

CHAPTER VI.

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 Caldi-

gate 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 word 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 VII.

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