

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

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 arm's 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:—

“BARINGTON 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 £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 Plumcum-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 Smirkie's, 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 were 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, squire," 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, squire."

"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, squire; 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 generally that, in the course of another month or so, the woman would be induced to give way under the pressure put upon her by the family generally.

CHAPTER III.

NEWS FROM THE GOLD MINES.

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