

when the morning came matters had softened themselves a little.

## CHAPTER XI.

### 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 gentlefolk 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 Eng-

land, 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?"

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