

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 V.

### 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 brag-gadocio. 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 anyone; 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.

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