

JOHN CALDIGATE.

CHAPTER I.

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

monëy, 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 re-seated 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 willingly 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 defiled. 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 a world,—we are sure to think that our prayers have been heard.

CHAPTER II.

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