, to guard themselves from the dangerous

attractions of casual companions by a composed manner and unenthusiastic

conversation. Who does not know the sagacious lady who, after sitting at

table with the same gentleman for a month, can say, 'Good-bye, Mr.

Jones,' just as though Mr. Jones had been a stranger under her notice

but for a day. But others gush out, and when Mr. Jones takes his

departure, hardly know how not to throw themselves into his arms. The

intercourse between our hero and Mrs. Smith had been such that, as a

gentleman, he could not leave her without some allusion to future

meetings. That was all up to the evening before their arrival. The whole

ship's company, captain, officers, quarter-masters, passengers, and all,

were quite sure that she had succeeded in getting a promise of marriage

from him. But there had been nothing of the kind.

Among others, Dick Shand was sure that there was some entanglement.

Entanglement was the word he always used in discussing the matter with

Mrs. Callander. Between Dick and his friend there had been very little

confidential communication of late. Caldigate had forbidden Shand to

talk to him about Mrs. Smith, and thus had naturally closed the man's

mouth on other matters. And then they had fallen into different sets.

Dick, at least, had fallen into a set, while Caldigate had hardly

associated with any but the one dangerous friend. Dick had lived much

with a bevy of noisy young men who had been given to games and smoking,

and to a good deal of drink. Caldigate had said not a word, even when

on one occasion Dick had stumbled down into the cabin very much the

worse for what he had taken. How could he find fault with Dick's folly

when he would not allow Dick to say a word to him as to his own? But on

this last day at sea it became necessary that they should understand

each other.

'What do you mean to do when you land?' Caldigate asked.

All that had been settled between them very exactly long since. At a

town called Nobble, about three hundred miles west of Sydney, there

lived a man, supposed to be knowing in gold, named Crinkett, with whom

they had corresponded, and to whom they intended, in the first instance,

to apply. And about twenty miles beyond Nobble were the new and now much

reputed Ahalala diggings, at which they purposed to make their first

debut. It had been decided that they would go direct from Melbourne to

Nobble,--not round by Sydney so as to see more of the world, and thus

spend more money,--but by the direct route, taking the railway to Albury

and the coaches, which they were informed were running between Albury

and Nobble. And it had also been determined that they would spend but

two nights in Melbourne,--'just to get their things washed,'--so keen

had they been in their determination to begin their work. But on all

these matters there had been no discussion now for a month, nor even an

allusion to them.

'What do you mean to do when we land?' Caldigate asked on that last day.

'I thought all that was settled. But I suppose you are going to change

everything?'

'I am going to change nothing. Only you seem to have got into such a way

of life that I didn't know whether you would be prepared for serious

work.'

'I shall be as well prepared as you are, I don't doubt,' said Dick. 'I

have no impediment of any kind.'

'I certainly have none. Then we will start by the first train on

Wednesday morning for Albury. We must have our heavy things sent round

by sea to Sydney, and get them from there as best we can. When we are a

little fixed, one of us can run down to Sydney.'

And so it was settled, without any real confidence between them, but in

conformity with their previous arrangements.

It was on the evening of the same day, after they had sighted Cape

Otway, that Mrs. Smith and Caldigate began their last conversation on

board the Goldfinder,--a conversation which lasted, with one or two

interruptions, late into the night.

'So we have come to the end of it,' she said.

'To the end of what?'

'To the end of all that is pleasant and easy and safe. Don't you

remember my telling you how I dreaded the finish? Here I have been

fairly comfortable and have in many respects enjoyed it. I have had you

to talk to; and there has been a flavour of old days about it. What

shall I be doing this time to-morrow?'

'I don't know your plans.'

'Exactly;--and I have not told you, because I would not have you

bothered with me when I land. You have enough on your own hands; and if

I were to be a burden to you now it might be a serious trouble. I am

afraid poor Mr. Shand objects to me.'

'You don't think that would stand in my way?'

'It stands in mine. Of course, with your pride and your obstinacy you

would tell Mr. Shand to go to--the devil if he ventured to object to any

little delay that might be occasioned by looking after me. Then Mr.

Shand would go--there, or elsewhere; and all your plans would be broken

up, and you would be without a companion.'

'Unless I had you.' Of all the words which he could have spoken in such

an emergency these were the most foolish; and yet, at so tender a

moment, how were they to be repressed?

'I do think that Dick Shand is dangerous,' she answered, laughing; 'but

I should be worse. I am afraid Dick Shand will--drink.'

'If so, we must part. And what would you do?'

'What would I do? What could I do?' Then there was a pause. 'Perhaps I

should want you to--marry me, which would be worse than Dick Shand's

drinking. Eh?'

There is an obligation on a man to persevere when a woman has encouraged

him in love-making. It is like riding at a fence. When once you have set

your horse at it you must go on, however impracticable it may appear as

you draw close to it. If you have never looked at the fence at all,--if

you have ridden quite the other way, making for some safe gate or

clinging to the dull lane,--then there will be no excitement, but also

there will be no danger and no disgrace. Caldigate had ridden hard at

the fence, and could not crane at it now that it was so close to him. He

could only trust to his good fortune to carry him safe over. 'I don't

suppose you would want it,' he said, 'but I might.'

'You would want me, but you would not want me for always. I should be a

burden less easy to shake off than Dick Shand.'

'Is that the way a man is always to look at a woman?'

'It is the way in which they do, I think. I often wonder that any man is

ever fool enough to marry. A poor man may want some one to serve him,

and may be able to get service in no other way; or a man, poor in

another way, may find an heiress convenient;--but otherwise I think men

only marry when they are caught. Women are prehensile things, which have

to cling to something for nourishment and support. When I come across

such a one as you I naturally put out my feelers.'

'I have not been aware of it.'

'Yes, you are; and I do not doubt that your mind is vacillating about

me. I am sure you like me.'

'Certainly, I like you.'

'And you know that I love you.'

'I did not know it.'

'Yes, you did. You are not the man to be diffident of yourself in such a

matter. You must either think that I love you, or that I have been a

great hypocrite in pretending to do so. Love you!' They were sitting

together on a large spar which was lashed on to the deck, and which had

served throughout all the voyage for a seat for second-class passengers

There were others now on the farther end of it; but there was a feeling

that when Caldigate and Mrs. Smith were together it would not be civil

to intrude upon their privacy. At this time it was dark; but their eyes

had become used to the gloom, and each could see the other's face. 'Love

you!' she repeated, looking up at him, speaking in a very low voice, but

yet, oh so clearly, so that not a fraction of a sound was lost to his

ears, with no special emotion in her face, with no contortion, no

grimace, but with her eyes fixed upon his. 'How should it be possible

that I should not love you? For two months we have been together as

people seldom are in the world,--as they never can be without hating

each other or loving each other thoroughly. You have been very good to

me who am all alone and desolate. And you are clever, educated,--and a

man. How should I not love you? And I know from the touch of your hand,

from your breath when I feel it on my face, from the fire of your eye,

and from the tenderness of your mouth, that you, too, love me.'

'I do,' he said.

'But as there may be marriage without love, so there may be love without

marriage. You cannot but feel how little you know of me, and ignorant as

you are of so much, that to marry me might be--ruin.' It was just what

he had told himself over and over again, when he had been trying to

resolve what he would do in regard to her. 'Don't you know that?'

'I know that it might have been so among the connections of home life.'

'And to you the connections of home life may all come back. That woman

talked about your "roll of ancestors." Coming from her it was absurd.

But there was some truth in it. You know that were you to marry me, say

to-morrow, in Melbourne, it would shut you out from--well, not the

possibility but the probability of return.'

'I do not want to go back.'

'Nor do I want to hinder you from doing so. If we were alike desolate,

alike alone, alike cast out, oh then, what a heaven of happiness I

should think had been opened to me by the idea of joining myself to you!

There is nothing I could not do for you. But I will not be a millstone

round your neck.'

She had taken so much the more prominent part in all this that he felt

himself compelled by his manliness to say something in contradiction to

it--something that should have the same flavour about it as had her

self-abnegation and declared passion. He also must be unselfish and

enthusiastic. 'I do not deny that there is truth in what you say.'

'It is true.'

'Of course I love you.'

'It ought to be of course,--now.'

'And of course I do not mean to part from you now, as though we were

never to see each other again.'

'I hope not quite that.'

'Certainly not. I shall therefore hold you as engaged to me, and myself

as engaged to you,--unless something should occur to separate us.' It

was a foolish thing to say, but he did not know how to speak without

being foolish. It is not usual that a gentleman should ask a lady to be

engaged to him '--unless something should occur to separate them!' 'You

will consent to that,' he said.

'What I will consent to is this, that I will be yours, all yours,

whenever you may choose to send for me. At any moment I will be your

wife for the asking. But you shall go away first, and shall think of it,

and reflect upon it,--so that I may not have to reproach myself with

having caught you.'

'Caught me?'

'Well, yes, caught you. I do feel that I have caught you,--almost. I do

feel,--almost,--that I ought to have had nothing to do with you. From

the beginning of it all I knew that I ought to have nothing to say to

you. You are too good for me.' Then she rose from her place as though to

leave him. 'I will go down now,' she said, 'because I know you will have

many things to do. To-morrow, when we get up, we shall be in the

harbour, and you will be on shore quite early. There will be no time for

a word of farewell then. I will meet you again here just before we go to

bed,--say at half-past ten. Then we will arrange, if we can arrange, how

we may meet again.'

And so she glided away from him, and he was left alone, sitting on the

spar. Now, at any rate, he had engaged himself. There could not be any

doubt about that. He certainly could not be justified in regarding

himself as free because she had told him that she would give him time to

think of it. Of course he was engaged to marry her. When a man has been

successful in his wooing he is supposed to be happy. He asked himself

whether he was proud of the result of this intimacy. She had told

him,--she herself,--that she had 'caught him', meaning thereby that he

had been taken as a rabbit with a snare or a fish with a baited hook. If

it had been so, surely she would not herself have said so. And yet he

was aware how common it is for a delinquent to cover his own delinquency

by declaring it. 'Of course I am idle,' says the idle one, escaping the

disgrace of his idleness by his honesty. 'I have caught you!' There is

something soothing to the vanity in such a declaration from a pretty

woman. That she should have wished to catch you is something;--something

that the net should itself be so pleasant, with its silken meshes! But

the declaration may not the less be true and the fact unpleasant. In the

matter of matrimony a man does not wish to be caught; and Caldigate,

fond as he was of her, acknowledged that what she said was true.

He leant back in a corner that was made by the hatchway, and endeavoured

to think over his life and prospects. If this were a true engagement,

then must he cease altogether to think of Hester Bolton. Then must that

dream be abandoned. It is of no use to the most fervid imagination to

have a castle projected in Spain from which all possible foundation has

been taken away. In his dreams of life a man should never dream that

which is altogether impossible. There had been something in the thought

of Hester Bolton which had taken him back from the roughnesses of his

new life, from the doubtful respectability of Mrs. Smith, from the

squalor of the second-class from the whisky-laden snores of Dick Shand,

to a sweeter, brighter, cleaner world. Till this engagement had been

absolutely spoken he could still indulge in that romance, distant and

unreal as it was. But now,--now it seemed to be brought in upon him very

forcibly that he must rid his thoughts of Hester Bolton,--or else rid

his life of Mrs. Smith.

But he was engaged to marry Mrs. Smith. Then he got up, and walked

backwards and forwards along the deck, asking himself whether this could

really be the truth. Was he bound to this woman for his life? And if so,

had he done a thing of which he already repented himself? He tried to

persuade himself that she was admirably fitted for the life which he was

fated to lead. She was handsome, intellectual, a most delightful

companion, and yet capable of enduring the hardships of an adventurous

uncertain career. Ought he not to think himself peculiarly lucky in

having found for himself so eligible a companion? But there is something

so solemn, so sacred, in the name of wife. A man brought up among soft

things is so imbued with the feeling that his wife should be something

better, cleaner, sweeter, holier than himself that he could not but be

awe-struck when he thought that he was bound to marry this all but

nameless widow of some drunken player,--this woman who, among other

women, had been thought unfit for all companionship!

But things arrange themselves. How probable it was that he would never

be married to her. After all, this might be but an incident, and not an

unpleasant incident, in his life. He had had his amusement out of it,

and she had had hers. Perhaps they would part to meet no more. But when

he thought that there might be comfort in this direction, he felt that

he was a scoundrel for thinking so.

'And this is to say good-bye?' 'Twas thus she greeted him again that

night. 'Good-bye--'

'Good-bye, my love.'

'My love! my love! And now remember this; my address will be,

Post-office, Melbourne. It will be for you to write to me. You will not

hear from me unless you do. Indeed I shall know nothing of you. Let me

have a line before a month is over.' This he promised, and then they

parted.

At break of day on the following morning the Goldfinder rode over the

Rip into Hobson's Bay. There were still four hours before the ship lay

at her moorings; but during all that time Mrs. Smith was not seen by

Caldigate. As he got into the boat which took him and Shand from the

ship to the pier at Sandridge she kissed her hand to him over the side

of the vessel. Before eleven o'clock Dick Shand and his companion were

comfortably put up at the Miners' Home in Flinders Lane.

Chapter IX

Nobble

During the two days which Dick and Caldigate spent together in Melbourne

Mrs. Smith's name was not mentioned between them. They were particularly

civil each to the other and went to work together, making arrangements

at a bank as to their money, taking their places, despatching their

luggage, and sorting their belongings as though there had been no such

woman as Mrs. Smith on board the Goldfinder. Dick, though he had been

inclined to grumble when his mystery had been taken out of his

hands,--who had, of course, been jealous when he saw that the lady had

discarded her old hat and put on new ribbons, not for him, but for

another,--was too conscious of the desolation to which he would be

subjected by quarrelling with his friend. He felt himself unable to go

alone, and was therefore willing that the bygones of the ship should be

bygones. Caldigate, on the other hand, acknowledged to himself that he

owed some reparation to his companion. Of course he had not bound

himself to any special mode of life;--but had he, in his present

condition, allied himself more closely to Mrs. Smith, he would, to some

extent, have thrown Dick over. And then, as soon as he was on shore, he

did feel somewhat ashamed of himself in regard to Mrs. Smith. Was it not

manifest that any closer alliance, let the alliance be what it might,

must be ruinous to him? As it was, had he not made an absolute fool of

himself with Mrs. Smith? Had he not got himself already into a mess from

which there was no escape? Of course he must write to her when the month

was over. The very weight of his thoughts on this matter made him tamer

with Dick and more observant than he would otherwise have been.

They were during those two days frequently about the town, looking at

the various streets and buildings, at the banks and churches and

gardens,--as is usual with young men when they visit a new town; but,

during it all, Caldigate's mind was more intent on Mrs. Smith than he

was on the sights of the place. Melbourne is not so big but that she

might easily have thrown herself in his way had she pleased. Strangers

residing in such a town are almost sure to see each other before

twenty-four hours are gone. But Mrs. Smith was not seen. Two or three

times he went up and down Collins Street alone, without his friend, not

wishing to see her,--aware that he had better not see her,--but made

restless by a nervous feeling that he ought to wish to see her, that he

should, at any rate, not keep out of her way. But Mrs. Smith did not

show herself. Whatever might be her future views, she did not now take

steps to present herself to him. 'I shall be so much the more bound to

present myself to her,' he said to himself. 'But perhaps she knows all

that,' he added in the same soliloquy.

On the Wednesday morning they left Melbourne by the 6 A.M. train for

Albury, which latter place they reached the same day, about 2 P.M.,

having then crossed the Murray river, and passed into the colony of New

South Wales. Here they stayed but a few hours and then went on by coach

on their journey to Nobble. From one wretched vehicle they were handed

on to another, never stopping anywhere long enough to go to bed,--three

hours at one wretched place and five at another,--travelling at the rate

of six miles an hour, bumping through the mud and slush of the bush

roads, and still going on for three days and three nights. This was

roughing it indeed. Even Dick complained, and said that, of all the

torments prepared for wicked mortals on earth, this Australian coaching

was the worst. They went through Wagga-Wagga and Murrumburra, and other

places with similar names, till at last they were told that they had

reached Nobble. Nobble they thought was the foulest place which they had

ever seen. It was a gold-digging town, as such places are called, and

had been built with great rapidity to supply the necessities of adjacent

miners. It was constructed altogether of wood, but no two houses had

been constructed alike. They generally had gable ends opening on to the

street, but were so different in breadth, altitude, and form, that it

was easy to see that each enterprising proprietor had been his own

architect. But they were all alike in having enormous advertisement-boards,

some high, some broad, some sloping, on which were declared the merits of

the tradesmen who administered within to the wants of mining humanity. And

they had generally assumed most singular names for themselves: 'The Old

Stick-in-the-Mud Soft Goods Store,' 'The Polyeuka Stout Depot,' 'Number

Nine Flour Mills,' and so on,--all of which were very unintelligible to

our friends till they learned that these were the names belonging to

certain gold-mining claims which had been opened in the neighbourhood

of Nobble. The street itself was almost more perilous to vehicles than

the slush of the forest-tracks, so deep were the holes and so uncertain

the surface. When Caldigate informed the driver that they wanted to be

taken as far as Henniker's hotel, the man said that he had given up

going so far as that for the last two months, the journey being too

perilous. So they shouldered their portmanteaus and struggled forth

down the street. Here and there a short bit of wooden causeway, perhaps

for the length of three houses, would assist them; and then, again, they

would have to descend into the roadway and plunge along through the mud.

'It is not quite as nice walking as the old Quad at Trinity,' said

Caldigate.

'It is the beastliest hole I ever put my foot in since I was born,' said

Dick, who had just stumbled and nearly came to the ground with his

burden. 'They told us that Nobble was a fine town.'

Henniker's hotel was a long, low wooden shanty, divided into various

very small partitions by thin planks, in most of which two or more

dirty-looking beds had been packed very closely. But between these

little compartments there was a long chamber containing a long and very

dirty table, and two long benches. Here were sitting a crowd of miners,

drinking, when our friends were ushered in through the bar or counter

which faced to the street. At the bar they were received by a dirty old

woman who said that she was Mrs. Henniker. Then they were told, while

the convivial crowd were looking on and listening, that they could have

the use of one of the partitions and their 'grub' for 7s. 6d. a-day

each. When they asked for a partition apiece, they were told that if

they didn't like what was offered to them they might go elsewhere. Upon

that they agreed to Mrs. Henniker's terms, and sitting down on one of

the benches looked desolately into each others faces.

Yes;--it was different from Trinity College, different from Babington,

very different even from the less luxurious comfort of the house at

Pollington. The deck, even the second-class cabin, of the Goldfinder had

been better than this. And then they had no friend, not even an

acquaintance, within some hundred miles. The men around them were not

uncivil. Australian miners never are so. But they were inquisitive,

familiar, and with their half-drunken good-humour, almost repulsive. It

was about noon when our friends reached Henniker's, and they were told

that there would be dinner at one. There was always 'grub' at one, and

'grub' at seven, and 'grub' at eight in the morning. So one of the men

informed them. The same gentleman hoped that the strangers were not very

particular, as the 'grub,' though plentiful was apt to be rough of its

kind.

'You'll have it a deal worse before you've done if you're going on to

Ahalala,' said another. Then Caldigate said that they did intend to go

on to Ahalala. 'We're going to have a spell at gold-digging,' said he.

What was the use of making any secret of the matter? 'We knowed that

ready enough,' said one of the men. 'Chaps like you don't come much to

Nobble for nothing else. Have you got any money to start with?'

'A few half-crowns,' said Dick, cautiously.

'Half-crowns don't go very far here, my mate. If you can spend four or

five pounds a-week each for the next month, so as to get help till you

know where you are, it may be you'll turn up gold at Ahalala;--but if

not, you'd better go elsewhere. You needn't be afraid. We ain't a-going

to rob you of nothing.'

'Nor yet we don't want nothing to drink,' said another.

'Speak for yourself, Jack,' said a third. 'But come;--as these are

regular new chums, I don't care if I shout for the lot myself.' Then the

dirty old woman was summoned, and everybody had whisky all round. When

that was done, another generous man came to the front, and there was

more whisky, till Caldigate was frightened as to the result.

Evil might have come from it, had not the old woman opportunely brought

the 'grub' into the room. This she chucked down on the table in such a

way that the grease out of the dish spattered itself all around. There

was no tablecloth, nor had any preparation been made; but in the middle

of the table there was a heap of dirty knives and forks, with which the

men at once armed themselves; and each took a plate out of a heap that

had been placed on a shelf against the wall. Caldigate and Shand, when

they saw how the matter was to be arranged, did as the other men. The

'grub' consisted of an enormous lump of boiled beef, and a bowl of

potatoes, which was moderate enough in size considering that there were

in all about a dozen men to be fed. But there was meat enough for

double the number, and bread in plenty, but so ill-made as to be

rejected by most of the men. The potatoes were evidently the luxury;

and, guided by that feeling, the man who had told the strangers that

they need not be afraid of being robbed, at once selected six out of the

bowl, and deposited three each before Dick and Caldigate. He helped the

others all round to one each, and then was left without any for himself.

'I don't care a damn for that sort of tucker,' he said, as though he

despised potatoes from the bottom of his heart. Of all the crew he was

the dirtiest, and was certainly half drunk. Another man holloaed to

'Mother Henniker' for pickles; but Mother Henniker, without leaving her

seat at the bar, told them to 'pickle themselves.' Whereupon one of the

party, making some allusion to Jack Brien's swag,--Jack Brien being

absent at the moment,--rose from his seat and undid a great roll lying

in one of the corners. Every miner has his swag,--consisting of a large

blanket which is rolled up, and contains all his personal luggage. Out

of Jack Brien's swag were extracted two large square bottles of pickles.

These were straightway divided among the men, care being taken that Dick

and Caldigate should have ample shares. Then every man helped himself to

beef, as much as he would, passing the dish round from one to the other.

When the meal was half finished, Mrs. Henniker brought in an enormous

jorum of tea, which she served out to all the guests in tin pannikins,

giving to every man a fixed and ample allowance of brown sugar, without

at all consulting his taste. Milk there was none. In the midst of this

Jack Brien came in, and with a clamour of mirth the empty pickle jars

were shown him. Jack, who was a silent man, and somewhat melancholy,

merely shook his head and ate his beef. It may be presumed that he was

fond of pickles, having taken so much trouble to provide them; but he

said not a word of the injury to which he had been subjected.

'Them's a-going to Ahalala, Jack,' said the distributor of the

potatoes, nodding his head to indicate the two new adventurers.

'Then they're a-going to the most infernal, mean, ----, ----

break-heartedest place as God Almighty ever put on this 'arth for the

perplexment of poor unfortunate ---- ---- miners.' This was Jack Brien's

eloquence, and his description of Ahalala. Before this he had not spoken

a word, nor did he speak again till he had consumed three or four pounds

of beef, and had swallowed two pannikins of tea. Then he repeated his

speech: 'There isn't so ---- ---- an infernal, mean, break-hearted a

place as Ahalala,--not nowhere; no, not nowhere. And so them chums'll

find for theirselves if they go there.' Then his neighbour whispered

into Caldigate's ear that Jack had gone to Ahalala with fifty sovereigns

in his pocket, and that he wasn't now worth a red cent.

'But there is gold there?' asked Caldigate.

'It's my belief there's gold pretty much everywhere, and you may find it,

or you mayn't. That's where it is;--and the mayn'ts are a deal oftener

turning up than the mays.'

'A man can get work for wages,' suggested Dick.

'Wages! What's the use of that? A man as knows mining can earn wages.

But Ahalala aint a place for wages. If you want wages, go to one of the

old-fashioned places,--Bendigo, or the like of that. I've worked for

wages, but what comes of it? A man goes to Ahalala because he wants to

run his chance, and get a big haul. It's every one on his own bottom

pretty much at Ahalala.'

'Wages be ----!' said Jack Brien, rising from the seat and hitching up

his trousers as he left the room. It was very evident that Jack Brien

was a gambler.

After dinner there was a smoke, and after the smoke Dick Shand 'shouted'

for the company. Dick had quite learned by this time the mystery of

shouting. When one man 'stands' drinks all round, he shouts; and then

it is no more than reciprocal that another man should do the same. And,

in this way, when the reciprocal feeling is spread over a good many

drinkers, a good deal of liquor is consumed.

While Dick Shand's 'shout' was being consumed, Caldigate asked one of

his new friends where Mr. Crinkett lived. Was Mr. Crinkett known in

Nobble? It seemed that Crinkett was very well known in Nobble indeed. If

anybody had done well at Nobble, Mr. Crinkett had done well. He was the

'swell' of the place. This informant did not think that Mr. Crinkett had

himself gone very deep at Ahalala. Mr. Crinkett had risen high enough in

his profession to be able to achieve more certainty than could be found

at such a place as Ahalala. By this time they were on the road to Mr.

Crinkett's house, this new friend having undertaken to show them the

way.

'He can put you up to a thing or two, if he likes,' said the new friend.

'Perhaps he's a pal of yourn?'

Caldigate explained that he had never seen Mr. Crinkett, but that he had

come to Nobble armed with a letter from a gentleman in England who had

once been concerned in gold-digging.

'He's a civil enough gent, is Crinkett,' said the miner;--'but he do

like making money. They say of him there's nothing he wouldn't

sell,--not even his grandmother's bones. I like trade, myself,' added

the miner; 'but some of 'em's too sharp. That's where Crinkett lives.

He's a swell; ain't he?'

They had walked about half a mile from the town, turning down a lane at

the back of the house, and had made their way through yawning pit-holes

and heaps of dirt and pools of yellow water,--where everything was

disorderly and apparently deserted,--till they came to a cluster of

heaps so large as to look like little hills; and here there were signs

of mining vitality. On their way they had not come across a single shred

of vegetation, though here and there stood the bare trunks of a few

dead and headless trees, the ghosts of the forest which had occupied the

place six or seven years previously. On the tops of these artificial

hills there were sundry rickety-looking erections, and around them were

troughs and sheds and rude water-works. These, as the miner explained

were the outward and visible signs of the world-famous 'Old

Stick-in-the-Mud' claim, which was now giving two ounces of gold to the

ton of quartz, and which was at present the exclusive property of Mr.

Crinkett, who had bought out the tribute shareholders and was working

the thing altogether on his own bottom. As they ascended one of those

mounds of upcast stones and rubble, they could see on the other side the

crushing-mills, and the engine-house, and could hear the thud, thud,

thud of the great iron hammers as they fell on the quartz,--and then,

close beyond, but still among the hillocks, and surrounded on all sides

by the dirt and filth of the mining operations, was Mr. Crinkett's

mansion. 'And there's his very self a-standing at the gate a-counting

how many times the hammer falls a minute, and how much gold is a-coming

from every blow as it falls.' With this little observation as to Mr.

Crinkett's personal character, the miner made his way back to his

companions.

Chapter X

Polyeuka Hall

The house which they saw certainly surprised them much, and seemed to

justify the assertion just before made to them that Mr. Crinkett was a

swell. It was marvellous that any man should have contemplated the

building of such a mansion in a place so little attractive, with so many

houses within view. The house and little attempted garden, together with

the stables and appurtenances, may have occupied half an acre. All

around it were those hideous signs of mining operations which make a

country rich in metals look as though the devil had walked over it,

dragging behind him an enormous rake. There was not a blade of grass to

be seen. As far as the eye could reach there stood those ghost-like

skeletons of trees in all spots where the soil had not been turned up;

but on none of them was there a leaf left, or even a branch. Everywhere

the ground was thrown about in hideous uncovered hillocks, all of which

seemed to have been deserted except those in the immediate neighbourhood

of Mr. Crinkett's house. But close around him one could see wheels

turning and long ropes moving, and water running in little wooden

conduits, all of which were signs of the activity going on under ground.

And then there was the never-ceasing thud, thud, thud of the

crushing-mill, which from twelve o'clock on Sunday night to twelve

o'clock on Saturday night, never paused for a moment, having the effect,

on that vacant day, of creating a painful strain of silence upon the

ears of those who were compelled to remain on the spot during the

unoccupied time. It was said that in Mr. Crinkett's mansion every

sleeper would wake from his sleep as soon as the engine was stopped,

disturbed by the unwonted quiescence.

But the house which had been built in this unpromising spot was quite

entitled to be called a mansion. It was of red brick, three storeys

high, with white stone facings to all the windows and all the corners,

which glittered uncomfortably in the hot sun. There was a sweep up to

it, the road having been made from the dÃ©bris of the stone out of which

the gold had been crushed; but though there was the sweep up to the door

carefully made for the length of a few dozen yards, there was nothing

that could be called a road outside, though there were tracks here and

there through the hillocks, along which the waggons employed about the

place struggled through the mud. The house itself was built with a large

hall in the middle, and three large windows on each side. On the floor

there were four large rooms, with kitchens opening out behind, and above

there were, of course, chambers in proportion and in the little garden

there was a pond and a big bath-house, and there were coach-houses and

stables;--so that it was quite a mansion. It was called Polyeuka Hall,

because while it was being built Mr. Crinkett was drawing large gains

from the Polyeuka mine, about three miles distant on the other side of

Nobble. For the building of his mansion on this special site, no one

could imagine any other reason than that love which a brave man has of

overcoming difficulties. To endeavour to create a paradise in such a

Pandemonium required all the energies of a Crinkett. Whether or not he

had been successful depended of course on his own idiosyncrasies. He

had a wife who, it is to be hoped, liked her residence. They had no

children, and he spent the greater part of his time away in other mining

districts in which he had ventures. When thus absent, he would live as

Jack Brien and his friends were living at Mrs. Henniker's, and was

supposed to enjoy the ease of his inn more thoroughly than he did the

constraint of his grand establishment.

At the present moment he was at home, and was standing at the gate of

his domain all alone, with a pipe in his mouth,--perhaps listening, as

the man had said, to the noise of his own crushing-machine. He was

dressed in black, with a chimney-pot on his head,--and certainly did not

look like a miner, though he looked as little like a gentleman. Our

friends were in what they conceived to be proper miners' costume, but

Mr. Crinkett knew at a glance that there was something uncommon about

them. As they approached he did not attempt to open the gate, but

awaited them, looking over the top of it from the inside. 'Well, my

mates, what can I do for you?' he said, still remaining on his side, and

apparently intending that they should remain on theirs. Then Caldigate

brought forth his letter, and handed it to the owner of the place across

the top of the gate. 'I think Mr. Jones wrote to you about us before,'

said Caldigate.

Crinkett read the letter very deliberately. Perhaps he required time to

meditate what his conduct should be. Perhaps he was not quick at reading

written letters. But at last he got to the end of the very few words

which the note contained. 'Jones!' he said, 'Jones wasn't much account

when he was out here.'

'We don't know a great deal about him,' said Dick.

'But when he heard that we were coming, he offered us a letter to you,'

said Caldigate. 'I believe him to be an honest man.'

'Honest! Well, yes; I daresay he's honest enough. He never robbed me of

nothing. And shall I tell you why? Because I know how to take care that

he don't, nor yet nobody else.' As he said this, he looked at them as

though he intended that they were included among the numbers against

whom he was perfectly on his guard.

'That's the way to live,' said Dick.

'That's the way I live, my friend. He did write before. I remember

saying to myself what a pair of simpletons you must be if you was

thinking of going to Ahalala.'

'We do think of going there,' said Caldigate.

'The road's open to you. Nobody won't prevent you. You can get beef and

mutton there, and damper, and tea no doubt, and what they call brandy,

as long as you've got the money to pay for it. One won't say anything

about what price they'll charge you. Have you got any money?' Then

Caldigate made a lengthened speech, in which he explained so much of

their circumstances as seemed necessary. He did not name the exact sum

which had been left at the bank in Melbourne, but he did make Mr.

Crinkett understand that they were not paupers. They were anxious to do

something in the way of mining, and particularly anxious to make money.

But they did not quite know how to begin. Could he give them a hint?

They meant to work with their own hands, but perhaps it might be well

for them at first to hire the services of some one to set them a-going.

Crinkett listened very patiently, still maintaining his position on his

own side of the gate. Then he spoke words of such wisdom as was in him.

'Ahalala is just the place to ease you of a little money. Mind I tell

you. Gold! of course there's been gold to be got there. But what's been

the cost of it? What's been the return? If sixteen hundred men, among

'em, can sell fifteen hundred pounds' worth of gold a week, how is each

man to have twenty shillings on Saturday night? That's about what it is

at Ahalala. Of course there's gold. And where there's gold chucked about

in that way, just on the surface, one gets it and ten don't. Who is to

say you mayn't be the one. As to hiring a man to show you the way,--you

can hire a dozen. As long as you'll pay 'em ten shillings a-day to loaf

about, you may have men enough. But whether they'll show you the way to

anything except the liquor store, that's another thing. Now shall I tell

you what you two gents had better do?' Dick declared that the two gents

would be very much obliged to him if he would take that trouble. 'Of

course you've heard of the "Old Stick-in-the-Mud"?' Dick told him that

they had heard of that very successful mining enterprise since their

arrival at Nobble. 'You ask on the veranda at Melbourne, or at Ballarat,

or at Sydney. If they don't tell you about it, my name's not Crinkett.

You put your money, what you've got, into ten-shilling shares. I'll

accommodate you, as you're friends of Jones, with any reasonable number.

We're getting two ounces to the ton. The books'll show you that.'

'We thought you'd purchased out all the shareholders said Caldigate.

'So I did, and now I'm redividing it. I'd rather have a company. It's

pleasanter. If you can put in a couple of thousand pounds or so between

you, you can travel about and see the country, and your money'll be

working for you all the time. Did you ever see a gold mine?'

They owned that they never yet had been a yard below ground. Then he

opened his gate preparatory to taking them down the 'Old

Stick-in-the-Mud,' and brought them with him into one of the front

rooms. It was a large parlour, only half furnished, not yet papered,

without a carpet, in which it appeared that Mr. Crinkett kept his own

belongings. Here he divested himself of his black clothes and put on a

suit of miner's garments,--real miner's garments, very dirty, with a

slouch hat, on the top of which there was a lump of mud in which to

stick a candle-end. Any one learned in the matter would immediately have

known the real miner. 'Now if you like to see a mine we will go down,

and then you can do as you like about your money.'

They started forth, Crinkett leading the way, and entered the

engine-house. As they went he said not a word, being aware that gold,

gold that they could see with their eyes in its raw condition, would

tempt them more surely than all his eloquence. In the engine-house the

three of them got into a box or truck that was suspended over the mouth

of a deep shaft, and soon found themselves descending through the bowels

of the earth. They went down about four hundred feet, and as they were

reaching the bottom Crinkett remarked that it was 'a goodish deep hole

all to belong to one man.' 'Yes,' he added as Caldigate extricated

himself from the truck, 'and there's a precious lot more gold to come

out of it yet, I can tell you.'

In all the sights to be seen about the world there is no sight in which

there is less to be seen than in a gold-mine. The two young men were

made to follow their conductor along a very dirty underground gallery

for about a quarter of a mile, and then they came to four men working

with picks in a rough sort of chamber, and four others driving holes in

the walls. They were simply picking down the rock, in doing which they

were assisted by gunpowder. With keen eyes Crinkett searched along the

roof and sides, and at last showed to his companions one or two little

specks which he pronounced to be gold. 'When it shows itself like that

all about, you may guess whether it's a paying concern! Two ounces to

the ton, my boys!' As Dick and Caldigate hitherto knew nothing about

ounces and tons in reference to gold, and as they had heard of nuggets,

and lumps of gold nearly as big as their fist, they were not much

exalted by what they saw down the 'Old Stick-in-the-Mud.' Nor did they

like the darkness and dampness and dirt and dreariness of the place.

They had both resolved to work, as they had often said, with their own

hands;--but in thinking over it their imagination had not pictured to

them so uncomfortable a workshop as this. When they had returned to the

light, the owner of the place took them through the crushing-mill

attached, showed them the stone or mulloch, as it was thrust into the

jaws of the devouring animal, and then brought them in triumph round to

the place where the gold was eliminated from the dÃ©bris of mud and

water. The gold did not seem to them to be very much; but still there it

was. 'Two ounces to the ton, my boys!' said Crinkett, as he brought them

back to his house. 'You'll find that a 10s. share'll give you about 6d.

a month. That's about 60 per cent, I guess. You can have your money

monthly. What comes out of that there mine in a March, you can have in

a April, and so on. There ain't nothing like it anywhere else,--not as I

knows on. And instead of working your hearts out, you can be just

amusing yourselves about the country. Don't go to Ahalala;--unless it is

for dropping your money. If that's what you want, I won't say but

Ahalala is as good a place as you'll find in the colony.' Then he

brought a bottle of whisky out of a cupboard, and treated them to a

glass of grog apiece. Beyond that his hospitality did not go.

Dick looked as though he liked the idea of having a venture in the 'Old

Stick-in-the-Mud.' Caldigate, without actually disbelieving all that had

been said to him, did not relish the proposal. It was not the kind of

thing which they had intended. After they had learned their trade as

miners it might be very well for them to have shares in some established

concern;--but in that case he would wish to be one of the managers

himself, and not to trust everything to any Crinkett, however honest.

That suggestion of travelling about and amusing themselves, did not

commend itself to him. New South Wales might, he thought, be a good

country for work, but did not seem to offer much amusement beyond sheer

idleness, and brandy-and-water.

'I rather think we should like to do a little in the rough first,' he

said.

'A very little'll go a long way with you, I'm thinking.'

'I don't see that at all,' said Dick, stoutly.

'You go down there and take one of them picks in your hand for a

week,--eight hours at a time, with five minutes' spell allowed for a

smoke, and see how you'll feel at the end of the week.'

'We'll try it on, if you'll give us 10s. a-day for the week,' said

Caldigate, rubbing his hands together.

'I wouldn't give you half-a-crown for the whole time between you, and

you wouldn't earn it. Ten shillings a day! I suppose you think a man has

only just to say the word and become a miner out of hand. You've a deal

to learn before you'll be worth half the money. I never knew chaps like

you come to any good at working. If you've got a little money, you know,

I've shown you what you can do with it. But perhaps you haven't.'

The conversation was ended by a declaration on the part of Caldigate

that they would take a week to think over Mr. Crinkett's kind

proposition, and that they might as well occupy the time by taking a

look at Ahalala. A place that had been so much praised and so much

abused must be worth seeing. 'Who's been a-praising it,' asked Crinkett,

angrily, 'unless it's that fool Jones? And as for waiting, I don't say

that you'll have the shares at that price next week.' In this way he

waxed angry; but, nevertheless, he condescended to recommend a man to

them, when Caldigate declared that they would like to hire some

practical miner to accompany them. 'There's Mick Maggott,' said he,

'knows mining a'most as well as anybody. You'll hear of him, may be, up

at Henniker's. He's honest; and if you can keep him off the drink he'll

do as well as anybody. But neither Mick nor nobody else can do you no

good at Ahalala.' With that he led them out of the gate, and nodding his

head at them by way of farewell, left them to go back to Mrs.

Henniker's.

To Mrs. Henniker's they went, and there, stretched out at length on the

wooden veranda before the house, they found the hero of the

potatoes,--the man who had taken them down to Crinkett's house. He

seemed to be fast asleep, but as they came up on the boards, he turned

himself on his elbow, and looked at them. 'Well, mates,' he said, 'what

do you think of Tom Crinkett now you've seen him?'

'He doesn't seem to approve of Ahalala,' said Dick.

'In course he don't. When a new rush is opened like that, and takes

away half the hands a man has about him, and raises the wages of them

who remain, in course he don't like it. You see the difference. The Old

Stick-in-the-Mud is an established kind of thing.'

'It's a paying concern, I suppose,' said Caldigate.

'It has paid;--not a doubt about it. Whether it's played out or not, I'm

not so sure. But Ahalala is a working-man's diggings, not a master's,

such as Crinkett is now. Of course Crinkett has a down on Ahalala.'

'Your friend Jack Brien didn't seem to think much of the place,' said

Dick.

'Poor Jack is one of them who never has a stroke of luck. He's a sort of

chum who, when he has a bottle of pickles, somebody else is sure to eat

'em. Ahalala isn't so bad. It's one of them chancy places, of course.

You may and you mayn't, as I was a-saying before. When the great rush

was on, I did uncommon well at Ahalala. I never was the man I was then.'

'What became of it?' asked Caldigate with a smile.

'Mother Henniker can tell you that, or any other publican round the

country. It never will stick to me. I don't know why, but it never will.

I've had my luck, too. Oh, laws! I might have had my house, just as

grand as Polly Hooker this moment, only I never could stick to it like

Tom Crinkett. I've drank cham--paign out of buckets;--I have.'

'I'd rather have a pot of beer out of the pewter,' said Caldigate.

'Very like. One doesn't drink cham--paign because it's better nor

anything else. A nobbler of brandy's worth ten of it. It's the glory of

out-facing the swells at their own game. There was a chap over in the

other colony shod his horse with gold,--and he had to go shepherding

afterwards for thirty pounds a-year and his grub. But it's something for

him to have ridden a horse with gold shoes. You've never seen a

bucketful of cham--paign in the old country?'

When both Dick and Caldigate had owned that they had never encountered

luxury so superabundant, and had discussed the matter in various

shapes,--asking whether the bucket had been emptied, and other questions

of the same nature,--Caldigate inquired of his friend whether he knew

Mick Maggott?

'Mick Maggott!' said the man, jumping up to his feet. 'Who wants Mick

Maggott?' Then Caldigate explained the recommendation which Mr. Crinkett

had made. 'Well;--I'm darned;--Mick Maggott? I'm Mick Maggott, myself.'

Before the evening was over an arrangement had been made between the

parties, and had even been written on paper and signed by all the three.

Mick on the morrow was to proceed to Ahalala with his new comrades, and

was to remain with them for a month, assisting them in all their views;

and for this he was to receive ten shillings a-day. But, in the event of

his getting drunk, he was to be liable to dismissal at once. Mick

pleaded hard for one bout of drinking during the month;--but when Dick

explained that one bout might last for the entire time, he acknowledged

that the objection was reasonable and assented to the terms proposed.

Chapter XI

Ahalala

It was all settled that night, and some necessary purchases made.

Ahalala was twenty-three miles from Nobble, and a coach had been

established through the bush for the benefit of miners going to the

diggings;--but Mick was of opinion that miners ought to walk, with their

swag on their backs, when the distance was not more than forty miles.

'You look so foolish getting out of one of them rattletrap coaches,' he

said, 'and everybody axing whether you're going to pick for yourself or

buy a share in a claim. I'm all for walking,--if it ain't beneath you.'

They declared themselves quite ready to walk, and under Mick's guidance

they went out and bought two large red blankets and two pannikins. Mick

declared that if they went without swags on their backs and pannikins

attached to their swags, they would be regarded with evil eyes by all

who saw them. There were some words about the portmanteaus. Mick

proposed that they should be left for the entire month in the charge of

Mrs. Henniker, and, when this was pronounced impossible, he was for a

while disposed to be off the bargain. Caldigate declared that, with all

his ambition to be a miner, he must have a change of shirts. Then Mick

pointed to the swag. Couldn't he put another shirt into the swag? It was

at last settled that one portmanteau should be sent by the coach, and

one left in the charge of Mrs. Henniker. 'Them sort of traps ain't never

any good, in my mind,' said Mick. 'It's unmanly, having all them togs. I

like a wash as well as any man,--trousers, jersey, drawers, and all. I'm

always at 'em when I get a place for a rinse by the side of a creek. But

when my things are so gone that they won't hang on comfortable any

longer, I chucks 'em away and buys more. Two jerseys is good, and two

drawers is good, because of wet. Boots is awkward, and I allays does

with one pair. Some have two, and ties 'em on with the pannikin. But it

ain't ship-shape. Them's my ideas, and I've been at it these nine years.

You'll come to the same.'

The three started the next morning at six, duly invested with their

swags. Before they went they found Mrs. Henniker up, with hot tea,

boiled beef, and damper. 'Just one drop at starting,--for the good of

the house,' said Mick, apologetically. Whereupon the whisky was

brought, and Mick insisted on shouting for it out of his own pocket.

They had hardly gone a mile out of Nobble before Maggott started a

little difficulty,--merely for the purpose of solving it with a master's

hand. 'There ain't to be no misters among us, you know.'

'Certainly not,' said Caldigate.

'My name's Mick. This chap's name's Dick. I didn't exactly catch your'n.

I suppose you've been kursened.'

'Yes;--they christened me John.'

'Ain't it never been Jack with you?'

'I don't think it ever was.'

'John! It do sound lackadaisical. What I call womanish. But perhaps it's

for the better. We have such a lot of Jacks. There's dirty Jack, and

Jack the nigger, and Jack Misery,--that's poor Jack Brien;--and a lot

more. Perhaps you wouldn't like not another name of that sort.'

'Well; no,--unless it's necessary.'

'There ain't another John about the place, as I know. I never knew a

John down a mine,--never. We'll try it, anyhow.'

And so that was settled. As it happened, though Dick Shand had always

been Dick to his friend, Caldigate had never, as yet, been either John

or Jack to Dick Shand. There are men who fall into the way of being

called by their Christian names, and others who never hear them except

from their own family. But before the day was out, Caldigate had become

John to both his companions. 'It don't sound as it ought to do;--not

yet,' said Mick, after he had tried it about a dozen times in five

minutes.

Before the day was over it was clear that Mick Maggott had assumed the

mastery. When three men start on an enterprise together, one man must be

'boss.' Let the republic be as few as it may one man must be president.

And as Mick knew what he was about, he assumed the situation easily. The

fact that he was to receive wages from the others had no bearing on the

subject at all. Before they got to Ahalala, Caldigate had begun to

appreciate all this, and to understand in part what they would have to

do during this month, and how they would have to live. It was proposed

that they should at once fix on a spot,--'peg out a claim,' on some

unoccupied piece of ground, buy for themselves a small tent,--of which

they were assured that they would find many for sale,--and then begin to

sink a hole. When they entered Ahalala, Caldigate was surprised to find

that Mick was the most tired of the three. It is always so. The man who

has laboured from his youth upwards can endure with his arms. It is he

who has had leisure to shoot, to play cricket, to climb up mountains and

to handle a racket, that can walk. 'Darned if you ain't better stuff

than I took you for,' said Mick, as the three let the swags down from

their backs on the veranda of Ridley's hotel at Ahalala.

Ahalala was a very different place from Nobble,--made Nobble seem to be

almost a compact and prosperous city. At Nobble there was at any rate a

street. But at Ahalala everything was straggling. The houses, such as

they were, stood here and there about the place, while a great part of

the population lived under canvas. And then Ahalala was decidedly in the

forest. The trees around had not yet been altogether killed, nor had

they been cut down in sufficient numbers to divest the place of its

forest appearance. Ahalala was leafy, and therefore, though much less

regular, also less hideous than Nobble. When Dick first made tender

inquiry as to the comforts of an hotel, he was assured that there were

at least a couple of dozen. But the place was bewildering. There seemed

to be no beginning to it and no end. There were many tracks about here

and there,--but nothing which could be called a road. The number of

holes was infinite,--each hole covered by a rough windlass used for

taking out the dirt, which was thrown loosely anywhere round the

aperture. Here and there were to be seen little red flags stuck upon the

end of poles. These indicated, as Mick informed them, those fortunate

adventures in which gold had been found. At those very much more

numerous hillocks which showed no red flag, the labourers were hitherto

labouring in vain. There was a little tent generally near to each

hillock in which the miners slept, packed nearly as close as sheep in a

fold. As our party made its way through the midst of this new world to

Ridley's hotel, our friend observed many a miner sitting at his evening

meal. Each generally had a frying-pan between his legs, out of which he

was helping himself to meat which he had cooked on the ashes just behind

him. Sometimes two or three were sharing their provisions out of the

same frying-pan; but as a rule each miner had his own, and each had it

between his legs.

Before they had been at Ahalala twenty-four hours they also had their

tent and their frying-pan and their fire, and had pegged out their

claim, and were ready to commence operations on the morrow. It was soon

manifest to Caldigate and Dick Shand that they would have been very much

astray without a 'boss' to direct them. Three or four hours had been

passed in forming a judgment as to the spot on which they should

commence to dig. And in making his choice Mick had been guided by many

matters as to which our two adventurers were altogether ignorant. It

might be that Mick was equally so; but he at any rate assumed some

knowledge. He looked to the fall of the ground, the line in which the

red flags were to be traced,--if any such line could be found,--and was

possessed of a considerable amount of jargon as to topographical mining

secrets. At last they found a spot, near a creek, surrounded by

forest-trees, perhaps three hundred yards from the nearest adjacent

claim, and, as Mick declared, in a direct line with three red flags.

Here they determined to commence their operations. 'I don't suppose we

shall do any good,' said Caldigate to Dick, 'but we must make a

beginning, if only for the sake of hardening our hands. We shall be

learning something at the time even though we only shovel up so much

mud.'

For a fortnight they shovelled up the soil continuously without any

golden effects, and, so far, without any feeling of disappointment. Mick

had told them that if they found a speck at the end of three weeks they

would be very fortunate. They had their windlass, and they worked in

relays; one man at the bottom, one man at the wheel, and one man idle.

In this way they kept up their work during eighteen hours of the day.

Each man in this way worked twelve hours, and had twelve for sleeping,

and cooking, and eating. Other occupation they had none. During the

fortnight neither of them went any further distance from their claim

than to the neighbouring shop. Mick often expressed his admiration at

their continued industry, not understanding the spirit which will induce

such young men as them to work, even when the work is agonising. And

they were equally charmed with Mick's sobriety and loyalty. Not a word

had been said as to hours of work,--and yet he was as constant to their

long hours as though the venture was his own,--as though there was no

question of wages.

'We ain't had a drop o' drink yet,' said Mick one night. 'Ain't we a

holding off like Britons?' There was great triumph in his voice as he

said this;--very great triumph, but, also, as Caldigate thought, a sound

of longing also. They were now in their third week, and the word whisky

had never been pronounced between them. At this moment, when Mick's

triumphant ejaculation was uttered, they were all lying--in bed. It

shall be called bed by way of compliment. They had bought a truss of

straw, which Mick had declared to be altogether unnecessary and

womanish, and over that was laid a white india-rubber sheet which

Caldigate had brought with him from England. This, too, had roused the

miner's wrath. Nevertheless he condescended to lie upon it. This was

their bed; and here they lay, each wrapped up in his blanket, Mick in

the middle, with our two friends at the sides. Now it was not only on

Mick's account, but quite as much in reference to Dick Shand, that

Caldigate deprecated any reference to drink. The abstention hitherto had

been marvellous. He himself would have gone daily to the store for a

bottle of beer, but that he recognised the expediency of keeping them

away from the place. He had heard that it was a peculiarity of the

country that all labour was done without drink, even when it was done by

determined drunkards. The drunkard would work for a month, and then

drink for a month,--and then, after a time, would die. The drink almost

always consisted of spirits of the worst description. It seemed to be

recognised by the men that work and drink must be kept separate. But

Mick's mind travelled away on this occasion from the little tent to the

delights of Ridley's bar. 'We haven't had a drop of drink yet,' he said.

'We'll push through the month without it;--eh, old boy?' said Caldigate.

'What wouldn't I give for a pint of bitter beer?' said Shand.

'Or a bottle of Battleaxe between the three of us!' said

Mick;--Battleaxe being the name for a certain brand of brandy.

'Not a drop till the month is over,' said Caldigate turning himself

round in his blanket. Then there were whisperings between the other two

men, of which he could only hear the hum.

On the next morning at six Caldigate and Dick Shand were at the hole

together. It was Caldigate's turn to work till noon, whereas Dick went

off at nine, and Mick would come on from nine till three. At nine Mick

did not make his appearance, and Dick declared his purpose of looking

after him. Caldigate also threw down his tools, as he could not work

alone, and went in search. The upshot of it was, that he did not see

either of his companions again till he found them both very drunk at a

drinking-shop about two miles away from their claim, just before dusk!

This was terrible. He did at last succeed in bringing back his own

friend to the tent, having, however, a sad task in doing so. But Mick

Maggott would not be moved. He had his wits about him enough to swear

that he cared for nothing. He was going to have a spree. Nobody had ever

known him to be talked out of it when he had once set his mind upon it.

He had set his mind upon it now, and he meant to have his whack. This

was what he said of himself: 'It ain't no good, John. It ain't no good

at all, John. Don't you trouble yourself, John. I'm going to have it

out, John, so I tell you.' This he said, nodding his head about in a

maudlin sort of way, and refusing to allow himself to be moved.

On the next day Dick Shand was sick, repentant, and idle. On the third,

he returned to his work,--working however, with difficulty. After that,

he fairly recovered himself, and the two Cambridge men went on

resolutely at their hole. They soon found how hard it was not to go

astray without their instructed mate. The sides of the shaft became

crooked and uneven, and the windlass sometimes could not be made to

work. But still they persevered, and went on by themselves for an entire

week without a sign of gold. During this time various fruitless

expeditions were made by both the men in search of Maggott. He was still

at the same drinking-shop, but could not be induced to leave it. At last

they found him with the incipient horrors of delirium tremens, and yet

they could not get him away. The man who kept the place was quite used

to delirium tremens, and thought nothing about it. When Caldigate tried

a high moral tone everybody around him laughed at him.

They had been digging for a month, and still without a speck of gold,

when, one morning early, Mick appeared in front of the tent. It was then

about eight, and our friends had stopped their work to eat their

breakfast. The poor man, without saying a word, came and crouched down

before them;--not in shame,--not at all that; but apparently in an agony

of sickness,--'I've had my bout,' he said.

'I don't suppose you're much the better for it,' replied Caldigate.

'No; I ain't none the better. I thought it was all up with me yesterday.

Oh, laws! I've had it heavy this time.'

'Why are you such a fool?'

'Well;--you see, John, some of us is born fools. I'm one of 'em. You

needn't tell me, 'cause I know all about it without any sermoning.

Nobody don't know it so well as I do! How should they? If you had my

inside now,--and my head! Oh, laws!'

'Give it up, man.'

'That's easy said;--as if I wouldn't if I could. I haven't got a blessed

coin left to buy a bite of bread with,--and I couldn't touch a morsel if

I had ever so much. I'll take my blanket and be off as soon as I can

move.' All this time he had been crouching, but now he threw himself at

length upon the ground.

Of course they did what they could for the poor wretch. They got him

into the tent, and they made him swallow some tea. Then he slept; and in

the course of the afternoon he had so far recovered as to be able to eat

a bit of meat. Then, when his companions were at their work, he

carefully packed up his swag, and fastening it on to his back, appeared

by the side of the hole. 'I'm come to bid you good-bye he said.

'Where are you going, Mick?' asked Caldigate, climbing up out of the

hole by the rope.

'I'm blessed if I know, but I'm off. You are getting that hole

tarnation crooked.'

The man was going without any allusion to the wages he had earned, or to

the work that he had done. But then, in truth, he had not earned his

wages, as he had broken his contract. He made no complaint, however, and

no apology, but was prepared to start.

'That's all nonsense,' said Dick, catching hold of him.

'You put your swag down,' said Caldigate, also catching hold of the

other shoulder.

'What am I to put my swag down for? I'm a-going back to Nobble.

Crinkett'll give me work.'

'You're not going to leave us in that way,' said Dick.

'Stop and make the shaft straight,' said Caldigate. The man looked

irresolute. 'Friends are not to part like that.'

'Friends!' said the poor fellow. 'Who'll be friends to such a beast as I

be? But I'll stay out the month if you'll find me my grub.'

'You shall have your grub and your money, too. Do you think we've

forgotten the potatoes?'

'---- the potatoes,' said the man, bursting into tears. Then he chucked

away his swag, and threw himself under the tent upon the straw. The next

day he was making things as straight as he could down the shaft.

When they had been at work about five weeks there was a pole stuck into

their heap of dirt, and on the top of the pole there was a little red

flag flying. At about thirty feet from the surface, when they had

already been obliged to insert transverse logs in the shaft to prevent

the sides from falling in, they had come upon a kind of soil altogether

different from the ordinary clay through which they had been working.

There was a stratum of loose shingle or gravelly earth, running

apparently in a sloping direction, taking the decline of the very

slight hill on which their claim was situated. Mick, as soon as this was

brought to light, became an altered man. The first bucket of this stuff

that was pulled up was deposited by him separately, and he at once sat

down to wash it. This he did in an open tin pan. Handful after handful

he washed, shifting and teasing it about in the pan, and then he cast it

out, always leaving some very small residuum. He was intent upon his

business to a degree that Caldigate would have thought to be beyond the

man's nature. With extreme patience he went on washing handful after

handful all the day, while the other two pulled up fresh buckets of the

same stuff. He would not pause to eat, or hardly to talk. At last there

came a loud exclamation. 'By------, we've got it!' Then Dick and

Caldigate, stooping down, were shown four or five little specks in the

angle of the pan's bottom. Before the sun had set they had stuck up

their little red flag, and a crowd of neighbours was standing round them

asking questions as to their success.

Chapter XII

Mademoiselle Cettini

After three days of successful washing, when it became apparent that a

shed must be built, and that, if possible, some further labour must be

hired, Mick said that he must go. 'I ain't earned nothing,' he said,

'because of that bout, and I ain't going to ask for nothing, but I can't

stand this any longer. I hope you'll make your fortins.' Then came the

explanation. It was not possible, he said, that a regular miner, such as

he was, should be a party to such a grand success without owning a share

in it. He was quite aware that nothing belonged to him. He was working

for wages and he had forfeited them. But he couldn't see the gold

coming out under his hands in pailfuls and feel that none of it belonged

to him. Then it was agreed that there should be no more talk of wages,

and that each should have a third share in the concern. Very much was

said on the matter of drink, in all of which Caldigate was clever enough

to impose on his friend Dick the heavy responsibility of a mentor. A man

who has once been induced to preach to another against a fault will feel

himself somewhat constrained by his own sermons. Mick would make no

promises; but declared his intention of trying very hard. 'If anybody'd

knock me down as soon as I goes a yard off the claim, that'd be best.'

And so they renewed their work, and at the end of six weeks from the

commencement of their operations sold nine ounces of gold to the manager

of the little branch bank which had already established itself at

Ahalala. These were hardly 'pailfuls'; but gold is an article which adds

fervour to the imagination and almost creates a power for romance.

Other matters, however, were not running smoothly with John Caldigate at

this eventful time. To have found gold so soon after their arrival was

no doubt a great triumph, and justified him in writing a long letter to

his father, in which he explained what he had done, and declared that he

looked forward to success with confidence. But still he was far from

being at ease. He could not suffer himself to remain hidden at Ahalala

without saying something of his whereabouts to Mrs. Smith. After what

had happened between them he would be odious to himself if he omitted to

keep the promise which he had made to her. And yet he would so fain have

forgotten her,--or rather have wiped away from the reality of his past

life that one episode, had it been possible. A month's separation had

taught him to see how very silly he had been in regard to this

woman,--and had also detracted much from those charms which had

delighted him on board ship. She was pretty, she was clever, she had

the knack of being a pleasant companion. But how much more than all

these was wanted in a wife? And then he knew nothing about her. She

might be, or have been, all that was disreputable. If he could not shake

himself free from her, she would be a millstone round his neck. He was

aware of all that, and as he thought of it he would think also of the

face of Hester Bolton, and remember her form as she sat silent in the

big house at Chesterton. But nevertheless it was necessary that he

should write to Mrs. Smith. He had promised that he would do so, and he

must keep his word.

The name of the woman had not been mentioned between him and Dick Shand

since they left the ship. Dick had been curious, but had been afraid to

inquire, and had in his heart applauded the courage of the man who had

thus been able to shake off at once a woman with whom he had amused

himself. Caldigate himself was continually meditating as he worked with

the windlass in his hand, or with his pick at the bottom of the hole,

whether in conformity with the usages of the world he could not

simply--drop her. Then he remembered the words which had passed between

them on the subject, and he could not do it. He was as yet too young to

be at the same time so wise and so hard. 'I shall hold you as engaged to

me,' he had said, 'and myself as engaged to you.' And he remembered the

tones of her voice as, with her last words, she had said to him, 'My

love, my love!' They had been very pleasant to him then, but now they

were most unfortunate. They were unfortunate because there had been a

power in them from which he was now unable to extricate himself.

Therefore, during one of those leisure periods in which Mick and Dick

were at work, he wrote his letter, with the paper on his knees,

squatting down just within his tent on a deal case which had contained

boxes of sardines, bottles of pickles, and cans of jam. For now, in

their prosperity, they had advanced somewhat beyond the simple plenty of

the frying-pan. It was a difficult letter to write. Should it be

ecstatic and loving, or cold and severe,--or light, and therefore false?

'My own one, here I am. I have struck gold. Come to me and share it.'

That would have been ecstatic and loving.' 'Tis a hard life this, and

not fit for a woman's weakness. But it must be my life--and therefore

let there be an end of all between us.' That would have been cold and

severe. 'How are you, and what are you doing? Dick and I are shoving

along. It isn't half as nice as on board ship. Hope to see you before

long, and am yours,--just the same as ever.' That would have been light

and false,--keeping the word of promise to the ear but breaking it to

the heart. He could not write either of these. He began by describing

what they had done, and had completed two pages before he had said a

word of their peculiar circumstances in regard to each other. He felt

that his letter was running into mere gossip, and was not such as she

would have a right to expect. If any letter were sent at all, there must

be something more in it than all this. And so, after much thinking of

it, he at last rushed, as it were, into hot words, and ended it as

follows: 'I have put off to the last what I have really got to say. Let

me know what you are doing and what you wish,--and whether you love me.

I have not as yet the power of offering you a home, but I trust that the

time may come.' These last words were false. He knew that they were

false. But the falseness was not of a nature to cause him to be ashamed.

It shames no man to swear that he loves a woman when he has ceased to

love her;--but it does shame him to drop off from the love which he has

promised. He balanced the matter in his mind for a while before he would

send his letter. Then, getting up quickly, he rushed forth, and dropped

it into the post-office box.

The very next day chance brought to Ahalala one who had been a

passenger on board the Goldfinder; and the man, hearing of the success

of Shand and Caldigate came to see them. 'Of course you know,' said the

man, 'what your fellow-passenger is doing down at Sydney?' Dick Shand,

who was present, replied that they had heard nothing of any

fellow-passenger. Caldigate understood at once to whom the allusion was

made, and was silent. 'Look here,' said the man, bringing a newspaper

out of his pocket, and pointing to a special advertisement. 'Who do you

think that is?' The advertisement declared that Mademoiselle Cettini

would, on such and such a night, sing a certain number of songs, and

dance a certain number of dances, and perform a certain number of

tableaux, at a certain theatre in Sydney. 'That's your Mrs. Smith,' said

the man, turning to Caldigate.

'I am very glad she has got employment,' said Caldigate; 'but she is not

my Mrs. Smith.'

'We all thought that you and she were very thick.'

'All the same I beg you to understand that she is not my Mrs. Smith,'

repeated Caldigate, endeavouring to appear unconcerned, but hardly able

to conceal his anger.

Dancing dances, singing songs, and acting tableaux;--and all under the

name of Mademoiselle Cettini! Nothing could be worse,--unless, indeed,

it might be of service to him to know that she was earning her bread,

and therefore not in distress, and earning it after a fashion of which

he would be at liberty to express his disapproval. Nothing more was said

at the time about Mrs. Smith, and the man went his way.

Ten days afterwards Caldigate, in the presence both of Mick and Dick,

declared his purpose of going down to Sydney. 'Our luggage must be

looked after,' said he;--'and I have a friend whom I want to see,' he

added, not choosing to lie. At this time all was going successfully with

them. Mick Maggott lived in such a manner that no one near him would

have thought that he knew what whisky meant. His self-respect had

returned to him, and he was manifestly 'boss.' There had come to be

necessity for complicated woodwork below the surface, and he had shown

himself to be a skilled miner. And it had come to pass that our two

friends were as well assured of his honesty as of their own. He had been

a veritable godsend to them,--and would remain so, could he be kept away

from the drinking-shops.

'If you go away don't you think he'll break out?' Dick asked when they

were alone together.

'I hope not. He seems to have been steadied by success. At any rate I

must go.'

'Is it to see--Mrs. Smith?' Dick as he asked the question put on his

most serious face. He did not utter the name as though he were finding

fault. The time that had passed had been sufficient to quench the

unpleasantness of their difference on board ship. He was justified in

asking his friend such a question, and Caldigate felt that it was so.

'I am.'

'Don't you think, upon the whole,----. I don't like to interfere, but

upon my word the thing is so important.'

'You think I had better not see her?'

'I do.'

'And lie to her?'

'All is fair in love and war.'

'That means that no faith is due to a woman. I cannot live by such a

doctrine. I do not mind owning to you that I wish I could do as you bid

me. I can't. I cannot be so false. I must go, old fellow; but I know all

that you would say to me, and I will endeavour to escape honestly from

this trouble.' And so he went.

Yes;--to escape honestly from that trouble! But how? It is just that

trouble from which there is no honest escape,--unless a man may honestly

break his word. He had engaged himself to her so much that, simply to

ignore her would be cowardly as well as false. There was but one thing

that he could do, but one step that he could take, by which his security

and his self-respect might both be maintained. He would tell her the

exact truth, and put it to her whether, looking at their joint

circumstances, it would not be better that they should--part. Reflecting

on this during his three days' journey down to Sydney, it was thus that

he resolved,--forgetting altogether in his meditations the renewed force

of the woman's charms upon himself.

As he went from the railway station at Sydney to the third-class inn at

which he located himself, he saw the hoardings on all sides placarded

with the name of Mademoiselle Cettini. And there was a picture on some

of these placards of a wonderful female, without much clothes, which was

supposed to represent some tragic figure in a tableau. There was the

woman whom he was to make his wife. He had travelled all night, and had

intended to seek Mrs. Smith immediately after his breakfast. But so

unhappy was he, so much disgusted by the tragic figure in the picture,

that he postponed his visit and went after his luggage. His luggage was

all right in the warehouse, and he arranged that it should be sent down

to Nobble. Waggons with stores did make their way to Nobble from the

nearest railway station, and hopes were held out that the packages might

be there in six weeks' time. He would have been willing to postpone

their arrival for twelve months, for twenty-four months, could he, as

compensation have been enabled to postpone, with honour, his visit to

Mrs. Smith for the same time.

Soon after noon, however, his time was vacant, and he rushed to his

fate. She had sent him her address, and he found her living in very

decent lodgings overlooking the public park. He was at once shown up to

her room, where he found her at breakfast. 'So you have come,' she

said. Then, when the door was shut, she flung herself into his arms.

He was dressed as a miner might be dressed who was off work and out for

a holiday;--clean, rough, and arranged with a studied intention to look

as little like a gentleman as possible. The main figure and manner were

so completely those of a gentleman that the disguise was not perfect;

but yet he was rough. She was dressed with all the pretty care which a

woman can use when she expects her lover to see her in morning costume.

Anything more unlike the Mrs. Smith of the ship could not be imagined.

If she had been attractive then, what was she now? If her woman's charms

sufficed to overcome his prudence while they were so clouded, what

effect would they have upon him now? And she was in his arms! Here there

was no quartermaster to look after the proprieties;--no Mrs. Crompton,

no Mrs. Callander, no Miss Green to watch with a hundred eyes for the

exchange of a chance kiss in some moment of bliss. 'So you have come!

Oh, my darling oh, my love!' No doubt it was all just as it should be.

If a lady may not call the man to whom she is engaged her love and her

darling, what proper use can there be for such words? And into whose

arms is she to jump, if not into his? As he pressed her to his heart,

and pressed his lips to hers, he told himself that he ought to have

arranged it all by letter.

'Why Cettini?' he asked. But he smiled as he put the question. It was

intended to be serious, but still he could not be hard upon her all at

once.

'Why fifty thousand fools?'

'I don't understand.'

'Supposing there to be fifty thousand people in Sydney,--as to which I

know nothing. Or why ever so many million fools in London? If I called

myself Mrs. Smith nobody would come and see me. If I called myself

Madame Cettini, not nearly so many would come. You have got to

inculcate into the minds of the people an idea that a pure young girl is

going to jump about for their diversion. They know it isn't so. But

there must be a flavour of the idea. It isn't nice, but one has to

live.'

'Were you ever Cettini before?'

'Yes,--when I was on the stage as a girl.' Then he thought he remembered

that she had once told him some particular in regard to her early life,

which was incompatible with this, unless indeed she had gone under more

than one name before she was married. 'I used as a child to dance and

sing under that name.'

'Was it your father's name?'

She smiled as she answered, 'You want to discover all the little mean

secrets of my life at once, and do not reflect that, in so far as they

were mean, they are disagreeable as subjects of conversation. I was not

mean myself.'

'I am sure of that.'

'If you are sure of it, is not that enough? Of course I have been among

low people. If not, why should I have been a singer on the stage at so

early an age, why a dancer, why should I have married such a one as Mr.

Smith?'

'I do not know of what sort he was,' said Caldigate.

'This is not the time to ask, when you have just come to see me;--when I

am so delighted to see you! Oh, it is such a pleasure! I have not had a

nice word spoken to me since I left the Goldfinder. Come and take a walk

in the gardens? Nobody knows me off the stage yet, and nobody knows you.

So we can do just as we like. Come and tell me about the gold.'

He did go, and did tell her about the gold, and before he had been with

her an hour, sitting about on the benches in that loveliest of all

places, the public gardens at Sydney, he was almost happy with her. It

was now late in the autumn, in May; but the end of the autumn in Sydney

is the most charming time of the year. He spent the whole day with her,

dining with her in her lodgings at five in order that he might take her

to the theatre at seven. She had said a great deal to him about her

performances, declaring that he would find them to be neither vulgar nor

disagreeable. She told him that she had no friend in Sydney, but that

she had been able to get an engagement for a fortnight at Melbourne, and

had been very shortly afterwards pressed to come on to Sydney. She

listened not only with patience, but apparently with the greatest

pleasure, to all that he could tell her of Dick Shand, and Mr. Crinkett,

and Mick Maggott, arousing herself quite to enthusiasm when he came to

the finding of the gold. But there was not a word said the whole day as

to their future combined prospects. Nor was there any more outspoken

allusion to loves and darlings, or any repetition of that throwing

herself into his arms. For once it was natural. If she were wanted thus

again, the action must be his,--not hers. She was clever enough to know

that.

'What do you think of it?' she said, when he waited to take her home.

'It is the only good dancing I ever saw in my life. But----'

'Well!'

'I will tell you to-morrow.'

'Tell me whatever you think and you will see that I will attend to you.

Come about eleven,--not sooner, as I shall not be dressed. Now

good-night.'

Chapter XIII

Coming Back

The letter which Caldigate wrote to his father from Ahalala, telling him

of the discovery of gold upon their claim, contained the first tidings

which reached Folking of the wanderer, and that was not received till

seven or eight months had passed by since he left the place. The old

Squire, during that time, had lived a very solitary life. In regard to

his nephew, whom he had declared his purpose of partially adopting, he

had expressed himself willing to pay for his education, but had not

proposed to receive him at Folking. And as to that matter of heirship,

he gave his brother to understand that it was not to be regarded as a

settled thing. Folking was now his own to do what he liked with it, and

as such it was to remain. But he would treat his nephew as a son while

the nephew seemed to him to merit such treatment. As for the estate, he

was not at all sure whether it would not be better for the community at

large, and for the Caldigate family in particular, that it should be cut

up and sold in small parcels. There was a long correspondence between

him and his brother, which was ended by his declaring that he did not

wish to see any of the family just at present at Folking. He was low in

spirits, and would prefer to be alone.

He was very low in spirits and completely alone. All those who knew

anything about him,--and they were very few, the tenants, perhaps, and

servants, and old Mr. Bolton,--were of opinion that he had torn his son

out from all place in his heart, had so thoroughly disinherited the

sinner, not only from his house and acres, but from his love, that they

did not believe him capable of suffering from regret. But even they knew

very little of the man. As he wandered about alone among the dikes, as

he sat alone among his books, even as he pored over the volumes which

were always in his hand, he was ever mourning and moaning over his

desolation. His wife and daughters had been taken from him by the hand

of God;--but how had it come to pass that he had also lost his son, that

son who was all that was left to him? When he had first heard of those

dealings with Davis, while John was amusing himself with the frivolities

of Babington, he had been full of wrath, and had declared to himself

that the young man must be expelled, if not from all affection, yet from

all esteem. And he had gone on to tell himself that it would be

unprofitable for him to live with a son whom he did not esteem. Then it

had come to pass that, arguing it out in his own mind, rationally, as he

had thought, but still under the impulse of hot anger, he had determined

that it was better that they should part, even though the parting should

be for ever. But now he had almost forgotten Davis,--had turned the

matter over in his mind till he had taught himself to think that the

disruption had been altogether his son's work, and in no degree his own.

His son had not loved him. He had not been able to inspire his son with

love. He was solitary and wretched because he had been harsh and

unforgiving. That was his own judgment as to himself. But he never said a

word of his feelings to any human being.

John had promised to write. The promise had not been very

enthusiastically given; but still, as the months went by it was

constantly remembered. The young man, after leaving Cambridgeshire, had

remained some weeks at the Shands' house before he had started;--and

from thence he had not written. The request had been that he should

write from Australia, and the correspondence between him and his father

had always been so slight, that it had not occurred to him to write from

Pollington. But Mr. Caldigate had,--not expected, but hoped that a

letter might come at the last moment. He knew to a day, to an hour, when

the vessel would sail from Plymouth. There might have been a letter from

Plymouth, but no letter came. And then the months went by slowly. The

son did not write from Melbourne, nor from Nobble,--nor from Ahalala

till gold had been found. So it came to pass that nearly eight months

had passed, and that the father had told himself again and again that

his son had torn himself altogether away from all remembrance of his

home, before the letter came.

It was not a long letter, but it was very satisfactory The finding of

the gold was in itself, of course, a great thing; but the manner in

which it was told, without triumph or exultation, but with an air of

sober, industrious determination, was much more; and then there was a

word or two at the end: 'Dear father,--I think of you every day, and am

already looking forward to the time when I may return and see you

again.' As he read it, the tears rolled down his cheeks, and unluckily

the old housekeeper came into the room at the same time.

'Is it from Mr. John, sir?'

He had to recover himself, and to get rid of his tears, and to answer

the old woman in an unconcerned tone, all in a moment, and it

disconcerted him.

'Yes,--yes;' he said. 'I'll tell you all about it another time.'

'Is he well, sir?'

'I daresay he is. He doesn't say. It's about business. Didn't you hear

me say that I'd tell you another time?' And so the old woman was turned

out of the room, having seen the tear and heard the little gurgle in the

throat.

'He seems to be doing well,' the Squire said to Mr. Holt. 'He has got a

couple of partners, and they have succeeded in finding gold. He may

probably come back some day; but I don't suppose it will be for the

next twenty years.'

After that he marked the posts, which he knew came from that part of the

world by San Francisco, and had resolved not to expect anything by that

of the next month,--when there came, a day before its time, a much

longer letter than the last. In this there was given a detailed

description of the 'claim' at Ahalala, which had already been named

Folking. Much was said of Mick, and much was said of Dick, both of whom

were working 'as steady as rocks.' The number of ounces extracted were

stated, with the amount of profits which had been divided. And something

was said as to the nature of their life at Ahalala. They were still

living under their original tent, but were meditating the erection of a

wooden shanty. Ahalala, the writer said, was not a place at which a

prosperous miner could expect to locate himself for many years; but the

prospects were good enough to justify some present attention to personal

comforts. All this was rational, pleasant, and straightforward. And in

the letter there was no tone or touch of the old quarrel. It was full

and cordial,--such as any son might write to any father. It need hardly

be said that there was no mention made in it of Mrs. Smith. It was

written after the return of John Caldigate from Sydney to Ahalala, but

contained no reference to any matrimonial projects.

Letters then came regularly, month by month, and were always regularly

answered,--till a chance reader would have thought that no father and no

son stood on better terms with each other. There had been misfortunes;

but the misfortunes did not seem to touch John Caldigate himself. After

three months of hard work and steady conduct Mick Maggott had broken out

and had again taken to drinking champagne out of buckets. Efforts were

made, with infinite trouble, to reclaim him, which would be successful

for a time,--and then again he would slip away into the mud. And then

Shand would sometimes go into the mud with him; and Shand, when drunk,

would be more unmanageable even than Mick. And this went on till Mick

had--killed himself, and Dick Shand had disappeared. 'I grieve for the

man as for a dear friend,' he said in one of his father's letters; 'for

he has been as true to me as steel in all things, save drink; and I feel

that I have learned under him the practical work of a gold-miner as it

cannot be learned except by the unwearied attention of the teacher.

Could he have kept from spirits, this man would have made a large

fortune and would have deserved it; for he was indefatigable and

never-ending in resources.' Such was the history of poor Mick Maggott.

And Shand's history was told also. Shand strayed away to Queensland, and

then returning was again admitted to a certain degree of partnership,

and then again fell into drink, and at last, deserting the trade of a

miner, tried his hand at various kinds of work, till at last he became a

simple shepherd. From time to time Caldigate sent him money when he was

in want of it, but they had not again come together as associates in

their work.

All this was told in his monthly letters which came to be expected at

Folking, till each letter was regarded as the rising of a new sun. There

is a style of letter-writing which seems to indicate strength of purpose

and a general healthy condition on the part of the writer. In all his

letters, the son spoke of himself and his doings with confidence and

serenity, somewhat surprising his father after a while by always

desiring to be remembered to Mr., Mrs., and Miss Bolton. This went on

not only from month to month, but from year to year, till at the end of

three years from the date at which the son had left Folking, there had

come to be a complete confidence between him and his father. John

Caldigate had gone into partnership with Crinkett,--who had indeed

tried to cheat him wretchedly but had failed,--and at that time was the

manager of the Polyeuka mine. The claim at Ahalala had been sold, and he

had deserted the flashy insecurity of alluvial searchings for the

fundamental security of rock-gold. He was deep in the crushing of

quartz, and understood well the meaning of two ounces to the ton,--that

glittering boast by which Crinkett had at first thought to allure him.

From time to time he sent money home, paying back to his father and to

Bolton's bank what had been borrowed on the estate. For there had passed

between them many communications respecting Folking. The extravagances

of the son became almost the delight of the father, when the father had

become certain of the son's reform. There had been even jocular

reference to Davis, and a complete understanding as to the amount of

money to be given to the nephew in compensation for the blighted hopes

as to the reversion of the property.

Why it should have been that these years of absence should have endeared

to John Caldigate a place which, while it was his home, had always been

distasteful to him, I cannot perhaps explain to those readers who have

never strayed far from their original nests;--and to those who have been

wanderers I certainly need not explain it. As soon as he felt that he

could base the expression of his desires as to Folking on the foundation

of substantial remittances, he was not slow to say that he should like

to keep the place. He knew that he had no right to the reversion, but

perhaps his father would sympathise with his desire to buy back his

right. His father, with all his political tenets as to land, with his

often-expressed admiration as to the French system, with his loud

denunciations of the absurdity of binding a special family to a special

fraction of the earth's surface, did sympathise with him so strongly,

that he at once accepted the arrangement. 'I think that his conduct has

given him a right to demand it,' he said to Mr. Bolton.

'I don't quite see that. Money certainly gives a man great powers. If he

has money enough he can buy the succession to Folking if you choose to

sell it to him.'

'I mean as my son,' said the father somewhat proudly. 'He was the heir.'

'But he ceased to be so,--by his own doing. I advised you to think

longer over it before you allowed him to dispossess himself.'

'It certainly has been all for the best.'

'I hope so. But when you talk of his right, I am bound to say that he

has none. Folking is now yours, without encumbrance, and you can give it

to whom you please.'

'It was he who paid off the mortgage.'

'You have told me that he sent you part of the money;--but that's

between you and him. I am very glad, Caldigate, that your son has done

so well;--and the more so perhaps because the early promise was not

good. But it may be doubted whether a successful gold-digger will settle

down quietly as an English country gentleman.'

There can be no doubt that old Mr. Bolton was a little jealous, and,

perhaps, in some degree incredulous, as to the success of John Caldigate.

His sons had worked hard from the very beginning of their lives. With

them there had been no period of Newmarket, Davis, and disreputation. On

the basis of capital, combined with conduct, they had gradually risen to

high success. But here was a young man, who, having by his

self-indulgence thrown away all the prospects of his youth, had

rehabilitated himself by the luck of finding gold in a gully. To Mr.

Bolton it was no better than had he found a box of treasure at the

bottom of a well. Mr. Bolton had himself been a seeker of money all his

life, but he had his prejudices as to the way in which money was to be

sought. It should be done in a gradual, industrious manner, and in

accordance with recognised forms. A digger who might by chance find a

lump of gold as big as his head, or might work for three months without

finding any, was to him only one degree better than Davis, and therefore

he did not receive his old friend's statements as to the young man's

success with all the encouragement which his old friend would have

liked.

But his father was very enthusiastic in his return letter to the miner.

The matter as to the estate had been arranged. The nephew, who, after

all, had not shown himself to be very praiseworthy, had already

been--compensated. His own will had already been made,--of course in his

son's favour. As there had been so much success,--and as continued

success must always be doubtful,--would it not be well that he should

come back as soon as possible? There would be enough now for them all.

Then he expressed an opinion that such a place as Nobble could not be

very nice for a permanent residence.

Nobble was not very nice. Over and beside his professional success,

there was not much in his present life which endeared itself to John

Caldigate. But the acquisition of gold is a difficult thing to leave.

There is a curse about it, or a blessing,--it is hard to decide

which,--that makes it almost impossible for a man to tear himself away

from its pursuit when it is coming in freely. And the absolute

gold,--not the money, not the balance at one's banker's, not the

plentiful so much per annum,--but the absolute metal clinging about the

palm of one's hands like small gravel, or welded together in a lump too

heavy to be lifted, has a peculiar charm of its own. I have heard of a

man who, having his pocket full of diamonds, declared, as he let them

run through his fingers, that human bliss could not go beyond that

sensation. John Caldigate did not shoe his horse with gold; but he liked

to feel that he had enough gold by him to shoe a whole team. He could

not return home quite as yet. His affairs were too complicated to be

left quite at a moment's notice. If, as he hoped, he should find himself

able to leave the colony within four years of the day on which he had

begun work, and could then do so with an adequate fortune, he believed

that he should have done better than any other Englishman who had set

himself to the task of gold-finding. In none of his letters did he say

anything special about Hester Bolton; but his inquiries about the family

generally were so frequent as to make his father wonder why such

questions should be asked. The squire himself, who was living hardly a

dozen miles from Mr. Bolton's house, did not see the old banker above

once a quarter perhaps and the ladies of the family certainly not

oftener than once a year. Very little was said in answer to any of

John's inquiries. 'Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Bolton are, I believe, quite

well.' So much was declared in one of the old squire's letters; and even

that little served to make known that at any rate, so far, no tidings as

to marriage on the part of Hester had reached the ear of her father's

old friend. Perhaps this was all that John Caldigate wanted to learn.

At last there came word that John intended to come home with the next

month's mail. This letter arrived about midsummer, when the miner had

been absent three years and a half. He had not settled all his affairs

so completely but that it might be necessary that he should return; but

he thought that he would be able to remain at least twelve months in

England. And in England he intended to make his home. Gold, he said, was

certainly very attractive; but he did not like New South Wales as a

country in which to live. He had now contracted his ventures to the one

enterprise of the Polyeuka mine, from which he was receiving large

monthly dividends. If that went on prosperously, perhaps he need not

return to the colony at all. 'Poor Dick Shand!' he said. 'He is a

shepherd far away in the west, hardly earning better wages than an

English ploughman, and I am coming home with a pocket full of money! A

few glasses of whisky have made all the difference!'

The squire when he received this felt more of exultation than he had

ever known in his life. It seemed as though something of those

throbbings of delight which are common to most of us when we are young,

had come to him for the first time in his old age. He could not bring

himself to care in the least for Dick Shand. At last,--at last,--he was

going to have near him a companion that he could love.

'Well, yes; I suppose he has put together a little money,' he said to

Farmer Holt, when that worthy tenant asked enthusiastically as to the

truth of the rumours which were spread about as to the young squire's

success. 'I rather think he'll settle down and live in the old place

after all.'

'That's what he ought to do, squoire--that's what he ought to do,' said

Mr. Holt, almost choked by the energy of his own utterances.

Chapter XIV

Again at Home

On his arrival in England John Caldigate went instantly down to Folking.

He had come back quite fortified in his resolution of making Hester

Bolton his wife, if he should find Hester Bolton willing and if she

should have grown at all into that form and manner, into those ways of

look, of speech, and of gait, which he had pictured to himself when

thinking of her. Away at Nobble the females by whom he had been

surrounded had not been attractive to him. In all our colonies the women

are beautiful and in the large towns a society is soon created, of which

the fastidious traveller has very little ground to complain; but in the

small distant bush-towns, as they are called, the rougher elements must

predominate Our hero, though he had worn moleskin trousers and jersey

shirts, and had worked down a pit twelve hours a-day with a pickaxe, had

never reconciled himself to female roughnesses. He had condescended to

do so occasionally,--telling himself that it was his destiny to pass his

life among such surroundings; but his imagination had ever been at work

with him, and he possessed a certain aptitude for romance which told him

continually that Hester Bolton was the dream of his life, and ought to

become, if possible, the reality; and now he came back resolved to

attempt the reality,--unless he should find that the Hester Bolton of

Chesterton was altogether different from the Hester Bolton of his

dreams.

The fatted calf was killed for him in a very simple but full-hearted

way. There was no other guest to witness the meeting. 'And here you

are,' said the father.

'Yes, sir, here I am;--all that's left of me.'

'There is quite plenty,' said the father, looking at the large

proportions of his son. 'It seems but a day or two since you went;--and

yet they have been long days. I hardly expected to see you again,

John,--certainly not so soon as this; certainly not in such

circumstances. If ever a man was welcome to a house, you are welcome to

this. And now,--what do you mean to do with yourself?'

'By nine o'clock to-morrow morning you will probably find a pit opened

on the lawn, and I shall be down to the middle, looking for gold. Ah,

sir, I wish you could have known poor Mick Maggott.'

'If he would have made holes in my lawn I am glad he did not come home

with you.' This was the first conversation, but both the father and son

felt that there was a tone about it which had never before been heard

between them.

John Caldigate at this time was so altered in appearance, that they who

had not known him well might possibly have mistaken him. He was now

nearly thirty, but looked older than his age. The squareness of his brow

was squarer, and here and there through his dark brown hair there was to

be seen an early tinge of coming grey; and about his mouth was all the

decision of purpose which comes to a man when he is called upon to act

quickly on his own judgment in matters of importance; and there was that

look of self-confidence which success gives. He had thriven in all that

he had undertaken. In that gold-finding business of his he had made no

mistakes. Men who had been at it when a boy had tried to cheat him, but

had failed. He had seen into such mysteries as the business possessed

with quick glances, and had soon learned to know his way. And he had

neither gambled nor drank,--which are the two rocks on which gold-miners

are apt to wreck their vessels. All this gave him an air of power and

self-assertion which might, perhaps, have been distasteful to an

indifferent acquaintance, but which at this first meeting was very

pleasing to the father. His son was somebody,--had done something, that

son of whom he had been so thoroughly ashamed when the dealings with

Davis had first been brought to light. He had kept up his reading too;

had strong opinions of his own respecting politics; regarded the

colonies generally from a politico-economical point of view; had ideas

on social, religious, and literary subjects sufficiently alike to his

father's not to be made disagreeable by the obstinacy with which he

maintained them. He had become much darker in colour, having been, as it

seemed, bronzed through and through by colonial suns and colonial

labour. Altogether he was a son of whom any father might be proud, as

long as the father managed not to quarrel with him. Mr. Caldigate, who

during the last four years had thought very much on the subject, was

determined not to quarrel with his son.

'You asked, sir, the other day what I meant to do?'

'What are we to find to amuse you?'

'As for amusement, I could kill rats as I used to do; or slaughter a

hecatomb of pheasants at Babington,'--here the old man winced, though

the word hecatomb reconciled him a little to the disagreeable allusion.

'But it has come to me now that I want so much more than amusement. What

do you say to a farm?'

'On the estate?'--and the landlord at once began to think whether there

was any tenant who could be induced to go without injustice.

'About three times as big as the estate if I could find it. A man can

farm five thousand acres as well as fifty, I take it, if he have the

capital. I should like to cut a broad sward, or, better still, to roam

among many herds. I suppose a man should have ten pounds an acre to

begin with. The difficulty would be in getting the land.' But all this

was said half in joke; for he was still of opinion that he would, after

his year's holiday, be forced to return for a time to New South Wales.

He had fixed a price for which, up to a certain date, he would sell his

interest in the Polyeuka mine. But the price was high, and he doubted

whether he would get it; and, if not, then he must return.

He had not been long at Folking,--not as yet long enough to have made

his way into the house at Chesterton,--before annoyance arose. Mrs.

Shand was most anxious that he should go to Pollington and 'tell them

anything about poor Dick.' They did, in truth, know everything about

poor Dick; that poor Dick's money was all gone, and that poor Dick was

earning his bread, or rather his damper, mutton, and tea, wretchedly, in

the wilderness of a sheep-run in Queensland. The mother's letter was not

very piteous, did not contain much of complaint,--alluded to poor Dick

as one whose poverty was almost natural, but still it was very pressing.

The girls were so anxious to hear all the details,--particularly Maria!

The details of the life of a drunken sot are not pleasant tidings to be

poured into a mother's ear, or a sister's. And then, as they two had

gone away equal, and as he, John Caldigate, had returned rich, whereas

poor Dick was a wretched menial creature, he felt that his very presence

in England would carry with it some reproach against himself. He had in

truth been both loyal and generous to Dick; but still,--there was the

truth. He had come back as a rich man to his own country, while Dick was

a miserable Queensland shepherd. It was very well for him to tell his

father that a few glasses of whisky had made the difference; but it

would be difficult to explain this to the large circle at Pollington, and

very disagreeable even to him to allude to it. And he did not feel

disposed to discuss the subject with Maria, with that closer confidence

of which full sympathy is capable. And yet he did not know how to refuse

to pay the visit. He wrote a line to say that as soon as he was at

liberty he would run up to Pollington, but that at present business

incidental to his return made such a journey impossible.

But the letter, or letters, which he received from Babington were more

difficult to answer even than the Shand despatch. There were three of

them,--from his uncle, from Aunt Polly, and from--not Julia--but Julia's

second sister; whereby it was signified that Julia's heart was much too

heavily laden to allow her to write a simple, cousinly note. The

Babington girls were still Babington girls,--would still romp, row

boats, and play cricket; but their condition was becoming a care to

their parents. Here was this cousin come back, unmarried, with gold at

command,--not only once again his father's heir, but with means at

command which were not at all diminished by the Babington imagination.

After all that had passed in the linen-closet, what escape would there

be for him? That he should come to Babington would be a matter of

course. The real kindness which had been shown to him there as a child

would make it impossible that he should refuse.

Caldigate did feel it to be impossible to refuse. Though Aunt Polly had

on that last occasion been somewhat hard upon him, had laid snares for

him, and endeavoured to catch him as a fowler catches a bird, still

there had been the fact that she had been as a mother to him when he had

no other mother. His uncle, too, had supplied him with hunting and

shooting and fishing, when hunting and shooting and fishing were the

great joys of his life. It was incumbent on him to go to Babington,---

probably would be incumbent on him to pay a prolonged visit there. But

he certainly would not marry Julia. As to that his mind was so fixed

that even though he should have to declare his purpose with some

rudeness, still he would declare it. 'My aunt wants me to go over to

Babington,' he said to his father.

'Of course she does.'

'And I must go?'

'You know best what your own feelings are as to that. After you went,

they made all manner of absurd accusations against me. But I don't wish

to force a quarrel upon you on that account.'

'I should be sorry to quarrel with them, because they were kind to me

when I was a boy. They are not very wise.'

'I don't think I ever knew such a houseful of fools.' There was no

relationship by blood between the Squire of Folking and the Squire of

Babington; but they had married two sisters, and therefore Mrs.

Babington was Aunt Polly to John Caldigate.

'But fools may be very worthy, sir. I should say that a great many

people are fools to you.'

'Not to me especially,' said the squire, almost angrily.

'People who read no books are always fools to those who do read.'

'I deny it. Our neighbour over the water'--the middle wash was always

called the water at Folking--'never looks at a book, as far as I know,

and he is not a fool. He thoroughly understands his own business But

your uncle Babington doesn't know how to manage his own property,--and

yet he knows nothing else. That's what I call being a fool.'

'Now, I'm going to tell you a secret, sir.'

'A secret!'

'You must promise to keep it.'

'Of course I will keep it, if it ought to be kept.'

'They want me to marry Julia.'

'What!'

'My cousin Julia. It's an old affair. Perhaps it was not Davis only that

made me run away five years ago.'

'Do you mean they asked you;--or did you ask her?'

'Well; I did not ask her. I do not know that I can be more explicit.

Nevertheless it is expected; and as I do not mean to do it, you can see

that there is a difficulty.'

'I would not go near the place, John.'

'I must.'

'Then you'll have to marry her.'

'I won't.'

'Then there'll be a quarrel.'

'It may be so, but I will avoid it if possible. I must go. I could not

stay away without laying myself open to a charge of ingratitude. They

were very kind to me in the old days.' Then the subject was dropped; and

on the next morning, John wrote to his aunt saying that he would go over

to Babington after his return from London. He was going to London on

business, and would come back from London to Babington on a day which he

named. Then he resolved that he would take Pollington on his way down,

knowing that a disagreeable thing to be done is a lion in one's path

which should be encountered and conquered as soon as possible.

But there was one visit which he must pay before he went up to London.

'I think I shall ride over to-morrow and call on the Boltons,' he said

to his father.

'Of course; you can do that if you please.'

'He was a little rough to me, but he was kind. I stayed a night at his

house, and he advanced me the money.'

'As for the money, that was a matter of business. He had his security,

and, in truth, his interest. He is an honest man, and a very old friend

of mine. But perhaps I may as well tell you that he has always been a

little hard about you.'

'He didn't approve of Davis,' said the son, laughing.

'He is too prejudiced a man to forget Davis.'

'The more he thinks of Davis, the better he'll think of me if I can make

him believe that I am not likely to want a Davis again.'

'You'll find him probably at the bank about half-past two.'

'I shall go to the house. It wouldn't be civil if I didn't call on Mrs.

Bolton.'

As the squire was never in the habit of going to the house at Chesterton

himself, and as Mrs. Bolton was a lady who kept up none of the outward

ceremonies of social life, he did not quite understand this; but he made

no further objection.

On the following day, about five in the afternoon, he rode through the

iron gates, which he with difficulty caused to be opened for him, and

asked for Mrs. Bolton. When he had been here before, the winter had

commenced, and everything around had been dull and ugly; but now it was

July, and the patch before the house was bright with flowers. The roses

were in full bloom, and every morsel of available soil was bedded out

with geraniums. As he stood holding his horse by the rein while he rang

the bell, a side-door leading through the high brick wall from the

garden, which stretched away behind the house, was suddenly opened, and

a lady came through with a garden hat on, and garden gloves, and a

basket full of rose leaves in her hand. It was the lady of whom he had

never ceased to think from the day on which he had been allowed just to

touch her fingers, now five years ago.

It was she, of course, whom he had come to see, and there she was to be

seen. It was of her that he had come to form a judgment,--to tell

himself whether she was or was not such as he had dreamed her to be. He

had not been so foolishly romantic as to have been unaware that in all

probability she might have grown up to be something very different from

that which his fancy had depicted. It might or it might not come to pass

that that promise of loveliness,--of loveliness combined with innocence

and full intelligence,--should be kept. How often it is that Nature is

unkind to a girl as she grows into womanhood, and robs the attractive

child of her charms! How often will the sparkle of early youth get

itself quenched utterly by the dampness and clouds of the opening world.

He knew all that,--and knew too that he had only just seen her, had

barely heard the voice which had sounded so silvery sweet in his ears.

But there she was,--to be seen again, to be heard, if possible, and to

receive his judgment. 'Miss Bolton,' he said, coming down the stone

steps which he had ascended, that he might ring the bell, and offering

her his hand.

'Mr. Caldigate!'

'You remember me, then?'

'Oh yes, I remember you very well. I do not see people often enough to

forget them. And papa said that you were coming home.'

'I have come at once to call upon your mother and your father,--and upon

you. I have to thank him for great kindness to me before I went.'

'Poor mamma is not quite well,' said the daughter. 'She has headaches so

often, and she has one now. And papa has not come back from the bank. I

have been gardening and am all----.' Then she stopped and blushed, as

though ashamed of herself for saying so much.

'I am sorry Mrs. Bolton is unwell. I will not go the ceremony of leaving

a card, as I hope to able to come again to thank her for her kindness

before I went on my travels. Will you tell your father that I called?'

Then he mounted his horse, feeling, as he did so, that he was throwing

away an opportunity which kind fortune had given him. There they were

together, he and this girl of whom he had dreamed;--and now he was

leaving her, because he did not know how to hold her in conversation for

ten minutes! But it was true, and he had to leave her. He could not

instantly tell her how he admired her, how he loved her, how he had

thought of her, and how completely she had realised all his fondest

dreams. When on his horse, he turned round, and, lifting his hat to her,

took a last glance. It could not have been otherwise, he said to

himself. He had been sure that she would grow up to be exactly that

which he had found her. To have supposed that Nature could have been

untrue to such promises as had been made then, would have been to

suppose Nature a liar.

Just outside the gate he met the old banker, who, according to his daily

custom, had walked back from the town. 'Yes,' said Mr. Bolton, 'I

remember you,--I remember you very well. So you found a lot of gold?'

'I got some.'

'You have been one of the few fortunate, I hear. I hope you will be able

to keep it, and to make a good use of it. My compliments to your father.

Good evening.'

'I shall take an early opportunity of paying my respects again to Mrs.

Bolton, who, I am sorry to hear, is not well enough to see me,' said

Caldigate, preventing the old curmudgeon from escaping with his intended

rapidity.

'She is unfortunately often an invalid, sir,--and feels therefore that

she has no right to exact from any one the ceremony of morning visits.

Good evening sir.'

But he cared not much for this coldness. Having found where the gold lay

at this second Ahalala,--that the gold was real gold,--he did not doubt

but that he would be able to make good his mining operations.

Chapter XV

Again At Pollington

On his arrival at Pollington, all the Shands welcomed him as though he

had been the successful son or successful brother who had gone out from

among them; and spoke of 'Poor Dick' as being the unsuccessful son or

unsuccessful brother,--as indeed he was. There did not seem to be the

slightest anger against him, in that he had thriven and had left Dick

behind him in such wretched poverty. There was no just ground for anger,

indeed. He was well aware of that. He had done his duty by Dick to the

best of his ability. But fathers and mothers are sometimes apt to think

that more should be done for their own children than a friend's best

ability can afford. These people, however, were reasonable. 'Poor Dick!'

'Isn't it sad?' 'I suppose when he's quite far away in the bush like

that he can't get it,'--by which last miserable shred of security the

poor mother allowed herself to be in some degree comforted.

'Now I want you to tell me,' said the father, when they were alone

together on the first evening, 'what is really his condition?'

'He was a shepherd when I last heard about him.'

'He wrote to his mother by the last mail, asking whether something

cannot be done for him. He was a shepherd then. What is a shepherd?'

'A man who goes about with the sheep all day, and brings them up to a

camp at night. He may probably be a week without seeing a human being,

That is the worst of it.'

'How is he fed?'

'Food is brought out to his hut,--perhaps once a week, perhaps once a

fortnight,--so much meat, so much flour, so much tea, and so much sugar.

And he has thirty or thirty-five pounds a-year besides.'

'Paid weekly?'

'No;--perhaps quarterly, perhaps half-yearly. He can do nothing with his

money as long as he is there. If he wants a pair of boots or a new

shirt, they send it out to him from the store, and his employer charges

him with the price. It is a poor life, sir.'

'Very poor. Now tell me, what can we do for him?'

'It is an affair of money.'

'But is it an affair of money, Mr. Caldigate? Is it not rather an affair

of drink? He has had his money,--more than his share; more than he ought

to have had. But even though I were able to send him more, what good

would it do him?'

This was a question very difficult to answer. Caldigate had been forced

to answer it to himself in reference to his own conduct. He had sent

money to his former friend, and could without much damage to himself

have sent more. Latterly he had been in that condition as to money in

which a man thinks nothing of fifty pounds,--that condition which

induces one man to shoe his horse with gold, and another to chuck his

bank-notes about like half-crowns. The condition is altogether opposed

to the regulated prudence of confirmed wealth. Caldigate had stayed his

hand in regard to Dick Shand simply because the affair had been one not

of money but of drink. 'I suppose a man may be cured by the absence of

liquor?'

'By the enforced absence?'

'No doubt they often break out again. I hardly know what to say, sir. If

you think that money will do good,--money, that is, in moderation,--I

will advance it. He and I started together, and I am sometimes aghast

with myself when I think of the small matter which, like the point on a

railway, sent me running rapidly on to prosperity,--while the same

point, turned wrong, hurried him to ruin. I have taken my glass of grog,

too, my two glasses,--or perhaps more. But that which would elate him

into some fury of action would not move me. It was something nature did

for me rather than virtue. I am a rich man, and he is a shepherd,

because something was put into my stomach capable of digesting bad

brandy, which was not put into his.'

'A man has more than one chance. When he found how it was with him, he

should have abstained. A man must pay the fine of his own weakness.'

'Oh, yes. It is all understood somewhere, I suppose, though we don't

understand it. I tell you what it is, Dr. Shand. If you think that five

hundred pounds left with you can be of any assistance, you can have it.'

But the doctor seemed to doubt whether the money would do any good, and

refused to take it, at any rate for the present. What could he do with

it, if he did take it? 'I fear that he must lie upon his bed as he has

made it,' said the doctor sorrowfully. 'It is a complaint which money

cannot cure, but can always exaggerate. If, without costing myself or my

family a shilling, I could put a thousand pounds into his hands

to-morrow, I do not know whether I ought to do it.'

'You will remember my offer.'

The doctor thanked him, and said that he would remember. So the

conversation was ended, and the doctor went about the ordinary

occupation of his life, apparently without any settled grief at his

heart. He had done his duty by his son, and that sufficed,--or almost

sufficed, for him.

Then came the mother's turn. Could anything be sent to the poor lost

one,--to poor Dick? Clothes ran chiefly in her mind. If among them they

could make up a dozen of shirts, would there be any assured means of

getting them conveyed safely to Dick's shepherd-hut out in the

Queensland bush? In answer to this Caldigate would fain have explained,

had it been possible, that Dick would not care much for a dozen new

shirts,--that they would be to him, even if received, almost as little a

source of comfort as would be a ton of Newcastle coals. He had sunk

below shirts by the dozen; almost below single shirts, such as Mrs.

Shand and her daughters would be able to fabricate. Some upper flannel

garment, and something in the nature of trousers, with a belt round his

middle, and an old straw-hat would be all the wardrobe required by him.

Men by dint of misery rise above the need of superfluities. The poor

wretch whom you see rolling himself, as it were, at the corner of the

street within his old tattered filthy coat, trying to extract something

more of life and warmth out of the last glass of gin which he has

swallowed, is by no means discomposed because he has no clean linen for

the morrow. All this Caldigate understood thoroughly;--but there was a

difficulty in explaining it to Dick Shand's mother. 'I think there would

be some trouble about the address,' he said.

'But you must know so many people out there.'

'I have never been in Queensland myself, and have no acquaintance with

squatters. But that is not all, Mrs. Shand.'

'What else? You can tell me. Of course I know what it is that he has

come to. I don't blind myself to it, Mr. Caldigate, even though I am his

mother. But I am his mother; and if I could comfort him, just a

little----'

'Clothes are not what he wants;--of clothes he can get what is

necessary, poor as he is.'

'What is it he wants most?'

'Somebody to speak to;--some one to be kind to him.'

'My poor boy!'

'As he has fallen to what he is now, so can he rise again if he can find

courage to give his mind to it. I think that if you write to him and

tell him so, that will be better than sending him shirts. The doctor has

been talking to me about money for him.'

'But, Mr. Caldigate, he couldn't drink the shirts out there in the bush.

Here, where there is a pawn-broker at all the corners, they drink

everything.'

He had promised to stay two days at Pollington and was of course aware

of the dangers among which he walked. Maria had been by no means the

first to welcome him. All the other girls had presented themselves

before her. And when at last she did come forward she was very shy. The

eldest daughter had married her clergyman though he was still only a

curate; and the second had been equally successful with Lieutenant

Postlethwaite though the lieutenant had been obliged in consequence to

leave the army and to earn his bread by becoming agent to a soap-making

company. Maria Shand was still Maria Shand, and was it not too probable

that she had remained so for the sake of that companion who had gone

away with her darling brother Dick? 'Maria has been thinking so much

about your coming,' said the youngest,--not the girl who had been

impertinent and ill-behaved before, for she had since become a grown-up

Miss Shand, and had a young attorney of her own on hand, and was

supposed to be the one of the family most likely to carry her pigs to a

good market,--but the youngest of them all who had been no more than a

child when he had been at Pollington before. 'I hope she is at home,'

said Caldigate 'At home! Of course she's at home. She wouldn't be away

when you're coming!'

The Shands were demonstrative, always;--and never hypocritical. Here it

was; told at once,--the whole story. He was to atone for having left

Dick in the lurch by marrying Maria. There did seem to him to be a

certain amount of justice in the idea; but then, unfortunately, it could

not be carried out. If there were nothing else against it but the

existence of the young lady at Chesterton, that alone would have been

sufficient. And then, though Maria Shand was very well, though, no

doubt, she would make a true and loving wife to any husband, though

there had been a pretty touch of feeling about the Thomson's

'Seasons,'--still, still, she was not all that he fancied that a wife

should be. He was quite willing to give Â£500 for Dick; but after that he

thought that he would have had almost enough of the Shands. He could not

marry Maria, and so he must say plainly if called upon to declare

himself in the matter. There was an easiness about the family generally

which enabled him to hope that the difficulty would be light. It would

be as nothing compared with that coming scene between himself and aunt

Polly, perhaps between himself and his uncle Babington, or

perhaps,--worse again,--between himself and Julia!

When he found himself alone with Maria in the drawing-room on the

following morning, he almost thought that it must have been arranged by

the family. 'Doesn't it seem almost no time since you went away,' said

the young lady.

'It has gone quickly;--but a great deal has been done.'

'I suppose so. Poor Dick!'

'Yes, indeed! Poor fellow! We can only hope about Dick. I have been

speaking to your father about him.'

'Of course we all know that you did your very best for him. He has said

so himself when he has written. But you;--you have been fortunate.'

'Yes, I have done very well. There is so much chance at it that there is

nothing to be proud of.'

'I am sure there is a great deal;--cleverness, and steadiness, and

courage, and all that. We were delighted to hear it, though poor Dick

could not share it with you. You have made an immense fortune.'

'Oh dear no,--not that. I have been able to get over the little

difficulties which I left behind me when I went away, and have got

something in hand to live upon.'

'And now----?'

'I suppose I shall go back again,' said Caldigate, with an air of

indifference.

'Go back again!' said Maria, who had not imagined this. But still a man

going back to Australia might take a wife with him. She would not object

to the voyage. Her remembrance of the evening on which she had crept

down and put the little book into his valise was so strong that she felt

herself to be justified in being in love with him. 'But not for always?'

'Certainly not;--but just to wind up affairs.'

It would be no more than a pleasant wedding-tour,--and, perhaps, she

could do something for poor Dick. She could take the shirts so far on

their destination.

'Oh, Mr. Caldigate, how well I remember that last night!'

'So indeed, do I,--and the book.' The hardship upon the moth is that

though he has already scorched himself terribly in the flame, and burned

up all the tender fibre of his wings, yet he can't help returning to the

seductions of the tallow-candle till his whole body has become a

wretched cinder. Why should he have been the first to speak of the book?

Of course she blushed, and of course she stammered But in spite of her

stammering she could say a word. 'I dare say you never looked at it.'

'Indeed I did,--very often. Once when Dick saw it in my hands, he wanted

to take it away from me.'

'Poor Dick!'

'But I have never parted with it for an hour!'

'Where is it now?' she asked.

'Here,' said Caldigate, pulling it out of the breast-pocket of his

coat. If he had had the presence of mind to say that he had lent the

book to another young lady, and that she had never returned it, there

might probably have been an end of this little trouble at once. But when

the little volume appeared, just as though it had been kept close to his

heart during all these four years, of course she was entitled to hope.

He had never opened the book since that morning in his cabin, not caring

for the academic beauties of Thomson's 'Seasons;'--had never looked at

it till it had occurred to him as proper that he should take it with him

to Pollington. Now he brought it out of his pocket, and she put out her

hand to receive it from him. 'You are not going to take it back again?'

'Certainly not if it be of any value to you?'

'Do you not value the presents which your friends make you?'

'If I care for the friends, I do.'

'As I care very much for this friend I shall keep the book.'

'I don't think that can be true, Mr. Caldigate?'

He was painfully near the blaze;--determined not to be burned, and yet

with no powers of flying away from the candle into the farthest corner

of the room. 'Why not true? I have kept it hitherto. It has been with me

in many very strange places.'

Then there was a pause,--while he thought of escaping, and she of

utilising the occasion. And yet it was not in her nature to be

unmaidenly or aggressive Only if he did like her it would be so very

nice, and it is so often the case that men want a little encouragement!

'I dare say you thought more of the book than the donor.'

'That is intended to be unkind.'

'No;--certainly not. I can never be unkind to a friend who has been so

very good as you were to poor Dick. Whatever else may happen, I

shall,--never,--forget--that.' By this time there was a faint sound of

sobbing to be heard, and then she turned away her face that she might

wipe a tear from her eyes. It was a real tear, and a real sob, and she

really thought that she was in love with him.

'I know I ought not to have come here,' he said.

'Why not?' she asked energetically.

'Because my coming would give rise to so much sadness about your

brother.'

'I am so glad you have come,--so very glad. Of course we wanted to hear.

And besides----'

'What besides?'

'Papa and mamma, and all of them, are so glad to see you. We never

forget old friends.' Then again there was silence. 'Never,' she

repeated, as she rose from her chair slowly and went out of the room.

Though he had fluttered flamewards now and again, though he had shown

some moth-like aptitudes, he had not shown himself to be a downright,

foolish, blind-eyed moth, determined to burn himself to a cinder as a

moth should do. And she;--she was weak. Having her opportunity at

command, she went away and left him, because she did not know what more

to say. She went away to her own bedroom, and cried, and had a headache,

during the remainder of the day. And yet there was no other day!

Late that evening, just at the hour when, on the previous night, he was

closeted with the father, he found himself closeted with the mother.

'She has never forgotten you for one moment since you left us,' said the

mother. Mrs. Shand had rushed into the subject so quickly that these

were almost the first words she said to him. He remained quite quiet,

looking out from the open window into the moonlight. When a distinct

proposition was made to him like this, he certainly would not be a moth.

'I don't know whether you have thought of her too, Mr. Caldigate.' He

only shook his head. 'That is so?'

'I hope you do not think that I have been to blame in any way,' he said,

with a conscience somewhat stricken;--for he remembered well that he

had kissed the young lady on that evening four years ago.

'Oh no. I have no complaint to make. My poor child! It is a pity. But I

have nothing more to say. It must be so then?'

'I am the least settled man in all the world, Mrs. Shand.'

'But at some future time?'

'I fear not. My mind is intent on other things.' So it was;--intent on

Hester Bolton! But the statement as he made it, was certainly false, for

it was intended to deceive. Mrs. Shand shook hands with him kindly,

however, as she sent him away to bed, telling him that breakfast should

be ready for him at eight the next morning.

His train left Pollington at nine, and at eight the doctor with all his

family were there to greet him at the breakfast-table,--with all the

family except Maria. The mother, in the most natural tone in the world,

said that poor Maria had a headache and could not come down. They filled

his plate with eggs and bacon and toast, and were as good to him as

though he had blighted no hopes and broken no heart. He whispered one

word at going to the doctor. 'Pray remember that whenever you think the

money can be of use, it is there. I consider that I owe him quite as

much as that.' The father grasped his hand, and all of them blessed him

as he went.

'If I can only get away from Babington as easily!' he said to himself,

as he took his place in the railway carriage.

Chapter XVI

Again at Babington

The affair of Julia Babington had been made to him in set terms, and

had, if not accepted, not been at once refused. No doubt this had

occurred four years ago, and, if either of them had married since, they

would have met each other without an unpleasant reminiscence. But they

had not done so, and there was no reason why the original proposition

should not hold good. After escaping from Babington he had, indeed,

given various reasons why such a marriage was impossible. He had sold

his inheritance. He was a ruined man. He was going out to Australia as a

simple miner. It was only necessary for him to state all this, and it

became at once evident that he was below the notice of Julia Babington.

But everything had been altered since that. He had regained his

inheritance, he had come back a rich man, and he was more than ever

indebted to the family because of the violent fight they had made on his

behalf, just as he was going. As he journeyed to Babington all this was

clear to him; and it was clear to him also that, from his first entrance

into the house, he must put on an air of settled purpose, he must gird

up his loins seriously, he must let it be understood that he was not as

he used to be, ready for worldly lectures from his aunt, or for romping

with his female cousins, or for rats, or rabbits, or partridges, with

the male members of the family. The cares of the world must be seen to

sit heavy on him, and at the very first mention of a British wife he

must declare himself to be wedded to Polyeuka.

At Babington he was received with many fatted calves. The whole family

were there to welcome him, springing out upon him and dragging him out

of the fly as soon as he had entered the park gates. Aunt Polly almost

fainted as she was embracing him under an oak tree; and tears, real

tears, ran down the squire's face as he shook both his nephew's hands at

once. 'By George,' said the Babington heir, 'you're the luckiest fellow

I ever heard of! We all thought Folking was gone for good.' As though

the possessions of Folking were the summit of human bliss! Caldigate

with all the girls around him could not remonstrate with words, but his

spirit did remonstrate. 'Oh, John, we are so very, very, very, very glad

to have you back again,' said Julia, sobbing and laughing at the same

time. He had kissed them all of course, and now Julia was close to his

elbow as he walked up to the house.

In the midst of all this there was hardly opportunity for that

deportment which he meant to exercise. When fatted calves are being

killed for you by the dozen, it is very difficult to repudiate the good

nature of the slaughterers. Little efforts he did make even before he

got to the house. 'I hardly know how I stand just yet,' he had said, in

answer to his uncle's congratulations as to his wealth. 'I must go out

again at any rate.'

'Back to Australia?' asked his aunt.

'I fear so. It is a kind of business,--gold-mining,--in which it is very

hard for a man to know what he's worth. A claim that has been giving you

a thousand pounds net every month for two years past, comes all of

sudden a great deal worse than valueless. You can't give it up, and you

have to throw back your thousands in profitless work.'

'I wouldn't do that,' said the squire.

'I'd stick to what I'd got,' said the Babington heir.

'It is a very difficult business,' said Caldigate, with a considerable

amount of deportment, and an assumed look of age,--as though the cares

of gold-seeking had made him indifferent to all the lighter joys of

existence.

'But you mean to live at Folking?' asked Aunt Polly.

'I should think probably not. But a man situated as I am, never can say

where he means to live.'

'But you are to have Folking?' whispered the squire,--whispered it so

that all the party heard the words;--whispering not from reticence but

excitement.

'That's the idea at present,' said the Folking heir. 'But Polyeuka is so

much more to me than Folking. A gold mine with fifty or sixty thousand

pounds worth of plant about it, Aunt Polly, is an imperious mistress.'

In all this our hero was calumniating himself. Polyeuka and the plant he

was willing to abandon on very moderate terms, and had arranged to wipe

his hands of the whole concern if those moderate terms were accepted.

But cousin Julia and aunt Polly were enemies against whom it was

necessary to assume whatever weapons might come to his hand.

He had arranged to stay a week at Babington. He had considered it all

very deeply, and had felt that as two days was the least fraction of

time which he could with propriety devote to the Shands, so must he give

at least a week to Babington. There was, therefore, no necessity for any

immediate violence on the part of the ladies. The whole week might

probably have been allowed to pass without absolute violence, had he not

shown by various ways that he did not intend to make many visits to the

old haunts of his childhood before his return to Australia. When he said

that he should not hunt in the coming winter; that he feared his hand

was out for shooting; that he had an idea of travelling on the Continent

during the autumn; and that there was no knowing when he might be

summoned back to Polyeuka, of course there came across Aunt Polly's

mind,--and probably also across Julia's mind,--an idea that he meant to

give them the slip again. On the former occasion he had behaved badly.

This was their opinion. But, as it had turned out, his circumstances at

the moment were such as to make his conduct pardonable. He had been

harassed by the importunities both of his father and of Davis; and

that, under such circumstances, he should have run away from his

affianced bride, was almost excusable, But now----! It was very

different now. Something must be settled. It was very well to talk about

Polyeuka. A man who has engaged himself in business must, no doubt,

attend to it. But married men can attend to business quite as well as

they who are single. At any rate, there could be no reason why the

previous engagement should not be consolidated and made a family affair.

There was felt to be something almost approaching to resistance in what

he had said and done already. Therefore Aunt Polly flew to her weapons,

and summoned Julia also to take up arms. He must be bound at once with

chains, but the chains were made as soft as love and flattery could make

them. Aunt Polly was almost angry,--was prepared to be very angry;--but

not the less did she go on killing fatted calves.

There were archery meetings at this time through the country, the period

of the year being unfitted for other sports. It seemed to Caldigate as

though all the bows and all the arrows had been kept specially for

him,--as though he was the great toxophilite of the age,--whereas no man

could have cared less for the amusement than he. He was carried here and

was carried there; and then there was a great gathering in their own

park at home. But it always came to pass that he and Julia were shooting

together,--as though it were necessary that she should teach him,--that

she should make up by her dexterity for what was lost by his

awkwardness,--that she by her peculiar sweetness should reconcile him to

his new employment. Before the week was over, there was a feeling among

all the dependants at Babington, and among many of the neighbours, that

everything was settled, and that Miss Julia was to be the new mistress

of Folking.

Caldigate knew that it was so. He perceived the growth of the feeling

from day to day. He could not say that he would not go to the meetings,

all of which had been arranged beforehand. Nor could he refuse to stand

up beside his cousin Julia and shoot his arrows directly after she had

shot hers. Nor could he refrain from acknowledging that though she was

awkward in a drawing-room, she was a buxom young woman dressed in green

with a feather in her hat and a bow in her hand; and then she could

always shoot her arrows straight into the bull's-eye. But he was well

aware that the new hat had been bought specially for him, and that the

sharpest arrow from her quiver was intended to be lodged in his heart.

He was quite determined that any such shooting as that should be

unsuccessful.

'Has he said anything?' the mother asked the daughter. 'Not a word.'

This occurred on the Sunday night. He had reached Babington on the

previous Tuesday, and was to go to Folking on next Tuesday. 'Not a

word.' The reply was made in a tone almost of anger. Julia did believe

that her cousin had been engaged to her, and that she actually had a

right to him, now that he had come back, no longer ruined.

'Some men never do,' said Aunt Polly, not wishing to encourage her

daughter's anger just at present. 'Some men are never left alone with a

girl for half a moment, but what they are talking stuff and nonsense.

Others never seem to think about it in the least. But whether it's the

one or whether it's the other, it makes no difference afterwards. He

never had much talk of that kind. I'll just say a word to him, Julia.'

The saying of the word was put off till late on Sunday evening. Sunday

was rather a trying day at Babington. If hunting, shooting, fishing,

croquet, lawn-billiards, bow and arrows, battledore and shuttle-cock,

with every other game, as games come up and go, constitute a worldly

kind of life, the Babingtons were worldly. There surely never was a

family in which any kind of work was so wholly out of the question, and

every amusement so much a matter of course. But if worldliness and

religion are terms opposed to each other, then they were not worldly.

There were always prayers for the whole household morning and evening.

There were two services on Sunday, at the first of which the males, and

at both of which the females, were expected to attend. But the great

struggle came after dinner at nine o'clock, when Aunt Polly always read

a sermon out loud to the assembled household. Aunt Polly had a certain

power of her own, and no one dared to be absent except the single

servant who was left in the kitchen to look after the fire.

The squire himself was always there, but a peculiar chair was placed for

him, supposed to be invisible to the reader, in which he slept during

the whole time, subject to correction from a neighbouring daughter in

the event of his snoring. An extra bottle of port after dinner was

another Sunday observance which added to the irritability of the

occasion,--so that the squire, when the reading and prayers were over,

would generally be very cross, and would take himself up to bed almost

without a word, and the brothers would rush away almost with indecent

haste to their smoking. As the novels had all been put away into a

cupboard, and the good books which were kept for the purpose strewed

about in place of them, and as knitting, and even music, were tabooed,

the girls, having nothing to do, would also go away at an early hour.

'John, would you mind staying a few moments with me?' said Aunt Polly,

in her softest voice when Caldigate was hurrying after his male cousins.

He knew that the hour had come, and he girded up his loins.

'Come nearer, John,' she said,--and he came nearer, so that she could

put her hand upon his. 'Do you remember, John, when you and I and Julia

were together in that little room up-stairs?' There was so much pathos

in her voice, she did her acting so well, that his respect for her was

greatly augmented,--as was also his fear. 'She remembers it very well.'

'Of course I remember it, Aunt Polly. It's one of those things that a

man doesn't forget.'

'A man ought not to forget such a scene as that,' she said, shaking her

head. 'A man would be very hard of heart if he could forget it.'

Now must be the moment for his exertion! She had spoken so plainly as to

leave no doubt of her meaning, and she was pausing for an answer; yet he

hesitated,--not in his purpose, but doubting as to his own manner of

declaring it. He must be very decided. Upon that he was resolved. He

would be decided, though they should drag him in pieces with wild horses

for it afterwards. But he would fain be gentle with his aunt if it were

possible. 'My dear Aunt Polly, it won't do; I'm not going to be caught,

and so you may as well give it over.' That was what he wished her to

understand;--but he would not say it in such language. Much was due to

her, though she was struggling to catch him in a trap. 'When I had made

such a fool of myself before I went--about money,' he said, 'I thought

that was all over.'

'But you have made anything but a fool of yourself since,' she replied

triumphantly; 'you have gone out into the world like a man, and have

made your fortune, and have so returned that everybody is proud of you.

Now you can take a wife to yourself and settle down, and be a happy

goodman.'

It was exactly his view of life;--only there was a difference about the

wife to be taken. He certainly had never said a word to his cousin which

could justify this attack upon him. The girl had been brought to him in

a cupboard, and he had been told that he was to marry her! And that when

he had been young and drowned with difficulties. How is a man ever to

escape if he must submit under such circumstances as these? 'My dear

Aunt Polly, I had better tell you at once that I cannot marry my cousin

Julia.' Those were the words which he did speak, and as he spoke there

was a look about his eyes and his mouth which ought to have made her

know that there was no hope.

'And why not? John Caldigate, is this you that I hear?'

'Why should I?'

'Because you promised it.'

'I never did, Aunt Polly.'

'And because she loves you.'

'Even if it were so, am I to be bound by that? But, indeed, indeed, I

never even suggested it,--never thought of it. I am very fond of my

cousin, very fond of all my cousins. But marriage is a different thing.

I am inclined to think that cousins had better not marry.'

'You should have said that before. But it is nonsense. Cousins marry

every day. There is nothing about it either in the Bible or the

Prayer-book. She will die.'

Aunt Polly said this in a tone of voice which made it a matter of regret

that she should not have been educated for Drury Lane. But as she said

it, he could not avoid thinking of Julia's large ankles, and red cheeks,

and of the new green hat and feather. A girl with large ankles is, one

may suppose, as liable to die for love as though she were as fine about

her feet as a thorough-bred filly; and there is surely no reason why a

true heart and a pair of cherry cheeks should not go together. But our

imagination has created ideas in such matters so fixed, that it is

useless to contend against them. In our endeavours to produce effects,

these ideas should be remembered and obeyed. 'I hope not on that

account,' said Caldigate, and as he uttered the words some slightest

suspicion of a smile crossed his face.

Then Aunt Polly blazed forth in wrath. 'And at such a moment as this

you can laugh!'

'Indeed, I did not laugh;--I am very far from laughing, Aunt Polly.'

'Because I am anxious for my child, my child whom you have deceived, you

make yourself merry with me!'

'I am not merry. I am miserably unhappy because of all this. But I

cannot admit that I have deceived my cousin. All that was settled, I

thought, when I went away. But coming back at the end of four years, of

four such long years, with very different ideas of life----'

'What ideas?'

'Well,--at any rate, with ideas of having my own way,--I cannot submit

myself to this plan of yours, which, though it would have given me so

much----'

'It would give you everything, sir.'

'Granted! But I cannot take everything. It is better that we should

understand each other, so that my cousin, for whom I have the most

sincere regard, should not be annoyed.'

'Much you care!'

'What shall I say?'

'It signifies nothing what you say. You are a false man. You have

inveigled your cousin's affections, and now you say that you can do

nothing for her. This comes from the sort of society you have kept out

at Botany Bay! I suppose a man's word there is worth nothing, and that

the women are of such a kind they don't mind it. It is not the way with

gentlemen here in England; let me tell you that!' Then she stalked out

of the room, leaving him either to go to bed, or join the smokers or to

sit still and repent at his leisure, as he might please. His mind,

however, was chiefly occupied for the next half-hour with thinking

whether it would be possible for him to escape from Babington on the

following morning.

Before the morning he had resolved that, let the torment of the day be

what it might, he would bear it,--unless by chance he might be turned

out of the house. But no tragedy such as that came to relieve him. Aunt

Polly gave him his tea at breakfast with a sternly forbidding look,--and

Julia was as cherry-cheeked as ever, though very silent. The killing of

calves was over, and he was left to do what he pleased during the whole

day. One spark of comfort came to him. 'John, my boy,' said his uncle in

a whisper, 'what's the matter between you and Madame?' Mr. Babington

would sometimes call his wife Madame when he was half inclined to laugh

at her. Caldigate of course declared that there was nothing wrong. The

squire shook his head and went away. But from this it appeared to

Caldigate that the young lady's father was not one of the

conspirators,--by ascertaining which his mind was somewhat relieved.

On the next morning the fly came for him, and he went away without any

kisses. Upon the whole he was contented with both his visits, and was

inclined to assure himself that a man has only to look a difficulty in

the face, and that the difficulty will be difficult no longer.

Chapter XVII

Again at Puritan Grange

As Caldigate travelled home to Folking he turned many things in his

mind. In the first place he had escaped, and that to him was a matter of

self-congratulation. He had declared his purpose in reference to his

cousin Julia very clearly;--and though he had done so he had not

quarrelled utterly with the family. As far as the young lady's father

was concerned or her brothers, there had been no quarrel at all. The

ill-will against him was confined to the women. But as he thought of it

all, he was not proud of himself. He had received great kindness from

their hands, and certainly owed them much in return. When he had been a

boy he had been treated almost as one of the family;--but as he had not

been quite one of them, would it not have been natural that he should be

absorbed in the manner proposed? And then he could not but admit to

himself that he had been deficient in proper courage when he had been

first caught and taken into the cupboard. On that occasion he had

neither accepted nor rejected the young lady; and in such a matter as

this silence certainly may be supposed to give consent. Though he

rejoiced in his escape he was not altogether proud of his conduct in

reference to his friends at Babington.

Would it not have been better that he should have told his aunt frankly

that his heart was engaged elsewhere? The lady's name would have been

asked, and the lady's name could not have been given. But he might in

this way have prepared the way for the tidings which would have to be

communicated should he finally be successful with Hester Bolton. Now

such news would reach them as an aggravation of the injury. For that,

however, there could be no remedy. The task at present before him was

that of obtaining a footing in the house at Chesterton, and the more he

thought of it the more he was at a loss to know how to set about it.

They could not intend to shut such a girl up, through all her young

years, as in a convent. There must be present to the minds of both of

them an idea that marriage would be good for her, or, at any rate, that

she should herself have some choice in the matter. And if there were to

be any son-in-law why should not he have as good a chance as any other?

When they should learn how constantly the girl's image had been present

to his mind, so far away, during so many years, under such hard

circumstances would not that recommend him to them? Had he not proved

himself to be steady, industrious, and a good man of business? In regard

to position and fortune was he not such as a father would desire for

his daughter? Having lost his claim to Folking, had he not regained

it;--and in doing so had he not shown himself to be something much more

than merely the heir to Folking? An immediate income would, of course,

be necessary;--but there was money enough. He would ask the old man for

nothing. Reports said that though the old man had been generous to his

own sons, still he was fond of money. He should have the opportunity of

bestowing his daughter in marriage without being asked for a shilling.

And then John Caldigate bethought himself with some pride that he could

make a proper settlement on his wife without burdening the estate at

Folking with any dowers. But of what use would be all this if he could

not get at the girl to tell her that he loved her?

He might, indeed, get at the father and tell his purpose plainly and

honestly. But he thought that his chance of prevailing with the girl

might be better than with the father. In such cases it is so often the

daughter who prevails with her own parents after she has surrendered her

own heart. The old man had looked at him sternly, had seemed even in

that moment of time to disapprove of him. But the girl----. Well; in

such an interview as that there had not been much scope for approval.

Nor was he a man likely to flatter himself that any girl could fall in

love with him at first sight. But she had not looked sternly at him. In

the few words which she had spoken her voice had been very sweet. Both

of them had said they remembered him after the long interval that had

passed;--but the manner of saying so had been very different. He was

almost sure that the old man would be averse to him, though he could

tell himself personally that there was no just cause for such aversion.

But if this were so, he could not forward his cause by making his offer

through the father.

'Well, John, how has it gone with you at Babington?' his father asked

almost as soon as they were together.

It had not been difficult to tell his father of the danger before he

made his visit, but now he hesitated before he could avow that the young

lady's hand had again been offered to him. 'Pretty well, sir. We had a

good deal of archery and that kind of thing. It was rather slow.'

'I should think so. Was there nothing besides the archery?'

'Not much.'

'The young lady was not troublesome?'

'Perhaps the less we say about it the better, sir. They were very kind

to me when I was a boy.'

'I have nothing to say at all, unless I am to be called on to welcome

her as a daughter-in-law.'

'You will not have to do that, sir.'

'I suppose, John, you mean to marry some day,' said the father after a

pause. Then it occurred to the son that he must have some one whom he

could trust in this matter which now occupied his mind, and that no one

probably might be so able to assist him as his father. 'I wish I knew

what your idea of life is,' continued Mr. Caldigate. 'I fear you will be

growing tired of this place, and that when you get back to your

gold-mines you will stay there.'

'There is no fear of that. I do not love the place well enough.'

'If you were settled here, I should feel more comfortable. I sometimes

think, John, that if you would fix yourself I would give the property up

to you altogether and go away with my books into some town. Cambridge,

perhaps, would do as well as any other.'

'You must never do that, sir. You must not leave Folking. But as for

myself,--I have ideas about my own life.'

'Are they such that you can tell them?'

'Yes;--you shall hear them all. But I shall expect you to help me;--or

at least not turn against me?'

'Turn against you, John! I hope I may never have to do that again. What

is that you mean?' This he said very seriously. There was usually in his

voice something of a tone of banter,--a subdued cynicism,--which had

caused everybody near him to be afraid of him, and which even yet was

habitual to him. But now that was all gone. Was there to be any new

source of trouble betwixt him and his son?

'I intend to ask Hester Bolton to be my wife,' said John Caldigate.

The father, who was standing in the library, slapped both his hands down

upon the table. 'Hester Bolton!'

'Is there any objection?'

'What do you know about her? Why;--she's a child.'

'She is nearly twenty, sir.'

'Have you ever seen her?'

'Yes, I have seen her,--twice. I daresay you'll think it very absurd,

but I have made up my mind about it. If I say that I was thinking about

it all the time I was in Australia, of course you will laugh at me.'

'I will not laugh at you at all, John.'

'If any one else were to say so to me, I should laugh at them. But yet

it was so. Have you ever seen her?'

'I suppose I have. I think I remember a little girl.'

'For beauty I have never seen anybody equal to her,' said the lover. 'I

wish you'd go over to Chesterton and judge for yourself.'

'They wouldn't know what such a thing meant. It is years since I have

been in the house. I believe that Mrs. Bolton devotes herself to

religious exercises and that she regards me as a pagan.'

'That's just the difficulty, sir. How am I to get at her? But you may be

sure of this, I mean to do it. If I were beat I do think that then I

should go back and bury myself in the gold-mines. You asked me what I

meant to do about my future life. That is my purpose. If she were my

wife I should consult her. We might travel part of the time, and I might

have a farm. I should always look upon Folking as home. But till that

is settled, when you ask me what I mean to do with my life, I can only

say that I mean to marry Hester Bolton.'

'Did you tell them at Babington?'

'I have told nobody but you. How am I to set about it?'

Then Mr. Caldigate sat down and began to scratch his head and to

consider. 'I don't suppose they ever go out anywhere.'

'I don't think they do;--except to church.'

'You can't very well ask her there. You can always knock at the

house-door.'

'I can call again once;--but what if I am refused then? It is of no use

knocking if a man does not get in.' After a little more conversation the

squire was so far persuaded that he assented to the proposed marriage as

far as his assent was required; but he did not see his way to give any

assistance. He could only suggest that his son should go direct to the

father and make his proposition in the old-fashioned legitimate fashion.

But when it was put to him whether Mr. Bolton would not certainly reject

the offer unless it were supported by some goodwill on the part of his

own daughter, he acknowledged that it might probably be so. 'You see,'

said the squire, 'he believes in gold, but he doesn't believe in

gold-mines.'

'It is that accursed Davis that stands against me,' said the son.

John Caldigate, no doubt, had many things to trouble him. Before he had

resolved on making his second visit to Chesterton, he received a most

heartrending epistle from Aunt Polly in which he was assured that he was

quite as dear to her as ever, quite as dear as her own children, and in

which he was implored to return to the haunts of his childhood where

everybody loved him and admired him. After what had passed, he was

determined not to revisit the haunts till he was married, or, at any

rate, engaged to be married. But there was a difficulty in explaining

this to Aunt Polly without an appearance of ingratitude. And then there

were affairs in Australia which annoyed him. Tom Crinkett was taking

advantage of his absence in reference to Polyeuka,--that his presence

would soon be required there;--and other things were not going quite

smoothly. He had much to trouble him;--but still he was determined to

carry out his purpose with Hester Bolton. Since the day on which he had

roused himself to the necessity of an active life he had ever called

upon himself 'not to let the grass grow under his feet.' And he had

taught himself to think that there were few things a man could not

achieve if he would only live up to that motto. Therefore, though he was

perplexed by letters from Australia, and though his Aunt Polly was a

great nuisance, he determined to persevere at once. If he allowed

himself to revisit Nobble before he had settled this matter with Hester

Bolton, would it not be natural that Hester Bolton should be the wife of

some other man before he returned?

With all this on his mind he started off one day on horseback to

Cambridge. When he left Folking he had not quite made up his mind

whether he would go direct to the bank and ask for old Mr. Bolton, or

make a first attempt at that fortified castle at Chesterton. But on

entering the town he put his horse up at an inn just where the road

turns off to Chesterton, and proceeded on foot to the house. This was

about a mile distant from the stable, and as he walked that mile he

resolved that if he could get into the house at all he would declare his

purpose to some one before he left it. What was the use of

shilly-shallying? 'Who ever did anything by letting the grass grow under

his feet?' So he knocked boldly at the door and asked for Mrs. Bolton.

After a considerable time, the maid came and told him, apparently with

much hesitation, that Mrs. Bolton was at home. He was quite determined

to ask for Miss Bolton if Mrs. Bolton were denied to him. But the girl

said that Mrs. Bolton was at home, seeming by her manner to say at the

same time, 'I cannot tell a lie about it, because of the sin; but I

don't know what business you can have here, and I'm sure that my

mistress does not want to see any such a one as you.' Nevertheless she

showed him into the big sitting-room on the left hand of the hall, and

as he entered he saw the skirts of a lady's dress vanishing through

another door. Had there been a moment allowed him he would boldly have

called the lady back, for he was sure that the lady was Hester;--but the

lady was gone and the door closed before he could open his mouth.

Then he waited for full ten minutes, which, of course, seemed to him to

be very much more than an hour. At last the door was opened and Mrs.

Bolton appeared. The reader is not to suppose that she was an ugly,

cross-looking old woman. She was neither ugly, nor old, nor cross. When

she had married Mr. Bolton, she had been quite young, and now she was

not much past forty. And she was handsome too, with a fine oval face

which suited well with the peculiar simplicity of her dress and the

sober seriousness of her gait and manner. It might, perhaps, be said of

her that she tried to look old and ugly,--and cross too, but that she

did not succeed. She now greeted her visitor very coldly, and having

asked after old Mr. Caldigate, sat silent looking at John Caldigate as

though there were nothing more possible for her to say.

'I could not but come to see you and thank you for your kindness before

I went,' said John.

'I remember your coming about some business. We have very few visitors

here.'

'I went out, you know, as a miner.'

'I think I heard Mr. Bolton say so.'

'And I have succeeded very well.'

'Oh, indeed!'

'So well that I have been able to come back; and though I may perhaps

be obliged to revisit the colony to settle my affairs there, I am going

to live here at home.'

'I hope that will be comfortable to you.' At every word she spoke, her

voice took more and more plainly that tone of wonder which we are all of

us apt to express when called on to speak on matters which we are at the

moment astonished to have introduced to us.

'Yes; Mrs. Bolton, I hope it will. And now I have got something

particular to say.'

'Perhaps you had better see--Mr. Bolton--at the bank.'

'I hope I may be able to do so. I quite intend it. But as I am here, if

you will allow me, I will say a word to you first. In all matters there

is nothing so good as being explicit.' She looked at him as though she

was altogether afraid of him. And indeed she was. Her husband's opinion

of the young man had been very bad five years ago,--and she had not

heard that it had been altered since. Young men who went out to the

colonies because they were ruined, were, to her thinking, the worst

among the bad,--men who drank and gambled and indulged in strange lives,

mere castaways, the adopted of Satan. And, to her thinking, among men,

none were so rough as miners,--and among miners none were so godless, so

unrestrained so wild as the seekers after gold. She had read, perhaps,

something of the Spaniards in Central America, and regarded such

adventurers as she would pirates and freebooters generally. And then

with regard to the Caldigates generally,--the elder of whom she knew to

have been one of her husband's intimate friends in his less regenerated

days,--she believed them to be infidel freethinkers. She was not,

therefore, by any means predisposed in favour of this young man; and

when he spoke of his desire to be explicit, she thought that he had

better be explicit anywhere rather than in her drawing-room. 'You may

remember,' he said, 'that I had the pleasure of meeting your daughter

here before I left the country five years ago.' Then she listened with

all her ears. There were not many things in this empty, vain, hard

unattractive world which excited her. But the one thing in regard to

which she had hopes and fears, doubts and resolutions,--the one matter

as to which she knew that she must ever be on her guard, and yet as to

which she hardly knew how she was to exercise her care,--was her child.

'And once I have seen her since I have been back, though only for a

moment.' Then he paused as though expecting that she should say

something;--but what was it possible that she should say? She only

looked at him with all her eyes, and retreated a little from him with

her body, as anxious to get away from a man of his class who should dare

even to speak to her of her girl. 'The truth is, Mrs. Bolton, that her

image has been present to me through all my wanderings, and I am here to

ask her to be my wife.' She rose from her chair as though to fly from

him,--and then sitting down again stared at him with her mouth open and

her eyes fixed upon him. His wife! Her Hester to become the wife of such

a one as that! Her girl, as to whom, when thinking of the future life of

her darling, she had come to tell herself that there could be no man

good enough, pure enough, true enough, firm enough in his faith and

life, to have so tender, so inestimable a treasure committed to his

charge!

Chapter XVIII

Robert Bolton

Caldigate felt at the moment that he had been very abrupt,--so abrupt as

to have caused infinite dismay. But then it had been necessary that he

should be abrupt in order that he might get the matter understood. The

ordinary approaches were not open to him, and unless he had taken a

more than usually rapid advantage of the occasion which he had made for

himself, he would have had to leave the house without having been able

to give any of its inmates the least idea of his purpose. And then,--as

he said to himself,--matrimony is honest. He was in all worldly respects

a fit match for the young lady. To his own thinking there was nothing

preposterous in the nature of his request, though it might have been

made with some precipitate informality. He did not regard himself

exactly as the lady regarded him, and therefore, though he saw her

surprise, he still hoped that he might be able to convince her that in

all that he was doing he was as anxious for the welfare of her child as

she could be herself.

She sat there so long without saying a word that he found himself

obliged to renew his suit. 'Of course, Mrs. Bolton, I am aware how very

little you know of me.'

'Nothing at all,' she answered, hurriedly;--'or rather too much.'

He blushed up to his eyes, perfectly understanding the meaning of her

words; and, knowing that he had not deserved them, he was almost angry.

'If you will make inquiry I think you will find that I have so far

succeeded as to justify you in hoping that I may be able to marry and

settle myself in my own country.'

'You don't know my daughter at all.'

'Very little.'

'It is quite out of the question. She is very young, and such a thing

has never occurred to her. And we are not the same sort of people.'

'Why not, Mrs. Bolton? Your husband and my father have been intimate

friends for a great many years. It is not as though I had taken up the

idea only yesterday. It has been present with me, comforting me, during

all my work, for the last five years. I know all your daughter's

features as though she had been my constant companion.' The lady

shivered and almost trembled at this profanation of her child's name.

It was trouble to her that one so holy should ever have been thought

about by one so unholy. 'Of course I do not ask for anything at

present;--but will you not consult your husband as to the propriety of

allowing her to make my acquaintance?'

'I shall tell my husband, of course.'

'And will repeat to him what I say?'

'I shall tell him,--as I should any other most wild proposition that

might be made to me. But I am quite sure that he will be very angry.'

'Angry! why should he be angry?'

'Because----' Then she stopped.

'I do not think, Mrs. Bolton, that there can be any cause for anger. If

I were a beggar, if I were below her in position, if I had not means to

keep a wife,--even if I were a stranger to his name, he might be angry.

But I do not think he can be angry with me, now, because, in the most

straightforward way, I come to the young lady's parents and tell them

that I love their child. Is it a disgrace to me that of all whom I have

seen I think her to be the loveliest and best? Her father may reject me;

but he will be very unreasonable if he is angry with me.'

She could not tell him about the dove and the kite, or the lamb and the

wolf. She could not explain to him that he was a sinner, unregenerated,

a wild man in her estimation, a being of quite another kind than

herself, and therefore altogether unfitted to be the husband of her

girl! Her husband, no doubt, could do all this--if he would. But then

she too had her own skeleton in her own cupboard. She was not quite

assured of her own husband's regeneration. He went to church regularly,

and read his Bible, and said his prayers. But she feared,--she was

almost sure,--that he liked the bank-books better than his Bible. That

he would reject this offer from John Caldigate, she did not doubt. She

had always heard her husband speak of the man with disapprobation and

scorn. She had heard the whole story of Davis and the Newmarket debts.

She had heard, too, the man's subsequent prosperity spoken of as a thing

of chance,--as having come from gambling on an extensive scale. She

herself regarded money acquired in so unholy a way as likely to turn to

slate-stones, or to fly away and become worse than nothing. She knew

that Mr. Bolton, whether regenerate or not, regarded young Caldigate as

an adventurer, and that therefore, the idea of such a marriage would be

as unpalatable to him as to herself. But she did not dare to tell her

visitor that he was an unregenerate kite, lest her husband would not

support her.

'Whatever more you have got to say, you had better say it to him,' she

replied to the lover when he had come to the end of his defence. At that

moment the door opened, and a gentleman entered the room. This was Mr.

Robert Bolton, the attorney. Now of all her husband's sons,--who were,

of course, not her sons,--Mrs. Bolton saw this one the most frequently

and perhaps liked him the least. Or it might be juster to say that she

was more afraid of him than of the others. The two eldest, who were both

in the bank, were quiet, sober men, who lived affluently and were

married to religious wives, and brought up their children plentifully

and piously. She did not see very much of them, because her life was not

a social life. But among her friends they were the most intimate. But

Robert's wife was given to gaiety and dinner-parties and had been seen

even at balls. And Robert himself was much oftener at the Grange than

either of the other brothers. He managed his father's private affairs,

and was, perhaps, of all his sons the best liked by the father. He was

prosperous in his business and was reported to be the leading lawyer in

the town. In the old Cambridge days he had entertained John Caldigate at

his house; and though they had not met since the miner's return from

Australia, each at once knew the other, and their greeting was friendly

'Where's Hess?' said Robert, asking at once after his sister.

'She is engaged, Robert,' said Mrs. Bolton, very seriously, and very

firmly.

'She gave me a commission about some silk, and Margaret says that it

can't be executed in Cambridge. She must write to Fanny.' Margaret was

Mrs. Robert Bolton, and Fanny was the wife of the barrister brother who

lived in London.

'I will tell her, Robert.'

'All the same I should have liked to have seen her.'

'She is engaged, Robert.' This was said almost more seriously and more

firmly than before.

'Well, Caldigate,' said the attorney, turning to the visitor, 'so you

are the one man who has not only gone to the gold country and found

gold, but has brought his gold home with him.'

'I have brought a little home;--but I hope others have done so before.'

'I have never heard of any. You seem to have been uncommonly lucky. Hard

work, wasn't it?'

'Hard enough at first.'

'And a good deal of chance?'

'If a man will work steadily, and has backbone enough to stand up

against reverses without consoling himself with drink; and if, when the

gold comes, he can refrain from throwing it about as though it were

endless, I think a man may be tolerably sure to earn something.' Then he

told the story of the horse with the golden shoes.

'Shoes of gold upon a horse!' said Mrs. Bolton, holding up both her

hands. The man who could even tell such a story must be an adventurer.

But, nevertheless the story had interested her so that she had been

enticed into taking some part in the conversation.

When Caldigate got up to take his leave, Robert Bolton offered to walk

back to the town with him. He had expected to find his father, but

would now look for him at the bank. They started together; and as they

went Caldigate told his story to the young lady's half-brother. It

occurred to him that of all the family Robert Bolton would be the most

reasonable in such a matter; and that of all the family he might perhaps

be the best able to give assistance. When Robert Bolton had heard it

all, at first he whistled. Then he asked the following question. 'What

did she say to you?'

'She did not give me much encouragement.'

'I should think not. Though I say it who shouldn't, Hester is the

sweetest girl in Cambridgeshire. But her mother thinks her much too good

to be given in marriage to any man. This kind of thing was bound to come

about some day.'

'But Mrs. Bolton seems to have some personal objection to me.'

'That's probable.'

'I don't know why she should.'

'She has got one treasure of her own, in enjoying which she is shut out

from all the rest of the world. Is it unnatural that she should be a

little suspicious about a man who proposes to take her treasure away

from her?'

'She must surrender her treasure to some one,--some day.'

'If it be so, she will hope to do so to a man of whose antecedents she

may know more than she does of yours. What she does know of you is of a

nature to frighten her. You will excuse me.'

'Oh, of course.'

'She has heard that you went away under a cloud, having surrendered your

estate. That was against you. Well;--you have come back, and she hears

that you have brought some money with you. She does not care very much

about money; but she does care about regularity and fixed habits. If

Hess is to be married at all she would especially wish that her husband

should be a religious man. Perhaps you are.'

'I am neither the one thing nor the other,--especially.'

'And therefore peculiarly dangerous in her eyes It is natural that she

should oppose you.'

'What am I to do, then?'

'Ah! How am I to answer that? The whole story is very romantic, and I do

not know that we are a romantic family. My father is autocratic in his

own house.'

This last assurance seemed to contain some comfort As Mrs. Bolton would

be his enemy in the matter, it was well that the power of deciding

should be in other hands. 'I do not mean to give it up,' said he.

'I suppose you must if they won't open their doors to you.'

'I think they ought to allow me to have the chance of seeing her.'

'I don't see why they should. Mind I am not saying anything of this for

myself. If I were my sister's guardian, I should take the trouble to

make many inquiries before I either asked you into my house or declined

to do so. I should not give access to you, or to any other gentleman

merely because he asked it.'

'Let them make inquiry.'

'Mrs. Bolton probably thinks that she already knows enough. What my

father may say I cannot even surmise.'

'Will you tell him?'

'If you wish it.'

'Tell him also that I will wait upon him at once if he desires it. He

shall know everything about my affairs,--which indeed require no

concealment. I can settle enough upon her for her comfort. If she is to

have anything of her own, that will be over and above. As far as I am

concerned myself, I ask no question about that. I think that a man ought

to earn enough for himself and for his wife too. As to religion----'

'If I were you, I would leave that alone,' said the lawyer.

'Perhaps so.'

'I will tell my father. That is all I can say. Good-bye.'

So they parted; and Caldigate, getting on his horse, rode back to

Folking. Looking back at what he had done that day, he was almost

disposed to be contented with it. The lady's too evident hostility was,

of course, to be deprecated;--but then he had expected it. As Robert

Bolton had explained to him very clearly, it was almost impossible that

he should, at the first, be regarded by her with favourable eyes. But he

thought that the brother had been quite as favourable to him as he could

have expected, and the ice was broken. The Bolton family generally would

know what he was about. Hester would not be told, of course;--at any

rate, not at once. But the first steps had been taken, and it must be

for him now so to press the matter that the ultimate decision should be

made to rest in her hands as soon as possible.

'What did Mr. Bolton say to you?' asked the squire.

'I did not see him.'

'And what did the young lady say?'

'I did not see her.'

'Or the mamma?'

'I did see her, and told her my project.'

'I should think she would be startled?'

'She was not very propitious, sir; but that was not to be expected.'

'She is a poor melancholy half-crazed creature, I take it,' said the

squire; 'at least, that is what I hear. The girl, I should think, would

be glad to get away from such a home. But I am afraid you will find a

good many obstacles.' After that nothing more was said about the matter

at Folking for some days.

But there was a great deal said upon the matter both in Cambridge and at

Chesterton. Robert Bolton found his father at the bank on the same

afternoon, and performed his promise. 'Did he see your step-mother?'

asked the old man.

'Oh yes; and as far as I can understand, did not receive very much

favour at her hands.'

'But he did not see Hester?'

'Certainly not to-day.'

Then the old man looked up into his son's face, as though seeking some

expression there from which he might take some counsel. His own nature

had ever been imperious; but he was old now, and, in certain

difficulties which environed him, he was apt to lean on his son Robert.

It was Robert who encouraged him still to keep in his hands some share

of the management of the bank; and it was to Robert that he could look

for counsel when the ceremonious strictness of his wife at home became

almost too hard even for him.

'It is natural to suppose that Hester should be married some day,' said

the lawyer.

'Her mother will never wish it.'

'She will never wish it at any given moment, but she would probably

assent to the proposition generally. Why not Hester as well as another

girl? It is the happiest life for women.'

'I am not sure. I am not sure.'

'Women think so themselves, and Hester will probably be the same as

others. She will, of course, have an opinion of her own.'

'She will be guided by her mother.'

'Not altogether. It will only be fair that she should be consulted on a

matter of such importance to herself.'

'You would not tell her what this man has been saying?'

'Not necessarily. I say that she should be consulted generally as to her

future life. In regard to this man, I see no objection to him if he be a

good man.'

'He was here at college. You know what he did then?'

'Yes; and I know, too, something of what he has done since. He went away

disinherited and almost degraded. He has come back, as I hear,

comparatively a rich man. He has got back his inheritance, which might

probably be settled on his children if he were to be married. And all

this he has done off his own bat. Where other men stumble so frequently,

he has stood on his legs. No doubt, he has lived with rough people, but

still he seems to be a gentleman. Hester will be well off, no doubt,

some day.'

'She will have something,--something,' said the old man.

'But this suitor asks for nothing. It is not as though he were coming to

you to prop him up in the world. It does not look like that at least. Of

course, we ought to make inquiry as to his means.'

'The mortgage has been paid off.'

'So much we know, and the rest may be found out. I do not mean at all to

say that he should be allowed to have his own way. I think too much of

my sister for that. But, in this matter, we ought to regard simply her

happiness and her welfare;--and in considering that you ought to be

prepared for her coming marriage. You may take it for granted that she

will choose to give herself, sooner or later, to some man. Give a girl

good looks, and good sense, and good health, and she is sure to wish to

be some man's wife,--unless she be deterred by some conventual

superstition.'

If there were any words capable of conveying horror to the mind of the

old banker, they were convents, priests, and papacy,--of which the

lawyer was well aware when speaking thus of his sister. Mrs. Bolton was

certainly not addicted to papistical observances, nor was she at all

likely to recommend the seclusion of her daughter in a convent. All her

religious doctrines were those of the Low Church. But she had a

tendency to arrive at similar results by other means. She was so afraid

of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that she would fain shut up her

child so as to keep her from the reach of all evil. Vowed celibacy was

abominable to her, because it was the resource of the Roman Catholics;

and because she had been taught to believe that convent-walls were

screens for hiding unheard-of wickedness. But yet, on behalf of her

child, she desired seclusion from the world, fancying that so and so

only might security be ensured. Superstition was as strong with her as

with any self-flagellated nun. Fasting, under that name, she held in

abhorrence. But all sensual gratifications were wicked in her sight. She

would allow all home indulgences to her daughter, each under some

separate plea,--constrained to do so by excessive love; but she did so

always in fear and trembling, lest she was giving some foothold to

Satan. All of which Robert Bolton understood better even than did his

father when he gave the above advice in reference to this lover.

Chapter XIX

Men Are So Wicked

A month had passed by since Caldigate's interview with Mrs. Bolton, and

nothing had as yet been decided either for him or against him at

Chesterton And the fact that no absolute decision had been made against

him may be taken as having been very much in his favour. But of those

who doubted, and doubting, had come to no decision, Mrs. Bolton herself

was by no means one. She was as firm as ever in her intention that the

idea should not even be suggested to her daughter. Nor, up to this time,

had our hero's name been even mentioned to Hester Bolton.

About a week after Caldigate's visit to Chesterton in the early days of

August, he wrote to Robert Bolton saying that he was going into Scotland

for a month, and that he trusted that during that time his proposition

might be considered. On his return he would take the liberty of calling

on Mr. Bolton at the bank. In the meantime he hoped that inquiries might

be made as to his position in the world, and in order that such

inquiries might be effectual he gave a reference to his man of business

in London. To this letter Robert Bolton sent no answer; but he went up

to London, and did make the inquiries as suggested, and consulted his

brother the barrister, and his sister-in-law the barrister's wife. They

were both of opinion that John Caldigate was behaving well, and were of

opinion also that something should be done to liberate Hester from the

thraldom of her mother. 'I knew how it would be when she grew up and

became a woman,' said Mrs. William Bolton. 'Nobody will be allowed to

see her, and she won't have a chance of settling herself. When we asked

her to come up here for a couple of months in the season, Mrs. Bolton

sent me word that London is a terrible place for young girls,--though,

of course, she knew that our own girls were being brought up here.' Then

the ways of Mrs. Bolton at Chesterton and Hester's future life generally

were discussed in a spirit that was by no means unfriendly to our hero.

The suggested inquiries were made in the city, and were all favourable.

Everyone connected with the mining interests of the Australian colonies

knew the name of John Caldigate. All of that class of people were well

aware of his prosperity and confirmed good-fortune. He had brought with

him or sent home nobody quite knew how much money. But it was very well

known that he had left his interest in the Polyeuka mine to be sold for

Â£60,000, and now there had come word that a company had created itself

for the sake of making the purchase, and that the money would be

forthcoming. The gentleman in the city connected with mining matters did

not think that Mr. Caldigate would be called upon to go out to the

colony again, unless he chose to do so for his own pleasure. All this

Robert Bolton learned in the City, and he learned also that the man as

to whom he was making inquiry was held in high esteem for honesty,

perseverance, and capacity. The result of all this was that he returned

to Cambridge with a feeling that his sister ought to be allowed to make

the man's acquaintance. He and his brother had agreed that something

should be done to liberate their sister from her present condition. Love

on the part of a mother may be as injurious as cruelty, if the mother be

both tyrannical and superstitious. While Hester had been a child, no

interference had been possible or perhaps expedient,--but the time had

now come when something ought to be done. Such having been the decision

in Harley Street, where the William Boltons lived, Robert Bolton went

back home with the intention of carrying it out.

This could only be done through the old man, and even with him not

without great care. He was devotedly attached to his young wife;--but

was very averse to having it thought that he was ruled by her. Indeed,

in all matters affecting his establishment, his means, and his business,

he would hardly admit of interference from her at all. His worldly

matters he kept between himself and his sons. But in regard to his soul

he could not restrain her, and sometimes would hardly oppose her. The

prolonged evening prayers, the sermons twice a-week, the two long church

services on Sundays,--indulgence as to the third being allowed to him

only on the score of his age,--he endured at her command. And in regard

to Hester, he had hitherto been ruled by his wife, thinking it proper

that a daughter should be left in the hands of her mother. But now, when

he was told that if he did not interfere, his girl would be constrained

by the harsh bonds of an unnatural life, stern as he was himself and

inclined to be gloomy, little as he was disposed to admit ideas of

recreation and delight, he did acknowledge that something should be done

to relieve her. 'But when I die she must be left in her mother's hands,'

said the old banker.

'It is to be hoped that she may be in other hands before that,' replied

his son. 'I do not mean to say anything against my step-mother;--but for

a young woman it is generally best that she should be married. And in

Hester's peculiar position, she ought to have the chance of choosing for

herself.'

In this way something almost like a conspiracy was made on behalf of

Caldigate. And yet the old man did not as yet abandon his prejudices

against the miner. A man who had at so early an age done so much to ruin

himself, and had then sprung so suddenly from ruin to prosperity, could

not, he thought, be regarded as a steady well-to-do man of business. He

did agree that, as regarded Hester, the prison-bars should be removed;

but he did not think that she should be invited to walk forth with Mr.

John Caldigate. Robert declared that his sister was quite able to form

an opinion of her own, and boldly suggested that Hester should be

allowed to come and dine at his house. 'To meet the man?' asked the

banker in dismay. 'Yes,' said Robert. 'He isn't an ogre. You needn't be

afraid of him. I shall be there,--and Margaret. Bring her yourself if

you are afraid of anything. No plant ever becomes strong by being kept

always away from the winds of heaven.' To this he could not assent at

the time. He knew that it was impossible to assent without consulting

his wife. But he was brought so far round as to think that if nothing

but his own consent were wanting, his girl would be allowed to go and

meet the ogre.

'I suppose we ought to wish that Hester should be married some day,' he

said to his wife about this time. She shuddered and dashed her hands

together as though deprecating some evil,--some event which she could

hardly hope to avoid but which was certainly an evil. 'Do you not wish

that yourself?' She shook her head. 'Is it not the safest condition in

which a woman can live?'

'How shall any one be safe among the dangers of this world, Nicholas?'

She habitually called her husband by his Christian name, but she was the

only living being who did so.

'More safe then?' said he. 'It is the natural condition of a woman.'

'I do not know. Sin is natural.'

'Very likely. No doubt. But marriage is not sinful.'

'Men are so wicked.'

'Some of them are.'

'Where is there one that is not steeped in sin over his head?'

'That applies to women also; doesn't it?' said the banker petulantly. He

was almost angry because she was introducing a commonplace as to the

world's condition into a particular argument as to their daughter's

future life,--which he felt to be unfair and illogical.

'Of course it does, Nicholas. We are all black and grimed with sin, men

and women too; and perhaps something more may be forgiven to men because

they have to go out into the world and do their work. But neither one

nor the other can be anything but foul with sin;--except,--except--'

He was quite accustomed to the religious truth which was coming, and, in

an ordinary way, did not object to the doctrine which she was apt to

preach to him often. But it had no reference whatever to the matter now

under discussion. The general condition of things produced by the fall

of Adam could not be used as an argument against matrimony generally.

Wicked as men and women are it is so evidently intended that they should

marry and multiply, that even she would not deny the general propriety of

such an arrangement. Therefore when he was talking to her about their

daughter, she was ill-treating him when on that occasion she flew away

to her much-accustomed discourse.

'What's the use, then, of saying that men are wicked?'

'They are. They are!'

'Not a doubt about it. And so are the women, but they've got to have

husbands and wives. They wouldn't be any the better if there were no

marrying. We have to suppose that Hester will do the same as other

girls.'

'I hope not, Nicholas.'

'But why not?'

'They are vain, and they adorn themselves, not in modest apparel, as St.

Paul says in First Timothy, chapter second, nor with shame-facedness and

sobriety; but with braided hair and gold and pearls and costly array.'

'What has that to do with it?'

'Oh, Nicholas!'

'She might be married without all those things.'

'You said you wanted her to be like other girls.'

'No, I didn't. I said she would have to get married like other girls.

You don't want to make a nun of her.'

'A nun! I would sooner sit by her bedside and watch her die! My Hester a

nun!'

'Very well, then. Let her go out into the world----'

'The world, Nicholas! The world, the flesh, and the devil! Do they not

always go together?'

He was much harassed and very angry. He knew how unreasonable she was,

and yet he did not know how to answer her. And she was dishonest with

him. Because she felt herself unable to advocate in plain terms a

thorough shutting up of her daughter,--a protecting of her from the

temptation of sin by absolute and prolonged sequestration,--therefore

she equivocated with him, pretending to think that he was desirous of

sending his girl out to have her hair braided and herself arrayed in

gold and pearls. It was thoroughly dishonest, and he understood the

dishonesty. 'She must go somewhere,' he said, rising from his chair and

closing the conversation. At this time a month had passed since

Caldigate had been at Chesterton, and he had now returned from Scotland

to Folking.

On the following day Hester was taken out to dinner at The Nurseries, as

Robert Bolton's house was called,--was taken out by her father. This was

quite a new experiment, as she had never dined with any of her aunts and

cousins except at an early dinner almost as a child,--and even as a

child not at her brother Robert's. But the banker, after having declared

that she must go somewhere, had persisted. It is not to be supposed that

Caldigate was on this occasion invited to meet her;--nor that the father

had as yet agreed that any such meeting should be allowed. But as

William Bolton,--the London brother,--and Mrs. William and one of their

girls were down at Cambridge, it was arranged that Hester should meet

her relatives. Even so much as this was not settled without much

opposition on the part of Hester's mother.

There was nobody at the house but members of the family. The old

banker's oldest son Nicholas was not there as his wife and Mrs. Robert

did not get on well together. Mrs. Nicholas was almost as strict as Mrs.

Bolton herself, and, having no children of her own, would not have

sympathised at all in any desire to procure for Hester the wicked luxury

of a lover. The second son Daniel joined the party with his wife, but he

had married too late to have grown-up children. His wife was strict

too,--but of a medium strictness. Teas, concerts, and occasional dinner

parties were with her permissible;--as were also ribbons and a certain

amount of costly array. Mrs. Nicholas was in the habit of telling Mrs.

Daniel that you cannot touch pitch and not be defiled,--generally

intending to imply that Mrs. Robert was the pitch; and would harp on the

impossibility of serving both God and mammon, thinking perhaps that her

brother-in-law Robert and mammon were one and the same. But Daniel, who

could go to church as often as any man on Sundays, and had thoroughly

acquired for himself the reputation of a religious man of business, had

his own ideas as to proprieties and expediencies, and would neither

quarrel with his brother Robert, or allow his wife to quarrel with Mrs.

Robert. So that the Nicholases lived very much alone. Mrs. Nicholas and

Mrs. Bolton might have suited each other, might have been congenial and

a comfort each to the other, but the elder son and the elder son's wife

had endeavoured to prevent the old man's second marriage, and there had

never been a thorough reconciliation since. There are people who can

never forgive. Mrs. Nicholas had never forgiven the young girl for

marrying the old man, and the young girl had never forgiven the

opposition of her elder step-daughter-in-law to her own marriage. Hence

it had come to pass that the Nicholases were extruded from the family

conclaves, which generally consisted of the Daniels and the Roberts. The

Williams were away in London, not often having much to do with these

matters. But they too allied themselves with the dominant party, it

being quite understood that as long as the old man lived Robert was and

would be the most potent member of the family.

When the father and the three sons were in the dining-room together,

after the six or seven ladies had left them, the propriety of allowing

John Caldigate to make Hester's acquaintance was fully discussed. 'I

would not for the world interfere,' said Robert, 'if I did not think it

unfair to the dear girl that she should be shut up there altogether.'

'Do you suppose that the young man is in earnest?' asked Daniel.

As to this they all agreed that there could be no doubt. He was, too, an

old family friend, well-to-do in the world, able to make proper

settlements, and not at all greedy as to a fortune with his wife. Even

Daniel Bolton thought that the young man should have a chance,--by

saying which he was supposed to declare that the question ought to be

left to the arbitrament of the young lady. The old banker was unhappy

and ill at ease. He could not reconcile himself at once to so great a

change. Though he felt that the excessive fears of his wife, if

indulged, would be prejudicial to their girl, still he did not wish to

thrust her out into the world all at once. Could there not be some

middle course? Could there not be a day named, some four years hence, at

which she might be allowed to begin to judge for herself? But his three

sons were against him, and he could not resist their joint influence. It

was therefore absolutely decided that steps should be taken for enabling

John Caldigate to meet Hester at Robert Bolton's house.

'I suppose it will end in a marriage,' William Bolton said to his

brother Robert when they were alone.

'Of course it will. She is the dearest creature in the world;--so good

to her mother; but no fool, and quite aware that the kind of restraint

to which she has been subjected is an injustice. Of course she will be

gratified when a man like that tells her that he loves her. He is a

good-looking fellow, with a fine spirit and plenty of means. How on

earth can she do better?'

'But Mrs. B.?' said William, who would sometimes thus disrespectfully

allude to his step-mother.

'Mrs. B. will do all she can to prevent it,' said Robert; 'but I think

we shall find that Hester has a will of her own.'

On the following day John Caldigate called at the bank, where the banker

had a small wainscoted back-parlour appropriated to himself. He had

already promised that he would see the young man, and Caldigate was

shown into the little room. He soon told his story, and was soon clever

enough to perceive that the telling of his story was at any rate

permitted. The old father did not receive him with astonishment and

displeasure combined, as the young mother had done. Of course he made

difficulties, and spoke of the thing as being beyond the bounds of

probability. But objection no stronger than that may be taken as

amounting almost to encouragement in such circumstances. And he paid

evident attention to all that Caldigate said about his own pecuniary

affairs,--going so far as to say that he was not in a condition to

declare whether he would give his daughter any fortune at all on her

marriage.

'It is quite unnecessary,' said Caldigate.

'She will probably have something at my death,' rejoined the old man.

'And when may I see her?' asked Caldigate.

In answer to that Mr. Bolton would not at first make any suggestion

whatsoever,--falling back upon his old fears, and declaring that there

could be no such meetings at all, but at last allowing that the lover

should discuss the matter with his son Robert.

'Perhaps I may have been mistaken about the young man Caldigate,' the

banker said to his wife that night.

'Oh, Nicholas!'

'I only say that perhaps I may have been mistaken.'

'You are not thinking of Hester?'

'I said nothing about Hester then;--but perhaps I may have been

mistaken in my opinion about that young man John Caldigate.'

John Caldigate, as he rode home after his interview at the bank, almost

felt that he had cleared away many difficulties, and that, by his

perseverance, he might probably be enabled to carry out the dream of his

earlier youth.

Chapter XX

Hester's Courage

After that Caldigate did not allow the grass to grow under his feet, and

before the end of November the two young people were engaged. As Robert

Bolton had said, Hester was of course flattered and of course delighted

with this new joy. John Caldigate was just the man to recommend himself

to such a girl, not too light, not too prone to pleasure, not contenting

himself with bicycles, cricket matches, or billiards, and yet not wholly

given to serious matters as had been those among whom she had hitherto

passed her days. And he was one who could speak of his love with soft

winning words, neither roughly nor yet with too much of shame-faced

diffidence. And when he told her how he had sworn to himself after

seeing her that once,--that once when all before him in life was

enveloped in doubt and difficulty,--that he would come home and make her

his wife, she thought that the manly constancy of his heart was almost

divine. Of course she loved him with all her heart. He was in all

respects one made to be loved by a woman;--and then what else had she

ever had to love? When once it was arranged that he should be allowed to

speak to her, the thing was done. She did not at once tell him that it

was done. She took some few short halcyon weeks to dally with the vow

which her heart was ready to make; but those around her knew that the

vow had been inwardly made; and those who were anxious on her behalf

with a new anxiety, with a new responsibility, redoubled their inquiries

as to John Caldigate. How would Robert Bolton or Mrs. Robert excuse

themselves to that frightened miserable mother if at last it should turn

out that John Caldigate was not such as they had represented him to be?

But no one could pick a hole in him although many attempts to pick holes

were made. The question of his money was put quite at rest by the

transference of all his securities, balances, and documents to the

Boltons' bank, and the Â£60,000 for Polyeuka was accepted, so that there

was no longer any need that he should go again to the colony. This was

sweet news to Hester when she first heard it;--for it had come to pass

that it had been agreed that the marriage should be postponed till his

return, that having been the one concession made to Mrs. Bolton. There

had been many arguments about it;--but Hester at last told him that she

had promised so much to her mother and that she would of course keep her

promise. Then the arrangement took such a form that the journey was not

necessary,--or perhaps the objection to the journey became so strong in

Caldigate's mind that he determined to dispense with it at any price.

And thus, very greatly to the dismay of Mrs. Bolton, suddenly there came

to be no reason why they should not be married almost at once.

But there was an attempt made at the picking of holes,--or rather many

attempts. It would be unfair to say that this was carried on by Mrs.

Bolton herself;--but she was always ready to listen to what evil things

were said to her. Mrs. Nicholas, in her horror at the general wickedness

of the Caldigates almost reconciled herself to her step-mother, and

even Mrs. Daniel began to fear that a rash thing was being done. In

the first place there was the old story of Davis and Newmarket. Robert

Bolton, who had necessarily become the advocate and defender of our

hero generally, did not care much for Davis and Newmarket. All young

men sow their wild oats. Of course he had been extravagant. Since his

extravagance he had shown himself to be an industrious, sensible, steady

member of society;--and there was the money that he had earned! What

young man had earned more in a shorter time, or had ever been more

prudent in keeping it? Davis and Newmarket were easily answered by a

reference to the bank account. Did he ever go to Newmarket now, though

he was living so close to it? On that matter Robert Bolton was very

strong.

But Mrs. Nicholas had found out that Caldigate had spent certainly two

Sundays running at Folking without going to church at all; and, as far

as she could learn, he was altogether indifferent about public worship.

Mrs. Bolton, who could never bring herself to treat him as a son-in-law,

but who was still obliged to receive him, taxed him to his face with his

paganism. 'Have you no religion, Mr. Caldigate?' He assured her that he

had, and fell into a long discussion in which he thoroughly confused

her, though he by no means convinced her that he was what he ought to

be. But he went with her to church twice on one Sunday, and showed her

that he was perfectly familiar with the ways of the place.

But perhaps the loudest complaint came from the side of Babington; and

here two sets of enemies joined their forces together who were

thoroughly hostile to each other. Mrs. Babington declared loudly that

old Bolton had been an errand-boy in his youth, and that his father had

been a porter and his mother a washerwoman. This could do no real harm,

as Caldigate would not have been deterred by any such rumours, even had

they been true; but they tended to show animosity, and enabled Mrs.

Nicholas to find out the cause of the Babington opposition. When she

learned that John Caldigate had been engaged to his cousin Julia, of

course she made the most of it; and so did Mrs. Bolton. And in this way

it came to be reported not only that the young man had been engaged to

Miss Babington before he went to Australia,--but also that he had

renewed his engagement since his return. 'You do not love her, do you?'

Hester asked him. Then he told her the whole story, as nearly as he

could tell it with some respect for his cousin, laughing the while at

his aunt's solicitude, and saying, perhaps something not quite

respectful as to Julia's red cheeks and green hat, all of which

certainly had not the effect of hardening Hester's heart against him.

'The poor young lady can't help it if her feet are big,' said Hester,

who was quite alive to the grace of a well-made pair of boots, although

she had been taught to eschew braided hair and pearls and gold.

Mrs. Babington, however, pushed her remonstrances so far that she boldly

declared that the man was engaged to her daughter, and wrote to him more

than once declaring that it was so. She wrote, indeed, very often,

sometimes abusing him for his perfidy, and then, again, imploring him to

return to them, and not to defile the true old English blood of the

Caldigates with the suds of a washerwoman and the swept-up refuse of a

porter's shovel. She became quite eloquent in her denunciation, but

always saying that if he would only come back to Babington all would be

forgiven him. But in these days he made no visits to Babington.

Then there came a plaintive little note from Mrs. Shand. Of course they

wished him joy if it were true. But could it be true? Men were very

fickle, certainly; but this change seemed to have been very, very

sudden! And there was a word or two, prettily written in another hand,

on a small slip of paper--'Perhaps you had better send back the book';

and Caldigate, as he read it, thought that he could discern the

almost-obliterated smudge of a wiped-up tear. He wrote a cheerful letter

to Mrs. Shand, in which he told her that though he had not been

absolutely engaged to marry Hester Bolton before he started for

Australia,--and consequently before he had ever been at Pollington,--yet

his mind had been quite made up to do so; and that therefore he regarded

himself as being abnormally constant rather than fickle. 'And tell your

daughter, with my kindest regards,' he added, 'that I hope I may be

allowed to keep the book.'

The Babington objections certainly made their way in Cambridge and out

at Chesterton further than any others, and for a time did give a hope to

Mrs. Bolton and Mrs. Nicholas,--and made Robert Bolton shrug his

shoulders uneasily when he heard all the details of the engagement in

the linen-closet. But there came at one moment a rumour, which did not

count for much among the Boltons, but which disturbed Caldigate himself

more than any of the other causes adduced for breaking off his intended

marriage. Word came that he had been very intimate with a certain woman

on his way out to Melbourne;--a woman supposed to be a foreigner and an

actress; and the name of Cettini was whispered. He did not know whence

the rumour came;--but on one morning Robert Bolton, half-laughing, but

still with a tone of voice that was half-earnest, taxed him with having

as many loves as Lothario. 'Who is Cettini?' asked Robert Bolton.

'Cettini?' said Caldigate, with a struggle to prevent a blush.

'Did you travel with such a woman?'

'Yes;--at least, if that was her name. I did not hear it till

afterwards. A very agreeable woman she was.'

'They say that you promised to marry her when on board.'

'Then they lie. But that is a matter of course. There are so many lies

going about that I almost feel myself to be famous.'

'You did not see her after the journey?'

'Yes, I did. I saw her act at Sydney; and very well she acted. Have you

anything else to ask?' Robert Bolton said that he had nothing else to

ask,--and seemed, at the moment, to turn his half-serious mood into one

that was altogether jocular. But the mention of the name had been a

wound; and when an anonymous letter a few days afterwards reached Hester

herself he was really unhappy. Hester made nothing of the letter--did

not even show it to her mother. At that time a day had been fixed for

their marriage; and she already regarded her lover as nearer to her than

either father or mother. The letter purported to be from some one who

had travelled with her lover and this woman on board ship, and declared

that everybody on board the ship had thought that Caldigate meant to

marry the woman,--who then, so said the letter, called herself Mrs.

Smith. Hester showed the letter to Caldigate, and then Caldigate told

his story. There had been such a woman, who had been much ill-treated

because of her poverty. He had certainly taken the woman's part. She had

been clever and, as he had thought, well-behaved. And, no doubt, there

had been a certain amount of friendship. He had seen her again in

Sydney, where he had found her exercising her profession as an actress.

That had been all. 'I cannot imagine, dear,' he said, 'that you should

be jealous of any woman; but certainly not of such a one as she.' 'Nor

can I imagine,' said Hester, stoutly, 'that I could possibly be jealous

of any woman.' And then there was nothing more said about the woman

Smith-Cettini.

During all this time there were many family meetings. Those between Mr.

Caldigate, the father, and old Mr. Bolton were pleasant enough, though

not peculiarly cordial. The banker, though he had been brought to agree

to the marriage had not been quite reconciled to it. His younger son had

been able to convince him that it was his duty to liberate his daughter

from the oppression of her mother's over-vigilance, and all the rest had

followed very quickly,--overwhelming him, as it were, by stern

necessity. When once the girl had come to understand that she could have

her own way, if she chose to have a way of her own, she very quickly

took the matter into her own management. And in this way the engagement

became a thing settled before the banker had realised the facts of the

position. Though he could not be cordial he endeavoured to be gracious

to his old friend. But Mrs. Bolton spoke words which made all friendship

impossible. She asked old Mr. Caldigate after his soul, and when he

replied to her less seriously than she thought becoming, she told him

that he was in the bad way. And then she said things about the marriage

which implied that she would sooner see her daughter in her grave than

married to a man who was no more than a professing Christian. The

conversation ended in a quarrel, after which the squire would not go

again to Puritan Grange.

There was indeed a time, an entire week, during which the mother and

daughter hardly spoke to each other. In these days Mrs. Bolton

continually demanded of her husband that he should break off the match,

always giving as a reason the alleged fact that John Caldigate was not a

true believer. It had been acknowledged between them that if such were

the fact the man would be an unfit husband for their daughter. But they

differed as to the fact. The son had over and over again declared

himself to be a faithful member of the Church of England,--not very

scrupulous perhaps in the performance of her ceremonies,--but still a

believing member. That his father was not so every one knew, but he was

not responsible for his father. Mr. Bolton seemed to think that the

argument was good;--but Mrs. Bolton was of opinion that to become

willingly the daughter-in-law of an infidel, would be to throw oneself

with one's eyes open in the way of perdition. Hester through all this

declared that nothing should now turn her from the man she loved, 'Not

though he were an infidel himself?' said the terror-stricken mother.

'Nothing!' said Hester, bravely. 'Of course I should try to change him.'

A more wretched woman than Mrs. Bolton might not probably then have been

found. She suddenly perceived herself to be quite powerless with the

child over whom her dominion had hitherto been supreme. And she felt

herself compelled to give way to people whom, with all her heart, she

hated. She determined that nothing,--nothing should induce her to soften

her feelings to this son-in-law who was forced upon her. The man had

come and had stolen from her her treasure, her one treasure. And that

other man whom she had always feared and always hated, Robert Bolton,

the man whose craft and worldliness had ever prevented her from

emancipating her husband from the flesh and the devil, had brought all

this about. Then she reconciled herself to her child, and wept over her,

and implored heaven to save her. Hester tried to argue with her,--spoke

of her own love,--appealed to her mother, asking whether, as she had now

declared her love, it could be right that she should abandon a man who

was so good and so fondly attached to her. Then Mrs. Bolton would hide

her face, and sob, and put up renewed prayers to heaven that her

daughter might not by means of this unhappy marriage become lost to all

sense of grace.

It was very miserable, but still the prospect of the marriage was never

abandoned nor postponed. A day had been settled a little before

Christmas, and the Robert Boltons would allow of no postponement. The

old man was so tormented by the misery of his own home that he himself

was averse to delay. There could be no comfort for him till the thing

should have been done. Mrs. Bolton had suggested that it should be put

off till the spring;--but he had gloomily replied that as the thing had

to be done, the sooner it was done the better.

It had been settled almost from the first that the marriage festival

should be held, not at Puritan Grange, but at The Nurseries; and

gradually it came to be understood that Mrs. Bolton herself would not be

present, either at the church or at the breakfast. It was in vain that

Hester implored her mother to yield to her in something, to stand with

her at any rate on the steps before the altar. 'Would you wish me to go

and lie before my God?' said the unhappy woman. 'When I would give all

that I have in the world except my soul,--my life, my name, even my

child herself, to prevent this, am I to go and smile and be

congratulated, and to look as though I were happy?' There was,

therefore, very much unhappiness at the Grange, and an absence of all

triumph even at The Nurseries. At the old bank-house in the town where

the Nicholases lived, the marriage was openly denounced; and even the

Daniels, though they were pledged to be present, were in doubt.

'I suppose it is all right,' said Mrs. Robert to her husband.

'Of course it is all right. Why not?'

'It seems sad that such an event as a marriage should give rise to so

much ill-feeling. I almost wish we had not meddled, Robert.'

'I don't think there is anything to regret. Remember what Hester's

position would have been if my father had died, leaving her simply to

her mother's guardianship! We were bound to free her from that, and we

have done it.' This was all very well;--but still there was no triumph,

no ringing of those inward marriage bells the sound of whose music ought

to be so pleasant to both the families concerned.

There were, however, two persons quite firm to their purpose, and these

were the bride and bridegroom. With him firmness was comparatively easy.

When his father suggested that the whole Bolton family was making itself

disagreeable, he could with much satisfaction reply that he did not

intend to marry the whole Bolton family. Having answered the first

letter or two he could ignore the Babington remonstrances. And when he

was cross-examined as to points of doctrine, he could with sincerity

profess himself to be of the same creed with his examiners. If he went

to church less often than old Mr. Bolton, so did old Mr. Bolton go less

often than his wife. It was a matter as to which there was no rule. Thus

his troubles were comparatively light, and his firmness might be

regarded as a thing of course. But she was firm too, and firm amidst

very different circumstances. Though her mother prayed and sobbed,

implored her, and almost cursed her, still she was firm. She had given

her word to the man, and her heart, and she would not go back. 'Yes,

papa. It is too late now,' she said, when her father coming from his

wife, once suggested to her that even yet it was not too late. 'Of

course I shall marry him,' she said to Mrs. Robert, almost with

indignation, when Mrs. Robert on one occasion almost broke down in her

purpose.

'Dear aunt, indeed, indeed, you need not interfere,' she said to Mrs.

Nicholas. 'If he were all that they have called him, still I would marry

him,' she said to her other aunt,--'because I love him.' And so they all

became astonished at the young girl whom they had reared up among them,

and to understand that whatever might now be their opinions, she would

have her way.

And so it was decided that they should be married on a certain Tuesday

in the middle of December. Early in the morning she was to be brought

down to her aunt's house, there to be decked in her bridal robes, thence

to be taken to the church, then to return for the bridal feast, and from

thence to be taken off by her husband,--to go whither they might list.

Chapter XXI

The Wedding

It was a sad wedding, though everything within the power of Mr. Robert

Bolton was done to make it gay. There was a great breakfast, and all the

Boltons were at last persuaded to be present except Mrs. Bolton and Mrs.

Nicholas. As to Mrs. Nicholas she was hardly even asked. 'Of course we

would be delighted to see Mrs. Nicholas, if she would come,' Mrs. Robert

said to Nicholas himself. But there had been such long-continued and

absolute hostility between the ladies that this was known to be

impossible. In regard to Mrs. Bolton herself, great efforts were made.

Her husband condescended to beg her to consent on this one occasion to

appear among the Philistines. But as the time came nearer she became

more and more firm in her resolution. 'You shall not touch pitch and not

be defiled,' she said. 'You cannot serve God and Mammon.' When the old

man tried to show her that there was no question of Mammon here, she

evaded him, as she always did on such occasions, either by a real or

simulated deficiency of consequent intelligence. She regarded John

Caldigate as being altogether unregenerate, and therefore a man of the

world,--and therefore a disciple of Mammon. She asked him whether he

wanted her to do what she thought to be sinful. 'It is very sinful

hating people as you hate my sons' families,' he said in his wrath. 'No,

Nicholas, I do not hate their families. I certainly do not hate

Margaret, nor yet Fanny;--but I think that they live in opposition to

the Gospel. Am I to belie my own belief?' Now the old man was quite

certain that his wife did hate both Robert's wife and William's and

would not admit in her own mind this distinction between the conduct of

persons and the persons themselves. But he altogether failed in his

attempts to induce her to go to the breakfast.

The great contest was between the mother and the daughter; but in all

that passed between them no reference was even made to the banquet. As

to that Hester was indifferent. She thought, on the whole, that her

mother would do best to be absent. After all, what is a breakfast;--or

what the significance of any merry-meeting, even for a wedding? There

would no doubt be much said and much done on such an occasion at

variance with her mother's feelings. Even the enforced gaiety of the

dresses would be distasteful to her, and there would hardly be

sufficient cause for pressing her to be present on such an occasion. But

in reference to the church, the question, to Hester's thinking, was very

different, 'Mamma,' she said, 'if you are not there, it will be a

lasting misery to me.'

'How can I go there when I would give so much to save you from going

there yourself?' This was a terrible thing for a mother to say to her

own child on the eve of her wedding, but it had been now said so often

as to have lost something of its sting. It had come to be understood

that Mrs. Bolton would not allow herself to give any assent to the

marriage, but that the marriage was to go on without such assent. All

that had been settled. But still she might go to the church with them

and pray for good results. She feared that evil would come, but still

she might wish for good,--wish for it and pray for it.

'You don't want me to be unhappy, mamma?'

'Want!' said the mother. 'Who can want her child to be unhappy? But

there is an unhappiness harder to be borne, more to be dreaded, enduring

so much longer than that which we may suffer here.'

'Will you not come and pray that I may be delivered also from that? As I

am going from you, will you not let me know that you are there with me

at the last moment. Though you do not love him, you do not wish to

quarrel with me. Oh, mamma, let me feel at any rate that you are there.'

Then the mother promised that she would be there, in the church, though

unknown to or at least unrecognised by any one else. When the morning

came, and when Hester was dropped at The Nurseries, in order that she

might go up and be invested in her finery amidst her bridesmaids, who

were all her cousins, the carriage went on and took Mrs. Bolton to the

church. It was represented to her that, by this arrangement, she would

be forced to remain an hour alone in the cold building. But she was one

of those who regarded all discomfort as meritorious, as in some way

adding something to her claim for heaven. Self-scourging with rods as a

penance, was to her thinking a papistical ordinance most abominable and

damnatory; but the essence of the self-scourging was as comfortable to

her as ever was a hair-shirt to a Roman Catholic enthusiast. So she went

and sat apart in a dark distant pew, dressed in black and deeply veiled,

praying, not it is to be feared, that John Caldigate might be a good

husband to her girl, but that he, as he made his way downward to things

below, might not drag her darling with him. That only a few can be saved

was the fact in all her religion with which she was most thoroughly

conversant. The strait way and the narrow gate, through which only a few

can pass! Were they not known to all believers, to all who had a

glimmering of belief, as an established part of the Christian faith, as

a part so established that to dream even that the gate would be made

broad and the way open would be to dream against the Gospel, against the

very plainest of God's words? If so,--and she would tell herself at all

hours that certainly, certainly, certainly so it was,--then why should

she trouble herself for one so little likely to come in the way of

salvation as this man who was now robbing her of her daughter? If it was

the will of the Almighty,--as it clearly was the will of the

Almighty,--that, out of every hundred, ninety and nine should perish,

could she dare now to pray more than for one? Or if her prayers were

wider must they not be inefficacious? Yes;--there had been the thief

upon the cross! It was all possible. But this man was a thief, not upon

the cross. And, therefore, as she prayed that morning she said not a

prayer for him.

In the meantime the carriage had gone back for the bride, who in very

simple raiment, but yet in bridal-white array, was taken up to the

church. These Boltons were prosperous people, who had all their

carriages, so that there was no lack of vehicles. Two of the girls from

London and two from The Nurseries made up the bevy of bridesmaids who

were as bright and fair as though the bride had come from some worldlier

stock. Mrs. Robert, indeed, had done all she could to give to the whole

concern a becoming bridal brightness, till even Mrs. Daniel had been

tempted to remonstrate. 'I don't see why you shouldn't wear pretty

things if you've got the money to pay for them,' said Mrs. Robert. Mrs.

Daniel shook her head, but on the afternoon before the wedding she

bought an additional ribbon.

Caldigate came over from Folking that morning attended by one John

Jones, an old college friend, as his best man. The squire was not at the

wedding, but on the day before he was with Hester at The Nurseries,

telling her that she should be his dear daughter, and at the same time

giving her a whole set of wicked but very pretty worldly gauds. 'Upon my

word, my dear, he has been very gracious,' said Mrs. Robert, when she

saw them. 'I quite envy the girls being married nowadays, because they

get such pretty things.'

'They are very pretty,' said Hester.

'And must have cost, I'm afraid to say how much money.'

'I suppose it means to say that he will love me, and therefore I am so

glad to have them!' But the squire, though he did mean to say that he

would love her, did not come to the wedding. He was, he said,

unaccustomed to such things, and hoped that he might be excused.

Therefore, from the Folking side there was no one but John Caldigate

himself and John Jones. Of the Babingtons, of course, there was not one.

As long as there was a possibility of success Mrs. Babington had kept up

her remonstrances;--but when there was no longer a possibility she

announced that there was to be an everlasting quarrel between the

houses. Babington and Folking were for the future to know nothing of

each other. Caldigate had hoped that though the ladies would for a time

be unforgiving, his uncle and his male cousins would not take up the

quarrel. But aunt Polly was too strong for that; and he was declared to

be a viper who had been warmed in all their bosoms and had then stung

them all round. 'If you will nurse a viper in your bosom of course he

will sting you,' said Aunt Polly in a letter which she took the trouble

to write to the squire. In reply to which the squire wrote back thus;

'My dear sister, if you will look into your dictionary of natural

history you will see that vipers have no stings. Yours truly, D.

Caldigate.' This letter was supposed to add much to the already existing

offence.

But the marriage ceremony was performed in spite of all this

quarrelling, and the mother standing up in the dark corner of her pew

heard her daughter's silver-clear voice as she vowed to devote herself

to her husband. As she heard it, she also devoted herself. When sorrow

should come as sorrow certainly would come, then she would be ready once

again to be a mother to her child. But till that time should come the

wife of John Caldigate would be nothing to her.

She was not content with thinking and resolving that it should be so,

but she declared her intention in so many words to her daughter. For

poor Hester, though she was proud of her husband, this was in truth a

miserable day. Could she have been induced to separate herself

altogether from her mother on the previous night, or even on that

morning, it would have been better, but there was with her that

customary longing for a last word of farewell which has often made so

many of us wretched. And then there was a feeling that, as she was

giving herself away in marriage altogether in opposition to her mother's

counsels, on that very account she owed to her more attached and

increased observance. Therefore, she had arranged with her husband that

when she returned from the banquet to prepare herself for her journey, a

longer absence than usual should be allowed to her;--so that she might

be taken back to Chesterton, and might thus see her mother the last

after saying farewell to all the others. Then the carriage should return

to The Nurseries and he would be ready to step in, and she need not show

herself again, worn out as she would be with the tears and sobbings

which she anticipated.

It all went as it was arranged, but it would have been much better to

arrange it otherwise. The journey to the Grange and back, together with

the time spent in the interview, took an hour,--and the time went very

slowly with the marriage guests. There always comes a period beyond

which it is impossible to be festive. When the bride left the room, the

bridesmaids and other ladies went with her. Then the gentlemen who

remained hardly knew what to do with each other. Old Mr. Bolton was not

jovial on the occasion, and the four brothers hardly knew how to find

subjects for conversation on such an occasion. The bridegroom felt the

hour to be very long, although he consented to play billiards with the

boys; and John Jones, although he did at last escape and find his way up

among the girls, thought that his friend had married himself into a very

sombre family. But all this was pleasant pastime indeed compared with

that which poor Hester endured in her mother's bedroom. 'So it has been

done,' said Mrs. Bolton, sitting in a comfortless little chair, which

she was accustomed to use when secluded, with her Bible, from all the

household. She spoke in a voice that might have been fit had a son of

hers been just executed on the gallows.

'Oh, mamma, do not speak of it like that!'

'My darling, my own one; would you have me pretend what I do not feel?'

'Why, yes. Even that would be better than treatment such as this.' That

would have been Hester's reply could she have spoken her mind; but she

could not speak it, and therefore she stood silent. 'I will not pretend.

You and your father have done this thing against my wishes and against

my advice.'

'It is I that have done it, mamma.'

'You would not have persevered had he been firm,--as firm as I have

been. But he has vacillated, turning hither and thither, serving God and

Mammon. And he has allowed himself to be ruled by his own son. I will

never, never speak to Robert Bolton again.'

'Oh mamma, do not say that.'

'I do say it. I swear it. You shall not touch pitch and not be defiled.

If there be pitch on earth he is pitch. If your eye offend you, pluck it

out. He is my step-son, I know; but I will pluck him out like an eye

that has offended. It is he that has robbed me of my child.'

'Am I not still your child?' said Hester, going down on her knees with

her hands in her mother's lap and her eyes turned up to her mother's

face.

'No. You are not mine any longer. You are his. You are that man's wife.

When he bids you do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, you

must do it. And he will bid you. You are not my child now. As days run

on and sins grow black I cannot warn you now against the wrath to come.

But though you are not my child, though you are this man's wife, I will

pray for you.'

'And for him?'

'I do not know. I cannot say. Who am I that I should venture to pray

specially for a stranger? That His way may be shown to all

sinners;--thus will I pray for him. And it will be shown. Though whether

he will walk in it,--who can say that?' So much was true of John

Caldigate, no doubt, and is true of all; but there was a tone in her

voice which implied that in regard to this special sinner there could be

very little hope indeed.

'Why should you think that he is bad, mamma?'

'We are all bad. There is no doubt about his being bad. There is not one

among us fit to sweep the lowest step of God's throne. But they who are

His people shall be made bright enough to sit round His feet. May the

time come when you, my darling, shall be restored to the fold.' The poor

young wife by this time had acknowledged to herself the mistake she had

made in thus coming to her mother after her marriage. She now was of

course in that ecstatic phase of existence which makes one's own self

altogether subordinate to the self of another person. That her husband

should be happy constituted her hope of happiness; that he should be

comfortable, her comfort. If he were thought worthy, that would be her

worthiness; or if he were good, that would be her goodness. And even as

to those higher, more distant aspirations, amidst which her mother was

always dwelling, she would take no joy for herself which did not include

him. The denunciations against him which were so plainly included even

in her mother's blessings and prayers for herself, did not frighten her

on behalf of the man to whom she had devoted herself. She could see the

fanaticism and fury of her mother's creed. But she could not escape from

the curse of the moment. When that last imprecation was made by the

woman, with her hands folded and her eyes turned up to heaven, Hester

could only bury her face on her mother's knees and weep. 'When that time

comes, and I know it will come, you shall return to me, and once more be

my child,' said the mother.

'You do not mean that I shall leave my husband?'

'Who can tell? If you do, and I am living, you shall be my child. Till

then we must be apart. How can it be otherwise? Can I give my cheek to a

man to be kissed, and call him my son, when I think that he has robbed

me of my only treasure?'

This was so terrible that the daughter could only hang around her

mother's neck, sobbing and kissing her at the same time, and then go

without another word. She was sure of this,--that if she must lose one

or the other, her mother or her husband, then she would lose her mother.

When she returned to The Nurseries, her husband, according to agreement

came out to her at once. She had bidden adieu to all the others; but at

the last moment her father put his hand into the carriage, so that she

could take it and kiss it. 'Mamma is so sad,' she said to him; 'go home

to her and comfort her.' Of course the old man did go home, but he was

aware that there would for some time be little comfort there either for

him or for his wife. He and his sons had been too powerful for her in

arranging the marriage; but now, now that it was done, nothing could

stop her reproaches. He had been made to think it wrong on one side to

shut his girl up, and now from the other side he was being made to think

that he had done very wrong in allowing her to escape.

It had been arranged that they should be driven out of Cambridge to the

railway station at Audley End on their way to London; so that they might

avoid the crowd of people who would know them at the Cambridge station.

As soon as they had got away from the door of Robert Bolton's house, the

husband attempted to comfort his young wife. 'At any rate it is over,'

he said, alluding of course to the tedium of their wedding festivities.

'So much is over,' she replied.

'You do not regret anything?'

She shook her head slowly as she leaned lovingly against his shoulder.

'You are not sorry, Hester, that you have become my wife?'

'I had to be your wife,--because I love you.'

'Is that a sorrow?'

'I had been all my mother's;--and now I am all yours. She has thrown me

off because I have disobeyed her. I hope you will never throw me off.'

'Is it likely?'

'I think not. I know that I shall never throw you off. They have tried

to make me believe that you are not all that you ought to be--in

religion. But now your religion shall be my religion, and your life my

life. I shall be of your colour--altogether. But, John, a limb cannot

be wrenched out of a socket, as I have been torn away from my mother,

without pain.'

'She will forgive it all when we come back.'

'I fear--I fear. I never knew her to forgive anything yet.' This was

very bad; but nevertheless it was plain to him as it had been plain to

Robert and William Bolton, that not because of the violence of the

woman's character should the life of her daughter have been sacrificed

to her. His duty to make her new life bright for her was all the more

plain and all the more sound,--and as they made their first journey

together he explained to her how sacred that duty should always be to

him.

Chapter XXII

As To Touching Pitch

Before the wedding old Mr. Caldigate arranged with his son that he would

give up to the young married people the house at Folking, and indeed the

entire management of the property. 'I have made up my mind about it,'

said the squire, who at this time was living with his son on happy

terms. 'I have never been adapted for the life of a country gentleman,'

he continued, 'though I have endeavoured to make the best of it, and

have in a certain way come to love the old place. But I don't care about

wheat nor yet about bullocks;--and a country house should always have a

mistress.' And so it was settled. Mr. Caldigate took for himself a house

in Cambridge, whither he proposed to remove nothing but himself and his

books, and promised to have Folking ready for his son and his son's

bride on their return from their wedding tour. In all this Robert Bolton

and the old squire acted together, the brother thinking that the

position would suit his sister well. But others among the Boltons,--Mrs

Daniel, the London people, and even Mrs. Robert herself,--had thought

that the 'young people' had better be further away from the influences

or annoyances of Puritan Grange. Robert, however, had declared that it

would be absurd to yield to the temper, and prejudice, and fury--as he

called it--of his father's wife. When this discussion was going on she

had absolutely quarrelled with the attorney, and the attorney had made

up his mind that she should be--ignored. And then, too, as Robert

explained, it must be for the husband and not for the wife to choose

where they would live. Folking was, or at any rate would be, his own, by

right of inheritance, and it was not to be thought of that a man should

be driven away from his natural duties and from the enjoyment of his

natural privileges by the mad humours of a fanatic female. In all this

old Mr. Bolton was hardly consulted; but there was no reason why he

should express an opinion. He was giving his daughter absolutely no

fortune; nor had he even vouchsafed to declare what money should be

coming to her at his death. John Caldigate had positively refused to say

a word on the subject;--had refused even when instigated to do so by

Hester's brother. 'It shall be just as he pleases,' Caldigate had said.

'I told your father that I was not looking after his daughter with any

view to money, and I will be as good as my word.' Robert had told her

father that something should be arranged;--but the old man had put it

off from day to day, and nothing had been arranged. And so it came to

pass that he was excluded almost from having an opinion as to his

daughter's future life.

It was understood that the marriage trip should be continued for some

months. Caldigate was fettered by no business that required an early

return. He had worked hard for five years, and felt that he had earned a

holiday. And Hester naturally was well disposed to be absent for as long

a time as would suit her husband. Time, and time alone, might perhaps

soften her mother's heart. They went to Italy, and stayed during the

winter months in Rome, and then, when the fine weather came, they

returned across the Alps, and lingered about among the playgrounds of

Europe, visiting Switzerland, the Tyrol, and the Pyrenees, and returning

home to Cambridgeshire at the close of the following September.

And then there was a reason for the return. It would be well that the

coming heir to the Folking estate should be born at Folking. Whether an

heir, or only an insignificant girl, it would be well that the child

should be born amidst the comforts of home; and so they came back. When

they reached the station at Cambridge the squire was there to receive

them, as were also Robert Bolton and his wife. 'I am already in my new

house,' said the old man,--'but I mean to go out with you for to-day and

to-morrow, and just stay till you are comfortably fixed.'

'I never see her myself,' said Robert, in answer to a whispered inquiry

from his sister. 'Or it would be more correct to say she will never see

me. But I hear from the others that she speaks of you constantly.'

'She has written to me of course. But she never mentions John. In

writing back I have always sent his love, and have endeavoured to show

that I would not recognise any quarrel.'

'If I were you,' said Robert, 'I would not take him with me when I

went.' Then the three Caldigates were taken off to Folking.

A week passed by and then arrived the day on which it had been arranged

that Hester was to go to Chesterton and see her mother. There had been

numerous letters, and at last the matter was settled between Caldigate

and old Mr. Bolton at the bank. 'I think you had better let her come

alone,' the old man had said when Caldigate asked whether he might be

allowed to accompany his wife. 'Mrs. Bolton has not been well since her

daughter's marriage and has felt the desolation of her position very

much. She is weak and nervous, and I think you had better let Hester

come alone.' Had Caldigate known his mother-in-law better he would not

have suggested a visit from himself. No one who did know her would have

looked forward to see her old hatred eradicated by an absence of nine

months. Hester therefore went into Cambridge alone, and was taken up to

the house by her father. As she entered the iron gates she felt almost

as though she were going into the presence of one who was an enemy to

herself. And yet when she saw her mother, she rushed at once into the

poor woman's arms. 'Oh, mamma, dear mamma, dearest mamma! My own, own,

own mamma!'

Mrs. Bolton was sitting by the open window of a small breakfast parlour

which looked into the garden, and had before her on her little table her

knitting and a volume of sermons. 'So you have come back, Hester,' she

said after a short pause. She had risen at first to receive her

daughter, and had returned her child's caresses, but had then reseated

herself quickly, as though anxious not to evince any strong feeling on

the occasion.

'Yes, mamma, I have come back. We have been so happy!'

'I am glad you have been happy. Such joys are short-lived; but, still--'

'He has been so good to me, mamma!'

Good! What was the meaning of the word good? She doubted the goodness of

such goodness as his. Do not they who are tempted by the pleasures of

the world always praise the good-nature and kindness of them by whom

they are tempted? There are meanings to the word good which are so

opposed one to another! 'A husband is, I suppose, generally kind to his

wife, at any rate for a little time,' she said.

'Oh, mamma, I do so wish you knew him!' The woman turned her face round,

away from her daughter, and assumed that look of hard, determined

impregnable obstinacy with which Hester had been well acquainted all

her life. But the young wife had come there with a purpose, not strong

perhaps, in actual hope, but resolute even against hope to do her best.

There must be an enduring misery to her unless she could bring her

mother into some friendly relation with her husband, and she had

calculated that the softness produced by her return would give a better

chance for this than she might find at any more protracted time. But

Mrs. Bolton had also made her calculations and had come to her

determination. She turned her head away therefore, and sat quite silent,

with the old stubborn look of resolved purpose.

'Mamma, you will let him come to you now?'

'No.'

'Not your own Hester's husband?'

'No.'

'Are we to be divided for ever?'

'Did I not tell you before,--when you were going? Shall I lie, and say

that I love him? I will not touch pitch, lest I be defiled.'

'Mamma, he is my husband. You shall not call him pitch. He is my very

own. Mamma, mamma!--recall the word that you have said.'

The woman felt that it had to be recalled in some degree. 'I said

nothing of him, Hester. I call that pitch which I believe to be wrong,

and if I swerve but a hair's-breadth wittingly towards what I believe to

be evil, then I shall be touching pitch and then I shall be defiled. I

did not say that he was pitch. Judge not and ye shall not be judged.'

But if ever judgment was pronounced, and a verdict given, and penalties

awarded, such was done now in regard to John Caldigate.

'But, mamma, why will it be doing evil to be gracious to your daughter's

husband?'

The woman had an answer to this appeal very clearly set forth in her

mind though she was unable to produce it clearly in words. When the

marriage had been first discussed she had opposed it with all her

power, because she had believed the man to be wicked. He was

unregenerate;--and when she had put it to her husband and to the

Nicholases and to the Daniels to see whether such was not the case, they

had not contradicted her. It was acknowledged that he was such a one as

Robert,--a worldly man all round. And then he was worse than Robert,

having been a spendthrift, a gambler, and, if the rumours which had

reached them were true, given to the company of loose women. She had

striven with all her might that such a one should not be allowed to take

her daughter from her, and had striven in vain. He had succeeded;--but

his character was not changed by his success. Did she not know him to be

chaff that must be separated by the wind from the corn and then consumed

in the fire? His character was not altered because that human being whom

she loved the best in all the world had fallen into his power. He was

not the less chaff,--the less likely to be burned. That her daughter

should become chaff also,--ah, there was the agony of it! If instead of

taking the husband and wife together she could even now separate

them,--would it not be her duty to do so? Of all duties would it not be

the first? Let the misery here be what it might, what was that to

eternal misery or to eternal bliss? When therefore she was asked whether

she would be doing evil were she to be gracious to her own son-in-law,

she was quite, quite sure that any such civility would be a sin. The man

was pitch,--though she had been coerced by the exigencies of a worldly

courtesy to deny that she had intended to say so. He was pitch to her,

and she declared to herself that were she to touch him she would be

denied. But she knew not in what language to explain all this. 'What you

call graciousness, Hester, is an obligation of which religion knows

nothing,' she said after a pause.

'I don't know why it shouldn't. Are we to be divided, mamma, because of

religion?'

'If you were alone----'

'But I am not alone. Oh, mamma, mamma, do you not know that I am going

to become a mother?'

'My child!'

'And you will not be with me, because you think that you and John differ

as to religious forms.'

'Forms!' she said. 'Forms! Is the spirit there? By their fruits ye shall

know them. I ask you yourself whether his life as you have seen it is

such as I should think conformable with the Word of God?'

'Whose life is so?'

'But an effort may be made. Do not let us palter with each other,

Hester! There are the sheep,--and there are the goats! Of which is he?

According to the teaching of your early years, in which flock would he

be found if account were taken now?'

There was something so terrible in this that the young wife who was thus

called upon to denounce her husband separated herself by some steps from

her mother, retreating back to a chair in which she seated herself. 'Do

you remember, mamma, the words you said just now? Judge not and ye shall

not be judged.'

'Nor do I judge.'

'And how does it go on? Forgive and ye shall be forgiven.'

'Neither do I judge, nor can I forgive.' This she said, putting all her

emphasis on the pronoun, and thereby declaring her own humility. 'But

the great truths of my religion are dear to me. I will not trust myself

in the way of sinners, because by some worldly alliance to which I

myself was no consenting party, I have been brought into worldly contact

with them. I at any rate will be firm. I say to you now no more than I

said, ah, so many times, when it was still possible that my words should

not be vain. They were vain. But not on that account am I to be

changed. I will not be wound like a skein of silk round your little

finger.' That was it. Was she to give way in everything because they had

been successful among them in carrying out this marriage in opposition

to her judgment? Was she to assent that this man be treated as a sheep

because he had prevailed against her, while she was so well aware that

he would still have been a goat to them all had he not prevailed? She at

any rate was sincere. She was consistent. She would be true to her

principles even at the expense of all her natural yearnings. Of what use

to her would be her religious convictions if she were to give them up

just because her heart-strings were torn and agonised? The man was a

goat though he were ten times told her child's husband. So she looked

again away into the garden and resolved that she would not yield in a

single point.

'Good-bye, mamma,' said Hester, rising from her chair, and coming up to

her mother.

'Good-bye, Hester. God bless you, my child!'

'You will not come to me to Folking?'

'No. I will not go to Folking.'

'I may come to you here?'

'Oh yes;--as often as you will, and for as long as you will.'

'I cannot stay away from home without him, you know,' said the young

wife.

'As often as you will, and for as long as you will,' the mother said

again, repeating the words with emphasis. 'Would I could have you here

as I used to do, so as to look after every want and administer to every

wish. My fingers shall work for your baby, and my prayers shall be said

for him and for you, morning and night. I am not changed, Hester. I am

still and ever shall be, while I am spared, your own loving mother.' So

they parted, and Hester was driven back to Folking.

In forming our opinion as to others we are daily brought into

difficulty by doubting how much we should allow to their convictions,

and how far we are justified in condemning those who do not accede to

our own. Mrs. Bolton believed every word that she said. There was no

touch of hypocrisy about her. Could she without sting of conscience have

gone off to Folking and ate of her son-in-law's bread and drank of his

cup, and sat in his presence, no mother living would have enjoyed more

thoroughly the delight of waiting upon and caressing and bending over

her child. She denied herself all this with an agony of spirit, groaning

not only over their earthly separation, thinking not only of her

daughter's present dangers, but tormented also by reflections as to

dangers and possible separations in another world. But she knew she was

right. She knew at least that were she to act otherwise there would be

upon her conscience the weight of sin. She did not know that the

convictions on which she rested with such confidence had come in truth

from her injured pride,--had settled themselves in her mind because

she had been beaten in her endeavours to prevent her daughter's

marriage. She was not aware that she regarded John Caldigate as a

goat,--as one who beyond all doubt was a goat,--simply because John

Caldigate had had his way, while she had been debarred from hers. Such

no doubt was the case. And yet who can deny her praise for fidelity to

her own convictions? When we read of those who have massacred and

tortured their opponents in religion, have boiled alive the unfortunates

who have differed from themselves as to the meaning of an unintelligible

word or two, have vigorously torn the entrails out of those who have

been pious with a piety different from their own, how shall we dare to

say that they should be punished for their fidelity? Mrs. Bolton spent

much of that afternoon with her knees on the hard boards,--thinking that

a hassock would have taken something from the sanctity of the

action,--wrestling for her child in prayer. And she told herself that

her prayer had been heard. She got up more than ever assured that she

must not touch pitch lest she should be defiled. Let us pray for what we

will with earnestness,--though it be for the destruction of half of a

world,--we are sure to think that our prayers have been heard.

Chapter XXIII

The New Heir

Things went on smoothly at Folking, or with apparent smoothness, for

three months, during which John Caldigate surprised both his friends and

his enemies by the exemplary manner in which he fulfilled his duties as

a parish squire. He was put on the commission, and was in the way to

become the most active Justice of the Peace in those parts. He made

himself intimate with all the tenants, and was almost worshipped by Mr.

Ralph Holt, his nearest neighbour, to whose judgment he submitted

himself in all agricultural matters. He shot a little, but moderately,

having no inclination to foster what is called a head of game. And he

went to church very regularly, having renewed his intimacy with Mr.

Bromley, the parson, a gentleman who had unfortunately found it

necessary to quarrel with the old squire, because the old squire had

been so manifestly a pagan.

There had been unhappiness in the parish on this head, and, especially,

unhappiness to Mr. Bromley, who was a good man. That Mr. Caldigate

should be what he called a pagan had been represented by Mr. Bromley to

his friends as a great misfortune, and especially a misfortune to the

squire himself. But he would have ignored that in regard to social

life,--so Mr. Bromley said when discussing the matter,--if the pagan

would have desisted from arguing the subject. But when Mr. Caldigate

insisted on the parson owning the unreasonableness of his own belief,

and called upon him to confess himself to be either a fool or a

hypocrite, then the parson found himself constrained to drop all further

intercourse. 'It is the way with all priests,' said the old squire

triumphantly to the first man he could get to hear him. 'The moment you

disagree with them they become your enemies at once, and would

straightway kill you if they had the power.' He probably did not know

how very disagreeable he had made himself to the poor clergyman.

But now matters were on a much better footing, and all the parish

rejoiced. The new squire was seen in his pew every Sunday morning, and

often entertained the parson at the house. The rumour of this change was

indeed so great that more than the truth reached the ears of some of the

Boltons, and advantage was taken of it by those who desired to prove to

Mrs. Bolton that the man was not a goat. What more would she have? He

went regularly to morning and evening service,--here it was that rumour

exaggerated our hero's virtues,--did all his duty as a country

gentleman, and was kind to his wife. The Daniels, who were but lukewarm

people, thought that Mrs. Bolton was bound to give way. Mrs. Robert

declared among her friends that the poor woman was becoming mad from

religion, and the old banker himself was driven very hard for a reply

when Robert asked him whether such a son-in-law as John Caldigate ought

to be kept at arms' length. The old man did in truth hate the name of

John Caldigate, and regretted bitterly the indiscretion of that day when

the spendthrift had been admitted within his gates. Though he had agreed

to the marriage, partly from a sense of duty to his child, partly under

the influences of his son, he had, since that, been subject to his wife

for nine or ten months. She had not been able to prevail against him in

action; but no earthly power could stop her tongue. Now when these new

praises were dinned into his ears, when he did convince himself that, as

far as worldly matters went, his son-in-law was likely to become a

prosperous and respected gentleman, he would fain have let the question

of hostility drop. There need not have been much intercourse between

Puritan Grange and Folking; but then also there need be no quarrel. He

was desirous that Caldigate should be allowed to come to the house, and

that even visits of ceremony should be made to Folking. But Mrs. Bolton

would have nothing to do with such half friendship. In the time that was

coming she must be everything or nothing to her daughter. And she could

not be brought to think that one who had been so manifestly a goat

should cease to be a goat so suddenly. In other words, she could not

soften her heart towards the man who had conquered her. Therefore when

the time came for the baby to be born there had been no reconciliation

between Puritan Grange and Folking.

Mrs. Babington had been somewhat less stern. Immediately on the return

of the married couple to their own home she had still been full of

wrath, and had predicted every kind of evil; but when she heard that all

tongues were saying all good things of this nephew of hers, and when she

was reminded by her husband that blood is thicker than water, and when

she reflected that it is the duty of Christians to forgive injuries, she

wrote to the sinner as follows:--

'BABINGTON HALL, \_November\_ 187-.

'My DEAR JOHN,--We are all here desirous that bygones should be

bygones, and are willing to forgive,--though we may not perhaps be

able to forget. I am quite of opinion that resentments should not be

lasting, let them have been ever so well justified by circumstances

at first.

'Your uncle bids me say that he hopes you will come over and shoot

the Puddinghall coverts with Humphry and John. They propose Thursday

next but would alter the day if that does not suit.

'We have heard of your wife's condition, of course, and trust that

everything may go well with her. I shall hope to make her

acquaintance some day when she is able to receive visitors.

'I am particularly induced at the present moment to hold out to you

once more the right hand of fellowship and family affection by the

fact that dear Julia is about to settle herself most advantageously

in life. She is engaged to marry the Rev. Augustus Smirkie, the

rector of Plum-cum-Pippins near Woodbridge in this county. We all

like Mr. Smirkie very much indeed, and think \_that Julia has been

most fortunate in her choice\_.' (These words were underscored doubly

by way of showing how very much superior was Mr. Augustus Smirkie to

Mr. John Caldigate.) 'I may perhaps as well mention, to avoid

anything disagreeable at present, that Julia is at this time staying

with Mr. Smirkie's mother at Ipswich.--Your affectionate aunt,

'MARYANNE BABINGTON.'

Caldigate was at first inclined to send, in answer to this letter, a

reply which would not have been agreeable to his aunt, but was talked

into a better state of mind by his wife. 'Telling me that she will

forgive me! The question is whether I will forgive her!' 'Let that be

the question,' said his wife, 'and do forgive her. She wants to come

round, and, of course, she has to make the best of it for herself. Tell

her from me that I shall be delighted to see her whenever she chooses to

come.'

'Poor Julia!' said Caldigate, laughing.

'Of course you think so, John. That's natural enough. Perhaps I think so

too. But what has that to do with it?'

'It's rather unfortunate that I know so much about Mr. Smirkie. He is

fifty years old, and has five children by his former wife.'

'I don't see why he shouldn't be a good husband for all that.'

'And Plum-cum-Pippins is less than \_Â£300\_ a-year. Poor dear Julia!'

'I believe you are jealous, John.'

'Well; yes. Look at the way she has underscored it. Of course I'm

jealous.' Nevertheless he wrote a courteous answer promising to go over

and shoot the coverts, and stay for one night.

He did go over and shoot the coverts, and stayed for one night; but the

visit was not very successful. Aunt Polly would talk of the glories of

the Plum-cum-Pippins rectory in a manner which implied that dear Julia's

escape from a fate which once threatened her had been quite

providential. When he alluded,--as he did, but should not have done,--to

the young Smirkies, she spoke with almost ecstatic enthusiasm of the

'dear children,' Caldigate knowing the while that the eldest child must

be at least sixteen. And then, though Aunt Polly was kind to him, she

was kind in an almost insulting manner,--as though he were to be

received for the sake of auld lang syne in spite of the step he had

taken downwards in the world. He did his best to bear all this with no

more than an inward smile, telling himself that it behoved him as a man

to allow her to have her little revenge. But the smile was seen, and the

more that was seen of it, the more often was he reminded that he had

lost that place in the Babington elysium which might have been his, had

he not been too foolish to know what was good for him. And a hint was

given that the Boltons a short time since had not been aristocratic,

whereas it was proved to him from Burke's Landed Gentry that the

Smirkies had been established in Suffolk ever since Cromwell's time. No

doubt their land had gone, but still there had been Smirkies.

'How did you get on with them?' his father asked, as he passed home

through Cambridge.

'Much the same as usual. Of course in such a family a son-in-law elect

is more thought of than a useless married man.'

'They snubbed you.'

'Aunt Polly snubbed me a little, and I don't think I had quite so good a

place for the shooting as in the old days. But all that was to be

expected. I quite agree with Aunt Polly that family quarrels are foolish

things.'

'I am not so sure. Some people doom themselves to an infinity of

annoyance because they won't avoid the society of disagreeable people. I

don't know that I have ever quarrelled with any one. I have never

intended to do so. But when I find that a man or woman is not

sympathetic I think it better to keep out of the way.' That was the

squire's account of himself. Those who knew him in the neighbourhood

were accustomed to say that he had quarrelled with everybody about him.

In December the baby was born, just twelve months after the marriage,

and there was great demonstrations of joy, and ringing of bells in the

parishes of Utterden and Netherden. The baby was a boy, and all was as

it ought to be. John Caldigate himself, when he came to look at his

position and to understand the feeling of those around him, was

astonished to find how strong was the feeling in his own favour, and how

thoroughly the tenants had been outraged by the idea that the property

might be made over to a more distant member of the family. What was it

to them who lived in the house at Folking? Why should they have been

solicitous in the matter? They had their leases, and there was no

adequate reason for supposing that one Caldigate would be more pleasant

in his dealing with them than another. And yet it was evident to him now

that this birth of a real heir at the squire's house, with a fair

prospect that the acres would descend in a right line, was regarded by

them all with almost superstitious satisfaction. The bells were rung as

though the church-towers were going to be pulled down, and there was not

a farmer or a farmer's wife who did not come to the door of Folking to

ask how the young mother and the baby were doing.

'This is as it should be, squoire,' said Ralph Holt, who was going about

in his Sunday clothes, as though it was a day much too sacred for muck

and work. He had caught hold of Caldigate in the stable yard, and was

now walking with him down towards the ferry.

'Yes;--she's doing very well, they tell me,' said the newly-made father.

'In course she'll do well. Why not? A healthy lass like she, if I may

make so free? There ain't nothing like having them strong and young,

with no town-bred airs about 'em. I never doubted as she wouldn't do

well. I can tell from their very walk what sort of mothers they'll be.'

Mr. Holt had long been known as the most judicious breeder of stock in

that neighbourhood. 'But it ain't only that, squoire.'

'The young'un will do well too, I hope.'

'In course he will. Why not? The foals take after their dams for a time,

pretty much always. But what I mean is;--we be all glad you've come back

from them out-o'-the-way parts.'

'I had to go there, Holt.'

'Well;--we don't know much about that, sir, and I don't mean nothing

about that.'

'To tell the truth, my friend, I should not have done very well here

unless I had been able to top-dress the English acres with a little

Australian gold.'

'Like enough, squoire; like enough. But I wasn't making bold to say

nothing about that. For a young gentleman to go out a while and then to

come back was all very well. Most of 'em does it. But when there was a

talk as you wern't to come back, and that Master George was to take the

place;--why then it did seem as things was very wrong.'

'Master George might have been quite as good as I.'

'It wasn't the proper thing, squoire. It wasn't straight. If you hadn't

never a' been, sir, or if the Lord Almighty had taken you as he did the

others, God bless 'em, nobody wouldn't have had a right to say nothing.

But as you was to the fore it wouldn't have been straight, and no one

wouldn't have thought it straight.' Instigated by this John Caldigate

looked a good deal into the matter that day, and began to feel that,

having been born Squire of Folking, he had, perhaps, no right to deal

with himself otherwise. Then various thoughts passed through his mind as

to other dealings which had taken place. How great had been the chance

against his being Squire of Folking when he started with Dick Shand to

look for Australian gold! And how little had been the chance of his

calling Hester Bolton his wife when he was pledging his word to Mrs.

Smith on board the Goldfinder! But now it had all come round to him just

as he would have had it. There was his wife up-stairs in the big

bed-room with her baby,--the wife as to whom he had made that romantic

resolution when he had hardly spoken to her; and there had been the

bells ringing and the tenants congratulating him, and everything had

been pleasant. His father who had so scorned him,--who in the days of

Davis and Newmarket had been so well justified in scorning him,--was now

his closest friend. Thinking of all this, he told himself that he had

certainly received better things than he had deserved.

A day or two after the birth of the baby Mrs. Robert came out to see the

new prodigy, and on the following day Mrs. Daniel. Mrs. Robert was, of

course, very friendly and disposed to be in all respects a good

sister-in-law. Hester's great grief was in regard to her mother. She was

steadfast enough in her resolution to stand in all respects by her

husband if there must be a separation,--but the idea of the separation

robbed her of much of her happiness. Mrs. Robert was aware that a great

effort was being made with Mrs. Bolton. The young squire's

respectability was so great, and his conduct so good, that not only the

Boltons themselves, but neighbours around who knew aught of the Bolton

affairs, were loud in denouncing the woman for turning up her nose at

such a son-in-law. The great object was to induce her to say that she

would allow Caldigate to enter the house at Chesterton. 'You know I

never see her now,' said Mrs. Robert; 'I'm too much of a sinner to think

of entering the gates.'

'Do not laugh at her, Margaret,' said Hester.

'I do not mean to laugh at her. It is simply the truth. Robert and I

have made up our minds that it is better for us all that I should not

put myself in her way.'

'Think how different it must be for me!'

'Of course it is. It is dreadful to think that she should be

so--prejudiced. But what can I do, dear? If they will go on persevering,

she will, of course, have to give way.' The 'they' spoken of were the

Daniels, and old Mr. Bolton himself, and latterly the Nicholases, all of

whom were of opinion that the separation of the mother from her daughter

was very dreadful, especially when it came to be understood that the

squire of Folking went regularly to his parish church.

On the next day Mrs. Daniel came out; and though she was much less liked

by Hester than her younger sister-in-law, she brought more comfortable

tidings. She had been at the Grange a day or two before, and Mrs. Bolton

had almost consented to say that she would see John Caldigate. 'You

shouldn't be in a hurry, you know, my dear,' said Mrs. Daniel.

'But what has John done that there should be any question about all

this?'

'I suppose he was a little--just a little--what they call fast once.'

'He got into debt when he was a boy,' said the wife, 'and then paid off

everything and a great deal more by his own industry. It seems to me

that everybody ought to be proud of him.'

'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 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 XXIV

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 to 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 plaints 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 was that 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 these 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 villainy

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 XXV

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 with a look of offence.

The attorney's manner and tone seemed to him to convey reproach; and he

was determined that none of the Boltons should have the liberty to find

fault with him. It had been suggested, some weeks since, before the baby

was born, that an effort should be made to induce Mrs. Bolton to act as

godmother. And, since that, among the names of many other relatives and

friends, those of uncle Babington and Robert Bolton had been proposed.

Hester had been particularly anxious that her brother should be asked,

because,--as she so often said to her husband,--he had always been her

firm friend in the matter of her marriage. But now, when the question

was to be settled, John Caldigate shook his head.

'I was afraid there was something even before baby was born,' said the

wife.

'There is something, my pet.'

'What is it, John? You do not mean to keep it secret from me?'

'I have not the slightest objection to your asking him to stand;--but I

think it possible that he may refuse.'

'Why should he refuse?'

'Because, as you say, there is something wrong between us. There have

been applications for money about the Polyeuka mine. I would not trouble

you about it while you were ill.'

'Does he think you ought to give back the money?'

'No,--not that. We are quite agreed about the money. But another

question has come up;--and though we are, I believe, agreed about that

too, still there has been something a little uncomfortable.'

'Would not baby make that all right?'

'I think if you were to ask your brother William it would be better.'

'May I not know what it is now, John?'

'I have meant you to know always,--from the moment when it

occurred,--when you should be well enough.'

'I am well now.'

'I hardly know; and yet I cannot bear to keep it secret from you.'

There was something in his manner which made her feel at once that the

subject to which he alluded was of the greatest importance. Whether weak

or strong, of course she must be told now. Let the shock of the tidings

be what it might, the doubt would be worse. She felt all that, and she

knew that he could feel it. 'I am quite strong,' she said; 'you must

tell me now.'

'Is baby asleep? Put him in the cradle.'

'Is it so bad as that?'

'I do not say that it is bad at all. There is nothing bad in it,--except

a lie. Let me put him in the cradle.'

Then he took the child very gently and deposited him, fast asleep, among

the blankets. He had already assumed for himself the character of being

a good male nurse; and she was always delighted when she saw the baby in

his arms. Then he came and seated himself close to her on the sofa, and

put his arm round her waist. 'There is nothing bad--but a lie.'

'A lie may be so very bad!'

'Yes, indeed; and this lie is very bad. Do you remember my telling

you--about a woman?'

'That Mrs. Smith;--the dancing woman?'

'Yes;--her.'

'Of course I remember.'

'She was one of those, it seems, who bought the Polyeuka mine.'

'Oh, indeed!'

'She, with Crinkett and others. Now they want their money back again.'

'But can they make you send it? And would it be very bad--to lose it?'

'They cannot make me send it. They have no claim to a single shilling.

And if they could make me pay it, that would not be very bad.'

'What is it, then? You are afraid to tell me?'

'Yes, my darling,--afraid to speak to you of what is so wicked;--afraid

to shock you, to disgust you; but not afraid of any injury that can be

done to you. No harm will come to you.'

'But to you?'

'Nor to me;--none to you, or to me, or to baby there.' As he said this

she clutched his hand with hers. 'No harm, dearest; and yet the thing is

so abominable that I can hardly bring myself to wound your ears with

it.'

'You must tell now, John.'

'Yes, I must tell you. I have thought about it much, and I know that it

is better that you should be told.' He had thought much about it, and

had so resolved. But he had not quite known how difficult the telling

would be. And now he was aware that he was adding to the horror she

would feel by pausing and making much of the thing. And yet he could not

tell it as though it were a light matter. If he could have declared it

all at once,--at first, with a smile on his face, then expressing his

disgust at the woman's falsehood,--it would have been better. 'That

woman has written me a letter in which she declares herself to be--my

wife!'

'Your wife! John! Your wife?' These exclamations came from her almost

with a shriek as she jumped up from his arms and for a moment stood

before him.

'Come back to me,' he said. Then again she seated herself. 'You did not

leave me then because you doubted me?'

'Oh no,' she cried, throwing herself upon him and smothering him with

kisses--'No, no! It was surprise at such horrid words,--not doubt, not

doubt of you. I will never doubt you.'

'It was because I was sure of you that I have ventured to tell you

this.'

'You may be sure of me,' she said, sobbing violently the while. 'You are

sure of me; are you not? And now tell it me all. How did she say so? why

did she say so? Is she coming to claim you? Tell me all. Oh, John, tell

me everything.'

'The why is soon told. Because she wants money. She had heard no doubt

of my marriage and thought to frighten me out of money. I do not think

she would do it herself. The man Crinkett has put her up to it.'

'What does she say?'

'Just that,--and then she signs herself,--Euphemia Caldigate.'

'Oh, John!'

'Now you know it all.'

'May I not see the letter?'

'For what good? But you shall see it if you wish it. I have determined

that nothing shall be kept back from you. In all that there may ever be

to trouble us the best comfort will be in perfect confidence.' He had

already learned enough of her nature to be sure that in this way would

he best comfort her, and most certainly ensure her trust in himself.

'Oh yes,' she cried. 'If you will tell me all, I will never doubt you.'

Then she took the letter from his hand, and attempted to read it. But

her excitement was so great that though the words were written very

clearly, she could not bring her mind to understand them. 'Treachery!

Ruin! Married to you! What is it all? Do you read it to me;--every word

of it.' Then he did read it; every word of it. 'She says that she will

marry the other man. How can she marry him when she says that she

is--your wife?'

'Just so, my pet. But you see what she says. It does not matter much to

her whether it be true or false, so that she can get my money from me.

But, Hester, I would fain be just even to her. No doubt she wrote the

letter.'

'Who else would have written it?'

'She wrote it. I know her hand. And these are her words,--because they

are properly expressed. But it is all his doing,--the man's doing. He

has got her in his power, and he is using her in this way.'

'If you sent her money--?'

'Not a shilling;--not though she were starving; not now. A man who gives

money under a threat is gone. If I were to send her money, everyone

would believe this tale that she tells. Your brother Robert would

believe it.'

'He knows it?'

'I took the letter to him instantly, but I made up my mind that I would

not show it you till baby was born. You can understand that?' She only

pressed closer to him as he said this. 'I showed it to Robert, and,

altogether we are not quite such friends since as we were before.'

'You do not mean that he believes it?'

'No; not that. He does not believe it. If he did, I do not see how he

and I could ever speak to each other again. I don't think he believes it

at all. But I had to tell him the whole story, and that, perhaps,

offended him.' The 'whole story' had not been told to Hester, nor did he

think it necessary that it should be told. There was no reason why these

details which Robert had elicited by his questions should be repeated to

her,--the promise of marriage, the interference of the Wesleyan

minister, the use made of his name,--of all this he said nothing. But

she had now been told that which to her had been very dreadful, and she

was not surprised that her brother should have been offended when he

heard the same sad story. She, of course, had at once pardoned the old

offence. A young wife when she is sure of her husband, will readily

forgive all offences committed before marriage, and will almost be

thankful for the confidence placed in her when offences are confessed.

But she could understand that a brother could not be thankful, and she

would naturally exaggerate in her own mind the horror which he would

feel at such a revelation. Then the husband endeavoured to lighten the

effect of what he had said. 'Offence, perhaps, is the wrong word. But he

was stiff and masterful, if you know what I mean.'

'You would not bear that, certainly, John?'

'No. I have to own that I do not love the assumption of

authority,--except from you.'

'You do not like it from anybody, John.'

'You would not wish me to submit myself to your brother?'

'No; but I think I might ask him to be baby's godfather.'

'As you please; only you would be unhappy if he refused.'

Then there came a little wail from the cradle and the baby was taken up,

and for some minutes his little necessities occupied the mother to the

exclusion even of that terrible letter. But when Caldigate was about to

leave the room, she asked him another question. 'Will she do anything

more, John?'

'I can hardly say. I should think not.'

'What does Robert think?'

'He has not told me. I sent an immediate refusal by the telegraph wires,

and have heard nothing since.'

'Is he--nervous about it?'

'I hardly know. It dwells in his mind, no doubt.'

'Are you nervous?'

'It dwells in my mind. That is all.'

'May I speak to him about it?'

'Why should you? What good would it do? I would rather you did not.

Nevertheless, if you feel frightened, if you think that there is

anything wrong, it will be natural that you should go to him for

assistance. I will not forbid it.' As he said this he stood back away

from her. It was but by a foot or two, but still there was a sign of

separation which instantly made itself palpable to her.

'Wrong, how wrong?' she said, following him and clinging to him. 'You do

not suppose that I would go to him because I think you wrong? Do you not

know that whatever might come I should cling to you? What is he to me

compared to you? No; I will never speak to him about it.'

He returned her caress with fervour, and stroked her hair, and kissed

her forehead. 'My dearest! my own! my darling! But what I mean is that

if some other man's opinion on this subject is necessary to your

comfort, you may go to him.'

'No other man's opinion shall be necessary to me about anything. I will

not speak about it to Robert, or to any one. But if more should come of

it, you will tell me?'

'You shall know everything that comes. I have never for a moment had the

idea of keeping it back from you. But because of baby, and because baby

had to be born, I delayed it.' This was an excuse which, as the mother

of her child, she could not but accept with thankfulness.

'I think I will ask him,' she said that night, referring again to the

vexed question of godfathers. Uncle Babington had some weeks since very

generously offered his services, and, of course, they had been

generously accepted. Among the baby's relations he was the man of

highest standing in the world; and then this was a mark of absolute

forgiveness in reference to the wrongs of poor Julia. And a long letter

had been prepared to Mrs. Bolton, written by Hester's own hand, not

without much trouble, in which the baby's grandmother was urged to take

upon herself the duties of godmother. All this had been discussed in the

family, so that the nature of the petition was well known to Mrs.

Bolton for some time before she received it. Mrs. Daniel, who had

consented to act in the event of a refusal from Puritan Grange, had more

than once used her influence with her step-mother-in-law. But no hint

had as yet come to Folking as to what the answer might be. It had also

been suggested that Robert should be the other godfather,--the proposal

having been made to Mrs. Robert. But there had come upon all the Boltons

a feeling that Robert was indifferent perhaps, even unwilling to

undertake the task. And yet no one knew why. Mrs. Robert herself did not

know why.

The reader, however, will know why, and will understand how it was that

Mrs. Robert was in the dark. The attorney, though he was suspicious,

though he was frightened, though he was, in truth, very angry with this

new brother-in-law, through whose ante-nuptial delinquencies so much

sorrow was threatened to the Bolton family, nevertheless kept the secret

from all the Cambridge Boltons. It had been necessary to him to seek

counsel with some one, but he had mentioned the matter only to his

brother William. But he did not wish to add to the bond which now tied

him to Folking. If this horror, this possible horror, should fall upon

them,--if it should turn out that he had insisted on giving his sister

in marriage to a man already married,--then,--then,--then----! Such

possible future incidents were too terrible to be considered closely,

but with such a possibility he would not add to the bonds. At Puritan

Grange they would throw all the responsibility of what had been done

upon him. This feeling was mingled with his love for his sister,--with

the indignation he would not only feel but show if it should turn out

that she had been wronged. 'I will destroy him,--I will destroy him

utterly,' he would sometimes say to himself as he thought of it.

And now the godfather question had to be decided, 'No,' he said to his

wife, 'I don't care about such things. I won't do it. You write and tell

her that I have prejudices, or scruples, or whatever you choose to call

it.'

'There is to be a little tarradiddle told, and I am to tell it?'

'I have prejudices and scruples.'

'About the religion of the thing?' She knew,--as of course, she was

bound to know,'--that he had at any rate a round dozen of god-children

somewhere about the country. There were the young Williams, and the

young Daniels, and her own nephews and nieces, with the parents of all

of whom uncle Robert had been regarded as the very man for a godfather.

The silversmith in Trumpington Street knew exactly the weight of the

silver cup that was to be given to the boy or to a girl. The Bible and

prayer-books were equally well regulated. Mrs. Robert could not but

smile at the idea of religious scruples. 'I wish I knew what it was that

has come over you of late. I fancy you have quarrelled with John

Caldigate.'

'If you think that, then you can understand the reason.'

'What is it about?'

'I have not quarrelled with him. It is possible that I may have to do

so. But I do not mean to say what it is about.' Then he smiled. 'I don't

want you to ask any more questions, but just to write to Hester as

kindly as you can, saying I don't mean to be godfather any more. It will

be a good excuse in regard to all future babies.' Mrs. Robert was a good

wife and did as she was bid. She worded her refusal as cautiously as she

could, and,--on that occasion,--asked her husband no further question.

The prayer that was addressed to the lady of Puritan Grange became the

subject of much debate of great consideration, and I may say also of

lengthened prayer. To Mrs. Bolton this position of godmother implied

much of the old sacred responsibility which was formerly attached to it,

and which Robert Bolton, like other godfathers and godmothers of the

day, had altogether ignored. She had been already partly brought round,

nearly persuaded, in regard to the acceptance of John Caldigate as her

son-in-law. It did not occur to her to do other than hate him. How was

it possible that such a woman should do other than hate the man who had

altogether got the better of her as to the very marrow of her life, the

very apple of her eye? But she was alive to her duty towards her

daughter; and when she was told that the man was honest in his dealings,

well-to-do in the world, a professing Christian who was constant in his

parish church, she did not know how to maintain her opinion, that in

spite of all this, he was an unregenerate castaway. Therefore, although

she was determined still to hate him, she had almost made up her mind to

enter his house. With these ideas she wrote a long letter to Hester, in

which she promised to have herself taken out to Folking in order that

she might be present as godmother at the baby's baptism. She would lunch

at Folking, but must return to Chesterton before dinner. Even this was a

great thing gained.

Then it was arranged that Daniel Bolton should stand as second godfather

in place of his brother Robert.

Chapter XXVI

A Stranger in Cambridge

'I am sorry you will not come out to us to-morrow.' On the day before

the christening, which was at last fixed for a certain Tuesday in the

middle of February, John Caldigate went into Cambridge, and at once

called upon the attorney at his office. This he did partly instigated

by his own feelings, and partly in compliance with his wife's wishes.

Before that letter had come he and his brother-in-law had been fast

friends; and now, though for a day or two he had been angry with what he

had thought to be unjustifiable interference, he regretted the loss of

such a friend. More than three months had now passed since the letter

had come, but his mind was far from being at ease, and he felt that if

trouble should come it would be very well for him to have Robert Bolton

on his side.

'Margaret is going,' said the attorney.

'Why do you not bring her?'

'Days are days with me, my boy. I can't afford to give up a morning for

every baby that is born.'

'That of course may be true, and if that is the reason, I have nothing

more to say.' As he spoke he looked in his brother-in-law's face, so as

almost to prevent the possibility of continued pretence.

'Well, Caldigate, it isn't the reason altogether,' said the other. 'If

you would have allowed it to pass without further explanation so would

I. But if the truth must be spoken in so many words, I will confess that

I would rather not go out to Folking till I am sure we shall be no more

troubled by your friends in Australia.'

'Why not? Why should you not go out to Folking?'

'Simply because I may have to take an active part against you. I do not

suppose it will come to that, but it is possible. I need not say that I

trust there may be nothing of the kind, but I cannot be sure. It is on

the cards.'

'I think that is a hard judgment. Do you mean to say that you believe

that woman's statement not only against mine, but against the whole

tenor of my life and character?'

'No; I do not believe the woman's statement. If I did, I should not be

talking to you now. The woman has probably lied, and is probably a tool

in the hands of others for raising money, as you have already suggested.

But, according to your own showing there has been much in your life to

authorise the statement. I do not know what does or does not constitute

a marriage there.'

'The laws are the same as ours.'

'There at any rate you are wrong. Their marriage laws are not the same

as ours, though how they may differ you and I probably do not accurately

know. And they may be altered at any time as they may please. Let the

laws be what they will, it is quite possible, after what you have told

me, that they may bring up evidence which you would find it very

difficult to refute. I don't think it will be so. If I did I should use

all my influence to remove my sister at once.'

'You couldn't do it,' said Caldigate, very angrily.

'I tell you what I should endeavour to do. You must excuse me if I stand

aloof just at present. I don't suppose you can defend such a condition

of things as you described to me the other day.'

'I do not mean to be put upon my defence,--at any rate by you,' said

Caldigate, very angrily. And then he left the office.

He had come into Cambridge with the intention of calling at Puritan

Grange after he had left the attorney, and when he found himself in the

street he walked on in the direction of Chesterton. He had wished to

thank his wife's mother for her concession and had been told by Hester

that if he would call, Mrs. Bolton would certainly see him now. Had

there been no letter from the woman in Australia, he would probably not

have obeyed his wife's behest in this matter. His heart and spirit would

then have been without a flaw, and, proud in his own strength and his

own rectitude, he would have declared to himself that the absurd

prejudices of a fanatic woman were beneath his notice. But that letter

had been a blow, and the blow, though it had not quelled him, had

weakened his forces. He could conceal the injury done him even from his

wife, but there was an injury. He was not quite the man that he had been

before. From day to day, and from hour to hour, he was always

remonstrating with himself because it was so. He was conscious that in

some degree he had been cowed, and was ever fighting against the

feeling. His tenderness to his wife was perhaps increased, because he

knew that she still suffered from the letter; but he was almost ashamed

of his own tenderness, as being a sign of weakness. He made himself very

busy in these days,--busy among his brother magistrates, busy among his

farming operations, busy with his tenants, busy among his books, so as

to show to those around him that he was one who could perform all the

duties of life, and enjoy all the pleasures, with an open brow and a

clear conscience. He had been ever bold and self-asserting; but now he

was perhaps a little over-bold. But through it all the Australian letter

and the Australian woman were present to him day and night.

It was this resolution not to be quelled that had made him call upon the

attorney at his office; and when he found himself back in the street he

was very angry with the man. 'If it pleases him, let it be so,' he said

to himself. 'I can do in the world without him.' And then he thought of

that threat,--when the attorney had said that he would remove his

sister. 'Remove her! By heavens!' He had a stick in his hand, and as he

went he struck it angrily against a post. Remove his wife! All the

Boltons in Cambridgeshire could not put a hand upon her, unless by his

leave! For some moments his anger supported him; but after a while that

gave way to the old feeling of discomfort which pervaded him always. She

was his wife, and nobody should touch her. Nevertheless he might find it

difficult, as Robert Bolton had said, to prove that that other woman

was not his wife.

Robert Bolton's office was in a small street close to Pembroke College,

and when he came out of it he had intended to walk direct through

Trumpington Street and Trinity Street to Chesterton. But he found it

necessary to compose himself and so to arrange his thoughts that he

might be able to answer such foolish questions as Mrs. Bolton would

probably ask him without being flurried. He was almost sure that she had

heard nothing of the woman. He did not suspect Robert Bolton of

treachery in that respect; but she would probably talk to him about the

iniquity of his past life generally, and he must be prepared to answer

her. It was incumbent upon him to shake off, before he reached

Chesterton, that mixture of alarm and anger which at present dominated

him; and with this object, instead of going straight along the street,

he turned into the quadrangle of King's College, and passing through the

gardens and over the bridge, wandered for a while slowly under the trees

at the back of the college. He accused himself of a lack of manliness in

that he allowed himself to be thus cowed. Did he not know that such

threats as these were common? Was it not just what might have been

expected from such a one as Crinkett, when Crinkett was driven to

desperation by failing speculations? As he thought of the woman, he

shook his head, looking down upon the ground. The woman had at one time

been very dear to him. But it was clearly now his duty to go on as

though there were no such woman as Euphemia Smith, and no such man as

Thomas Crinkett. And as for Robert Bolton, he would henceforth treat him

as though his anger and his suspicions were unworthy of notice. If the

man should choose of his own accord to reassume the old friendly

relations,--well and good. No overtures should come from him--Caldigate.

And if the anger and the suspicions endured, why then, he, Caldigate,

could do very well without Robert Bolton.

As he made these resolutions he turned in at a little gate opening into

a corner of St. John's Gardens, with the object of passing through the

college back into the streets of the town. It was not quite his nearest

way, but he loved the old buildings, and the trees, and the river, even

in winter. It still was winter, being now the middle of February; but,

as it happened, the air was dry and mild, and the sun was shining.

Still, he was surprised at such a time of the year to see an elderly man

apparently asleep on one of the benches which are placed close to the

path. But there he was, asleep, with his two hands on a stick, and his

head bent forward over his stick. It was impossible not to look at the

man sleeping there in that way; but Caldigate would hardly have looked,

would hardly have dared to look, could he have anticipated what he would

see. The elderly man was Thomas Crinkett. As he passed he was quite sure

that the man was Thomas Crinkett. When he had gone on a dozen yards, he

paused for a moment to consider what he would do. A dozen different

thoughts passed through his mind in that moment of time. Why was the man

there? Why, indeed, could he have come to England except with the view

of prosecuting the demand which he and the woman had made? His presence

even in England was sufficient to declare that this battle would have to

be fought. But to Cambridge he could have come with no other object than

that of beginning the attack at once. And then, had he already commenced

his work? He had not at any rate been to Robert Bolton, to whom any one

knowing the family would have first referred him. And why was he

sleeping there? Why was he not now at work upon his project? Again,

would it be better at the present moment that he should pass by the man

as though he had not seen him; or should he go back and ask him his

purpose? As the thought passed through his mind, he stayed his step for

a moment on the pathway and looked round. The man had moved his

position, and was now sitting with his head turned away but evidently

not asleep. Then it occurred to Caldigate that Crinkett's slumbers had

been only a pretence, that the man had seen and recognised him, and at

the moment had not chosen to make himself known. And it occurred to him

also that in a matter of such importance as this he should do nothing on

the spur of the moment,--nothing without consideration. A word spoken to

Crinkett, a word without consideration, might be fatal to him. So he

passed on, having stood upon the path hardly more than a second or two.

Before he had got up to the new buildings of St. John's a cold sweat had

come out all over him. He was conscious of this, and conscious also that

for a time he was so confounded by the apparition of his enemy as to be

unable to bring his mind to work properly on the subject. 'Let him do

his worst,' he kept on saying to himself; 'let him do his worst.' But he

knew that the brave words, though spoken only to himself, were mere

braggadocio No doubt the man would do his worst, and very bad it would

be to him. At the moment he was so cowed by fear that he would have

given half his fortune to have secured the woman's silence,--and the

man's. How much better would it have been had he acceded to the man's

first demand as to restitution of a portion of the sum paid for

Polyeuka, before the woman's name had been brought into the matter at

all?

But reflections such as these were now useless and he must do something.

It was for his wife's sake,--he assured himself,--for his wife's sake

that he allowed himself to be made thus miserable by the presence of

this wretched creature. What would she not be called upon to suffer?

The woman no doubt would be brought before magistrates and judges, and

would be made to swear that she was his wife. The whole story of his

life in Australia would be made public,--and there was so much that

could not be made public without overwhelming her with sorrow! His own

father, too, who had surrendered the estate to him, must know it all.

His father hitherto had not heard the name of Mrs. Smith, and had been

told only of Crinkett's dishonest successes and dishonest failures. When

Caldigate had spoken of Crinkett to his father, he had done so with a

triumph as of a man whom he had weighed and measured and made use

of,--whose frauds and cunning he had conquered by his own honesty and

better knowledge. Now he could no longer weigh and measure and make use

of Crinkett. Crinkett had been a joke to him in talking with his father.

But Crinkett was no joke now.

While walking through the College quad, he was half stupefied by his

confusion, and was aware that such was his condition. But going out

under the gate he paused for a moment and shook himself. He must at any

rate summon his own powers to his aid at the moment and resolve what he

would do. However bad all this might be, there was a better course and a

worse. If he allowed this confusion to master him he would probably be

betrayed into the worse course. Now, at this moment, in what way would

it become him to act? He drew himself together, shaking his head and

shoulders,--so as to shake off his weakness,--pressing his foot for a

moment on the earth so as to convince himself of his own firmness, and

then he resolved.

He was on the way out to see his mother-in-law, but he thought that

nothing now could be gained by going to Chesterton. It was not

impossible that Crinkett might have been there. If so the man would have

told something of his story; and his wife's mother was the last person

in the world whom, under such circumstances, he could hope to satisfy.

He must tell no lie to any one; he must at least conceal nothing of the

things as they occurred now. He must not allow it to be first told by

Crinkett that they two had seen each other in the Gardens. But he could

not declare this to Mrs. Bolton. For the present, the less he saw of

Mrs. Bolton the better. She would come to the christening

to-morrow,--unless indeed Crinkett had already told enough to induce her

to change her mind,--but after that any intimacy with the house at

Chesterton had better be postponed till this had all been settled.

But how much would have to be endured before that! Robert Bolton had

almost threatened to take his wife away from him. No one could take his

wife away from him,--unless, indeed, the law were to say that she was

not his wife. But how would it be with him if she herself, under the

influence of her family, were to wish to leave him! The law no doubt

would give him the custody of his own wife, till the law had said that

she was not his wife. But could he keep her if she asked him to let her

go? And should she be made to doubt,--should her mind be so troubled as

it would be should she once be taught to think it possible that she had

been betrayed,--would she not then want to go from him? Would it not

be probable that she would doubt when she should be told that this

woman had been called by her husband's name in Australia, and when he

should be unable to deny that he had admitted, or at least had not

contradicted, the appellation?

On a sudden, when he turned away from the street leading to Chesterton

as he came out of the College, he resolved that he would at once go back

to Robert Bolton. The man was offensive, suspicious and self-willed;

but, nevertheless, his good services, if they could be secured, would be

all-important. For his wife's sake, as Caldigate said to himself,--for

his wife's sake he must bear much. 'I have come to tell you something

that has occurred since I was here just now,' said Caldigate, meeting

his brother-in-law at the door of the office. 'Would you mind coming

back?'

'I am rather in a hurry.'

'It is of importance, and you had better hear it,' said Caldigate,

leading the way imperiously to the inner room. 'It is for your sister's

sake. That man Crinkett is in Cambridge.'

'In Cambridge?'

'I saw him just now.'

'And spoke to him?' the attorney asked.

'No. I passed him; and I do not know even whether he recognised me. But

he is here, in Cambridge.'

'And the woman?'

'I have told you all that I know. He has not come here for nothing.'

'Probably not,' said the attorney, with a scornful smile. 'You will hear

of him before long.'

'Of course I shall. I have come to you now to ask a question. I must put

my case at once into a lawyer's hands. Crinkett, no doubt, will commit

perjury and I must undergo the annoyance and expense of proving him to

be a perjurer. She probably is here also, and will be ready to commit

perjury. Of course I must have a lawyer. Will you act for me?'

'I will act for my sister.'

'Your sister and I are one; and I am obliged, therefore, to ask again

whether you will act for me? Of course I should prefer it. Though you

are, I think, hard to me in this matter, I can trust you implicitly. It

will be infinitely better for Hester that it should be so. But I must

have some lawyer.'

'And so must she.'

'Hers and mine must be the same. As to that I will not admit any

question. Can you undertake to fight this matter on my behalf,--and on

hers? If you feel absolutely hostile to me you had better decline. For

myself, I cannot understand why there should be such hostility.'

Caldigate had so far conquered his own feelings of abasement as to be

able to say this with a determined face, looking straight into the

attorney's eyes, at any rate without sign of fear.

'It wants thinking about,' said Robert Bolton.

'To-morrow the baby is to be christened, and for Hester's sake I will

endeavour to put this matter aside;--but on Wednesday I must know.'

'On Wednesday morning I will answer your question. But what if this man

comes to me in the meantime?'

'Listen to him or speak to him, just as seems good to you. You know

everything that there is to tell, and may therefore know whether he lies

or speaks the truth.'

Then Caldigate went to the inn, got his horse, and rode back to Folking.

Chapter XXVII

The Christening

The next day was the day of the christening. Caldigate, on his return

home from Cambridge, had felt himself doomed to silence. He could not

now at this moment tell his wife that the man had come,--the man who

would doubtless work her such terrible misery. She was very strong. She

had gone through the whole little event of her baby's birth quite as

well as could be expected, and had been just what all her friends might

have wished her to be. But that this blow had fallen upon her,--but that

these ill news had wounded her,--she would now have been triumphant.

Her mother was at last coming to her. Her husband was all that a husband

should be. Her baby was, to her thinking, sweeter, brighter, more

satisfactory than any other baby ever had been. But the first tidings

had been told to her. She had seen the letter signed 'Euphemia

Caldigate'; and of course she was ill at ease. Knowing how vexatious the

matter was to her husband, she had spoken of it but seldom,--having

asked but a question now and again when the matter pressed itself too

severely on her mind. He understood it all, both her reticence and her

sufferings. Her sufferings must of course be increased. She must know

before long that Crinkett, and probably the woman also, were in her

neighbourhood. But he could not tell her now when she was preparing her

baby for his ceremony in the church.

The bells were rung, and the baby was prepared, and Mrs. Bolton came out

to Folking according to her promise. Though Robert was not there, many

of the Boltons were present, as was also Uncle Babington. He had come

over on the preceding evening, making on this occasion his first journey

to Folking since his wife's sister had died; and the old squire was

there in very good humour, though he excused himself from going to the

church by explaining that as he had no duty to perform he would only be

in the way amongst them all. Daniel and Mrs. Bolton had also been at

Folking that night, and had then for the first time been brought into

contact with the Babington grandeur. The party had been almost gay, the

old squire having taken some delight in what he thought to be the

absurdities of his brother-in-law. Mr. Babington himself was a man who

was joyous on most occasions and always gay on such an occasion as this.

He had praised the mother, and praised the baby, and praised the house

of Folking generally, graciously declaring that his wife looked forward

to the pleasure of making acquaintance with her new niece, till old Mr.

Caldigate had been delighted with these manifestations of condescension.

'Folking is a poor place,' said he, 'but Babington is really a

country-house.'

'Yes,' replied the other squire, much gratified, 'Babington is what you

may call really a good country-house.'

You had to laugh very hard at him before you could offend Uncle

Babington. In all this John Caldigate was obliged to assist, knowing all

the time, feeling all the time, that Crinkett was in Cambridge; and

through all this the young mother had to appear happy, knowing the

existence of that letter signed 'Euphemia Caldigate,'--feeling it at

every moment. And they both acted their parts well. Caldigate

himself,--though when he was alone the thought of what was coming would

almost crush him,--could always bear himself bravely when others were

present.

On the morning before they went to church, when the bells were ringing,

old Mr. Bolton came in a carriage with his wife from Cambridge. She, of

course, condescended to give her hand to her son-in-law but she did it

with a look which was full of bitterness. She did not probably intend to

be specially bitter, but bitterness of expression was common to her. She

was taken, however, at once up to the baby, and then in the presence of

her daughter and grandchild it may be presumed that she relaxed a

little. At any rate, her presence in the house made her daughter happy

for the time.

Then they all went to the church, except the squire, who, as he himself

pleaded, had no duty to perform there. Mrs. Bolton, as she was taken

through the hall, saw him and recognised him, but would not condescend

even to bow her head to him, though she knew how intimate he had been

with her husband. She still felt,--though she had yielded for this day,

this day which was to make her grandchild a Christian,--that there must

be, and should be, a severance between people such as the Boltons and

people such as the Caldigates.

As the service went on, and as the water was sprinkled, and as the

prayers were said, Caldigate felt thankful that so much had been allowed

to be done before the great trouble had disclosed itself. The doubt

whether even the ceremony could be performed before the clap of thunder

had been heard through all Cambridge had been in itself a distinct

sorrow to him. Had Crinkett showed himself at Chesterton, neither Mrs.

Bolton nor Daniel Bolton would have been standing then at the font. Had

Crinkett been heard of at Babington, Uncle Babington would not now have

been at Folking. All this was passing through his mind as he was

standing by the font. When the ceremony of making the young Daniel

Humphrey Caldigate a Christian was all but completed, he fancied that he

saw old Mr. Bolton's eyes fixed on something in the church, and he

turned his head suddenly, with no special purpose, but simply looking,

as one is apt to look, when another looks. There he saw, on a seat

divided from himself by the breadth of the little nave, Thomas Crinkett

sitting with another man.

There was not a shadow of a doubt on his mind as to the identity of the

Australian--nor as to that of Crinkett's companion. At the moment he did

not remember the man's name, but he knew him as a miner with whom he had

been familiar at Ahalala, and who had been in partnership both with

himself and Crinkett at Nobble,--as one who had, alas! been in his

society when Euphemia Smith had been there also. At that instant he

remembered the fact that the man had called Euphemia Smith Mrs.

Caldigate in his presence, and that he had let the name pass without

remonstrance. The memory of that moment flashed across him now as he

quickly turned back his face towards his child who was still uttering

his little wail in the arms of the clergyman.

Utterden church is not a large building. The seat on which Crinkett had

placed himself was one usually occupied by parish boys at the end of the

row of appropriated seats and near to the door. Less than half-a-dozen

yards from it, at the other side of the way leading up the church, stood

the font, so that the stranger was almost close to Caldigate when he

turned. They were so near that others there could not but have observed

them. Even the clergyman, however absorbed he might have been in his

sacred work, could not but have observed them. It was not there as it

might have been in a town. Any stranger, even on a Sunday, would be

observed by all in Utterden church,--how much then at a ceremony which,

as a rule, none but friends attend! And Crinkett was looking on with all

his eyes, leaning forward over his stick and watching closely. Caldigate

had taken it all in, even in that moment. The other man was sitting

back, gazing at nothing as though the matter to him were indifferent.

Caldigate could understand it all. The man was there simply to act or to

speak when he might be wanted.

As the ceremony was completed John Caldigate stood by and played with

all proper words and actions the part of the young father. No one

standing there could see by his face that he had been struck violently;

that he had for a few moments been almost unable to stand. But he

himself was aware that a cold sweat had broken out all over him as

before. Though he leaned over the baby lying in his mother's arms and

kissed it, and smiled on the young mother, he did so as some great actor

will carry out his part before the public when nearly sinking to the

ground from sudden suffering. What would it be right that he should do

now,--now,--now? No one there had heard of Crinkett except his wife. And

even she herself had no idea that the man of whom she had heard was in

England. Should he speak to the man, or should he endeavour to pass out

of the church as though he had not recognised him? Could he trust

himself even to make the endeavour when he should have turned round and

when he would find himself face to face with the man?

And then what should he say, and how should he act, if the man addressed

him in the church? The man had not come out there to Utterden for

nothing, and probably would so address him. He had determined on telling

no lie,--no lie, at any rate, as to present circumstances. That life of

his in Australia had been necessarily rough; and though successful, had

not been quite as it should have been. As to that, he thought that it

ought to be permitted to him to be reticent. But as to nothing since his

marriage would he lie. If Crinkett spoke to him he must acknowledge the

man,--but if Crinkett told his story about Euphemia Smith in the church

before them all, how should he then answer? There was but a moment for

him to decide it all. The decision had to be made while he was handing

back his babe to its mother with his sweetest smile.

As the party at the font was broken up, the eyes of them all were fixed

upon the two strangers. A christening in a public church is a public

service, and open to the world at large. There was no question to be

asked them, but each person as he looked at them would of course think

that somebody else would recognise them. They were decently

dressed,--dressed probably in such garments as gentlemen generally wear

on winter mornings,--but any one would know at a glance that they were

not English gentlemen. And they were of an appearance unfamiliar to any

one there but Caldigate himself,--clean, but rough, not quite at home in

their clothes, which had probably been bought ready-made; with rough,

ignoble faces,--faces which you would suspect, but faces, nevertheless,

which had in them something of courage. As the little crowd prepared to

move from the font, the two men got up and stood in their places.

Caldigate took the opportunity to say a word to Mr. Bromley before he

turned round, so that he might yet pause before he decided. At that

moment he resolved that he would recognise his enemy, and treat him with

the courtesy of old friendship. It would be bad to do at the moment, but

he thought that in this way he might best prepare himself for the

future. Crinkett had appealed to him for money, but Crinkett himself had

said nothing to him about Euphemia Smith. The man had not as yet accused

him of bigamy. The accusation had come from her, and it still might be

that she had used Crinkett's name wrongfully. At any rate, he thought

that when the clap of thunder should have come, it would be better for

him not to have repudiated a man with whom it would then be known that

his relations had once been so intimate.

He addressed himself therefore at once to his old associate. 'I am

surprised to see you here, Mr. Crinkett.' This he said with a smile and

a pleasant voice, putting out his hand to him. How hard it was to summon

up that smile! How hard to get that tone of voice! Even those

commonplace words had been so difficult of selection! 'Was it you I saw

yesterday in the College gardens?'

'Yes, it was me, no doubt.'

'I turned round, and then thought that it was impossible We have just

been christening my child. Will you come up to our breakfast?'

'You remember Jack Adamson,--eh?'

'Of course I do,' said Caldigate, giving his hand to the second man, who

was rougher even than Crinkett. 'I hope he will come up also. This is my

uncle, Mr. Babington; and this is my father-in-law, Mr. Bolton.' 'These

were two of my partners at Nobble,' he said, turning to the two old

gentlemen, who were looking on with astonished eyes. 'They have come

over here, I suppose, with reference to the sale I made to them lately

of my interests at Polyeuka.'

'That's about it,' said Adamson.

'We won't talk business just at this moment, because we have to eat our

breakfast and drink our boy's health. But when that is done, I'll hear

what you have to say;--or come into Cambridge to-morrow just as you

please. You'll walk up to the house now, and I'll introduce you to my

wife?'

'We don't mind if we do eat a bit,--do we, Jack?' said Crinkett. Jack

bobbed his head, and so they walked back to Folking, the three of them

together, while the two Mr. Boltons and Uncle Babington followed behind.

The ladies and the baby had been taken in a carriage.

The distance from the church to the house at Folking was less than half

a mile, but Caldigate thought that he would never reach his hall door.

How was he to talk to the men,--with what words and after what fashion?

And what should he say about them to his wife when he reached home? She

had seen him speak to them, had known that he had been obliged to stay

behind with them when it would have been so natural that he should have

been at her side as she got into the carriage. Of that he was aware, but

he could not know how far their presence would have frightened her.

'Yes,' he said, in answer to some question from Crinkett; 'the property

round here is not exactly mine, but my father's.'

'They tell me as it's yours now?' said Crinkett.

'You haven't to learn to-day that in regard to other people's concerns

men talk more than they know. The land is my father's estate, but I live

here.'

'And him?' asked Adamson.

'He lives in Cambridge.'

'That's what we mean,--ain't it, Crinkett?' said Adamson. 'You're boss

here?'

'Yes, I'm boss.'

'And a deuced good time you seem to have of it,' said Crinkett.

'I've nothing to complain of,' replied Caldigate, feeling himself at the

moment to be the most miserable creature in existence.

It was fearful work,--work so cruel that his physical strength hardly

enabled him to support it. He already repented his present conduct,

telling himself that it would have been better to have treated the men

from the first as spies and enemies;--though in truth his conduct had

probably been the wisest he could have adopted. At last he had the men

inside the hall door, and, introducing them hurriedly to his father, he

left them that he might rush up to his wife's bedroom. The nurse was

there and her mother; and, at the moment, she only looked at him. She

was too wise to speak to him before them. But at last she succeeded in

making an opportunity of being alone with her husband. 'You stay here,

nurse; I'll be back directly, mamma,' and then she took him across the

passage into his own dressing-room. 'Who are they, John? who are they?'

'They are men from the mines. As they were my partners, I have asked

them to come in to breakfast.'

'And the woman?' As she spoke she held on to the back of a chair by

which she stood, and only whispered her question.

'No woman is with them.'

'Is it the man,--Crinkett?'

'Yes, it is Crinkett.'

'In this house! And I am to sit at table with him?'

'It will be best so. Listen, dearest; all that I know, all that we know

of Crinkett is, that he is asking money of me because the purchase he

made of me has turned out badly for him.'

'But he is to marry that woman, who says that she is--' Then she

stopped, looking into his face with agony. She could not bring herself

to utter the words which would signify that another woman claimed to be

her husband's wife.

'You are going too fast, Hester. I cannot condemn the man for what the

woman has written until I know that he says the same himself. He was my

partner, and I have had his money;--I fear, all his money. He as yet has

said nothing about the woman. As it is so, it behoves me to be courteous

to him. That I am suffering much, you must be well aware. I am sure you

will not make it worse for me.'

'No, no,' she said, embracing him; 'I will not. I will be brave. I will

do all that I can. But you will tell me everything?'

'Everything,' he said. Then he kissed her, and went back again to his

unwelcome guests. She was not long before she followed him, bringing her

baby in her arms. Then she took the child round to be kissed by all its

relatives, and afterwards bowed politely to the two men, and told them

that she was glad to see her husband's old friends and fellow-workmen.

'Yes, mum,' said Jack Adamson; 'we've been fellow-workmen when the work

was hard enough. 'T young squire seems to have got over his difficulties

pretty tidy!' Then she smiled again, and nodded to them, and retreated

back to her mother.

Mrs. Bolton scowled at them, feeling certain that they were godless

persons;--in which she was right. The old banker, drawing his son Daniel

out of the room, whispered an inquiry; but Daniel Bolton knew nothing.

'There's been something wrong as to the sale of that mine,' said the

banker. Daniel Bolton thought it probable that there had been something

wrong.

The breakfast was eaten, and the child's health was drunk, and the hour

was passed. It was a bad time for them all, but for Caldigate it was a

very bitter hour. To him the effort made was even more difficult than to

her;--as was right;--for she at any rate had been blameless. Then the

Boltons went away, as had been arranged, and also Uncle Babington while

the men still remained.

'If you don't mind, squire, I'll take a turn with you,' said Crinkett at

last; 'while Jack can sit anywhere about the place.'

'Certainly,' said Caldigate. And so they took their hats and went off,

and Jack Adamson was left 'sitting anywhere' about the place.

Chapter XXVIII

Tom Crinkett at Folking

Caldigate thought that he had better take his companion where there

would be the least chance of encountering many eyes. He went therefore

through the garden into the farmyard and along the road leading back to

the dike, and then he walked backwards and forwards between the ferry,

over the Wash, and the termination of the private way by which they had

come. The spot was not attractive, as far as rural prettiness was

concerned. They had, on one hand or the other as they turned, the long,

straight, deep dike which had been cut at right angles to the Middle

Wash; and around, the fields were flat, plashy, and heavy-looking with

the mud of February. But Crinkett for a while did not cease to admire

everything. 'And them are all yourn?' he said, pointing to a crowd of

corn-stacks standing in the haggard.

'Yes, they're mine. I wish they were not.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'As prices are at present, a man doesn't make pinch by growing corn and

keeping it to this time of the year.'

'And where them chimneys is,--is that yourn?' This he said pointing

along the straight line of the road to Farmer Holt's homestead, which

showed itself on the other side of the Wash.

'It belongs to the estate,' said Caldigate.

'By jingo! And how I remember your a-coming and talking to me across the

gate at Polyeuka Hall!'

'I remember it very well.'

'I didn't know as you were an estated gent in those days.'

'I had spent a lot of money when I was young, and the estate, as you

call it, was not large enough to bear the loss. So I had to go out and

work, and get back what I had squandered.'

'And you did it?'

'Yes, I did it.'

'My word, yes! What a lot of money you took out of the colony,

Caldigate!'

'I'm not going to praise myself, but I worked hard for it, and when I

got it I didn't run riot.'

'Not with drink.'

'Nor in any other way. I kept my money.'

'Well;--I don't know as you was very much more of a Joseph than anybody

else.' Then Crinkett laughed most disagreeably; and Caldigate, turning

over various ideas rapidly in his mind, thought that a good deed would

be done if a man so void of feeling could be drowned beneath the waters

of the black deep dike which was slowly creeping along by their side.

'Any way you was lucky,--infernally lucky.'

'You did not do badly yourself. When I first reached Nobble you had the

name of more money than I ever made.'

'Who's got it now? Eh, Caldigate! who's got my money now?'

'It would take a clever man to tell that.'

'It don't take much cleverness for me to tell who has got more of it nor

anybody else, and it don't take much cleverness for me to tell that I

ain't got none of it left myself;--none of it, Caldigate. Not a d-----

hundred pounds!' This he said with terrible energy.

'I'm sorry it's so bad as that with you, Crinkett.'

'Yes;--you is sorry, I daresay. You've acted sorry in all you said and

done since I got taken in last by that ---- mine;--haven't you? Well;--I

have got just a few hundreds; what I could scrape together to bring me

and a few others as might be wanted over to England. There's Jack

Adamson with me and ---- just two more. They may be wanted, squire.'

The attack now was being commenced, and how was he to repel it, or to

answer it? Only on one ground had he received from Robert Bolton a

decided opinion. Under no circumstances was he to give money to these

persons. Were he to be guilty of that weakness he would have delivered

himself over into their hands. And not only did he put implicit trust in

the sagacity of Robert Bolton, but he himself knew enough of the world's

opinion on such a matter to be aware that a man who has allowed himself

to be frightened out of money is supposed to have acknowledged some

terrible delinquency. He had been very clear in his mind when that

letter came from Euphemia Smith that he would not now make any rebate.

Till that attack had come, it might have been open to him to be

generous;--but not now. And yet when this man spoke of his own loss,

and reminded him of his wealth;--when Crinkett threw it in his teeth

that by a happy chance he had feathered his nest with the spoils taken

from the wretched man himself,--then he wished that it was in his power

to give back something.

'Is that said as a threat?' he asked, looking round on his companion,

and resolving that he would be brave.

'That's as you take it, squire. We don't want to threaten nothing.'

'Because if you do, you'd better go, and do what you have to do away

from here.'

'Don't you be so rough now with an old pal. You won't do no good by

being rough. I wasn't rough to you when you came to Polyeuka Hall

without very much in your pocket.' This was untrue, for Crinkett had

been rough, and Caldigate's pockets had been full of money; but there

could be no good got by contradicting him on small trifles. 'I was a

good mate to you then. You wouldn't even have got your finger into the

"Old Stick-in-the-Mud," nor yet into Polyeuka, but for me. I was the

making of your fortin, Caldigate. I was.'

'My fortune, such as it is, was made by my own industry.'

'Industry be blowed! I don't know that you were so much better than

anybody else. Wasn't I industrious? Wasn't I thinking of it morning,

noon, and night, and nothing else? You was smart. I do allow that,

Caldigate. You was very smart.'

'Did you ever know me dishonest?'

'Pooh! what's honesty? There's nothing so smart as honesty. Whatever you

got, you got a sure hold of. That's what you mean by honesty. You was

clever enough to take care as you had really got it. Now about this

Polyeuka business, I'll tell you how it is. I and Jack Adamson and

another,'--as he alluded to the 'other' he winked,--'we believed in

Polyeuka; we did. D----- the cussed hole! Well;--when you was gone we

thought we'd try it. It was not easy to get the money as you wanted, but

we got it. One of the banks down at Sydney went shares, but took all the

plant as security. Then the cussed place ran out the moment the money

was paid. It was just as though fortin had done it a purpose. If you

don't believe what I'm a-saying, I've got the documents to show you.'

Caldigate did believe what the man said. It was a matter as to which he

had, in the way of business, received intelligence of his own from the

colony, and he was aware that he had been singularly lucky as to the

circumstances and time of the sale. But there had been nothing 'smart'

about it. Those in the colony who understood the matter thought at the

time that he was making a sacrifice of his own interests by the terms

proposed. He had thought so himself, but had been willing to make it in

order that he might rid himself of further trouble. He had believed that

the machinery and plant attached to the mine had been nearly worth the

money, and he had been quite certain that Crinkett himself, when making

the bargain, had considered himself to be in luck's way. But such

property, as he well knew, was, by its nature, precarious and liable to

sudden changes. He had been fortunate, and the purchasers had been the

reverse Of that he had no doubt, though probably the man had exaggerated

his own misfortune. When he had been given to understand how bad had

been the fate of these old companions of his in the matter, with the

feelings of a liberal gentleman he was anxious to share with them the

loss. Had Crinkett come to him, explaining all that he now explained,

without any interference from Euphemia Smith, he would have been anxious

to do much. But now;--how could he do anything now? 'I do not at all

disbelieve what you tell me about the mine,' he said.

'And yet you won't do anything for us? You ain't above taking all our

money and seeing us starve; and that when you have got everything round

you here like an estated gentleman, as you are?'

There was a touch of eloquence in this, a soundness of expostulation

which moved him much. He could afford to give back half the price he had

received for the mine and yet be a well-to-do man.

He paid over to his father the rents from Folking, but he had the house

and home-farm for nothing. And the sum which he had received for

Polyeuka by no means represented all his savings. He did not like to

think that he had denuded this man who had been his partner of

everything in order that he himself might be unnecessarily rich. It was

not pleasant to him to think that the fatness of his opulence had been

extracted from Jack Adamson and from--Euphemia Smith. When the

application for return of the money had been first made to him from

Australia, he hadn't known what he knew now. There had been no eloquence

then,--no expostulation. Now he thoroughly wished that he was able to

make restitution. 'A threat has been used to me,' he muttered almost

anxious to explain to the man his exact position.

'A threat! I ain't threatened nothing. But I tell you there will be

threats and worse than threats. Fair means first and foul means

afterwards! That's about it, Caldigate.'

If he could have got this man to say that there was no threat, to be

simply piteous, he thought that he might even yet have suggested some

compromise. But that was impossible when he was told that worse than

threats was in store for him. He was silent for some moments, thinking

whether it would not be better for him to rush into that matter of

Euphemia Smith himself. But up to this time he had no absolute knowledge

that Crinkett was aware of the letter which had been written. No doubt

that in speaking of 'another' as being joined with himself and Adamson

he had intended that Euphemia Smith should be understood. But till her

name had been mentioned, he could not bring himself to mention it. He

could not bring himself to betray the fear which would become evident if

he spoke of the woman.

'I think you had better go to my lawyer,' he said.

'We don't want no lawyering. The plunder is yours, no doubt. Whether

you'll have so much law on your side in other matters,--that's the

question.' Crinkett did not in the least understand the state of his

companion's mind. To Crinkett it appeared that Caldigate was simply

anxious to save his money.

'I do not know that I can say anything else to you just at present. The

bargain was a fair bargain, and you have no ground for any claim. You

come to me with some mysterious threat------'

'You understand,' said Crinkett.

'I care nothing for your threats. I can only bid you go and do your

worst.'

'That's what we intend.'

'That you should have lost money by me is a great sorrow to me.'

'You look sorry, squire.'

'But after what you have said, I can make you no offer. If you will go

to my brother-in-law, Mr. Robert Bolton--'

'That's the lady's brother?'

'My wife's brother.'

'I know all about it, Caldigate. I won't go to him at all. What's he to

us? It ain't likely that I am going to ask him for money to hold our

tongues. Not a bit of it. You've had sixty thousand pounds out of that

mine. The bank found twenty and took all the plant. There's forty gone.

Will you share the loss? Give us twenty and we'll be off back to

Australia by the first ship. And I'll take a wife back with me. You

understand? I'll take a wife back with me. Then we shall be all square

all round.'

With what delight would he have given the twenty thousand pounds, had he

dared! Had there been no question about the woman, he would have given

the money to satisfy his own conscience as to the injury he had

involuntarily done to his old partners. But he could not do it now. He

could make no suggestion towards doing it. To do so would be to own to

all the Boltons that Mrs. Euphemia Smith was his wife. And were he to

do so, how could he make himself secure that the man and the woman would

go back to Australia and trouble him no more? All experience forbade him

to hope for such a result. And then the payment of the money would be

one of many damning pieces of evidence against him. They had now got

back for the second time to the spot at which the way up to the house at

Folking turned off from the dike. Here he paused and spoke what were

intended to be his last words. 'I have nothing more to say, Crinkett. I

will not promise anything myself. A threatened man should never give

way. You know that yourself. But if you will go to my brother-in-law I

will get him to see you.'

'D---- your brother-in-law. He ain't your brother-in-law, no more than I

am.'

Now the sword had been drawn and the battle had been declared. 'After

that,' said Caldigate, walking on in front, 'I shall decline to speak to

you any further.' He went back through the farmyard at a quick pace,

while Crinkett kept up with him, but still a few steps behind. In the

front of the house they found Jack Adamson, who, in obedience to his

friend's suggestion had been sitting anywhere about the place.

'I'm blowed if he don't mean to stick to every lump he's robbed us of!'

said Crinkett, in a loud voice.

'He do, do he? Then we know what we've got to be after.'

'I've come across some of 'em precious mean,' continued Crinkett; 'but a

meaner skunk nor this estated gent, who is a justice of the peace and a

squire and all that, I never did come across, and I don't suppose I

never shall.' And then they stood looking at him, jeering at him. And

the gardener, who was then in the front of the house, heard it all.

'Darvell,' said the squire, 'open the gate for these gentlemen.' Darvell

of course knew that they had been brought from the church to the house,

and had been invited in to the christening breakfast.

'If I were Darvell I wouldn't take wages from such a skunk as you,' said

Crinkett. 'A man as has robbed his partners of every shilling, and has

married a young lady when he has got another wife living out in the

colony. At least she was out in the colony. She ain't there now,

Darvell. She's somewhere else now. That's what your master is, Darvell.

You'll have to look out for a place, because your master'll be in quod

before long. How much is it they gets for bigamy, Jack? Three years at

the treadmill;--that's about it. But I pities the young lady and the

poor little bastard.'

What was he to do? A sense of what was fitting for his wife rather than

for himself forbade him to fly at the man and take him by the throat.

And now, of course, the wretched story would be told through all

Cambridgeshire. Nothing could prevent that now. 'Darvell,' he said, as

he turned towards the hall steps, 'you must see these men off the

premises. The less you say to them the better.'

'We'll only just tell him all about it as we goes along comfortable,'

said Adamson. Darvell, who was a good sort of man in his way,--slow

rather than stupid, weighted with the ordinary respect which a servant

has for his master,--had heard it all, but showed no particular anxiety

to hear more. He accompanied the men down to the Causeway, hardly

opening his mouth to them, while they were loud in denouncing the

meanness of the man who had deserted a wife in Australia, and had then

betrayed a young lady here in England.

'What were they talking about?' said his wife to him when they were

alone. 'I heard their voices even here.'

'They were threatening me;--threatening me and you.'

'About that woman?'

'Yes; about that woman. Not that they have dared yet to mention her

name,--but it was about that woman.'

'And she?'

'I've heard nothing from her since that letter. I do not know that she

is in England, but I suppose that she is with them.'

'Does it make you unhappy, John?'

'Very unhappy.'

'Does it frighten you?'

'Yes. It makes me fear that you for a while will be made miserable,--you

whom I had thought that I could protect from all sorrow and from all

care! O my darling! of course it frightens me; but it is for you.'

'What will they do first, John?'

'They have already said words before the man there which will of course

be spread about the country.'

'What words?'

Then he paused, but after pausing he spoke very plainly. 'They said that

you were not my wife.'

'But I am.'

'Indeed you are.'

'Tell me all truly. Though I were not, I would still be true to you.'

'But, Hester,--Hester, you are. Do not speak as though that were

possible.'

'I know that you love me. I am sure of that. Nothing should ever make me

leave you;--nothing. You are all the world to me now. Whatever you may

have done I will be true to you. Only tell me everything.'

'I think I have,' he said, hoarsely. Then he remembered that he had told

much to Robert Bolton which she had not heard. 'I did tell her that I

would marry her.'

'You did.'

'Yes, I did.'

'Is not that a marriage in some countries?'

'I think nowhere,--certainly not there. And the people, hearing of it

all, used to call her by my name.'

'O John!--will not that be against us?'

'It will be against me,--in the minds of persons like your mother.'

'I will care nothing for that. I know that you have repented, and are

sorry. I know that you love me now.'

'I have always loved you since the first moment that I saw you.'

'Never for a moment believe that I will believe them. Let them do what

they will, I will be your wife. Nothing shall take me away from you. But

it is sad, is it not; on that the very day that poor baby has been

christened?' Then they sat and wept together and tried to comfort each

other. But nothing could comfort him. He was almost prostrated at the

prospect of his coming misery,--and of hers.

Chapter XXIX

'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 effect 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,--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.

Chapter XXX

The Conclave at Puritan Grange

John Caldigate was committed, and liberated on bail. This occurred in

Cambridge on the Wednesday after the christening; and before the

Saturday night following, all the Boltons were thoroughly convinced that

this wretched man, who had taken from them their daughter and their

sister, was a bigamist, and that poor Hester, though a mother, was not a

wife. The evidence against him, already named, was very strong, but they

had been put in possession of other, and as they thought more damning

evidence than any to which he had alluded in telling his version of the

story to Robert Bolton. The woman had produced, and had shown to Robert

Bolton, the envelope of a letter addressed in John Caldigate's

handwriting to 'Mrs. Caldigate, Ahalala, Nobble,' which letter had been

dated inside from Sydney, and which envelope bore the Sydney postmark.

Caldigate's handwriting was peculiar, and the attorney declared that he

could himself swear to it. The letter itself she also produced, but it

told less than the envelope. It began as such a letter might begin,

'Dearest Feemy,' and ended 'Yours, ever and always, J.C.' As she herself

had pointed out, a man such as Caldigate does not usually call his wife

by that most cherished name in writing to her. The letter itself

referred almost altogether to money matters, though perhaps hardly to

such as a man generally discusses with his wife. Certain phrases seemed

to imply a distinct action. She had better sell these shares or those,

if she could, for a certain price,--and suchlike. But she explained,

that they both when they married had been possessed of mining shares,

represented by scrip which passed from hand to hand readily, and that

each still retained his or her own property. But among the various small

documents which she had treasured up for use, should they be needed for

some possible occasion such as this, was a note, which had not, indeed,

been posted, but which purported to have been written by the minister,

Allan, to Caldigate himself, offering to perform the marriage at

Ahalala, but advising him to have the ceremony performed at some more

settled place, where an established church community with a permanent

church or chapel admitted the proper custody of registers. Nothing could

be more sensible, or written in a better spirit than this letter, though

the language was not that of an educated man. This letter, Caldigate

had, she said, showed to her, and she had retained it. Then she brought

forward two handkerchiefs which she herself had marked with her new

name, Euphemia Caldigate, and the date of the year. This had been done,

she declared, immediately after her marriage, and the handkerchiefs

seemed by their appearance to justify the assertion. Caldigate had

admitted a promise, admitted that he had lived with the woman, admitted

that she had passed by his name, admitted that there had been a

conversation with the clergyman in regard to his marriage. And now there

were three others, besides the woman herself, who were ready to

swear,--who had sworn,--that they had witnessed the ceremony!

A clerk had been sent out early in November by Robert and William Bolton

to make inquiry in the colony, and he could not well return before the

end of March. And, if the accused man should ask for delay, it would

hardly be possible to refuse the request as it might be necessary for

his defence that he, too, should get evidence from the colony. The next

assizes would be in April, and it would hardly be possible that the

trial should take place so soon. And if not there would be a delay of

three or four months more. Even that might hardly suffice should a plea

be made on Caldigate's behalf that prolonged inquiry was indispensable.

A thousand allegations might be made, as to the characters of these

witnesses,--characters which doubtless were open to criticism; as to

the probability of forgery; as to the necessity of producing Allan, the

clergyman; as to Mrs. Smith's former position,--whether or no she was

in truth a widow when she was living at Ahalala. Richard Shand had been

at Ahalala, and must have known the truth. Caldigate might well declare

that Richard Shand's presence was essential to his defence. There would

and must be delay.

But what, in the meantime, would be the condition of Hester,--Hester

Bolton, as they feared that they would be bound in duty to call

her,--of Hester and her infant? The thing was so full of real

tragedy,--true human nature of them all was so strongly affected, that

for a time family jealousies and hatred had to give way. To father and

mother and to the brothers, and to the brother's wife, it was equally

a catastrophe, terrible, limitless, like an earthquake, or the falling

upon them of some ruined tower. One thing was clear to them all,--that

she and her child must be taken away from Folking. Her continued

residence there would be a continuation of the horror. The man was not

her husband. Not one of them was inspired by a feeling of mercy to

allege that, in spite of all that they had heard, he still might be her

husband. Even Mrs. Robert, who had been most in favour of the Caldigate

marriage, did not doubt for an instant. The man had been a gambler at

home on racecourses, and then had become a gambler at the gold-mines in

the colony. His life then, by his own admission, had been disreputable.

Who does not know that vices which may be treated with tenderness,

almost with complaisance, while they are kept in the background, became

monstrous, prodigious, awe-inspiring when they are made public? A

gentleman shall casually let slip some profane word, and even some

friendly parson standing by will think but little of it; but let the

profane word, through some unfortunate accident, find its way into the

newspapers, and the gentleman will be held to have disgraced himself

almost for ever. Had nothing been said of a marriage between Caldigate

and Mrs. Smith, little would have been thought by Robert Bolton, little

perhaps by Robert Bolton's father, little even by Robert Bolton's wife,

of the unfortunate alliance which he had admitted. But now, everything

was added to make a pile of wickedness as big as a mountain.

From the conclave which was held on Saturday at Puritan Grange to decide

what should be done, it was impossible to exclude Mrs. Bolton. She was

the young mother's mother, and how should she be excluded? From the

first moment in which something of the truth had reached her ears, it

had become impossible to silence her or to exclude her. To her all those

former faults would have been black as vice itself, even though there

had been no question of a former marriage. Outside active sins, to which

it may be presumed no temptation allured herself, were abominable to

her. Evil thoughts, hardness of heart, suspicions, unforgivingness,

hatred, being too impalpable for denunciation in the Decalogue but lying

nearer to the hearts of most men than murder, theft, adultery, and

perjury, were not equally abhorrent to her. She had therefore allowed

herself to believe all evil of this man, and from the very first had set

him down in her heart as a hopeless sinner. The others had opposed

her,--because the man had money. In the midst of her shipwreck, in the

midst of her misery, through all her maternal agony, there was a certain

triumph to her in this. She had been right,--right from first to last,

right in everything. Her poor old husband was crushed by the feeling

that they had, among them, allowed this miscreant to take their darling

away from them,--that he himself had assented; but she had not assented;

she was not crushed. Before Monday night all Cambridge had heard

something of the story, and then it had been impossible to keep her in

the dark. And now, when the conclave met, of course she was one. The old

man was there, and Robert Bolton, and William the barrister, who had

come down from London to give his advice, and both Mr. and Mrs. Daniel.

Mrs. Daniel, of all the females of the family, was the readiest to

endure the severity of the step-mother, and she was now giving what

comfort she could by her attendance at the Grange.

'Of course she should come home,' said the barrister. Up to this moment

no one had seen Hester since the evil tidings had been made known; but

a messenger had been sent out to Folking with a long letter from her

mother, in which the poor nameless one had been implored to come back

with her baby to her old home till this matter had been settled. The

writer had endeavoured to avoid the saying of hard things against the

sinner; but her feelings had been made very clear. 'Your father and

brothers and all of us think that you should come away from him while

this is pending. Nay; we do not hesitate to say that it is your bounden

duty to leave him.'

'I will never, never leave my dearest, dearest husband. If they were to

put my husband into gaol I would sit at the door till they had let him

out.' That, repeated over and over again, had been the purport of her

reply. And that word 'husband,' she used in almost every line, having

only too clearly observed that her mother had not used it at all.

'Dearest mother,' she said, ending her letter, 'I love you as I have

always done. But when I became his wife, I swore to love him best. I

did not know then how strong my love could be. I have hardly known till

now, when he is troubled, of what devotion I was capable. I will not

leave him for a moment,--unless I have to do so at his telling.'

Such being her determination, and so great her obstinacy, it was quite

clear that they could not by soft words or persuasive letters bring her

to their way of thinking. She would not submit to their authority, but

would claim that as a married woman she owed obedience only to her

husband. And it would certainly not be within their power to make her

believe that she was not Caldigate's wife. They believed it. They felt

that they knew the facts. To them any continuation of the alliance

between their poor girl and the false traitor was abominable. They would

have hung the man without a moment's thought of mercy had it been

possible. There was nothing they would not have done to rescue their

Hester from his power. But how was she to be rescued till the dilatory

law should have claimed its victim? 'Can't she be made to come away by

the police?' asked the mother.

The barrister shook his head. 'Couldn't the magistrates give an order?'

asked the father. Mr. Bolton had been a magistrate himself,--was one

still indeed, although for some years he had not sat upon the

bench,--but he had no very clear idea of a magistrate's power. The

barrister again shook his head. 'You seemed to think that something of

the kind could be done,' he said, turning to Robert. When he wanted

advice he would always turn to Robert, especially in the presence of the

barrister, intending to show that he thought the lower branch of the

profession to be at any rate more accurate than the higher.

'I said something about an order from the Vice-Chancellor. But I fear

we should not succeed in getting it.' The barrister again shook his

head.

'Do you mean to say that nothing can be done?' exclaimed Mrs. Bolton,

rising up from her seat; 'that no steps can be taken?'

'If she were once here, perhaps you could--prevent her return,'

whispered the barrister.

'Persuade her not to go back,' suggested Mrs. Daniel.

'Well;--that might come after a time. But I think you would have the

feeling of the community with you if you succeeded;--well, not violence,

you understand.'

'No; not violence,' said the father.

'I could be violent with him,' said Mrs. Bolton.

'Just do not let her leave the house,' continued the barrister. 'Of

course it would be disagreeable.'

'I should not mind that,' said Mrs. Bolton. 'In doing my duty I could

bear anything. To separate her from him I could undergo any trouble.'

'But he would have the power to fetch her?' asked the father,

doubtfully.

'No doubt;--by law he would have such power. But the magistrates would

be very loath to assist him. The feeling of the community, as I said,

would be in your favour. She would be cowed, and when once she was away

from him he would probably feel averse to increase our enmity by taking

strong measures for her recovery.' Mrs. Bolton seemed to declare by her

face that it would be quite impossible for him to increase her enmity.

'But we can't lock her up,' said the old man.

'Practically you can. Take her bonnet away,--or whatever she came in.

Don't let there be a vehicle to carry her back. Let the keys be turned

if it be necessary. The servants must know of course what you are doing;

but they will probably be on your side. I don't mean to say that if she

be resolute to escape at any cost you can prevent her. But probably she

will not be resolute like that. It requires a deal of resolution for a

young woman to show herself in the streets alone in so wretched a plight

as hers. It depends on her disposition.'

'She is very determined,' said Hester's mother.

'And you can be equally so.' To this assertion Mrs. Bolton assented

with a little nod. 'You can only try it. It is one of those cases in

which, unfortunately, publicity cannot be avoided. We have to do the

best we can for her, poor dear, according to our conscience. I should

induce her to come on a visit to her mother, and then I should, if

possible, detain her.'

It was thus that William Bolton gave his advice; and as Robert Bolton

assented, it was determined that this should be the line of action. Nor

can it be said that they were either cruel or unloving in their

projected scheme. Believing as they did that the man was not her

husband, it must be admitted that it was their duty to take her away

from him if possible. But it was not probable that Hester herself would

look upon their care of her in the same light. She would beat herself

against the bars of her cage; and even should she be prevented from

escaping by the motives and reasons which William Bolton had suggested,

she would not the less regard her father and mother as wicked tyrants.

The mother understood that very well. And she, though she was hard to

all the world besides, had never been hard to her girl. No tenderest

female bosom that ever panted at injustice done to her offspring was

more full than hers of pity, love, and desire. To save her Hester from

sin and suffering she would willingly lay down her life. And she knew

that in carrying out the scheme that had been proposed she must appear

to her girl to be an enemy,--to be the bitterest of all enemies! I have

seen a mother force open the convulsively closed jaws of her child in

order that some agonising torture might be applied,--which, though

agonising, would tend to save her sick infant's life. She did it

though, the child shrank from her as from some torturing fiend. This

mother resolved that she would do the same,--though her child, too,

should learn to hate her.

William Bolton undertook to go out to Folking and give the invitation

by which she was to be allured to come to Puritan Grange,--only for a

day and night if longer absence was objectionable; only for a morning

visit, if no more could be achieved. It was all treachery and

falsehood;--a doing of certain evil that possible good might come from

it. 'She will hate me for ever, but yet it ought to be done,' said

William Bolton; who was a good man, an excellent husband and father,

and regarded in his own profession as an honourable trustworthy man.

'She will never stay,' the old man said to his wife, when the others had

gone and they two were left together.

'I don't know.'

'I am sure she will never stay.'

'I will try.'

Mrs. Robert said the same thing when the scheme was explained to her.

'Do you think anybody could keep me a prisoner against my will,--unless

they locked me up in a cell? Do you think I would not scream?'

The husband endeavoured to explain that the screaming might depend on

the causes which had produced the coercion. 'I think you would scream,

and scream till you were let loose, if the person locking you up had

nothing to justify him. But if you felt that the world would be all

against you, then you would not scream and would not be let out.'

Mrs. Robert, however, seemed to think that no one could keep her in any

house against her own will without positive bolts, bars, and chains.

In the meantime much had been settled out at Folking, or had been

settled at Cambridge, so that the details were known at Folking. Mr.

Seely had taken up the case, and had of course gone into it with much

more minuteness than Robert Bolton had done. Caldigate owned to the

writing of the envelope, and to the writing of the letter, but declared

that that letter had not been sent in that envelope. He had written the

envelope in some foolish joke while at Ahalala,--he remembered doing it

well; but he was quite sure that it had never passed through the Sydney

post-office. The letter itself had been written from Sydney. He

remembered writing that also, and he remembered posting it at Sydney in

an envelope addressed to Mrs. Smith. When Mr. Seely assured him that he

himself had seen the post-office stamp of Sydney on the cover, Caldigate

declared that it must have been passed through the post-office for

fraudulent purposes after it had left his hands. 'Then,' said Mr. Seely,

'the fraud must have been meditated and prepared three years ago,--which

is hardly probable.'

As to the letter from the clergyman, Allan, of which Mr. Seely had

procured a copy, Caldigate declared that it had certainly never been

addressed to him. He had never received any letter from Mr. Allan,--had

never seen the man's handwriting. He was quite sure that if he were in

New South Wales he could get a dozen people to swear that there had

never been such a marriage at Ahalala. He did name many people,

especially Dick Shand. Then Mr. Seely proposed to send out an agent to

the colony, who should take the depositions of such witnesses as he

could find, and who should if possible bring Dick Shand back with him.

And, at whatever cost, search should be made for Mr. Allan; and Mr.

Allan should, if found, be brought to England, if money could bring him.

If Mr. Allan could not be found, some document written by him might

perhaps be obtained with reference to his handwriting. But, through it

all, Mr. Seely did believe that there had been some marriage ceremony

between his client and Mrs. Euphemia Smith.

All this, down to the smallest detail, was told to Hester,--Hester

Bolton or Hester Caldigate, whichever she might be. And there was no

word uttered by the man she claimed as her husband which she did not

believe as though it were gospel.

Chapter XXXI

Hester Is Lured Back

On the Monday morning, Mr. William Bolton, the barrister, who had much

to his own inconvenience remained at Cambridge for the purpose of

carrying out the scheme which he had proposed, went over to Folking in a

fly. He had never been at the place before, and was personally less well

acquainted with the family into which his sister had married than any

other Bolton. Had everything been pleasant, nothing could have been more

natural than such a visit; but as things were very far from pleasant

Hester was much surprised when he was shown into her room. It had been

known to Robert Bolton that Caldigate now came every day into Cambridge

to see either his lawyer or his father, and that therefore he would

certainly not be found at home about the middle of the day. It was

henceforth to be a law with all the Boltons, at any rate till after the

trial, that they would not speak to, or if possible see, John Caldigate.

Not without very strong cause would William Bolton have entered his

house, but that strong cause existed.

'Oh, William! I am so glad to see you,' said Hester, rushing into her

brother's arms.

'I too am glad to see you, Hester, though the time is so sad to us all.'

'Yes; yes. It is sad;--oh, so sad! Is it not terrible that there should

be people so wicked, and that they should be able to cause so much

trouble to innocent persons.'

'With all my heart I feel for you,' said the brother, caressing his

young sister.

With quickest instinct she immediately perceived that a slight emphasis

given to the word 'you' implied the singular number. She drew herself

back a little, still feeling, however, that no offence had as yet been

committed against which she could express her indignation. But it was

necessary that a protest should be made at once. 'I am so sorry that my

husband is not here to welcome you. He has gone into Cambridge to fetch

his father. Poor Mr. Caldigate is so troubled by all this that he

prefers now to come and stay with us.'

'Ah, indeed! I dare say it will be better that the father and the son

should be together.'

'Father and son, or even mother and daughter, are not like husbands and

wives, are they?'

'No; they are not,' said the barrister, not quite knowing how to answer

so very self-evident a proposition, but understanding accurately the

line of thought which had rendered it necessary for the poor creature

to reassert at every moment the bond by which she would fain be bound

to the father of her child.

'But Mr. Caldigate is so good,--so good and gentle to me and baby, that

I am delighted that he should be here with John. You know of all this.'

'Yes, I know, of course.'

'And will feel all that John has to suffer.'

'It is very bad, very bad for everybody concerned. By his own showing,

his conduct----'

'William,' said she, 'let this be settled in one word. I will not hear a

syllable against my husband from you or any one else. I am delighted to

see you,--I cannot tell you how delighted. Oh, if papa would come,--or

mamma! Dear, dear mamma! You don't suppose but what I love you all!'

'I am sure you do.'

'But not from papa or mamma even will I hear a word against him. Would

Fanny,'--Fanny was the barrister's wife--'let her people come and say

things behind your back?'

'I hope not.'

'Then, believe that I can be as stout as Fanny. But we need not quarrel.

You will come and see baby, and have some lunch. I am afraid they will

not be here till three or four, but they will be so glad to see you if

you will wait.'

He would not wait, of course; but he allowed himself to be taken away to

see baby, and did eat his lunch. Then he brought forward the purport of

his mission. 'Your mother is most anxious to see you, Hester. You will

go and visit her?'

'Oh, yes,' said Hester, unaware of any danger. 'But I wish she would

come to me.'

'My dear girl, as things are at present that is impossible. You can

understand as much as that. There must be a trial.'

'I suppose so.'

'And till that has been held your mother would be wrong to come here. I

express no judgment against any one.'

'I should have thought mamma would have been the first to support

me,--me and baby,' she said sobbing.

'Certainly, if you were homeless--'

'But I am not. My husband gives me a house to live in, and I want none

other.'

'What I wish to explain is that if you were in want of anything--'

'I am in want of nothing--but sympathy.'

'You have it from me and from all of us. But pray, listen for a moment.

She cannot come to you till the trial be over. I am sure Mr. Caldigate

would understand that.'

'He comes to me,' she said, alluding to her father-in-law, and not

choosing to understand that her brother should have called her husband

'Mr. Caldigate.'

'But there can be no reason why you should not go to Chesterton.'

'Just to see mamma?'

'For a day or two,' he replied, blushing inwardly at his own lie. 'Could

you go to-morrow?'

'Oh no;--not to stay. Of course I must ask my husband. I'm sure he'll

let me go if I ask it, but not to-morrow. Why to-morrow?'

'Only that your mother longs to see you.' He had been specially

instigated to induce her to come as soon as possible. 'You may imagine

how anxious she is.'

'Poor mamma! Yes;--I know she suffers. I know mamma's feelings. Mamma

and I must, must, must quarrel if we talk about this. Of course I will

go to see her. But will you tell her this,--that if she cannot speak of

my husband with affection and respect it will be better that--she should

not mention him at all. I will not submit to a word even from her.'

When he took his departure it was settled that she should, with her

husband's permission, go over to Chesterton for a couple of nights in

the course of the next week; but that she could not fix the day till she

had seen him. Then, when he was taking his departure and kissing her

once again, she whispered a word to him. 'Try and be charitable,

William. I sometimes think that at Chesterton we hardly knew what

charity meant.'

That evening the proposed visit to Chesterton was discussed at Folking.

The old man had very strongly taken up his son's side, and was of

opinion that the Boltons were not only uncharitable, but perversely

ill-conditioned in the view which they took. To his thinking, Crinkett,

Adamson, and the woman were greedy, fraudulent scoundrels, who had

brought forward this charge solely with the view of extorting money. He

declared that the very fact that they had begun by asking for money

should have barred their evidence before any magistrates. The oaths of

the four 'scoundrels' were, according to him, worth nothing. The scrap

of paper purporting to be a copy of the marriage certificate, and the

clergyman's pretended letter, were mere forgeries, having about them no

evidence or probability of truth. Any one could have written them. As to

that envelope addressed to Mrs. Caldigate, with the Sydney postmark, he

had his own theory. He thought but little of the intercourse which his

son acknowledged with the woman, but was of opinion that his son 'had

been an ass' in writing those words. But a man does not marry a woman by

simply writing his own name with the word mistress prefixed to it on an

envelope. Any other woman might have adduced the envelope as evidence of

his marriage with her! It was, he said, monstrous that any one should

give credence to such bundles of lies. Therefore his words were gospel,

and his wishes were laws to Hester. She clung round him, and hovered

over him, and patted him like a very daughter, insisting that he should

nurse the baby, and talking of him to her husband as though he were

manifestly the wisest man in Cambridgeshire. She forgot even that little

flaw in his religious belief. To her thinking at the present moment, a

man who would believe that her baby was the honest son of an honest

father and mother had almost religion enough for all purposes.

'Quite right that you should go,' said the old man.

'I think so,' said the husband, 'though I am afraid they will trouble

her.'

'The only question is whether they will let her come back.'

'What!' exclaimed Hester.

'Whether they won't keep you when they've got you.'

'I won't be kept. I will come back. You don't suppose I'd let them talk

me over?'

'No, my dear; I don't think they'll be able to do that. But there are

such things as bolts and bars.'

'Impossible!' said his son.

'Do you mean that they'll send me to prison?' asked Hester.

'No; they can't do that. They wouldn't take you in at the county jail,

but they might make a prison of Puritan Grange. I don't say they will,

but they might try it.'

'I should get out, of course.'

'I daresay you would; but there might be trouble.'

'Papa would not allow that,' said Hester. 'Papa understands better than

that. I've a right to go where I like, just as anybody else;--that is,

if John tells me.' The matter was discussed at some length, but John

Caldigate was of opinion that no such attempt as the old man had

suggested was probable,--or even possible. The idea that in these days

any one should be kept a prisoner in a private house,--any one over whom

no one in that house possessed legitimate authority,--seemed to him to

be monstrous. That a husband should lock up his wife might be possible,

or a father his unmarried and dependent daughter; but that any one

should venture to lock up another man's wife was, he declared, out of

the question. Mr. Caldigate again said that he should not be surprised

if it were attempted; but acknowledged that the attempt could hardly be

successful.

As Hester was anxious to make the visit, it was arranged that she should

go. It was not that she expected much pleasure even in seeing her

mother;--but that it was expedient at such a time to maintain what

fellowship might still be possible with her own family. The trial would

of course liberate them from all their trouble; and then, when the trial

should be over, it would be very sad if an entire rupture between

herself and her parents should have been created. She would be true to

her husband; as true as a part must be to the whole, as the heart must

to the brain. They two were, and ever would be, one. But if her mother

could be spared to her, if she could be saved from a lasting quarrel

with her mother, it would be so much to her! Tears came into the eyes

even of the old man as he assented; and her husband swore to her that

for her sake he would forgive every injury from any one bearing the name

of Bolton when all this should be over.

A day was therefore fixed, and a note was written, and on the last day

of February she and her baby and her nurse were taken over to Puritan

Grange. In the meantime telegrams at a very great cost had been flying

backwards and forwards between Cambridge and Sydney. William and Robert

Bolton had determined among them that, at whatever expense to the

family, the truth must be ascertained; and to this the old banker had

assented. So far they were right, no doubt. If the daughter and sister

was not in truth a wife,--if by grossest, by most cruel ill-usage she

had been lured to a ruin for which there could be no remedy in this

world,--it would be better that the fact should be known at once, so

that her life might be pure though it could never again be bright. But

it was strange that, with all these Boltons, there was a desire, an

anxiety, to prove the man's guilt rather than his innocence. Mrs. Bolton

had always regarded him as a guilty man,--though guilty of she knew not

what. She had always predicted misery from a marriage so distasteful to

her; and her husband, though he had been brought to oppose her and to

sanction the marriage, had, from the moment in which the sanction was

given, been induced by her influence to reject it. Robert Bolton, when

the charge was first made, when the letter from the woman was first

shown to him, had become aware that he had made a mistake in allowing

this trouble to come upon the family; and then, as from point to point

the evidence had been opened out to him, he had gradually convinced

himself that the son-in-law and brother-in-law, whom he had, as it

were, forced into the family, was a bigamist. There was present to them

all an intense desire to prove the man's guilt, which was startling to

all around who heard anything of the matter. Up to this time the Bolton

telegrams and the Caldigate telegrams had elicited two facts,--that

Allan the Wesleyan minister had gone to the Fiji Islands and had there

died, and that they at Nobble who had last known Dick Shand's address,

now knew it no longer. Caldigate had himself gone to Pollington, and had

there ascertained that no tidings had been received from Dick by any of

the Shand family for the last twelve months. It had been decided that

the trial must be postponed at any rate till the summer assizes, which

would be held in Cambridge about the last week in August; and it was

thought by some that even then the case would not be ready. There was,

no doubt, an opinion prevalent in Cambridge that the unfortunate young

mother should be taken home to her own family till the matter should be

decided; and among the ladies of the town John Caldigate himself was

blamed severely for not allowing her to place herself under her father's

protection; but the ladies of the town generally were not probably well

acquainted with the disposition and temper of the young wife herself.

Things were in this condition when Hester and her baby went to her

father's house. Though that suspicion as to some intended durance which

Mr. Caldigate had expressed was not credited by her, still, as she was

driven up to the house, the idea was in her mind. She looked at the door

and she looked at the window, and she could not conceive it possible

that such a thing should be attempted. She thought of her own knowledge

of the house; how, if it were necessary, she could escape from the back

of the garden into the little field running down to the river, and how

she could cross the ferry. Of course she knew every outlet and inlet

about the place, and was sure that confinement would be impossible. But

she did not think of her bonnet nor of her boots, nor of the horror

which it would be to her should she be driven to wander forth into the

town, and to seek a conveyance back to Folking in the public streets.

She went on a Monday with an understanding that she was to remain there

till Wednesday. Mrs. Bolton almost wished that a shorter visit had been

arranged in order that she might at once commence her hostile operations

without any intermediate and hypocritical pretences. She had planned her

campaign thoroughly in her own mind, and had taken the cook into her

confidence, the cook being the oldest and most religious servant in the

house. When the day of departure should have come the cook was to lock

the doors, and the gardener was to close the little gate at the bottom

of the garden; and the bonnet and other things were to be removed, and

then the mother would declare her purpose. But in the meantime allusions

to that intended return to Folking must be accepted, and listened to

with false assent. It was very grievous, but so it was arranged. As soon

as Hester was in the house the mother felt how much better it would have

been to declare to her daughter at once that she was a prisoner;--but it

was then too late to alter their proposed plans.

It very nearly came to pass that Hester left her mother on the morning

of her arrival. They had both determined to be cautious, reticent, and

forbearing but the difference between them was so vital that reticence

was impossible. At first there was a profusion of natural tears, and a

profusion of embraces Each clung to the other for a while as though some

feeling might be satisfied by mere contact; and then the woe of the

thing, the woe of it, was acknowledged on both sides! They could agree

that the wickedness of the wicked was very wicked. Wherever might lie

the sin of fraud and falsehood, the unmerited misfortunes of poor

Hester were palpable enough. They could weep together over the wrongs

inflicted on that darling baby. But by degrees it was impossible to

abstain from alluding to the cause of their sorrow;--and such allusion

became absolutely necessary when an attempt was made to persuade Hester

to remain at her old home with her own consent. This was done by her

father on the evening of her arrival, in compliance with the plan that

had been arranged. 'No, papa, no; I cannot do that,' she said, with a

tone of angry determination.

'It is your duty, Hester. All your friends will tell you so.'

'My duty is to my husband,' she said, 'and in such a matter I can allow

myself to listen to no other friend.' She was so firm and fixed in this

that he did not even dare to go on with his expostulation.

But afterwards, when they were upstairs together, Mrs. Bolton spoke out

more at length and with more energy. 'Mamma, it is of no use,' said

Hester.

'It ought to be of use. Do you know the position in which you are?'

'Very well. I am my husband's wife.'

'If it be so, well. But if it be not so, and if you remain with him

while there is a doubt upon the matter, then you are his mistress.'

'If I am not his wife, then I will be his mistress,' said Hester,

standing up and looking as she spoke much as her mother would look in

her most determined moments.

'My child!'

'What is the use of all this, mamma? Nothing shall make me leave him.

Others may be ashamed of me; but because of this I shall never be

ashamed of myself. You are ashamed of me!'

'If you could mean what you said just now I should be ashamed of you.'

'I do mean it. Though the juries and the judges should say that he was

not my husband, though all the judges in England should say it, I would

not believe them. They may put him in prison and so divide us; but they

never shall divide my bone from his bone, and my flesh from his flesh.

As you are ashamed of me, I had better go back to-morrow.'

Then Mrs. Bolton determined that early in the morning she would look to

the bolts and bars; but when the morning came matters had softened

themselves a little.

Chapter XXXII

The Babington Wedding

It is your duty,--especially your duty,--to separate them.' This was

said by Mr. Smirkie, the vicar of Plum-cum-Pippin, to Mr. Bromley, the

rector of Utterden, and the words were spoken in the park at Babington

where the two clergymen were taking a walk together. Mr. Smirkie's

first wife had been a Miss Bromley, a sister of the clergyman at

Utterden; and as Julia Babington was anxious to take to her bosom all

her future husband's past belongings, Mr. Bromley had been invited to

Babington. It might be that Aunt Polly was at this time well inclined

to exercise her hospitality in this direction by a feeling that Mr.

Bromley would be able to talk to them about this terrible affair. Mr.

Bromley was intimate with John Caldigate, and of course would know all

about it. There was naturally in Aunt Polly's heart a certain amount of

self-congratulation at the way in which things were going. Mr. Smirkie,

no doubt, had had a former wife, but no one would call him a bigamist.

In what a condition might her poor Julia have been but for that

interposition of Providence! For Aunt Polly regarded poor Hester Bolton

as having been quite a providential incident, furnished expressly for

the salvation of Julia. Hitherto Mr. Bromley had been very short in

his expressions respecting the Folking tragedy, having simply declared

that, judging by character, he could not conceive that a man such as

Caldigate would have been guilty of such a crime. But now he was being

put through his facings more closely by his brother-in-law.

'Why should I want to separate them?'

'Because the evidence of his guilt is so strong.'

'That is for a jury to judge.'

'Yes; and if a jury should decide that there had been no Australian

marriage,--which I fear we can hardly hope;--but if a jury were to

decide that, then of course she could go back to him. But while there is

a doubt, I should have thought, Tom, you certainly would have seen it,

even though you never have had a wife of your own.'

'I think I see all that there is to see,' said the other. 'If the poor

lady has been deceived and betrayed, no punishment can be too heavy for

the man who has so injured her. But the very enormity of the iniquity

makes me doubt it. As far as I can judge, Caldigate is a high-spirited,

honest gentleman, to whom the perpetration of so great a sin would

hardly suggest itself.'

'But if,--but if--! Think of her condition, Tom!'

'You would have to think of your own, if you were to attempt to tell her

to leave him.'

'That means that you are afraid of her.'

'It certainly means that I should be very much afraid if I thought of

taking such a liberty. If I believed it to be my duty, I hope that I

would do it.'

'You are her clergyman.'

'Certainly. I christened her child. I preach to her twice every Sunday.

And if she were to die I should bury her.'

'Is that all?'

'Pretty nearly;--except that I generally dine at the house once a week.'

'Is there nothing further confided to you than that?'

'If she were to come to me for advice, then it would be my duty to give

her what advice I thought to be best; and then--'

'Well, then?'

'Then I should have to make up my mind,--which I have not done at

present,--I should have to make up my mind, not as to his guilt, for I

believe him to be innocent, but as to the expediency of a separation

till a jury should have acquitted him. But I am well aware that she

won't come to me; and from little words which constantly drop from her,

I am quite sure that nothing would induce her to leave her husband but a

direct command from himself.'

'You might do it through him.'

'I am equally sure that nothing would induce him to send her away.'

But such a conviction as this was not sufficient for Mr. Smirkie. He was

alive to the fact,--uncomfortably alive to the fact,--that the ordinary

life of gentle-folk in England does not admit of direct clerical

interference. As a country clergyman, he could bestow his admonitions

upon his poorer neighbours; but upon those who were well-to-do he could

not intrude himself unasked, unless, as he thought, in cases of great

emergency. Here was a case of very great emergency. He was sure that he

would have courage for the occasion if Folking were within the bounds of

Plum-cum-Pippin. It was just the case in which counsel should be

volunteered;--in which so much could be said which would be gross

impertinence from others though it might be so manifest a duty to a

clergyman! But Mr. Bromley could not be aroused to a sense either of his

duty or of his privileges. All this was sad to Mr. Smirkie, who

regretted those past days in which, as he believed, the delinquent soul

had been as manifestly subject to ecclesiastical interference as the

delinquent body has always been to the civil law.

But with Julia, who was to be his wife, he could be more imperative.

She was taught to give thanks before the throne of grace because she had

been spared the ignominy of being married to a man who could not have

made her his wife, and had had an unstained clergyman of the Church of

England given to her for her protection. For with that candour which is

so delightful, and so common in these days, everything had been told to

Mr. Smirkie,--how her young heart had for a time turned itself towards

her cousin, how she had been deceived, and then how rejoiced she was

that by such deceit she had been reserved for her present more glorious

fate. 'And won't Mr. Bromley speak to her?' Julia asked.

'It is a very difficult question,--a very difficult question, indeed,'

said Mr. Smirkie, shaking his head. He was quite sure that were Folking

in his parish he would perform the duty, though Mr. Caldigate and the

unfortunate lady might be as a lion and a lioness in opposition to him;

but he was also of opinion that sacerdotal differences of opinion should

not be discussed among laymen,--should not be discussed by a clergyman

even with the wife of his bosom.

At Babington opinion was somewhat divided. Aunt Polly and Julia were of

course certain that John Caldigate had married the woman in Australia.

But the two other girls and their father were not at all so sure.

Indeed, there had been a little misunderstanding among the Babingtons

on the subject, which was perhaps strengthened by the fact that Mr.

Smirkie had more endeared himself to Julia's mother than to Julia's

father or sisters, and that Mr. Smirkie himself was very clear as to

the criminality of the bigamist. 'I suppose you are often there,' Mr.

Babington said to his guest, the parson of Utterden.

'Yes; I have seen a good deal of them.'

'Do you think it possible?'

'Not probable,' said the clergyman.

'I don't,' said the Squire. 'I suppose he was a little wild out there,

but that is a very different thing from bigamy. Young men, when they

get out to those places, are not quite so particular as they ought to

be, I daresay. When I was young, perhaps I was not as steady as I ought

to have been. But, by George! here is a man comes over and asks for a

lot of money; and then the woman asks for money; and then they say that

if they don't get it, they'll swear the fellow was married in

Australia. I can't fancy that any jury will believe that.'

'I hope not.'

'And yet, Madame,'--the Squire was in the habit of calling his wife

Madame when he intended to insinuate anything against her,--'has got it

settled in her head that this young woman isn't his wife at all. I think

it's uncommon hard. A man ought to be considered innocent till he has

been found guilty. I shall go over and see him one of these days, and

say a kind word to her.'

There was at that moment some little difference of opinion, which was

coming to a head in reference to a very delicate matter. When the

conversations above related took place, the Babington wedding had been

fixed to take place in a week's time. Should cousin John be invited, or

should he not? Julia was decidedly against it. 'She did not think,' she

said, 'that she could stand up at the altar and conduct herself on an

occasion so trying if she were aware that he were standing by her.' Mr.

Smirkie, of course, was not asked,--was not directly asked. But equally,

of course, he was able to convey his own opinion through his future

bride. Aunt Polly thought that the county would be shocked if a man

charged with bigamy was allowed to be present at the marriage. But the

Squire was a man who could have an opinion of his own; and after having

elicited that of Mr. Bromley, insisted that the invitation should be

sent.

'It will be a pollution,' said Julia, sternly, to her younger sisters.

'You will be a married woman almost before you have seen him,' said

Georgiana, the second, 'and so it won't matter so much to you. We must

get over it as we can.'

Julia had been thought by her sisters not to bear the Smirkie triumph

with sufficient humility; and they, therefore, were sometimes a little

harsh to her. 'I don't think you understand it at all,' said Julia. 'You

have no conception what should be the feelings of a married woman,

especially when she is going to become the wife of one of God's

ministers.'

But in spite of all this, Aunt Polly wrote to her nephew as follows:--

'Dear John,--Our dearest Julia is to be married on Tuesday next. You

know how anxious we all have been to maintain affectionate family

relations with you, and we therefore do not like the idea of our

sweet child passing from her present sphere to other duties without

your presence. Will you come over on Monday evening, and stay till

after the breakfast? It is astonishing how many of our friends from

the two counties have expressed their wish to grace the ceremony by

their company. I doubt whether there is a clergyman in the diocese

of Ely more respected and thought of by all the upper classes than

Augustus Smirkie.

'I do not ask Mrs. Caldigate, because, under present circumstances,

she would not perhaps wish to go into company, and because Augustus

has never yet had an opportunity of making her acquaintance. I will

only say that it is the anxious wish of us all here that you and she

together may soon see the end of these terrible troubles.--Believe

me to be, your affectionate aunt,

'Maryanne Babington.'

The writing of this letter had not been effected without much

difficulty. The Squire himself was not good at the writing of letters,

and, though he did insist on seeing this epistle, so that he might be

satisfied that Caldigate had been asked in good faith, he did not know

how to propose alterations. 'That's all my eye,' he said, referring to

his son-in-law that was to be. 'He's as good as another, but I don't

know that he's any better.'

'That, my dear,' said Aunt Polly, 'is because you do not interest

yourself about such matters. If you had heard what the Archdeacon said

of him the other day, you would think differently.'

'He's another parson,' said the Squire. 'Of course they butter each

other up.' Then he went on to the other paragraph. 'I wouldn't have said

anything about his wife.'

'That would not have been civil,' said Aunt Polly; 'and as you insist on

my asking him, I do not wish to be rude.' And so the letter was sent as

it was written.

It reached Caldigate on the day which Hester was passing with her mother

at Chesterton,--on the Tuesday. She had left Folking on the Monday,

intending to return on the Wednesday. Caldigate was therefore alone with

his father. 'They might as well have left that undone,' said he,

throwing the letter over the table.

'It's about the silliest letter I ever read,' said the old Squire; 'but

it is intended for civility. She means to show that she does not condemn

you. There are many people who do not know when to speak and when to be

silent. I shouldn't go.'

'No, I shan't go.'

'But I should take it as meant in kindness.'

Then John Caldigate wrote back as follows:--'All this that has befallen

my wife and me prevents us from going anywhere. She is at the present

moment with her own people at Chesterton, but when she returns I shall

not leave her. Give my kindest love to Julia, and ask her from me to

accept the little present which I send her.'

Julia declared that she would much rather not have accepted the brooch,

and that she would never wear it. But animosity against such articles

wears itself out quickly, and it may be expected that the little

ornament will be seen in the houses of the Suffolk gentry among whom Mr.

Smirkie is so popular.

Whether it was Mr. Smirkie's popularity, or the general estimation in

which the Babington family were held, or the delight which is taken by

the world at large in weddings, there was a very great gathering at

Babington church, and in the Squire's house afterwards. Though it was

early in March,--a time of the year which, in the eastern counties of

England, is not altogether propitious to out-of-doors festivity,--though

the roads were muddy, and the park sloppy, and the church abominably

open to draughts, still there was a crowd. The young ladies in that part

of the world had been slow in marrying lately, and it was felt that the

present occasion might give a little fillip to the neighbourhood. This

was the second Suffolk young lady that Mr. Smirkie had married, and he

was therefore entitled to popularity. He certainly had done as much as

he could, and there was probably no one around who had done more.

'I think the dear child will be happy,' said Mrs. Babington to her old

friend, Mrs. Munday,--the wife of Archdeacon Munday, the clerical

dignitary who had given Mr. Smirkie so good a character.

'Of course she will,' said Mrs. Munday, who had already given three

daughters in marriage to three clergymen, and who had, as it were,

become used to the transfer.

'And that she will do her duty in it.'

'Why not? There's nothing difficult in it if she only sees that he has

his surplice and bands properly got up. He is not, on the whole, a

bad-tempered man; and though the children are rough, they'll grow out of

that. And she ought to make him take two, or perhaps three, glasses of

port wine on Sundays. Mr. Smirkie is not as young as he used to be, and

two whole duties, with the Sunday school, which must be looked into, do

take a good deal out of a man. The archdeacon, of course, has a curate;

but I suppose Mr. Smirkie could hardly manage that just at present?'

The views which had hitherto been taken at Babington of the bride's

future life had been somewhat loftier than this. The bands and the

surplice and the port wine seemed to be small after all that had been

said. The mother felt that she was in some degree rebuked,--not having

yet learned that nothing will so much lessen the enthusiasm one may feel

for the work of a barrister, or a member of Parliament, or a clergyman,

as a little domestic conversation with the wife of the one or the other.

But Mrs. Munday was a lady possessing much clerical authority, and that

which she said had to be endured with equanimity.

Mr. Smirkie seemed to enjoy the occasion, and held his own through the

day with much dignity, The archdeacon, and the clergyman of the parish,

and Mr. Bromley, all assisted, and nothing was wanting of outward

ceremony which a small country church could supply. When his health was

drunk at the breakfast he preached quite a little sermon as he returned

thanks, holding his bride's hands in his the while, performing his part

in the scene in a manner which no one else would have dared to attempt.

Then there was the parting between the mother and daughter, upstairs,

before she was taken away for her ten days' wedding-tour to Brighton.

'My darling;--it is not so far but that I can come and see you very

often.'

'Pray do, mamma.'

'And I think I can help you with the children.'

'I am not a bit afraid of them, mamma. I intend to have my way with

them, and that will be everything. I don't mean to be weak. Of course

Augustus will do what he thinks best in the parish, but he quite

understands that I am to be mistress at home. As for Mrs. Munday, mamma,

I don't suppose that she knows everything. I believe I can manage quite

as well as Mrs. Munday.'

Then there was a parting joint congratulation that she had not yielded

to the allurements of her cousin, John Caldigate. 'Oh, no, mamma; that

would never have done.'

'Think where you might have been now!'

'I am sure I should have found out his character in time and have broken

from him, let it have cost what it might. A man that can do such things

as that is to me quite horrible. What is to become of her, and her

baby;--and, perhaps, two,' she added in a whisper, holding up her hands

and shaking her head. The ceremony through which she had just passed had

given her courage to hint at such a possibility. 'I suppose she'll have

to be called Miss Bolton again.' Of course there was some well-founded

triumph in the bosom of the undoubted Mrs. Augustus Smirkie as she

remembered what her own fate might have been. Then she was carried away

in the family carriage amidst a deluge of rice and a shower of old

shoes.

That same night Mr. Bromley gave an account of the wedding to John

Caldigate at Folking, telling him how well all the personages had

performed their parts. 'Poor Julia! she at any rate will be safe.'

'Safe enough, I should think,' said the clergyman.

'What I mean is that she has no dangers to fear such as my poor wife has

encountered. Whomever I think of now I cannot but compare them to

ourselves. No woman surely was ever so ill-used as she, and no man ever

so unfortunate as myself.'

'It will be all over in August.'

'And where shall I be? My own lawyer tells me that it is too probable

that I shall be in prison. And where will she be then?'

Chapter XXXIII

Persuasion

Early on the Tuesday morning Hester came down into the breakfast parlour

at Puritan Grange, having with difficulty persuaded herself that she

would stay the appointed hours in her mother's house. On the previous

evening her mother had, she thought, been very hard on her, and she had

determined to go. She would not stay even with her mother, if her mother

insisted upon telling her that she was not her husband's wife. But

during the night she was able to persuade herself to bear what had been

already said,--to let it be as though it had been forgotten. Her mother

was her mother. But she would bear no more. As to herself and her own

conduct her parents might say what they pleased to her. But of her

husband she would endure to hear no evil word spoken. In this spirit she

came down into the little parlour.

Mrs. Bolton was also up,--had been up and about for some time previous.

She was a woman who never gave way to temptations of ease. A nasty dark

morning at six o'clock, with just light enough to enable her to dress

without a candle, with no fire and no hot water, with her husband

snoring while she went through her operations, was to her thinking the

proper condition of things for this world. Not to be cold, not to be

uncomfortable, not to strike her toes against the furniture because she

could not quite see what she was about, would to her have been to be

wicked. When her daughter came into the parlour, she had been about the

house for more than an hour, and had had a conference both with the cook

and with the gardener. The cook was of opinion that not a word should be

said, or an unusual bolt drawn, or a thing removed till the Wednesday.

'She can't carry down her big box herself, ma'am; and the likes of Miss

Hester would never think of going without her things;--and then there's

the baby.' A look of agony came across the mother's face as she heard

her daughter called Miss Hester;--but in truth the woman had used the

name from old association, and not with any reference to her late young

mistress's present position. 'I should just tell her flat on Wednesday

morning that she wasn't to stir out of this, but I wouldn't say nothing

at all about any of it till then.' The gardener winked and nodded his

head, and promised to put a stake into the ground behind the little

wicket-gate which would make the opening of it impossible. 'But take my

word for it, ma'am, she'll never try that. She'll be a deal too proud.

She'll rampage at the front door, and 'll despise any escaping like.'

That was the gardener's idea, and the gardener had long known the young

lady. By these arguments Mrs. Bolton was induced to postpone her prison

arrangements till the morrow.

When she found her daughter in the small parlour she had settled much in

her mind. During the early morning,--that is, till Mr. Bolton should

have gone into Cambridge,--not a word should be said about the marriage.

Then when they two would be alone together, another attempt should be

made to persuade Hester to come and live at Chesterton till after the

trial. But even in making that attempt no opinion should be expressed as

to John Caldigate's wickedness, and no hint should be given as to the

coming incarceration. 'Did you bring baby down with you?' the

grandmother asked. No; baby had been awake ever so long, and then had

gone to sleep again, and the nurse was now with him to protect him from

the sufferings incident to waking. 'Your papa will be down soon, and

then we will have breakfast,' said Mrs. Bolton. After that there was

silence between them for some time.

A bond of discord, if the phrase may be allowed, is often quite as

strong as any bond coming from concord and agreement. There was to both

these women a subject of such paramount importance to each that none

other could furnish matter of natural conversation. The one was saying

to herself ever and always, 'He is my husband. Let the outside world say

what it may, he is my husband.' But the other was as constantly denying

to herself this assertion and saying, 'He is not her husband. Certainly

he is not her husband.' And as to the one the possession of that which

she claimed was all the world, and as to the other the idea of the

possession without true possession entailed upon her child pollution,

crime, and ignominy, it was impossible but that the mind of each should

be too full to admit of aught but forced expressions on other matters.

It was in vain for them to attempt to talk of the garden, the house, the

church, or of the old man's health. It was in vain even to attempt to

talk of the baby. There are people who, however full their hearts may

be, full of anger or full of joy, can keep the fulness in abeyance till

a chosen time for exhibiting it shall come. But neither of these two was

such a person. Every stiff plait in the elder woman's muslin and crape

declared her conviction that John Caldigate was not legally married to

her daughter. Every glance of Hester's eye, every motion made with her

hands, every little shake of her head, declared her purpose of fighting

for that one fact, whatever might be the odds against her.

When the banker came down to breakfast things were better for a little

time. The pouring out of his tea mitigated somewhat the starchiness of

his wife's severity, and Hester when cutting the loaf for him could seem

to take an interest in performing an old duty. He said not a word

against Caldigate; and when he went out, Hester, as had been her custom,

accompanied him to the gate. 'Of course you will be here when I come,'

he said.

'Oh yes; I do not go home till to-morrow.' Then she parted from him,

and spent the next hour or two up-stairs with her baby.

'May I come in?' said the mother, knocking at the door.

'Oh yes, mamma. Don't you think baby is very like his father?'

'I dare say. I do not know that I am good at tracing likenesses. He

certainly is like you.'

'So much more like his father!' said Hester.

After that there was a pause, and then the mother commenced her task in

her most serious voice. 'Hester, my child, you can understand that a

duty may become so imperious that it must be performed.'

'Yes,' said Hester, pressing her lips close together 'I can understand

that.' There might be a duty very necessary for her to perform, though

in the performance of it she should be driven to quarrel absolutely with

her own mother.

'So it is with me. Whom do you think I love best in all the world?'

'Papa.'

'I do love your father dearly, and I endeavour, by God's grace, to do my

duty by him, though, I fear, it is done imperfectly. But, my child, our

hearts, I think, yearn more to those who are younger than ourselves than

to our elders. We love best those whom we have cherished and protected,

and whom we may perhaps still cherish and protect. When I try to tear my

heart away from the things of this vile world, it clings to you--to

you--to you!'

Of course this could not be borne without an embrace 'Oh, mamma!' Hester

exclaimed, throwing herself on her knees before her mother's lap.

'If you suffer, must not I suffer? If you rejoice, would I not fain

rejoice with you if I could? Did I not bring you into the world, my only

one, and nursed you, and prayed for you, and watched you with all a

mother's care as you grew up among the troubles of the world? Have you

not known that my heart has been too soft towards you even for the due

performance of my duties?'

'You have always been good to me, mamma.'

'And am I altered now? Do you think that a mother's heart can be changed

to her only child?'

'No, mamma.'

'No, Hester. That, I think, is impossible. Though for the last twelve

months I have not seen you day by day,--though I have not prepared the

food which you eat and the clothes which you wear, as I used to do,--you

have been as constantly in my mind. You are still my child, my only

child.'

'Mamma, I know you love me.'

'I so love you as to know that I sin in so loving aught that is human.

And so loving you, must I not do my duty by you? When love and duty both

compel me to speak, how shall I be silent?'

'You have said it, mamma,' said Hester, slowly drawing herself up from

off the ground.

'And is saying it once enough, when, as I think, the very soul, the

immortal soul, of her who is of all the dearest to me depends on what I

may say;--may be saved, or, oh, perhaps lost for ever by the manner in

which I may say it! How am I not to speak when such thoughts as these

are heavy within me?'

'What is it you would say?' This Hester asked with a low hoarse voice

and a stern look, as though she could not resist her mother's prayer for

the privilege of speaking; but at the same time was resolutely prepared

not to be turned a hair's-breadth by anything that might be said.

'Not a word about him.'

'No, mamma; no. Unless you can tell me that you will love him as your

son-in-law.'

'Not a word about him,' she repeated, in a harsher voice. She felt that

that promise should have been enough, and that in the present

circumstances she should not have been invited to love the man she

hated. 'Your father and I wish you for the next few months to come and

live with us.'

'It is quite impossible,' said Hester, standing very upright, with a

face altogether unlike that she had worn when kneeling at her mother's

knees.

'You should listen to me.'

'Yes, I will listen.'

'There will be a trial.'

'Undoubtedly. John, at least, seems to think so. It is possible that

these wicked people may give it up, or that they may have no money to go

on; but I suppose there will be a trial.'

'The woman has bound herself to prosecute him.'

'Because she wants to get money. But we need not discuss that, mamma.

John thinks that there will be a trial.'

'Till that is over, will you not be better away from him? How will it be

with you if it should be decided that he is not your husband?' Here

Hester of course prepared herself for interruption, but her mother

prayed for permission to continue.

'Listen to me for one moment, Hester.'

'Very well, mamma. Go on.'

'How would it be with you in that case? You must be separated then. As

that is possible, is it not right that you should obey the ordinances of

God and man, and keep yourself apart till they who are in authority

shall have spoken?'

'There are no such ordinances.'

'There are indeed. If you were to ask all your friends, all the married

women in Cambridgeshire, what would they say? Would they not all tell

you that no woman should live with a man while there is a shadow of

doubt? And as to the law of God, you know God's law, and can only defend

yourself by your own certainty as to a matter respecting which all

others are uncertain. You think yourself certain because such certainty

is a way to yourself out of your present misery.'

'It is for my child,' she shouted; 'and for him.'

'As for your babe, your darling babe, whether he be yours in joy of

heart or in agony of spirit, he is still yours. No one will rob you of

him. If it be as we fear, would not I help you to love him, help you to

care for him, help you to pray for him? If it were so, would I desert

him or you because in your innocence you had been betrayed into

misfortune? Do I not feel for your child? But when he grows up and is a

man, and will have learned the facts of his early years, let him be

able to tell himself that his mother though unfortunate was pure.'

'I am pure,' she said.

'My child, my own one, can I, your mother, think aught else of you? Do

I not know your heart? Do not I know the very thoughts within you?'

'I am pure. He has become my husband, and nothing can divide us. I

never gave a thought to another man. I never had the faintest liking,

as do other girls. When he came and told me that he had seen me and

loved me, and would take me for his wife, I felt at once that I was all

his,--his to do as he liked with me, his to nourish him, his to worship

him, his to obey him, his to love him let father or mother or all the

world say what they would to the contrary. Then we were married. Till

he was my own, I never even pressed my lips upon his. But I became his

wife by a bond that nothing shall break. You tell me of God's law. By

God's law I am his wife, let the people say what they will. I have but

two to think of.'

'Yourself and him?' asked her mother.

'I have three to think of,--God, and him, and my child; and may God be

good to me and them, as in this matter I will put myself away from

myself altogether. It is for me to obey him, and I will submit myself

to none other. If he bids me go, I will go; if he bids me stay here, I

will stay. I have become his so entirely, that no judges--no judges can

divide us. Judges! I know but one Judge, and He is there; and He has

said that those whom He has joined together, man shall not put asunder.

Pure! pure! No one should praise herself, but as a woman I do know that

I am pure.'

Then the mother's heart yearned greatly towards her daughter; and yet

she was no whit changed. She knew nothing of phrases of logic, but she

felt that Hester had begged the whole question. Those whom God had

joined together! True, true! If only one could know whether in this or

the other case God had joined the couple. As Hester argued the matter,

no woman should be taken from the man she had married, though he might

have a dozen other wives all living. And she spoke of purity as though

it were a virtue which could be created and consecrated simply by the

action of her own heart, as though nothing outside,--no ceremony, no

ordinance,--could affect it. The same argument would enable her to live

with John Caldigate after he should come out of prison, even though, as

would then be the case, another woman would have the legal right of

calling herself Mrs. John Caldigate! On the previous day she had

declared that if she could not be his wife, she would be his mistress.

The mother knew what she meant,--that, let people call her by what name

they might, she would still be her husband's wife in the eye of God.

But she would not be so. And then she would not be pure. And, to Mrs.

Bolton, the worst of it was that this cloudiness had come upon her

daughter,--this incapacity to reason it out,--because the love of a

human being had become so strong within her bosom as to have superseded

and choked the love of heavenly things. But how should she explain all

this? 'I am not asking you to drop his name.'

'Drop his name! I will never drop it. I cannot drop it. It is mine. I

could not make myself anything but Mrs. John Caldigate if I would. And

he,' she said, taking the baby up from its cradle and pressing it to

her bosom, 'he shall be Daniel Caldigate to the day of his death. Do

you think that I will take a step that shall look like robbing my child

of his honest name,--that will seem to imply a doubt that he is not his

own father's honest boy,--that he is not a fitting heir to the property

which his forefathers have owned so long? Never! They may call me what

name they will, but I will call myself John Caldigate's wife as long as

I have a voice to make myself heard.'

It was the same protest over and over again, and it was vain to answer.

'You will not stay under your father's roof?'

'No; I have to live under my husband's roof.' Then Mrs. Bolton left the

room, apparently in anger. Though her heart within might be melting

with ruth, still it was necessary that she should assume a look of

anger. On the morrow she would have to show herself angry with a

vengeance, if she should then still be determined to carry out her

plan. And she thought that she was determined. What had pity to do with

it, or love, or moving heart-stirring words? Were not all these things

temptation from the Evil One, if they were allowed to interfere with

the strict line of hard duty? When she left the room, where the young

mother was still standing with her baby in her arms, she doubted for

some minutes,--perhaps for some half-hour,--then she wrestled with

those emanations from the Evil One,--with pity, with love, and suasive

tenderness,--and at last overcame them. 'I know I am pure,' the

daughter had said. 'I know I am right,' said the mother.

But she spoke a word to her husband when he came home. 'I cannot bend

her; I cannot turn her, in the least.'

'She will not stay?'

'Not of her own accord.'

'You have told her?'

'Oh no; not till to-morrow.'

'She ought to stay, certainly,' said the father. There had been very

little intercourse between the mother and daughter during the

afternoon, and while the three were sitting together, nothing was said

about the morrow. The evening would have seemed to be very sad and very

silent, had they not all three been used to so many silent evenings in

that room. Hester, during her wedding tour and the few weeks of her

happiness at Folking, before the trouble had come, had felt a new life

and almost an ecstasy of joy in the thorough liveliness of her husband.

But the days of her old home were not so long ago that its old manners

should seem strange to her. She therefore sat out the hours patiently,

stitching some baby's ornament, till her mother told her that the time

for prayer had come. After worship her father called her out into the

hall as he went up to his room. 'Hester,' he said, 'it is not right

that you should leave us to-morrow.'

'I must, papa.'

'I tell you that it is not right. You have a home in which everybody

will respect you. For the present you should remain here.'

'I cannot, papa. He told me to go back to-morrow. I would not disobey

him now,--not now,--were it ever so.' Then the old man paused as though

he were going on with the argument, but finding that he had said all

that he had to say, he slowly made his way upstairs.

'Good-night, mamma,' said Hester, returning only to the door of the

sitting-room.

'Good-night, my love.' As the words were spoken they both felt that

there was something wrong,--much that was wrong. 'I do not think they

will do that,' said Hester to herself, as she went up the stairs to her

chamber.

Chapter XXXIV

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

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 carrying 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 armchair. 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

armchair, 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.

Chapter XXXV

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

up-stairs 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.

Chapter XXXVI

The Escape

During the whole of that night Hester kept her position in the hall,

holding her baby in her arms as long as the infant would sleep in that

position, and then allowing the nurse to take it to its cradle

up-stairs. And during the whole night also Mrs. Bolton remained with her

daughter. Tea was brought to them, which each of them took, and after

that neither spoke a word to the other till the morning. Before he went

to bed, Mr. Bolton came down and made an effort for their joint comfort.

'Hester,' he said, 'why should you not go to your room? You can do

yourself no good by remaining there.' 'No,' she said, sullenly; 'no; I

will stay.' 'You will only make yourself ill,--you and your mother.'

'She can go. Though I should die, I will stay here.'

Nor could he succeed better with his wife. 'If she is obstinate, so must

I be,' said Mrs. Bolton. It was in vain that he endeavoured to prove to

her that there could be no reason for such obstinacy, that her daughter

would not attempt to escape during the hours of the night without her

baby.

'You would not do that,' said the old man, turning to his daughter. But

to this Hester would make no reply, and Mrs. Bolton simply declared her

purpose of remaining. To her mind there was present an idea that she

would, at any rate, endure as much actual suffering as her daughter.

There they both sat, and in the morning they were objects pitiable to be

seen.

Macbeth and Sancho have been equally eloquent in the praise of sleep.

'Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care!' But sleep will

knit up effectually no broken stitches unless it be enjoyed in bed.

'Blessings on him who invented sleep,' said Sancho. But the great

inventor was he who discovered mattresses and sheets and blankets. These

two unfortunates no doubt slept; but in the morning they were weary,

comfortless, and exhausted. Towels and basins were brought to them, and

then they prepared themselves to watch through another day. It seemed to

be a trial between them, which could outwatch the other. The mother was,

of course, much the older; but with poor Hester there was the baby to

add to her troubles. Never was there a woman more determined to carry

out her purpose than Mrs. Bolton, or one more determined to thwart the

purpose of another than she who still called herself Hester Caldigate.

In the morning Mrs. Bolton implored her husband to go into Cambridge as

usual; but he felt that he could not leave the house with such inmates.

So he sat in his bedroom dozing wretchedly in his arm-chair.

Caldigate appeared before the house at nine o'clock, no further attempt

having been made to exclude his entrance by the side gate, and asked to

see Mr. Bolton. 'Papa is up-stairs,' said Hester through the window. But

the old man would not come down to see his visitor, nor would he send

any message. Then Caldigate declared his purpose of going at once to the

mayor and demanding assistance from the police. He at any rate would

return with the carriage as early as he could after his visit to the

magistrates' office. He went to the mayor, and inflicted much trouble on

that excellent officer, who, however, at last, with the assistance of

his clerk,--and of Robert Bolton, whom he saw on the sly,--came to the

decision that his own authority would not suffice for the breaking open

of a man's house in order that his married daughter should be taken by

violence from his custody. 'No doubt,' he said; 'no doubt,' when

Caldigate pleaded that Mr. Bolton's daughter was, at any rate for the

present, his own wife; and that a man's right to have his wife is

undoubted. Those words 'no doubt' were said very often; but no other

words were said. Then the clerk expressed an opinion that the proper

course would be for Mr. Caldigate to go up to London and get an order

from the Vice-Chancellor; which was, of course, tantamount to saying

that his wife was to remain at Chesterton till after the trial,--unless

she could effect her own escape.

But not on that account was he inclined to yield. He had felt from the

first, as had she also, that she would make her way out of the house, or

would not make it, as she might or might not have the courage to be

persistent in demanding it. This, indeed, had been felt both by William

and Robert Bolton when they had given their counsel. 'She is a woman

with a baby, and when in your house will be subject to your influences.

She will be very angry at first, but will probably yield after a time to

your instructions. She will at last give an unwilling assent to the

course you propose. That is what may be expected. But if she should be

firmer than we think, if there should be in her bosom a greater power of

resistance than we expect, should she dash herself too violently against

the cage,--then you must let her go.' That was intended to be the gist

of the advice given, though it perhaps was not so accurately expressed.

It was in that way understood by the old man; but Mrs. Bolton would not

so understand it. She had taken the matter in hand, and as she pressed

her lips together she told herself that she intended to go through with

it.

And so did Hester. But as this day went on, Hester became at times

almost hysterical in her efforts to communicate with her husband through

the window, holding up her baby and throwing back her head, and was

almost in convulsions in her efforts to get at him. He on the other side

thundered at the door with the knocker, till that instrument had been

unscrewed from within. But still he could knock with his stick and shout

with his voice; while the people outside the iron gates stood looking on

in a crowd. In the course of the day Robert Bolton endeavoured to get an

order from the magistrates for the removal of Caldigate by the police.

But the mayor would not assent either to that. Old Mr. Bolton was the

owner of the house, and if there was a nuisance to be complained of, it

was he that must complain. The mayor during these days was much tried.

The steady married people of the borough,--the shopkeepers and their

wives, the doctors and lawyers and clergymen,--were in favour of Mr.

and Mrs. Bolton. It was held to be fitting that a poor lady in Hester's

unfortunate position should be consigned to the care of her parents till

the matter had been settled. But the people generally sympathised with

the young husband and young wife, and were loud in denouncing the

illegality of the banker's proceedings. And it was already rumoured that

among the undergraduates Caldigate's side was favoured. It was generally

known that Crinkett and the woman had asked for money before they had

brought their accusation, and on that account sympathy ran with the

Squire of Folking. The mayor, therefore, did not dare to give an order

that Caldigate should be removed from off the premises at Puritan

Grange, knowing that he was there in search of a wife who was only

anxious to place herself in his custody.

But nothing was done all that day. About four in the afternoon, while

Caldigate was still there, and at a moment in which poor Hester had been

reduced by the continuance of her efforts to a state of hysterical

prostration, the old man summoned his wife upstairs. She, with a motion

to the cook, who still guarded the stairs, obeyed the order, and for a

moment left her watch.

'You must let her go,' said the old man, with tremulous anxiety, beating

with his fingers on his knees as he spoke. 'You must let her go.'

'No; no!'

'It will kill her.'

'If I let her go, I shall kill her soul,' said the determined woman. 'Is

not her soul more than her body?'

'They will say we--murdered her.'

'Who will say it? And what would that be but the breath of a man? Does

not our Father who is in heaven know that I would die to do her a

service, if the service accorded with His will? Does He not know that I

am cruel to her here in order that she may be saved from eternal----'

She was going to say, in the natural fervour of her speech, 'from

eternal cruelty to come,' but she checked herself. To have admitted that

such a judgment could be worse than just, worse even than merciful,

would be blasphemy to her. 'Oh, He knows! He knows! And if He knows,

what matters what men say that I have done to her.'

'I cannot have it go on like this,' said he, still whispering.

'She will be wearied out, and then we will take her to her bed.'

But Mr. Bolton succeeded in demanding that a telegram should be sent up

to William requesting him to come down to the Grange as early as

possible on the following morning. This was sent, and also a message to

Robert Bolton in Cambridge, telling him that William had been summoned.

During these two days he had not been seen at the Grange, though he knew

much of what was being done there. Had he, however, been aware of all

that his sister and step-mother were enduring, he would probably have

appeared upon the scene. As it was, he had justified his absence by

pleading to himself Mrs. Bolton's personal enmity, and the understanding

which existed that he should not visit the house. Then, when it was

dark, Caldigate with the carriage again returned to the town, where he

slept as he had done on the previous night. Again their food was brought

to the two women in the hall, and again each of them swallowed a cup of

tea as they prepared themselves for the work of the night.

In the hall there was a gas-stove, which was kept burning, and gave a

faint glimmer, so that each could see the outline of the other. Light

beyond that there was none. In the weary long hours of nights such as

these, nights passed on the seats of railway carriages, or rougher

nights, such as some of us remember, on the outside of coaches, or

sitting by the side of the sick, sleep will come early and will early

go. The weariness of the past day will produce some forgetfulness for an

hour or two, and then come the slow, cold, sad hours through which the

dawn has to be expected. Between two and three these unfortunates were

both awake, the poor baby having been but lately carried back from its

mother to its cradle. Then suddenly Mrs. Bolton heard rather than saw

her daughter slip down from her chair on to the ground and stretch

herself along upon the hard floor. 'Hester,' she said; but Hester did

not answer. 'Hester, are you hurt?' When there was still no answer, the

mother got up, with limbs so stiff that she could hardly use them, and

stood over her child. 'Hester, speak to me.'

'I will never speak to you more,' said the daughter.

'My child, why will you not go to your comfortable wholesome bed?'

'I will not go; I will die here.'

'The door shall not be locked. You shall have the key with you. I will

do nothing to hurt you if you will go to your bed.'

'I will not go; leave me alone. You cannot love me, mamma, or you would

not treat me like this.'

'Love you! Oh, my child! If you knew! If you could understand! Why am I

doing this? Is it not because I feel it to be my duty? Will you let me

take you to your bed?'

'No, never. I, too, can do my duty,--my duty to my husband. It is to

remain here till I can get to him, even though I should die.' Then she

turned her poor limbs on the hard floor, and the mother covered her with

a cloak and placed a cushion beneath her head. Then, after standing a

while over her child, she returned to her chair, and did not move or

speak again till the old cook came, with the first glimmer of the

morning, to inquire how the night had been passed.

'I cannot allow this; I cannot allow this,' said Mr. Bolton, when he

shuffled down in his slippers. The old servant had been up to him and

had warned him that such sufferings as these might have a tragic

end,--too probably an end fatal to the infant. If the mother's strength

should altogether fail her, would it not go badly with the baby? So the

cook had argued, who had been stern enough herself, anxious enough to

secure 'Miss Hester' from the wickedness of John Caldigate. But she was

now cowed and frightened, and had acknowledged to herself that if 'Miss

Hester' would not give way, then she must be allowed to go forth, let

the wickedness be what it might.

'There must be an end to this,' said the old man.

'What end?' asked his wife. 'Let her obey her parents.'

'I will obey only my husband,' said Hester.

'Of course there must be an end. Let her go to her bed, and, weary as I

am, I will wait upon her as only a mother can wait upon her child. Have

I not prayed for her through the watches of the night, that she might be

delivered from this calamity, that she might be comforted by Him in her

sorrow? What have I done these two last weary days but pray to the Lord

God that He might be merciful to her?'

'Let me go,' said Hester.

'I will not let you go,' said the mother, rising from her seat. 'I too

can suffer. I too can endure. I will not be conquered by my own child.'

There spoke the human being. That was the utterance natural to the

woman. 'In this struggle, hard as it is, I will not be beat by one who

has been subject to my authority.' In all those prayers,--and she had

prayed,--there had been the prayer in her heart, if not in her words,

that she might be saved from the humiliation of yielding.

Early in the day Caldigate was again in front of the house, and outside

there was a close carriage with a pair of horses, standing at the

gardener's little gate. And at the front gate, which was still chained,

there was again the crowd. At about one both William and Robert Bolton

came upon the scene, and were admitted by the gardener and cook through

the kitchen-door into the house. They were close to Caldigate as they

entered; neither did they speak to him or he to them. At that moment

Hester was standing with the baby at the window, and saw them. 'Now I

shall be allowed to go,' she exclaimed. Mrs. Bolton was still seated

with her back to the windows; but she had heard the steps on the gravel,

and the opening of the kitchen-door; and she understood Hester's words,

and was aware that her husband's sons were in the house.

They had agreed as to what should be done, and at once made their way up

into the hall. 'William, you will make them let me go. You will make

them let me go,' said Hester, rushing at once to the elder of the two,

and holding out her baby as though for him to take. She was now in a

state so excited, so nervous, so nearly hysterical, that she was hardly

able to control herself. 'You will not let them kill me, William,--me

and my baby.' He kissed her and said a kind word or two, and then,

inquiring after his father, passed on up-stairs. Then Mrs. Bolton

followed him, leaving Robert in the hall with Hester. 'I know that you

have turned against me,' said Hester.

'Indeed no. I have never turned against you. I have thought that you

would be better here than at Folking for the present.'

'That is being against me. A woman should be with her husband. You told

them to do this. And they have nearly killed me,--me and my baby.'

In the meantime William Bolton up-stairs was very decided in his opinion

that they must at once allow Caldigate to take her back to Folking. She

had, as he said, proved herself to be too strong for them. The

experiment had been tried and had failed. No doubt it would be

better,--so he thought,--that she should remain for the present at the

Grange; so much better that a certain show of force had been justified.

But as things were going, no further force would be justified. She had

proved her power, and must be allowed to go. Mrs. Bolton, however, would

not even yet acknowledge that she was beaten. In a few more hours, she

thought, Hester would allow herself to be taken to her bed, and then all

might be well. But she could not stand against the combined force of her

husband and his two sons; and so it was decided that the front door

should be opened for the prisoner, and that the chains should be removed

from the gate. 'I should be afraid of the people,' William Bolton said

to his father.

It was not till this decision had been given that Mrs. Bolton felt that

the struggle of the last three days had been too much for her. Now, at

last, she threw herself upon her bed, weeping bitter tears, tears of a

broken spirit, and there she lay prostrate with fatigue and misery. Nor

would she go down to say a word of farewell. How could she say adieu to

her daughter, leaving her house in such circumstances 'I will give her

your love,' said William Bolton.

'Say nothing to her. She does not care for my love, nor for the love of

her Father in heaven. She cares only for that adulterer.'

The door was opened from within, and the chains were taken away from the

gate. 'Oh, John,--oh, my husband,' she exclaimed, as she leaped down the

steps into his arms, 'never let me go again; not for a day,--not for an

hour!' Then her boxes were brought down, and the nurse came with the

child, whom the mother at once took and placed in his father's arms. And

the carriage was brought in, and the luggage was placed on it, and the

nurse and the baby were seated. 'I will go up to poor mamma for one

moment,' she said. She did go to her mother's room, and throwing herself

upon the wretched woman, wept over her and kissed her. But the mother,

though in some sort she returned the caress, said not a word as her

daughter left the room. And she went also to her father and asked his

blessing. He muttered a word or two, blessing her, no doubt, with

inarticulate words. He also had been thoroughly vanquished.

Then she got into the carriage, and was taken back to Folking lying in

John Caldigate's arms.

Chapter XXXVII

Again at Folking

Thus Hester prevailed, and was taken back to the house of the man who

had married her. By this time very much had been said about the matter

publicly. It had been impossible to keep the question,--whether John

Caldigate's recent marriage had been true or fraudulent,--out of the

newspapers; and now the attempt that had been made to keep them apart

by force gave an additional interest to the subject. There was an

opinion, very general among elderly educated people, that Hester

ought to have allowed herself to be detained at the Grange. 'We do

not mean to lean heavily on the unfortunate young lady,' said the

'Isle-of-Ely-Church-Intelligencer'; 'but we think that she would have

better shown a becoming sense of her position had she submitted her

self to her parents till the trial is over. Then the full sympathy of

all classes would have been with her; and whether the law shall restore

her to a beloved husband, or shall tell her that she has become the

victim of a cruel seducer, she would have been supported by the

approval and generous regard of all men.' It was thus for the most part

that the elderly and the wise spoke and thought about it. Of course,

they pitied her; but they believed all evil of Caldigate, declaring

that he too was bound by a feeling of duty to restore the unfortunate

one to her father and mother until the matter should have been set at

rest by the decision of a jury.

But the people,--especially the people of Utterden and Netherden,

and of Chesterton, and even of Cambridge,--were all on the side of

Caldigate and Hester as a married couple. They liked the persistency

with which he had claimed his wife, and applauded her to the echo for

her love and firmness. Of course the scene at Puritan Grange had been

much exaggerated. The two nights were prolonged to intervals varying

from a week to a fortnight. During that time she was said always to

have been at the window holding up her baby. And Mrs. Bolton was

accused of cruelties which she certainly had not committed. Some

details of the affair made their way into the metropolitan Press,--so

that the expected trial became one of those \_causes cÃ©lÃ¨bres\_ by which

the public is from time to time kept alive to the value and charm of

newspapers.

During all this John Caldigate was specially careful not to

seclude himself from public view, or to seem to be afraid of his

fellow-creatures. He was constantly in Cambridge, generally riding

thither on horseback, and on such occasions was always to be seen in

Trumpington Street and Trinity Street. Between him and the Boltons

there was, by tacit consent, no intercourse whatever after the

attempted imprisonment. He never showed himself at Robert Bolton's

office, nor when they met in the street did they speak to each other.

Indeed at this time no gentleman or lady held any intercourse with

Caldigate, except his father and Mr. Bromley the clergyman. The

Babingtons were strongly of opinion that he should have surrendered

the care of his wife; and Aunt Polly went so far as to write to him

when she first heard of the affair at Chesterton, recommending him

very strongly to leave her at the Grange. Then there was an angry

correspondence, ended at last by a request from Aunt Polly that there

might be no further intercourse between Babington and Folking till

after the trial.

Caldigate, though he bore all this with an assured face, with but

little outward sign of inward misgiving, suffered much,--much even from

the estrangement of those with whom he had hitherto been familiar. To

be 'cut' by any one was a pain to him. Not to be approved of, not to be

courted, not to stand well in the eyes of those around him, was to him

positive and immediate suffering. He was supported no doubt by the full

confidence of his father, by the friendliness of the parson, and by

the energetic assurances of partisans who were all on his side,--such

as Mr. Ralph Holt, the farmer. While Caldigate had been in Cambridge

waiting for his wife's escape, Holt and one or two others were maturing

a plan for breaking into Puritan Grange, and restoring the wife to

her husband. All this supported him. Without it he could hardly have

carried himself as he did. But with all this, still he was very

wretched. 'It is that so many people should think me guilty,' he said

to Mr. Bromley.

She bore it better--though, of course, now that she was safe at Folking,

she had but little to do as to outward bearing. In the first place, no

doubt as to his truth ever touched her for a moment,--and not much doubt

as to the result of the trial. It was to her an assured fact that John

Caldigate was her husband, and she could not realise the idea that, such

being the fact, a jury should say that he was not. But let all that be

as it might, they two were one; and to adhere to him in every word, in

every thought, in every little action, was to her the only line of

conduct possible. She heard what Mr. Bromley said, she knew what her

father-in-law thought, she was aware of the enthusiasm on her side of

the folk at Folking. It seemed to her that this opposition to her

happiness was but a continuation of that which her mother had always

made to her marriage. The Boltons were all against her. It was a

terrible sorrow to her. But she knew how to bear it bravely. In the

tenderness of her husband, who at this time was very tender to her, she

had her great consolation.

On the day of her return she had been very ill,--so ill that Caldigate

and his father had been much frightened. During the journey home in the

carriage, she had wept and laughed hysterically, now clutching her baby,

and then embracing her husband. Before reaching Folking she had been so

worn with fatigue that he had hardly been able to support her on the

seat. But after rest for a day or two, she had rallied completely. And

she herself had taken pleasure and great pride in the fact that through

it all her baby had never really been ill. 'He is a little man,' she

said, boasting to the boy's father, 'and knows how to put up with

troubles. And when his mamma was so bad he didn't peak and pine and cry,

so as to break her heart. Did he, my own, own brave little man?' And she

could boast of her own health too. 'Thank God I am strong, John. I can

bear things which would break down other women. You shall never see me

give way because I am a poor creature.' Certainly she had a right to

boast that she was not a poor creature.

Caldigate no doubt was subject to troubles of which she knew nothing. It

was quite clear to him that Mr. Seely, his own lawyer, did in truth

believe that there had been some form of marriage between him and

Euphemia Smith. The attorney had never said so much,--had never accused

him. It would probably have been opposed to all the proprieties in such

a matter that any direct accusation should have been made against him by

his own attorney. But he could understand from the man's manner that his

mind was not free from a strong suspicion. Mr. Seely was eager enough as

to the defence; but seemed to be eager as against opposing evidence

rather than on the strength of evidence on his own side. He was not

apparently desirous of making all the world know that such a marriage

certainly never took place; but that, whether such a marriage had taken

place or not, the jury ought not to trust the witnesses. He relied, not

on the strength of his own client, but on the weakness of his client's

adversaries. It might probably be capable of proof that Crinkett and

Adamson and the woman had conspired together to get money from John

Caldigate; and if so, then their evidence as to the marriage would be

much weakened. And he showed himself not averse to any tricks of trade

which might tend to get a verdict. Could it be proved that John Crinkett

had been dishonest in his mining operations? Had Euphemia Smith allowed

her name to be connected with that of any other man in Australia? What

had been her antecedents? Was it not on the cards that Allan, the

minister, had never undergone any ceremony of ordination? And, if not,

might it not be shown that a marriage service performed by him would be

no marriage service at all? Could not the jury be made to think,--or at

least some of the jury,--that out there, in that rough lawless

wilderness, marriage ceremonies were very little understood? These were

the wiles to which he seemed disposed to trust; whereas Caldigate was

anxious that he should instruct some eloquent indignant advocate to

declare boldly that no English gentleman could have been guilty of

conduct so base, so dastardly, and so cruel! 'You see, Mr. Caldigate,'

the lawyer said on one occasion, 'to make the best of it, our own hands

are not quite clean. You did promise the other lady marriage.'

'No doubt. No doubt I was a fool; and I paid for my folly. I bought her

off. Having fallen into the common scrape,--having been pleased by her

prettinesses and clevernesses and women's ways,--I did as so many other

men have done. I got out of it as best I could without treachery and

without dishonour. I bought her off. Had she refused to take my money, I

should probably have married her,--and probably have blown my brains out

afterwards. All that has to be acknowledged,--much to my shame. Most of

us would have to blush if the worst of our actions were brought out

before us in a court of law. But there was an end of it. Then they come

over here and endeavour to enforce their demand for money by a threat.'

'That envelope is so unfortunate,' said the lawyer.

'Most unfortunate.'

'Perhaps we shall get some one before the day comes who will tell the

jury that any marriage up at Ahalala must have been a farce.'

All this was unsatisfactory, and became so more and more as the weeks

went by. The confidential clerk whom the Boltons had sent out when the

first threat reached them early in November,--the threat conveyed in

that letter from the woman which Caldigate had shown to Robert

Bolton,--returned about the end of March. The two brothers, Robert and

William, decided upon sending him to Mr. Seely, so that any information

obtained might be at Caldigate's command, to be used, if of any use, in

his defence. But there was in truth very little of it. The clerk had

been up to Nobble and Ahalala, and had found no one there who knew

enough of the matter to give evidence about it. The population of mining

districts in Australia is peculiarly a shifting population, so that the

most of those who had known Caldigate and his mode of life there were

gone. The old woman who kept Henniker's Hotel at Nobble had certainly

heard that they were married; but then she had added that many people

there called themselves man and wife from convenience. A woman would

often like a respectable name where there was no parson near at hand to

entitle her to it. Then the parsons would be dilatory and troublesome

and expensive, and a good many people were apt to think that they could

do very well without ceremonies. She evidently would have done no good

to either side as a witness. This clerk had found Ahalala almost

deserted,--occupied chiefly by a few Chinese, who were contented to

search for the specks of gold which more ambitious miners had allowed

to slip through their fingers. The woman had certainly called herself

Mrs. Caldigate, and had been called so by many. But she had afterwards

been called Mrs. Crinkett, when she and Crinkett had combined their

means with the view of buying the Polyeuka mine. She was described

as an enterprising, greedy woman, upon whom the love of gold had had

almost more than its customary effect. And she had for a while been

noted and courted for her success, having been the only female miner

who was supposed to have realised money in these parts. She had been

known to the banks at Nobble, also even at Sydney; and had been

supposed at one time to have been worth twenty or thirty thousand

pounds. Then she had joined herself with Crinkett, and all their

money had been supposed to vanish in the Polyeuka mine. No doubt

there had been enough in that to create animosity of the most bitter

kind against Caldigate. He in his search for gold had been uniformly

successful,--was spoken of among the Nobble miners as the one man who

in gold- digging had never had a reverse. He had gone away just before

the bad time came on Polyeuka; and then had succeeded, after he had

gone, in extracting from these late unfortunate partners of his every

farthing that he had left them! There was ample cause for animosity.

Allan, the minister, who certainly had been at Ahalala, was as certainly

dead. He had gone out from Scotland as a Presbyterian clergyman, and no

doubt had ever been felt as to his being that which he called

himself;--and a letter from him was produced which had undoubtedly been

written by himself. Robert Bolton had procured a photograph of the note

which the woman produced as having been written by Allan to Caldigate.

The handwriting did not appear to him to be the same, but an expert had

given an opinion that they both might have been written by the same

person. Of Dick Shand no tidings had been found. It was believed that he

had gone from Queensland to some of the Islands,--probably to the Fijis;

but he had sunk so low among men as to have left no trace behind him. In

Australia no one cares to know whence a shepherd has come or whither he

goes. A miner belongs to a higher class, and is more considered. The

result of all which was, in the opinion of the Boltons, adverse to John

Caldigate. And in discussing this with his client, Mr. Seely

acknowledged that nothing had as yet come to light sufficient to shake

the direct testimony of the woman, corroborated as it was by three

persons, all of whom would swear that they had been present at the

marriage.

'No doubt they endeavoured to get money from you,' said Mr. Seely; 'and

I may be well assured in my own mind that money was their sole object.

But then it cannot be denied that their application to you for money had

a sound basis,--one which, though you might fairly refuse to allow it,

takes away from the application all idea of criminality. Crinkett has

never asked for money as a bribe to hold his tongue. In a matter of

trade between them and you, you were very successful; they were very

unfortunate. A man asking for restitution in such circumstances will

hardly be regarded as dishonest.'

It was to no purpose that Caldigate declared that he would willingly

have remitted a portion of the money had he known the true

circumstances. He had not done so, and now the accusation was made. The

jury, feeling that the application had been justifiable, would probably

keep the two things distinct. That was Mr. Seely's view; and thus, in

these days, Caldigate gradually came to hate Mr. Seely. There was no

comfort to be had from Mr. Seely.

Mr. Bromley was much more comfortable, though, unfortunately, in such a

matter less to be trusted.

'As to the minister's handwriting,' he said, 'that will go for nothing.

Even if he had written the note----'

'Which he didn't,' said Caldigate.

'Exactly. But should it be believed to have been his, it would prove

nothing. And as to the envelope, I cannot think that any jury would

disturb the happiness of a family on such evidence as that. It all

depends on the credibility of the people who swear that they were

present; and I can only say that were I one of the jury, and were the

case brought before me as I see it now, I certainly should not believe

them. There is here one letter to you, declaring that if you will comply

with her demands, she will not annoy you, and declaring also her

purpose of marrying some one else. How can any juryman believe her after

that?'

'Mr. Seely says that twelve men will not be less likely to think me a

bigamist because she has expressed her readiness to commit bigamy; that,

if alone, she would not have a leg to stand upon, but that she is amply

corroborated; whereas I have not been able to find a single witness to

support me. It seems to me that in this way any man might be made the

victim of a conspiracy.'

Then Mr. Bromley said that all that would be too patent to a jury to

leave any doubt upon the matter. But John Caldigate himself, though he

took great comfort in the society of the clergyman, did in truth rely

rather on the opinion of the lawyer.

The old squire never doubted his son for a moment, and in his

intercourse with Hester showed her all the tenderness and trust of a

loving parent. But he, too, manifestly feared the verdict of a jury.

According to him, things in the world around him generally were

very bad. What was to be expected from an ordinary jury such as

Cambridgeshire would supply but prejudice, thick-headed stupidity,

or at the best a strict obedience to the dictum of a judge. 'It is a

case,' he said, 'in which no jury about here will have sense enough to

understand and weigh the facts. There will be on one side the evidence

of four people, all swearing the same thing. It may be that one or more

of them will break down under cross-examination, and that all will then

be straight. But if not, the twelve men in a box will believe them

because they are four, not understanding that in such a case four may

conspire as easily as two or three. There will be the Judge, no doubt;

but English judges are always favourable to convictions. The Judge

begins with the idea that the man before him would hardly have been

brought there had he not been guilty.'

In all this, and very much more that he said both to Mr. Bromley and

his son, he was expressing his contempt for the world around him rather

than any opinion of his own on this particular matter. 'I often think,'

said he, 'that we have to bear more from the stupidity than from the

wickedness of the world.'

It should be mentioned that about a week after Hester's escape from

Chesterton there came to her a letter from her mother.

'DEAREST HESTER,--You do not think that I do not love you because

I tried to protect you from what I believe to be sin and evil and

temptation? You do not think that I am less your mother because I

caused you suffering? If your eye offend you, pluck it out. Was I

not plucking out my own eye when I caused pain to you? You ought to

come back to me and your father. You ought to do so even now. But

whether you come back or not, will you not remember that I am the

mother who bore you, and have always loved you? And when further

distress shall come upon you, will you not return to me?--Your

unhappy but most loving Mother,

'MARY BOLTON.'

In answer to this Hester, in a long letter, acknowledged her mother's

love, and said that the memory of those two days at Chesterton should

lessen neither her affection nor her filial duty; but, she went on to

say that, in whatever distress might come upon her, she should turn to

her husband for comfort and support, whether he should be with her, or

whether he should be away from her. 'But,' she added, concluding her

letter, 'beyond my husband and my child, you and papa will always be

the dearest to me.'

Chapter XXXVIII

Bollum

There was not much to enliven the house at Folking during these days.

Caldigate would pass much of his time walking about the place, applying

his mind as well as he could to the farm, and holding up his head among

the tenants, with whom he was very popular. He had begun his reign over

them with hands not only full but free. He had drained, and roofed, and

put up gates, and repaired roads, and shown himself to be an active man,

anxious to do good. And now in his trouble they were very true to him.

But their sympathy could not ease the burden at his heart. Though by his

words and deeds among them he seemed to occupy himself fully, there was

a certain amount of pretence in every effort that he made. He was always

affecting a courage in which he felt himself to be deficient. Every

smile was false. Every brave word spoken was an attempt at deceit. When

alone in his walks,--and he was mostly alone,--his mind would fix itself

on his great trouble, and on the crushing sorrow which might only too

probably fall upon that loved one whom he had called his wife. Oh, with

what regret now did he think of the good advice which the captain had

given him on board the Goldfinder, and of the sententious, timid wisdom

of Mrs. Callender! Had she,--his Hester, ever uttered to him one word of

reproach,--had she ever shuddered in his sight when he had acknowledged

that the now odious woman had in that distant land been in his own

hearing called by his own name,--it would have been almost better. Her

absolute faith added a sting to his sufferings.

Then, as he walked alone about the estate, he would endeavour to think

whether there might not yet be some mode of escape,--whether something

might not be done to prevent his having to stand in the dock and abide

the uncertain verdict of a jury. With Mr. Seely he was discontented.

Mr. Seely seemed to be opposed to any great effort,--would simply trust

to the chance of snatching little advantages in the Court. He had money

at command, if fifty thousand pounds,--if double that sum,--would have

freed him from this trouble, he thought that he could have raised it,

and was sure that he would willingly pay it. Twenty thousand pounds two

months since, when Crinkett appeared at the christening would have sent

these people away. The same sum, no doubt, would send them away now.

But then the arrangement might have been possible. But now,--how was

it now? Could it still be done? Then the whole thing might have been

hidden, buried in darkness. Now it was already in the mouths of all

men. But still, if these witnesses were made to disappear,--if this

woman herself by whom the charge was made would take herself away--then

the trial must be abandoned. There would be a whispering of evil,--or,

too probably, the saying of evil without whispering. A terrible injury

would have been inflicted upon her and his boy;--but the injury would

be less than that which he now feared.

And there was present to him through all this a feeling that the money

ought to be paid independently of the accusation brought against him.

Had he known at first all that he knew now,--how he had taken their all

from these people, and how they had failed absolutely in the last great

venture they had made,--he would certainly have shared their loss with

them. He would have done all that Crinkett had suggested to him when he

and Crinkett were walking along the dike. Crinkett had said that on

receiving twenty thousand pounds he would have gone back to Australia,

and would have taken a wife with him! That offer had been quite

intelligible, and if carried out would have put an end to all trouble.

But he had mismanaged that interview. He had been too proud, too

desirous not to seem to buy off a threatening enemy. Now, as the trouble

pressed itself more closely upon him,--upon him and his Hester,--he

would so willingly buy off his enemy if it were possible! 'They ought to

have the money,' he said to himself; 'if only I could contrive that it

should be paid to them.'

One day as he was entering the house by a side door, Darvell the

gardener told him that there was a gentleman waiting to see him. The

gentleman was very anxious to see him, and had begged to be allowed to

sit down. Darvell, when asked whether the gentleman was a gentleman,

expressed an affirmative opinion. He had been driven over from Cambridge

in a hired gig, which was now standing in the yard, and was dressed, as

Darvell expressed it, 'quite accordingly and genteel.' So Caldigate

passed into the house and found the man seated in the dining-room.

'Perhaps you will step into my study?' said Caldigate. Thus the two men

were seated together in the little room which Caldigate used for his

own purposes.

Caldigate, as he looked at the man, distrusted his gardener's judgment.

The coat and hat and gloves, even the whiskers and head of hair, might

have belonged to a gentleman; but not, as he thought, the mouth or the

eyes or the hands. And when the man began to speak there was a mixture

of assurance and intended complaisance, an effected familiarity and an

attempt at ease, which made the master of the house quite sure that his

guest was not all that Darvell had represented. The man soon told his

story. His name was Bollum, Richard Bollum, and he had connections

with Australia;--was largely concerned in Australian gold-mines. When

Caldigate heard this, he looked round involuntarily to see whether the

door was closed. 'We're tiled, of course,' said Bollum. Caldigate with

a frown nodded his head, and Bollum went on. He hadn't come there,

he said, to speak of some recent troubles of which he had heard. He

wasn't the man to shove his nose into other people's matters. It was

nothing to him who was married to whom. Caldigate shivered, but sat

and listened in silence. But Mr. Bollum had had dealings,--many

dealings,--with Timothy Crinkett. Indeed he was ready to say that

Timothy Crinkett was his uncle. He was not particularly proud of his

uncle, but nevertheless Timothy Crinkett was his uncle. Didn't Mr.

Caldigate think that something ought to be done for Timothy Crinkett?

'Yes, I do,' said Caldigate, finding himself compelled to say something

at the moment, and feeling that he could say so much with positive

truth.

Then Bollum continued his story, showing that he knew all the

circumstances of Polyeuka. 'It was hard on them, wasn't it, Mr.

Caldigate?'

'I think it was.'

'Every rap they had among them, Mr. Caldigate! You left them as bare as

the palm of my hand!'

'It was not my doing. I simply made him an offer, which every one at the

time believed to be liberal.'

'Just so. We grants all that. But still you got all their money;--old

pals of yours too, as they say out there.'

'It is a matter of most intense regret to me. As soon as I knew the

circumstances, Mr. Bollum, I should have been most happy to have divided

the loss with them--'

'That's it,--that's it. That's what'd be right between man and man,'

said Mr. Bollum, interrupting him.

'Had no other subject been introduced.'

'I know nothing about other subjects. I haven't come here to meddle with

other subjects. I'm, as it were, a partner of Crinkett's. Any way, I am

acting as his agent. I'm quite above board, Mr. Caldigate, and in what

I say I mean to stick to my own business and not go beyond it. Twenty

thousand pounds is what we ask,--so that we and you may share the loss.

You agree to that?'

'I should have agreed to it two months since,' said Caldigate, fearing

that he might be caught in a trap,--anxious to do nothing mean, unfair,

or contrary to the law,--craving in his heart after the bold, upright

conduct of a thoroughly honourable English gentleman, and yet desirous

also to use, if it might be used, the instrumentality of this man.

'And why not now? You see,' said Bollum, becoming a little more

confidential, 'how difficult it is for me to speak. Things ain't

altered. You've got the money. They've lost the money. There isn't any

ill-will, Mr. Caldigate. As for Crinkett, he's a rough diamond, of

course. What am I to say about the lady?'

'I don't see that you need say anything.'

'That's just it. Of course she's one of them. That's all. If there is to

be money, she'll have her share. He's an old fool, and perhaps they'll

make a match of it.' As he said this he winked. 'At any rate they'll be

off to Australia together. And what I propose is this, Mr. Caldigate--'

Then he paused.

'What do you propose?'

'Make the money payable in bills to their joint order at Sydney. They

don't want to be wasting any more time here. They'll start at once. This

is the 12th April, isn't it? Tuesday the 12th?' Caldigate assented. 'The

old Goldfinder leaves Plymouth this day week.' From this he was sure

that Bollum had heard all the story from Euphemia Smith herself, or he

would not have talked of the 'old' Goldfinder. 'Let them have the bills

handed to them on board, and they'll go. Let me have the duplicates

here. You can remit the money by July to your agents,--to take up the

bills when due. Just let me be with you when the order is given to your

banker in London, and everything will be done. It's as easy as kiss.'

Caldigate sat silent, turning it over in his own mind, trying to

determine what would be best. Here was another opportunity. But it was

one as to which he must come to a decision on the spur of the moment. He

must deal with the man now or never. The twenty thousand pounds were

nothing. Had there been no question about his wife, he would have paid

the money, moved by that argument as to his 'old pals,'--by the

conviction that the result of his dealing with them had in truth been to

leave them 'as bare as the palm of his hand.' They were welcome to the

money; and if by giving the money he could save his Hester, how great a

thing it would be! Was it not his duty to make the attempt? And yet

there was in his bosom a strong aversion to have any secret dealing with

such a man as this,--to have any secret dealing in such a matter. To buy

off witnesses in order that his wife's name and his boy's legitimacy

might be half,--only half,--established! For even though these people

should be made absolutely to vanish, though the sea should swallow them,

all that had been said would be known, and too probably believed for

ever!

And then, too, he was afraid. If he did this thing alone, without

counsel, would he not be putting himself into the hands of these

wretches? Might he not be almost sure that when they had gotten his

money they would turn upon him and demand more? Would not the payment of

the money be evidence against him to any jury? Would it be possible to

make judge or jury believe, to make even a friend believe, that in such

an emergency he had paid away so large a sum of money because he had

felt himself bound to do so by his conscience?

'Well, squire,' said Bollum, 'I think you see your way through it; don't

you?'

'I don't regard the money in the least. They would be welcome to the

money.'

'That's a great point, anyway.'

'But--'

'Ay; but! You're afraid they wouldn't go. You come down to Plymouth, and

don't put the bills into their hands or mine till the vessel is under

weigh, with them aboard. Then you and I will step into the boat, and be

back ashore. When they know the money's been deposited at a bank in

London, they'll trust you as far as that. The Goldfinder won't put back

again when she's once off. Won't that make it square?'

'I was thinking of something else.'

'Well, yes; there's that trial a-coming on; isn't there?'

'These people have conspired together to tell the basest lie.'

'I know nothing about that, Mr. Caldigate. I haven't got so much as an

opinion. People tell me that all the things look very strong on their

side.'

'Liars sometimes are successful.'

'You can be quit of them,--and pay no more than what you say you

kind of owes. I should have thought Crinkett might have asked forty

thousand; but Crinkett, though he's rough,--I do own he's rough,--but

he's honest after a fashion. Crinkett wants to rob no man; but he feels

it hard when he's got the better of. Lies, or no lies, can you do

better?'

'I should like to see my lawyer first,' said Caldigate almost panting in

his anxiety.

'What lawyer? I hate lawyers.'

'Mr. Seely. My case is in his hands, and I should have to tell him.'

'Tell him when you come back from Plymouth, and hold your peace till

that's done. No good can come of lawyers in such a matter as this. You

might as well tell the town-crier. Why should he want to put bread out

of his own mouth? And if there is a chance of hard words being said,

why should he hear them? He'll work for his money, no doubt; but what

odds is it to him whether your lady is to be called Mrs. Caldigate or

Miss Bolton? He won't have to go to prison. His boy won't be!--you know

what.' This was terrible, but yet it was all so true! 'I'll tell you

what it is, squire. We can't make it lighter by talking about it all

round. I used to do a bit of hunting once; and I never knew any good

come of asking what there was the other side of the fence. You've got to

have it, or you've got to leave it alone. That's just where you are. Of

course it isn't nice.'

'I don't mind the money.'

'Just so. But it isn't nice for a swell like you to have to hand it over

to such a one as Crinkett just as the ship's starting, and then to bolt

ashore along with me. The odds are, it is all talked about. Let's own

all that. But then it's not nice to have to hear a woman swear that

she's your wife, when you've got another,--specially when she's got

three men as can swear the same. It ain't nice for you to have me

sitting here. I'm well aware of that. There's the choice of evils. You

know what that means. I'm a-putting it about as fair as a man can put

anything. It's a pity you didn't stump up the money before. But it's not

altogether quite too late yet.'

'I'll give you an answer to-morrow, Mr. Bollum.'

'I must be in town to-night.'

'I will be with you in London to-morrow if you will give me an address.

All that you have said is true; but I cannot do this thing without

thinking of it.'

'You'll come alone?'

'Yes,--alone.'

'As a gentleman?'

'On my word as a gentleman I will come alone.'

Then Bollum gave him an address,--not the place at which he resided, but

a certain coffee-house in the City, at which he was accustomed to make

appointments. 'And don't you see any lawyer,' said Bollum, shaking his

finger. 'You can't do any good that way. It stands to reason that no

lawyer would let you pay twenty thousand pounds to get out of any

scrape. He and you have different legs to stand upon.' Then Mr. Bollum

went away, and was driven back in his gig to the Cambridge Hotel.

As soon as the front door was closed Hester hurried down to her husband,

whom she found still in the hall. He took her into his own room, and

told her everything that had passed,--everything, as accurately as he

could. 'And remember,' he said, 'though I do not owe them money, that I

feel bound by my conscience to refund them so much. I should do it, now

I know the circumstances, if no charge had been brought against me.'

'They have perjured themselves, and have been so wicked.'

'Yes, they have been very wicked.'

'Let them come and speak the truth, and then let them have the money.'

'They will not do that, Hester.'

'Prove them to be liars, and then give it to them.'

'My own girl, I am thinking of you.'

'And I of you. Shall it be said of you that you bought off those who had

dared to say that your wife was not your wife? I would not do that. What

if the people in the Court should believe what they say?'

'It would be bad for you, then, dearest.'

'But I should still be your wife. And baby would still be your own, own

honest boy. I am sometimes unhappy, but I am never afraid. Let the devil

do his worst, but never speak him fair. I would scorn them till it is

all over. Then, if money be due to them, let them have it.' As she said

this, she had drawn herself a little apart from him,--a little away from

the arm which had been round her waist, and was looking him full in the

face. Never before, even during the soft happiness of their bridal

tour, had she seemed to him to be so handsome.

But her faith, her courage, and her beauty did not alter the

circumstances of the case. Because she trusted him, he was not the less

afraid of the jury who would have to decide, or of the judge, who, with

stern eyes, would probably find himself compelled to tell the jury that

the evidence against the prisoner was overwhelming. In choosing what

might be best to be done on her account, he could not allow himself to

be guided by her spirit. The possibility that the whole gang of them

might be made to vanish was present to his mind. Nor could he satisfy

himself that in doing as had been proposed to him he would be speaking

the devil fair. He would be paying money which he ought to pay, and

would perhaps be securing his wife's happiness.

He had promised, at any rate, that he would see the man in London on the

morrow, and that he would see him alone. But he had not promised not to

speak on the subject to his attorney. Therefore, after much thought, he

wrote to Mr. Seely to make an appointment for the next morning, and then

told his wife that he would have to go to London on the following day.

'Not to buy those men off?' she said.

'Whatever is done will be done by the advice of my lawyer,' he said,

peevishly. 'You may be sure that I am anxious enough to do the best.

When one has to trust to a lawyer, one is bound to trust to him.' This

seemed to be so true that Hester could say nothing against it.

Chapter XXXIX

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. Seely.'

'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 appointment 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

Polyeuka 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

day. 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

steadfastly 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 stretching 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.

Chapter XL

Waiting For The Trial

As he returned to Cambridge Caldigate was not altogether contented

with himself. He tried to persuade himself, in reference to the money

which he had refunded, that in what he had done he had not at all

been actuated by the charge made against him. Had there been no such

accusation he would have felt himself bound to share the loss with

these people as soon as he had learned the real circumstances. The

money had been a burden to him. For the satisfaction of his own honour,

of his own feelings, it had become necessary that the money should be

refunded. And the need of doing so was not lessened by the fact that

a base conspiracy had been made by a gang of villains who had thought

that the money might thus be most readily extracted from him. That was

his argument with himself, and his defence for what he had done. But

nevertheless he was aware that he had been driven to do it now,--to

pay the money at this special moment,--by an undercurrent of hope that

these enemies would think it best for themselves to go as soon as they

had his money in their hands. He wished to be honest, he wished to be

honourable, he wished that all that he did could be what the world

calls 'above board'; but still it was so essential for him and for his

wife that they should go! He had been very steady in assuring these

wretched ones that they might go or stay, as they pleased. He had been

careful that there should be a credible witness of his assurance. He

might succeed in making others believe that he had not attempted to

purchase their absence; but he could not make himself believe it.

Even though a jury should not convict him, there was so much in his

Australian life which would not bear the searching light of

cross-examination! The same may probably be said of most of us. In such

trials as this that he was anticipating, there is often a special

cruelty in the exposure of matters which are for the most part happily

kept in the background. A man on some occasion inadvertently takes a

little more wine than is good for him. It is an accident most uncommon

with him, and nobody thinks much about it. But chance brings the case

to the notice of the police courts, and the poor victim is published to

the world as a drunkard in the columns of all the newspapers. Some young

girl fancies herself in love, and the man is unworthy. The feeling

passes away, and none but herself, and perhaps her mother, are the

wiser. But if by some chance, some treachery, a letter should get

printed and read, the poor girl's punishment is so severe that she is

driven to wish herself in the grave.

He had been foolish, very foolish, as we have seen, on board the

Goldfinder,--and wicked too. There could be no doubt about that. When it

would all come out in this dreaded trial he would be quite unable to

defend himself. There was enough to enable Mrs. Bolton to point at him

with a finger of scorn as a degraded sinner. And yet,--yet there had

been nothing which he had not dared to own to his wife in the secrecy of

their mutual confidence, and which, in secret, she had not been able to

condone without a moment's hesitation. He had been in love with the

woman,--in love after a fashion. He had promised to marry her. He had

done worse than that. And then, when he had found that the passion for

gold was strong upon her, he had bought his freedom from her. The story

would be very bad as told in Court, and yet he had told it all to his

wife! She had admitted his excuse when he had spoken of the savageness

of his life, of the craving which a man would feel for some feminine

society, of her undoubted cleverness, and then of her avarice. And then

when he swore that through it all he had still loved her,--her, Hester

Bolton,--whom he had but once seen, but whom, having seen, he had never

allowed to pass out of his mind, she still believed him, and thought

that the holiness of that love had purified him. She believed him;--but

who else would believe him? Of course he was most anxious that those

people should go.

Before he left London he wrote both to Mr. Seely and to Robert Bolton,

saying what he had done. The letter to his own attorney was long and

full. He gave an account in detail of the whole matter, declaring that

he would not allow himself to be hindered from paying a debt which he

believed to be due, by the wickedness of those to whom it was owing.

'The two things have nothing to do with each other,' he said, 'and if

you choose to throw up my defence, of course you can do so. I cannot

allow myself to be debarred from exercising my own judgment in another

matter because you think that what I decide upon doing may not tally

with your views as to my defence.' To Robert Bolton he was much shorter.

'I think you ought to know what I have done,' he said; 'at any rate, I

do not choose that you should be left in ignorance.' Mr. Seely took no

notice of the communication, not feeling himself bound to carry out his

threat by withdrawing his assistance from his client. But Robert and

William Bolton agreed to have Crinkett's movements watched by a

detective policeman. They were both determined that if possible Crinkett

and the woman should be kept in the country.

In these days the old Squire made many changes in his residence,

vacillating between his house in Cambridge and the house at Folking. His

books were at Cambridge, and he could not have them brought back; and

yet he felt that he ought to evince his constancy to his son, his

conviction of his son's innocence, by remaining at Folking. And he was

aware, too, that his presence there was a comfort both to his son and

Hester. When John Caldigate had gone up to London, his father had been

in Cambridge, but on his return he found the old Squire at his old house.

'Yes,' he said, telling the story of what he had just done, 'I have paid

twenty thousand pounds out of hand to those rascals, simply because I

thought I owed it to them!' The Squire shook his head, not being able

to approve of the act.' I don't see why I should have allowed myself to

be hindered from doing what I thought to be right because they were

doing what they knew to be wrong.'

'They won't go, you know.'

'I daresay not, sir. Why should they?'

'But the jury will believe that you intended to purchase their absence.'

'I think I have made all that clear.'

'I am afraid not, John. The man applied to you for the money, and was

refused. That was the beginning of it. Then the application was repeated

by the woman with a threat; and you again refused. Then they present

themselves to the magistrates, and make the accusation; and, upon that,

you pay the money. Of course it will come out at the trial that you paid

it immediately after this renewed application from Bollum. It would have

been better to have defied them.'

'I did defy them,' said John Caldigate. But all that his father said

seemed to him to be true, so that he repented himself of what he had

done.

He made no inquiry on the subject, but, early in May he heard from Mr.

Seely that Crinkett and the woman were still in London, and that they

had abandoned the idea of going at once to Australia. According to Mr.

Seely's story,--of the truth of which he declared himself to be by

no means certain,--Crinkett had wished to go, but had been retained

by the woman. 'As far as I can learn,' said Mr. Seely, 'she is in

communication with the Boltons, who will of course keep her if it be

possible. He would get off if he could; but she, I take it, has got

hold of the money. When you made the cheque payable to her order, you

effectually provided for their remaining here. If he could have got the

money without her name, he would have gone, and she would have gone

with him.'

'But that was not my object,' said Caldigate angrily. Mr. Seely

thereupon shrugged his shoulders. Early in June the man came back who

had been sent out to Sydney in February on behalf of Caldigate. He also

had been commissioned to seek for evidence, and to bring back with him,

almost at any cost, whatever witness or witnesses he might find whose

presence in England would serve Caldigate's cause. But he brought no

one, and had learned very little. He too had been at Ahalala and at

Nobble. At Nobble the people were now very full of the subject and were

very much divided in opinion. There were Crinketters and

anti-Crinketters, Caldigatites and anti-Caldigatites. A certain number

of persons were ready to swear that there had been a marriage, and an

equal number, perhaps, to swear that there had been none. But no new

fact had been brought to light. Dick Shand had not been found,--who had

been living with Caldigate when the marriage was supposed to have been

solemnised. Nor had that register been discovered from which the copy of

the certificate was supposed to have been taken. All through the

Colony,--so said this agent,--a very great interest was felt in the

matter. The newspapers from day to day contained paragraphs about it.

But nobody had appeared whom it was worth while to bring home. Mrs.

Henniker, of the hotel at Nobble, had offered to swear that there had

been no marriage. This offer she made and repeated when she had come to

understand accurately on whose behalf this last agent had come to the

Colony. But then, before she had understood this, she had offered to

swear the reverse; and it became known that she was very anxious to be

carried back to the old country free of expense. No credible witness

could be found who had heard Caldigate call the woman Mrs. Smith after

the date assigned to the marriage. She no doubt had used various names,

had called herself sometimes Mrs. Caldigate, sometimes Mrs. Smith, but

generally, in such documents as she had to sign in reference to her

mining shares, Euphemia Cettini. It was by that name that she had been

known in Sydney when performing on the stage, and it was now alleged on

her behalf that she had bought and sold shares in that name under the

idea that she would thus best secure to herself their separate and

undisturbed possession. Proof was brought home that Caldigate himself

had made over to her shares in that name; but Mr. Seely did not depend

much on this as proof against the marriage.

Mr. Seely seemed to depend very little on anything,--so little that

Caldigate almost wished that he had carried out his threat and thrown

up the case. 'Does he not believe you when you tell him?' his wife

asked. Caldigate was forced to confess that apparently the lawyer did

not believe him. In fact, Mr. Seely had even said as much. 'In such

cases a lawyer should never believe or disbelieve; or, if he does,

he should never speak of his belief. It is with your acquittal or

conviction that I am concerned, in which matter I can better assist you

by cool judgment than by any fervid assurance.' All this made Caldigate

not only angry but unhappy, for he could not fail to perceive that the

public around him were in the same mind as Mr. Seely. In his own parish

they believed him, but apparently not beyond his parish. It might be

possible that he should escape,--that seemed to be the general opinion;

but then general opinion went on to declare that there was no reason

for supposing that he had not married the woman merely because he said

that he had not done so.

Then gradually there fell upon poor Hester's mind a doubt,--and, after

that, almost a conviction. Not a doubt as to her husband's truth! No

suspicion on that score ever troubled her for a moment. But there came

upon her a fear, almost more than a fear, that these terrible enemies

would be strong enough to override the truth, and to carry with them

both a judge and a jury. As the summer months ran on, they all became

aware that for any purpose of removing the witnesses the money had been

paid in vain. Crinkett was living in all opulence at a hotel at

Brighton; and the woman, calling herself Mrs. Caldigate, had taken

furnished apartments in London. Rumour came that she was frequently seen

at the theatres, and that she had appeared more than once in an open

carriage in the parks. There was no doubt but that Caldigate's money had

made them very comfortable for the present. The whole story of the money

had been made public, and of course there were various opinions about

it. The prevailing idea was, that an attempt had been made to buy off

the first wife, but that the first wife had been clever enough to get

the money without having to go. Caldigate was thought to have been very

foolish; on which subject Bollum once expressed himself strongly to a

friend. 'Clever!' he said; 'Caldigate clever! The greatest idiot I ever

came across in my life! I'd made it quite straight for him,--so that

there couldn't have been a wrinkle. But he wouldn't have it. There are

men so soft that one can't understand 'em.' To do Bollum justice it

should be said that he was most anxious to induce his uncle and the

woman to leave the country when they had got the money.

Though very miserable, Hester was very brave. In the presence of her

husband she would never allow herself to seem to doubt. She would speak

of their marriage as a thing so holy that nothing within the power of

man could disturb it. Of course they were man and wife, and of course

the truth would at last prevail. Was not the Lord able, in His own good

time, to set all these matters right? And in discussing the matter with

him she would always seem to imply that the Lord's good time would be

the time of the trial. She would never herself hint to him that there

might be a period of separation coming. Though in secrecy she was

preparing for what might befall him, turning over in her woman's mind

how she might best relieve the agony of his jail, she let no sign

escape her that she looked forward to such misery. She let no such sign

escape her in her intercourse with him. But with his father she could

speak more freely. It had, indeed, come to be understood between her and

the old Squire, that it would be best that they should discuss the

matter openly. Arrangements must be made for their future life, so that

when the blow came they might not be unprepared. Hester declared that

nothing but positive want of shelter should induce her to go back to

Chesterton. 'They think him to be all that's bad,' she said. 'I know him

to be all that's good. How is it possible that we should live together?'

The old man had, of course, turned it over much in his mind. If it could

be true that that woman had in truth become his son's wife, and that

this dear, sweet, young mother had been deceived, betrayed, and cheated

out of her very existence, then that house at Folking could be no proper

home for her. Her grave would be best, but till that might be reached

any home would be better than Folking. But he was almost sure that it

was not so, and her confidence,--old as he was, and prone to be

suspicious,--made him confident.

When the moment came he could not doubt how he would answer her. He

could not crush her spirit by seeming for a moment to have a suspicion.

'Your home, of course, shall be here,' he said. 'It shall be your own

house.'

'And you?'

'It shall be my house too. If it should come to that, we will be, at any

rate, together. You shall not be left without a friend.'

'It is not for myself,' she said; 'but for his boy and for him;--what

will be best for them. I would take a cabin at the prison-gate, so as to

be nearest to him,--if it were only myself.' And so it was settled

between them, that should that great misery fall upon them, she would

remain at Folking and he would remain with her. Nothing that judge or

jury could do would deprive her of the right to occupy her husband's

house.

In this way the months of May and June and the first fortnight of July

wore themselves away, and then the time for the trial had come. Up to

the last it had been hoped that tidings might be heard either by letter

or telegram from Dick Shand; but it seemed that he had vanished from the

face of the earth. No suggestion of news as to his whereabouts was

received on which it might have been possible to found an argument for

the further postponement of the trial. Mr. Seely had been anxious for

such postponement,--perhaps thinking that as the hotel at Brighton and

the carriages in the park were expensive, Crinkett and the lady might

take their departure for Australia without saying a word to the lawyer

who had undertaken the prosecution. But there was no adequate ground for

delay, and on Tuesday the 17th July the trial was to be commenced. On

the previous day Caldigate, at his own request, was introduced to Sir

John Joram, who had been brought down special to Cambridge for his

defence. Mr. Seely had advised him not to see the barrister who was to

defend him, leaving it, however, quite at his option to do so or not as

he pleased. 'Sir John will see you, but I think he had rather not,' said

Mr. Seely. But Caldigate had chosen to have the interview. 'I have

thought it best to say just one word to you,' said Caldigate.

'I am quite at your service,' said Sir John.

'I want you to hear from my own lips that a falser charge than this was

never made against a man.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Sir John,--and then he paused. 'That is to

say, Mr. Caldigate, I am bound in courtesy to you to make some such

civil reply as I should have made had I not been employed in your case,

and had circumstances then induced you to make such a statement to me.

But in truth, as I am so employed, no statement from your lips ought to

affect me in the least. For your own sake I will say that no statement

will affect me. It is not for me to believe or disbelieve anything in

this matter. If carried away by my feelings, I were to appeal to the

jury for their sympathy because of my belief, I should betray your

cause. It will be my duty not to make the jury believe you, who, in your

position, will not be expected even to tell the truth; but to induce

them, if possible, to disbelieve the witnesses against you who will be

on their oath. Second-hand protestations from an advocate are never of

much avail, and in many cases have been prejudicial. I can only assure

you that I understand the importance of the interests confided to me,

and that I will endeavour to be true to my trust.'

Caldigate, who wanted sympathy, who wanted an assurance of confidence in

his word, was by no means contented with his counsellor; but he was too

wise at the present moment to quarrel with him.

Chapter XLI

The First Day

Then came the morning on which Caldigate and Hester must part. Very

little had been said about it, but a word or two had been absolutely

necessary. The trial would probably take two days, and it would not be

well that he should be brought back to Folking for the sad intervening

night. And then,--should the verdict be given against him, the prison

doors would be closed against her, his wife, more rigidly than against

any other friend who might knock at them inquiring after his welfare.

Her, at any rate, he would not be allowed to see. All the prison

authorities would be bound to regard her as the victim of his crime and

as the instrument of his vice. The law would have locked him up to

avenge her injuries,--of her, whose only future joy could come from that

distant freedom which the fraudulent law would at length allow to him.

All this was not put into words between them, but it was understood. It

might be that they were to be parted now for a term of years, during

which she would be as a widow at Folking while he would be alone in his

jail.

There are moments as to which it would be so much better that their

coming should never be accomplished! It would have been better for them

both had they been separated without that last embrace. He was to start

from Folking at eight that he might surrender himself to the hands of

justice in due time for the trial at ten. She did not come down with him

to the breakfast parlour, having been requested by him not to be there

among the servants when he took his departure; but standing there in her

own room, with his baby in her arms, she spoke her last word, 'You will

keep up your courage, John?'

'I will try, Hester.'

'I will keep up mine. I will never fail, for your sake and his,'--here

she held the child a moment away from her bosom,--'I will never allow

myself to droop. To be your wife and his mother shall be enough to

support me even though you should be torn from both of us for a time.'

'I wish I were as brave as you,' he said.

'You will leave me here,' she continued, 'mistress of your house; and if

God spares me, here you will find me. They can't move me from this. Your

father says so. They may call me what they will, but they cannot move

me. There is the Lord above us, and before Him they cannot make me other

than your wife,--your wife,--your wife.' As she repeated the name, she

put the boy out to him, and when he had taken the child, she stretched

out her hands upwards, and falling on her knees at his feet, prayed to

God for his deliverance. 'Let him come back to us, O my God. Deliver

him from his enemies, and let him come back to us.'

'One kiss, my own,' he said, as he raised her from the ground.

'Oh yes;--and a thousand shall be in store for you when you come back to

us. Yes; kiss him too. Your boy shall hear the praises of his father

every day, till at last he shall understand that he may be proud of you

even though he should have learned why it is that you are not with him.

Now go, my darling. Go; and support yourself by remembering that I have

got that within me which will support me.' Then he left her.

The old Squire had expressed his intention of being present throughout

the trial, and now was ready for the journey. When counselled to remain

at home, both by Mr. Seely and by his son, he had declared that only by

his presence could he make the world around him understand how confident

he was of his son's innocence. So it was arranged, and a place was kept

for him next to the attorney. The servants all came out into the hall

and shook hands with their young master; and the cook, wiping her eyes

with her apron, declared that she would have dinner ready for him on the

following day. At the front door Mr. Holt was standing, having come over

the ferry to greet the young squire before his departure. 'They may say

what they will there, squire, but they won't make none of us here

believe that you've been the man to injure a lady such as she up there.'

Then there was another shaking of hands, and the father and son got into

the carriage.

The court was full, of course. Mr. Justice Bramber, by whom the case

was to be tried, was reputed to be an excellent judge, a man of no

softnesses,--able to wear the black cap without convulsive throbbings,

anxious also that the law should run its course,--averse to mercy when

guilt had been proved, but as clear-sighted and as just as Minos; a man

whom nothing could turn one way or another,--who could hang his friend,

but who would certainly not mulct his enemy because he was his enemy.

It had reached Caldigate's ears that he was unfortunate in his judge;

by which, they who had so said, had intended to imply that this judge's

mind would not be perverted by any sentiments as to the prisoner, as to

the sweet young woman who called herself his wife at home, or as to

want of sweetness on the part of the other woman who claimed him.

The jury was sworn in without more than ordinary delay, and then the

trial was commenced. That which had to be done for the prosecution

seemed to be simple enough. The first witness called was the woman

herself, who was summoned in the names of Euphemia Caldigate

\_alias\_ Smith. She gave her evidence very clearly, and with great

composure,--saying how she had become acquainted with the man on board

the ship; how she had been engaged to him at Melbourne; how he had come

down to her at Sydney; how, in compliance with his orders, she had

followed him up to Ahalala; and how she had there been married to him

by Mr. Allan. Then she brought forth the documents which professed to

be the copy of the register of the marriage, made by the minister in

his own book; and the envelope,--the damning envelope,--which Caldigate

was prepared to admit that he had himself addressed to Mrs. Caldigate;

and the letter which purported to have been written by the minister to

Caldigate, recommending him to be married in some better established

township than that existing at Ahalala. She did it well. She was very

correct, and at the same time very determined, giving many details of

her early theatrical life, which it was thought better to get from

her in the comparative ease of a direct examination than to have them

extracted afterwards by an adverse advocate. During her evidence in

chief, which was necessarily long, she seemed to be quite at ease; but

those around her observed that she never once turned her eyes upon him

whom she claimed as her husband except when she was asked whether the

man there before her was the man she had married at Ahalala. Then,

looking at him for a moment in silence, she replied, very steadily,

'Yes; that is my husband, John Caldigate.'

To Caldigate and his friends,--and indeed to all those collected in

the court,--the most interesting person of the day was Sir John Joram.

In a sensational cause the leading barrister for the defence is always

the hero of the plot,--the actor from whom the best bit of acting is

expected,--the person who is most likely to become a personage on the

occasion. The prisoners are necessarily mute, and can only be looked

at, not heard. The judge is not expected to do much till the time comes

for his charge, and even then is supposed to lower the dignity of the

bench if he makes his charge with any view to effect on his own behalf.

The barrister who prosecutes should be tame, or he will appear to be

vindictive. The witnesses, however interesting they may be in detail,

are but episodes. Each comes and goes, and there is an end of them. But

the part of the defending advocate requires action through the whole of

the piece. And he may be impassioned. He is bound to be on the alert.

Everything seems to depend on him. They who accuse can have or should

have no longing for the condemnation of the accused one. But in

regard to the other, an acquittal is a matter of personal prowess, of

professional triumph, and possibly of well simulated feeling.

Sir John Joram was at this time a man of considerable dignity, above

fifty years of age, having already served the offices of Solicitor and

Attorney-General to his party. To his compeers and intimate friends it

seemed to be but the other day since he was Jacky Joram, one of the

jolliest little fellows ever known at an evening party, up to every kind

of fun, always rather short of money, and one of whom it was thought

that, because he was good-looking, he might some day achieve the success

of marrying a woman with money. On a sudden he married a girl without a

shilling, and men shook their heads and sighed as they spoke of poor

Jacky Joram. But, again, on a sudden,--quite as suddenly,--there came

tidings that Jacky had been found out by the attorneys, and that he was

earning his bread. As we grow old things seem to come so quickly! His

friends had hardly realised the fact that Jacky was earning his bread

before he was in Parliament and had ceased to be Jacky. And the celerity

with which he became Sir John was the most astonishing of all. Years no

doubt had passed by. But years at fifty are no more than months at

thirty,--are less than weeks in boyhood. And now while some tongues, by

dint of sheer habit, were still forming themselves into Jacky, Sir John

Joram had become the leading advocate of the day, and a man renowned for

the dignity of his manners.

In the House,--for he had quite got the ear of the House,--a certain

impressive good sense, a habit of saying nothing that was not necessary

to the occasion, had chiefly made for him the high character he enjoyed;

but in the law courts it was perhaps his complaisance, his peculiar

courtesy, of which they who praised him talked the most. His aptitude to

get verdicts was of course the cause of his success. But it was observed

of him that in perverting the course of justice,--which may be said to

be the special work of a successful advocate,--he never condescended to

bully anybody. To his own witnesses he was simple and courteous, as are

barristers generally. But to adverse witnesses he was more courteous,

though no doubt less simple. Even to some perjured comrade of an

habitual burglar he would be studiously civil: but to a woman such as

Euphemia Caldigate, \_alias\_ Smith, it was certain that he would be so

smooth as to make her feel almost pleased with the amenities of her

position.

He asked her very many questions, offering to provide her with the

comfort of a seat if it were necessary. She said that she was not at

all tired, and that she preferred to stand. As to the absolute fact of

the marriage she did not hesitate at all. She was married in the tent

at Ahalala in the presence of Crinkett and Adamson, and of her own

female companion, Anna Young,--all of whom were there to give evidence

of the fact. Whether any one else was in the tent, she could not say,

but she knew that there were others at the entrance. The tent was

hardly large enough for more than five or six. Dick Shand had not been

there, because he had always been her enemy, and had tried to prevent

the marriage. And she was quite clear about the letter. There was a

great deal said about the letter. She was sure that the envelope with

the letter had come to her at Ahalala by post from Sydney when her

husband was at the latter place. The Sydney postmark with the date was

very plain. There was much said as to the accuracy and clearness of the

Sydney postmark, and something as to the absence of any postmark at

Nobble. She could not account for the absence of the Nobble postmark.

She was aware that letters were stamped at Nobble generally. Mr. Allan,

she said, had himself handed to her the copy of the register almost

immediately after the marriage, but she could not say by whom it had

been copied. The letter purporting to be from Mr. Allan to her husband

was no doubt, she said, in the minister's handwriting. Caldigate had

showed it to her before their marriage, and she had kept it without any

opposition from him. Then she was asked as to her residence after her

marriage, and here she was less clear. She had lived with him first at

Ahalala and then at Nobble, but she could not say for how long. It had

been off and on. There had been quarrels, and after a time they had

agreed to part. She had received from him a certain amount of mining

shares and of money, and had undertaken in return never to bother him

any more. There was a great deal said about times and dates, which left

an impression upon those around her in the court that she was less sure

of her facts than a woman in such circumstances naturally would have

been.

Then Sir John produced the letter which she had written to Caldigate,

and in which she had distinctly offered to marry Crinkett if the money

demanded were paid. She must have expected the production of this

letter, but still, for a few moments, it silenced her. 'Yes,' she said,

at last, 'I wrote it.'

'And the money you demanded has been paid?'

'Yes, it has been paid. But not then. It was not paid till we came

over.'

'But if it had been paid then you would have--married Mr. Crinkett?' Sir

John's manner as he asked the question was so gentle and so soft that it

was felt by all to contain an apology for intruding on so delicate a

subject. But when she hesitated, he did, after a pause, renew his

inquiry in another form. 'Perhaps this was only a threat, and you had no

purpose of carrying it out.'

Then she plucked up her courage. 'I have not married him,' she said.

'But did you intend it?'

'I did. What were the laws to me out there? He had left me and had taken

another wife. I had to do the best for myself. I did intend it. But I

didn't do it. A woman can't be tried for her intentions.'

'No,' said Sir John. 'But she may be judged by her intentions.'

Then she was asked why she had not gone when she had got the money,

according to her promise. 'He defied us,' she said, 'and called us bad

names,--liars and perjurers. He knew that we were not liars. And then we

were watched and told that we might not go. As he said that he was

indifferent, I was willing enough to stay and see it out.'

'You cannot give us,' he asked again,--and this was his last

question,--'any clearer record of those months which you lived with your

husband?'

'No,' she said, 'I cannot. I kept no journal.' Then she was allowed to

go, and though she had been under examination for three hours, it was

thought she had escaped easily.

Crinkett was the next, who swore that he had been Caldigate's partner

in sundry mining speculations,--that they had been in every way

intimate,--that he had always recommended Caldigate to marry Mrs.

Smith, thinking, as he said, 'that respectability paid in the long

run,'--and that, having so advised him, he had become Caldigate's

special friend at the time, to the exclusion of Dick Shand, who was

generally drunk, and who, whether drunk or sober, was opposed to the

marriage. He had been selected to stand by his friend at the marriage,

and he, thinking that another witness would be beneficial, had taken

Adamson with him. His only wonder was that any one should dispute a

fact which was at the time so notorious both at Ahalala and at Nobble.

He held his head high during his evidence in chief, and more than

once called the prisoner 'Caldigate,'--'Caldigate knew this,'--and

'Caldigate did that.' It was past four when he was handed over for

cross-examination; but when it was said that another hour would suffice

for it, the judge agreed to sit for that other hour.

But it was nearly two hours before the gentleman who was with Sir John

had finished his work, during which Mr. Crinkett seemed to suffer much.

The gentleman was by no means so complacent as Sir John, and asked some

very disagreeable questions. Had Crinkett intended to commit bigamy by

marrying the last witness, knowing at the time that she was a married

woman? 'I never said that I intended to marry her,' said Crinkett.

'What she wrote to Caldigate was nothing to me.' He could not be made to

own, as she had done in a straightforward way, that he had intended to

set the law at defiance. His courage failed him, and his presence of

mind, and he was made to declare at last that he had only talked about

such a marriage, with the view of keeping the woman in good humour, but

that he had never intended to marry her. Then he was asked as to

Bollum;--had he told Bollum that he intended to marry the woman? At last

he owned that he might have done so. Of course he had been anxious to

get his money, and he had thought that he might best do so by such an

offer. He was reduced to much misery during his cross-examination; but

on the one main statement that he had been present at the marriage he

was not shaken.

At six o'clock the trial was adjourned till the next day, and the two

Caldigates were taken in a fly to a neighbouring inn, at which rooms had

been provided for them. Here they were soon joined by Mr. Seely, who

explained, however, that he had come merely to make arrangements for the

morrow. 'How is it going?' asked Caldigate.

The question was very natural, but it was one which Mr. Seely was not

disposed to answer. 'I couldn't give an opinion,' he said. 'In such

cases I never do give an opinion. The evidence is very clear, and has

not been shaken; but the witnesses are people of a bad character.

Character goes a long way with a jury. It will depend a good deal on the

judge, I should say. But I cannot give an opinion.'

No opinion one way or the other was expressed to the father or son,--who

indeed saw no one else the whole evening; but Robert Bolton, in

discussing the matter with his father, expressed a strong conviction

that Caldigate would be acquitted. He had heard it all, and understood

the nature of such cases. 'I do not in the least doubt that they were

married,' said Robert Bolton. 'All the circumstances make me sure of

it. But the witnesses are just of that kind which a jury always

distrusts. The jury will acquit him, not because they do not believe the

marriage, but out of enmity to Crinkett and the woman.'

'What shall we do, then?' asked the old man. To this Robert Bolton could

make no answer. He only shook his head and turned away.

Chapter XLII

The Second Day

The court had been very full on the first day of the trial, but on the

following morning it was even more crowded, so that outsiders who had no

friend connected with justice, had hardly a chance of hearing or seeing

anything. Many of the circumstances of the case had long been known to

the public, but matters of new and of peculiar interest had been

elicited,--the distinct promise made by the woman to marry another man,

so as to render her existing husband safe in his bigamy by committing

bigamy herself,--the payment to these people by Caldigate of an immense

sum of money,--the fact that they two had lived together in Australia

whether married or not;--all this, which had now been acknowledged on

both sides, added to the romance of the occasion. While it could hardly

be doubted, on the one side, that Caldigate had married the woman,--so

strong was the evidence,--it could not be at all doubted, on the other

side, that the accusation had been planned with the view of raising

money, and had been the result of a base conspiracy. And then there was

the additional marvel, that though the money had been paid,--the whole

sum demanded,--yet the trial was carried on. The general feeling was

exactly that which Robert Bolton had attributed to the jury. People did

believe that there had been a marriage, but trusted nevertheless that

Caldigate might be acquitted,--so that his recent marriage might be

established. No doubt there was a feeling with many that anything done

in the wilds of Australia ought not 'to count' here at home in England.

Caldigate with his father was in court a little before ten, and at that

hour punctually the trial was recommenced. The first business was the

examination of Adamson, who was quite clear as to the marriage. He had

been concerned with Crinkett in money operations for many years, and

had been asked by him to be present simply as a witness. He had never

been particularly intimate with Caldigate, and had had little or

nothing to do with him afterwards. He was cross-examined by the second

gentleman, but was not subjected to much annoyance. He had put what

little money he possessed into the Polyeuka mine, and had come over to

England because he had thought that, by so doing, he might perhaps get

a portion of his money back. Had there been a conspiracy, and was he

one of the conspirators? Well, he rather thought that there had been

a conspiracy, and that he was one of the conspirators. But then he

had only conspired to get what he thought to be his own. He had lost

everything in the Polyeuka mine; and as the gentleman no doubt had

married the lady, he thought he might as well come forward,--and that

perhaps in that way he would get his money. He did not mind saying that

he had received a couple of thousand pounds, which was half what he had

put into Polyeuka. He hoped that, after paying all his expenses, he

would be able to start again at the diggings with something above a

thousand. This was all straight sailing. The purpose which he had in

view was so manifest that it had hardly been worth while to ask him the

questions.

Anna Young was the next, and she encountered the sweet courtesies of Sir

John Joram. These sweet courtesies were prolonged for above an hour,

and were not apparently very sweet to Miss Young. Of the witnesses

hitherto examined she was the worst. She had been flippantly confident

in her memories of the marriage ceremony when questioned on behalf of

the prosecution, but had forgotten everything in reference to her

friend's subsequent married life. She had forgotten even her own life,

and did not quite know where she had lived. And at last she positively

refused to answer questions though they were asked with the most

engaging civility. She said that, 'Of course a lady had affairs which

she could not tell to everybody.' 'No, she didn't mean lovers;--she

didn't care for the men at all.' 'Yes; she did mean money. She had done

a little mining, and hoped to do a little more.' 'She was to have a

thousand pounds and her expenses, but she hadn't got the money

yet,'--and so on. Probably of all the witnesses yet examined Miss Young

had amused the court the most.

There were many others, no doubt necessary for the case, but hardly

necessary for the telling of the story. Captain Munday was there, the

captain of the Goldfinder, who spoke of Caldigate's conduct on board,

and of his own belief that they two were engaged when they left the

ship. 'As we are prepared to acknowledge that there was an engagement, I

do not think that we need trouble you, Captain Munday,' said Sir John.

'We only deny the marriage.' Then the cheque for twenty thousand pounds

was produced, and clerks from the bank to prove the payment, and the old

waiter from the Jericho Coffee-house,--and others, of whom Sir John

Joram refused to take any notice whatever. All that had been

acknowledged. Of course the money had been paid. Of course the intimacy

had existed. No doubt there had been those interviews both at Folking

and up in London. But had there ever been a marriage in that tent at

Ahalala? That, and that only, was the point to which Sir John Joram

found it necessary to give attention.

A slight interval was allowed for lunch, and then Sir John rose to

begin his speech. It was felt on all sides that his speech was to be

the great affair of the trial. Would he be able so to represent these

witnesses as to make a jury believe that they had sworn falsely, and

that the undoubted and acknowledged conspiracy to raise money had been

concocted without any basis of truth? There was a quarter of an hour

during which the father remained with his son in the precincts of the

prison, and then the judge and the lawyers, and all they whose places

were assured to them trooped back into court. They who were less

privileged had fed themselves with pocketed sandwiches, not caring to

risk the loss of their seats.

Sir John Joram began by holding, extended in his fingers towards the

jury, the envelope which had undoubtedly been addressed by Caldigate to

'Mrs. Caldigate, Ahalala, Nobble,' and in which a certain letter had

been stated to have been sent by him to her. 'The words written on that

envelope,' said he, 'are to my mind the strongest evidence I have ever

met of the folly to which a man may be reduced by the softness of

feminine intercourse. I acknowledge, on the part of my client, that he

wrote these words. I acknowledge that if a man could make a woman his

wife by so describing her on a morsel of paper, this man would have made

this woman his wife. I acknowledge so much, though I do not acknowledge,

though I deny, that any letter was ever sent to this woman in the

envelope which I hold in my hand. His own story is that he wrote those

words at a moment of soft and foolish confidence, when they two together

were talking of a future marriage,--a marriage which no doubt was

contemplated, and which probably had been promised. Then he wrote the

address, showing the woman the name which would be hers should they ever

be married;--and she has craftily kept the document. That is his story.

That is my story. Now I must show you why I think it also should be your

story. The woman,--I must describe her in this way lest I should do her

an injustice by calling her Mrs. Smith, or do my client an injustice by

calling her Mrs. Caldigate,--has told you that this envelope, with an

enclosure which she produced, reached her at Nobble through the post

from Sydney. To that statement I call upon you to give no credit. A

letter so sent would, as you have been informed, bear two postmarks,

those of Sydney and of Nobble. This envelope bears one only. But that is

not all. I shall call before you two gentlemen experienced in affairs of

the post-office, and they will tell you that the postmarks on this

envelope, both that of the town, Sydney, and that by which the postage

stamp is obliterated, are cleaner, finer, and better perceived than they

would have been had it passed in ordinary course through the

post-office. Letters in the post-office are hurried quickly through the

operation of stamping, so that one passing over the other while the

stamping ink is still moist, will to some extent blot and blur that with

which it has come in contact. He will produce some dozens taken at

random, and will show that with them all such has been the case. This

blotting, this smudging, is very slight, but it exists; it is always

there. He will tell you that this envelope has been stamped as one and

alone,--by itself,--with peculiar care;--and I shall ask you to believe

that the impression has been procured by fraud in the Sydney

post-office. If that be so; if in such a case as this fraud be once

discovered, then I say that the whole case will fall to the ground, and

that I shall be justified in telling you that no word that you have

heard from these four witnesses is worthy of belief.

'Nothing worthy of belief has been adduced against my client unless that

envelope be so. That those four persons have conspired together for the

sake of getting money is clear enough. To their evidence I shall come

presently, and shall endeavour to show you why you should discredit

them. At present I am concerned simply with this envelope, on which I

think that the case hangs. As for the copy of the register, it is

nothing. It would be odd indeed if in any conspiracy so much as that

could not be brought up. Had such a register been found in the archives

of any church, however humble, and had an attested copy been produced,

that would have been much. But this is nothing. Nor is the alleged

letter from Mr. Allan anything. Were the letter genuine it would show

that such a marriage had been contemplated, not that it had been

solemnised. We have, however, no evidence to make us believe that the

letter is genuine. But this envelope,'--and he again stretched it out

towards the jury,--'is evidence. The impression of a post-office stamp

has often been accepted as evidence. But the evidence may be false

evidence, and it is for us to see whether it may not probably be so now.

'In the first place, such evidence requires peculiar sifting, which

unfortunately cannot be applied to it in the present case, because it

has been brought to us from a great distance. Had the envelope been in

our possession from the moment in which the accusation was first made,

we might have tested it, either by sending it to Sydney or by obtaining

from Sydney other letters or documents bearing the same stamp, affixed

undoubtedly on the date here represented. But that has not been within

our power. The gentlemen whom I shall bring before you will tell you

that these impressions or stamps have a knack of verifying themselves,

which makes it very dangerous indeed for fraudulent persons to tamper

with them. A stamp used in June will be hardly the same as it will be in

July. Some little bruise will have so altered a portion of the surface

as to enable detection to be made with a microscope. And the stamp used

in 1870 will certainly have varied its form in 1871. Now, I maintain

that time and opportunity should have been given to us to verify this

impression. Copies of all impressions from day to day are kept in the

Sydney post-office, and if it be found that on this day named, the 10th

of May, no impression in the Sydney office is an exact facsimile of this

impression then I say that this impression has been subsequently and

fraudulently obtained, and that the only morsel of corroborative

evidence offered to you will be shown to be false evidence. We have been

unable to get impressions of this date. Opportunities have not been

given to us. But I do not hesitate to tell you that you should demand

such opportunities before you accept that envelope as evidence on which

you can send my client to jail, and deprive that young wife, whom he has

made his own, of her husband, and afford the damning evidence of your

verdict towards robbing his son of his legitimacy.'

He said very much more about the envelope, clearly showing his own

appreciation of its importance and declaring again and again that if

he could show that a stain of perjury affected the evidence in any

one point all the evidence must fall to the ground, and that if there

were ground to suspect that the envelope had been tampered with,

then that stain of perjury would exist. After that he went on to the

four conspirators, as he called them, justifying the name by their

acknowledged object of getting money from his client. 'That they came

to this country as conspirators, with a fraudulent purpose, my learned

friend will not deny.'

'I acknowledge nothing of the kind,' said the learned friend.

'Then my learned friend must feel that his is a case in which he cannot

safely acknowledge anything. I do not doubt, gentlemen, but that you

have made up your mind on that point.' He went on to show that they

clearly were conspirators;--that they had confessed as much themselves.

'It is no doubt possible that my client may have married this female

conspirator, and she is not the less entitled to protection from the

law because she is a conspirator. Nor, because she is a conspirator,

should he be less amenable to the law for the terrible injury he would

then have done to that other lady. But if they be conspirators,--if it

be shown to you that they came to this country,--not that the woman

might claim her husband, not that the others might give honest

testimony against a great delinquent,--but in order that they might

frighten him out of money, then I am entitled to tell you that you

should not rest on their evidence unless it be supported, and that

the fact of their conspiracy gives you a right, nay, makes it your

imperative duty, to suspect perjury.'

The remainder of the day was taken up with Sir John's speech, and with

the witnesses which he called for the defence. He certainly succeeded in

strengthening the compassion which was felt for Caldigate and for the

unfortunate young mother at Folking. 'It was very well,' he said, 'for

my learned friend to tell you of the protection which is due to a

married woman when a husband has broken the law, and betrayed his trust

by taking another wife to himself, as this man is accused of having

done. But there is another aspect in which you will regard the question.

Think of that second wife and of her child, and of the protection which

is due to her. You well know that she does not suspect her husband, that

she fears nothing but a mistaken verdict from you,--that she will be

satisfied, much more than satisfied, if you will leave her in possession

of her home, her husband, and the unalloyed domestic happiness she has

enjoyed since she joined her lot with his. Look at the one woman, and

then at the other. Remember their motives, their different lives, their

different joys, and what will be the effect of your verdict upon each of

them. If you are satisfied that he did marry that woman, that vile

woman, the nature of whose life has been sufficiently exposed to you,

of course your verdict must be against him. The law is the law, and must

be vindicated. In that case it will be your duty, your terrible duty, to

create misery, to destroy happiness, to ruin a dear innocent young

mother and her child, and to separate a loving couple, every detail of

whose life is such as to demand your sympathy. And this you must do at

the bidding of four greedy, foul conspirators. Innocent, sweet,

excellent in all feminine graces as is the one wife,--unlovely

unfeminine, and abhorrent as is the other,--you must do your duty. God

forbid that I should ask you to break an oath, even for the sake of that

young mother. But in such a case, I do think, I may ask you to be very

careful as to what evidence you accept. I do think that I may again

point out to you that those four witnesses, bound as they are together

by a bond of avarice, should be regarded but as one,--and as one to

whose sworn evidence no credit is due unless it be amply corroborated. I

say that there is no corroboration. This envelope would be strong

corroboration if it had been itself trustworthy.' When he sat down the

feeling in court was certainly in favour of John Caldigate.

Then a cloud of witnesses were brought up for the defence, each of whom,

however, was soon despatched. The two clerks from the post-office gave

exactly the evidence which Sir John had described, and exposed to the

jury their packet of old letters. In their opinion the impression on the

envelope was finer and cleaner than that generally produced in the

course of business. Each of them thought it not improbable that the

impression had been surreptitiously obtained. But each of them

acknowledged, on cross-examination, that a stamp so clean and perfect

might be given and maintained without special care; and each of them

said that it was quite possible that a letter passing through the

post-office might escape the stamp of one of the offices in which it

would be manipulated.

Then there came the witnesses as to character, and evidence was given as

to Hester's determination to remain with the man whom she believed to be

her husband. As to this there was no cross-examination. That Caldigate's

life had been useful and salutary since his return to Folking no one

doubted,--nor that he had been a loving husband. If he had committed

bigamy, it was, no doubt, for the public welfare that such a crime

should be exposed and punished. But that he should have been a bigamist,

would be a pity,--oh, such a pity! The pity of it; oh, the pity of it!

For now there had been much talk of Hester and her home at Folking, and

her former home at Chesterton; and people everywhere concerned

themselves for her peace, for her happiness, for her condition of life.

Chapter XLIII

The Last Day

After Sir John Joram's speech, and when the work of the second day had

been brought to a close, Caldigate allowed his hopes to rise higher than

they had ever mounted since he had first become aware that the

accusation would in truth be brought against him. It seemed to be almost

impossible that any jury should give a verdict in opposition to

arguments so convincing as those Sir John had used. All those details

which had appeared to himself to be so damning to his own cause now

melted away, and seemed to be of no avail. And even Mr. Seely, when he

came to see his client in the evening, was less oppressive than usual.

He did not, indeed, venture to express hope, but in his hopelessness he

was somewhat more hopeful than before. 'You must remember, Mr.

Caldigate,' he said, 'that you have not yet heard the judge, and that

with such a jury the Judge will go much further than any advocate. I

never knew a Cambridgeshire jury refuse to be led by Judge Bramber.'

'Why a Cambridgeshire jury?' asked old Mr. Caldigate; 'and why Judge

Bramber especially?'

'We are a little timid, I think, here in the eastern counties,--a little

wanting in self-confidence. An advocate in the north of England has a

finer scope, because the people like to move counter to authority. A

Lancashire jury will generally be unwilling to do what a judge tells

them. And then Judge Bramber has a peculiar way of telling a jury. If he

has a strong opinion of his own he never leaves the jury in doubt about

it. Some judges are--what I call flabby, Mr. Caldigate. They are a

little afraid of responsibility, and leave the jury and the counsel to

fight it out among them. Sir John did it very well, no doubt;--very

well. He made the best he could of that postage stamp, though I don't

know that it will go for much. The point most in our favour is that

those Australians are a rough lot to look at. The woman has been

drinking, and has lost her good looks,--so that the jurymen won't be

soft about her.' Caldigate, when he heard this, thought of Euphemia

Smith on board the Goldfinder, when she certainly did not drink, when

her personal appearance was certainly such as might touch the heart of

any juryman. Gold and drink together had so changed the woman that he

could hardly persuade himself that she was that forlorn attractive

female whom he had once so nearly loved.

Before he went to bed, Caldigate wrote to his wife as he had done also

on the preceding evening. 'There is to be another long, tedious,

terrible day, and then it may be that I shall be able to write no more.

For your sake, almost more than for my own, I am longing for it to be

over. It would be vain for me to attempt to tell you all that took

place. I do not dare to give you hope which I know may be fallacious.

And yet I feel my own heart somewhat higher than it was when I wrote

last night.' Then he did tell her something of what had taken place,

speaking in high praise of Sir John Joram. 'And now my own, own wife, my

real wife, my beloved one, I have to call you so, perhaps for the last

time for years. If these men shall choose to think that I married that

woman, we shall have to be so parted that it would be better for us to

be in our graves. But even then I will not give up all hope. My father

has promised that the whole colony shall be ransacked till proof be

found of the truth. And then, though I shall have been convicted, I

shall be reinstated in my position as your husband. May God Almighty

bless you, and our boy, till I may come again to claim my wife and my

child without disgrace.'

The old man had made the promise. 'I would go myself,' said he, 'were it

not that Hester will want my support here.' For there had been another

promise made,--that by no entreaty, no guile, no force, should Hester be

taken from Folking to Chesterton.

Early on the third day Judge Bramber began his charge, and in doing so

he told the jury that it would occupy him about three hours. And in

exactly three hours' time he had completed his task. In summing up the

case he certainly was not 'flabby';--so little so, that he left no doubt

on the minds of any who heard him of the verdict at which he had himself

arrived. He went through the evidence of the four chief witnesses very

carefully, and then said that the antecedents of these people, or even

their guilt, if they had been guilty, had nothing to do with the case

except in so far as it might affect the opinion of the jury as to their

veracity. They had been called conspirators. Even though they had

conspired to raise money by threats, than which nothing could be more

abominable,--even though by doing so they should have subjected

themselves to criminal proceedings, and to many penalties,--that would

not lessen the criminality of the accused if such a marriage as that

described had in truth taken place. 'This,' said the judge, 'is so much

a matter of course that I should not insist upon it had it not been

implied that the testimony of these four persons is worth nothing

because they are conspirators. It is for you to judge what their

testimony is worth, and it is for you to remember that they are four

distinct witnesses, all swearing to the same thing.' Then he went into

the question of the money. There could be no doubt that the four persons

had come to England with the purpose of getting money out of the

accused, and that they had succeeded. With their mode of doing

this,--whether criminal or innocent,--the jury had nothing to do, except

as it affected their credit. But they were bound to look to Caldigate's

motive in paying so large a sum. It had been shown that he did not owe

them a shilling, and that when the application for money reached him

from Australia he had refused to give them a shilling. Then, when they

had arrived here in England, accusation was made; and when they had

offered to desert the case if paid the money, then the money was paid.

The prisoner, when paying it, had no doubt intimated to those who

received it that he made no bargain with them as to their going away.

And he had taken a friend with him who had given his evidence in court,

and this friend had manifestly been taken to show that the money was not

secretly paid. The jury would give the prisoner the benefit of all

that,--if there was benefit to be derived from it. But they were bound

to remember, in coming to their verdict, that a very large sum of money

had been paid to the witnesses by the prisoner, which money certainly

was not due to them.

He dwelt, also, at great length on the stamp on the envelope, but

contrived at last to leave a feeling on the minds of those who heard

him, that Sir John had shown the weakness of his case by trusting so

much to such allegations as he had made. 'It has been represented,' said

Judge Bramber, 'that the impression which you have seen of the Sydney

post-office stamp has been fraudulently obtained. Some stronger evidence

should, I think, be shown of this before you believe it. Two clerks from

the London post-office have told you that they believed the impression

to be a false one; but I think they were hardly justified in their

opinion. They founded it on the clearness and cleanness of the

impression; but they both of them acknowledged afterwards that such

clearness and cleanness is simply unusual, and by no means

impossible,--not indeed improbable. But how would it have been if the

envelope had been brought to you without any post-office impression,

simply directed to Mrs. Caldigate, by the man who is alleged to have

made the woman his wife shortly before the envelope was written? Would

it not in that case have been strong evidence? If any fraud were

proved,--such a fraud as would be that of getting some post-office

official falsely to stamp the envelope,--then the stain of perjury would

be there. But it will be for you to consider whether you can find such

stain of perjury merely because the impression on the envelope is clear

and clean.'

When he came to the present condition of Caldigate's wife and child at

Folking, he was very tender in his speech,--but even his tenderness

seemed to turn itself against the accused.

'Of that poor lady I can only speak with that unfeigned respect which I

am sure you all feel. That she was happy in her marriage till this

accusation reached her ears, no one can doubt. That he to whom she was

given in marriage has done his duty by her, treating her with full

affection and confidence, has been proved to us. Who can think that such

a condition of things shall be disturbed, that happiness so perfect is

to be turned to misery and misfortune, without almost an agony of

regret? But not on that account can you be in any way released from your

duty. In this case you are not entitled to think of the happiness or

unhappiness of individuals. You have to confine yourself to the

evidence, and must give your verdict in accordance with that.'

John Caldigate, as he heard the words, told himself at once that the

judge had, in fact, desired the jury to find a verdict against him. Not

a single point had been made in his favour, and every point had been

made to tell against him. The judge had almost said that a man's promise

to marry a woman should be taken as evidence of marriage. But the jury,

at any rate, did not show immediate alacrity in obeying the judge's

behest. They returned once or twice to ask questions; and at three

o'clock Caldigate was allowed to go to his inn, with an intimation that

he must hold himself in readiness to be brought back and hear the

verdict at a moment's notice. 'I wish they would declare it at once,' he

said to his father. 'The suspense is worse than all.'

During the afternoon the matter was discussed very freely throughout the

borough. 'I thought they would have agreed almost at once,' said the

mayor, at about four o'clock, to Mr. Seely, who, at this moment, had

retired to his own office where the great magistrate of the borough was

closeted with him. The mayor had been seated on the bench throughout the

trial, and had taken much interest in the case. 'I never imagined that

there could be much doubt after Judge Bramber's summing up.'

'I hear that there's one man holding out,' said the attorney in a low

voice.

'Who is it?' whispered the mayor. The mayor and Mr. Seely were very

intimate.

'I suppose it's Jones, the tanner at Ely. They say that the Caldigates

have had dealings with his family from generation to generation. I knew

all about it, and when they passed his name, I wondered that Burder

hadn't been sharper.' Mr. Burder was the gentleman who had got up the

prosecution on the part of the Crown.

'It must be something of that kind,' said the mayor. 'Nothing else would

make a jury hesitate after such a charge as that. I suppose he did marry

her.' Mr. Seely shrugged his shoulders. 'I have attended very closely to

the case, and I know I should have been against him on a jury. God bless

my soul! Did any man ever write to a woman as his wife without having

married her?'

'It has been done, I should think.'

'And that nobody should have been got to say that they weren't man and

wife.'

'I really have hardly formed an opinion,' said Mr. Seely, still

whispering, 'I am inclined to think that there was probably some

ceremony, and that Caldigate salved his conscience, when he married

Bolton's daughter, by an idea that the ceremony wasn't valid. But

they'll convict him at last. When he told me that he had been up to town

and paid that money, I knew it was all up with him. How can any juryman

believe that a man will pay twenty thousand pounds, which he doesn't

owe, to his sworn enemy, merely on a point of conscience?'

At the same time the old banker was sitting in his room at the bank, and

Robert Bolton was with him. 'There cannot be a doubt of his guilt,' said

Robert Bolton.

'No, no,--not a doubt.'

'But the jury may disagree?'

'What shall we do then?' said the banker.

'There must be another trial. We must go on till we get a verdict.'

'And Hester? What can we do for Hester?'

'She is very obstinate, and I fear we have no power. Even though she is

declared not to be his wife, she can choose her own place of living. If

he is convicted, I think that she would come back. Of course she ought

to come back.'

'Of course, of course.'

'Old Caldigate, too, is very obstinate; but it may be that we should be

able to persuade him. He will know that she ought to be with her

mother.'

'Her poor mother! Her poor mother! And when he comes out of prison?'

'Her very nature will have been altered by that time,' said the

attorney. 'She will, I trust, have consented before that to take up her

residence under your roof.'

'I shall be dead,' said the old man. 'Disgrace and years together will

have killed me before that time comes.'

The Smirkies were staying at Babington, and the desire for news there

was very intent. Mr. Smirkie was full of thought on the matter, but was

manifestly in favour of a conviction. 'Yes; the poor young woman is very

much to be pitied,' he said, in answer to the squire, who had ventured

to utter a word in favour of Hester. 'A young woman who falls into the

hands of an evil man must always be pitied; but it is to prevent the

evil men from preying upon the weaker sex that examples such as these

are needed. When we think what might have been the case here, in this

house, we have all of us a peculiar reason to be thankful for the

interposition of divine Providence.' Here Mr. Smirkie made a little

gesture of thanksgiving, thanking Heaven for its goodness to his wife in

having given her himself. 'Julia, my love, you have a very peculiar

reason to be thankful, and I trust you are so. Yes,--we must pity the

poor young lady; but it will be well that the offender should be made

subject to the outraged laws of his country.' Mrs. Smirkie, as she

listened to these eloquent words, closed her eyes and hands in token of

her thankfulness for all that Providence had done for her.

If she knew how to compare her condition with that of poor Hester at

this time, she had indeed cause for thankfulness. Hester was alone with

her baby, and with no information but what had been conveyed to her by

her husband's letters. As she read the last of the two she acknowledged

to herself that too probably she would not even see his handwriting

again till the period of his punishment should have expired. And then?

What would come then? Sitting alone, at the open window of her bed-room,

with her boy on her lap, she endeavoured to realise her own position.

She would be a mother, without a husband,--with her bastard child.

However innocent he might be, such would be her position under the law.

It did not suffice that they too should be man and wife as thoroughly as

any whom God had joined together, if twelve men assembled together in a

jury-box should say otherwise. She had told him that she would be

brave;--but how should she be brave in such a condition as this? What

should she do? How should she look forward to the time of his release?

Could anything ever again give her back her husband and make him her own

in the eyes of men? Could anything make men believe that he had always

been her own, and that there had been no flaw? She had been very brave

when they had attempted to confine her, to hold her by force at

Chesterton. Then she had been made strong, had always been comforted, by

opposition. The determination of her purpose to go back had supported

her. But now,--how should it be with her now? and with her boy? and with

him?

The old man was very good, good and eager in her cause, and would let

her live at Folking. But what would they call her? When they wrote to

her from Chesterton how would they address her letters? Never, never

would she soil her fingers by touching a document that called her by any

other name than her own. Yes, her own;--let all the jurymen in all the

counties, let all the judges on the bench, say what they would to the

contrary. Though it should be for all her life,--though there should

never come the day on which they,--they,--the world at large would do

him justice and her, though they should call her by what hard name they

would, still up there, in the courts of her God, she would be his wife.

She would be a pure woman there, and there would her child be without a

stain. And here, here in this world, though she could never more be a

wife in all things, she would be a wife in love, a wife in care, a wife

in obedience, a wife in all godly truth. And though it would never be

possible for her to show her face again among mankind, never for her,

surely the world would be kinder to her boy! They would not begrudge him

his name! And when it should be told how it had come to pass that there

was a blot upon his escutcheon, they would not remind him of his

mother's misery. But, above all, there should be no shade of doubt as to

her husband. 'I know,' she said, speaking aloud, but not knowing that

she spoke aloud, 'I know that he is my husband.' Then there was a knock

at the door. 'Well; yes;--has it come? Do you know?'

No; nothing was known there at that moment, but in another minute all

would be known. The wheels of the old Squire's carriage had been heard

upon the gravel. 'No, ma'am, no; you shall not leave the room,' said the

nurse. 'Stay here and let him come to you.'

'Is he alone?' she asked. But the woman did not know. The wheels of the

carriage had only been heard.

Alas, alas! he was alone. His heart too had been almost broken as he

bore the news home to the wife who was a wife no longer.

'Father!' she said, when she saw him.

'My daughter;--O my daughter!' And then, with their hands clasped

together, they sat speechless and alone, while the news was spread

through the household which the old man did not dare to tell to his

son's wife.

It was very slowly that the actual tidings reached her ears. Mr.

Caldigate, when he tried to tell them, found that the power of words had

left him. Old as he was, and prone to cynic indifference as he had shown

himself, he was affected almost like a young girl. He sobbed

convulsively as he hung over her, embracing her. 'My daughter!' he said,

'my daughter! my daughter!'

But at last it was all told. Caldigate had been declared guilty, and the

judge had condemned him to be confined to prison for two years. Judge

Bramber had told him that, in his opinion, the jury could have found no

other verdict; but he went on to say that, looking for some excuse for

so terrible a deed as that which had been done,--so terrible for that

poor lady who was now left nameless with a nameless infant,--he could

imagine that the marriage, though legally solemnised, had nevertheless

been so deficient in the appearances of solemnity as to have imbued the

husband with the idea that it had not meant all that a marriage would

have meant if celebrated in a church and with more of the outward

appurtenances of religion. On that account he refrained from inflicting

a severer penalty.

Chapter XLIV

After the Verdict

When the verdict was given, Caldigate was at once marched round into the

dock, having hitherto been allowed to sit in front of the dock between

Mr. Seely and his father. But, standing in the dock, he heard the

sentence pronounced upon him. 'I never married the woman, my lord,' he

said, in a loud voice. But what he said could be of no avail. And then

men looked at him as he disappeared with the jailers down the steps

leading to regions below, and away to his prison, and they knew that he

would no more be seen or heard of for two years. He had vanished. But

there was the lady who was not his wife out at Folking,--the lady whom

the jury had declared not to be his wife. What would become of her?

There was an old gentleman there in the court who had known Mr.

Caldigate for many years,--one Mr. Ryder, who had been himself a

practising barrister but had now retired. In those days they seldom saw

each other; but, nevertheless, they were friends. 'Caldigate,' he said,

'you had better let her go back to her own people.'

'She shall stay with me,' he replied.

'Better not. Believe me, she had better not. If so, how will it be with

her when he is released? The two years will soon go by, and then she

will be in his house. If that woman should die, he might marry her,--but

till then she had better be with her own people.'

'She shall stay with me,' the old man said again, repeating the words

angrily, and shaking his head. He was so stunned by the blow that he

could not argue the matter, but he knew that he had made the promise,

and that he was resolved to abide by it.

She had better go back to her own people! All the world was saying it.

She had no husband now. Everybody would respect her misfortune.

Everybody would acknowledge her innocence. All would sympathise with

her. All would love her. But she must go back to her own people. There

was not a dissentient voice. 'Of course she must go back to you now,'

Nicholas Bolton said to her father, and Nicholas Bolton seldom

interfered in anything. 'The poor lady will of course be restored to her

family,' the judge had said in private to his marshal, and the marshal

had of course made known what the judge had said. On the next morning

there came a letter from William Bolton to Robert. 'Of course Hester

must come back now. Nothing else is possible.' Everybody decided that

she must come back. It was a matter which admitted of no doubt. But how

was she to be brought to Chesterton?

None of them who decided with so much confidence as to her future,

understood her ideas of her position as a wife. 'I am bone of his bone

and flesh of his flesh,' she said to herself, 'made so by a sacrament

which no jury can touch. What matters what the people say? They may make

me more unhappy than I am. They may kill me by their cruelty. But they

cannot make me believe myself not to be his wife. And while I am his

wife, I will obey him, and him only.'

What she called 'their cruelty' manifested itself very soon. The first

person who came to her was Mrs. Robert Bolton, and her visit was made on

the day after the verdict. When Hester sent down word begging to be

permitted in her misery to decline to see even her sister-in-law, Mrs.

Robert sent her up a word or two written in pencil--'My darling, whom

have you nearer? Who loves you better than I?' Then the wretched one

gave way, and allowed her brother's wife to be brought to her. She was

already dressed from head to foot in black, and her baby was with her.

The arguments which Mrs. Robert Bolton used need not be repeated, but it

may be said that the words she used were so tender, and that they were

urged with so much love, so much sympathy, and so much personal

approval, that Hester's heart was touched. 'But he is my husband,'

Hester said. 'The judge cannot alter it; he is my husband.'

'I will not say a word to the contrary. But the law has separated you,

and you should obey the law. You should not even eat his bread now,

because--because--. Oh, Hester, you understand.'

'I do understand,' she said, rising to her feet in her energy, 'and

I will eat his bread though it be hard, and I will drink of his cup

though it be bitter. His bread and his cup shall be mine, and none

other shall be mine. I do understand. I know that these wicked people

have blasted my life. I know that I can be nothing to him now. But his

child shall never be made to think that his mother had condemned his

father. Yes, Margaret,' she said again, 'I do love you, and I do trust

you, and I know that you love me. But you do not love him; you do not

believe in him. If they came to you and took Robert away, would you go

and live with other people? I do love papa and mamma. But this is his

house, and he bids me stay here. The very clothes which I wear are his

clothes. I am his; and though they were to cut me apart from him, still

I should belong to him. No,--I will not go to mamma. Of course I have

forgiven her, because she meant it for the best; but I will never go

back to Chesterton.'

Then there came letters from the mother, one letter hot upon the other,

all appealing to those texts in Scripture by which the laws of nations

are supposed to be supported. 'Give unto Caesar the things which are

Caesar's.' It was for the law to declare who were and who were not man

and wife, and in this matter the law had declared. After this how could

she doubt? Or how could she hesitate as to tearing herself away from the

belongings of the man who certainly was not her husband? And there were

dreadful words in these letters which added much to the agony of her who

received them,--words which were used in order that their strength might

prevail. But they had no strength to convert, though they had strength

to afflict. Then Mrs. Bolton, who in her anxiety was ready to submit

herself to any personal discomfort, prepared to go to Folking. But

Hester sent back word that, in her present condition, she would see

nobody,--not even her mother.

But it was not only from the family of the Boltons that these

applications and entreaties came. Even Mr. Seely took upon himself to

tell Mr. Caldigate that under existing circumstances Hester should not

be detained at Folking.

'I do not know that either she or I want advice in the matter,' Mr.

Caldigate replied. But as a stone will be worn hollow in time by the

droppings of many waters, so was it thought that if all Cambridge would

continue firm in its purpose, then this stone might at last be made to

yield. The world was so anxious that it resolved among itself that it

would submit to any amount of snubbing in carrying out its object. Even

the mayor wrote. 'Dear Mr. Caldigate, greatly as I object to all

interference in families, I think myself bound to appeal to you as to

the unfortunate condition of that young lady from Chesterton.' Then

followed all the arguments, and some of the texts,--both of which were

gradually becoming hackneyed in the matter. Mr. Caldigate's answer to

this was very characteristic: 'Dear Mr. Mayor, if you have an objection

to interfere in families, why do you do it?' The mayor took the rebuke

with placid good-humour, feeling that his little drop might also have

done something towards hollowing the stone.

But of all the counsellors, perhaps Mr. Smirkie was the most zealous and

the most trusting. He felt himself to be bound in a peculiar manner to

Folking,--by double ties. Was not the clergyman of the parish the

brother of his dear departed one? And with whom better could he hold

sweet counsel? And then that second dear one, who had just been

vouchsafed to him,--had she not as it were by a miracle been rescued

from the fate into which the other poor lady had fallen, and obtained

her present thoroughly satisfactory position? Mr. Smirkie was a

clergyman who understood it to be his duty to be urgent for the good

cause, in season and out of season, and who always did his duty. So he

travelled over to Utterden and discussed the matter at great length with

Mr. Bromley. 'I do believe in my heart,' said Mr. Bromley, 'that the

verdict is wrong.' But Mr. Smirkie, with much eloquence, averred that

that had nothing to do with the question. Mr. Bromley opened his eyes

very wide. 'Nothing at all,' said Mr. Smirkie. 'It is the verdict of the

jury, confirmed by the judge, and the verdict itself dissolves the

marriage. Whether the verdict be wrong or right, that marriage ceremony

is null and void. They are not man and wife;--not now, even if they ever

were. Of course you are aware of that.'

Mr. Smirkie was altogether wrong in his law. Such men generally are. Mr.

Bromley in vain endeavoured to point out to him that the verdict could

have no such power as was here claimed for it, and that if any claim was

to be brought up hereafter as to the legitimacy of the child, the fact

of the verdict could only be used as evidence, and that that evidence

would or would not be regarded as true by another jury, according to the

views which that other jury might take. Mr. Smirkie would only repeat

his statements with increased solemnity,--'That marriage is no marriage.

That poor lady is not Mrs. John Caldigate. She is Miss Hester Bolton,

and, therefore, every breath of air which she draws under that roof is a

sin.' As he said this out upon the dike-side he looked about him with

manifest regret that he had no other audience than his brother-in-law.

And at last, after much persevering assiduity, Mr. Smirkie succeeded in

reaching Mr. Caldigate himself, and expressed himself with boldness. He

was a man who had at any rate the courage of his opinions. 'You have to

think of her future life in this world and in the next,' he said. 'And

in the next,' he repeated with emphasis, when Mr. Caldigate paused.

'As to what will affect her happiness in this world, sir,' said the old

man very gravely, 'I think you can hardly be a judge.'

'Good repute,' suggested the clergyman.

'Has she done anything that ought to lessen the fair fame of a woman in

the estimation of other women? And as to the next world, in the rewards

and punishments of which you presume it to be your peculiar duty to

deal, has she done anything which you think will subject her to the

special wrath of an offended Deity?' This question he asked with a

vehemence of voice which astounded his companion. 'She has loved her

husband with a peculiar love,' he continued. 'She has believed herself

to be joined to him by ties which you shall call romantic, if you

will,--superstitious, if you will.'

'I hope not,--I hope not,' said Mr. Smirkie, holding up both his hands,

not at all understanding the old man's meaning, but intending to express

horror at 'superstition,' which he supposed to be a peculiar attribute

of the Roman Catholic branch of the Christian Church. 'Not that I hope.'

'I cannot fathom, and you, apparently, cannot at all understand, her

idea of the sanctity of the marriage vow. But if you knew anything

about her, I think you would refrain from threatening her with divine

wrath; and as you know nothing about her, I regard such threats, coming

from you, as impertinent, unmanly, inhuman, and blasphemous.' Mr.

Caldigate had commenced this conversation, though vehemently, still in

so argumentative a manner, and in his allusions to the lady's romantic

and superstitious ideas had seemed to yield so much, that the terrible

vigour of his last words struck the poor clergyman almost to the

ground. One epithet came out after another, very clearly spoken, with a

pause between each of them; and the speaker, as he uttered them, looked

his victim close in the face. Then he walked slowly away, leaving Mr.

Smirkie fixed to the ground. What had he done? He had simply made a

gentle allusion to the next world, as, surely, it was his duty to do.

Whether this old pagan did or did not believe in a next world himself,

he must at any rate be aware that it is the peculiar business of a

clergyman to make such references. As to 'impertinent' and 'unmanly,'

he would let them go by. He was, he conceived, bound by his calling to

be what people called impertinent, and manliness had nothing to do with

him. But 'inhuman' and blasphemous!' Why had he come all the way over

from Plum-cum-Pippins, at considerable personal expense, except in

furtherance of that highest humanity which concerns itself with

eternity? And as for blasphemy, it might, he thought, as well be said

that he was blasphemous whenever he read the Bible aloud to his flock!

His first idea was to write an exhaustive letter on the subject to

Mr. Caldigate, in which he would invite that gentleman to recall the

offensive words. But as he drove his gig into the parsonage yard at

Plum-cum-Pippins, he made up his mind that this, too, was among the

things which a Christian minister should bear with patience.

But the dropping water always does hollow the stone,--hollow it a little

though the impression may not be visible to the naked eye. Even when

rising in his wrath, Mr. Caldigate had crushed the clergyman by the

violence of his language,--having been excited to anger chiefly by the

thick-headedness of the man in not having understood the rebuke intended

to be conveyed by his earlier and gentler words,--even when leaving the

man, with a full conviction that the man was crushed, the old Squire was

aware that he, the stone, was being gradually hollowed. Hester was now

very dear to him. From the first she had suited his ideas of a wife for

his son. And her constancy in her misery had wound itself into his

heart. He quite understood that her welfare should now be his great

care. There was no one else from whom she would listen to a word of

advice. From her husband, whose slightest word would have been a law to

her, no word could now come. From her own family she was entirely

estranged, having been taught to regard them simply as enemies in this

matter. She loved her mother; but in this matter her mother was her

declared enemy. His voice, and his voice alone, could now reach her

ears. As to that great hereafter to which the clergyman had so

flippantly alluded, he was content to leave that to herself. Much as he

differed from her as to details of a creed, he felt sure that she was

safe there. To his thinking, she was the purest human being that had

ever come beneath his notice. Whatever portion of bliss there may be for

mankind in a life after this life, the fullest portion of that bliss

would be hers, whether by reason of her creed or in spite of it.

Accustomed to think much of things, it was thus that he thought of her

in reference to the world to come. But as to this world, he was not

quite so sure. If she could die and have that other bliss at once, that

would be best,--only for the child, only for the child! But he did

doubt. Would it do for her to ignore that verdict altogether, when his

son should be released from jail, and be to him as though there had been

no verdict? Would not the finger of scorn be pointed at her;--and, as he

thought of it,--possibly at future children? Might it not be better for

her to bow to the cruelty of Fate, and consent to be apart from him at

any rate while that woman should be alive? And again, if such would be

better, then was it not clear that no time should be lost in beginning

that new life? If at last it should be ruled that she must go back to

her mother, it would certainly be well that she should do so now, at

once, so that people might know that she had yielded to the verdict. In

this way the stone was hollowed--though the hollowing had not been made

visible to the naked eye of Mr. Smirkie.

He was a man whose conscience did not easily let him rest when he

believed that a duty was incumbent on him. It was his duty now, he

thought, not to bid her go, not to advise her to go,--but to put before

her what reasons there might be for her going.

'I am telling you,' he said, 'what other people say.'

'I do not regard what other people say.'

'That might be possible for a man, Hester, but a woman has to regard

what the world says. You are young, and may have a long life before you.

We cannot hide from ourselves the fact that a most terrible misfortune

has fallen upon you, altogether undeserved but very grievous.'

'God, when he gave me my husband,' she replied, 'did me more good than

any man can do me harm by taking him away. I never cease to tell myself

that the blessing is greater than the misfortune.'

'But, my dearest----'

'I know it all, father. I know what you would tell me. If I live here

after he comes out of prison people will say that I am his mistress.'

'Not that, not that,' he cried, unable to bear the contumely of the

word, even from her lips.

'Yes, father; that is what you mean. That is what they all mean. That is

what mamma means, and Margaret. Let them call me what they will. It is

not what they call me, but what I am. It is bad for a woman to have evil

said of her, but it is worse for her to do evil. It is your house, and

you, of course, can bid me go.'

'I will never do that.'

'But unless I am turned out homeless on to the roads, I will stay here

where he left me. I have only one sure way of doing right, and that is

to obey him as closely as I can. He cannot order me now, but he has left

his orders. He has told me to remain under this roof, and to call myself

by his name, and in no way to derogate from my own honour as his wife.

By God's help I will do as he bids me. Nothing that any of them can say

shall turn me an inch from the way he has pointed out. You are good to

me.'

'I will try to be good to you.'

'You are so good to me that I can hardly understand your goodness.

Trusting to that, I will wait here till he shall come again and tell me

where and how I am to live.'

After that the old Squire made no further attempt in the same direction,

finding that no slightest hollow had been made on that other stone.

Chapter XLV

The Boltons Are Much Troubled

The condition of the inhabitants of Puritan Grange during the six weeks

immediately after the verdict was very sad indeed. I have described

badly the character of the lady living there, if I have induced my

readers to think that her heart was hardened against her daughter. She

was a woman of strong convictions and bitter prejudices; but her heart

was soft enough. When she married, circumstances had separated her

widely from her own family, in which she had never known either a

brother or a sister; and the burden of her marriage with an old man had

been brightened to her by the possession of an only child,--of one

daughter, who had been the lamp of her life, the solitary delight of her

heart, the single relief to the otherwise solitary tedium of her

monotonous existence. She had, indeed attended to the religious training

of her girl with constant care;--but the yearnings of her maternal heart

had softened even her religion, so that the laws, and dogmas, and texts,

and exercises by which her husband was oppressed, and her servants

afflicted, had been made lighter for Hester,--sometimes not without

pangs of conscience on the part of the self-convicted parent. She had

known, as well as other mothers, how to gloat over the sweet charms of

the one thing which in all the world had been quite her own. She had

revelled in kisses and soft touches. Her Hester's garments had been a

delight to her, till she had taught herself to think that though

sackcloth and ashes were the proper wear for herself and her husband,

nothing was too soft, too silken, too delicate for her little girl. The

roses in the garden, and the goldfish in the bowl, and the pet spaniel,

had been there because such surroundings had been needed for the

joyousness of her girl. And the theological hardness of the literature

of the house had been somewhat mitigated as Hester grew into reading, so

that Watt was occasionally relieved by Wordsworth, and Thomson's

'Seasons' was alternated with George Withers's 'Hallelujah.'

Then had come, first the idea of the marriage, and, immediately

consequent upon the idea, the marriage itself. The story of that has

been told, but the reader has perhaps hardly been made to understand the

utter bereavement which it brought on the mother. It is natural that the

adult bird should delight to leave the family nest, and that the mother

bird should have its heart-strings torn by the separation. It must be

so, alas! even when the divulsions are made in the happiest manner. But

here the tearing away had nothing in it to reconcile the mother. She was

suddenly told that her daughter was to be no longer her own. Her

step-son had interfered and her husband had become powerful over her

with a sudden obstinacy. She had had no hand in the choice. She would

fain have postponed any choice, and would then fain have herself made

the choice. But a man was brought who was distasteful to her at all

points, and she was told that that man was to have her daughter! He was

thoroughly distasteful He had been a spendthrift and a gambler;--then a

seeker after gold in wild, godless countries, and, to her thinking, not

at all the better because he had been a successful seeker. She believed

the man to be an atheist. She was told that his father was an infidel,

and was ready to believe the worst of the son. And yet in this terrible

emergency she was powerless. The girl was allowed to see the man, and

declared almost at once that she would transfer herself from her

mother's keeping to the keeping of this wicked one! She was transferred,

and the mother had been left alone.

Then came the blow,--very quickly, the blow which, as she now told

herself morning, noon, and night, was no worse than she had expected.

Another woman claimed the man as her husband, and so claimed him that

the world all around her had declared that the claim would be made good.

And the man himself had owned enough to make him unfit,--as she

thought,--to have the custody of any honest woman. Then she acknowledged

to herself the full weight of the misfortune that had fallen upon

them,--the misfortune which never would have fallen upon them had they

listened to her counsel,--and she had immediately put her shoulders to

the wheel with the object of rescuing her child from the perils, from

the sin, from the degradation of her position. And could she have

rescued her, could she have induced her daughter to remain at Puritan

Grange, there would even then have been consolation. It was one of the

tenets of her life,--the strongest, perhaps, of all those doctrines on

which she built her faith,--that this world is a world of woe; that

wailing and suffering, if not gnashing of teeth, is and should be the

condition of mankind preparatory to eternal bliss. For eternal bliss

there could, she thought, be no other preparation She did not want to be

happy here, or to have those happy around her whom she loved. She had

stumbled and gone astray,--she told herself hourly now that she had

stumbled and gone astray,--in preparing those roses and ribbons, and

other lightnesses for her young girl. It should have been all sackcloth

and ashes. Had it been all sackcloth and ashes there would not have been

this terrible fall. But if the loved one would now come back to

sackcloth and ashes,--if she would assent to the blackness of religious

asceticism, to penitence and theological gloom, and would lead the life

of the godly but comfortless here in order that she might insure the

glories and joys of the future life, then there might be

consolation;--then it might be felt that this tribulation had been a

precious balm by which an erring soul had been brought back to its due

humility.

But Wordsworth and Thomson, though upon the whole moral poets, had done

their work. Or, if not done altogether by them, the work had been done

by the latitude which had admitted them. So that the young wife, when

she found herself breathing the free air with which her husband

surrounded her, was able to burst asunder the remnants of those cords of

fanaticism with which her mother had endeavoured to constrain her. She

looked abroad, and soon taught herself to feel that the world was bright

and merry, that this mortal life was by no means necessarily a place of

gloom, and the companionship of the man to whom Providence had allotted

her was to her so happy, so enjoyable, so sufficient, that she found

herself to have escaped from a dark prison and to be roaming among

shrubs and flowers, and running waters, which were ever green, which

never faded, and the music of which was always in her ears. When the

first tidings of Euphemia Smith came to Folking she was in all her

thoughts and theories of life poles asunder from her mother. There might

be suffering and tribulation,--suffering even to death. But her idea of

the manner in which the suffering should be endured and death awaited

was altogether opposed to that which was hot within her mother's bosom.

But not the less did the mother still pray, still struggle, and still

hope. They, neither of them, quite understood each other, but the mother

did not at all understand the daughter. She, the mother, knew what the

verdict had been, and was taught to believe that by that verdict the

very ceremony of her daughter's marriage had been rendered null and

void. It was in vain that the truth of the matter came to her from

Robert Bolton, diluted through the vague explanations of her husband.

'It does not alter the marriage, Robert says.' So it was that the old

man told his tale, not perfectly understanding, not even quite

believing, what his son had told him.

'How can he dare to say so?' demanded the indignant mother of the

injured woman. 'Not alter the marriage when the jury have declared that

the other woman is his wife! In the eyes of God she is not his wife.

That cannot be imputed as sin to her,--not that,--because she did it not

knowing. She, poor innocent, was betrayed. But now that she knows it,

every mouthful that she eats of his bread is a sin.'

'It is the old man's bread,' said this older man, weakly.

'What matter? It is the bread of adultery.' It may certainly be said

that at this time Mrs. Bolton herself would have been relieved from none

of her sufferings by any new evidence which would have shown that

Crinkett and the others had sworn falsely. Though she loved her daughter

dearly, though her daughter's misery made her miserable, yet she did not

wish to restore the husband to the wife. Any allusion to a possibility

that the verdict had been a mistaken verdict was distasteful to her. Her

own original opinion respecting Caldigate had been made good by the

verdict. The verdict had proved her to be right, and her husband with

all his sons to have been wrong. The triumph had been very dark to her;

but still it had been a triumph. It was to her an established fact that

John Caldigate was not her daughter's husband and therefore she was

anxious, not to rehabilitate her daughter's position, but to receive her

own miserable child once more beneath the shelter of her own wing. That

they two might pray together, struggle together, together wear their

sackcloth and ashes, and together console themselves with their hopes of

eternal joys, while they shuddered, not altogether uncomfortably, at

the torments prepared for others,--this was now the only outlook in

which she could find a gleam of satisfaction; and she was so assured of

the reasonableness of her wishes, so convinced that the house of her

parents was now the only house in which Hester could live without

running counter to the precepts of her own religion, and counter also to

the rules of the wicked outside world, that she could not bring herself

to believe but that she would succeed at last. Merely to ask her child

to come, to repeat the invitation, and then to take a refusal, was by no

means sufficient for her energy. She had failed grievously when she had

endeavoured to make her daughter a prisoner at the Grange. After such an

attempt as that, it could hardly be thought that ordinary invitations

would be efficacious. But when that attempt had been made, it was

possible that Hester should justify herself by the law. According to law

she had then been Caldigate's wife. There had been some ground for her

to stand upon as a wife, and as a wife she had stood upon it very

firmly. But now there was not an inch of ground. The man had been

convicted as a bigamist, and the other woman, the first woman, had been

proved to be his wife. Mrs. Bolton had got it into her head that the two

had been dissevered as though by some supernal power; and no explanation

to the contrary, brought to her by her husband from Robert, had any

power of shaking her conviction. It was manifest to all men and to all

women, that she who had been seduced, betrayed, and sacrificed should

now return with her innocent babe to the protection of her father's

roof; and no stone must be left unturned till the unfortunate one had

been made to understand her duty.

The old banker in these days had not a good time, nor, indeed, had the

Boltons generally. Mrs. Bolton, though prone to grasp at power on every

side, was apt, like some other women who are equally grasping, to

expect almost omnipotence from the men around her when she was desirous

that something should be done by them in accordance with her own

bidding. Knowing her husband to be weak from age and sorrow, she could

still jeer at him because he was not abnormally strong; and though her

intercourse with his sons and their families was now scanty and

infrequent, still by a word here and a line there she could make her

reproaches felt by them all. Robert, who saw his father every day, heard

very much of them. Daniel was often stung, and even Nicholas. And the

reproaches reached as far as William, the barrister up in London.

'I am sure I don't know what we can do,' said the miserable father,

sitting huddled up in his arm-chair one evening towards the end of

August. It was very hot, but the windows were closed because he could

not bear a draught, and he was somewhat impatiently waiting for the hour

of prayers which were antecedent to bed, where he could be silent even

if he could not sleep.

'There are five of you. One should be at the house every day to tell her

of her duty.'

'I couldn't go.'

'They could go,--if they cared. If they cared they would go. They are

her brothers.'

'Mr. Caldigate would not let them enter the house,' said the old man.

'Do you mean that he would separate her from her brother and her

parents?'

'Not if she wished to see them. She is her own mistress, and he will

abet her in whatever she may choose to do. That is what Robert says.'

'And what Robert says is to be law?'

'He knows what he is talking about.' Mr. Bolton as he said this shook

his head angrily, because he was fatigued.

'And he is to be your guide even when your daughter's soul is in

jeopardy?' This was the line of argument in reference to which Mr.

Bolton always felt himself to be as weak as water before his wife. He

did not dare to rebel against her religious supremacy, not simply

because he was a weak old man in presence of a strong woman, but from

fear of denunciation. He, too, believed her creed, though he was made

miserable by her constant adherence to it. He believed, and would fain

have let that suffice. She believed, and endeavoured to live up to her

belief. And so it came to pass that when she spoke to him of his own

soul, of the souls of those who were dear to him, or even of souls in

general, he was frightened and paralysed. He had more than once

attempted to reply with worldly arguments, but had suffered so much in

the encounter that he had learned to abstain. 'I cannot believe that she

would refuse to see us. I shall go myself; but if we all went we should

surely persuade her.' In answer to this the poor man only groaned, till

the coming in of the old servant to arrange the chairs and put the big

Bible on the table relieved him from something of his misery.

'I certainly will not interfere,' Robert Bolton said to his father on

the next morning. 'I will not go to Folking, because I am sure that I

should do no good. Hester, no doubt, would be better at your

house,--much better. There is nothing I would not do to get her back

from the Caldigates altogether,--if there was a chance of success. But

we have no power;--none whatever.'

'No power at all,' said the banker, shaking his head, and feeling some

satisfaction at the possession of an intelligible word which he could

quote to his wife.

'She is controller of her own actions as completely as are you and I. We

have already seen how inefficacious with her are all attempts at

persuasion. And she knows her position. If he were out of prison

to-morrow he would be her husband.'

'But he has another wife.'

'Of that the civil law knows nothing. If money were coming to her he

could claim it, and the verdict against him would only be evidence, to

be taken for what it was worth. It would have been all very well had she

wished to sever herself from him; but as she is determined not to do so,

any interference would be useless.' The question as to the marriage or

no marriage was not made quite clear to the banker's mind, but he did

understand that neither he, nor his wife, nor his sons had 'any power,'

and of that argument he was determined to make use.

William, the barrister in London, was induced to write a letter, a very

lengthy and elaborate epistle having come from Mrs. Bolton to his wife,

in which the religious duty of all the Boltons was set forth in strong

language, and in which he was incited to do something. It was almost the

first letter which Mrs. William Bolton had ever received from her

step-mother, whatever trifling correspondence there might have been

between them having been of no consequence. They, too, felt that it

would be better that Hester should return to her old home, but felt also

that they had no power. 'Of course, she won't,' said Mrs. William.

'She has a will of her own,' said the barrister.

'Why should she? Think of the gloom of that home at Chesterton, and her

absolute independence at Folking. No doubt it would be better. The

position is so frightful that even the gloom would be better. But she

won't. We all know that.'

The barrister, however, feeling that it would be better, thought that he

should perform his duty by expressing his opinion, and wrote a letter to

Hester, which was intended to be if possible persuasive;--and this was

the answer:--

'DEAR WILLIAM,--If you were carried away to prison on some horrible

false accusation, would Fanny go away from you, and desert your

house and your affairs, and return to her parents? You ask her, and

ask her whether she would believe anything that anybody could say

against you. If they told her that her children were nameless, would

she agree to make them so by giving up your name? Wouldn't she cling

to you the more, the more all the world was against you?' ('I

would,' said Fanny, with tearful energy. 'Fanny' was, of course,

Mrs. William Bolton, and was the happy mother of five nearly

grown-up sons and daughters, and certainly stood in no peril as to

her own or their possession of the name of Bolton. The letter was

being read aloud to her by her husband, whose mind was also stirred

in his sister's favour by the nature of the arguments used.) 'If

so,' continued the writer, 'why shouldn't I be the same? I don't

believe a word the people said. I am sure I am his wife. And as,

when he was taken away from me, he left a house for his wife and

child to live in, I shall continue to live in it.

'All the same, I know you mean to be good to me. Give my best love

to Fanny, and believe me your affectionate sister,

'HESTER CALDIGATE.'

In every letter and stroke of the name as she wrote it there was an

assertion that she claimed it as her own, and that she was not ashamed

of it.

'Upon my word,' said Mrs. William Bolton, through her tears, 'I am

beginning to think that she is almost right.' There was so much of

conjugal proper feeling in this that the husband could only kiss his

wife and leave her without further argument on the matter.

Chapter XLVI

Burning Words

'No power at all; none whatever,' the banker said, when he was next

compelled to carry on the conversation. This was immediately upon his

return home from Cambridge, for his wife never allowed the subject to be

forgotten or set aside. Every afternoon and every evening it was being

discussed at all hours not devoted to prayers, and every morning it was

renewed at the breakfast-table.

'That comes from Robert.' Mr. Bolton was not able to deny the assertion.

'What does he mean by "no power"?'

'We can't make her do it. The magistrates can't interfere.'

'Magistrates! Has it been by the interference of magistrates that men

have succeeded in doing great things? Was it by order from the

magistrates that the lessons of Christ have been taught over all the

world? Is there no such thing as persuasion? Has truth no power? Is she

more deaf to argument and eloquence than another?'

'She is very deaf, I think,' said the father, doubting his own

eloquence.

'It is because no one has endeavoured to awaken her by burning words to

a true sense of her situation When she said this she must surely have

forgotten much that had occurred during those weary hours which had been

passed by her and her daughter outside there in the hall. 'No power!'

she repeated. 'It is the answer always made by those who are too sleepy

to do the Lord's work. It was because men said that they had no power

that the grain fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth. It

is that aversion to face difficulties which causes the broad path to be

crowded with victims. I, at any rate, will go. I may have no power, but

I will make the attempt.'

Soon after that she did make the attempt. Mr. Bolton, though he was

assured by Robert that such an attempt would produce no result, could

not interfere to prevent it. Had he been far stronger than he was in his

own house, he could hardly have forbidden the mother to visit the

daughter. Hester had sent word to say that she did not wish to see even

her mother. But this had been immediately after the verdict, when she

was crushed and almost annihilated by her misery. Some weeks had now

passed by, and it could not be that she would refuse to admit the

visitor, when such a visitor knocked at her door. They had loved each

other as mothers and daughters do love when there is no rival in the

affection,--when each has no one else to love. There never had been a

more obedient child, or a more loving parent. Much, no doubt, had

happened since to estrange the daughter from the mother. A husband had

been given to her who was more to her than any parent,--as a husband

should be. And then there had been that terrible opposition, that

struggle, that battle in the hall. But the mother's love had never waned

because of that. She was sure that her child would not refuse to see

her.

So the fly was ordered to take her out to Folking, and on the morning

fixed she dressed herself in her blackest black. She always wore brown

or black,--brown being the colour suitable for the sober and sad

domesticities of her week-days, which on ceremonies and Sabbath was

changed for a more solemn black. But in her wardrobe there were two such

gowns, one of which was apparently blacker than the other, nearer to a

guise of widowhood,--more fit, at any rate, for general funereal

obsequies. There are women who seem always to be burying someone; and

Mrs. Bolton, as she went forth to visit her daughter, was fit to bury

any one short of her husband.

It was a hot day in August, and the fly travelled along the dusty road

very slowly. She had intended to reach Folking at twelve, so that her

interview might be over and that she might return without the need of

eating. There is always some idea of festivity connected with food eaten

at a friend's table, and she did not wish to be festive. She was, too,

most unwilling to partake of John Caldigate's bread. But she did not

reach the house till one, and when she knocked at the door Hester's

modest lunch was about to be put upon the table.

There was considerable confusion when the servant saw Mrs. Bolton

standing in the doorway. It was quite understood by everyone at Folking

that for the present there was to be no intercourse between the Boltons

and the Caldigates. It was understood that there should be no visitors

of any kind at Folking, and it had been thought that Mr. Smirkie had

forced an entrance in an impertinent manner. But yet it was not possible

to send Mrs. Bolton from her own daughter's door with a mere 'not at

home.' Of course she was shown in,--and was taken to the parlour, in

which the lunch was prepared, while word was taken up to Hester

announcing that her mother was there.

Mr. Caldigate was in the house,--in his own book-room, as it used to be

called,--and Hester went to him first. 'Mamma is here,--in the

dining-room.'

'Your mother!'

'I long to see mamma.'

'Of course you do.'

'But she will want me to go away with her.'

'She cannot take you unless you choose to go.'

'But she will speak of nothing else. I know it. I wish she had not

come.'

'Surely, Hester, you can make her understand that your mind is made up.'

'Yes, I shall do that. I must do that. But, father, it will be very

painful. You do not know what things she can say. It nearly killed me

when I was at the Grange. You will not see her, I suppose?'

'If you wish it, I will. She will not care to see me; and as things are

at present, what room is there for friendship?'

'You will come if I send for you?'

'Certainly. If you send for me I will come at once.'

Then she crept slowly out of the room, and very slowly and very silently

made her way to the parlour-door. Though she was of a strong nature,

unusually strong of heart and fixed of purpose, now her heart misgave

her. That terrible struggle, with all its incidents of weariness and

agony, was present to her mind. Her mother could not turn the lock on

her now; but, as she had said, it would be very dreadful. Her mother

would say words to her which would go through her like swords. Then she

opened the door, and for a moment there was the sweetness of an embrace.

There was a prolonged tenderness in the kiss which, even to Mrs. Bolton,

had a charm for the moment to soften her spirit. 'Oh, mamma; my own

mamma!'

'My child!'

'Yes, mamma;--every day when I pray for you I tell myself that I am

still your child,--I do.'

'My only one! my only one!--all that I have!' Then again they were in

each other's arms. Yet, when they had last met, one had been the jailer,

and the other the prisoner; and they had fought it out between them with

a determined obstinacy which at moments had almost amounted to hatred.

But now the very memory of these sad hours increased their tenderness.

'Hester, through it all, do you not know that my heart yearns for you

day and night?--that in my prayers I am always remembering you? that my

dreams are happy because you are with me? that I am ever longing for

you as Ruth longed for Naomi? I am as Rachel weeping for her children,

who would not be comforted because they are not. Day and night my

heart-strings are torn asunder because my eyes behold you not.'

It was true,--and the daughter knew it to be true. But what could be

done? There had grown up something for her, holier, greater, more

absorbing even than a mother's love. Happily for most young wives,

though the new tie may surmount the old one, it does not crush it or

smother it. The mother retains a diminished hold, and knowing what

nature has intended is content. She, too, with some subsidiary worship,

kneels at the new altar, and all is well. But here, though there was

abundant love, there was no sympathy. The cause of discord was ever

present to them both. Unless John Caldigate was acknowledged to be a

fitting husband, not even the mother could be received with a full

welcome. And unless John Caldigate were repudiated, not even the

daughter could be accepted as altogether pure. Parental and filial

feelings sufficed for nothing between them beyond the ecstasy of a

caress.

As Hester was standing mute, still holding her mother's hand, the

servant came to the door, and asked whether she would have her lunch.

'You will stay and eat with me, mamma? But you will come up to my room

first?'

'I will go up to your room, Hester.'

'Then we will have our lunch,' Hester said, turning to the servant. So

the two went together to the upper chamber, and in a moment the mother

had fetched her baby, and placed it in her mother's arms.

'I wish he were at the Grange,' said Mrs. Bolton. Then Hester shook her

head; but feeling the security of her position, left the baby with its

grandmother. 'I wish he were at the Grange. It is the only fitting home

for him at present.'

'No, mamma; that cannot be.'

'It should be so, Hester. It should be so.'

'Pray do not speak of it, dear mamma.'

'Have I not come here on purpose that I might speak of it? Sweet as it

is to me to have you in my arms, do you not know that I have come for

that purpose,--for that only?'

'It cannot be so.'

'I will not take such an answer, Hester. I am not here to speak of

pleasure or delights,--not to speak of sweet companionship, or even of a

return to that more godly life which, I think, you would find in your

father's house. Had not this ruin come, unhappy though I might have

been, and distrustful, I should not have interfered. Those whom God has

joined together, let not man put asunder.'

'It is what I say to myself every hour. God has joined us, and no man,

no number of men, shall put us asunder.'

'But, my own darling,--God has not joined you! When he pretended to be

joined to you, he had a wife then living,--still living.'

'No.'

'Will you set up your own opinion against evidence which the jury has

believed, which the judge has believed, which all the world has

believed?'

'Yes, I will,' said Hester, the whole nature of whose face was now

altered, and who looked as she did when sitting in the hall-chair at

Puritan Grange,--'I will. Though I were almost to know that he had been

false, I should still believe him to be true.'

'I cannot understand that, Hester.'

'But I know him to be true,--quite true,' she said, wishing to erase the

feeling which her unguarded admission had made. 'Not to believe him to

have been true would be death to me; and for my boy's sake, I would wish

to live. But I have no doubt, and I will listen to no one,--not even to

you, when you tell me that God did not join us together.'

'You cannot go behind the law, Hester. As a citizen, you must obey the

law.'

'I will live here,--as a citizen,--till he has been restored to me.'

'But he will not then be your husband. People will not call you by his

name. He cannot have two wives. She will be his wife. Oh, Hester, have

you thought of it?'

'I have thought of it,' she said, raising her face, looking upwards

through the open window, out away towards the heavens, and pressing her

foot firmly upon the floor. 'I have thought of it,--very much; and I

have asked--the Lord--for counsel. And He has given it me. He has told

me what to believe, what to know, and how to live. I will never again

lie with my head upon his bosom unless all that be altered. But I will

serve him as his wife, and obey him; and if I can I will comfort him. I

will never desert him. And not all the laws that were ever made, nor all

the judges that ever sat in judgment shall make me call myself by

another name than his.'

The mother had come there to speak burning words, and she had in some

sort prepared them; but now she found herself almost silenced by the

energy of her daughter. And when her girl told her that she had applied

to her God for counsel, and that the Lord had answered her prayers--that

the Lord had directed her as to her future life,--then the mother hardly

knew how to mount to higher ground, so as to seem to speak from a more

exalted eminence. And yet she was not at all convinced. That the Lord

should give bad counsel she knew to be impossible. That the Lord would

certainly give good counsel to such a suppliant, if asked aright, she

was quite sure. But they who send others to the throne of heaven for

direct advice are apt to think that the asking will not be done aright

unless it be done with their spirit and their bias,--with the spirit and

bias which they feel when they recommend the operation. No one has ever

thought that direct advice from the Lord was sufficient authority for

the doing of that of which he himself disapproved. It was Mrs. Bolton's

daily custom to kneel herself and ask for such counsel, and to enjoin

such asking upon all those who were subject to her influence. But had

she been assured by some young lady to whom she had recommended the

practice that heavenly warrant had thus been secured for balls and

theatres, she would not have scrupled to declare that the Lord had

certainly not been asked aright. She was equally certain of some

defalcation now. She did not doubt that Hester had done as she had said.

That the prayer had been put up with energetic fervour, she was sure.

But energetic fervour in prayer was, she thought, of no use,--nay, was

likely to be most dangerous, when used in furtherance of human

prepossessions and desires. Had Hester said her prayers with a proper

feeling of self-negation,--in that religious spirit which teaches the

poor mortal here on earth to know that darkness and gloom are safer than

mirth and comfort,--then the Lord would have told her to leave Folking,

to go back to Puritan Grange, and to consent once more to be called

Hester Bolton. This other counsel had not come from the Lord,--had come

only from Hester's own polluted heart. But she was not at the moment

armed with words sufficiently strong to explain all this.

'Hester,' she said, 'does not all this mean that your own proud spirit

is to have a stronger dominion over you than the experience and wisdom

of all your friends?'

'Perhaps it does. But, at any rate, my proud spirit will retain its

pride.'

'You will be obstinate?'

'Certainly I will. Nothing on earth shall make me leave this house till

I am told by its owner to go.'

'Who is its owner? Old Mr. Caldigate is its owner.'

'I hardly know. Though John has explained it again and again, I am so

bad at such things that I am not sure. But I can do what I please with

it. I am the mistress here. As you say that the Grange is your house, I

can say that this is mine. It is the abode appointed for me, and here I

will abide.'

'Then, Hester, I can only tell you that you are sinning. It is a heavy,

grievous, and most obvious sin.'

'Dear mother,--dear mamma; I knew how it would be if you came. It is

useless for me to say more. Were I to go away, that to me would be the

sin. Why should we discuss it any more? There comes a time to all of us

when we must act on our own responsibility. My husband is in prison, and

cannot personally direct me. No doubt I could go, were I so pleased. His

father would not hinder me, though he is most unwilling that I should

go. I must judge a little for myself. But I have his judgment to fall

back upon. He told me to stay, and I shall stay.'

Then there was a pause, during which Mrs. Bolton was thinking of her

burning words,--was remembering the scorn with which she had treated her

husband when he told her that they had 'no power.' She had endeavoured

herself not to be sleepy in doing the Lord's work. But her seed, too,

had fallen upon stony places. She was powerless to do, or even to say,

anything further. 'Then I may go,' she muttered.

'You will come and eat with me, mamma?'

'No, my dear,--no.'

'You do not wish that there should be a quarrel?'

'There is very much, Hester, that I do not wish. I have long ceased to

trust much to any wishes. There is a great gulf between us, and I will

not attempt to bridge it by the hollow pretence of sitting at table with

you. I will still pray that you may be restored to me.' Then she went to

the door.

'Mamma, you will kiss me before you go?'

'I will cover you with kisses when you return to your own home.' But in

spite of this, Hester went down with her into the hall, holding by her

raiment; and as Mrs. Bolton got into the fly, she did succeed in kissing

her mother's hand.

'She has gone,' said Hester, going to her father-in-law's room. 'Though

I was so glad to see her, I wish she had not come. When people think so

very, very differently on a matter which is so very, very important, it

is better that they should not meet, let them love each other ever so.'

As far as Hester and Mr. Caldigate were concerned the visit had in truth

been made without much inconvenience. There had been no absolute

violence,--no repetition of such outward quarrelling as had made those

two days at the Grange so memorable. There was almost a feeling of

relief in Hester's bosom when her mother was driven away after that

successful grasp at the parting hand. Though they had differed much,

they had not hated each other during that last half-hour. Hester had

been charged with sin;--which, however, had been a matter of course. But

in Mrs. Bolton's heart there was a feeling which made her return home

very uncomfortable. Having twitted her husband with his lack of power,

she had been altogether powerless herself; and now she was driven to

confess to herself that no further step could be taken. 'She is

obstinate,' she said to her husband,--'stiff-necked in her sin, as are

all determined sinners. I can say no more to her. It may be that the

Lord will soften her heart when her sorrows have endured yet for a

time.' But she said no more of burning words, or of eloquence, or of the

slackness of the work of those who work as though they were not in

earnest.

Chapter XLVII

Curlydown and Bagwax

There had been a sort of pledge given at the trial by Sir John Joram

that the matter of the envelope should be further investigated. He had

complained in his defence that the trial had been hurried on,--that time

had not been allowed for full inquiries, seeing that the character of

the deed by which his client had been put in jeopardy depended upon what

had been done on the other side of the globe. 'This crime,' he had said,

'if it be a crime, was no doubt committed in the parish church of

Utterden in the early part of last year; but all the evidence which has

been used or which could be used to prove it to have been a crime, has

reference to things done long ago, and far away. Time has not been

allowed us for rebutting this evidence by counter-evidence.' And yet

much time had been allowed. The trial had been postponed from the spring

to the summer assizes; and then the offence was one which, from its very

nature, required speedy notice. The Boltons, who became the instigators

of the prosecution, demanded that the ill-used woman should be relieved

as quickly as possible from her degradation. There had been a general

feeling that the trial should not be thrown over to another year; and,

as we are aware, it had been brought to judgment and the convicted

criminal was in jail. But Sir John still persevered, and to this

perseverance he had been instigated very much by a certain clerk in the

post-office.

Two post-office clerks had been used as witnesses at the trial, of whom

the elder, Mr. Curlydown, had been by no means a constant or an

energetic witness. A witness, when he is brought up for the defence,

should not be too scrupulous, or he will be worse than useless. In a

matter of fact a man can only say what he saw, or tell what he heard, or

declare what he knew. He should at least do no more. Though it be to

save his father, he should not commit perjury. But when it comes to

opinion, if a man allows himself to waver, he will be taken as thinking

the very opposite of what he does think. Such had been the case with Mr.

Curlydown. He had intended to be very correct. He had believed that the

impression of the Sydney stamp was on the whole adverse to the idea that

it had been obtained in the proper way; and yet he had, when

cross-examined, acknowledged that it might very probably have been

obtained in the proper way. It certainly had not been 'smudged' at all,

and such impressions generally did become 'smudged.' But then he was

made to say also that impressions very often did not become smudged. And

as to the word 'Nobble' which should have been stamped upon the

envelope, he thought that in such a case its absence was very

suspicious; but still he was brought to acknowledge that post-masters in

provincial offices far away from inspection, frequently omit that part

of their duty. All this had tended to rob the envelope of those

attributes of deceit and conspiracy which Sir John Joram attributed to

it, and had justified the judge in his opinion that Mr. Curlydown's

evidence had told them little or nothing. But even Mr. Curlydown had

found more favour with the judge than Samuel Bagwax, the junior of the

two post-office witnesses. Samuel Bagwax had perhaps been a little too

energetic. He had made the case his own, and was quite sure that the

envelope had been tampered with. I think that the counsel for the Crown

pressed his witness unfairly when he asked Mr. Bagwax whether he was

absolutely certain that an envelope with such an impression could not

have passed through the post-office in the ordinary course of business.

'Nothing is impossible,' Mr. Bagwax had replied. 'Is it not very much

within the sphere of possibility?' the learned gentleman had asked. The

phrase was misleading, and Mr. Bagwax was induced to say that it might

be so. But still his assurance would probably have had weight with the

jury but for the overstrained honesty of his companion. The judge had

admonished the jury that in reference to such a point they should use

their own common-sense rather than the opinion of such a man as Mr.

Bagwax. A man of ordinary common-sense would know how the mark made by a

die on a letter would be affected by the sort of manipulation to which

the letter bearing it would be subjected;--and so on. From all which it

came to pass that the judge was understood to have declared that that

special envelope might very well have passed in ordinary course through

the Sydney post-office.

But Samuel Bagwax was not a man to be put down by the injustice of

lawyers. He knew himself to have been ill-treated. He was confident that

no man alive was more competent than himself to form an opinion on such

a subject; and he was sure, quite sure,--perhaps a little too

sure,--that there had been some dishonesty with that envelope. And thus

he became a strong partisan of John Caldigate and of Mrs. John

Caldigate. If there had been tampering with that envelope, then the

whole thing was fraudulent, false, and the outcome of a base conspiracy.

Many points were present to his mind which the lawyers between them

would not allow him to explain properly to a jury. When had that die

been cut, by which so perfect an impression had been formed? If it could

be proved that it had been cut since the date it bore, then of course

the envelope would be fraudulent. But it was only in Sydney that this

could be ascertained. He was sure that a week's ordinary use would have

made the impression less perfect. Some letters must of course be

subjected to new dies, and this letter might in due course have been so

subjected. But it was more probable that a new stamp should have been

selected for a surreptitious purpose. All this could be ascertained by

the book of daily impressions kept in the Sydney post-office;--but

there had not been time to get this evidence from Sydney since this

question of the impression had been ventilated. It was he who had first

given importance to the envelope; and being a resolute and almost heroic

man, he was determined that no injustice on the part of a Crown

prosecutor, no darkness in a judge's mind, no want of intelligence in a

jury, should rob him of the delight of showing how important to the

world was a proper understanding of post-office details. He still

thought that that envelope might be made to prove a conspiracy on the

part of Crinkett and the others, and he succeeded in getting Sir John

Joram to share that belief.

The envelope itself was still preserved among the sacred archives of the

trial. That had not been bodily confided to Samuel Bagwax. But various

photographs had been made of the document, which no doubt reproduced

exactly every letter, every mark, and every line which was to be seen

upon it by the closest inspection. There was the direction, which was

admitted to be in Caldigate's handwriting,--the postage-stamp, with its

obliterating lines,--and the impression of the Sydney postmark. That was

nearly all. The paper of the envelope had no water-marks. Bagwax thought

that if he could get hold of the envelope itself something might be done

even with that; but here Sir John could not go along with him, as it had

been fully acknowledged that the envelope had passed from the possession

of Caldigate into the hands of the woman bearing the written address. If

anything could be done, it must be done by the postmarks,--and those

postmarks Bagwax studied morning, noon, and night.

It had now been decided that Bagwax was to be sent out to Sydney at the

expense of the Caldigates. There had been difficulty as to leave of

absence for such a purpose. The man having been convicted, the

postmaster-general was bound to regard him as guilty, and hesitated to

allow a clerk to be absent so long on behalf of a man who was already in

prison. But the Secretary of State overruled this scruple, and the leave

was to be given. Bagwax was elate,--first and chiefly because he trusted

that he would become the means of putting right a foul and cruel wrong.

For in these days Bagwax almost wept over the hardships inflicted on

that poor lady at Folking. But he was elated also by the prospect of his

travels, and by the godsend of a six months' leave of absence. He was a

little proud, too, at having had this personal attention paid to him by

the Secretary of State. All this was very gratifying. But that which

gratified him was not so charming to his brother clerks. They had never

enjoyed the privilege of leaving that weary office for six months. They

were not allowed to occupy themselves in contemplating an envelope. They

were never specially mentioned by the Secretary of State. Of course

there was a little envy, and a somewhat general feeling that Bagwax,

having got to the weak side of Sir John Joram, was succeeding in having

himself sent out as a first-class overland passenger to Sydney, merely

as a job. Paris to be seen, and the tunnel, and the railways through

Italy, and the Suez Canal,--all these places, not delightful to the

wives of Indian officers coming home or going out, were an Elysium to

the post-office mind. His expenses to be paid for six months on the most

gentleman-like footing, and his salary going on all the time! Official

human nature, good as it generally is, cannot learn that such glories

are to be showered on one not specially deserving head without something

akin to enmity. The general idea, therefore, in the office, was that

Bagwax would do no good in Sydney, that others would have been better

than Bagwax,--in fact, that of all the clerks in all the departments,

Bagwax was the very last man who ought to have been selected for an

enterprise demanding secrecy, discretion, and some judicial severity.

Curlydown and Bagwax occupied the same room at the office in St.

Martin's-le-Grand; and there it was their fate in life to arrange,

inspect, and generally attend to those apparently unintelligible

hieroglyphics with which the outside coverings of our correspondence are

generally bedaubed. Curlydown's hair had fallen from his head, and his

face had become puckered with wrinkles, through anxiety to make these

markings legible and intelligible. The popular newspaper, the popular

member of Parliament, and the popular novelist,--the name of Charles

Dickens will of course present itself to the reader who remembers the

Circumlocution office,--have had it impressed on their several

minds,--and have endeavoured to impress the same idea on the minds of

the public generally,--that the normal Government clerk is quite

indifferent to his work. No greater mistake was ever made, or one

showing less observation of human nature. It is the nature of a man to

appreciate his own work. The felon who is made simply to move shot,

perishes because he knows his work is without aim. The fault lies on the

other side. The policeman is ambitious of arresting everybody. The

lawyer would rather make your will for you gratis than let you make your

own. The General can believe in nothing but in well-trained troops.

Curlydown would willingly have expended the whole net revenue of the

post-office,--and his own,--in improving the machinery for stamping

letters. But he had hardly succeeded in life. He had done his duty, and

was respected by all. He lived comfortably in a suburban cottage with a

garden, having some private means, and had brought up a happy family in

prosperity;--but he had done nothing new. Bagwax, who was twenty years

his junior, had with manifest effects, added a happy drop of turpentine

to the stamping-oil,--and in doing so had broken Curlydown's heart. The

'Bagwax Stamping Mixture' had absolutely achieved a name, which was

printed on the official list of stores. Curlydown's mind was vacillating

between the New River and a pension,--between death in the breach and

acknowledged defeat,--when a new interest was lent to his life by the

Caldigate envelope. It was he who had been first sent by the

Postmaster-General to Sir John Joram's chambers. But the matter had

become too large for himself alone, and in an ill-fated hour Bagwax had

been consulted. Now Bagwax was to be sent to Sydney,--almost with the

appointments of a lawyer!

They still occupied the same room,--a fact which infinitely increased

the torments of Curlydown's position. They ought to have been moved very

far asunder. Curlydown was still engaged in the routine ordinary work of

the day, seeing that the proper changes were made in all the stamps used

during the various hours of the day,--assuring himself that the crosses

and letters and figures upon which so much of the civilisation of Europe

depended, were properly altered and arranged. And it may well be that

his own labours were made heavier by the devotion of his colleagues to

other matters. And yet from time to time Bagwax would ask him questions,

never indeed taking his advice, but still demanding his assistance.

Curlydown was not naturally a man of ill-temper or an angry heart. But

there were moments in which he could hardly abstain from expressing

himself with animosity.

On a certain morning in August, Bagwax was seated at his table, which as

usual was laden with the envelopes of many letters. There were some

hundreds before him, the marks on which he was perusing with a strong

magnifying-glass. It had been arranged that he was to start on his great

journey in the first week in September, and he employed his time before

he went in scanning all the envelopes bearing the Sydney postmark which

he had been able to procure in England. He spent the entire day with a

magnifying-glass in his hand;--but as Curlydown was also always armed in

the same fashion, that was not peculiar. They did much of their work

with such tools.

The date on the envelope,--the date conveyed by the impression, to which

so much attention had been given,--was 10th May 1873. Bagwax had

succeeded in getting covers bearing dates very close to that. The 7th of

May had been among his treasures for some time, and now he had acquired

an entire letter, envelope and all, which bore the Sydney impression of

the 13th May. This was a great triumph. 'I have brought it within a

week,' he said to Curlydown, bending down over his glass, and inspecting

at the same time the two dates.

'What's the good of that?' asked Curlydown, as he passed rapidly under

his own glass the stamps which it was his duty to inspect from day to

day.

'All the good in the world,' said Bagwax, brandishing his own magnifier

with energy. 'It is almost conclusive.' Now the argument with Bagwax was

this,--that if he found in the Sydney postmarks of 7th May, and in those

of 13th May, the same deviations or bruises in the die, those deviations

must have existed also on the days between these two dates;--and as the

impression before him was quite perfect, without any deviation, did it

not follow that it must have been obtained in some manner outside the

ordinary course of business?

'There are a dozen stamps in use at the Sydney office,' said Curlydown.

'Perhaps so; or, at any rate, three or four. But I can trace as well as

possible the times at which new stamps were supplied. Look here.' Then

he threw himself over the multitude of envelopes, all of which had been

carefully arranged as to dates, and began to point out the periods.

'Here, you see, in 1873, there is nothing that quite tallies with the

Caldigate letter. I have measured them to the twentieth part of an inch,

and I am sure that early in May '73 there was not a stamp in use in the

Sydney office which could have made that impression. I have eighteen

Mays '73, and not one of them could have been made by the stamp that did

this.' As he spoke thus, he rapped his finger down on the copy of the

sacred envelope which he was using. 'Is not that conclusive?'

'If it was not conclusive to keep a man from going to prison,' said

Curlydown, remembering the failure of his own examination, 'it will not

be conclusive to get him out again.'

'There I differ. No doubt further evidence is necessary and therefore I

must go to Sydney.'

'If it is conclusive, I don't see why you should go to Sydney at all. If

your proof is so perfect, why should that fellow be kept in prison while

you are running about the world?'

This idea had also occurred to Bagwax, and he had thought whether it

would be possible for him to be magnanimous enough to perfect his proof

in England, so as to get a pardon from the Secretary of State at once,

to his own manifest injury. 'What would satisfy you and me,' said

Bagwax, 'wouldn't satisfy the ignorant.' To the conductor of an omnibus

on the Surrey side of the river, the man who does not know what 'The

Castle' means is ignorant. The outsider who is in a mist as to the

'former question,' or 'the order of the day,' is ignorant to the member

of Parliament. To have no definite date conveyed by the term 'Rogation

Sunday' is to the clerical mind gross ignorance. The horsey man thinks

you have been in bed all your life if the 'near side' is not as

descriptive to you as 'the left hand.' To Bagwax and Curlydown, not to

distinguish postmarks was to be ignorant. 'I fear it wouldn't satisfy

the ignorant,' said Bagwax, thinking of his projected journey to

Sydney.

'Proof is proof,' said Curlydown. 'I don't think you'll ever get him

out. The time has gone by. But you may do just as much here as there.'

'I'm sure we shall get him out. I'll never rest in my bed till we have

got him out.'

'Mr. Justice Bramber won't mind whether you rest in your bed or

not,--nor yet the Secretary of State.'

'Sir John Joram--' began Bagwax. In these discussions Sir John Joram was

always his main staff.

'Sir John Joram has got other fish to fry before this time. It's a

marvel to me, Bagwax, that they should give way to all this nonsense. If

anything could be done, it could be done in half the time,--and if

anything could be done, it could be done here. By the time you're back

from Sydney, Caldigate's time will be half out. Why don't you let Sir

John see your proof? You don't want to lose your trip, I suppose.'

Caldigate was languishing in prison, and that poor, nameless lady was

separated from her husband, and he had the proof lying there on the table

before him,--sufficient proof, as he did in his heart believe! But how

often does it fall to the lot of a post-office clerk to be taken round

the world free of expense? The way Curlydown put it was ill-natured and

full of envy. Bagwax was well aware that Curlydown was instigated solely

by envy. But still, these were his own convictions,--and Bagwax was in

truth a soft-hearted, conscientious man.

'I do think it ought to be enough for any Secretary of State,' said he,

'and I'll go to Sir John Joram to-morrow. Of course, I should like to see

the world;--who wouldn't? But I'd rather be the means of restoring that

fellow to his poor wife, than be sent to all the four quarters of the

globe with a guinea a-day for personal expenses.' In this way he nobly

made up his mind to go at once to Sir John Joram.

Chapter XLVIII

Sir John Joram's Chambers

Mr. Curlydown's insinuations had been very cruel, but also very

powerful. Bagwax, as he considered the matter that night in his bed, did

conscientiously think that a discreet and humane Secretary of State

would let the unfortunate husband out of prison on the evidence which he

(Bagwax) had already collected. My readers will not perhaps agree with

him. The finding of a jury and the sentence of a judge must be regarded

seriously by Secretaries of State, and it is probable that Bagwax's

theory would not make itself clear to that great functionary. A good

many 'ifs' were necessary. If the woman claiming Caldigate as her

husband would swear falsely to anything in that matter, then she would

swear falsely to everything. If this envelope had never passed through

the Sydney post-office then she would have sworn falsely about the

letter,--and therefore her evidence would have been altogether false. If

this postmark had not been made in the due course of business, and on

the date as now seen, then the envelope had not passed regularly through

the Sydney office. So far it was all clear to the mind of Bagwax, and

almost clear that the postmark could not have been made on the date it

bore. The result for which he was striving with true faith had taken

such a hold of his mind, he was so adverse to the Smith-Crinkett

interest, and so generously anxious for John Caldigate and the poor lady

at Folking, that he could not see obstacles;--he could not even clearly

see the very obstacles which made his own going to Sydney seem to others

to be necessary. And yet he longed to go to Sydney with all his heart.

He would be almost broken-hearted if he were robbed of that delight.

In this frame of mind he packed all his envelopes carefully into a large

hand-bag, and started in a cab for Sir John Joram's chambers. 'Where are

you going with them now?' Curlydown asked, somewhat disdainfully, just

as Bagwax was starting. Curlydown had taken upon himself of late to

ridicule the envelopes, and had become almost an anti-Caldigatite.

Bagwax vouchsafed to make him no reply. On the previous afternoon he had

declared his purpose of going at once to Sir John, and had written, as

Curlydown well knew, a letter to Sir John's clerk to make an

appointment. Sir John was known to be in town though it was the end of

August, being a laborious man who contented himself with a little

partridge-shooting by way of holiday. It had been understood that he was

to see Bagwax before his departure. All this had been known to

Curlydown, and the question had been asked only to exasperate. There was

a sarcasm in the 'now' which determined Bagwax to start without a word

of reply.

As he went down to the Temple in the cab he turned over in his mind a

great question which often troubles many of us. How far was he bound to

sacrifice himself for the benefit of others? He had done his duty

zealously in this matter, and now was under orders to continue the work

in a manner which opened up to him a whole paradise of happiness. How

grand was this opportunity of seeing something of the world beyond St.

Martin's-le-Grand! And then the pecuniary gain would be so great!

Hitherto he had received no pay for what he had done. He was a simple

post-office clerk, and was paid for his time by the Crown,--very

moderately. On this projected journey all his expenses would be paid for

him, and still he would have his salary. Sir John Joram had declared the

journey to be quite necessary. The Secretary of State had probably not

occupied his mind much with the matter; but in the mind of Bagwax there

was a fixed idea that the Secretary thought of little else, and that the

Secretary had declared that his hands were tied till Bagwax should have

been to Sydney. But his conscience told him that the journey was not

necessary, and that the delay would be cruel. In that cab Bagwax made up

his mind that he would do his duty like an honest man.

Sir John's chambers in Pump Court were gloomy without, though commodious

and ample within. Bagwax was now well known to the clerk, and was

received almost as a friend. 'I think I've got it all as clear as

running water, Mr. Jones,' he said, feeling no doubt that Sir John's

clerk, Mr. Jones, must feel that interest in the case which pervaded his

own mind.

'That will be a good thing for the gentleman in prison, Mr. Bagwax.'

'And for the lady; poor lady! I don't know whether I don't think almost

more of her than of him.' Mr. Jones was returning to his work, having

sent in word to Sir John of this visitor's arrival. But Bagwax was too

full of his subject, and of his own honesty, for that. 'I don't think

that I need go out after all, Mr. Jones.'

'Oh indeed!'

'Of course it will be a great sell for me.'

'Will it, now?'

'Sydney, I am told, is an Elysium upon earth.'

'It's much the same as Botany Bay; isn't it?' asked Jones.

'Oh, not at all; quite a different place. I was reading a book the other

day which said that Sydney harbour is the most beautiful thing God ever

made on the face of the globe.'

'I know there used to be convicts there,' said Mr. Jones, very

positively.

'Perhaps they had a few once, but never many. They have oranges there,

and a Parliament almost as good as our own, and a beautiful new

post-office. But I shan't have to go, Mr. Jones. Of course, a man has to

do his duty.'

'Some do, and more don't. That's as far as I see, Mr. Bagwax.'

'I'm all for Nelson's motto, Mr. Jones,--"England expects that every man

this day shall do his duty."' In repeating these memorable words Bagwax

raised his voice.

'Sir John don't like to hear anything through the partition, Mr.

Bagwax.'

'I beg pardon. But whenever I think of that glorious observation I am

apt to become a little excited. It'll go a long way, Mr. Jones, in

keeping a man straight if he'll only say it to himself often enough.'

'But not to roar it out in an eminent barrister's chambers. He didn't

hear you, I daresay; only I thought I'd just caution you.'

'Quite right, Mr. Jones. Now I mean to do mine. I think we can get the

party out of prison without any journey to Sydney at all; and I'm not

going to stand in the way of it. I have devoted myself to this case, and

I'm not going to let my own interest stand in the way. Mr. Jones, let a

man be ever so humble, England does expect--that he'll do his duty.'

'By George, he'll hear you, Mr. Bagwax;--he will indeed.' But at that

moment Sir John's bell was rung, and Bagwax was summoned into the great

man's room. Sir John was sitting at a large office-table so completely

covered with papers that a whole chaos of legal atoms seemed to have

been deposited there by the fortuitous operation of ages. Bagwax, who

had his large bag in his hand, looked forlornly round the room for some

freer and more fitting board on which he might expose his documents. But

there was none. There were bookshelves filled with books, and a large

sofa which was covered also with papers, and another table laden with

what seemed to be a concrete chaos,--whereas the chaos in front of Sir

John was a chaos in solution. Sir John liked Bagwax, though he was

generally opposed to zealous co-operators. There was in the man a

mixture of intelligence and absurdity, of real feeling and affectation,

of genuine humility as to himself personally and of thorough confidence

in himself post-officially, which had gratified Sir John; and Sir John

had been quite sure that the post-office clerk had intended to speak the

absolute truth, with an honest, manly conviction in the innocence of his

client, and in the guilt of the witnesses on the other side. He was

therefore well disposed towards Bagwax. 'Well, Mr. Bagwax he said; 'so I

understand you have got a little further in the matter since I saw you

last.'

'A good deal further, Sir John.'

'As how? Perhaps you can explain it shortly.'

This was troublesome. Bagwax did not think that he could explain the

matter very shortly. He could not explain the matter at all without

showing his envelopes; and how was he to show them in the present

condition of that room? He immediately dived into his bag and brought

forth the first bundle of envelopes. 'Perhaps, Sir John, I had better

put them out upon the floor,' he said.

'Must I see all those?'

There were many more bundles within which Bagwax was anxious that the

barrister should examine minutely. 'It is very important, Sir John. It

is indeed. It is really altogether a case of postmarks,--altogether. We

have never in our branch had anything so interesting before. If we can

show that that envelope certainly was not stamped with that postmark in

the Sydney post-office on the 10th May 1873, then we shall get him

out,--shan't we?'

'It will be very material, Mr. Bagwax,' said Sir John, cautiously.

'They will all have sworn falsely, and then somebody must have obtained

the postmark surreptitiously. There must have been a regular plant. The

stamp must have been made up and dated on purpose,--so as to give a

false date. Some official in the Sydney post-office must have been

employed.'

'That's what we want you to find out over there,' said Sir John, who was

not quite so zealous, perhaps not quite so conscientious, as his more

humble assistant,--whose mind was more occupied with other matters.

'You'll find out all that at Sydney.'

The temptation was very great. Sir John wanted him to go,--told him that

he ought to go! Sir John was the man responsible for the whole matter.

He, Bagwax, had done his best. Could it be right for him to provoke Sir

John by contesting the matter,--contesting it so much to his own

disadvantage? Had he not done enough for honesty?--enough to satisfy

even that grand idea of duty? As he turned the bundle of documents round

in his hand, he made up his mind that he had not done enough. There was

a little gurgle in his throat, almost a tear in his eye, as he replied,

'I don't think I should be wanted to go if you would look at these

envelopes.'

Sir John understood it all at once,--and there was much to understand.

He knew how anxious the man was to go on this projected journey, and he

perceived the cause which was inducing him to surrender his own

interests. He remembered that the journey must be made at a great

expense to his own client. He ran over the case in his mind, and

acknowledged to himself that conclusive evidence,--evidence that should

be quite conclusive,--of fraud as to the envelope, might possibly

suffice to release his client at once from prison. He told himself also

that he could not dare to express an opinion on the matter himself

without a close inspection of those postmarks,--that a close inspection

might probably take two hours, and that the two hours would finally have

to be abstracted from the already curtailed period of his nightly

slumbers. Then he thought of the state of his tables, and the

difficulties as to space. Perhaps that idea was the one strongest in his

mind against the examination.

But then what a hero was Bagwax! What self-abnegation was there! Should

he be less ready to devote himself to his client,--he, who was paid for

his work,--than this post-office clerk, who was as pure in his honesty

as he was zealous in the cause? 'There are a great many of them, I

suppose?' he said, almost whining.

'A good many, Sir John.'

'Have at it!' said the Queen's Counsel and late Attorney-General,

springing up from his chair. Bagwax almost jumped out of the way, so

startled was he by the quick and sudden movement. Sir John rang his

bell; but not waiting for the clerk, began to hurl the chaos in solution

on to the top of the concrete chaos. Bagwax naturally attempted to

assist him. 'For G---'s sake, don't you touch them!' said Sir John, as

though avenging himself by a touch of scorn for the evil thing which was

being done to him. Then Jones hurried into the room, and with more

careful hands assisted his master, trying to preserve some order with

the disturbed papers. In this way the large office-table was within

three minutes made clear for the Bagwaxian strategy. Mr. Jones declared

afterwards that it was seven years since he had seen the entire top of

that table. 'Now go ahead!' said Sir John, who seemed, during the

operation, to have lost something of his ordinary dignity.

Bagwax, who since that little check had been standing perfectly still,

with his open bag in his hands, at once began his work. The plain before

him was immense, and he was able to marshal all his forces. In the

centre, and nearest to Sir John, as he sat in his usual chair, were

exposed all the Mays '73. For it was thus that he denominated the

envelopes with which he was so familiar. There were 71's, and 72's, and

74's, and 75's. But the 73's were all arranged in months, and then in

days. He began by explaining that he had obtained all these envelopes

'promiscuously,' as he said. There had been no selection, none had been

rejected. Then courteously handing his official magnifying-glass to the

barrister, he invited him to inspect them all generally,--to make, as it

were, a first cursory inspection,--so that he might see that there was

not one perfect impression perfect as that impression on the Caldigate

envelope was perfect. 'Not one,' said Bagwax, beating his bosom in

triumph.

'That seems perfect,' said Sir John, pointing with the glass to a

selected specimen.

'Your eyes are very good, Sir John,--very good indeed. You have found

the cleanest and truest of the whole lot. But if you'll examine the tail

of the Y, you'll see it's been rubbed a little. And then if you'll

follow with your eye the circular line which makes up the round of the

postmark, you'll find a dent on the outside bar. I go more on the dents

in those bars, Sir John, than I do on the figures. All the bars are

dented more or less,--particularly the Mays '73. They don't remain quite

true, Sir John,--not after a day's fair use. They've taken a new stamp

out of the store to do the Caldigate envelope. They couldn't get at the

stamps in use. That's how it has been.'

Sir John listened in silence as he continued to examine one envelope

after another through the glass. 'Now, Sir John, if we come to the Mays

'73, we shall find that just about that time there has been no new stamp

brought into use. There isn't one, either, that is exactly the Caldigate

breadth. I've brought a rule by which you can get to the fiftieth of an

inch.' Here Bagwax brought out a little ivory instrument marked all over

with figures. 'Of course they're intended to be of the same pattern. But

gradually, very gradually, the circle has always become smaller. Isn't

that conclusive? The Caldigate impression is a little, very

little--ever so little--but a little smaller than any of the Mays '73.

Isn't that conclusive?'

'If I understand it, Mr. Bagwax, you don't pretend to say that you have

got impressions of all the stamps which may have been in use in the

Sydney office at that time? But in Sydney, if I understand the matter

rightly, they keep daily impressions of all the stamps in a book.'

'Just so--just so, Sir John,' said Bagwax, feeling that every word

spoken to the lawyer renewed his own hopes of going out to Sydney,--but

feeling also that Sir John would be wrong, very wrong, if he subjected

his client to so unnecessarily prolonged a detention in the Cambridge

county prison. 'They do keep a book which would be quite conclusive. I

could have the pages photographed.'

'Would not that be best? and you might probably find out who it was who

gave this fraudulent aid.'

'I could find out everything,' said Bagwax, energetically; 'but----'

'But what?'

'It is all found out there. It is indeed, Sir John. If I could get you

to go along with me, you would see that that letter couldn't have gone

through the Sydney post-office.'

'I think I do see it. But it is so difficult, Mr. Bagwax, to make others

see things.'

'And if it didn't,--and it never did;--but if it didn't, why did they

say it did? Why did they swear it did? Isn't that enough to make any

Secretary let him go?'

The energy, the zeal, the true faith of the man, were admirable. Sir

John was half disposed to rise from his seat to embrace the man, and

hail him as his brother,--only that had he done so he would have made

himself as ridiculous as Bagwax. Zeal is always ridiculous. 'I think I

see it all,' he said.

'And won't they let the man go?'

'There were four persons who swore positively that they were present at

the marriage, one of them being the woman who is said to have been

married. That is direct evidence. With all our search, we have hitherto

found no one to give us any direct evidence to rebut this. Then they

brought forward, to corroborate these statements, a certain amount of

circumstantial evidence,--and among other things this letter.'

'The Caldigate envelope,' said Bagwax, eagerly.

'What you call the Caldigate envelope. It was unnecessary, perhaps; and,

if fraudulent, certainly foolish. They would have had their verdict

without it.'

'But they did it,' said Bagwax, in a tone of triumph.

'It is a pity, Mr. Bagwax, you were not brought up to our profession.

You would have made a great lawyer.'

'Oh, Sir John!'

'Yes, they did it. And if it can be proved that they have done it

fraudulently, no doubt that fraud will stain their direct evidence. But

we have to remember that the verdict has been already obtained. We are

not struggling now with a jury, but with an impassive emblem of

sovereign justice.'

'And therefore the real facts will go the further, Sir John.'

'Well argued, Mr. Bagwax,--admirably well argued. If you should ever be

called, I hope I may not have you against me very often. But I will

think of it all. You can take the envelopes away with you, because you

have impressed me vividly with all that they can tell me. My present

impression is, that you had better take the journey. But within the next

few days I will give a little more thought to it, and you shall hear

from me.' Then he put out his hand, which was a courtesy Mr. Bagwax had

never before enjoyed 'You may believe me, Mr. Bagwax, when I say that I

have come across many remarkable men in many cases which have fallen

into my hands,--but that I have rarely encountered a man whom I have

more thoroughly respected than I do you.'

Mr. Bagwax went away to his own lodging exulting,--but more than ever

resolved that the journey to Sydney was unnecessary. As usual, he spent

a large portion of that afternoon in contemplating the envelopes; and

then, as he was doing so, another idea struck him,--an idea which

made him tear his hairs with disgust because it had not occurred to

him before. There was now opened to him a new scope of inquiry, an

altogether different matter of evidence. But the idea was by far too

important to be brought in and explained at the fag-end of a chapter.

Chapter XLIX

All the Shands

There had been something almost approaching to exultation at Babington

when the tidings of Caldigate's alleged Australian wife were first heard

there. As the anger had been great that Julia should be rejected, so had

the family congratulation been almost triumphant when the danger which

had been escaped was appreciated. There had been something of the same

feeling at Pollington among the Shands--who had no doubt allowed

themselves to think that Maria had been ill-treated by John Caldigate.

He ought to have married Maria,--at least such was the opinion of the

ladies of the family, who were greatly impressed with the importance of

the little book which had been carried away. But in regard to the

Australian marriage, they had differed among themselves. That Maria

should have escaped the terrible doom which had befallen Mrs. Bolton's

daughter, was, of course, a source of comfort. But Maria herself would

never believe the evil story. John Caldigate had not been--well, perhaps

not quite true to her. So much she acknowledged gently with the germ of

a tear in her eye. But she was quite sure that he would not have married

Hester Bolton while another wife was living in Australia. She arose

almost to enthusiasm as she vindicated his character from so base a

stain. He had been, perhaps, a little unstable in his affections,--as

men are so commonly. But not even when the jury found their verdict,

could she be got to believe that the John Caldigate whom she had known

would have betrayed a girl whom he loved as he was supposed to have

betrayed Hester Bolton. The mother and sisters, who knew the softness of

Maria's disposition,--and who had been more angry than their sister with

the man who had been wicked enough to carry away Thomson's 'Seasons' in

his portmanteau without marrying the girl who had put it there,--would

not agree to this. The verdict, at any rate, was a verdict. John

Caldigate was in prison. The poor young woman with her infant was a

nameless, unfortunate creature. All this might have happened to their

Maria. 'I should always have believed him innocent,' said Maria, wiping

away the germ of the tear with her knuckle.

The matter was very often discussed in the doctor's house at

Pollington,--as it was, indeed, by the public generally, and especially

in the eastern counties. But in this house there a double interest

attached to it. In the first place, there was Maria's escape,--which the

younger girls were accustomed to talk of as having been 'almost

miraculous;' and then there was Dick's absolute disappearance. It had

been declared at the trial, on behalf of Caldigate, that if Dick could

have been put into the witness-box, he would have been able to swear

that there had been no such marriage ceremony as that which the four

witnesses had elaborately described. On the other hand, the woman and

Crinkett had sworn boldly that Dick Shand, though not present at the

marriage, had been well aware that it had taken place, and that Dick,

could his evidence have been secured, would certainly have been a

witness on their side. He had been outside the tent,--so said the

woman,--when the marriage was being performed, and had refused to enter,

by way of showing his continued hostility to an arrangement which he had

always opposed. But when the woman said this, it was known that Dick

Shand would not appear, and the opinion was general that Dick had died

in his poverty and distress. Men who sink to be shepherds in Australia

because they are noted drunkards, generally do die. The constrained

abstinence of perhaps six months in the wilderness is agonising at

first, and nearly fatal. Then the poor wretch rushes to the joys of an

orgy with ten or fifteen pounds in his pocket; and the stuff which is

given to him as brandy soon puts an end to his sufferings. There was but

little doubt that such had been the fate of Dick,--unless, perhaps, in

the bosom of Maria and of his mother.

It was known too at Pollington, as well as elsewhere in the month of

August, that efforts were still to be made with the view of upsetting

the verdict. Something had crept out to the public as to the researches

made by Bagwax, and allusions had been frequent as to the unfortunate

absence of Dick Shand. The betting, had there been betting, would no

doubt have been in favour of the verdict. The four witnesses had told

their tale in a straightforward way; and though they were, from their

characters, not entitled to perfect credit, still their evidence had in

no wise been shaken. They were mean, dishonest folk, no doubt. They had

taken Caldigate's money, and had still gone on with the prosecution.

Even if there had been some sort of a marriage, the woman should have

taken herself off when she had received her money, and left poor Hester

to enjoy her happiness, her husband, and her home at Bolton. That was

the general feeling. But it was hardly thought that Bagwax, with his

envelope, would prevail over Judge Bramber in the mind of the Secretary

of State. Probably there had been a marriage. But it was singular that

the two men who could have given unimpeachable evidence on the matter

should both have vanished out of the world; Allan, the minister,--and

Dick Shand, the miner and shepherd.

'What will she do when he comes out?' Maria asked. Mrs.

Rewble,--Harriet,--the curate's wife, was there. Mr. Rewble, as curate,

found it convenient to make frequent visits to his father-in-law's

house. And Mrs. Posttlethwaite,--Matilda,--was with them, as Mr.

Posttlethwaite's business in the soap line caused him to live at

Pollington. And there were two unmarried sisters, Fanny and Jane. Mrs.

Rewble was by this time quite the matron, and Mrs. Posttlethwaite was

also the happy mother of children. But Maria was still Maria. Fanny

already had a string to her bow,--and Jane was expectant of many

strings.

'She ought to go back to her father and mother, of course,' said Mrs.

Rewble, indignantly.

'I know I wouldn't,' said Jane.

'You know nothing about it, miss, and you ought not to speak of such a

thing,' said the curate's wife. Jane at this made a grimace which was

intended to be seen only by her sister Fanny.

'It is very hard that two loving hearts should be divided,' said Maria.

'I never thought so much of John Caldigate as you did,' said Mrs.

Posttlethwaite. 'He seems to have been able to love a good many young

women all at the same time.'

'It's like tasting a lot of cheeses, till you get the one that suits

you,' said Jane. This offended the elder sister so grievously that she

declared she did not know what their mother was about, to allow such

liberty to the girls, and then suggested that the conversation should be

changed.

'I'm sure I did not say anything wrong,' said Jane, 'and I suppose it

is like that. A gentleman has to find out whom he likes best. And as he

liked Miss Bolton best, I think it's a thousand pities they should be

parted.'

'Ten thousand pities!' said Maria enthusiastically.

'Particularly as there is a baby,' said Jane,--upon which Mrs. Rewble

was again very angry.

'If Dick were to come home, he'd clear it all up at once,' said Mrs.

Posttlethwaite.

'Dick will never come home,' said Matilda mournfully.

'Never!' said Mrs. Rewble. 'I am afraid that he has expiated all his

indiscretions. It should make us who were born girls thankful that we

have not been subjected to the same temptations.'

'I should like to be a man all the same,' said Jane.

'You do not at all know what you are saying,' replied the monitor. 'How

little have you realized what poor Dick must have suffered! I wonder

when they are going to let us have tea. I'm almost famished.' Mrs.

Rewble was known in the family for having a good appetite. They were

sitting at this moment round a table on the lawn, at which they intended

to partake of their evening meal. The doctor might or might not join

them. Mrs. Shand, who did not like the open air, would have hers sent to

her in the drawing-room. Mr. Rewble would certainly be there. Mr.

Posttlethwaite, who had been home to his dinner, had gone back to the

soap-works. 'Don't you think, Jane, if you were to go in, you could

hurry them?' Then Jane went in and hurried the servant.

'There's a strange man with papa,' said Jane, as she returned.

'There are always strange men with papa,' said Fanny. 'I daresay he has

come to have his tooth out.' For the doctor's practice was altogether

general. From a baby to a back-tooth, he attended to everything now, as

he had done forty years ago.

'But this man isn't like a patient. The door was half open, and I saw

papa holding him by both hands.'

'A lunatic!' exclaimed Mrs. Rewble, thinking that Mr. Rewble ought to be

sent at once to her father's assistance.

'He was quite quiet, and just for a moment I could see papa's face. It

wasn't a patient at all. Oh, Maria!'

'What is it, child?' asked Mrs. Rewble.

'I do believe that Dick has come back.'

They all jumped up from their seats suddenly. Then Mrs. Rewble reseated

herself. 'Jane is such a fool!' she said.

'I do believe it,' said Jane. 'He had yellow trousers on, as if he had

come from a long way off. And I'm sure papa was very glad,--why should

he take both his hands?'

'I feel as though my legs were sinking under me,' said Maria.

'I don't think it possible for a moment,' said Mrs. Rewble. 'Maria, you

are so romantic! You would believe anything.'

'It is possible,' said Mrs. Posttlethwaite.

'If you will remain here, I will go into the house and inquire,' said

Mrs. Rewble. But it did not suit the others to remain there. For a

moment the suggestion had been so awful that they had not dared to stir;

but when the elder sister slowly moved towards the door which led into

the house from the garden, they all followed her. Then suddenly they

heard a scream, which they knew to come from their mother. 'I believe it

is Dick,' said Mrs. Rewble, standing in the doorway so as to detain the

others. 'What ought we to do?'

'Let me go in,' said Jane, impetuously. 'He is my brother.'

Maria was already dissolved in tears. Mrs. Posttlethwaite was struck

dumb by the awfulness of the occasion, and clung fast to her sister

Matilda.

'It will be like one from the grave,' said Mrs. Rewble, solemnly.

'Let me go in,' repeated Jane, impetuously. Then she pushed by her

sisters, and was the first to enter the house. They all followed her

into the hall, and there they found their mother supported in the arms

of the man who wore the yellow trousers. Dick Shand had in truth

returned to his father's house.

The first thing to do with a returned prodigal is to kiss him, and the

next to feed him; and therefore Dick was led away at once to the table

on the lawn. But he gave no sign of requiring the immediate slaughter of

a fatted calf. Though he had not exactly the appearance of a well-to-do

English gentleman, he did not seem to be in want. The yellow trousers

were of strong material, and in good order, made of that colour for

colonial use, probably with the idea of expressing some contempt for the

dingy hues which prevail among the legs of men at home. He wore a very

large checked waistcoat, and a stout square coat of the same material.

There was no look of poverty, and no doubt he had that day eaten a

substantial dinner; but the anxious mother was desirous of feeding him

immediately, and whispered to Jane some instructions as to cold beef,

which was to be added to the tea and toast.

As they examined him, holding him by the arms and hands, and gazing up

into his face, the same idea occurred to all of them. Though they knew

him very well now, they would hardly have known him had they met him

suddenly in the streets. He seemed to have grown fifteen years older

during the seven years of his absence. His face had become thin and long

and almost hollow. His beard went all round under his chin, and was

clipped into the appearance of a stiff thick hedge--equally thick, and

equally broad, and equally protrusive at all parts. And within this

enclosure it was shorn. But his mouth had sunk in, and his eyes. In

colour he was almost darker than brown. You would have said that his

skin had been tanned black, but for the infusion of red across it here

and there. He seemed to be in good present health, but certainly bore

the traces of many hardships 'And here you are all just as I left you,'

he said, counting up his sisters.

'Not exactly,' said Mrs. Rewble, remembering her family. 'And Matilda

has got two.'

'Not husbands, I hope,' said Dick.

'Oh, Dick! that is so like you,' said Jane, getting up and kissing him

again in her delight. Then Mr. Rewble came forward, and the

brothers-in-law renewed their old acquaintance.

'It seems just like the other day,' said Dick, looking round upon the

rose-bushes.

'Oh my boy! my darling, darling boy!' said the mother, who had hurried

up-stairs for her shawl, conscious of her rheumatism even amidst the

excitement of her son's return. 'Oh, Dick! This is the happiest day of

all my life. Wouldn't you like something better than tea?' This she said

with many memories and many thoughts; but still, with a mother's love,

unable to refrain from offering what she thought her son would wish to

have.

'There ain't anything better,' said Dick very solemnly.

'Nothing half so good to my thinking,' said Mrs. Rewble, imagining that

by a word in season she might help the good work.

The mother's eyes were filled with tears, but she did not dare to speak

a word. Then there was a silence for a few moments. 'Tell us all about

it, Dick,' said the father. 'There's whisky inside if you like it.' Dick

shook his head solemnly,--but, as they all thought, with a certain air

of regret. Tell us what you have to say,' repeated the doctor.

'I'm sworn off these two years.'

'Touched nothing for two years?' said the mother exultingly, with her

arms and shawl again round her son's neck.

'A teetotaller?' said Maria.

'Anything you like to call it. Only, what a gentleman's habits are in

that respect needn't be made the subject of general remark.' It was

evident he was a little sore, and Jane, therefore, offered him a dish

full of gooseberries. He took the plate in his hand and ate them

assiduously for a while in silence, as though unconscious of what he was

doing. 'You know all about it now, don't you?'

'Oh my dearest boy!' ejaculated the mother.

'You didn't get better gooseberries than those on your travels,' said

the doctor, calling him back to the condition of the world around him.

Then he told them of his adventures. For two terrible years he had been

a shepherd on different sheep-runs up in Queensland. Then he had found

employment on a sugar plantation, and had superintended the work of a

gang of South Sea Islanders,--Canakers they are called,--men who are

brought into the colony from the islands of the Pacific,--and who return

thence to their homes generally every three years, much to the regret of

their employers. In the transit of these men agents are employed, and to

this service Dick had, after a term, found himself promoted. Then it had

come to pass that he had remained for a period on one of these islands,

with the view of persuading the men to emigrate and reemigrate; and had

thus been resident among them for more than a couple of years. They had

used him well, and he had liked the islands,--having lived in one of

them without seeing another European for many months. Then the payments

which had from time to time been made to him by the Queensland planters

were stopped, and his business, such as it had been, came to an end. He

had found himself with just sufficient money to bring him home; and here

he was.

'My boy, my darling boy!' exclaimed his mother again, as though all

their joint troubles were now over.

The doctor remembered the adage of the rolling stone, and felt that the

return of a son at the age of thirty, without any means of maintaining

himself, was hardly an unalloyed blessing. He was not the man to turn a

son out of doors. He had always broadened his back to bear the full

burden of his large family. But even at this moment he was a little

melancholy as he thought of the difficulty of finding employment for the

wearer of those yellow trousers. How was it possible that a man should

continue to live an altogether idle life at Pollington and still remain

a teetotaller? 'Have you any plans I can help you in now?' he asked.

'Of course he'll remain at home for a while before he thinks of

anything,' said the mother.

'I suppose I must look about me,' said Dick. By-the-by, what has become

of John Caldigate?'

They all at once gazed at each other. It could hardly be that he did not

in truth know what had become of John Caldigate.

'Haven't you heard?' asked Maria.

'Of course he has heard,' said Mrs. Rewble.

'You must have heard,' said the mother.

'I don't in the least know what you are talking about. I have heard

nothing at all.'

In very truth he had heard nothing of his old friend,--not even that he

had returned to England. Then by degrees the whole story was told to

him. 'I know that he was putting a lot of money together,' said Dick

enviously. 'Married Hester Bolton? I thought he would! Bigamy! Euphemia

Smith! Married before! Certainly not at the diggings.'

'He wasn't married up at Ahalala?' asked the doctor.

'To Euphemia Smith? I was there when they quarrelled, and when she went

into partnership with Crinkett. I am sure there was no such marriage.

John Caldigate in prison for bigamy? And he paid them twenty thousand

pounds? The more fool he!'

'They all say that.'

'But it's an infernal plant. As sure as my name is Richard Shand, John

Caldigate never married that woman.'

Chapter L

Again at Sir John's Chambers

And this was the man as to whom it had been acknowledged that his

evidence, if it could be obtained, would be final. The return of Dick

himself was to the Shands an affair so much more momentous than the

release of John Caldigate from prison, that for some hours or so the

latter subject was allowed to pass out of sight. The mother got him

up-stairs and asked after his linen,--vain inquiry,--and arranged for

his bed, turning all the little Rewbles into one small room. In the long

run, grandmothers are more tender to their grand-children than their own

offspring. But at this moment Dick was predominant. How grand a thing to

have her son returned to her, and such a son,--a teetotaller of two

years' growth, who had seen all the world of the Pacific Ocean! As he

could not take whisky-and-water, would he like ginger-beer before he

went to bed,--or arrowroot? Dick decided in favour of ginger-beer, and

consented to be embraced again.

It was, I think, to Maria's credit that she was the first to bring back

the conversation to John Caldigate's marriage. 'Was she a very horrible

woman?' Maria asked, referring to Euphemia Smith.

'There were a good many of 'em out there, greedy after gold,' said Dick;

'but she beat 'em all; and she was awfully clever.'

'In what way, Dick?' asked Mrs. Rewble. Because she does not seem to me

to have done very well with herself.'

'She knew more about shares than any man of them all. But I think she

just drank a little. It was that which disgusted Caldigate.'

'He had been very fond of her?' suggested Maria.

'I never knew a man so taken with a woman.' Maria blushed, and Mrs.

Rewble looked round at her younger sisters as though desirous that they

should be sent to bed. 'All that began on board the ship. Then he was

fool enough to run after her down to Sydney; and of course she followed

him up to the mines.'

'I don't know why of course,' said Mrs. Posttlethwaite defending her sex

generally.

'Well, she did. And he was going to marry her. He did mean to marry

her;--there's no doubt of that. But it was a queer kind of life we lived

up there.'

'I suppose so,' said the doctor. Mrs. Rewble again looked at the girls

and then at her mother; but Mrs. Shand was older and less timid than her

married daughter. Mrs. Rewble when a girl herself had never been sent

away, and was now a pattern of female discretion.

'And she,' continued Dick, 'as soon as she had begun to finger the

scrip, thought of nothing but gold. She did not care much for marriage

just then, because she fancied the stuff wouldn't belong to herself. She

became largely concerned in the "Old Stick-in-the-Mud." That was

Crinkett's concern, and there were times at which I thought she would

marry him. Then Caldigate got rid of her altogether. That was before I

went away.'

'He never married her?' asked the doctor.

'He certainly hadn't married her when I left Nobble in June '73.'

'You can swear to that, Dick?'

'Certainly I can. I was with him every day. But there wasn't anyone

round there who didn't know how it was. Crinkett himself knew it.'

'Crinkett is one of the gang against him.'

'And there was a man named Adamson. Adamson knew.'

'He's another of the conspirators,' said the doctor.

'They won't dare to say before me,' declared Dick, stoutly, 'that Mrs.

Smith and John Caldigate had become man and wife before June '73. And

they hated one another so much then that it is impossible they should

have come together since. I can swear they were not married up to June

'73.'

'You'll have to swear it,' said the doctor, 'and that with as little

delay as possible.'

All this took place towards the end of August, about five weeks after

the trial, and a day or two subsequent to the interview between Bagwax

and the Attorney-General. Bagwax was now vehemently prosecuting his

inquiries as to that other idea which had struck him, and was at this

very moment glowing with the anticipation of success, and at the same

time broken-hearted with the conviction that he never would see the

pleasant things of New South Wales.

On the next morning, under the auspices of his father, Dick Shand wrote

the following letter to Mr. Seely, the attorney.

'POLLINGTON, \_30th August\_, 187-.

Sir,--I think it right to tell you that I reached my father's house

in this town late yesterday evening. I have come direct from one of

the South Sea Islands \_via\_ Honolulu and San Francisco, and have not

yet been in England forty-eight hours. I am an old friend of Mr.

John Caldigate, and went with him from England to the gold diggings

in New South Wales. My name will be known to you, as I am now aware

that it was frequently mentioned in the course of the late trial. It

will probably seem odd to you that I had never even heard of the

trial till I reached my father's house last night. I did not know

that Caldigate had married Miss Bolton, nor that Euphemia Smith had

claimed him as her husband.

'I am able and willing to swear that they had not become man and

wife up to June 1873, and that no one at Ahalala or Nobble conceived

them to be man and wife. Of course, they had lived together. But

everybody knew all about it. Some time before June,--early, I should

say, in that autumn,--there had been a quarrel. I am sure they were

at daggers drawn with each other all that April and May in respect

to certain mining shares, as to which Euphemia Smith behaved very

badly. I don't think it possible that they should ever have come

together again; but in May '73,--which is the date I have heard

named,--they certainly were not man and wife.

'I have thought it right to inform you of this immediately on my

return, and am, your obedient servant,

'RICHARD SHAND.'

Mr. Seely, when he received this letter, found it to be his duty to take

it at once to Sir John Joram, up in London. He did not believe Dick

Shand. But then he had put no trust in Bagwax, and had been from the

first convinced, in his own mind, that Caldigate had married the woman.

As soon as it was known to him that his client had paid twenty thousand

pounds to Crinkett and the woman, he was quite sure of the guilt of his

client. He had done the best for Caldigate at the trial, as he would

have done for any other client; but he had never felt any of that

enthusiasm which had instigated Sir John. Now that Caldigate was in

prison, Mr. Seely thought that he might as well be left there quietly,

trusting to the verdict, trusting to Judge Bramber, and trusting still

more strongly on his own early impressions. This letter from Dick,--whom

he knew to have been a ruined drunkard, a disgrace to his family, and

an outcast from society,--was to his thinking just such a letter as

would be got up in such a case, in the futile hope of securing the

succour of a Secretary of State. He was sure that no Secretary of State

would pay the slightest attention to such a letter. But still it would

be necessary that he should show it to Sir John, and as a trip to London

was not disagreeable to his professional mind, he started with it on the

very day of its receipt.

'Of course we must have his deposition on oath,' said Sir John.

'You think it will be worth while?'

'Certainly. I am more convinced than ever that there was no marriage.

That post-office clerk has been with me,--Bagwax,--and has altogether

convinced me.'

'I didn't think so much of Bagwax, Sir John.'

'I dare say not, Mr. Seely;--an absurdly energetic man,--one of those

who destroy by their over-zeal all the credit which their truth and

energy ought to produce. But he has, I think, convinced me that that

letter could not have passed through the Sydney post-office in May '73.'

'If so, Sir John, even that is not much,--towards upsetting a verdict.'

'A good deal, I think, when the characters of the persons are

considered. Now comes this man, whom we all should have believed, had he

been present, and tells this story. You had better get hold of him and

bring him to me, Mr. Seely.'

Then Mr. Seely hung up his hat in London for three or four days, and

sent to Pollington for Dick Shand. Dick Shand obeyed the order, and both

of them waited together upon Sir John. 'You have come back at a very

critical point of time for your friend,' said the barrister.

Dick had laid aside the coat and waistcoat with the broad checks, and

the yellow trousers, and had made himself look as much like an English

gentleman as the assistance of a ready-made-clothes shop at Pollington

would permit. But still he did not quite look like a man who had spent

three years at Cambridge. His experiences among the gold diggings, then

his period of maddening desolation as a Queensland shepherd, and after

that his life among the savages in a South Sea island, had done much to

change him. Sir John and Mr. Seely together almost oppressed him. But

still he was minded to speak up for his friend. Caldigate had, upon the

whole, been very good to him, and Dick was honest. 'He has been badly

used any way,' he said.

'You have had no intercourse with any of his friends since you have been

home, I think?' This question Sir John asked because Mr. Seely had

suggested that this appearance of the man at this special moment might

not improbably be what he called a 'plant.'

'I have had no intercourse with anybody, sir. I came here last Friday,

and I hadn't spoken a word to anybody before that. I didn't know that

Caldigate had been in trouble at all. My people at Pollington were the

first to tell me about it.'

'Then you wrote to Mr. Seely? You have heard of Mr. Seely?'

'The governor,--that's my father,--he had heard of Mr. Seely. I wrote

first as he told me. They knew all about it at Pollington as well as you

do.'

'You were surprised, then, when you heard the story?'

'Knocked off my pins, sir. I never was so much taken aback in my life.

To be told that John Caldigate had married Euphemia Smith after all that

I had seen,--and that he had been married to her in May '73! I knew of

course that it was all a got-up thing. And he's in prison?'

'He is in prison, certainly.'

'For bigamy?'

'Indeed he is, Mr. Shand.'

'And how about his real wife?'

'His real wife, as you call her----'

'She is, as sure as my name is Richard Shand.'

'It is on behalf of that lady that we are almost more anxious than for

Mr. Caldigate himself. In this matter she has been perfectly innocent;

and whoever may have been the culprit,--or culprits,--she has been

cruelly ill-used.'

'She'll have her husband back again, of course,' said Dick.

'That will depend in part upon what faith the judge who tried the case

may place in your story. Your deposition shall be taken, and it will be

my duty to submit it to the Secretary of State. He will probably be

actuated by the weight which this further evidence will have upon the

judge who heard the former evidence. You will understand, Mr. Shand,

that your word will be opposed to the words of four other persons.'

'Four perjured scoundrels,' said Dick, with energy.

'Just so,--if your story be true.'

'It is true, sir,' said Dick, with much anger in his tone.

'I hope so,--with all my heart. You are on the same side with us, you

know. I only want to make you understand how much ground there may be

for doubt. It is not easy to upset a verdict. And, I fear, many

righteous verdicts would be upset if the testimony of one man could do

it. Perhaps you will be able to prove that you only arrived at Liverpool

on Saturday night.'

'Certainly I can.'

'You cannot prove that you had not heard of the case before.'

'Certainly I can. I can swear it.' Sir John smiled. 'They all knew that

at Pollington. They told me of it. The governor told me about Mr. Seely,

and made me write the letter.'

'That would not be evidence,' said Sir John.

'Heavens on earth! I tell you I was struck all on a heap when I heard

it, just as much as if they had said he'd been hung for murder. You put

Crinkett and me together and then you'll know. I suppose you think

somebody's paying me for this,--that I've got a regular tip.'

'Not at all, Mr. Shand. And I quite understand that it should be

difficult for you to understand. When a man sees a thing clearly himself

he cannot always realise the fact that others do not see it also. I

think I perceive what you have to tell us, and we are very much obliged

to you for coming forward so immediately. Perhaps you would not mind

sitting in the other room for five minutes while I say a word to Mr.

Seely.'

'I can go away altogether.'

'Mr. Seely will be glad to see you again with reference to the

deposition you will have to make. You shall not be kept waiting long.'

Then Dick returned, with a sore heart, feeling half inclined to blaze

out in wrath against the great advocate. He had come forward to tell a

plain story, having nothing to gain, paying his railway fare and other

expenses out of his own--or rather out of his father's pocket, and was

told he would not be believed! It is always hard to make an honest

witness understand that it may be the duty of others to believe him to

be a liar, and Dick Shand did not understand it now.

'There was no Australian marriage,' Sir John said as soon as he was

alone with Mr. Seely.

'You think not?'

'My mind is clear about it. We must get that man out, if it be only for

the sake of the lady.'

'It is so very easy, Sir John, to have a story like that made up.'

'I have had to do with a good many made-up stories, Mr. Seely;--and with

a good many true stories.'

'Of course, Sir John;--no man with more.'

'He might be a party to making up a story. There is nothing that I have

seen in him to make me sure that he could not come forward with a

determined perjury. I shouldn't think it, but it would be possible. But

his father and mother and sisters wouldn't join him.' Dick had told the

story of the meeting on the lawn at great length. 'And had it been a

plot, he couldn't have imposed upon them. He wouldn't have brought them

into it. And who would have got at him to arrange the plot?'

'Old Caldigate.'

Sir John shook his head. 'Neither old Caldigate nor young Caldigate knew

anything of that kind of work. And then his story tallies altogether

with my hero Bagwax. Of Bagwax I am quite sure. And as Shand

corroborates Bagwax, I am nearly sure of him also. You must take his

deposition, and let me have it. It should be rather full, as it may be

necessary to hear the depositions also of the doctor and his wife. We

shall have to get him out.'

'You know best, Sir John.'

'We shall have to get him out, Mr. Seely, I think,' said Sir John,

rising from his chair. Then Mr. Seely took his leave, as was intended.

Mr. Seely was not at all convinced. He was quite willing that John

Caldigate should be released from prison, and that the Australian

marriage should be so put out of general credit in England as to allow

the young people to live in comfort at Folking as man and wife. But he

liked to feel that he knew better himself. He would have been quite

content that Mrs. John Caldigate should be Mrs. John Caldigate to all

the world,--that all the world should be imposed on,--so that he was

made subject to no imposition. In this matter, Sir John appeared to him

to be no wider awake than a mere layman. It was clear to Mr. Seely that

Dick Shand's story was 'got up,'--and very well got up. He had no pang

of conscience as to using it. But when it came to believing it, that

was quite another thing. The man turning up exactly at the moment! And

such a man! And then his pretending never to have heard of a case so

famous! Never to have heard this story of his most intimate friend! And

then his notorious poverty! Old Caldigate would of course be able to buy

such a man. And then Sir John's fatuity as to Bagwax! He could hardly

bring himself to believe that Sir John was quite in earnest. But he was

well aware that Sir John would know,--no one better,--by what arguments

such a verdict as had been given might be practically set aside. The

verdict would remain. But a pardon, if a pardon could be got from the

Secretary of State, would make the condition of the husband and wife the

same as though there had been no verdict. The indignities which they had

already suffered would simply produce for them the affectionate

commendation of all England. Mr. Seely felt all that, and was not at all

averse to a pardon. He was not at all disposed to be severe on Caldigate

senior if, as he thought, Caldigate senior had bribed this convenient

new witness. But it was too much to expect that he should believe it all

himself.

'You must come with me, Mr. Shand,' he said, 'and we must take your

story down in writing. Then you must swear to it before a magistrate.'

'All right, Mr. Seely.'

'We must be very particular, you know.'

'I needn't be particular at all;--and as to what Sir John Joram said, I

felt half inclined to punch his head.'

'That wouldn't have helped us.'

'It was only that I thought of Caldigate in prison that I didn't do it.

Because I have been roaming about the world, not always quite as well

off as himself, he tells me that he doesn't believe my word.'

'I don't think he said that.'

'He didn't quite dare; but what he said was as bad. He told me that

some one else wouldn't believe it. I don't quite understand what it is

they're not to believe. All I say is, that they two were not married in

May '73.'

'But about your never having heard of the case till you got home?'

'I never had heard a word about it. One would think that I had done

something wrong in coming forward to tell what I know.' The deposition,

however was drawn out in due form, at considerable length, and was

properly attested before one of the London magistrates.

Chapter LI

Dick Shand Goes To Cambridgeshire

The news of Shand's return was soon common in Cambridge. The tidings, of

course, were told to Mr. Caldigate, and were then made known by him to

Hester. The old man, though he turned the matter much in his

mind,--doubting whether the hopes thus raised would not add to Hester's

sorrow should they not ultimately be realised,--decided that he could

not keep her in the dark. Her belief could not be changed by any

statement which Shand might make. Her faith was so strong that no

evidence could shake it,--or confirm it. But there would, no doubt,

arise in her mind a hope of liberation if any new evidence against the

Australian marriage were to reach her; which hope might so probably be

delusive! But he knew her to be strong to endure as well as strong to

hope, and therefore he told her at once. Then Mr. Seely returned to

Cambridge, and all the facts of Shand's deposition were made known at

Folking. 'That will get him out at once, of course,' said Hester,

triumphantly, as soon as she heard it. But the Squire was older and more

cautious, and still doubted. He explained that Dick Shand was not a man

who by his simple word would certainly convince a Secretary of

State;--that deceit might be suspected;--that a fraudulent plot would be

possible; and that very much care was necessary before a convicted

prisoner would be released.

'I am quite sure, from Mr. Seely's manner, that he thinks I have bribed

the young man,' said Caldigate.

'You!'

'Yes;--I. These are the ideas which naturally come into people's heads.

I am not in the least angry with Mr. Seely, and feel that it is only too

likely that the Secretary of State and the judge will think the same. If

I were Secretary of State I should have to think so.'

'I couldn't suspect people like that.'

'And therefore, my dear, you are hardly fit to be Secretary of State. We

must not be too sanguine. That is all.'

But Hester was very sanguine. When it was fully known that Dick had

written to Mr. Seely immediately on his arrival at Pollington, and that

he had shown himself to be a warm partisan in the Caldigate interests,

she could not rest till she saw him herself, and persuaded Mr. Caldigate

to invite him down to Folking. To Folking therefore he went, with the

full intention of declaring John Caldigate's innocence, not only there,

but all through Cambridgeshire. The Boltons, of whom he had now heard

something, should be made to know what an honest man had to say on the

subject,--an honest man, and who was really on the spot at the time. To

Dick's mind it was marvellous that the Boltons should have been anxious

to secure a verdict against Caldigate,--which verdict was also against

their own daughter and their own sister. Being quite sure himself that

Caldigate was innocent, he could not understand the condition of feeling

which would be produced by an equally strong conviction of his guilt.

Nor was his mind, probably, imbued with much of that religious scruple

which made the idea of a feigned marriage so insupportable to all

Hester's relations. Nor was he aware that when a man has taken a

preconception home to himself and fastened it and fixed it, as it were,

into his bosom, he cannot easily expel it,--even though personal

interest should be on the side of such expulsion. It had become a

settled belief with the Boltons that John Caldigate was a bigamist,

which belief had certainly been strengthened by the pertinacious

hostility of Hester's mother. Dick had heard something of all this, and

thought that he would be able to open their eyes.

When he arrived at Folking he was received with open arms. Sir John

Joram had not quite liked him, because his manner had been rough. Mr.

Seely had regarded him from the first as a ruined man, and therefore a

willing perjurer. Even at Pollington his 'bush' manners had been a

little distasteful to all except his mother. Mr. Caldigate felt some

difficulty in making conversation with him. But to Hester he was as an

angel from heaven. She was never tired of hearing from him every detail

as to her husband's life at Ahalala and Nobble,--particularly as to his

life after Euphemia Smith had taken herself to those parts and had

quarrelled with him. The fact of the early infatuation had been

acknowledged on all sides. Hester was able to refer to that as a mother,

boasting of her child's health, may refer to the measles,--which have

been bad and are past and gone. Euphemia Smith had been her husband's

measles. Men generally have the measles. That was a thing so completely

acknowledged, that it was not now the source of discomfort. And the

disease had been very bad with him. So bad that he had talked of

marriage,--had promised marriage. Crafty women do get hold of innocent

men, and drive them sometimes into perdition,--often to the brink of

perdition. That was Hester's theory as to her husband. He had been on

the brink, but had been wise in time. That was her creed, and as it was

supported by Dick, she found no fault with Dick's manner,--not even with

the yellow trousers which were brought into use at Folking.

'You were with him on that very day,' she said. This referred to the day

in April on which it had been sworn that the marriage was solemnized.

'I was with him every day about that time. I can't say about particular

days. The truth is,--I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Caldigate,--I was

drinking a good deal just then.' His present state of abstinence had of

course become known at Folking, not without the expression of much

marvel on the part of the old Squire as to the quantity of tea which

their visitor was able to swallow. And as this abstinence had of course

been admired, Dick had fallen into a way of confessing his past

backslidings to a pretty, sympathetic friendly woman, who was willing to

believe all that he said, and to make much of him.

'But I suppose----' Then she hesitated; and Dick understood the

hesitation.

'I was never so bad,' said he, 'but what I knew very well what was going

on. I don't believe Caldigate and Mrs. Smith even so much as spoke to

each other all that month. She had had a wonderful turn of luck.'

'In getting gold?'

'She had bought and sold shares till she was supposed to have made a pot

of money. People up there got an idea that she was one of the lucky

ones,--and it did seem so. Then she got it into her head that she didn't

want Caldigate to know about her money, and he was downright sick of

her. She had been good-looking at one time, Mrs. Caldigate.'

'I daresay. Most of them are so, I suppose.'

'And clever. She'd talk the hind-legs off a dog, as we used to say out

there.'

'You had very odd sayings, Mr. Shand.'

'Indeed we had. But when she got in that way about her money, and then

took to drinking brandy, Caldigate was only too glad to be rid of her.

Crinkett believed in her because she had such a run of luck. She held a

lot of his shares,--shares that used to be his. So they got together,

and she left Ahalala and went to Polyeuka Hall. I remember it all as if

it were yesterday. When I broke away from Caldigate in June, and went to

Queensland, they hadn't seen each other for two months. And as for

having been married;--you might as well tell me that I had married her!'

If Mr. Caldigate had ever allowed a shade of doubt to cross his mind as

to his son's story, Dick Shand's further story removed it. The picture

of the life which was led at Ahalala and Nobble was painted for him

clearly, so that he could see, or fancy that he saw, what the condition

of things had been. And this increased faith trickled through to others.

Mr. Bromley who had always believed, believed more firmly than before,

and sent tidings of his belief to Plum-cum-Pippins and thence to

Babington. Mr. Holt, the farmer, became more than ever energetic, and in

a loud voice at a Cambridge market ordinary, declared the ill-usage done

to Caldigate and his young wife. It had been said over and over again at

the trial that Dick Shand's evidence was the one thing wanted, and here

was Dick Shand to give his evidence. Then the belief gained ground in

Cambridge; and with the belief there arose a feeling as to the egregious

wrong which was being done.

But the Boltons were still assured. None of them had as yet given any

sign of yielding. Robert Bolton knew very well that Shand was at

Folking, but had not asked to see him. He and Mr. Seely were on

different sides, and could not discuss the matter; but their ideas were

the same. It was incredible to Robert that Dick Shand should appear just

at this moment, unless as part of an arranged plan. He could not read

the whole plot; but was sure that there was a plot. It was held in his

mind as a certain fact, that John Caldigate would not have paid away

that large sum of money had he not thought that by doing so he was

buying off Crinkett and the other witnesses. Of course there had been a

marriage in Australia, and therefore the arrival of Dick Shand was to

him only a lifting of the curtain for another act of the play. An

attempt was to be made to get Caldigate out of prison, which attempt it

was his duty to oppose. Caldigate had, he thought, deceived and

inflicted a terrible stain on his family; and therefore Caldigate was an

enemy upon whom it behoved him to be revenged. This feeling was the

stronger in his bosom, because Caldigate had been brought into the

family by him.

But when Dick Shand called upon him at his office, he would not deny

himself. 'I have been told by some people that, as I am here in the

neighbourhood, I ought to come and speak to you,' said Dick. The 'some

people' had been, in the first instance, Mr. Ralph Holt, the farmer. But

Dick had discussed the matter with Mr. Bromley, and Mr. Bromley had

thought that Shand's story should be told direct to Hester's brother.

'If you have anything to say, Mr. Shand, I am ready to hear it.'

'All this about a marriage at Ahalala between John Caldigate and Mrs.

Smith is a got-up plan, Mr. Bolton.'

'The jury did not seem to think so, Mr. Shand.'

'I wasn't here then to let them know the truth.' Robert Bolton raised

his eyebrows, marvelling at the simplicity of the man who could fancy

that his single word would be able to weigh down the weight of evidence

which had sufficed to persuade twelve men and such a judge as Judge

Bramber. 'I was with Caldigate all the time, and I'm sure of what I'm

saying The two weren't on speaking terms when they were said to be

married.'

'Of course, Mr. Shand, as you have come to me, I will hear what you may

have to say. But what is the use of it? The man has been tried and found

guilty.'

'They can let him out again if he's innocent.'

'The Queen can pardon him, no doubt;--but even the Queen cannot quash

the conviction. The evidence was as clear as noonday. The judge and the

jury and the public were all in one mind.'

'But I wasn't here, then,' said Dick Shand, with perfect confidence.

Robert Bolton could only look at him and raise his eyebrows. He could

not tell him to his face that no unprejudiced person would believe the

evidence of such a witness. 'He's your brother-in-law said Dick, 'and I

supposed you'd be glad to know that he was innocent.'

'I can't go into that question, Mr. Shand. As I believe him to have been

guilty of as wicked a crime as any man can well commit, I cannot concern

myself in asking for a pardon for him. My own impression is that he

should have been sent to penal servitude.'

'By George!' exclaimed Dick. 'I tell you that it is all a lie from

beginning to end.'

'I fear we cannot do any good by talking about it, Mr. Shand.'

'By George!' Dick hitched up his yellow trousers as though he were

preparing for a fight. He wore his yellow trousers without braces, and

in all moments of energy hitched them up.

'If you please I will say good morning to you.'

'By George! when I tell you that I was there all the time, and that

Caldigate never spoke to the woman, or so much as saw her all that

month, and that therefore your own sister is in honest truth Caldigate's

wife, you won't listen to me! Do you mean to say that I'm lying?'

'Mr. Shand, I must ask you to leave my office.'

'By George! I wish I had you, Mr. Bolton, out at Ahalala, where there

are not quite so many policemen as there are here at Cambridge.'

'I shall have to send for one of them if you don't go away, Mr. Shand.'

'Here's a man who, even for the sake of his own sister, won't hear the

truth, just because he hates his sister's husband! What have I got to

get by lying?'

'That I cannot tell.' Bolton, as he said this, prepared himself for a

sudden attack; but Shand had sense enough to know that he would injure

the cause in which he was interested, as well as himself, by any

exhibition of violence, and therefore left the office.

'No,' said Mr. Bromley, when all this was told him; 'he is not a cruel

man, nor dishonest, nor even untrue to his sister. But having quite made

up his mind that Caldigate had been married in Australia, he cannot

release himself from the idea. And, as he thinks so, he feels it to be

his duty to keep his sister and Caldigate apart.'

'But why does he not believe me?' demanded Dick.

'In answer to that, I can only say that I do believe you.'

Then there came a request from Babington that Dick Shand would go over

to them there for a day. At Babington opinion was divided. Aunt Polly

and her eldest daughter, and with them Mr. Smirkie, still thought that

John Caldigate was a wicked bigamist; but the Squire and the rest of the

family had gradually gone over to the other side. The Squire had never

been hot against the offender, having been one of those who fancied that

a marriage at a very out-of-the-way place such as Ahalala did not

signify much. And now when he heard of Dick Shand's return and proffered

evidence, he declared that Dick Shand having been born a gentleman,

though he had been ever so much a sinner, and ever so much a drunkard,

was entitled to credence before a host of Crinketts. But with Aunt Polly

and Julia there remained the sense of the old injury, robbing Shand of

all his attributes of birth, and endowing even Crinkett with truth.

Then there had been a few words, and the Squire had asserted himself,

and insisted upon asking Shand to Babington.

'Did you ever see such trousers?' said Julia to her mother. 'I would not

believe him on his oath.'

'Certainly not,' said Mr. Smirkie, who of the three was by far the most

vehement in his adherence to the verdict. 'The man is a notorious

drunkard. And he has that look of wildness which bad characters always

bring with them from the colonies.'

'He didn't drink anything but water at lunch,' said one of the younger

girls.

'They never do when they're eating,' said Mr. Smirkie. For the great

teetotal triumph had not as yet been made known to the family at

Babington. 'These regular drunkards take it at all times by themselves

in their own rooms. He has delirium tremens in his face. I don't believe

a word that he says.'

'He certainly does wear the oddest trousers I ever saw,' said Aunt

Polly.

At the same time Dick himself was closeted with the Squire, and was

convincing him that there had been no Australian marriage at all. 'They

didn't jump over a broomstick, or anything of that kind?' asked the

Squire, intending to be jocose.

'They did nothing at all,' said Dick, who had worked himself up to a

state of great earnestness. 'Caldigate wouldn't as much as look at her

at that time;--and then to come home here and find him in prison because

he had married her! How any one should have believed it!'

'They did believe it. The women here believe it now, as you perceive.'

'It's an awful shame, Mr. Babington. Think of her, Mr. Babington. It's

harder on her even than him, for he was,--well, fond of the woman once.'

'It is hard. But we must do what we can to get him out. I'll write to

our member. Sir George supports the Government, and I'll get him to see

the Secretary. It is hard upon a young fellow just when he has got

married and come into a nice property.'

'And her, Mr. Babington!'

'Very bad, indeed. I'll see Sir George myself. The odd part of it is,

the Boltons are all against him. Old Bolton never quite liked the

marriage, and his wife is a regular Tartar.'

Thus the Squire was gained, and the younger daughter. But Mr. Smirkie

was as obdurate as ever. Something of his ground was cut from under his

feet when Dick's new and peculiar habits were observed at dinner. Mr.

Smirkie did indeed cling to his doctrine that your real drunkard never

drinks at his meals; but when Dick, on being pressed in regard to wine,

apologised by saying that he had become so used to tea in the colonies

as not to be able to take anything else at dinner, the peculiarity was

discussed till he was driven to own that he had drank nothing stronger

for the last two years. Then it became plain that delirium tremens was

not written on his face quite so plainly as Mr. Smirkie had at first

thought, and there was nothing left but his trousers to condemn him. But

Mr. Smirkie was still confident. 'I don't think you can go beyond the

verdict,' he said. 'There may be a pardon, of course;--though I shall

never believe it till I see it. But though there were twenty pardons she

ought not to go back to him. The pardon does not alter the crime,--and

whether he was married in Australia, or whether he was not, she ought to

think that he was, because the jury has said so. If she had any feeling

of feminine propriety she would shut herself up and call herself Miss

Bolton.'

'I don't agree with you in the least,' said the Squire; 'and I hope I

may live to see a dozen little Caldigates running about on that lawn.'

And there were a few words upstairs on the subject between Mr. Smirkie

and his wife--for even Mrs. Smirkie and Aunt Polly at last submitted

themselves to Dick's energy. 'Indeed, then, if he comes out,' said the

wife, 'I shall be very glad to see him at Plum-cum-Pippins.' This was

said in a voice which did not admit of contradiction, and was evidence

at any rate that Dick's visit to Babington had been successful in spite

of the yellow trousers.

Chapter LII

The Fortunes of Bagwax

An altogether new idea had occurred to Bagwax as he sat in his office

after his interview with Sir John Joram;--and it was an idea of such a

nature that he thought that he saw his way quite plain to a complete

manifestation of the innocence of Caldigate, to a certainty of a pardon,

and to an immediate end of the whole complication. By a sudden glance at

the evidence his eye had caught an object which in all his glances he

had never before observed. Then at once he went to work, and finding

that certain little marks were distinctly legible, he became on a sudden

violently hot,--so that the sweat broke out on his forehead. Here was

the whole thing disclosed at once,--disclosed to all the world if he

chose to disclose it. But if he did so, then there could not be any need

for that journey to Sydney, which Sir John still thought to be

expedient. And this thing which he had now seen was not one within his

own branch of work,--was not a matter with which he was bound to be

conversant. Somebody else ought to have found it out. His own knowledge

was purely accidental. There would be no disgrace to him in not finding

it out. But he had found it out.

Bagwax was a man who, in his official zeal and official capacity, had

exercised his intellect far beyond the matters to which he was bound to

apply himself in the mere performance of his duties. Post-marks were

his business; and had he given all his mind to postmarks, he would have

sufficiently carried out that great doctrine of doing the duty which

England expects from every man. But he had travelled beyond postmarks,

and had looked into many things. Among other matters he had looked into

penny stamps, twopenny stamps, and other stamps. In post-office

phraseology there is sometimes a confusion because the affixed effigy of

her Majesty's head, which represents the postage paid, is called a

stamp, and the postmarks or impressions indicating the names of towns

are also called stamps. Those postmarks or impressions had been the work

of Bagwax's life; but his zeal, his joy in his office, and the general

energy of his disposition, had opened up to him also all the mysteries

of the queen's heads. That stamp, that effigy, that twopenny

queen's-head, which by its presence on the corner of the envelope

purported to have been the price of conveying the letter from Sydney to

Nobble, on 10th May, 1873, had certainly been manufactured and sent out

to the colony since that date!

There are signs invisible to ordinary eyes which are plain as the sun at

noonday to the initiated. It is so in all arts, in all sciences. Bagwax

was at once sure of his fact. To his instructed gaze the little receipt

for twopence was as clearly dated as though the figures were written on

it. And yet he had never looked at it before. In the absorbing interest

which the postmark had created,--that fraudulent postmark as it

certainly was,--he had never condescended to examine the postage-stamp.

But now he saw and was certain.

If it was so,--and he had no doubt,--then would Caldigate surely be

released. It is hoped that the reader will follow the mind of Bagwax,

which was in this matter very clear. This envelope had been brought up

at the trial as evidence that, on a certain day, Caldigate had written

to the woman as his wife, and had sent the letter through the

post-office. For such sending the postage-stamp was necessary. The

postage-stamp had certainly been put on when the envelope was prepared

for its intended purpose. But if it could be proved by the stamp itself

that it had not been in existence on the date impressed on the envelope,

then the fraud would be quite apparent. And if there had been such

fraud, then would the testimony of all those four witnesses be crushed

into arrant perjury. They had produced the fraudulent document, and by

it would be thoroughly condemned. There could be no necessity for a

journey to Sydney.

As it all became clear to his mind, he thumped his table partly in

triumph,--partly in despair. 'What's the matter with you now?' said Mr.

Curlydown. It was a quarter past four, and Curlydown had not completed

his daily inspections. Had Bagwax been doing his proper share of work,

Curlydown would have already washed his hands and changed his coat, and

have been ready to start for the 4.30 train. As it was, he had an hour

of labour before him, and would be unable to count the plums upon his

wall, as was usual with him before dinner.

'It becomes more wonderful every day,' said Bagwax solemnly,--almost

awfully.

'It is very wonderful to me that a man should be able to sit so many

hours looking at one dirty bit of paper.'

'Every moment that I pass with that envelope before my eyes I see the

innocent husband in jail, and the poor afflicted wife weeping in her

solitude.'

'You'll be going on to the stage, Bagwax, before this is done.'

'I have sometimes thought that it was the career for which I was best

adapted. But, as to the envelope, the facts are now certain.'

'Any new facts?' asked Curlydown. But he asked the question in a

jeering tone, not at all as though desiring confidence or offering

sympathy.

'Yes,' replied Bagwax, slowly. 'The facts are certainly new,--and most

convincing; but as you have not given attention to the particular branch

concerned there can be no good in my mentioning them. You would not

understand me.' It was thus that he revenged himself on Curlydown. Then

there was again silence between them for a quarter of an hour, during

which Curlydown was hurrying through his work, and Bagwax was meditating

whether it was certainly his duty to make known the facts as to the

postage-stamp. 'You are so unkind,' said Bagwax at last, in a tone of

injured friendship, burning to tell his new discovery.

'You have got it all your way,' said Curlydown, without lifting his

head. 'And then, as you said just now,--I don't understand.'

'I'd tell you everything if you'd only be a little less hard.'

Curlydown was envious. He had, of course, been told of the civil things

which Sir John Joram had said; and though he did not quite believe all,

he was convinced that Bagwax was supposed to have distinguished himself.

If there was anything to be known he would like to know it. Nor was he

naturally quarrelsome. Bagwax was his old friend. 'I don't mean to be

hard,' he said. 'Of course one does feel oneself fretted when one has

been obliged to miss two trains.'

'Can I lend a hand?' said Bagwax.

'It doesn't signify now. I can't catch anything before the 5.20. One

does expect to get away a little earlier than that on a Saturday. What

is it that you've found out?'

'Do you really care to know?'

'Of course I do,--if it's anything in earnest. I took quite as much

interest as you in the matter when we were down at Cambridge.'

'You see that postage-stamp?' Bagwax stretched out the envelope,--or

rather the photograph of the envelope, for it was no more. But the

Queen's head, with all its obliterating smudges, and all its marks and

peculiarities, were to be seen quite as plainly as on the original,

which was tied up carefully among the archives of the trial. 'You see

that postage-stamp?' Curlydown took his glass, and looked at the

document, and declared that he saw the postage-stamp very plainly.

'But it does not tell you anything particular?'

'Nothing very particular--at the first glance,' said Curlydown, gazing

through the glass with all his eyes.

'Look again.'

'I see that they obliterate out there with a kind of star.'

'That has nothing to do with it.'

'The bunch of hair at the back of the head isn't quite like our bunch of

hair.'

'Just the same;--taken from the same die,' said Bagwax.

'The little holes for dividing the stamps are bigger.'

'It isn't that.'

'Then what the d---- is it?'

'There are letters at every corner,' said Bagwax.

'That's of course,' said Curlydown.

'Can you read those letters?' Curlydown owned that he never had quite

understood what those letters meant. 'Those two P's in the two bottom

corners tell me that that stamp wasn't printed before '74. It was all

explained to me not long ago. Now the postmark is dated '73.' There was

an air of triumph about Bagwax as he said this which almost drove

Curlydown back to hostility. But he checked himself merely shaking his

head, and continued to look at the stamp. 'What do you think of that?'

asked Bagwax.

'You'd have to prove it.'

'Of course I should. But the stamps are made here and are sent out to

the colony. I shall see Smithers at the stamp-office on Monday of

course.' Mr. Smithers was a gentleman concerned in the manufacture of

stamps. 'But I know my facts. I am as well aware of the meaning of those

letters as though I had made postage-stamps my own peculiar duty. Now

what ought I to do?'

'You wouldn't have to go, I suppose?'

'Not a foot.'

'And yet it ought to be found out how that date got there.' And

Curlydown put his finger upon the impression--10th May, 1873.

'Not a doubt about it. I should do a deal of good by going if they'd

give me proper authority to overhaul everything in the office out there.

They had the letter stamped fraudulently;--fraudulently, Mr. Curlydown!

Perhaps if I stayed at home to give evidence, they'd send you to Sydney

to find all that out.'

There was a courtesy in this suggestion which induced Curlydown to ask

his junior to come down and take pot-luck at Apricot Villa. Bagwax was

delighted, for his heart had been sore at the coolness which had grown

up between him and the man under whose wing he had worked for so many

years. He had been devoted to Curlydown till growing ambition had taught

him to think himself able to strike out a line for himself. Mr.

Curlydown had two daughters, of whom the younger, Jemima, had found much

favour in the eyes of Bagwax. But since the jealousy had sprung up

between the two men he had never seen Jemima, nor tasted the fruits of

Curlydown's garden. Mrs. Curlydown, who approved of Bagwax, had been

angry, and Jemima herself had become sullen and unloving to her father.

On that very morning Mrs. Curlydown had declared that she hated quarrels

like poison. 'So do I, mamma,' said Jemima, breaking her silence

emphatically. 'Not that Mr. Bagwax is anything to anybody.'

'That does look like something,' said Curlydown, whispering to his

friend in the railway carriage. They were sitting opposite to each

other, with their knees together,--and were of course discussing the

envelope.

'It is everything. When they were making up their case in Australia, and

when the woman brought out the cover with his writing upon it, with the

very name, Mrs. Caldigate, written by himself,--Crinkett wasn't

contented with that. So they put their heads together, and said that if

the letter could be got to look like a posted letter,--a letter sent

regularly by the post,--that would be real evidence. The idea wasn't

bad.'

'Nothing has ever been considered better evidence than postmarks,' said

Curlydown, with authority.

'It was a good idea. Then they had to get a postage-stamp. They little

knew how they might put their foot into it there. And they got hold of

some young man at the post-office who knew how to fix a date-stamp with

a past date. How these things become clear when one looks at them long

enough!'

'Only one has to have an eye in one's head.'

'Yes,' said Bagwax, as modestly as he could at such a moment. 'A fellow

has to have his wits about him before he can do anything out of the

common way in any line. You'd tell Sir John everything at

once;--wouldn't you?' Curlydown raised his hat and scratched his head.

'Duty first, you know. Duty first,' said Bagwax.

'In a man's own line,--yes,' said Curlydown. 'Somebody else ought to

have found that out. That's not post-office. It's stamps and taxes. It's

very hard that a man should have to cut the nose off his own face by

knowing more than he need know.'

'Duty! Duty!' said Bagwax as he opened the carriage-door and jumped out

on to the platform.

When he got up to the cottage, Mrs. Curlydovvn assured him that it was

quite a cure for sore eyes to see him. Sophia, the elder of the two

daughters at home, told him that he was a false truant; and Jemima

surmised that the great attractions of the London season had prevented

him from coming down to Enfield. 'It isn't that, indeed,' he said. 'I am

always delighted in running down. But the Caldigate affair has been so

important!'

'You mean the trial,' said Mrs. Curlydown. 'But the man has been in

prison ever so long.'

'Unjustly! Most unjustly!'

'Is it so, really?' asked Jemima. 'And the poor young bride?'

'Not so much of a bride,' said Sophia. 'She's got one, I know.'

'And papa says you're to go out to Botany Bay,' said Jemima. 'It'll be

years and years before you are back again.' Then he explained it was not

Botany Bay, and he would be back in six months. And, after all, he

wasn't going at all. 'Well, I declare, if papa isn't down the walk

already,' said Jemima, looking out of the window.

'I don't think I shall go at all,' said Bagwax in a melancholy tone as

he went up-stairs to wash his hands.

The dinner was very pleasant; and as Curlydown and his guest drank their

bottle of port together at the open window, it was definitely settled

that Bagwax should reveal the mystery of the postage-stamp to Sir John

Joram at once. 'I should have it like a lump of lead on my conscience

all the time I was on the deep,' said Bagwax, solemnly.

'Conscience is conscience, to be sure,' said Curlydown

'I don't think that I'm given to be afraid,' said Bagwax. 'The ocean, if

I know myself, would have no terrors for me;--not if I was doing my

duty. But I should hear the ship's sides cracking with every blast if

that secret were lodged within my breast.'

'Take another glass of port, old boy.'

Bagwax did take another glass, finishing the bottle, and continued.

'Farewell to those smiling shores. Farewell, Sydney, and all her charms.

Farewell to her orange groves, her blue mountains, and her rich

gold-fields.'

'Take a drop of whitewash to wind up, and then we'll join the ladies.'

Curlydown was a strictly hospitable man, and in his own house would not

appear to take amiss anything his guest might say. But when Bagwax

became too poetical over his wine, Curlydown waxed impatient. Bagwax

took his drop of whitewash, and then hurried on to the lawn to join

Jemima.

'And you really are not going to those distant parts?'

'No,' said Bagwax, with all that melancholy which wine and love combined

with sorrow can produce. 'That dream is over.'

'I am so glad.'

'Why should you be glad? Why should a resolve which it almost breaks my

heart to make be a source of joy to you?'

'Of course you would have nothing to regret at leaving, Mr. Bagwax.'

'Very much,--if I were going for ever. No;--I could never do that,

unless I were to take some dear one with me. But, as I said, that dream

is over. It has ever been my desire to see foreign climes, and the

chance so seldom comes in a man's way.'

'You've been to Ostend, I know, Mr. Bagwax.'

'Oh yes, and to Boulogne,' said Bagwax, proudly. 'But the desire of

travel grows with the thing it feeds on. I long to overcome great

distances,--to feel that I have put illimitable space behind me. To set

my foot on shores divided from these by the thickness of all the earth

would give me a sense of grandeur which I--which,--which,--would be

magnificent.'

'I suppose that is natural in a man.'

'In some men,' said Bagwax, not liking to be told that his heroic

instincts were shared by all his brethren.

'But women, of course, think of the dangers. Suppose you were to be cast

away!'

'What matter? With a father of a family of course it would be different.

But a lone man should never think of such things.' Jemima shook her head

and walked silently by his side. 'If I had some dear one who cared for

me I suppose it would be different with me.'

'I don't know,' said Jemima. 'Gentlemen like to amuse themselves

sometimes, but it doesn't often go very deep.'

'Things always go deep with me,' said Bagwax. 'I panted for that journey

to the Antipodes;--panted for it! Now that it is over, perhaps some day

I may tell you under what circumstances it has been relinquished. In the

meantime my mind passes to other things; or perhaps I should say my

heart--Jemima!' Then Bagwax stopped on the path.

'Go on, Mr. Bagwax. Papa will be looking at you.'

'Jemima,' he said, 'will you recompense me by your love for what I have

lost on the other side of the globe?' She recompensed him, and he was

happy.

The future father and son-in-law sat and discussed their joint affairs

for an hour after the ladies had retired. As to Jemima and his love,

Bagwax was allowed to be altogether triumphant. Mrs. Curlydown kissed

him, and he kissed Sophia. That was in public. What passed between him

and Jemima no human eye saw. The old post-office clerk took the younger

one to his heart, and declared that he was perfectly satisfied with his

girl's choice. 'I've always known that you were steady,' he said, 'and

that's what I look to. She has had her admirers, and perhaps might have

looked higher; but what's rank or money if a man's fond of pleasure?'

But when that was settled they returned again to the Caldigate envelope.

Curlydown was not quite so sure as to that question of duty. The

proposed journey to Sydney, with a pound a-day allowed for expenses, and

the traveller's salary going on all the time, would put a nice sum of

ready-money into Bagwax's pocket. 'It wouldn't be less than two hundred

towards furnishing my boy,' said Curlydown. 'You'll want it. And as for

the delay, what's six months? Girls like to have a little time to boast

about it.'

But Bagwax had made up his mind, and nothing would shake him. 'If

they'll let me go out all the same, to set matters right, of course I'd

take the job. I should think it a duty, and would bear the delay as well

as I could. If Jemima thought it right I'm sure she wouldn't complain.

But since I saw that letter on that stamp my conscience has told me that

I must reveal it all. It might be me as was in prison, and Jemima who

was told that I had a wife in Australia. Since I've looked at it in that

light I've been more determined than ever to go to Sir John Joram's

chambers on Monday. Good-night, Mr. Curlydown. I am very glad you asked

me down to the cottage to-day; more glad than anything.'

At half-past eleven, by the last train, Bagwax returned to town, and

spent the night with mingled dreams, in which Sydney, Jemima, and the

envelope were all in their turns eluding him, and all in their turns

within his grasp.

Chapter LIII

Sir John Backs His Opinion

Well, Mr. Bagwax, I'm glad that it's only one envelope this time.' This

was said by Sir John Joram to the honest and energetic post-office clerk

on the morning of Wednesday the 3d September, when the lawyer would

have been among the partridges down in Suffolk but for the vicissitudes

of John Caldigate's case. It was hard upon Sir John, and went something

against the grain with him. He was past the time of life at which men

are enthusiastic as to the wrongs of others,--as was Bagwax; and had, in

truth, much less to gain from the cause, or to expect, than Bagwax. He

thought that the pertinacity of Bagwax, and the coming of Dick Shand at

the moment of his holidays, were circumstances which justified the use

of a little internal strong language,--such as he had occasionally used

externally before he had become attorney-general. In fact he had--damned

Dick Shand and Bagwax, and in doing so had considered that Jones his

clerk was internal. 'I wish he had gone to Sydney a month ago,' he said

to Jones. But when Jones suggested that Bagwax might be sent to Sydney

without further trouble, Sir John's conscience pricked him. Not to be

able to shoot a Suffolk partridge on the 1st of September was very

cruel, but to be detained wrongfully in Cambridge jail was worse; and he

was of opinion that such cruelty had been inflicted on Caldigate. On the

Saturday Dick Shand had been with him. He had remained in town on the

Monday and Tuesday by agreement with Mr. Seely. Early on the Tuesday

intimation was given to him that Bagwax would come on the Wednesday with

further evidence,--with evidence which should be positively conclusive.

Bagwax had, in the meantime, been with his friend Smithers at the

stamp-office, and was now fully prepared. By the help of Smithers he had

arrived at the fact that the postage-stamp had certainly been fabricated

in 1874, some months after the date imprinted on the cover of the letter

to which it was affixed.

'No, Sir John;--only one this time. We needn't move anything.' All the

chaos had been restored to its normal place, and looked as though it had

never been moved since it was collected.

'And we can prove that this queen's-head did not exist before the 1st

January, 1874.'

'Here's the deposition,' said Bagwax, who, by his frequent intercourse

with Mr. Jones, had become almost as good as a lawyer himself,--'at

least, it isn't a deposition, of course,--because it's not sworn.'

'A statement of what can be proved on oath.'

'Just that, Sir John. It's Mr. Smithers! Mr. Smithers has been at the

work for the last twenty years. I knew it just as well as he from the

first, because I attend to these sort of things; but I thought it best

to go to the fountain-head.'

'Quite right.'

'Sir John will want to hear it from the fountain-head I said to myself;

and therefore I went to Smithers. Smithers is perhaps a little

conceited, but his word is--gospel. In a matter of postage-stamps

Smithers is gospel.'

Then Sir John read the statement; and though he may not have taken it

for gospel, still to him it was credible. 'It seems clear,' he said.

'Clear as the running stream,' said Bagwax.

'I should like to have all that gang up for perjury, Mr. Bagwax.'

'So should I, Sir John;--so should I. When I think of that poor dear

lady and her infant babe without a name, and that young father torn from

his paternal acres and cast into a vile prison, my blood boils within my

veins, and all my passion to see foreign climes fades into the

distance.'

'No foreign climes now, Mr. Bagwax.'

'I suppose not, Sir John,' said the hero, mournfully

'Not if this be true.'

'It's gospel, Sir John;--gospel. They might send me out to set that

office to rights. Things must be very wrong when they could get hold of

a date-stamp and use it in that way. There must be one of the gang in

the office.'

'A bribe did it, I should say.'

'I could find it out, Sir John. Let me alone for that. You could say

that you have found me--quick-like in this matter;--couldn't you, Sir

John?' Bagwax was truly happy in the love of Jemima Curlydown; but the

idea of earning two hundred pounds for furniture, and of seeing distant

climes at the same time, had taken a strong hold of his imagination.

'I am afraid I should have no voice in the matter,--unless with the view

of getting evidence.'

'And we've got that;--haven't we, Sir John?'

'I think so.'

'Duty, Sir John, duty!' said Bagwax, almost sobbing through his triumph.

'That's it, Mr. Bagwax.' Sir John too had given up his partridges,--for

a day or two.

'And that gentleman will now be restored to his wife?'

'It isn't for me to say. As you and I have been engaged on the same

side----' To be told that he had been on the same side with the late

attorney-general was almost compensation to Bagwax for the loss of his

journey. 'As you and I have been on the same side, I don't mind telling

you that I think that he ought to be released. The matter remains with

the Secretary of State, who will probably be guided by the judge who

tried the case.'

'A stern man, Sir John.'

'Not soft-hearted, Mr. Bagwax,--but as conscientious a man as you'll be

able to put your hand upon. The young wife with her nameless baby won't

move him at all. But were he moved by such consideration he would be so

far unfit for his office.'

'Mercy is divine,' said Bagwax.

'And therefore unfit to be used by a merely human judge. You know, I

suppose, that Richard Shand has come home?'

'No!'

'Indeed he has, and was with me a day or two since.'

'Can he say anything?' Bagwax was not rejoiced at Dick's opportune

return. He thoroughly wished that Caldigate should be liberated, but he

wished himself to monopolise the glory of the work.

'He says a great deal. He has sworn point-blank that there was no such

marriage at the time named. He and Caldigate were living together then,

and for some weeks afterwards, and the woman was never near them during

the time.'

'To think of his coming just now!'

'It will be a great help, Mr. Bagwax; but it wouldn't be enough alone.

He might possibly--tell an untruth.'

'Perjury on the other side, as it were.'

'Just that. But this little queen's-head here can't be untrue.'

'No, Sir John, no; that can't be,' said Bagwax, comforted; 'and the

dated impression can't lie either. The envelope is what'll do it after

all.'

'I hope so. You and Mr. Jones will prepare the statement for the

Secretary of State, and I will send it myself.' With that Mr. Bagwax

took his leave, and remained closeted with Mr. Jones for much of the

remainder of the day.

The moment Sir John was alone he wrote an almost angry note to his

friend Honybun, in conjunction with whom and another Member of

Parliament he had the shooting in Suffolk. Honybun, who was also a

lawyer, though less successful than his friend, was a much better shot,

and was already taking the cream off the milk of the shooting. 'I cannot

conceive,' he said at the end of his letter, 'that, after all my

experience, I should have put myself so much out of my way to serve a

client. A man should do what he's paid to do, and what it is presumed

that he will do, and nothing more. But here I have been instigated by an

insane ambition to emulate the good-natured zeal of a fellow who is

absolutely willing to sacrifice himself for the good of a stranger.'

Then he went on to say that he could not leave London till the Friday.

On the Thursday morning he put all the details together, and himself

drew out a paper for the perusal of the Secretary of State. As he looked

at the matter all round, it seemed to him that the question was so clear

that even Judge Bramber could not hesitate. The evidence of Dick Shand

was quite conclusive,--if credible. It was open, of course, to strong

doubt, in that it could not be sifted by cross-examination. Alone, it

certainly would not have sufficed to extort a pardon from any Secretary

of State,--as any Secretary of State would have been alive to the fact

that Dick might have been suborned. Dick's life had not been such that

his single word would have been regarded as certainly true. But in

corroboration it was worth much. And then if the Secretary or the judge

could be got to go into that very complicated question of the dated

stamp, it would, Sir John thought, become evident to him that the

impression had not been made at the time indicated. This had gradually

been borne in upon Sir John's mind, till he was almost as confident in

his facts as Bagwax himself. But this operation had required much time

and much attention. Would the Secretary, or would the judge, clear his

table, and give himself time to inspect and to measure two or three

hundred postmarks? The date of the fabrication of the postage-stamp

would of course require to be verified by official report;--but if the

facts as stated by Bagwax were thus confirmed, then the fraudulent nature

of the envelope would be put beyond doubt. It would be so manifest that

this morsel of evidence had been falsely concocted, that no clear-headed

man, let his prepossessions be what they might, could doubt it. Judge

Bramber would no doubt begin to sift the case with a strong bias in

favour of the jury. It was for a jury to ascertain the facts; and in

this case the jury had done so. In his opinion,--in Judge Bramber's

opinion, as the judge had often declared it,--a judge should not be

required to determine facts. A new trial, were that possible, would be

the proper remedy, if remedy were wanted; but as that was impossible, he

would be driven to investigate such new evidence as was brought before

him, and to pronounce what would, in truth, be another verdict. All this

was clear to Sir John; and he told himself that even Judge Bramber would

not be able to deny that false evidence had been submitted to the jury.

Sir John, as he occupied his mind with the matter on the Thursday

morning, did wake himself up to some generous energy on his client's

behalf,--so that in sending the written statements of the case to the

Home Secretary, he himself wrote a short but strongly-worded note. 'As

it is quite manifest,' he said, 'that a certain amount of false and

fraudulent circumstantial evidence has been brought into court by the

witnesses who proved the alleged marriage, and as direct evidence has

now come to hand on the other side which is very clear, and as far as we

know trustworthy, I feel myself justified in demanding her Majesty's

pardon for my client.'

On the next day he went down to Birdseye Lodge, near Ipswich, and was

quite enthusiastic on the matter with his friend Honybun. 'I never knew

Bramber go beyond a jury in my life,' said Honybun.

'He'll have to do it now. They can't keep him in prison when they find

that the chief witness was manifestly perjured. The woman swore on her

oath that the letter reached her by post in May, 1873. It certainly did

not do so. The cover, as we see it, has been fabricated since that

date.'

'I never thought the cover went for much,' said Honybun.

'For very little,--for nothing at all perhaps,--till proved to be

fraudulent. If they had left the letter alone their case would have

been strong enough for a conviction. As it was, they were fools enough

to go into a business of this sort; but they have done so, and as they

have been found out, the falsehood which has been detected covers every

word of their spoken evidence with suspicion. It will be like losing so

much of his heart's blood, but the old fellow will have to give way.'

'He never gave way in his life.'

'We'll make him begin.'

'I'll bet you a pony he don't.'

'I'll take the bet,' said the late Attorney-General. But as he did so he

looked round to see that not even a gamekeeper was near enough to hear

him.

On that Friday Bagwax was in a very melancholy state of mind at his

office, in spite of the brilliancy of his prospects with Miss Curlydown.

'I'll just come back to my old work,' he said to his future

father-in-law. 'There's nothing else for me to do.'

This was all as it should be, and would have been regarded a day or two

ago by Curlydown as simple justice. There had been quite enough of that

pottering over an old envelope, to the manifest inconvenience of himself

and others. But now the matter was altered. His was a paternal and an

affectionate heart, and he saw very plainly the pecuniary advantage of a

journey to Sydney. And he knew too that, in official life as well as

elsewhere, to those who have much, more is given. Now that Bagwax was to

him in the light of a son, he wished Bagwax to rise in the world. 'I

wouldn't give it up,' said he.

'But what would you do?'

'I'd stick to it like wax till they did something for me.'

'There's nothing to stick to.'

'I'd take it for granted I was going at once to Sydney. I'd get my

outfit, and, by George! I'd take my place.'

'I've told Sir John I wasn't going; and he said it wasn't necessary.'

As Bagwax told his sad tale he almost wept.

'I wouldn't mind that. I'd have it out of them somehow. Why is he to

have all the pay? No doubt it's been hundreds to him; and you've done

the work and got nothing.'

'When I asked him to get me sent, he said he'd no power;--not now it's

all so plain.' He turned his face down towards the desk to hide the tear

that now was, in truth, running down his face. 'But duty!' he said,

looking up again. 'Duty! England expects----. D--n it, who's going to

whimper? When I lay my head on my pillow at night and think that I, I,

Thomas Bagwax, have restored that nameless one to her babe and her lord,

I shall sleep even though that pillow be no better than a hard bolster.'

'Jemima will look after that,' said the father, laughing. 'But still I

wouldn't give it up. Never give a chance up,--they come so seldom. I'll

tell you what I should do;--I should apply to the Secretary for leave to

go to Sydney at once.'

'At my own expense?' said Bagwax, horrified.

'Certainly not;--but that you might have an opportunity of investigating

all this for the public service. It'll get referred round in some way to

the Secretary of State, who can't but say all that you've done. When it

gets out of a man's own office he don't so much mind doing a little job.

It sounds good-natured. And then if they don't do anything for you,

you'll get a grievance. Next to a sum of money down, a grievance is the

best thing you can have. A man who can stick to a grievance year after

year will always make money of it at last.'

On the Saturday, Bagwax went down to Apricot Lodge, having been invited

to stay with his beloved till the Monday. In the smiles of his beloved

he did find much consolation, especially as it had already been assured

to him that sixty pounds a-year would be settled on Jemima on and from

her wedding-day. And then they made very much of him. 'You do love me,

Tom; don't you?' said Jemima. They were sitting on camp-stools behind

the grotto, and Bagwax answered by pressing the loved one's waist.

'Better than going to Sydney, Tom,--don't you?'

'It is so very different,' said Bagwax,--which was true.

'If you don't like me better than anything else in all the world,

however different, I will never stand at the altar with you.' And she

moved her camp-stool perhaps an inch away.

'In the way of loving, of course I do.'

'Then why do you grieve when you've got what you like best?'

'You don't understand, Jemima, what a spirit of adventure means.'

'I think I do, or I shouldn't be going to marry you. That's quite as

great an adventure as a journey to Sydney. You ought to be very glad to

get off, now you're going to settle down as a married man.'

'Think what two hundred pounds would be, Jemima;--in the way of

furniture.'

'That's papa's putting in, I know. I hate all that hankering after

filthy lucre. You ought to be ashamed of wanting to go so far away just

when you're engaged You wouldn't care about leaving me, I suppose the

least.'

'I should always be thinking of you.'

'Yes, you would! But suppose I wasn't thinking of you. Suppose I took to

thinking of somebody else. How would it be then?'

'You wouldn't do that, Jemima.'

'You ought to know when you're well off, Tom.' By this time he had

recovered the inch and perhaps a little more. 'You ought to feel that

you've plenty to console you.'

'So I do. Duty! duty! England expects that every man----'

'That's your idea of consolation, is it?' And away went the camp-stool

half a yard.

'You believe in duty, don't you, Jemima?'

'In a husband's duty to his wife, I do;--and in a young man's duty to

his sweetheart.'

'And in a father's to his children.'

'That's as may be,' said she, getting up and walking away into the

kitchen-garden. He of course accompanied her, and before they got to the

house had promised her not to sigh for the delights of Sydney, nor for

the perils of adventure any more.

Chapter LIV

Judge Bramber

A secretary of State who has to look after the police and the

magistrates, to answer questions in the House of Commons, and

occasionally to make a telling speech in defence of his colleagues, and,

in addition to this, is expected to perform the duties of a practical

court of appeal in criminal cases, must have something to do. To have to

decide whether or no some poor wretch shall be hanged, when, in spite of

the clearest evidence, humanitarian petitions by the dozen overwhelm him

with claims for mercy, must be a terrible responsibility. 'No, your

Majesty, I think we won't hang him. I think we'll send him to penal

servitude for life;--if your Majesty pleases.' That is so easy, and

would be so pleasant. Why should any one grumble at so right royal a

decision? But there are the newspapers, always so prone to

complain;--and the Secretary has to acknowledge that he must be strong

enough to hang his culprits in spite of petitions, or else he must give

up that office. But when the evidence is not clear, the case is twice

more difficult. The jury have found their verdict, and the law intends

that the verdict of a jury shall be conclusive. When a man has been

declared to be guilty by twelve of his countrymen,--he is guilty, let

the facts have been what they may, and let the twelve have been ever so

much in error. Majesty, however, can pardon guilt, and hence arises some

awkward remedy for the mistakes of jurymen. But an unassisted Majesty

cannot itself investigate all things,--is not, in fact, in this country

supposed to perform any duties of that sort,--a Secretary of State is

invested with the privilege of what is called mercy. It is justice

rather that is wanted. If Bagwax were in the right about that

envelope,--and the reader will by this time think that he was right; and

if Dick Shand had sworn truly, then certainly our friend John Caldigate

was not in want of mercy. It was instant justice that he required,--with

such compensation as might come to him from the indignant sympathy of

all good men.

I remember to have seen a man at Bermuda whose fate was peculiar. He was

sleek, fat, and apparently comfortable, mixing pills when I saw him, he

himself a convict and administering to the wants of his brother

convicts. He remonstrated with me on the hardness of his position.

'Either I did do it, or I didn't,' he said. 'It was because they thought

I didn't that they sent me here. And if I didn't, what right had they to

keep me here at all?' I passed on in silence, not daring to argue the

matter with the man in face of the warder. But the man was right. He had

murdered his wife;--so at least the jury had said,--and had been

sentenced to be hanged. He had taken the poor woman into a little

island, and while she was bathing had drowned her. Her screams had been

heard on the mainland, and the jury had found the evidence sufficient.

Some newspaper had thought the reverse, and had mooted the

question;--was not the distance too great for such screams to have been

heard, or, at any rate, understood? So the man was again brought to

trial in the Court of the Home Office, and was,--not pardoned, but sent

to grow fat and make pills at Bermuda. He had, or he had not, murdered

his wife. If he did the deed he should have been hanged;--and if not, he

should not have been forced to make extorted pills.

What was a Secretary of State to do in such a case? No doubt he believed

that the wretch had murdered his wife. No doubt the judge believed it.

All the world believed it. But the newspaper was probably right in

saying that the evidence was hardly conclusive,--probably right because

it produced its desired effect. If the argument had been successfully

used with the jury, the jury would have acquitted the man. Then surely

the Secretary of State should have sent him out as though acquitted;

and, not daring to hang him, should have treated him as innocent.

Another trial was, in truth, demanded.

And so it was in Caldigate's case. The Secretary of State, getting up

early in the morning after a remarkable speech, in which he vindicated

his Ministry from the attacks of all Europe, did read all the papers,

and took home to himself the great Bagwaxian theory. He mastered Dick's

evidence;--and managed to master something also as to Dick's character.

He quite understood the argument as to the postage-stamps,--which went

further with him than the other arguments. And he understood the

perplexity of his own position. If Bagwax was right, not a moment should

be lost in releasing the ill-used man. To think of pardon, to mention

pardon, would be an insult. Instant justice, with infinite regrets that

the injuries inflicted admitted of no compensation,--that and that only,

was impressively demanded. How grossly would that man have been

ill-used!--how cruelly would that woman have been injured! But then,

again,--if Bagwax was wrong;--if the cunning fraud had been concocted

over here and not in Sydney;--if the plot had been made, not to

incarcerate an innocent man, but to liberate a guilty man, then how

unfit would he show himself for his position were he to be taken in by

such guile! What crime could be worse than that committed by Caldigate

against the young lady he had betrayed, if Caldigate were guilty? Upon

the whole, he thought it would be safer to trust to the jury; but

comforted himself by the reflection that he could for a while transfer

the responsibility. It would perhaps be expedient to transfer it

altogether. So he sent all the papers on to Judge Bramber.

Judge Bramber was a great man. Never popular, he had been wise enough to

disregard popularity. He had forced himself into practice, in opposition

to the attorneys, by industry and perspicuity. He had attended

exclusively to his profession, never having attempted to set his foot on

the quicker stepping-stones of political life. It was said of him that

no one knew whether he called himself Liberal or Conservative At

fifty-five he was put upon the bench, simply because he was supposed to

possess a judicial mind. Here he amply justified that opinion,--but not

without the sneer and ill-words of many. He was now seventy, and it was

declared that years had had no effect on him. He was supposed to be

absolutely merciless,--as hard as a nether millstone, a judge who could

put on the black cap without a feeling of inward disgust. But it may be

surmised that they who said so knew nothing of him,--for he was a man

not apt to betray the secrets of his inner life. He was noted for his

reverence for a jury, and for his silence on the bench. The older he

grew the shorter became his charges; nor were there wanting those who

declared that his conduct in this respect was intended as a reproach to

some who are desirous of adorning the bench by their eloquence. To sit

there listening to everything, and subordinating himself to others till

his interposition was necessary, was his idea of a judge's duty. But

when the law had declared itself, he was always strong in supporting the

law. A man condemned for murder ought to be hanged,--so thought Judge

Bramber,--and not released, in accordance with the phantasy of

philanthropists. Such were the requirements of the law. If the law were

cruel, let the legislators look to that. He was once heard to confess

that the position of a judge who had condemned an innocent man might be

hard to bear; but, he added, that a country would be unfortunate which

did not possess judges capable of bearing even that sorrow. In his heart

he disapproved of the attribute of mercy as belonging to the Crown. It

was opposed to his idea of English law, and apt to do harm rather than

good.

He had been quite convinced of Caldigate's guilt,--not only by the

direct evidence, but by the concurrent circumstances. To his thinking,

it was not in human nature that a man should pay such a sum as twenty

thousand pounds to such people as Crinkett and Euphemia Smith,--a sum of

money which was not due either legally or morally,--except with an

improper object. I have said that he was a great man; but he did not

rise to any appreciation of the motives which had unquestionably

operated with Caldigate. Had Caldigate been quite assured, when he paid

the money, that his enemies would remain and bear witness against him,

still he would have paid it. In that matter he had endeavoured to act as

he would have acted had the circumstances of the mining transaction been

made known to him when no threat was hanging over his head. But all that

Judge Bramber did not understand. He understood, however, quite clearly,

that under no circumstances should money have been paid by an accused

person to witnesses while that person's guilt and innocence were in

question. In his summing-up he had simply told the jury to consider the

matter;--but he had so spoken the word as to make the jury fully

perceive what had been the result of his own consideration.

And then Caldigate and the woman had lived together, and a distinct and

repeated promise of marriage had been acknowledged. It was acknowledged

that the man had given his name to the woman, so far as himself to write

it. Whatever might be the facts as to the postmark and postage-stamp,

the words 'Mrs. Caldigate' had been written by the man now in prison.

Four persons had given direct evidence; and in opposition to them there

had been nothing. Till Dick Shand had come, no voice had been brought

forward to throw even a doubt upon the marriage. That two false

witnesses should adhere well together in a story was uncommon; that

three should do so, most rare; with four it would be almost a miracle.

But these four had adhered. They were people, probably of bad

character,--whose lives had perhaps been lawless. But if so, it would

have been so much easier to prove them false if they were false. Thus

Judge Bramber, when he passed sentence on Caldigate had not in the least

doubted that the verdict was a true verdict.

And now the case was sent to him for reconsideration. He hated such

reconsiderations. He first read Sir John Joram's letter, and declared to

himself that it was unfit to have come from any one calling himself a

lawyer. There was an enthusiasm about it altogether beneath a great

advocate,--certainly beneath any forensic advocate employed otherwise

than in addressing a jury. He, Judge Bramber, had never himself talked

of 'demanding' a verdict even from a jury. He had only endeavoured to

win it. But that a man who had been Attorney-General,--who had been the

head of the bar,--should thus write to a Secretary of State, was to him

disgusting. To his thinking, a great lawyer, even a good lawyer, would

be incapable of enthusiasm as to any case in which he was employed. The

ignorant childish world outside would indulge in zeal and hot

feelings,--but for an advocate to do so was to show that he was no

lawyer,--that he was no better than the outside world. Even spoken

eloquence was, in his mind, almost beneath a lawyer,--studied eloquence

certainly was so. But such written words as these disgusted him. And

then he came across allusions to the condition of the poor lady at

Folking. What could the condition of the lady at Folking have to do with

the matter? Though the poor lady at Folking should die in her sorrow,

that could not alter the facts as they had occurred in Australia! It was

not for him, or for the Secretary of State, to endeavour to make things

pleasant all round here in England. It had been the jury's duty to find

out whether that crime had been committed, and his duty to see that all

due facilities were given to the jury. It had been Sir John Joram's duty

to make out what best case he could for his client,--and then to rest

contented. Had all things been as they should be, the Secretary of State

would have had no duty at all in the matter. It was in this frame of

mind that Judge Bramber applied himself to the consideration of the

case. No juster man ever lived;--and yet in his mind there was a bias

against the prisoner.

Nevertheless he went to his work with great patience, and a resolve to

sift everything that was to be sifted. The Secretary of State had done

no more than his required duty in sending the case to him, and he would

now do his. He took the counter-evidence as it came in the papers. In

order that the two Bagwaxian theories, each founded on the same small

document, might be expounded, one consecutively after the other, Dick

Shand and his deposition were produced first. The judge declared to

himself that Dick's single oath, which could not now be tested by

cross-examination, amounted to nothing. He had been a drunkard and a

pauper,--had descended to the lowest occupation which the country

afforded, and had more than once nearly died from delirium tremens. He

had then come home penniless, and had--produced his story. If such

evidence could avail to rescue a prisoner from his sentence, and to

upset a verdict, what verdict or what sentence could stand? Poor Dick's

sworn testimony, in Judge Bramber's mind, told rather against Caldigate

than for him.

Then came the postmarks,--as to which the Bagwaxian theory was quite

distinct from that as to the postage-stamp. Here the judge found the

facts to be somewhat complicated and mazy. It was long before he could

understand the full purport of the argument used, and even at last he

hardly understood the whole of it. But he could see nothing in it to

justify him in upsetting the verdict;--nothing even to convince him that

the envelope had been fraudulently handled. There was no evidence that

such a dated stamp had not been in use at Sydney on the day named.

Copies from the records kept daily at Sydney,--photographed

copies,--should have been submitted before that argument had been used.

But when it came to the postage-stamp, then he told himself very quickly

that the envelope had been fraudulently handled. The evidence as to the

date of the manufacture of the stamp was conclusive. It could not have

served to pay the postage on a letter from Sydney to Nobble in May 1873,

seeing that it had not then been in existence. And thus any necessity

there might otherwise have been for further inquiry as to the postmarks

was dissipated. The envelope was a declared fraud, and the fraud

required no further proof. That morsel of evidence had been fabricated,

and laid, at any rate, one of the witnesses in the last trial open to a

charge of perjury. So resolving, Judge Bramber pushed the papers away

from him, and began to think the case over in his mind.

There was certainly something in the entire case as it now stood to

excuse Sir John. That was the first line which his thoughts took. An

advocate having clearly seen into a morsel of evidence on the side

opposed to him, and having proved to himself beyond all doubt that it

was maliciously false, must be held to be justified in holding more than

a mere advocate's conviction as to the innocence of his client. Sir John

had of course felt that a foul plot had been contrived. A foul plot no

doubt had been contrived. Had the discovery taken place before the case

had been submitted to the jury, the detection of that plot would

doubtless have saved the prisoner, whether guilty or innocent. So much

Judge Bramber admitted.

But should it necessarily serve to save him now? Before a jury it would

have saved him, whether guilty or innocent. But the law had got hold of

him, and had made him guilty, and the law need not now subject itself to

the normal human weakness of a jury. The case was now in his hands,--in

his, and those of the Secretary, and there need be no weakness. If the

man was innocent, in God's name let him go;--though, as the judge

observed to himself, he had deserved all he had got for his folly and

vice. But this discovered plot by no means proved the man's innocence.

It only proved the determination of certain persons to secure his

conviction, whether by foul means or fair. Then he recapitulated to

himself various cases in which he had known false evidence to have been

added to true, with the object of convincing a jury as to a real fact.

It might well be that this gang of ruffians,--for it was manifest that

there had been such a gang,--finding the envelope addressed by the man

to his wife, had fraudulently,--and as foolishly as fraudulently,--

endeavoured to bolster up their case by the postage-stamp and the

postmark. Looking back at all the facts, remembering that fatal

twenty thousand pounds, remembering that though the postmarks were

forged on that envelope the writing was true, remembering the

acknowledged promise and the combined testimony of the four persons,--he

was inclined to think that something of the kind had been done in this

case. If it were so, though he would fain see the perpetrators of that

fraud on their trial for perjury, their fraud in no way diminished

Caldigate's guilt. That a guilty man should escape out of the hands of

justice by any fraud was wormwood to Judge Bramber. Caldigate was

guilty. The jury had found him so. Could he take upon himself to say

that the finding of the jury was wrong because the prosecuting party had

concocted a fraud which had not been found out before the verdict was

given? Sir John Joram, whom he had known almost as a boy, had 'demanded'

the release of his client. The word stuck in Judge Bramber's throat. The

word had been injudicious The more he thought of the word the more he

thought that the verdict had been a true verdict, in spite of the fraud.

A very honest man was Judge Bramber;--but human.

He almost made up his mind,--but then was obliged to confess to himself

that he had not quite done so. 'It taints the entire evidence with

perjury,' Sir John had said. The woman's evidence was absolutely so

tainted,--was defiled with perjury. And the man Crinkett had been so

near the woman that it was impossible to disconnect them. Who had

concocted the fraud? The woman could hardly have done so without the

man's connivance. It took him all the morning to think the matter out,

and then he had not made up his mind. To reverse the verdict would

certainly be a thorn in his side,--a pernicious thorn,--but one which,

if necessary, he would endure. Thorns, however, such as these are very

persuasive.

At last he determined to have inquiry made as to the woman by the

police. She had laid herself open to an indictment for perjury, and in

making inquiry on that head something further might probably be learned.

Chapter LV

How the Conspirators Throve

There had been some indiscretion among Caldigate's friends from which it

resulted that, while Judge Bramber was considering the matter, and

before the police intelligence of Scotland Yard even had stirred itself

in obedience to the judge's orders, nearly all the circumstances which

had been submitted to the judge had become public. Shand knew all that

Bagwax had done. Bagwax was acquainted with the whole of Dick's

evidence. And Hester down at Folking understood perfectly what had been

revealed by each of those enthusiastic allies. Dick, as we know, had

been staying at Folking, and had made his presence notable throughout

the county. He had succeeded in convincing uncle Babington, and had been

judged to be a false witness by all the Boltons. In that there had

perhaps been no great indiscretion. But when Bagwax opened a

correspondence with Mrs. John Caldigate and explained to her at great

length all the circumstances of the postmark and the postage-stamps, and

when at her instance he got a day's holiday and rushed down to Folking,

then, as he felt himself, he was doing that of which Sir John Joram and

Mr. Jones would not approve. But he could not restrain himself. And why

should he restrain himself when he had lost all hope of his journey to

Sydney? When the prospect of that delight no longer illumined his days,

why should he not enjoy the other delight of communicating his tidings,

--his own discoveries,--to the afflicted lady? Unless he did so it would

appear to her that Joram had done it all, and there would be no

reward,--absolutely none! So he told his tale,--at first by letter and

then with his own natural eloquence. 'Yes, Mrs. Caldigate the postmarks

are difficult. It takes a lifetime of study to understand all the ins

and outs of postmarks. To me it is A B C of course. When I had spent a

week or two looking into it I was sure that impression had never been

made in the way of business Bagwax was sitting out on the lawn at

Folking and the bereaved wife, dressed in black, was near him, holding

in her hand one of the photographed copies of the envelope. 'It's A B C

to me; but I don't wonder you shouldn't see it.'

'I think I do see a good deal,' said Hester.

'But any babe may understand that,' said Bagwax, pressing forward and

putting his forefinger on the obliteration of the postage-stamp. 'You

see the date in the postmark.'

'I know the date very well.'

'We've had it proved that on the date given there, this identical

postage-stamp had not yet been manufactured. The Secretary of State can't

get over that. I'll defy him.'

'Why don't they release him at once then?

'Between you and me, Mrs. Caldigate, I think it's Judge Bramber.'

'He can't want to injure an innocent man.'

'From what I've heard Sir John say, I fancy he doesn't like to have the

verdict upset. But they must do it. I'll defy them to get over that.'

And again he tapped the queen's-head. Then he told the story of his love

for Jemima, and of his engagement. Of course he was praised and

petted,--as indeed he deserved; and thus, though the house at Folking

was a sad house, he enjoyed himself,--as men do when much is made of

them by pretty women.

But the result of all this was that every detail of the story became

known to the public, and was quite common down at Cambridge. The old

squire was urgent with Mr. Seely, asking why it was that when those

things were known an instant order had not come from the Secretary of

State for the liberation of his son. Mr. Seely had not been altogether

pleased at the way in which Sir John had gone to work, and was still

convinced of the guilt of his own client. His answer was therefore

unsatisfactory, and the old squire proclaimed his intention of

proceeding himself to London and demanding an interview with the

Secretary of State. Then the Cambridge newspapers took up the

subject,--generally in the Caldigate interest,--and from thence the

matter was transferred to the metropolitan columns,--which, with one

exception, were strong in favour of such a reversal of the verdict as

could be effected by a pardon from the Queen. The one exception was

very pellucid, very unanswerable, and very cold-blooded. It might

have been written by Judge Bramber himself, but that Judge Bramber

would sooner have cut his hand off than have defiled it by making

public aught that had come before him judicially or officially. But

all Judge Bramber's arguments were there set forth. Dick wished his

father at once to proceed against the paper for libel because the

paper said that his word could not be taken for much. The postmark

theory was exposed to derision. There was no doubt much in the

postage-stamp, but not enough to upset the overwhelming weight of

evidence by which the verdict had been obtained. And so the case

became really public, and the newspapers were bought and read with

the avidity which marks those festive periods in which some popular

criminal is being discussed at every breakfast-table.

Much of this had occurred before the intelligence of Scotland Yard had

been set to work in obedience to Judge Bramber. The papers had been a

day or two in the Home Office, and three or four days in the judge's

hands before he could look at them. To Hester and the old squire at

Folking the incarceration of that injured darling was the one thing in

all the world which now required attention. To redress that terrible

grievance, judges, secretaries, thrones, and parliaments, should have

left their wonted tracks and thought of nothing till it had been

accomplished. But Judge Bramber, in the performance of his duties, was

never hurried; and at the Home Office a delay but of three or four days

amounted to official haste. Thus it came to pass that all that Bagwax

had done and all that Shand had said were known to the public at large

before the intelligence of Scotland Yard was at work,--before anybody

had as yet done anything.

Among the public were Euphemia Smith and Mr. Crinkett,--Adamson

also, and Anna Young, the other witness. Since the trial, this

confraternity had not passed an altogether fraternal life. When the

money had been paid, the woman had insisted on having the half. She,

indeed, had carried the cheque for the amount away from the Jericho

Coffee-house. It had been given into her hands and those of Crinkett

conjointly, and she had secured the document. The amount was payable

to their joint order, and each had felt that it would be better to

divide the spoil in peace. Crinkett had taken his half with many

grumblings, because he had, in truth, arranged the matter and

hitherto paid the expenses. Then the woman had wished to start at

once for Australia, taking the other female with her. But to this

Crinkett had objected. They would certainly, he said, be arrested

for breaking their bail at whatever port they might reach,--and why

should they go, seeing that the money had been paid to them on the

distinct understanding that they were not pledged to abandon the

prosecution. Most unwillingly the woman remained;--but did so fearing

lest worse evil might betide her. Then there had arisen quarrels

about the money between the two females, and between Crinkett and

Adamson. It was in vain that Crinkett showed that, were he to share

with Adamson, there would be very little of the plunder left to him.

Adamson demanded a quarter of the whole, short of a quarter of the

expenses, declaring that were it not paid to him, he would divulge

everything to the police. The woman, who had got her money in her

hand, and who was, in truth, spending it very quickly, would give

back nothing for expenses, unless her expenses in England also were

considered. Nor would she give a shilling to Anna Young, beyond an

allowance of Â£2 a week, till, as she said, they were both back in the

colony again. But Anna Young did not wish to go back to the colony.

And so they quarrelled till the trial came and was over.

The verdict had been given on the 20th July, and it was about the middle

of September when the newspapers made public all that Shand and Bagwax

between them had said and done. At that time the four conspirators were

still in England. The two men were living a wretched life in London, and

the women were probably not less wretched at Brighton. Mrs. Smith, when

she learned that Dick Shand was alive and in England, immediately

understood her danger,--understood her danger, but did not at all

measure the security which might come to her from the nature of Dick's

character. She would have flown instantly without a word to any one, but

that the other woman watched her day and night. They did not live under

the same roof, nor in similar style. Euphemia Smith wore silk, and

endeavoured to make the best of what female charms her ill mode of life

had left to her; while Young was content with poor apparel and poor

living,--but spent her time in keeping guard on the other. The woman in

silk knew that were she to leave her lodgings for half a day without the

knowledge of the woman in calico, the woman in calico would at once

reveal everything to the police. But when she understood the point which

had been raised and made as to the postmark,--which she did understand

thoroughly,--then she comprehended also her own jeopardy, and hurried up

to London to see Crinkett. And she settled matters with Young. If Young

would go back with her to Australia, everything there should be made

pleasant. Terms were made at the Brighton station. Anna Young was to

receive two thousand pounds in London, and would then remain as

companion with her old mistress.

In London there was a close conference, at first between the two

principals only. Crinkett thought that he was comparatively safe. He had

sworn to nothing about the letter; and though he himself had prepared

the envelope, no proof of his handiwork was forthcoming that he had done

so. But he was quite ready to start again to some distant portion of the

earth's surface,--to almost any distant portion of the earth's

surface,--if she would consent to a joining of purses. 'And who is to

keep the joint purse?' asked Mrs. Smith, not without a touch of grand

irony.

'Me, of course,' said Crinkett. 'A man always must have the money.'

'I'd sooner have fourteen years for perjury, like the Claimant,' said

Mrs. Smith, with a grand resolve that, come what might, she would stick

to her own money.

But at last it was decided. Adamson would not stir a step, but consented

to remain with two thousand pounds, which Crinkett was compelled to pay

him. Crinkett handed him the money within the precincts of one of the

city banks not an hour before the sailing of the Julius Vogel from the

London Docks for Auckland in New Zealand. At that moment both the women

were on board the Julius Vogel, and the gang was so far safe. Crinkett

was there in time, and they were carried safely down the river. New

Zealand had been chosen because there they would be further from their

persecutors than at any other spot they could reach. And the journey

would occupy long, and they were pervaded by an idea that as they had

been hitherto brought in question as to no crime, the officers of

justice would hardly bring them back from so great a distance.

The Julius Vogel touched at Plymouth on her outward voyage. How terribly

inconvenient must be this habit of touching to passengers going from

home, such as Euphemia Smith and Thomas Crinkett! And the wretched

vessel, which had made a quick passage round from the Thames, lay two

days and two nights at Dartmouth, before it went on to Plymouth. Our

friends, of course, did not go on shore. Our friends, who were known as

Mr. Catley and his two widowed sisters, Mrs. Salmon and Mrs. York, kept

themselves very quiet, and were altogether well-behaved. But the women

could not restrain some manifestation of their impatience. Why did not

the vessel start? Why were they to be delayed Then the captain made

known to them that the time for starting had not yet come. Three o'clock

on that day was the time fixed for starting. As the slow moments wore

themselves away, the women trembled, huddled together on the poop of the

vessel; while Crinkett, never letting the pipe out of his mouth, stood

leaning against the taffrail, looking towards the port, gazing across

the waters to see whether anything was coming towards the ship which

might bode evil to his journey. Then there came the bustle preparatory

to starting, and Crinkett thought that he was free, at any rate, for

that journey. But such bustle spreads itself over many minutes. Quarter

of an hour succeeded quarter of an hour, and still they were not off.

The last passenger came on board, and yet they were not off. Then

Crinkett with his sharp eyes saw another boat pushed off from the shore,

and heard a voice declare that the Julius Vogel had received a signal

not to start. Then Crinkett knew that a time of desperate trouble had

come upon him, and he bethought himself what he would do. Were he to

jump overboard, they would simply pick him up. Nor was he quite sure

that he wished to die. The money which he had kept had not been obtained

fraudulently, and would be left to him, he thought, after that term of

imprisonment which it might be his fate to endure. But then, again, it

might be that no such fate was in store for him. He had sworn only to

the marriage and not to the letter. It might still be possible that he

should be acquitted, while the woman was condemned. So he stood

perfectly still, and said not a word to either of his companions as to

the boat which was coming. He could soon see two men in the guise of

policemen, and another who was certainly a policeman, though not in that

guise. He stood there very quiet, and determined that he would tell his

own name and those of the two women at the first question that was asked

him. On the day but one following, Crinkett and Euphemia Smith were

committed in London to take their trial for perjury.

Adamson, when he had read the reports in the newspapers, and had learned

that the postage-stamp had been detected, and that Shand was at home,

also looked about him a little. He talked over the matter at great

length with Crinkett, but he did not tell Crinkett all his own ideas.

Some of them he did make known to Crinkett. He would not himself go to

the colonies with Crinkett, nor would he let Crinkett go till some share

of the plunder had been made over to him. This, after many words, had

been fixed at two thousand pounds; and the money, as we have seen, had

been paid. Crinkett had been careful to make the payment at as late a

moment as possible. He had paid the amount,--very much to his own regret

when he saw that boat coming,--because he was quite sure that Adamson

would at once have denounced him to the police, had he not done so.

Adamson might denounce him in spite of the payment;--but the payment

appeared to him to be his best chance. When he saw the boat coming, he

knew that he had simply thrown away his two thousand pounds.

In truth, he had simply thrown it away. There is no comfort in having

kept one's word honestly, when one would fain have broken it

dishonestly. Adamson, with the large roll of bank-notes still in his

pocket, had gone at once to Scotland Yard and told his story. At that

time all the details had been sent by the judge to the police-office,

and it was understood that a great inquiry was to be made. In the first

place, Crinkett and Euphemia Smith were wanted. Adamson soon made his

bargain. He could tell something,--could certainly tell where Crinkett

and the women were to be found; but he must be assured that any little

peccadillo of which he himself might have been guilty would be

overlooked. The peccadillo on his part had been very small, but he must

be assured. Then he was assured, and told the police at once that they

could stop the two travellers at Plymouth. And of course he told more

than that. There had been no marriage,--no real marriage. He had been

induced to swear that there had been a marriage, because he had regarded

the promise and the cohabitation as making a marriage,--'in heaven.'

So he had expressed himself, and so excused himself. But now his eyes

had been opened to the error of his ways, and he was free to acknowledge

that he had committed perjury. There had been no marriage;--certainly

none at all. He made his deposition, and bound himself down, and

submitted to live under the surveillance of the police till the affair

should be settled. Then he would be able to go where he listed, with two

thousand pounds in his pocket. He was a humble, silent, and generally

obedient man, but in this affair he had managed to thrive better than

any of the others. Anna Young was afterwards allowed to fill the same

position; but she failed in getting any of the money. While the women

were in London together, and as they were starting, Euphemia Smith had

been too strong for her companion. She had declared that she would not

pay the money till they were afloat, and then that she would not pay it

till they had left Plymouth. When the police came on board the Julius

Vogel, Anna Young had as yet received nothing.

Chapter LVI

The Boltons Are Very Firm

While all this was going on, as the general opinion in favour of

Caldigate was becoming stronger every day, when even Judge Bramber had

begun to doubt, the feeling which had always prevailed at Puritan Grange

was growing in intensity and converting itself from a conviction into a

passion. That the wicked bigamist had falsely and fraudulently robbed

her of her daughter was a religion to Mrs. Bolton;--and, as the matter

had proceeded, the old banker had become ever more and more submissive

to his wife's feelings. All the Cambridge Boltons were in accord on this

subject,--who had never before been in accord on any subject. Robert

Bolton, who understood thoroughly each point as it was raised on behalf

of Caldigate, was quite sure that the old squire was spending his money

freely, his own money and his son's, with the view of getting the

verdict set aside. What was so clear as that Dick Shand and Bagwax, and

probably also Smithers from the Stamps and Taxes, were all in the pay of

old Caldigate? At this time the defection of Adamson was not known to

him, but he did know that a strong case was being made with the

Secretary of State. 'If it costs me all I have in the world I will

expose them,' he said up in London to his brother William, the London

barrister.

The barrister was not quite in accord with the other Boltons. He also

had been disposed to think that Dick Shand and Bagwax might have been

bribed by the squire. It was at any rate possible. And the twenty

thousand pounds paid to the accusing witnesses had always stuck in his

throat when he had endeavoured to believe that Caldigate might be

innocent. It seemed to him still that the balance of evidence was

against the man who had taken his sister away from her home. But he was

willing to leave that to the Secretary of State and to the judge. He did

not see why his sister should not have her husband and be restored to

the world,--if Judge Bramber should at last decide that so it ought to

be. No money could bribe Judge Bramber. No undue persuasion could weaken

him. If that Rhadamanthus should at last say that the verdict had been a

wrong verdict, then,--for pity's sake, for love's sake, in the name of

humanity, and for the sake of all Boltons present and to come,--let the

man be considered innocent.

But Robert Bolton was more intent on his purpose, and was a man of

stronger passion. Perhaps some real religious scruple told him that a

woman should not live with a man who was not her true husband,--let any

judge say what he might. But hatred, probably, had more to do with it

than religion. It was he who had first favoured Caldigate's claim on

Hester's hand, and he who had been most grievously deceived. From the

moment in which the conviction had come upon him that Caldigate had even

promised his hand in marriage to Euphemia Smith, he had become

Caldigate's enemy,--his bitter enemy; and now he could not endure the

thought that he should be called upon again to receive Caldigate as his

brother-in-law. Caldigate's guilt was an idea fixed in his mind which no

Secretary of State, no Judge Bramber, no brother could expel.

And so it came to pass that there were hard words between him and his

brother. 'You are wrong,' said William.

'How wrong? You cannot say that you believe him to be innocent.'

'If he receives the Queen's pardon he is to be considered as innocent.'

'Even though you should know him to have been guilty?'

'Well,--yes,' said William, slowly, and perhaps indiscreetly. 'It is a

matter in which a man's guilt or innocence must be held to depend upon

what persons in due authority have declared. As he is now guilty of

bigamy in consequence of the verdict, even though he should never have

committed the offence, so should he be presumed to be innocent, when

that verdict has been set aside by the Queen's pardon on the advice of

her proper officers,--even though he committed the offence.'

'You would have your sister live with a man who has another wife alive?

It comes to that.'

'For all legal purposes he would have no other wife alive.'

'The children would be illegitimate.'

'There you are decidedly wrong,' said the barrister. 'The children would

be legitimate. Even at this moment, without any pardon, the child could

claim and would enter in upon his inheritance.'

'The next of kin would claim,' said the attorney.

'The burden of proving the former marriage would then be on him,' said

the barrister.

'The verdict would be evidence,' said the attorney.

'Certainly,' said the barrister; 'but such evidence would not be worth a

straw after a Queen's pardon, given on the advice of the judge who had

tried the former case. As yet we know not what the judge may say,--we do

not know the facts as they have been expounded to him. But if Caldigate

be regarded as innocent by the world at large, it will be our duty so to

regard him.'

'I will never look on him as Hester's husband,' said the attorney.

'I and Fanny have already made up our minds that we would at once ask

them to come to us for a month,' said the barrister.

'Nothing on earth will induce me to speak to him,' said the attorney.

'Then you will be very cruel to Hester,' said the barrister.

'It is dreadful to me,' said the attorney, 'that you should care so

little for your sister's reputation.' And so they quarrelled. Robert,

leaving the house in great dudgeon, went down on the following morning

to Cambridge.

At Puritan Grange the matter was argued rather by rules of religion than

of law; but as the rules of law were made by those interested to fit

themselves to expediency, so were the rules of religion fitted to

prejudice. No hatred could be more bitter than that which Mrs. Bolton

felt for the man whom she would permit no one to call her son-in-law.

Something as to the postage-stamp and the postmarks was told her; but

with a woman's indomitable obstinacy she closed her mind against all

that,--as indeed did also the banker. 'Is her position in the world to

depend upon a postage-stamp?' said the banker, intending to support his

wife. Then she arose in her wrath, and was very eloquent. 'Her position

in the world!' she said. 'What does it matter? It is her soul! Though

all men and all women should call her a castaway, it would be nothing if

the Lord knew her to be guiltless. But she will be living as an

adulteress with an adulterer. The law has told her that it is so. She

will feel every day and every night that she is a transgressor, and will

vainly seek consolation by telling herself that men have pardoned that

which God has condemned.' And again she broke forth. 'The Queen's

pardon! What right has the Queen to pardon an adulterer who has crept

into the bosom of a family and destroyed all that he found there? What

sense of justice can any Queen have in her bosom who will send such a

one back, to heap sin upon sin, to fasten the bonds of iniquity on the

soul of my child?' Postage-stamps and postmarks and an old envelope! The

triviality of the things as compared with the importance of everlasting

life made her feel that they were unworthy to be even noticed. It did

not occur to her that the presence of a bodkin might be ample evidence

of murder. Post-marks indeed,--when her daughter's everlasting life was

the matter in question! Then they told her of Dick Shand. She, too, had

heard of Dick Shand. He had been a gambler. So she said,--without much

truth. He was known for a drunkard, a spendthrift, a penniless idle

ne'er-do-well who had wandered back home without clothes to his

back;--which was certainly untrue, as the yellow trousers had been

bought at San Francisco;--and now she was told that the hated miscreant

was to be released from prison because such a one as this was ready to

take an oath! She had a knack of looking on such men,--ne'er-do-wells

like Dick Shand and Caldigate,--as human beings who had, as it were,

lost their souls before death, so that it was useless to think of them

otherwise than as already damned. That Caldigate should become a good,

honest, loving husband, or Dick Shand a truth-speaking witness, was to

her thinking much more improbable than that a camel should go through

the eye of a needle. She would press her lips together and grind her

teeth and shake her head when any one about her spoke of a doubt. The

man was in prison, at any rate for two years,--locked up safe for so

much time, as it might be a wild beast which with infinite trouble had

been caged. And now they were talking of undoing the bars and allowing

the monster to gorge himself again with his prey!

'If the Queen were told the truth she would never do it,' she said to

her amazed husband. 'The Queen is a mother and a woman who kneels in

prayer before her Maker. Something should be done, so that the truth may

be made known to her.'

To illuminate all the darkness which was betrayed by this appeal to him

was altogether beyond Mr. Bolton's power. He appreciated the depth of

the darkness. He knew, for instance, that the Queen herself would in

such a matter act so simply in accordance with the advice of some one

else, that the pardon, if given, would not in the least depend on her

Majesty's sentiments. To call it the Queen's pardon was a simple figure

of speech. This was manifest to him, and he was driven to endeavour to

make it manifest to her. She spoke of a petition to be sent direct to

the Queen, and insinuated that Robert Bolton, if he were anything like a

real brother, would force himself into her Majesty's presence. 'It isn't

the Queen,' said her husband.

'It is the Queen. Mercy is the prerogative of the Crown. Even I know as

much as that. And she is to be made to believe that this is mercy!'

'Her Majesty does what her Ministers tell her.'

'But she wouldn't if she was told the truth. I do not for a moment

believe that she would allow such a man as that to be let loose about

the world like a roaring lion if she knew all that you and I know. Mercy

indeed!'

'It won't be meant for mercy, my dear.'

'What then? Do you not know that the man has another wife alive,--a wife

much more suited to him than our poor darling? Nobody would hear my

voice while there was yet time. And so my child, my only one, was taken

away from me by her own father and her own brothers, and no one now will

exert himself to bring her back to her home!' The poor old man had had

but little comfort in his home since his daughter's marriage, and was

now more miserable than ever.

Then there came a letter from Hester to her mother. Since Mrs. Bolton's

last visit to Folking there had been some correspondence maintained. A

few letters had passed, very sad on each side, in which the daughter had

assured the mother of her undying love, and in which the mother had

declared that day and night she prayed for her child. But of Caldigate,

neither on one side nor on the other had mention been made. Now Hester,

who was full of hope, and sick with hope deferred, endeavoured to

convince her mother that the entire charge against her husband had been

proved by new evidence to be false. She recapitulated all the little

details with which the diligent reader must by this time be too well

acquainted. She made quite clear, as she thought, the infamous plot by

which the envelope had been made to give false evidence, and she added

the assurance that certainly before long her dear, dearest, ill-used

husband would be restored to her. Then she went on to implore her

mother's renewed affection both for herself and him and her boy,

promising that bygones should all be bygones; and then she ended by

declaring that though the return of her husband would make her very

happy, she could not be altogether happy unless her parents also should

be restored to her.

To this there came a crushing answer, as follows:---

'Puritan Grange, \_28th September\_.'

'Dearest Hester,--It was unnecessary that you should ask for a

renewal of your mother's love. There has never been a moment in

which she has not loved you,--more dearly, I fear, than one human

creature should ever love another. When I was strongest in opposing

you, I did so from love. When I watched you in the hall all those

hours, endeavouring to save you from further contact with the man

who had injured you, I did it from love. You need not doubt my love.

'But as to all the rest, I cannot agree to a word that you say. They

are plotting with false evidence to rescue the man from prison. I

will not give way to it when my soul tells me that it is untrue. As

your mother, I can only implore you to come back to me, and to save

yourself from the further evil which is coming upon you. It may be

that he will be enabled to escape, and then you will again have to

live with a husband that is no husband,--unless you will listen to

your mother's words.

'You are thinking of the good things of this world,--of a home with

all luxuries and ease, and of triumph over those who, for the good

of your soul, have hitherto marred your worldly joys. Is it thus

that you hope to win that crown of everlasting life which you have

been taught to regard as the one thing worthy of a Christian's

struggles? Is it not true that, since that wretched day on which you

were taken away from me, you have allowed your mind to pass from

thoughts of eternity to longings after vain joys in this bitter,

fruitless vale of tears? If that be so, can he who has so encouraged

you have been good to you? Do you remember David's words; "Some

trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name

of the Lord our God"? And then, again; "They are brought down and

fallen; but we are risen and stand upright." Ask yourself whether

you have stood upright or have fallen, since you left your father's

house; whether you have trusted in the Lord your God, or in horses

and chariots,--that is, in the vain comforts of an easy life? If it

be so, can it be for your good that you have left your father's

house? And should you not accept this scourge that has fallen upon

you as a healing balm from the hands of the Lord?

'My child, I have no other answer to send you. That I love you till

my very bowels yearn after you is most true. But I cannot profess to

believe a lie, or declare that to be good which I know to be evil.

'May the Lord bless you, and turn your feet aright, and restore you

to your loving mother,

'Mary Bolton.'

When Hester read this she was almost crushed. The delay since the new

tidings had come to her had not, in truth, been very great. It was not

yet quite a month since Shand had been at Folking, and a shorter period

since the discoveries of Bagwax had been explained to her. But the days

seemed to her to be very long; and day after day she thought that on

that day at least the news of his promised release would be brought to

her. And now, instead of these news, there came this letter from her

mother, harder almost in its words than any words which had hitherto

been either written or spoken in the matter. Even when all the world

should have declared him innocent,--when the Queen, and the great

officer of State, and that stern judge, should have said that he was

innocent,--even then her cruel mother would refuse to receive him! She

had been invited to ask herself certain questions as to the state of her

soul, and as to the teaching she had received since her marriage. The

subject is one on which there is no possible means of convergence

between persons who have learned to differ. Her mother's allusions to

chariots and horses was to her the enthusiasm of a fanatic. No doubt,

teaching had come to her from her husband, but it had come at the period

of life at which such lessons are easily learned. 'Brought down and

fallen!' she said to herself. 'Yes, we are all brought down and fallen;'

for she had not at all discarded the principles of her religious

faith;--'but a woman will hardly raise herself by being untrue to her

husband.' She, too, yearned for her mother;--but there was never a

moment's doubt in her mind to which she would cling if at last it should

become necessary that one should be cast off.

Mrs. Bolton, when the letter had been despatched, sat brooding over it

in deep regret mixed with deeper anger. She was preparing for herself an

awful tragedy. She must be severed for ever from her daughter, and so

severed with the opinion of all her neighbours against her! But what was

all that if she had done right? Or of what service to her would be the

contrary if she were herself to think,--nay, to know,--that she had done

wrong?

Chapter LVII

Squire Caldigate at the Home Office

When October came no information from the Secretary of State's office

had yet reached Folking, and the two inhabitants there were becoming

almost despondent as well as impatient. There was nobody with whom they

could communicate. Sir John Joram had been obliged to answer a letter

from the squire by saying that, as soon as there was anything to tell

the tidings would assuredly be communicated to him from the Home Office.

The letter had seemed to be cold and almost uncivil; but Sir John had in

truth said all that he could say. To raise hopes which, after all, might

be fallacious, would have been, on his part, a great fault. Nor, in

spite of his bet, was he very sanguine, sharing his friend Honybun's

opinion as to Judge Bramber's obstinacy. And there was a correspondence

between the elder Caldigate and the Home Office, in which the letters

from the squire were long and well argued, whereas the replies, which

always came by return of post, were short and altogether formal. Some

assistant under-secretary would sign his name at the end of three lines,

in which the correspondent was informed that as soon as the matter was

settled the result would be communicated.

Who does not know the sense of aggravated injustice which comes upon a

sufferer when redress for an acknowledged evil is delayed? The wronged

one feels that the whole world must be out of joint in that all the

world does not rise up in indignation. So it was with the old squire,

who watched Hester's cheek becoming paler day by day, and who knew by

her silence that the strong hopes which in his presence had been almost

convictions were gradually giving way to a new despair. Then he would

abuse the Secretary of State, say hard things of the Queen, express his

scorn as to the fatuous absurdities of the English law, and would make

her understand by his anger that he also was losing hope.

During these days preparations were being made for the committal of

Crinkett and Euphemia Smith, nor would Judge Bramber report to the

Secretary till he was convinced that there was sufficient evidence for

their prosecution. It was not much to him that Caldigate should spend

another week in prison. The condition of Hester did not even come

beneath his ken. When he found allusion to it in the papers before him,

he treated it as a matter which should not have been adduced,--in

bringing which under his notice there had been something akin to

contempt of court, as though an endeavour had been made to talk him over

in private. He knew his own character, and was indignant that such an

argument should have been used with himself. He was perhaps a little

more slow,--something was added to his deliberation,--because he was

told that a young wife and an infant child were anxiously expecting the

liberation of the husband and father. It was not as yet clear to Judge

Bramber that the woman had any such husband, or that the child could

claim his father.

At this crisis, when the first weeks in October had dragged themselves

tediously along, Mr. Caldigate, in a fit which was half rage and half

moodiness, took himself off to London. He did not tell Hester that he

was going till the morning on which he started, and then simply assured

her that she should hear from him by every post till he returned.

'You will tell me the truth, father.'

'If I know it myself, I will tell you.'

'But you will conceal nothing?'

'No;--I will conceal nothing. If I find that they are all utterly

unjust, altogether hard-hearted, absolutely indifferent to the wrong

they have done, I will tell you even that.' And thus he went.

He had hardly any fixed purpose in going. He knew that Sir John Joram

was not in London, and that if he were in town he ought not to be made

subject to visits on behalf of clients. To call upon any judge in such a

matter would be altogether out of place, but to call upon such a judge

as Judge Bramber would be very vain indeed. He had in his head some hazy

idea of forcing an answer from the officials in Downing Street; but in

his heart he did not believe that he should be able to get beyond the

messengers. He was one of a class, not very small in numbers, who, from

cultivating within their bosom a certain tendency towards suspicion,

have come to think that all Government servants are idle, dilatory,

supercilious and incompetent. That some of these faults may have existed

among those who took wages from the Crown in the time of George III. is

perhaps true. And the memory of those times has kept alive the

accusation. The vitality of these prejudices calls to mind the story of

the Nottinghamshire farmer who, when told of the return of Charles II.,

asked what had become of Charles I. Naseby, Worcester, and the fatal day

at Whitehall had not yet reached him. Tidings of these things had only

been approaching him during these twelve years. The true character of

the Civil Service is only now approaching the intelligence of those who

are still shaking their heads over the delinquencies of the last

century. But old Mr. Caldigate was a man peculiarly susceptible to such

hard judgments. From the crown down to the black helmet worn by the

policeman who was occasionally to be seen on Folking causeway, he

thought that all such headpieces were coverings for malpractices. The

bishop's wig had, he thought, disappeared as being too ridiculous for

the times; but even for the judge's wig he had no respect. Judge Bramber

was to him simply pretentious, and a Secretary of State no better than

any other man. In this frame of mind how was it probable that he should

do any good at the Home Office?

But in this frame of mind he went to the Home Office, and asked boldly

for the great man. It was then eleven o'clock in the morning and neither

had the great man, nor even any of the deputy great men, as yet made

their appearance. Mr. Caldigate of course fell back upon his old opinion

as to public functionaries, and, mentally, applied opprobrious epithets

to men who, taking the public pay, could not be at their posts an hour

before mid-day. He was not aware that the great man and the first deputy

great man were sitting in the House of Commons at 2 A.M. on that

morning, and that the office generally was driven by the necessity of

things to accommodate itself to Parliamentary exigencies.

Then he was asked his business. How could he explain to a messenger that

his son had been unjustly convicted of bigamy and was now in prison as a

criminal? So he left his card and said that he would call again at two.

At that hour precisely he appeared again and was told that the great man

himself could not see him. Then he nearly boiled over in his wrath,

while the messenger, with all possible courtesy, went on to explain that

one of the deputies was ready to receive him. The deputy was the

Honourable Septimus Brown, of whom it may be said that the Home Office

was so proud that it considered itself to be superior to all other

public offices whatever simply because it possessed Brown. He had been

there for forty years, and for many sessions past had been the salvation

of Parliamentary secretaries and under-secretaries. He was the uncle of

an earl, and the brother-in-law of a duke and a marquis. Not to know

Brown was, at the West End, simply to be unknown. Brooks's was proud of

him; and without him the 'Travellers'' would not have been such a

Travellers' as it is. But Mr. Caldigate, when he was told that Mr.

Brown would see him, almost left the lobby in instant disgust. When he

asked who was Mr. Brown, there came a muttered reply in which

'permanent' was the only word audible to him. He felt that were he to go

away in dudgeon simply because Brown was the name of the man whom he was

called upon to see, he would put himself in the wrong. He would by so

doing close his own mouth against complaint, which, to Mr. Caldigate,

would indeed have been a cutting of his own nose off his own face. With

a scowl, therefore he consented to be taken away to Mr. Brown.

He was, in the first place, somewhat scared by the room into which he

was shown, which was very large and very high. There were two clerks

with Mr. Brown, who vanished, however, as soon as the squire entered the

room. It seemed that Mr. Brown was certainly of some standing in the

office, or he would not have had two arm-chairs and a sofa in his room.

Mr. Caldigate, when he first consented to see Mr. Brown, had expected to

be led into an uncarpeted chamber where there would have been

half-a-dozen other clerks.

'I have your card, Mr. Caldigate,' said the official. 'No doubt you have

called in reference to your son.'

The squire had determined to be very indignant,--very indignant even

with the Secretary of State himself, to whose indifference he attributed

the delay which had occurred;--but almost more than indignant when he

found that he was to be fobbed off with Mr. Brown. But there was

something in the gentleman's voice which checked his indignation. There

was something in Mr. Brown's eye, a mixture of good-humour and

authority, which made him feel that he ought not to be angry with the

gentleman till he was quite sure of the occasion. Mr. Brown was a

handsome hale old man with grey whiskers and greyish hair, with a

well-formed nose and a broad forehead, carefully dressed with a light

waistcoat and a checked linen cravat, wearing a dark-blue frockcoat,

and very well made boots,--an old man, certainly, but who looked as

though old age must naturally be the happiest time of life. When a man's

digestion is thoroughly good and his pockets adequately filled, it

probably is so. Such were the circumstances of Mr. Brown, who, as the

squire looked at him, seemed to partake more of the nature of his nephew

and brothers-in-law than of the Browns generally.

'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Caldigate; 'I have called about my son who, I think

I may undertake to say, has been wrongly condemned, and is now wrongly

retained in prison.'

'You beg all the questions, Mr. Caldigate,' said the permanent

under-secretary, with a smile.

'I maintain that what you call the questions are now so clearly proved

as not to admit of controversy. No one can deny that a conspiracy was

got up against my son.'

'I shall not deny it, certainly, Mr. Caldigate. But in truth I know very

little or nothing about it.' The squire, who had been seated, rose from

his chair,--as in wrath,--about to pour forth his indignation. Why was

he treated in this way,--he who was there on a subject of such tragic

interest to him? When all the prospects, reputation, and condition of

his son were at stake, he was referred to a gentleman who began by

telling him that he knew nothing about the matter! 'If you will sit down

for a moment, Mr. Caldigate, I will explain all that can be explained,'

said Mr. Brown, who was weather-wise in such matters, and had seen the

signs of a coming storm.

'Certainly I will sit down.'

'In such cases as this the Secretary of State never sees those who are

interested. It is not right that he should do so.'

'There might be somebody to do so.'

'But not somebody who has been concerned in the inquiry. The Secretary

of State, if he saw you, could only refuse to impart to you any portion

of the information which he himself may possess, because it cannot be

right that he should give an opinion in the matter while he himself is

in doubt. You may be sure that he will open his mouth to no one except

to those from whom he may seek assistance, till he has been enabled to

advise her Majesty that her Majesty's pardon should be given or

refused.'

'When will that be?'

'I am afraid that I cannot name a day. You, Mr. Caldigate, are, I know,

a gentleman of position in your county and a magistrate. Cannot you

understand how minutely facts must be investigated when a Minister of

the Crown is called upon to accept the responsibility of either

upsetting or confirming the verdict of a jury?'

'The facts are as clear as daylight.'

'If they be so, your son will soon be a free man.'

'If you could feel what his wife suffers in the meantime!'

'Though I did feel it,--though we all felt it; as probably we do, for

though we be officials still we are men,--how should that help us? You

would not have a man pardoned because his wife suffers!'

'Knowing how she suffered, I do not think I should let much grass grow

under my feet while I was making the inquiry.'

'I hope there is no such grass grows here. The truth is, Mr. Caldigate,

that, as a rule, no person coming here on such an errand as yours is

received at all. The Secretary of State cannot, either in his own person

or in that of those who are under him, put himself in communication with

the friends of individuals who are under sentence. I am sure that you,

as a man conversant with the laws, must see the propriety of such a

rule.'

'I think I have a right to express my natural anxiety.'

'I will not deny it. The post is open to you, and though I fear that

our replies may not be considered altogether satisfactory, we do give

our full attention to the letters we receive. When I heard that you had

been here, and had expressed an intention of returning, from respect to

yourself personally I desired that you might be shown into my room. But

I could not have done that had it not been that I myself have not been

concerned in this matter.' Then he got up from his seat, and Mr.

Caldigate found himself compelled to leave the room with thanks rather

than with indignation.

He walked out of the big building into Downing Street, and down the

steps into the park. And going into the gardens, he wandered about them

for more than an hour, sometimes walking slowly along the water-side,

and then seating himself for a while on one of the benches. What must he

say to Hester in the letter which he must write as soon as he was back

at his hotel? He tried to sift some wheat out of what he was pleased to

call the chaff of Mr. Brown's courtesy. Was there not some indication to

be found in it of what the result might be? If there were any such

indication, it was, he thought, certainly adverse to his son. In whose

bosom might be the ultimate decision,--whether in that of the Secretary,

or the judge, or of some experienced clerk in the Secretary's

office,--it was manifest that the facts which had now been proven to the

world at large for many days, had none of the effects on that bosom

which they had on his own. Could it be that Shand was false, that Bagwax

was false, that the postage-stamp was false,--and that he only believed

them to be true? Was it possible that after all his son had married the

woman? He crept back to his hotel in Jermyn Street, and there he wrote

his letter.

'I think I shall be home to-morrow, but I will not say so for certain. I

have been at the Home Office, but they would tell me nothing. A man was

very civil to me, but explained that he was civil only because he knew

nothing about the case. I think I shall call on Mr. Bagwax at the

Post-office to-morrow, and after that return to Folking. Send in for the

day-mail letters, and then you will hear from me again if I mean to

stay.'

At ten o'clock on the following day he was at the Post-office, and there

he found Bagwax prepared to take his seat exactly at that hour.

Thereupon he resolved, with true radical impetuosity, that Bagwax was a

much better public servant than Mr. Brown. 'Well, Mr. Caldigate,--so

we've got it all clear at last,' said Bagwax.

There was a triumph in the tone of the clerk's voice which was not

intelligible to the despondent old squire. 'It is not at all clear to

me,' he said.

'Of course you've heard?'

'Heard what? I know all about the postage-stamp, of course.'

'If Secretaries of State and judges of the Court of Queen's Bench only

had their wits about them, the postage-stamp ought to have been quite

sufficient,' said Bagwax, sententiously.

'What more is there?'

'For the sake of letting the world know what can be done in our

department, it is a pity that there should be anything more.'

'But there is something. For God's sake tell me, Mr. Bagwax.'

'You haven't heard that they caught Crinkett just as he was leaving

Plymouth?'

'Not a word.'

'And the woman. They've got the lot of 'em, Mr. Caldigate. Adamson and

the other woman have agreed to give evidence, and are to be let go.'

'When did you hear it?'

'Well;--it is in the "Daily Tell-tale." But I knew it last night,--from

a particular source. I have been a good deal thrown in with Scotland

Yard since this began, Mr. Caldigate, and, of course, I hear things.'

Then it occurred to the squire that perhaps he had flown a little too

high in going at once to the Home Office. They might have told him more,

perhaps, in Scotland Yard. 'But it's all true. The depositions have

already been made. Adamson and Young have sworn that they were present

at no marriage. Crinkett they say, means to plead guilty; but the woman

sticks to it like wax.'

The squire had written a letter by the day-mail to say that he would

remain in London that further day. He now wrote again, at the

Post-office, telling Hester all that Bagwax had told him, and declaring

his purpose of going at once to Scotland Yard.

If this story were true, then certainly his son would soon be liberated.

Chapter LVIII

Mr. Smirkie Is Ill-used

It was on a Tuesday that Mr. Caldigate made his visit to the Home

Office, and on the Thursday he returned to Cambridge. On the platform

whom should he meet but his brother-in-law Squire Babington, who had

come into Cambridge that morning intent on hearing something further

about his nephew. He, too, had read a paragraph in his newspaper, 'The

Snapper,' as to Crinkett and Euphemia Smith.

'Thomas Crinkett, and Euphemia Smith, who gave evidence against Mr. John

Caldigate in the well-known trial at the last Cambridge assizes, have

been arrested at Plymouth just as they were about to leave the country

for New Zealand. These are the persons to whom it was proved that

Caldigate had paid the enormous sum of twenty thousand pounds a few days

before the trial. It is alleged that they are to be indicted for

perjury. If this be true, it implies the innocence of Mr. Caldigate,

who, as our readers will remember, was convicted of bigamy. There will

be much in the whole case for Mr. Caldigate to regret, but nothing so

much as the loss of that very serious sum of money. It would be idle to

deny that it was regarded by the jury, and the judge, and the public as

a bribe to the witnesses. Why it should have been paid will now probably

remain for ever a mystery.'

The squire read this over three times before he could quite

understand the gist of it, and at last perceived,--or thought that

he perceived,--that if this were true the innocence of his nephew

was incontestable. But Julia, who seemed to prefer the paternal

mansion at Babington to her own peculiar comforts and privileges at

Plum-cum-Pippins, declared that she didn't believe a word of it; and

aunt Polly, whose animosity to her nephew had somewhat subsided,

was not quite inclined to accept the statement at once. Aunt Polly

expressed an opinion that newspapers were only born to lie, but added

that had she seen the news anywhere else she would not have been a bit

surprised. The squire was prepared to swear by the tidings. If such a

thing was not to be put into a newspaper, where was it to be put? Aunt

Polly could not answer this question, but assisted in persuading her

husband to go into Cambridge for further information.

'I hope this is true,' said the Suffolk squire, tendering his hand

cordially to his brother-in-law. He was a man who could throw all his

heart into an internecine quarrel on a Monday and forget the

circumstance altogether on the Tuesday.

'Of what are you speaking?' asked the squire of Folking, with his usual

placid look, partly indifferent and partly sarcastic, covering so much

contempt of which the squire from Suffolk was able to read nothing at

all.

'About the man and the woman, the witnesses who are to be put in prison

at Plymouth, and who now say just the contrary to what they said

before.'

'I do not think that can be true,' said Mr. Caldigate.

'Then you haven't seen the "Snapper"?' asked Mr. Babington, dragging the

paper out of his pocket. 'Look at that.'

They were now in a cab together, going towards the town, and Mr.

Caldigate did not find it convenient to read the paragraph. But of

course he knew the contents. 'It is quite true,' he said, 'that the

persons you allude to have been arrested, and that they are up in

London. They will, I presume, be tried for perjury.'

'It is true?'

'There is no doubt of it.'

'And the party are splitting against each other?' asked Mr. Babington

eagerly.

'Two of them have already sworn that what they swore before was false.'

'Then why don't they let him out?'

'Why not, indeed?' said Mr. Caldigate.

'I should have thought they wouldn't have lost a moment in such a case.

They've got one of the best fellows in the world at the Home Office. His

name is Brown. If you could have seen Brown I'm sure he wouldn't have

let them delay a minute. The Home Office has the reputation of being so

very quick.'

In answer to this the squire of Folking only shook his head. He would

not even condescend to say that he had seen Brown, and certainly not to

explain that Brown had seemed to him to be the most absurdly-cautious

and courteously-dilatory man that he had ever met in his life. In

Trumpington Street they parted, Mr. Caldigate proceeding at once to

Folking, and Mr. Babington going to the office of Mr. Seely the

attorney. 'He'll be out in a day or two,' said the man of Suffolk, again

shaking his brother-in-law's hand; 'and do you tell him from me that I

hope it won't be long before we see him at Babington. I've been true to

him almost from the first, and his aunt has come over now. There is no

one against him but Julia, and these are things of course which young

women won't forget.'

Mr. Caldigate almost became genial as he accepted this assurance,

telling himself that his brother magistrate was as honest as he was

silly.

Mr. Babington, who was well known in Cambridge, asked many questions of

many persons. From Mr. Seely he heard but little. Mr. Seely had heard

of the arrest made at Plymouth, but did not quite know what to think

about it. If it was all square, then he supposed his client must after

all be innocent. But this went altogether against the grain with Mr.

Seely. 'If it be so, Mr. Babington,' he said, 'I shall always think

the paying away of that twenty thousand pounds the greatest miracle

I ever came across.' Nevertheless, Mr. Seely did believe that the two

witnesses had been arrested on a charge of perjury.

The squire then went to the governor of the jail, who had been connected

with him many years as a county magistrate. The governor had heard

nothing, received no information as to his prisoner from any one in

authority; but quite believed the story as to Crinkett and the woman.

'Perhaps you had better not see him, Mr. Babington,' said the governor,

'as he has heard nothing as yet of all this. It would not be right to

tell him till we know what it will come to.' Assenting to this, Mr.

Babington took his leave with the conviction on his mind that the

governor was quite prepared to receive an order for the liberation of

his prisoner.

He did not dare to go to Robert Bolton's office, but he did call at the

bank. 'We have heard nothing about it, Mr. Babington,' said the old

clerk over the counter. But then the old clerk added in a whisper, 'None

of the family take to the news, sir; but everybody else seems to think

there is a great deal in it. If he didn't marry her I suppose he ought

to be let out.'

'I should think he ought,' said the squire, indignantly as he left the

bank.

Thus fortified by what he considered to be the general voice of

Cambridge, he returned the same evening to Babington. Cambridge,

including Mr. Caldigate, had been unanimous in believing the report. And

if the report were true, then, certainly, was his nephew innocent. As he

thought of this, some appropriate idea of the injustice of the evil done

to the man and to the man's wife came upon him. If such were the

treatment to which he and she had been subjected,--if he, innocent, had

been torn away from her and sent to the common jail, and if she,

certainly innocent, had been wrongly deprived for a time of the name

which he had honestly given her,--then would it not have been right to

open to her the hearts and the doors at Babington during the period of

her great distress? As he thought of this he was so melted by ruth that

a tear came into each of his old eyes. Then he remembered the attempt

which had been made to catch this man for Julia--as to which he

certainly had been innocent,--and his daughter's continued wrath. That a

woman should be wrathful in such a matter was natural to him. He

conceived that it behoved a woman to be weak, irascible, affectionate,

irrational, and soft-hearted. When Julia would be loud in condemnation

of her cousin, and would pretend to commiserate the woes of the poor

wife who had been left in Australia, though he knew the source of these

feelings, he could not be in the least angry with her. But that was not

at all the state of his mind in reference to his son-in-law Augustus

Smirkie. Sometimes, as he had heard Mr. Smirkie inveigh against the

enormity of bigamy and of this bigamist in particular, he had determined

that some 'odd-come-shortly,' as he would call it, he would give the

vicar of Plum-cum-Pippins a moral pat on the head which should silence

him for a time. At the present moment when he got into his carriage at

the station to be taken home, he was not sure whether or no he should

find the vicar at Babington. Since their marriage, Mr. Smirkie had spent

much of his time at Babington, and seemed to like the Babington claret.

He would come about the middle of the week and return on the Saturday

evening, in a manner which the squire could hardly reconcile with all

that he had heard as to Mr. Smirkie's exemplary conduct in his own

parish. The squire was hospitality itself, and certainly would never

have said a word to make his house other than pleasant to his own girl's

husband. But a host expects that his corns should be respected, whereas

Mr. Smirkie was always treading on Mr. Babington's toes. Hints had been

given to him as to his personal conduct which he did not take altogether

in good part. His absence from afternoon service had been alluded to,

and it had been suggested to him that he ought sometimes to be more

careful as to his language. He was not, therefore ill-disposed to resent

on the part of Mr. Smirkie the spirit of persecution with which that

gentleman seemed to regard his nephew. 'Is Mr. Smirkie in the house,' he

asked the coachman. 'He came by the 3.40, as usual,' said the man. It

was very much 'as usual,' thought the squire.

'There isn't a doubt about it,' said the squire to his wife as he was

dressing. 'The poor fellow is as innocent as you.'

'He can't be,--innocent,' said aunt Polly.

'If he never married the woman whom they say he married he can't be

guilty.'

'I don't know about that, my dear.'

'He either did marry her or he didn't, I suppose.'

'I don't say he married her, but,--he did worse.'

'No, he didn't,' said the squire.

'That may be your way of thinking of it. According to my idea of what

is right and what is wrong, he did a great deal worse.'

'But if he didn't marry that woman he didn't commit bigamy when he

married this one,' argued he, energetically.

'Still he may have deserved all he got.'

'No; he mayn't. You wouldn't punish a man for murder because he doesn't

pay his debts.'

'I won't have it that he's innocent,' said Mrs. Babington.

'Who the devil is, if you come to that?'

'You are not, or you wouldn't talk in that way. I'm not saying anything

now against John. If he didn't marry the woman I suppose they'll let him

out of prison, and I for one shall be willing to take him by the hand;

but to say he's innocent is what I won't put up with!'

'He has sown his wild oats, and he's none the worse for that. He's as

good as the rest of us, I dare say.'

'Speak for yourself,' said the wife. 'I don't suppose you mean to tell

me that in the eyes of the Creator he is as good a man as Augustus.'

'Augustus be ----.' The word was spoken with great energy. Mrs.

Babington at the moment was employed in sewing a button on the

wristband of her husband's shirt, and in the start which she gave stuck

the needle into his arm.

'Humphrey!' exclaimed the agitated lady.

'I beg your pardon, but not his,' said the squire, rubbing the wound.

'If he says a word more about John Caldigate in my presence, I shall

tell him what I think about it. He has got his wife, and that ought to

be enough for him.'

After that they went down-stairs and dinner was at once announced.

There was Mr. Smirkie to give an arm to his mother-in-law. The squire

took his married daughter while the other two followed. As they crossed

the hall Julia whispered her cousin's name, but her father bade her be

silent for the present. 'I was sure it was not true,' said Mrs.

Smirkie.

'Then you're quite wrong,' said the squire, 'for it's as true as the

Gospel.' Then there was no more said about John Caldigate till the

servants had left the room.

Mr. Smirkie's general appreciation of the good things provided, did not

on this occasion give the owner of them that gratification which a host

should feel in the pleasures of his guests. He ate a very good dinner

and took his wine with a full appreciation of its merits. Such an

appetite on the part of his friends was generally much esteemed by the

squire of Babington, who was apt to press the bottle upon those who sat

with him, in the old-fashioned manner. At the present moment he eyed his

son-in-law's enjoyments with a feeling akin to disappointment. There was

a habit at Babington with the ladies of sitting with the squire when he

was the only man present till he had finished his wine, and, at Mrs.

Smirkie's instance, this custom was continued when she and her husband

were at the house. Fires had been commenced, and when the dinner-things

had been taken away they clustered round the hearth. The squire himself

sat silent in his place, out of humour, knowing that the peculiar

subject would be introduced, and determined to make himself

disagreeable.

'Papa, won't you bring your chair round?' said one of the girls who was

next to him. Whereupon he did move his chair an inch or two.

'Did you hear anything about John?' said the other unmarried sister.

'Yes, I heard about him. You can't help hearing about him in Cambridge

now. All the world is talking about him.'

'And what does all the world say?' asked Julia, flippantly. To this

question her father at first made no answer. 'Whatever the world may

say, I cannot alter my opinion,' continued Julia. 'I shall never be able

to look upon John Caldigate and Hester Bolton as man and wife in the

sight of God.'

'I might just as well take upon myself to say that I didn't look upon

you and Smirkie as man and wife in the sight of God.'

'Papa!' screamed the married daughter.

'Sir!' ejaculated the married son-in-law.

'My dear, that is a strange thing to say of your own child,' whispered

the mother.

'Most strange!' said Julia, lifting both her hands up in an agony.

'But it's true,' roared the squire. 'She says that, let the law say what

it may, these people are not to be regarded as man and wife.'

'Not by me,' said Julia.

'Who are you that you are to set up a tribunal of your own? And if you

judge of another couple in that way, why isn't some one to judge of you

after the same fashion?'

'There is the verdict,' said Mr. Smirkie. 'No verdict has pronounced me

a bigamist.'

'But it might for anything I know,' said the squire, angrily. 'Some

woman might come up in Plum-cum-Pippins and say you had married her

before your first wife.'

'Papa, you are very disagreeable,' said Julia.

'Why shouldn't there be a wicked lie told in one place as well as in

another? There has been a wicked lie told here; and when the lie is

proved to have been a lie, as plain as the nose on your face, he is to

tell me that he won't believe the young folk to be man and wife because

of an untrue verdict! I say they are man and wife;--as good a man and

wife as you and he;--and let me see who'll refuse to meet them as such

in my house?'

Mr. Smirkie had not, in truth, made the offensive remark. It had been

made by Mrs. Smirkie. But it had suited the squire to attribute it to

the clergyman. Mr. Smirkie was now put upon his mettle, and was obliged

either to agree or to disagree. He would have preferred the former, had

he not been somewhat in awe of his wife. As it was, he fell back upon

the indiscreet assertion which his father-in-law had made some time

back. 'I, at any rate, sir, have not had a verdict against me.'

'What does that signify?'

'A great deal, I should say. A verdict, no doubt, is human, and

therefore may be wrong.'

'So is a marriage human.'

'I beg your pardon, sir;--a marriage is divine.'

'Not if it isn't a marriage. Your marriage in our church wouldn't have

been divine if you'd had another wife alive.'

'Papa, I wish you wouldn't.'

'But I shall. I've got to hammer it into his head somehow.'

Mr. Smirkie drew himself up and grinned bravely. But the squire did not

care for his frowns. That last backhander at the claret-jug had

determined him. 'John Caldigate's marriage with his wife was not in the

least interfered with by the verdict.'

'It took away the lady's name from her at once,' said the indignant

clergyman.

'That's just what it didn't do,' said the squire, rising from his

chair;--'of itself it didn't affect her name at all. And now that it is

shown to have been a mistaken verdict, it doesn't affect her position.

The long and the short of it is this, that anybody who doesn't like to

meet him and his wife as honoured guests in my house had better stay

away. Do you hear that, Julia?' Then without waiting for an answer he

walked out before them all into the drawing-room and not another word

was said that night about the matter. Mr. Smirkie, indeed, did not utter

a word on any subject, till at an early hour he wished them all

good-night with dignified composure.

Chapter LIX

How The Big-Wigs Doubted

It's what I call an awful shame.' Mr. Holt and parson Bromley were

standing together on the causeway at Folking, and the former was

speaking. The subject under discussion was, of course, the continued

detention of John Caldigate in the county prison.

'I cannot at all understand it,' said Mr. Bromley.

'There's no understanding nothing about it, sir. Every man, woman, and

child in the county knows as there wasn't no other marriage, and yet

they won't let 'un out. It's sheer spite, because he wouldn't vote for

their man last 'lection.'

'I hardly think that, Mr. Holt.'

'I'm as sure of it as I stands here,' said Mr. Holt, slapping his thigh.

'What else 'd they keep 'un in for? It's just like their ways.'

Mr. Holt was one of a rare class, being a liberal farmer,--a Liberal,

that is, in politics; as was also Mr. Bromley, a Liberal among

parsons,--\_rava avis.\_ The Caldigates had always been Liberal, and Mr.

Holt had been brought up to agree with his landlord. He was now beyond

measure acerbated, because John Caldigate had not been as yet declared

innocent on evidence which was altogether conclusive to himself. The

Conservatives were now in power, and nothing seemed so natural to Mr.

Holt as that the Home Secretary should keep his landlord in jail because

the Caldigates were Liberals. Mr. Bromley could not quite agree to this,

but he also was of opinion that a great injustice was being done. He was

in the habit of seeing the young wife almost daily, and knew the havoc

which hope turned into despair was making with her. Another week had

now gone by since the old squire had been up in town, and nothing yet

had been heard from the Secretary of State. All the world knew that

Crinkett and Euphemia Smith were in custody, and still no tidings

came,--yet the husband, convicted on the evidence of these perjurers,

was detained in prison!

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, and Hester's heart was very sick

within her. 'Why do they not tell me something?' she said when her

father-in-law vainly endeavoured to comfort her. Why not, indeed? He

could only say hard things of the whole system under which the

perpetration of so great a cruelty was possible, and reiterate his

opinion that, in spite of that system, they must, before long, let his

son go free.

The delay in truth was not at the Home Office. Judge Bramber could not

as yet quite make up his mind. It is hoped that the reader has made up

his, but the reader knows somewhat more than the judge knew. Crinkett

had confessed nothing,--though a rumour had got abroad that he intended

to plead guilty. Euphemia Smith was constant in her assertion to all

those who came near her, that she had positively been married to the man

at Ahalala. Adamson and Anna Young were ready now to swear that all

which they had sworn before was false; but it was known to the police

that they had quarrelled bitterly as to the division of the spoil ever

since the money had been paid to the ring-leaders. It was known that

Anna Young had succeeded in getting nothing from the other woman, and

that the man had unwillingly accepted his small share, fearing that

otherwise he might get nothing. They were not trustworthy witnesses, and

it was very doubtful whether the other two could be convicted on their

evidence. The judge, as he turned it all over in his mind, was by no

means sure that the verdict was a mistaken verdict. It was at any rate a

verdict. It was a decision constitutionally arrived at from a jury. This

sending back of the matter to him hardly was constitutional.

It was abhorrent to his nature,--not that a guilty man should escape,

which he knew to be an affair occurring every day,--but that a guilty

man, who had been found to be guilty, should creep back through the

meshes of the law. He knew how many chances were given by the practice

of British courts to an offender on his trial, and he was quite in

favour of those chances. He would be urgent in telling a jury to give

the prisoner the benefit of a doubt. But when the transgressor, with all

those loopholes stopped, stood before him convicted, then he felt a

delight in the tightness of the grip with which he held the wretch, and

would tell himself that the world in which he lived was not as yet all

astray, in that a guilty man could still be made to endure the proper

reward of his guilt.

It was with him as when a hunter has hunted a fox after the approved

laws of venery. There have been a dozen ways of killing the animal of

which he has scorned to avail himself. He has been careful to let him

break from his covert, regarding all who would stop him as enemies to

himself. It has been a point of honour with him that the animal should

suffer no undue impediment. Any ill-treatment shown to the favoured one

in his course, is an injury done to the hunter himself. Let no man head

the fox, let no man strive to drive him back upon the hounds. Let all be

done by hunting law,--in accordance with those laws which give so many

chances of escape. But when the hounds have run into their quarry, not

all the eloquence of all the gods should serve to save that doomed one's

life.

So it was with Judge Bramber and a convicted prisoner. He would give the

man the full benefit of every quibble of the law till he was convicted.

He would be severe on witnesses, harsh to the police, apparently a very

friend to the man standing at the bar,--till the time came for him to

array the evidence before the jury. Then he was inexorable; and when the

verdict had been once pronounced, the prisoner was but as a fox about to

be thrown to the hounds.

And now there was a demand that this particular fox should be put back

into his covert! The Secretary of State could put him back, if he

thought fit. But in these matters there was so often a touch of

cowardice. Why did not the Secretary do it without asking him? There had

arisen no question of law. There was no question as to the propriety of

the verdict as found upon the evidence given at the trial. The doubt

which had arisen since had come from further evidence, of which the

Secretary was as well able to judge as he. No doubt the case was

difficult. There had been gross misdoing on both sides. But if Caldigate

had not married the woman, why had he paid those twenty thousands? Why

had he written those words on the envelope? There was doubt enough now,

but the time for giving the prisoner the benefit of the doubt was gone.

The fox had been fairly hunted, and Judge Bramber thought that he had

better die.

But he hesitated;--and while he was hesitating there came to him a

little reminder, a most gentle hint, in the shape of a note from the

Secretary of State's private secretary. The old squire's visit to the

office had not seemed to himself to be satisfactory, but he had made a

friend for himself in Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown looked into the matter, and

was of opinion that it would be well to pardon the young man. Even

though there had been some jumping over a broomstick at Ahalala, why

should things not be made comfortable here at home? What harm would a

pardon do to any one?--whereas there were so many whom it would make

happy. So he asked the Secretary whether that wasn't a hard case of

young Caldigate. The Secretary whispered that it was in Bramber's hands,

upon which Mr. Brown observed that, if so, it was certainly hard. But

the conversation was not altogether thrown away, for on that afternoon

the private secretary wrote his note.

Judge Bramber when he received the note immediately burned it,--and this

he did with considerable energy of action. If they would send him such

cases as that, what right had they to remind him of his duty? He was not

going to allow any private secretary or any Secretary of State, to hurry

him! There was no life or death in this matter. Of what importance was

it that so manifest an evil-doer as this young Caldigate should remain

in prison a day or two more,--a man who had attempted to bribe four

witnesses by twenty thousand pounds? It was an additional evil that such

a one should have such a sum for such a purpose. But still he felt that

there was a duty thrown upon him; and he sat down with all the papers

before him, determined to make up his mind before he rose from his

chair.

He did make up his mind, but did so at last by referring back the

responsibility to the Secretary of State. 'The question is one

altogether of evidence,' he said, 'and not of law. Any clear-headed man

is as able to reach a true decision as I am. It is such a question as

should be left to a jury,--and would justify a trial on appeal if that

were practicable. It would be well that the case should stand over till

Thomas Crinkett and Euphemia Smith shall have been tried for perjury,

which, as I understand, will take place at the next winter assizes. If

the Secretary of State thinks that the delay would be too long, I would

humbly suggest that he should take her Majesty's pleasure in accordance

with his own opinion as to the evidence.'

When that document was read at the Home Office by the few who were

privileged to read it, they knew that Judge Bramber had been in a very

ill humour. But there was no help for that. The judge had been asked for

advice and had refused to give it; or had advised,--if his remark on

that subject was to be taken for advice,--that the consideration of the

matter should be postponed for another three months. The case, if there

was any case in favour of the prisoner, was not one for pardon but for

such redress as might now be given for a most gross injustice. The man

had been put to a very great expense, and had been already in prison for

ten or eleven weeks, and his further detention would be held to have

been very cruel if it should appear at last that the verdict had been

wrong. The public press was already using strong language on the

subject, and the Secretary of State was not indifferent to the public

press. Judge Bramber thoroughly despised the press,--though he would

have been very angry if his 'Times' had not been ready for him at

breakfast every morning. And two or three questions had already been

asked in the House of Commons. The Secretary of State, with that

habitual strategy, without which any Secretary of State must be held to

be unfit for the position which he holds, contrived to answer the

questions so as to show that, while the gentlemen who asked them were

the most indiscreet of individuals, he was the most discreet of

Secretaries. And he did this, though he was strongly of opinion that

Judge Bramber's delay was unjustifiable. But what would be thought of a

Secretary of State who would impute blame in the House of Commons to one

of the judges of the land before public opinion had expressed itself so

strongly on the matter as to make such expression indispensable? He did

not think that he was in the least untrue in throwing blame back upon

the questioners, and in implying that on the side of the Crown there had

been no undue delay, though, at the moment, he was inwardly provoked at

the dilatoriness of the judge.

Public opinion was expressing itself very strongly in the press. 'The

Daily Tell-Tale' had a beautifully sensational article, written by their

very best artist. The whole picture was drawn with a cunning hand. The

young wife in her lonely house down in Cambridge which the artist not

inaptly called The Moated Grange! The noble, innocent, high-souled

husband, eating his heart out within the bars of a county prison, and

with very little else to eat! The indignant father, driven almost to

madness by the wrongs done to his son and heir! Had the son not been an

heir this point would have been much less touching. And then the old

evidence was dissected, and the new evidence against the new culprits

explained. In regard to the new culprits, the writer was very loud in

expressing his purpose to say not a word against persons who were still

to be tried;--but immediately upon that he went on and said a great many

words against them. Assuming all that was said about them to be true, he

asked whether the country would for a moment endure the idea that a man

in Mr. Caldigate's position should be kept in prison on the evidence of

such miscreants. When he came to Bagwax and the postmarks, he explained

the whole matter with almost more than accuracy. He showed that the

impression could not possibly have been made till after the date it

conveyed. He fell into some little error as to the fabrication of the

postage-stamp in the colony, not having quite seized Bagwax's great

point. But it was a most telling article. And the writer, as he turned

it off at his club, and sent it down to the office of the paper, was

ready to bet a five-pound note that Caldigate would be out before a week

was over. The Secretary of State saw the article, and acknowledged its

power. And then even the 'Slipper' turned round and cautiously expressed

an opinion that the time had come for mercy.

There could be no doubt that public opinion was running very high in

Caldigate's favour, and that the case had become thoroughly popular.

People were again beginning to give dinner-parties in London, and at

every party the matter was discussed. It was a peculiarly interesting

case because the man had thrown away so large a sum of money! People

like to have a nut to crack which is 'uncrackable,'--a Gordian knot

to undo which cannot even be cut. Nobody could understand the twenty

thousand pounds. Would any man pay such a sum with the object of buying

off false witnesses,--and do it in such a manner that all the facts

must be brought to light when he was tried? It was said here and there

that he had paid the money because he owed it;--but then it had been

shown so clearly that he had not owed any one a penny! Nevertheless the

men were all certain that he was not guilty, and the ladies thought

that whether he were guilty or not did not matter much. He certainly

ought to be released from prison.

But yet the Secretary doubted. In that unspoken but heartfelt accusation

of cowardice which the judge had made against the great officer of State

there had been some truth. How would it be if it should be made to

appear at the approaching trial that the two reprobates, who had turned

Queen's evidence against their associates, were to break down altogether

in their assertions? It might possibly then become quite apparent that

Caldigate had married the woman, and had committed bigamy, when he would

already have been pardoned for the last three months! The pardon in that

case would not do away with the verdict,--and the pardoned man would be

a convicted bigamist. What, then, would be the condition of his wife and

child? If subsequent question should arise as to the boy's legitimacy,

as might so probably be the case, in what light would he appear, he who

had taken upon himself, on his own responsibility, to extort from her

Majesty a pardon in opposition to a righteous and just verdict,--in

opposition to the judge who had tried the case? He had been angry with

Judge Bramber for not deciding, and was now frightened at the necessity

of deciding himself.

In this emergency he sent for the gentleman who had managed the

prosecution on the part of the Crown, and asked him to read up the case

again, 'I never was convinced of the prisoner's guilt,' said the

barrister.

'No!'

'It was one of those cases in which we cannot be convinced. The

strongest point against him was the payment of the money. It is possible

that he paid it from a Quixotic feeling of honour.'

'To false witnesses, and that before the trial!' said the Secretary.

'And there may have been a hope that, in spite of what he said himself

as to their staying, they would take themselves off when they had got

the money. In that way he may have persuaded himself that, as an honest

man, he ought to make the payment. Then as to the witnesses, there can

be little doubt that they were willing to lie. Even if their main story

were true, they were lying as to details.'

'Then you would advise a pardon?'

'I think so,' said the barrister, who was not responsible for his

advice.

'Without waiting for the other trial?'

'If the perjury be then proved,--or even so nearly proved as to satisfy

the outside world,--the man's detention will be thought to have been a

hardship.' The Secretary of State thanked the barrister and let him go.

He then went down to the House, and amidst the turmoil of a strong party

conflict at last made up his mind. It was unjust that such

responsibility should be thrown upon any one person. There ought to be

some Court of Appeal for such cases. He was sure of that now. But at

last he made up his mind. Early on the next morning the Queen should be

advised to allow John Caldigate to go free.

Chapter LX

How Mrs. Bolton Was Nearly Conquered

One morning about the middle of October, Robert Bolton walked out from

Cambridge to Puritan Grange with a letter in his pocket,--a very long

and a very serious letter. The day was that on which the Secretary of

State was closeted with the barrister, and on the evening of which he at

length determined that Caldigate should be allowed to go free. There

had, therefore, been no pardon granted,--as yet. But in the letter the

writer stated that such pardon would, almost certainly, be awarded.

It was from William Bolton, in London, to his brother the attorney, and

was written with the view of proving to all the Boltons at Cambridge,

that it was their duty to acknowledge Hester as the undoubted wife of

John Caldigate; and recommended also that, for Hester's sake, they

should receive him as her husband. The letter had been written with very

great care, and had been powerful enough to persuade Robert Bolton of

the truth of the first proposition.

It was very long, and as it repeated all the details of the evidence for

and against the verdict, it shall not be repeated here at its full

length. Its intention was to show that, looking at probabilities, and

judging from all that was known, there was much more reason to suppose

that there had been no marriage at Ahalala than that there had been one.

The writer acknowledged that, while the verdict stood confirmed against

the man, Hester's family were bound to regard it, and to act as though

they did not doubt its justice;--but that when that verdict should be

set aside,--as far as any criminal verdict can be set aside,--by the

Queen's pardon, then the family would be bound to suppose that they who

advised her Majesty had exercised a sound discretion.

'I am sure you will all agree with me,' he said, 'that no personal

feeling in regard to Caldigate should influence your judgment. For

myself, I like the man. But that, I think, has had nothing to do with my

opinion. If it had been the case that, having a wife living, he had

betrayed my sister into all the misery of a false marriage, and had made

her the mother of a nameless child, I should have felt myself bound to

punish him to every extent within my power. I do not think it

unchristian to say that in such a case I could not have forgiven him.

But presuming it to be otherwise,--as we all shall be bound to do if he

be pardoned,--then, for Hester's sake, we should receive the man with

whom her lot in life is so closely connected. She, poor dear, has

suffered enough, and should not be subjected to the further trouble of

our estrangement.

'Nor, if we acknowledge the charge against him to be untrue, is there

any reason for a quarrel. If he has not been bad to our sister in that

matter, he has been altogether good to her. She has for him that

devotion which is the best evidence that a marriage has been well

chosen. Presuming him to be innocent, we must confess, as to her, that

she has been simply loyal to her husband,--with such loyalty as every

married man would desire. For this she should be rewarded rather than

punished.

'I write to you thinking that in this way I may best reach my father and

Mrs. Bolton. I would go down and see them did I not know that your words

would be more efficacious with them than my own. And I do it as a duty

to my sister, which I feel myself bound to perform. Pray forgive me if I

remind you that in this respect she has a peculiar right to a

performance of your duty in the matter. You counselled and carried out

the marriage,--not at all unfortunately if the man be, as I think,

innocent. But you are bound at any rate to sift the evidence very

closely, and not to mar her happiness by refusing to acknowledge him if

there be reasonable ground for supposing the verdict to have been

incorrect.'

Sift the evidence, indeed! Robert Bolton had done that already very

closely. Bagwax and the stamps had not moved him, nor the direct

assurance of Dick Shand. But the incarceration by Government of Crinkett

and Euphemia Smith had shaken him, and the fact that they had

endeavoured to escape the moment they heard of Shand's arrival. But not

the less had he hated Caldigate. The feeling which had been impressed on

his mind when the first facts were made known to him remained. Caldigate

had been engaged to marry the woman, and had lived with her, and had

addressed her as his wife! The man had in a way got the better of him.

And then the twenty thousand pounds! And then, again, Caldigate's manner

to himself! He could not get over his personal aversion, and therefore

unconsciously wished that his brother-in-law should be guilty,--wished

at any rate that he should be kept in prison. Gradually had fallen upon

him the conviction that Caldigate would be pardoned. And then of course

there had come much consideration as to his sister's condition. He, too,

was a conscientious and an affectionate man. He was well aware of his

duty to his sister. While he was able to assure himself that Caldigate

was not her husband, he could satisfy himself by a conviction that it

was his duty to keep them apart. Thus he could hate the man, advocate

all severity against the man, and believe the while that he was doing

his duty to his sister as an affectionate brother. But now there was a

revulsion. It was three weeks since he and his brother had parted, not

with the kindest feelings, up in London, and during that time the

sifting of the evidence had been going on within his own breast from

hour to hour. And now this letter had come,--a letter which he could not

put away in anger, a letter which he could not ignore. To quarrel

permanently with his brother William was quite out of the question. He

knew the value of such a friend too well, and had been too often guided

by his advice. So he sifted the evidence once again, and then walked off

to Puritan Grange with the letter in his pocket.

In these latter days old Mr. Bolton did not go often into Cambridge. Men

said that his daughter's misfortune had broken him very much. It was

perhaps the violence of his wife's religion rather than the weight of

his daughter's sufferings which cowed him. Since Hester's awful

obstinacy had become hopeless to Mrs. Bolton, an atmosphere of sackcloth

and ashes had made itself more than ever predominant at Puritan Grange.

If any one hated papistry Mrs. Bolton did so; but from a similar action

of religious fanaticism she had fallen into worse that papistical

self-persecution. That men and women were all worms to be trodden under

foot, and grass of the field to be thrown into the oven, was borne in so

often on poor Mr. Bolton that he had not strength left to go to the

bank. And they were nearer akin to worms and more like grass of the

field than ever, because Hester would stay at Folking instead of

returning to her own home.

She was in this frame of mind when Robert Bolton was shown into the

morning sitting-room. She was sitting with the Bible before her, but

with some domestic needlework in her lap. He was doing nothing,--not

even having a book ready to his hand. Thus he would sit the greater

part of the day, listening to her when she would read to him, but much

preferring to be left alone. His life had been active and prosperous,

but the evening of his days was certainly not happy.

His son Robert had been anxious to discuss the matter with him first,

but found himself unable to separate them without an amount of ceremony

which would have filled her with suspicion. 'I have received a letter

this morning from William,' he said, addressing himself to his father.

'William Bolton is, I fear, of the world worldly,' said the step-mother.

'His words always savour to me of the huge ungodly city in which he

dwells.'

But that this was not a time for such an exercise he would have

endeavoured to expose the prejudice of the lady. As it was he was very

gentle. 'William is a man who understands his duty well,' he said.

'Many do that, but few act up to their understanding she rejoined.

'I think, sir, I had better read his letter to you. It has been written

with that intention, and I am bound to let you know the contents.

Perhaps Mrs. Bolton will let me go to the end so that we may discuss it

afterwards.'

But Mrs. Bolton would not let him go to the end. He had not probably

expected such forbearance. At every point as to the evidence she

interrupted him, striving to show that the arguments used were of no

real weight. She was altogether irrational, but still she argued her

case well. She withered Bagwax and Dick with her scorn; she ridiculed

the quarrels of the male and female witnesses; she reviled the Secretary

of State, and declared it to be a shame that the Queen should have no

better advisers. But when William Bolton spoke of Hester's happiness,

and of the concessions which should be made to secure that, she burst

out into eloquence. What did he know of her happiness? Was it not

manifest that he was alluding to this world without a thought of the

next? 'Not a reflection as to her soul's welfare has once come across

his mind,' she said;--'not an idea as to the sin with which her soul

would be laden were she to continue to live with the man when knowing

that he was not her husband.'

'She would know nothing of the kind,' said the attorney.

"She ought to know it," said Mrs. Bolton, again begging the whole

question.

But he persevered, as he had resolved to do when he left his house upon

this difficult mission. 'I am sure my father will acknowledge,' he said,

'that however strong our own feelings have been, we should bow to the

conviction of others who--'

But he was promulgating a doctrine which her conscience required her to

stop at once. 'The conviction of others shall never have weight with me

when the welfare of my eternal soul is at stake.'

'I am speaking of those who have had better means of getting at the

truth than have come within our reach. The Secretary of State can have

no bias of his own in the matter.'

'He is, I fear, a godless man, living and dealing with the godless. Did

I not hear the other day that the great Ministers of State will not even

give a moment to attend to the short meaningless prayers which are read

in the House of Commons?'

'No one,' continued Robert Bolton, trying to get away from sentiment

into real argument,--'no one can have been more intent on separating

them than William was when he thought that the evidence was against him.

Now he thinks the evidence in his favour. I know no man whose head is

clearer than my brother's. I am not very fond of John Caldigate.'

'Nor am I,' said the woman with an energy which betrayed much of her

true feeling.

'But if it be the case that they are in truth man and wife--'

'In the sight of God they are not so,' she said.

'Then,' he continued, trying to put aside her interruption, and to go on

with the assertion he had commenced, 'it must be our duty to acknowledge

him for her sake. Were we not to do so, we should stand condemned in the

opinion of all the world.'

'Who cares for the opinion of the world?'

'And we should destroy her happiness.'

'Her happiness here on earth! What does that matter? There is no such

happiness.'

It was a very hard fight, but perhaps not harder than he had expected.

He had known that she would not listen to reason,--that she would not

even attempt to understand it. And he had learned before this how

impregnable was that will of fanaticism in which she would entrench

herself,--how improbable it was that she would capitulate under the

force of any argument. But he thought it possible that he might move his

father to assert himself. He was well aware that, in the midst of that

apparent lethargy, his father's mind was at work with much of its old

energy. He understood the physical infirmities and religious vacillation

which, combined, had brought the old man into his present state of

apparent submission. It was hardly two years since the same thing had

been done in regard to Hester's marriage. Then Mr. Bolton had asserted

himself, and declared his will in opposition to his wife. There had

indeed been much change in him since that time, but still something of

the old fire remained. 'I have thought it to be my duty, sir,' he said,

'to make known to you William's opinion and my own. I say nothing as to

social intercourse. That must be left to yourself. But if this pardon be

granted, you will, I think, be bound to acknowledge John Caldigate to be

your son-in-law.'

'Your father agrees with me,' said Mrs. Bolton, rising from her chair,

and speaking in an angry tone.

'I hope you both will agree with me. As soon as tidings of the pardon

reach you, you should, I think, intimate to Hester that you accept her

marriage as having been true and legal. I shall do so, even though I

should never see him in my house again.'

'You of course will do as you please.'

'And you, sir?' he said, appealing to the old man.

'You have no right to dictate to your father,' said the wife angrily.

'He has always encouraged me to offer him my advice.' Then Mr. Bolton

shuffled in his chair, as though collecting himself for an effort,--and

at last sat up, with his head, however, bent forward, and with both his

arms resting on the arms of his chair. Though he looked to be old, much

older than he was, still there was a gleam of fire in his eye. He was

thin, almost emaciated, and his head hung forward as though there were

not strength left in his spine for him to sit erect. 'I hope, sir, you

do not think that I have gone beyond my duty in what I have said.'

'She shall come here,' muttered the old man.

'Certainly, she shall,' said Mrs. Bolton, 'if she will. Do you suppose

that I do not long to have my own child in my arms?'

'She shall come here, and be called by her name,' said the father.

'She shall be Hester,--my own Hester,' said the mother, not feeling

herself as yet called upon to contradict her husband.

'And John Caldigate shall come,' he said.

'Never!' exclaimed Mrs. Bolton.

'He shall be asked to come. I say he shall. Am I to be harder on my own

child than are all the others? Shall I call her a castaway, when others

say that she is an honest married woman?'

'Who has called her a castaway?'

'I took the verdict of the jury, though it broke my heart,' he

continued. 'It broke my heart to be told that my girl and her child were

nameless,--but I believed it because the jury said so, and because the

judge declared it. When they tell me the contrary, why shall I not

believe that? I do believe it; and she shall come here, if she will, and

he shall come.' Then he got up and slowly moved out of the room, so that

there might be no further argument on the subject.

She had reseated herself with her arms crossed, and there sat perfectly

mute. Robert Bolton stood up and repeated all his arguments, appealing

even to her maternal love,--but she answered him never a word. She had

not even yet succeeded in making the companion of her life submissive to

her! That was the feeling which was now uppermost in her mind. He had

said that Caldigate should be asked to the house, and should be

acknowledged throughout all Cambridge as his son-in-law. And having said

it, he would be as good as his word. She was sure of that. Of what avail

had been all the labour of her life with such a result?

'I hope you will think that I have done no more than my duty,' said

Robert Bolton, offering her his hand. But there she sat perfectly

silent, with her arms still folded, and would take no notice of him.

'Good-bye,' said he, striving to put something of the softness of

affection into his voice. But she would not even bend her head to

him;--and thus he left her.

She remained motionless for the best part of an hour. Then she got up,

and according to her daily custom walked a certain number of times round

the garden. Her mind was so full that she did not as usual observe every

twig, almost every leaf, as she passed. Nor, now that she was alone, was

that religious bias, which had so much to do with her daily life, very

strong within her. There was no taint of hypocrisy in her character; but

yet, with the force of human disappointment heavy upon her, her heart

was now hot with human anger, and mutinous with human resolves. She had

proposed to herself to revenge herself upon the men of her husband's

family,--upon the men who had contrived that marriage for her

daughter,--by devoting herself to the care of that daughter and her

nameless grandson, and by letting it be known to all that the misery of

their condition would have been spared had her word prevailed. That they

should live together a stern, dark, but still sympathetic life, secluded

within the high walls of that lonely abode, and that she should thus be

able to prove how right she had been, how wicked and calamitous their

interference with her child,--that had been the scheme of her life. And

now her scheme was knocked on the head, and Hester was to become a

prosperous ordinary married woman amidst the fatness of the land at

Folking! It was all wormwood to her. But still, as she walked, she

acknowledged to herself, that as that old man had said so,--so it must

be. With all her labour, with all her care, and with all her strength,

she had not succeeded in becoming the master of that weak old man.

Chapter LXI

The News Reaches Cambridge

The tidings of John Caldigate's pardon reached Cambridge on the Saturday

morning, and was communicated in various shapes. Official letters from

the Home Office were written to the governor of the jail and to the

sub-sheriff, to Mr. Seely who was still acting as attorney on behalf of

the prisoner, and to Caldigate himself. The latter was longer than the

others, and contained a gracious expression of Her Majesty's regret that

he as an innocent person should have been subjected to imprisonment. The

Secretary of State also was described as being keenly sensible of the

injustice which had been perpetrated by the unfortunate and most unusual

circumstances of the case. As the Home Office had decided that the man

was to be considered innocent, it decided also on the expression of its

opinion without a shadow of remaining doubt. And the news reached

Cambridge in other ways by the same post. William Bolton wrote both to

his father and brother, and Mr. Brown the Under-Secretary sent a private

letter to the old squire at Folking, of which further mention shall be

made. Before church time on the Sunday morning, the fact that John

Caldigate was to be released, or had been released from prison, was

known to all Cambridge.

Caldigate himself had borne his imprisonment on the whole well. He had

complained but little to those around him, and had at once resolved to

endure the slowly passing two years with silent fortitude,--as a brave

man will resolve to bear any evil for which there is no remedy. But a

more wretched man than he was after the first week of bitterness could

hardly be found. Fortitude has no effect in abating such misery other

than what may come from an absence of fretful impatience. The man who

endures all that the tormentors can do to him without a sign, simply

refuses to acknowledge the agonies inflicted. So it was with Caldigate.

Though he obeyed with placid readiness all the prison instructions, and

composed his features and seemed almost to smile when that which was to

be exacted from him was explained, he ate his heart in dismay as he

counted the days, the hours, the minutes, and then calculated the amount

of misery that was in store for him. And there was so much more for him

to think of than his own condition. He knew of course that he was

innocent of the crime imputed to him;--but would it not be the same to

his wife and child as though he had been in truth guilty? Would not his

boy to his dying day be regarded as illegitimate? And though he had been

wrongly condemned, had not all this come in truth from his own fault?

And when that eternity of misery within the prison walls should have

come to an end,--if he could live through it so as to see the end of

it,--what would then be his fate, and what his duty? He had perfect

trust in his wife; but who could say what two years might do,--two

years during which she would be subjected to the pressure of all her

friends? Where should he find her when the months had passed? And if she

were no longer at Folking, would she come back to him? He was sure,

nearly sure, that he could not claim her as his wife. And were she

still minded to share her future lot with him, in what way should he

treat her? If that horrid woman was his wife in the eye of the law,--and

he feared though hardly knew that it would be so,--then could not that

other one, who was to him as a part of his own soul, be his wife also?

What would become of his child, who, as far as he could see, would not

be his child at all in the eye of the law? Even while he was still a

free man, still uncondemned, an effort had been made to rob him of his

wife and boy,--an effort which for a time had seemed to be successful.

How would Hester be able to withstand such attempts when they would be

justified by a legal decision that she was not his wife,--and could

not become his wife while that other woman was alive? Such thoughts as

these did not tend to relieve the weariness of his days.

The only person from the outside world whom he was allowed to see during

the three months of his incarceration was Mr. Seely, and with him he had

two interviews. From the time of the verdict Mr. Seely was still engaged

in making those enquiries as to the evidence of which we have heard so

much, and though he was altogether unsympathetic and incredulous, still

he did his duty. He had told his client that these enquiries were being

made, and had, on his second visit, informed him of the arrival of Dick

Shand. But he had never spoken with hope, and had almost ridiculed

Bagwax with his postage-stamps and postmarks. When Caldigate first heard

that Dick was in England,--for a minute or two,--he allowed himself to

be full of hope. But the attorney had dashed his hopes. What was Shand's

evidence against the testimony of four witnesses who had borne the fire

of cross-examination? Their character was not very good, but Dick's was,

if possible, worse. Mr. Seely did not think that Dick's word would go

for much. He could simply say that, as far as he knew, there had been no

marriage. And in this Mr. Seely had been right, for Dick's word had not

gone for much. Then, when Crinkett and Mrs. Smith had been arrested, no

tidings had reached him of that further event. It had been thought best

that nothing as to that should be communicated to him till the result

should be known.

Thus it had come to pass that when the tidings reached the prison he was

not in a state of expectation. The governor of the prison knew what was

going on, and had for days been looking for the order of release. But he

had not held himself to be justified in acquainting his prisoner with

the facts. The despatches to him and to Caldigate from the Home Office

were marked immediate, and by the courtesy of the postmaster were given

in at the prison gates before daylight. Caldigate was still asleep when

the door of the cell was opened by the governor in person and the

communication was made to him as he lay for the last time stretched on

his prison pallet. 'You can get up a free man, Mr. Caldigate,' said the

governor, with his hand on his prisoner's shoulder. 'I have here the

Queen's pardon. It has reached me this morning.' Caldigate got up and

looked at the man as though he did not at first understand the words

that had been spoken. 'It is true, Mr. Caldigate. Here is my

authority,--and this, no doubt, is a communication of the same nature to

yourself.' Then Caldigate took the letter, and, with his mind still

bewildered, made himself acquainted with the gratifying fact that all

the big-wigs were very sorry for the misfortune which had befallen him.

In his state of mind, as it then was, he was by no means disposed to

think much of the injustice done to him. He had in store for him, for

immediate use, a whole world of glorious bliss. There was his house, his

property, his farm, his garden, and the free air. And there would be the

knowledge of all those around him that he had not done the treacherous

thing of which those wretches had accused him.

And added to all this, and above all this, there would be his wife and

his child! It was odd enough that a word from the mouth of an exalted

Parliamentary personage should be able to give him back one wife and

release him from another,--in opposition to the decision of the

law,--should avail to restore to his boy the name and birthright of

which he had been practically deprived, and should, by a stroke of his

pen, undo all that had been done by the combined efforts of jury, judge,

and prosecutor! But he found that so it was. He was pardoned, forsooth,

as though he were still a guilty man! Yet he would have back his wife

and child, and no one could gainsay him.

'When can I go?' he said, jumping from his bed.

'When you please;--now, at once. But you had better come into the house

and breakfast with me first.'

'If I may I would rather go instantly. Can you send for a carriage for

me?' Then the governor endeavoured to explain to him that it would be

better for his wife, and more comfortable for everybody concerned, that

she should have been enabled to expect him, if it were only for an hour

or two, before his arrival. A communication would doubtless have been

made from the Home Office to some one at Folking, and as that would be

sent out by the foot-postman it would not be received before nine in the

morning.

But Caldigate would not allow himself to be persuaded As for eating

before he had seen the dear ones at home, that he declared to be

impossible. A vision of what that breakfast might be to him with his own

wife at his side came before his eyes, and therefore a messenger was at

once sent for the vehicle.

But the postmaster, who from the beginning had never been a believer in

the Australian wife, and, being a Liberal, was staunch to the Caldigate

side of the question, would not allow the letter addressed to the old

squire to be retained for the slow operations of the regular messenger,

but sent it off manfully by horse express, before the dawn of day, so

that it reached the old squire almost as soon as the other letters

reached the prison. The squire, who was an early man, was shaving

himself when the despatch was brought into his room with an intimation

that the boy on horseback wanted to know what he was to do next. The boy

of course got his breakfast and Mr. Caldigate read his letter, which was

as follows:--

'HOME OFFICE,--\_October\_, 187-.

'My DEAR SIR,--When you did me the honour of calling upon me here I

was able to do no more than express my sympathy as to the misfortune

which had fallen upon your family, and to explain to you, I fear not

very efficiently, that at that moment the mouths of all of us here

were stopped by official prudence as to the matter which was

naturally so near your heart. I have now the very great pleasure of

informing you that the Secretary of State has this morning received

her Majesty's command to issue a pardon for your son. The official

intimation will be sent to him and to the county authorities by this

post, and by the time that this reaches you he will be a free man.

'In writing to you, I need hardly explain that the form of a pardon

from the Throne is the only mode allowed by the laws of the country

for setting aside a verdict which has been found in error upon false

evidence. Unfortunately, perhaps, we have not the means of annulling

a criminal conviction by a second trial; and therefore, on such

occasions as this,--occasions which are very rare,--we have but this

lame way of redressing a great grievance. I am happy to think that

in this case the future effect will be as complete as though the

verdict had been reversed. As to the suffering which has been

already endured by your son, by his much-injured wife, and by

yourself, I am aware that no redress can be given.

It is one of those cases in which the honest and good have to

endure a portion of the evil produced by the dishonesty of the

wicked. I can only add to this my best wishes for your son's

happiness on his return to his home, and express a hope that you

will understand that I would most willingly have made your visit to

the Home Office more satisfactory had it been within my power to do

so.--Believe me, very faithfully yours,

'SEPTIMUS BROWN.'

He had not read this letter to the end, and had hardly washed the soap

from his face, before he was in his daughter-in-law's room. She was

there with her child, still in bed,--thinking, thinking, thinking

whether there would ever come an end to her misery. 'It has come,' said

the old man.

'What has come?' she asked, jumping up with the baby in her arms. But

she knew what had come, for he had the letter open in his hands.

'They have pardoned him. The absurdity of the thing! Pardoning a man

whom they know to be innocent, and to have been injured!'

But the 'absurdity of the thing,' as the old squire very naturally

called it, was nothing to her now. He was to come back to her. She would

be in his arms that day. On that very day she would once again hold up

her boy to be kissed by his father.

'Where is he? When will he come? Of course I will go to him! You will

make them have the waggonnette at once; will you not? I will be dressed

in five minutes if you will go. Of course I will go to fetch him.'

But this the squire would not allow. The carriage should be sent, of

course, and if it met his son on the road, as was probable, there would

be no harm done. But it would not be well that the greeting between the

husband and the wife should be in public. So he went out to order the

carriage and to prepare himself to accompany it, leaving her to think

of her happiness and to make herself ready for the meeting. But when

left to herself she could hardly compose herself so as to brush her hair

and give herself those little graces which should be pleasant to his

eye. 'Papa is coming,' she said to her boy over and over again. 'Papa is

coming back. Papa will be here; your own, own, own papa.' Then she threw

aside the black gown, which she had worn since he left her, and chose

for her wear one which he himself had taken pride in buying for

her,--the first article of her dress in the choice of which he had been

consulted as her husband; and with quick unsteady hand she pulled out

some gay ribbon for her baby. Yes;--she and her boy would once again be

bright for his sake;--for his sake there should again be gay ribbons and

soft silks. 'Papa is coming, my own one; your own, own papa!' and then

she smothered the child with kisses.

While they were sitting at breakfast at Puritan Grange, the same news

reached Mr. and Mrs. Bolton. The letter to the old man from his son in

town was very short, merely stating that the authorities at the Home

Office had at last decided that Caldigate should be released from

prison. The writer knew that his father would be prepared for this news

by his brother; and all that could be said in the way of argument had

been said already. The letters which came to Puritan Grange were few in

number, and were generally addressed to the lady. The banker's letters

were all received at the house of business in the town. 'What is it?'

asked the wife, as soon as she saw the long official envelope. But he

read it to the end very slowly before he vouchsafed her any reply. 'It

has to do with that wretched man in prison,' she said. 'What is it?'

'He is in prison no longer.'

'They have let him escape?'

'The Queen has pardoned him because he was not guilty.'

'The Queen! As though she could know whether he be guilty or innocent.

What can the Queen know of the manner of his life in foreign

parts,--before he had taken my girl away from me?'

'He never married the woman. Let there be no more said about it. He

never married her.'

But Mrs. Bolton, though she was not victorious, was not to be silenced

by a single word. No more about it, indeed! There must be very much more

about it. 'If she was not his wife, she was worse,' she said.

'He has repented of that.'

'Repented!' she said, with scorn. What very righteous person ever

believed in the repentance of an enemy?

'Why should he not repent?'

'He has had leisure in jail.'

'Let us hope that he has used it. At any rate he is her husband. There

are not many days left to me here. Let me at least see my daughter

during the few that remain to me.'

'Do I not want to see my own child?'

'I will see her and her boy;--and I will have them called by the name

which is theirs. And he shall come,--if he will. Who are you, or who am

I, that we shall throw in his teeth the sins of his youth?' Then she

became sullen and there was not a word more said between them that

morning. But after breakfast the old gardener was sent into town for a

fly, and Mr. Bolton was taken to the bank.

'And what are we to do now?' asked Mrs. Robert Bolton of her husband,

when the tidings were made known to her also at her breakfast-table.

'We must take it as a fact that she is his wife.'

'Of course, my dear. If the Secretary of State were to say that I was

his wife, I suppose I should have to take it as a fact.'

'If he said that you were a goose it might be nearer the mark.'

'Really! But a goose must know what she is to do.'

'You must write her a letter and call her Mrs. Caldigate. That will be

an acknowledgment.'

'And what shall I say to her?'

'Ask her to come here, if you will.'

'And him?'

'And him, too. The fact is we have got to swallow it all. I was sure

that he had married that woman, and then of course I wanted to get

Hester away from him. Now I believe that he never married her, and

therefore we must make the best of him as Hester's husband.'

'You used to like him.'

'Yes;--and perhaps I shall again. But why on earth did he pay twenty

thousand pounds to those miscreants? That is what I could not get over.

It was that which made me sure he was guilty. It is that which still

puzzles me so that I can hardly make up my mind to be quite sure that he

is innocent. But still we have to be sure. Perhaps the miracle will be

explained some day.'

Chapter LXII

John Caldigate's Return

The carriage started with the old man in it as soon as the horses could

be harnessed; but on the Folking causeway it met the fly which was

bringing John Caldigate to his home,--so that the father and son greeted

each other in the street amidst the eyes of the villagers. To them it

did not much matter, but the squire had certainly been right in saving

Hester from so public a demonstration of her feelings. The two men said

hardly a word when they met, but stood there for a moment grasping each

other's hands. Then the driver of the fly was paid, and the carriage

was turned back to the house. 'Is she well?' asked Caldigate.

'She will be well now.'

'Has she been ill?'

'She has not been very happy, John, while you have been away from her.'

'And the boy?'

'He is all right. He has been spared the heart-breaking knowledge of the

injury done to him. It has been very bad with you, I suppose.'

'I do not like being in jail, sir. It was the length of the time before

me that seemed to crush me. I could not bring myself to believe that I

should live to see the end of it.'

'The end has come, my boy,' said his father, again taking him by the

hand, 'but the cruelty of the thing remains. Had there been another

trial as soon as the other evidence was obtained, the struggle would

have kept your heart up. It is damnable that a man in an office up in

London should have to decide on such a matter, and should be able to

take his own time about it!' The grievance was still at the old squire's

heart in spite of the amenity of Mr. Brown's letter; but John Caldigate,

who was approaching his house and his wife, and to whom, after his

imprisonment even the flat fields and dykes were beautiful, did not at

the moment much regard the anomaly of the machinery by which he had been

liberated.

Hester in the meantime had donned her silk dress, and had tied the gay

bow round her baby's frock, who was quite old enough to be astonished

and charmed by the unusual finery in which he was apparelled. Then she

sat herself at the window of a bedroom which looked out on to the gravel

sweep, with her boy on her lap, and there she was determined to wait

till the carriage should come.

But she had hardly seated herself before she heard the wheels. 'He is

here. He is coming. There he is!' she said to the child. 'Look! look! It

is papa.' But she stood back from the window that she might not be

seen. She had thought it out with many fluctuations as to the very spot

in which she would meet him. At one moment she had intended to go down

to the gate, then to the hall-door, and again she had determined that

she would wait for him in the room in which his breakfast was prepared

for him. But she had ordered it otherwise at last. When she saw the

carriage approaching, she retreated back from the window, so that he

should not even catch a glimpse of her; but she had seen him as he sat,

still holding his father's hand. Then she ran back to her own chamber

and gave her orders as she passed across the passage. 'Go down, nurse,

and tell him that I am here. Run quick, nurse; tell him to come at

once.'

But he needed no telling. Whether he had divined her purpose, or whether

it was natural to him to fly like a bird to his nest, he rushed upstairs

and was in the room almost before his father had left the carriage She

had the child in her hands when she heard him turn the lock of the door;

but before he entered the boy had been laid in his cradle,--and then she

was in his arms.

For the first few minutes she was quite collected, not saying much, but

answering his questions by a word or two. Oh yes; she was well; and baby

was well,--quite well. He, too, looked well, she said, though there was

something of sadness in his face. 'But I will kiss that away,--so soon,

so soon.' She had always expected that he would come back long, long

before the time that had been named. She had been sure of it, she

declared, because that it was impossible that so great injustice should

be done. But the last fortnight had been very long. When those wicked

people had been put in prison she had thought that then surely he would

come. But now he was there, with his arms round her, safe in his own

home, and everything was well. Then she lifted the baby up to be kissed

again and again, and began to dance and spring in her joy. Then,

suddenly, she almost threw the child into his arms, and seated herself,

covered her face with her hands and began to sob with violence. When he

asked her, with much embracing to compose herself, sitting close to her,

kissing her again and again, she shook her head as it lay upon his

shoulder, and then burst out into a fit of laughter. 'What does it

matter,' she said after a while, as he knelt at her knees;--'what does

it matter? My boy's father has come back to him. My boy has got his own

name, and he is an honest true Caldigate; and no one again will tell me

that another woman owns my husband, my own husband, the father of my

boy. It almost killed me, John, when they said that you were not mine.

And yet I knew that they said it falsely. I never doubted for a moment.

I knew that you were my own, and that my boy had a right to his father's

name. But it was hard to hear them say so, John. It was hard to bear

when my mother swore that it was so!'

At last they went down and found the old squire waiting for his

breakfast. 'I should think,' said he, 'that you would be glad to see a

loaf of bread on a clean board again, and to know that you may cut it as

you please. Did they give you enough where you were?'

'I didn't think much about it, sir.'

'But you must think about it now,' said Hester. 'To please me you must

like everything; your tea, and your fresh eggs, and the butter and the

cream. You must let yourself be spoilt for a time just to compensate me

for your absence.'

'You have made yourself smart to receive him at any rate,' said the

squire, who had become thoroughly used to the black gown which she had

worn morning, noon, and evening while her husband was away.

'Why should I not be smart,' she said, 'when my man has come to me? For

whose eyes shall I put on the raiment that is his own but for his? I

was much lower than a widow in the eyes of all men; but now I have got

my husband back again. And my boy shall wear the very best that he has,

so that his father may see him smile at his own gaudiness. Yes, father,

I may be smart now. There were moments in which I thought that I might

never wear more the pretty things which he had given me.' Then she rose

from her seat again, and hung on his neck, and wept and sobbed till he

feared that her heart-strings would break with joy.

So the morning passed away among them till about eleven o'clock, when

the servant brought in word that Mr. Holt and one or two other of the

tenants wanted to see the young master. The squire had been sitting

alone in the back room so that the husband and wife might be left

together; but he had heard voices with which he was familiar, and he now

came through to ask Hester whether the visitors should be sent away for

the present. But Hester would not have turned a dog from the door which

had been true to her husband through his troubles. 'Let them come,' she

said. 'They have been so good to me, John, through it all! They have

always known that baby was a true Caldigate.'

Holt and the other farmers were shown into the room, and Holt as a

matter of course became the spokesman. When Caldigate had shaken hands

with them all round, each muttering his word of welcome, then Holt

began: 'We wish you to know, squoire, that we, none of us, ain't been

comfortable in our minds here at Folking since that crawling villain

Crinkett came and showed himself at our young squire's christening.'

'That we ain't,' said Timothy Purvidge, another Netherden farmer.

'I haven't had much comfort since that day myself, Mr. Purvidge,' said

Caldigate,--'not till this morning.'

'Nor yet haven't none of us,' continued Mr. Holt, very impressively.

'We knowed as you had done all right. We was as sure as the church

tower. Lord love you, sir, when it was between our young missus,--who'll

excuse me for noticing these bright colours, and for saying how glad I

am to see her come out once again as our squire's wife should come

out,--between her and that bedangled woman as I seed in the court, it

didn't take no one long to know what was the truth!' The eloquence here

was no doubt better than the argument, as Caldigate must have felt when

he remembered how fond he had once been of that 'bedangled woman.'

Hester, who, though she knew the whole story, did not at this moment

join two and two together, thought that Mr. Holt put the case uncommonly

well. 'No! we knew,' he continued, with a wave of his hand. 'But the

jury weren't Netherden men,--nor yet Utterden, Mr. Halfacre,' he added,

turning to a tenant from the other parish. 'And they couldn't tell how

it all was as we could. And there was that judge, who would have

believed any miscreant as could be got anywhere, to swear away a man's

liberty,--or his wife and family, which is a'most worse. We saw how it

was to be when he first looked out of his eye at the two post-office

gents, and others who spoke up for the young squoire. It was to be

guilty. We know'd it. But it didn't any way change our minds. As to

Crinkett and Smith and them others, we saw that they were ruffians. We

never doubted that. But we saw as there was a bad time coming to you,

Mr. John. Then we was unhappy; unhappy along of you, Mr. John,--but

a'most worse as to this dear lady and the boy.'

'My missus cried that you wouldn't have believed,' said Mr. Purvidge.

'"If that's true," said my missus, "she ain't nobody; and it's my belief

she's as true a wife as ever stretched herself aside her husband."' Then

Hester bethought herself what present, of all presents, would be most

acceptable to Mrs. Purvidge, who was a red-faced, red-armed,

hard-working old woman, peculiarly famous for making cheeses.

'We all knew it,' said Mr. Holt, slapping his thigh with great energy.

'And now, in spite of 'em all, judge, jury, and lying witnesses,--the

king has got his own again.' At this piece of triumphant rhetoric there

was a cheer from all the farmers. 'And so we have come to wish you all

joy, and particularly you, ma'am, with your boy. Things have been said

of you, ma'am, hard to bear, no doubt. But not a word of the kind at

Folking, nor yet in Netherden;--nor yet at Utterden, Mr. Halfacre. But

all this is over, and we do hope that you, ma'am, and the young squoire

'll live long, and the young 'un of all long after we are gone to our

rest,--and that you'll be as fond of Folking as Folking is of you. I

can't say no fairer.' Then the tray was brought in with wine, and

everybody drank everybody's health, and there was another shaking of

hands all round. Mr. Purvidge, it was observed, drank the health of

every separate member of the family in a separate bumper, pressing the

edge of the glass securely to his lips, and then sending the whole

contents down his throat at one throw with a chuck from his little

finger.

The two Caldigates went out to see their friends as far as the gate, and

while they were still within the grounds there came a merry peal from

the bells of Netherden church-tower. 'I knew they'd be at it,' said Mr.

Holt.

'And quite right too,' said Mr. Halfacre. 'We'd rung over at Utterden,

only we've got nothing but that little tinkling thing as is more fitter

to swing round a bullock's neck than on a church-top.'

'I told 'em as they should have beer,' said Mr. Brownby, whose house

stood on Folking Causeway, 'and they shall have beer!' Mr. Brownby was a

silent man, and added nothing to this one pertinent remark.

'As to beer,' said Mr. Halfacre, 'we'd 'ave found the beer at Utterden.

There wouldn't have been no grudging the beer, Mr. Brownby, no more than

there is in the lower parish; but you can't get up a peal merely on

beer. You've got to have bells.'

While they were still standing at the gate, Mr. Bromley the clergyman

joined them, and walked back towards the house with the two Caldigates.

He, too, had come to offer his congratulations, and to assure the

released prisoner that he never believed the imputed guilt. But he would

not go into the house, surmising that on such a day the happy wife would

not care to see many visitors. But Caldigate asked him to take a turn

about the grounds, being anxious to learn something from the outside

world. 'What do they say to it all at Babington?'

'I think they're a little divided.'

'My aunt has been against me, of course.'

'At first she was, I fancy. It was natural that people should believe

till Shand came back.'

'Poor, dear old Dick. I must look after Dick. What about Julia?'

'SpretÃ¦ injuria formÃ¦!' said Mr. Bromley. 'What were you to expect?'

'I'll forgive her. And Mr. Smirkie? I don't think Smirkie ever looked on

me with favourable eyes.'

Then the clergyman was forced to own that Smirkie too had been among

those who had believed the woman's story. 'But you have to remember how

natural it is that a man should think a verdict to be right. In our

country a wrong verdict is an uncommon occurrence. It requires close

personal acquaintance and much personal confidence to justify a man in

supposing that twelve jurymen should come to an erroneous decision. I

thought that they were wrong. But still I knew that I could hardly

defend my opinion before the outside world.'

'It is all true,' said Caldigate; 'and I have made up my mind that I

will be angry with no one who will begin to believe me innocent from

this day.'

His mind, however, was considerably exercised in regard to the Boltons,

as to whom he feared that they would not even yet allow themselves to be

convinced. For his wife's happiness their conversion was of infinitely

more importance than that of all the outside world beyond. When the

gloom of the evening had come, she too came out and walked with him

about the garden and grounds with the professed object of showing him

whatever little changes might have been made. But the conversation soon

fell back upon the last great incident of their joint lives.

'But your mother cannot refuse to believe what everybody now declares to

be true,' he argued.

'Mamma is so strong in her feelings.'

'She must know they would not have let me out of prison in opposition to

the verdict until they were very sure of what they were doing.'

Then she told him all that had occurred between her and her mother since

the trial,--how her mother had come out to Folking and had implored her

to return to Chesterton, and had then taken herself away in dudgeon

because she had not prevailed. 'But nothing would have made me leave the

place,' she said, 'after what they tried to do when I was there before.

Except to go to church, I have not once been outside the gate.'

'Your brothers will come round, I suppose. Robert has been very angry

with me, I know. But he is a man of the world and a man of sense.'

'We must take it as it will come, John. Of course it would be very much

to me to have my father and mother restored to me. It would be very much

to know that my brothers were again my friends. But when I remember how

I prayed yesterday but for one thing, and that now, to-day, that one

thing has come to me;--how I have got that which, when I waked this

morning, seemed to me to be all the world to me, the want of which made

my heart so sick that even my baby could not make me glad, I feel that

nothing ought now to make me unhappy. I have got you, John, and

everything else is nothing.' As he stooped in the dark to kiss her again

among the rose-bushes, he felt that it was almost worth his while to

have been in prison.

After dinner there came a message to them across the ferry from Mr.

Holt. Would they be so good as to walk down to the edge of the great

dike, opposite to Twopenny Farm, at nine o'clock? As a part of the

message, Mr. Holt sent word that at that hour the moon would be rising.

Of course they went down to the dike,--Mr. Caldigate, John Caldigate,

and Hester there, outside Mr. Holt's farmyard, just far enough to avoid

danger to the hay-ricks and corn-stacks there was blazing an enormous

bonfire. All the rotten timber about the place and two or three

tar-barrels had been got together, and there were collected all the

inhabitants of the two parishes. The figures of the boys and girls and

of the slow rustics with their wives could be seen moving about

indistinctly across the water by the fluttering flame of the bonfire.

And their own figures, too, were observed in the moonlight, and John

Caldigate was welcomed back to his home by a loud cheer from all his

neighbours.

'I did not see much of it myself,' Mr. Holt said afterwards, 'because me

and my missus was busy among the stacks all the time, looking after the

sparks. The bonfire might a' been too big, you know.'

Chapter LXIII

How Mrs. Bolton Was Quite Conquered

Nearly a week passed over their heads at Puritan Grange before anything

further was either done or said, or even written, as to the return of

John Caldigate to his own home and to his own wife. In the meantime,

both Mrs. Robert and Mrs. Daniel had gone out to Folking and made visits

of ceremony,--visits which were intended to signify their acknowledgment

that Mrs. John Caldigate was Mrs. John Caldigate. With Mrs. Daniel the

matter was quite ceremonious and short. Mrs. Robert suggested something

as to a visit into Cambridge, saying that her husband would be delighted

if Hester and Mr. Caldigate would come and dine and sleep. Hester

immediately felt that something had been gained, but she declined the

proposed visit for the present. 'We have both of us,' she said, 'gone

through so much, that we are not quite fit to go out anywhere yet.' Mrs.

Robert had hardly expected them to come, but she had observed her

husband's behests. So far there had been a family reconciliation during

the first few days after the prisoner's release; but no sign came from

Mrs. Bolton; and Mr. Bolton, though he had given his orders, was not at

first urgent in requiring obedience to them. Then she received a letter

from Hester.

'DEAREST, DEAREST MAMMA,--Of course you know that my darling husband

has come back to me. All I want now to make me quite happy is to

have you once again as my own, own mother. Will you not send me a

line to say that it shall all be as though these last long dreary

months had never been;--so that I may go to you and show you my baby

once again? And, dear mamma, say one word to me to let me know that

you know that he is my husband. Tell papa to say so also.--Your most

affectionate daughter,

'HESTER CALDIGATE.'

Mrs. Bolton found this letter on the breakfast-table lying, as was usual

with her letters, close to her plate, and she read it without saying a

word to her husband. Then she put it in her pocket, and still did not

say a word. Before the middle of the day she had almost made up her

mind that she would keep the letter entirely to herself. It was well,

she thought, that he had not seen it, and no good could be done by

showing it to him. But he had been in the breakfast-parlour before her,

had seen the envelope, and had recognised the handwriting. They were

sitting together after lunch, and she was just about to open the book of

sermons with which, at that time, she was regaling him, when he stopped

her with a question. 'What did Hester say in her letter?'

Even those who intend to be truthful are sometimes surprised into a lie.

'What letter?' she said. But she remembered herself at once, and knew

that she could not afford to be detected in a falsehood. 'That note from

Hester? Yes;--I had a note this morning.'

'I know you had a note. What does she say?'

'She tells me that he--he has come back.'

'And what else? She was well aware that we knew that without her telling

us.'

'She wants to come here.'

'Bid her come.'

'Of course she shall come.'

'And him.' To this she made no answer, except with the muscles of her

face, which involuntarily showed her antagonism to the order she had

received. 'Bid her bring her husband with her,' said the banker.

'He would not come,--though I were to ask him.'

'Then let it be on his own head.'

'I will not ask him,' she said at last, looking away across the room at

the blank wall. 'I will not belie my own heart. I do not want to see him

here. He has so far got the better of me; but I will not put my neck

beneath his feet for him to tread on me.'

Then there was a pause;--not that he intended to allow her disobedience

to pass, but that he was driven to bethink himself how he might best

oppose her. 'Woman,' he said, 'you can neither forgive nor forget.'

'He has got my child from me,--my only child.'

'Does he persecute your child? Is she not happy in his love? Even if he

have trespassed against you, who are you that you should not forgive a

trespass? I say that he shall be asked to come here, that men may know

that in her own father's house she is regarded as his true and honest

wife.'

'Men!' she murmured. 'That men may know!' But she did not again tell him

that she would not obey his command.

She sat all the remainder of the day alone in her room, hardly touching

the work which she had beside her, not opening the book which lay by her

hand on the table. She was thinking of the letter which she knew that

she must write, but she did not rise to get pen and ink, nor did she

even propose to herself that the letter should be written then. Not a

word was said about it all the evening. On the next morning the banker

pronounced his intention of going into town, but before he started he

referred to the order he had given. 'Have you written to Hester?' he

asked. She merely shook her head. 'Then write to-day.' So saying, he

tottered down the steps with his stick and got into the fly.

About noon she did get her paper and ink, and very slowly wrote her

letter. Though her heart was, in truth, yearning towards her

daughter,--though at that moment she could have made any possible

sacrifice for her child had her child been apart from the man she

hated,--she could not in her sullenness force her words into a form of

affection.

'DEAR HESTER,' she said. 'Of course I shall be glad to see you and

your boy. On what day would it suit you to come, and how long would

you like to stay? I fear you will find me and your father but dull

companions after the life you are now used to. If Mr. Caldigate

would like to come with you, your father bids me say that he will

be glad to see him.--Your loving mother,

'MARY BOLTON.'

She endeavoured, in writing her letter, to obey the commands that had

been left with her, but she could not go nearer to it than this. She

could not so far belie her heart as to tell her daughter that she

herself would be glad to see the man. Then it took her long to write the

address. She did write it at last;

Mrs. JOHN CALDIGATE,

FOLKING.

But as she wrote it she told herself that she believed it to be a lie.

When the letter reached Hester there was a consultation over it, to

which old Mr. Caldigate was admitted. It was acknowledged on all sides

that anything would be better than a family quarrel. The spirit in which

the invitation had been written was to be found in every word of it.

There was not a word to show that Mrs. Bolton had herself accepted the

decision to which everyone else had come in the matter;--everything,

rather, to show that she had not done so. But, as the squire said, it

does not do to inquire too closely into all people's inner beliefs. 'If

everybody were to say what he thinks about everybody, nobody would ever

go to see anybody.' It was soon decided that Hester, with her baby,

should go on an early day to Puritan Grange, and should stay there for a

couple of nights. But there was a difficulty as to Caldigate himself. He

was naturally enough anxious to send Hester without him, but she was as

anxious to take him. 'It isn't for my own sake,' she said,--'because I

shall like to have you there with me. Of course it will be very dull for

you, but it will be so much better that we should all be reconciled, and

that everyone should know that we are so.'

'It would only be a pretence,' said he.

'People must pretend sometimes, John,' she answered. At last it was

decided that he should take her, reaching the place about the hour of

lunch, so that he might again break bread in her father's house,--that

he should then leave her there, and that at the end of the two days she

should return to Folking.

On the day named they reached Puritan Grange at the hour fixed. Both

Caldigate and Hester were very nervous as to their reception, and got

out of the carriage almost without a word to each other. The old

gardener, who had been so busy during Hester's imprisonment, was there

to take the luggage; and Hester's maid carried the child as Caldigate,

with his wife behind him, walked up the steps and rang the bell. There

was no coming out to meet them, no greeting them even in the hall. Mr.

Bolton was perhaps too old and too infirm for such running out, and it

was hardly within his nature to do so. They were shown into the

well-known morning sitting-room, and there they found Hester's father in

his chair, and Mrs. Bolton standing up to receive them.

Hester, after kissing her father, threw herself into her mother's arms

before a word had been said to Caldigate. Then the banker addressed him

with a set speech, which no doubt had been prepared in the old man's

mind. 'I am very glad,' he said, 'that you have brought this unhappy

matter to so good a conclusion, Mr. Caldigate.'

'It has been a great trouble,--worse almost for Hester than for me.'

'Yes, it has been sad enough for Hester,--and the more so because it was

natural that others should believe that which the jury and the judge

declared to have been proved. How should any one know otherwise?'

'Just so, Mr. Bolton. If they will accept the truth now, I shall be

satisfied.'

'It will come, but perhaps slowly to some folk. You should in justice

remember that your own early follies have tended to bring this all

about.'

It was a grim welcome, and the last speech was one which Caldigate

found it difficult to answer. It was so absolutely true that it admitted

of no answer. He thought that it might have been spared, and shrugged

his shoulders as though to say that that part of the subject was one

which he did not care to discuss. Hester heard it, and quivered with

anger even in her mother's arms. Mrs. Bolton heard it, and in the midst

of her kisses made an inward protest against the word used. Follies

indeed! Why had he not spoken out the truth as he knew it, and told the

man of his vices?

But it was necessary that she too should address him. 'I hope I see you

quite well, Mr. Caldigate,' she said, giving him her hand.

'The prison has not disagreed with me,' he said, with an attempt at a

smile, 'though it was not an agreeable residence.'

'If you used your leisure there to meditate on your soul's welfare, it

may have been of service to you.'

It was very grim. But the banker having made his one severe speech,

became kind in his manner, and almost genial. He asked after his

son-in-law's future intentions, and when he was told that they thought

of spending some months abroad so as to rid themselves in that way of

the immediate record of their past misery, he was gracious enough to

express his approval of the plan; and then when the lunch was announced,

and the two ladies had passed out of the room, he said a word to his

son-in-law in private. 'As I was convinced, Mr. Caldigate, when I first

heard the evidence, that that other woman was your wife, and was

therefore very anxious to separate my daughter from you, so am I

satisfied now that the whole thing was a wicked plot.'

'I am very glad to hear you say that, sir.'

'Now, if you please, we will go in to lunch.'

As long as Caldigate remained in the house Mrs. Bolton was almost

silent. The duties of a hostess she performed in a stiff ungainly way.

She asked him whether he would have hashed mutton or cold beef, and

allowed him to pour a little sherry into her wine-glass. But beyond this

there was not much conversation. Mr. Bolton had said what he had to say,

and sat leaning forward with his chin over his plate perfectly silent.

It is to be supposed that he had some pleasure in having his daughter

once more beneath his roof, especially as he had implored his wife not

to deprive him of that happiness during the small remainder of his days.

But he sat there with no look of joy upon his face. That she should be

stern, sullen, and black-browed was to be expected. She had been

compelled to entertain their guest; and was not at all the woman to bear

such compulsion meekly.

The hour at last wore itself away, and the carriage which was to take

Caldigate back to Folking was again at the door. It was a Tuesday. 'You

will send for me on Thursday,' she said to him in a whisper.

'Certainly.'

'Early? After breakfast, you know. I suppose you will not come

yourself.'

'Not here, I think. I have done all the good that I can do, and it is

pleasant to no one. But you shall pick me up in the town. I shall go in

and see your brother Robert.' Then he went, and Hester was left with her

parents.

As she turned back from the hall-door she found her mother standing at

the foot of the stairs, waiting for her. 'Shall I come with you, mamma?'

she said. Holding each other's arms they went up, and so passed into

Hester's room, where the nurse was sitting with the boy. 'Let her go

into my room,' said the elder lady. So the nurse took the baby away, and

they were alone together. 'Oh, Hester, Hester, my child!' said the

mother, flinging her arms wildly round her daughter.

The whole tenor of her face was changed at that moment. Even to Hester

she had been stern, forbidding, and sullen. There had not been a

gracious movement about her lips or eyes since the visitors had come. A

stranger, could a stranger have seen it all, would have said that the

mother did not love her child, that there was no touch of tenderness

about the woman's heart. But now, when she was alone, with the one thing

on earth that was dear to her, she melted at once. In a moment Hester

found herself seated on the sofa, with her mother kneeling before her,

sobbing, and burying her face in the loved one's lap. 'You love me,

Hester,--still.'

'Love you, mamma! You know I love you.'

'Not as it used to be. I am nothing to you now. I can do nothing for you

now. You turn away from me, because--because--because--'

'I have never turned away from you, mamma.'

'Because I could not bear that you should be taken away from me and

given to him.'

'He is good, mamma. If you would only believe that he is good!'

'He is not good. God only is good, my child.'

'He is good to me.'

'Ah, yes;--he has taken you from me. When I thought you were coming

back, in trouble, in disgrace from the world, nameless, a poor injured

thing, with your nameless babe, then I comforted myself because I

thought that I could be all and everything to you. I would have poured

balm into the hurt wounds. I would have prayed with you, and you and I

would have been as one before the Lord.'

'You are not sorry, mamma, that I have got my husband again?'

'Oh, I have tried,--I have tried not to be sorry.'

'You do not believe now that that woman was his wife?'

Then the old colour came back upon her face, and something of the old

look, and the tenderness was quenched in her eyes, and the softness of

her voice was gone. 'I do not know,' she said.

'Mamma, you must know. Get up and sit by me till I tell you. You must

teach yourself to know this,--to be quite sure of it. You must not think

that your daughter is,--is living in adultery with the husband of

another woman. To me who knew him there has never been a shadow of a

doubt, not a taint of fear to darken the certainty of my faith. It could

not have been so, perhaps, with you who have not known his nature. But

now, now, when all of them, from the Queen downwards, have declared that

this charge has been a libel, when even the miscreants themselves have

told against themselves, when the very judge has gone back from the word

in which he was so confident, shall my mother,--and my mother

only,--think that I am a wretched, miserable, nameless outcast, with a

poor nameless, fatherless baby? I am John Caldigate's wife before God's

throne, and my child is his child, and his lawful heir, and owns his

father's name. My husband is to me before all the world,--first, best,

dearest,--my king, my man, my master, and my lover. Above all things, he

is my husband.' She had got up, and was standing before her mother with

her arms folded before her breast, and the fire glanced from her eyes as

she spoke. 'But, mamma, because I love him more, I do not love you

less.'

'Oh yes, oh yes; so much less.'

'No, mamma. It is given to us, of God, so to love our husband; "For the

husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church." You

would not have me forget such teaching as that?'

'No,--my child; no.'

'When I went out and had him given to me for my husband, of course I

loved him best. The Lord do so to me and more also if aught but death

part him and me! But shall that make my mother think that her girl's

heart is turned away from her? Mamma, say that he is my husband.' The

frown came back, and the woman sat silent and sullen, but there was

something of vacillating indecision in her face. 'Mamma,' repeated

Hester, 'say that he is my husband.'

'I suppose so,' said the woman, very slowly.

'Mamma, say that it is so, and bless your child.'

'God bless you, my child.'

'And you know that it is so?'

'Yes.' The word was hardly spoken, but the lips of the one were close to

the ear of the other, and the sound was heard, and the assent was

acknowledged.

Chapter LXIV

Conclusion

The web of our story has now been woven, the piece is finished, and it

is only necessary that the loose threads should be collected, so that

there may be no unravelling. In such chronicles as this, something no

doubt might be left to the imagination without serious injury to the

story; but the reader, I think, feels a deficiency when, through tedium

or coldness, the writer omits to give all the information which he

possesses.

Among the male personages of my story, Bagwax should perhaps be allowed

to stand first. It was his energy and devotion to his peculiar duties

which, after the verdict, served to keep alive the idea that that

verdict had been unjust. It was through his ingenuity that Judge Bramber

was induced to refer the inquiry back to Scotland Yard, and in this way

to prevent the escape of Crinkett and Euphemia Smith. Therefore we will

first say a word as to Bagwax and his history.

It was rumoured at the time that Sir John Joram and Mr. Brown, having

met each other at the club after the order for Caldigate's release had

been given, and discussing the matter with great interest, united in

giving praise to Bagwax. Then Sir John told the story of those broken

hopes, of the man's desire to travel, and of the faith and honesty with

which he sacrificed his own aspirations for the good of the poor lady

whose husband had been so cruelly taken away from her. Then,--as it was

said at the time,--an important letter was sent from the Home Office to

the Postmaster-General, giving Mr. Bagwax much praise, and suggesting

that a very good thing would be done to the colony of New South Wales if

that ingenious and skilful master of postmarks could be sent out to

Sydney with the view of setting matters straight in the Sydney

office [1]. There was then much correspondence with the Colonial Office,

which did not at first care very much about Bagwax; but at last the

order was given by the Treasury, and Bagwax went. There were many tears

shed on the occasion at Apricot Villa. Jemima Curlydown thought that she

also should be allowed to see Sydney, and was in favour of an immediate

marriage with this object. But Bagwax felt that the boisterous ocean

might be unpropitious to the delights of a honeymoon; and Mr. Curlydown

reminded his daughter of all the furniture which would thus be lost.

Bagwax went as a gay bachelor, and spent six happy months in the bright

colony. He did not effect much, as the delinquent who had served

Crinkett in his base purposes had already been detected and punished

before his arrival; but he was treated with extreme courtesy by the

Sydney officials, and was able to bring home with him a treasure in the

shape of a newly-discovered manner of tying mail-bags. So that when the

'Sydney Intelligencer' boasted that the great English professor who had

come to instruct them all had gone home instructed, there was some truth

in it. He was married immediately after his return, and Jemima his wife

has the advantage, in her very pretty drawing-room, of every shilling

that he made by the voyage. My readers will be glad to hear that soon

afterwards he was appointed Inspector-General of Post-marks, to the

great satisfaction of all the post-office.

[Footnote 1: I hope my friends in the Sydney post-office will take

no offence should this story ever reach their ears. I know how well

the duties are done in that office, and, between ourselves, I think

that Mr. Bagwax's journey was quite unnecessary.]

One of the few things which Caldigate did before he took his wife

abroad was to 'look after Dick Shand.' It was manifest to all concerned

that Dick could do no good in England. His yellow trousers and the

manners which accompanied them were not generally acceptable in

merchants' offices and suchlike places. He knew nothing about English

farming, which, for those who have not learned the work early, is an

expensive amusement rather than a trade by which bread can be earned.

There seemed to be hardly a hope for Dick in England. But he had done

some good among the South Sea Islanders. He knew their ways and could

manage them. He was sent out, therefore, with a small capital to be

junior partner on a sugar estate in Queensland. It need hardly be said

that the small capital was lent to him by John Caldigate. There he took

steadily to work, and it is hoped by his friends that he will soon begin

to repay the loan.

The uncle, aunt, and cousins at Babington soon renewed their intimacy

with John Caldigate, and became intimate with Hester. The old squire

still turned up his nose at them, as he had done all his life, calling

them Boeotians, and reminding his son that Suffolk had always been a

silly county. But the Babingtons, one and all, knew this, and had no

objection to be accounted thick-headed as long as they were acknowledged

to be prosperous, happy, and comfortable. It had always been considered

at Babington that young Caldigate was brighter and more clever than

themselves; and yet he had been popular with them as a cousin of whom

they ought to be proud. He was soon restored to his former favour, and

after his return from the Continent spent a fortnight at the Hall, with

his wife, very comfortably. Julia, indeed, was not there, nor Mr.

Smirkie. Among all their neighbours and acquaintances Mr. Smirkie was

the last to drop the idea that there must have been something in that

story of an Australian marriage. His theory of the law on the subject

was still incorrect. The Queen's pardon, he said, could not do away with

the verdict, and therefore he doubted whether the couple could be

regarded as man and wife. He was very anxious that they should be

married again, and with great good-nature offered to perform the

ceremony himself either at Plum-cum-Pippins or even in the drawing-room

at Folking.

'Suffolk to the very backbone!' was the remark of the Cambridgeshire

squire when he heard of this very kind offer. But even he at last came

round, under his wife's persuasion, when he found that the paternal

mansion was likely to be shut against him unless he yielded.

Hester's second tour with her husband was postponed for some weeks,

because it was necessary that her husband should appear as a witness

against Crinkett and Euphemia Smith. They were tried also at Cambridge,

but not before Judge Bramber. The woman never yielded an inch. When she

found how it was going with her, she made fast her money, and with

infinite pluck resolved that she would endure with patience whatever

might be in store for her, and wait for better times. When put into the

dock she pleaded not guilty with a voice that was audible only to the

jailer standing beside her, and after that did not open her mouth during

the trial. Crinkett made a great effort to be admitted as an additional

witness against his comrade, but, having failed in that, pleaded guilty

at last. He felt that there was no hope for him with such a weight of

evidence against him, and calculated that his punishment might thus be

lighter, and that he would save himself the cost of an expensive

defence. In the former hope he was deceived as the two were condemned to

the same term of imprisonment. When the woman heard that she was to be

confined for three years with hard labour her spirit was almost broken.

But she made no outward sign; and as she was led away out of the dock

she looked round for Caldigate, to wither him with the last glance of

her reproach. But Caldigate, who had not beheld her misery without some

pang at his heart, had already left the court.

Judge Bramber never opened his mouth upon the matter to a single human

being. He was a man who, in the bosom of his family, did not say much

about the daily work of his life, and who had but few friends

sufficiently intimate to be trusted with his judicial feelings. The

Secretary of State was enabled to triumph in the correctness of his

decision, but it may be a question whether Judge Bramber enjoyed the

triumph. The matter had gone luckily for the Secretary; but how would it

have been had Crinkett and the woman been acquitted?--how would it have

been had Caldigate broken down in his evidence, and been forced to admit

that there had been a marriage of some kind? No doubt the accusation had

been false. No doubt the verdict had been erroneous. But the man had

brought it upon himself by his own egregious folly, and would have had

no just cause for complaint had he been kept in prison till the second

case had been tried. It was thus that Judge Bramber regarded the

matter;--but he said not a word about it to any one.

When the second trial was over, Caldigate and his wife started for

Paris, but stayed a few days on their way with William Bolton in London.

He and his wife were quite ready to receive Hester and her husband with

open arms. 'I tell you fairly,' said he to Caldigate, 'that when there

was a doubt, I thought it better that you and Hester should be apart.

You would have thought the same had she been your sister. Now I am only

too happy to congratulate both of you that the truth has been brought to

light.'

On their return Mrs. Robert Bolton was very friendly,--and Robert Bolton

himself was at last brought round to acknowledge that his convictions

had been wrong. But there was still much that stuck in his throat. 'Why

did John Caldigate pay twenty thousand pounds to those persons when he

knew that they had hatched a conspiracy against himself?' This question

he asked his brother William over and over again, and never could be

satisfied with any answer which his brother could give him.

Once he asked the question of Caldigate himself. 'Because I felt that,

in honour, I owed it to them,' said Caldigate; 'and, perhaps, a little

too because I felt that, if they took themselves off at once, your

sister might be spared something of the pain which she has suffered.'

But still it was unintelligible to Robert Bolton that any man in his

senses should give away so large a sum of money with so slight a

prospect of any substantial return.

Hester often goes to see her mother, but Mrs. Bolton has never been at

Folking, and probably never will again visit that house. She is a woman

whose heart is not capable of many changes, and who cannot readily give

herself to new affections. But having once owned that John Caldigate is

her daughter's husband, she now alleges no further doubt on the matter.

She writes the words 'Mrs. John Caldigate' without a struggle, and does

take delight in her daughter's visits.

When last I heard from Folking, Mrs. John Caldigate's second boy had

just been born.