LADY ANNA

[IN TWO VOLUMES]

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By

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VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF LADY LOVEL.

Women have often been hardly used by men, but perhaps no harder usage, no fiercer cruelty was ever experienced by a woman than that which fell to the lot of Josephine Murray from the hands of Earl Lovel, to whom she was married in the parish church of Applethwaite,—a parish without a village, lying among the mountains of Cumberland,—on the 1st of June, 181—. That her marriage was valid according to all the forms of the Church, if Lord Lovel were then capable of marrying, no one ever doubted; nor did the Earl ever allege that it was not so. Lovel Grange is a small house, surrounded by a small domain,—small as being the residence of a rich nobleman, lying among the mountains which separate Cumberland from Westmoreland, about ten miles from Keswick, very lovely, from the brightness of its own green sward and the luxuriance of its wild woodland, from the contiguity of overhanging mountains, and from the beauty of Lovel Tarn, a small lake belonging to the property, studded with little islands, each of which is covered with its own thicket of hollies, birch, and dwarfed oaks. The house itself is poor, ill built, with straggling passages and low rooms, and is a sombre, ill-omened looking place. When Josephine Murray was brought there as a bride she thought it to be very sombre and ill-

omened; but she loved the lakes and mountains, and dreamed of some vague mysterious joy of life which was to come to her from the wildness of her domicile.

I fear that she had no other ground, firmer than this, on which to found her hopes of happiness. She could not have thought Lord Lovel to be a good man when she married him, and it can hardly be said that she loved him. She was then twenty-four years old, and he had counted double as many years. She was very beautiful, dark, with large, bold, blue eyes, with hair almost black, tall, well made, almost robust, a well-born, brave, ambitious woman, of whom it must be acknowledged that she thought it very much to be the wife of a lord. Though our story will be concerned much with her sufferings, the record of her bridal days may be very short. It is with struggles that came to her in after years that we shall be most concerned, and the reader, therefore, need be troubled with no long description of Josephine Murray as she was when she became the Countess Lovel. It is hoped that her wrongs may be thought worthy of sympathy,—and may be felt in some sort to atone for the ignoble motives of her marriage.

The Earl, when he found his bride, had been living almost in solitude for a twelvemonth. Among the neighbouring gentry in the lake country he kept no friendly relations. His property there was small, and his character was evil. He was an English earl, and as such known in some unfamiliar fashion to those who know all earls; but he was a man never seen in Parliament, who had spent the greater part of his manhood abroad, who had sold estates in other counties, converting unentailed acres into increased wealth, but wealth of a kind much less acceptable to the general English aristocrat than that which comes direct from land. Lovel Grange was his only remaining English property, and when in London he had rooms at an hotel. He never entertained, and he

never accepted hospitality. It was known of him that he was very rich, and men said that he was mad. Such was the man whom Josephine Murray had chosen to marry because he was an earl.

He had found her near Keswick, living with her father in a pretty cottage looking down upon Derwentwater,—a thorough gentleman, for Captain Murray had come of the right Murrays;—and thence he had carried her to Lovel Grange. She had brought with her no penny of fortune, and no settlement had been made on her. Her father, who was then an old man, had mildly expostulated; but the ambition of the daughter had prevailed, and the marriage was accomplished. The beautiful young woman was carried off as a bride. It will be unnecessary to relate what efforts had been made to take her away from her father's house without bridal honours; but it must be told that the Earl was a man who had never yet spared a woman in his lust. It had been the rule, almost the creed of his life, that woman was made to gratify the appetite of man, and that the man is but a poor creature who does not lay hold of the sweetness that is offered to him. He had so lived as to teach himself that those men who devote themselves to their wives, as a wife devotes herself to her husband, are the poor lubberly clods of creation, who had lacked the power to reach the only purpose of living which could make life worth having. Women had been to him a prey, as the fox is a prey to the huntsman and the salmon to the angler. But he had acquired great skill in his sport, and could pursue his game with all the craft which experience will give. He could look at a woman as though he saw all heaven in her eyes, and could listen to her as though the music of the spheres was to be heard in her voice. Then he could whisper words which, to many women, were as the music of the spheres, and he could persevere, abandoning all other pleasures, devoting himself to the one wickedness with a perseverance which almost made success

certain. But with Josephine Murray he could be successful on no other terms than those which enabled her to walk out of the church with him as Countess Lovel.

She had not lived with him six months before he told her that the marriage was no marriage, and that she was—his mistress. There was an audacity about the man which threw aside all fear of the law, and which was impervious to threats and interference. He assured her that he loved her, and that she was welcome to live with him; but that she was not his wife, and that the child which she bore could not be the heir to his title, and could claim no heirship to his property. He did love her,—having found her to be a woman of whose company he had not tired in six months. He was going back to Italy, and he offered to take her with him,—but he could not, he said, permit the farce of her remaining at Lovel Grange and calling herself the Countess Lovel. If she chose to go with him to Palermo, where he had a castle, and to remain with him in his yacht, she might for the present travel under the name of his wife. But she must know that she was not his wife. She was only his mistress.

Of course she told her father. Of course she invoked every Murray in and out of Scotland. Of course there were many threats. A duel was fought up near London, in which Lord Lovel consented to be shot at twice,—declaring that after that he did not think that the circumstances of the case required that he should be shot at any more. In the midst of this a daughter was born to her and her father died,—during which time she was still allowed to live at Lovel Grange. But what was it expedient that she should do? He declared that he had a former wife when he married her, and that therefore she was not and could not be his wife. Should she institute a prosecution against him for bigamy, thereby acknowledging that she was herself no wife and that her child was illegitimate? From such evidence as she could get, she

believed that the Italian woman whom the Earl in former years had married had died before her own marriage. The Earl declared that the Countess, the real Countess, had not paid her debt to nature, till some months after the little ceremony which had taken place in Applethwaite Church. In a moment of weakness Josephine fell at his feet and asked him to renew the ceremony. He stooped over her, kissed her, and smiled. "My pretty child," he said, "why should I do that?" He never kissed her again.

What should she do? Before she had decided, he was in his yacht sailing to Palermo;—sailing no doubt not alone. What should she do? He had left her an income,—sufficient for the cast-off mistress of an Earl,—some few hundreds a year, on condition that she would quietly leave Lovel Grange, cease to call herself a Countess, and take herself and her bairn,—whither she would. Every abode of sin in London was open to her for what he cared. But what should she do? It seemed to her to be incredible that so great a wrong should befall her, and that the man should escape from her and be free from punishment,—unless she chose to own the baseness of her own position by prosecuting him for bigamy. The Murrays were not very generous in their succour, as the old man had been much blamed for giving his daughter to one of whom all the world knew nothing but evil. One Murray had fired two shots on her behalf, in answer to each one of which the Earl had fired into the air; but beyond this the Murrays could do nothing. Josephine herself was haughty and proud, conscious that her rank was greater than that of any of the Murrays with whom she came in contact. But what should she do?

The Earl had been gone five years, sailing about the world she knew not where, when at last she determined to institute a prosecution for bigamy. During these years she was still living at the Grange, with her child, and the Courts of Law had allotted

her some sum by way of alimony till her cause should be decided; but upon this alimony she found it very difficult to lay her hands,—quite impossible to lay her hands upon the entirety of it. And then it came to pass that she was eaten up by lawyers and tradesmen, and fell into bad repute as asserting that claims made against her, should legally be made against the very man whom she was about to prosecute because she was not his wife. And this went on till further life at Lovel Grange became impossible to her.

In those days there was living in Keswick a certain Mr. Thomas Thwaite, a tailor, who by degrees had taken a strong part in denouncing the wrongs to which Lady Lovel had been subjected. He was a powerful, sturdy man, with good means for his position, a well-known Radical in a county in which Radicals have never been popular, and in which fifty years ago they were much rarer than they are now. At this time Keswick and its vicinities were beginning to be known as the abodes of poets, and Thomas Thwaite was acquainted with Southey and Wordsworth. He was an intelligent, up-standing, impulsive man, who thought well of his own position in the world, and who could speak his mind. He was tall, massive, and square; tender-hearted and very generous; and he hated the Earl of Lovel with all his heart. Once the two men had met since the story of the Countess's wrongs had become known, and the tailor had struck the Earl to the ground. This had occurred as the Earl was leaving Lovel Grange, and when he was starting on his long journey. The scene took place after he had parted from his Countess,—whom he never was to see again. He rose to his feet and rushed at the tailor; but the two were separated, and the Earl thought it best to go on upon his journey. Nothing further was done as to the blow, and many years rolled by before the Earl came back to Cumberland.

It became impossible for the Countess and her daughter, the young Lady Anna as she was usually called, to remain at Lovel Grange, and they were taken to the house of Mr. Thwaite, in Keswick, as a temporary residence. At this time the Countess was in debt, and already there were lawsuits as to the practicability of obtaining payment of those debts from the husband's estate. And as soon as it was determined that the prosecution for bigamy should be instituted, the confusion in this respect was increased. The Countess ceased to call herself a countess, as she certainly would not be a countess should she succeed in proving the Earl to have been guilty. And had he been guilty of bigamy, the decree under which alimony was assigned to her would become void. Should she succeed, she would be a penniless unmarried female with a daughter, her child would be unfathered and base, and he,—as far as she could see,—would be beyond the reach of punishment. But, in truth, she and her friend the tailor were not in quest of success. She and all her friends believed that the Earl had committed no such crime. But if he were acquitted, then would her claim to be called Lady Lovel, and to enjoy the appanages of her rank, be substantiated. Or, at least, something would have been done towards substantiating those claims. But during this time she called herself Mrs. Murray, and the little Lady Anna was called Anna Murray.

It added much to the hardship of the woman's case that public sympathy in distant parts of the country,—up in London, and in southern counties, and even among a portion of the gentry in Cumberland and Westmoreland,—did not go with her. She had married without due care. Some men said,—and many women repeated the story,—that she had known of the existence of the former wife, when she had married the Earl. She had run into debt, and then repudiated her debts. She was now residing in the house of a low radical tailor, who had assaulted the man she

called her husband; and she was living under her maiden name. Tales were told of her which were utterly false,—as when it was said that she drank. Others were reported which had in them some grains of truth,—as that she was violent, stiff-necked, and vindictive. Had they said of her that it had become her one religion to assert her daughter's right,—per fas aut nefas,—to assert it by right or wrong; to do justice to her child let what injustice might be done to herself or others,—then the truth would have been spoken.

The case dragged itself on slowly, and little Anna Murray was a child of nine years old when at last the Earl was acquitted of the criminal charge which had been brought against him. During all this time he had been absent. Even had there been a wish to bring him personally into court, the law would have been powerless to reach him. But there was no such wish. It had been found impossible to prove the former marriage, which had taken place in Sicily;—or if not impossible, at least no adequate proof was forthcoming. There was no real desire that there should be such proof. The Earl's lawyers abstained, as far as they could abstain, from taking any steps in the matter. They spent what money was necessary, and the Attorney-General of the day defended him. In doing so, the Attorney-General declared that he had nothing to do with the Earl's treatment of the lady who now called herself Mrs. Murray. He knew nothing of the circumstances of that connection, and would not travel beyond his brief. He was there to defend Earl Lovel on a charge of bigamy. This he did successfully, and the Earl was acquitted. Then, in court, the counsel for the wife declared that his client would again call herself Lady Lovel.

But it was not so easy to induce other people to call her Lady Lovel.

And now not only was she much hampered by money difficulties, but so also was the tailor. But Thomas Thwaite never for a moment slackened in his labours to make good the position of the woman whom he had determined to succour; and for another and a longer period of eight years the battle went on. It went on very slowly, as is the wont with such battles; and very little way was made. The world, as a rule, did not believe that she who now again called herself the Countess Lovel was entitled to that name. The Murrays, her own people,—as far as they were her own people,—had been taught to doubt her claim. If she were a countess why had she thrown herself into the arms of an old tailor? Why did she let her daughter play with the tailor's child,—if, in truth, that daughter was the Lady Anna? Why, above all things, was the name of the Lady Anna allowed to be mentioned, as it was mentioned, in connection with that of Daniel Thwaite, the tailor's son?

During these eight weary years Lady Lovel,—for so she shall be called,—lived in a small cottage about a mile from Keswick, on the road to Grassmere and Ambleside, which she rented from quarter to quarter. She still obtained a certain amount of alimony, which, however, was dribbled out to her through various sieves, and which reached her with protestations as to the impossibility of obtaining anything like the moderate sum which had been awarded to her. And it came at last to be the case that she hardly knew what she was struggling to obtain. It was, of course, her object that all the world should acknowledge her to be the Countess Lovel, and her daughter to be the Lady Anna. But all the world could not be made to do this by course of law. Nor could the law make her lord come home and live with her, even such a cat and dog life as must in such case have been hers. Her money rights were all that she could demand;—and she found it to be impossible to get anybody to tell her what

were her money rights. To be kept out of the poorhouse seemed to be all that she could claim. But the old tailor was true to her,—swearing that she should even yet become Countess Lovel in very truth.

Then, of a sudden, she heard one day,—that Earl Lovel was again at the Grange, living there with a strange woman.

CHAPTER II.

THE EARL'S WILL.

Not a word had been heard in Keswick of the proposed return of the old lord,—for the Earl was now an old man,—past his sixtieth year, and in truth with as many signs of age as some men bear at eighty. The life which he had led no doubt had had its allurements, but it is one which hardly admits of a hale and happy evening. Men who make women a prey, prey also on themselves. But there he was, back at Lovel Grange, and no one knew why he had come, nor whence, nor how. To Lovel Grange in those days, now some forty years ago, there was no road for wheels but that which ran through Keswick. Through Keswick he had passed in the middle of the night, taking on the post-horses which he had brought with him from Grassmere, so that no one in the town should see him and his companion. But it was soon known that he was there, and known also that he had a companion. For months he resided thus, and no one saw him but the domestics who waited upon him. But rumours got abroad as to his conduct, and people through the county declared that Earl Lovel was a maniac. Still his property was in his own control, and he did what it listed him to do.

As soon as men knew that he was in the land, claim after claim was made upon him for money due on behalf of his wife, and loudest among the claimants was Thomas Thwaite, the tailor. He was loudest and fiercest among the claimants, but was loud and fierce not in enmity to his old friend the Countess, but with a firm resolve to make the lord pay the only price of his

wickedness which could be exacted from him. And if the Earl could be made to pay the claims against him which were made by his wife's creditors, then would the law, so far, have decided that the woman was his wife. No answer was made to any letter addressed to the Earl, and no one calling at the Grange could obtain speech or even sight of the noble owner. The lord's steward at the Grange referred all comers to the lord's attorneys in London, and the lord's attorneys simply repeated the allegation that the lady was not the lord's wife. At last there came tidings that an inquiry was to be made as to the state of the lord's health and the state of the lord's mind, on behalf of Frederic Lovel, the distant heir to the title. Let that question of the lord's marriage with Josephine Murray go as it might, Frederic Lovel, who had never seen his far-away cousin, must be the future earl. Of that there was no doubt;—and new inquiries were to be made. But it might well be that the interest of the young heir would be more deeply involved in the marriage question than in other matters concerning the family. Lovel Grange and the few mountain farms attached to the Cumberland estate must become his, let the frantic Earl do what damage he might to those who bore his name; but the bulk of the property, the wealth of the Lovels, the great riches which had enabled this mighty lord to live as a beast of prey among his kind, were at his own disposal. He had one child certainly, the Lady Anna, who would inherit it all were the father to die intestate, and were the marriage proved. The young heir and those near to him altogether disbelieved the marriage,—as was natural. They had never seen her who now called herself the Countess, but who for some years after her child was born had called herself Mrs. Murray,—who had been discarded by her own relations, and had taken herself to live with a country tailor. As years had rolled by the memory of what had really occurred in Applethwaite Church had become indistinct; and, though the reader knows that that

marriage was capable of easy proof,—that there would have been but little difficulty had the only difficulty consisted in proving that,—the young heir and the distant Lovels were not assured of it. Their interest was adverse, and they were determined to disbelieve. But the Earl might, and probably would, leave all his wealth to a stranger. He had never in any way noticed his heir. He cared for none that bore his name. Those ties in the world which we call love, and deem respectable, and regard as happy, because they have to do with marriage and blood relationship as established by all laws since the days of Moses, were odious to him and ridiculous in his sight, because all obligations were distasteful to him,—and all laws, except those which preserved to him the use of his own money. But now there came up the great question whether he was mad or sane. It was at once rumoured that he was about to leave the country, and fly back to Sicily. Then it was announced that he was dead.

And he was dead. He had died at the age of sixty-seven, in the arms of the woman he had brought there. His evil career was over, and his soul had gone to that future life for which he had made it fit by the life he had led here. His body was buried in Applethwaite churchyard, in the further corner of which long, straggling valley parish Lovel Grange is situated. At his grave there stood no single mourner;—but the young lord was there, of his right, disdaining even to wear a crape band round his hat. But the woman remained shut up in her own chamber,—a difficulty to the young lord and his lawyer, who could hardly tell the foreigner to pack and begone before the body of her late—lover had been laid in the grave. It had been simply intimated to her that on such a date,—within a week from the funeral,—her presence in the house could not longer be endured. She had flashed round upon the lawyer, who had attempted to make this

award known to her in broken French, but had answered simply by some words of scorn, spoken in Italian to her waiting-maid.

Then the will was read in the presence of the young earl;—for there was a will. Everything that the late lord had possessed was left, in one line, to his best-beloved friend, the Signorina Camilla Spondi; and it was stated, and very fully explained, that Camilla Spondi was the Italian lady living at the Grange at the date on which the will was made. Of the old lord's heir, the now existing Earl Lovel, no mention was made whatever. There were, however, two other clauses or parts in the will. There was a schedule giving in detail the particulars of the property left to Camilla Spondi; and there was a rambling statement that the maker of the will acknowledged Anna Murray to be his illegitimate daughter,—that Anna Murray's mother had never been the testator's legitimate wife, as his real wife, the true Countess Lovel, for whom he had separately made adequate provision, was still alive in Sicily at the date of that will,—and that by a former will now destroyed he had made provision for Anna Murray, which provision he had revoked in consequence of the treatment which he had received from Josephine Murray and her friends. They who believed the statements made in this will afterwards asserted that Anna had been deprived of her inheritance by the blow with which the tailor had felled the Earl to the earth.

To Camilla Spondi intimation was given of the contents of the Earl's will as far as they concerned her; but she was told at the same time that no portion of the dead man's wealth would be placed in her hands till the courts should have decided whether or no the old lord had been sane or insane when he signed the document. A sum of money was, however, given her, on condition that she should take her immediate departure;—and she departed. With her personally we need have no further

concern. Of her cause and of her claim some mention must be made; but in a few pages she will drop altogether from our story.

A copy of the will was also sent to the lawyers who had hitherto taken charge of the interests of the repudiated Countess, and it was intimated that the allowance hitherto made to her must now of necessity cease. If she thought fit to prosecute any further claim, she must do so by proving her marriage;—and it was explained to her, probably without much of legal or precise truth in the explanation, that such proof must include the disproving of the assertion made in the Earl's will. As it was the intention of the heir to set aside that will, such assurance was, to say the least of it, disingenuous. But the whole thing had now become so confused that it could hardly be expected that lawyers should be ingenuous in discussing it.

The young Earl clearly inherited the title and the small estate at Lovel Grange. The Italian woman was primâ facie heiress to everything else,—except to such portion of the large personal property as the widow could claim as widow, in the event of her being able to prove that she had been a wife. But in the event of the will being no will, the Italian woman would have nothing. In such case the male heir would have all if the marriage were no marriage;—but would have nothing if the marriage could be made good. If the marriage could be made good, the Lady Anna would have the entire property, except such portion as would be claimed of right by her mother, the widow. Thus the Italian woman and the young lord were combined in interest against the mother and daughter as regarded the marriage; and the young lord and the mother and daughter were combined against the Italian woman as regarded the will;—but the young lord had to act alone against the Italian woman, and against the mother and daughter whom he and his friends regarded as swindlers and impostors. It was for him to set aside the will in reference to the

Italian woman, and then to stand the brunt of the assault made upon him by the soi-disant wife.

In a very short time after the old Earl's death a double compromise was offered on behalf of the young Earl. The money at stake was immense. Would the Italian woman take £10,000, and go her way back to Italy, renouncing all further claim; and would the soi-disant Countess abandon her title, acknowledge her child to be illegitimate, and go her way with another £10,000;—or with £20,000, as was soon hinted by the gentlemen acting on the Earl's behalf? The proposition was one somewhat difficult in the making, as the compromise, if made with both, would be excellent, but could not be made to any good effect with one only. The young Earl certainly could not afford to buy off the Italian woman for £10,000, if the effect of such buying off would only be to place the whole of the late lord's wealth in the hands of his daughter and of his daughter's mother.

The Italian woman consented. She declared with Italian energy that her late loving friend had never been a day insane; but she knew nothing of English laws, and but little of English money. She would take the £10,000,—having had a calculation made for her of the number of lire into which it would run. The number was enormous, and she would take the offer. But when the proposal was mentioned to the Countess, and explained to her by her old friend, Thomas Thwaite, who had now become a poor man in her cause, she repudiated it with bitter scorn,—with a scorn in which she almost included the old man who had made it to her. "Is it for that, that I have been fighting?" she said.

"For that in part," said the old man.

"No, Mr. Thwaite, not for that at all; but that my girl may have her birth allowed and her name acknowledged."

"Her name shall be allowed and her birth shall be acknowledged," said the tailor, in whose heart there was nothing base. "She shall be the Lady Anna, and her mother shall be the Countess Lovel." The estate of the Countess, if she had an estate, then owed the tailor some five or six thousand pounds, and the compromise offered would have paid the tailor every shilling and have left a comfortable income for the two women.

"For myself I care but little," said the mother, taking the tailor's hand in hers and kissing it. "My child is the Lady Anna, and I do not dare to barter away her rights." This took place down at the cottage in Cumberland, and the tailor at once went up to London to make known the decision of the Countess,—as he invariably called her.

Then the lawyers went to work. As the double compromise could not be effected, the single compromise could not stand. The Italian woman raved and stamped, and swore that she must have her half million of lire. But of course no right to such a claim had been made good to her, and the lawyers on behalf of the young Earl went on with their work. Public sympathy as a matter of course went with the young Earl. As against the Italian woman he had with him every English man and woman. It was horrible to the minds of English men and English women that an old English Earldom should be starved in order that an Italian harlot might revel in untold riches. It was felt by most men and protested by all women that any sign of madness, be it what it might,—however insignificant,—should be held to be sufficient against such a claimant. Was not the fact that the man had made such a will in itself sufficient proof of his madness? There were not a few who protested that no further proof could be necessary. But with us the law is the same for an Italian harlot and an English widow; and it may well be that in its niceties it shall be found kinder to the former than to the latter. But the

Earl had been mad, and the law said that he was mad when he had made his will,—and the Italian woman went away, raging, into obscurity.

The Italian woman was conquered, and now the battle was open and free between the young Earl and the claimant Countess. Applications were made on behalf of the Countess for funds from the estate wherewith to prove the claim, and to a certain limited amount they were granted. Such had been the life of the late Earl that it was held that the cost of all litigation resulting from his misdeeds should be paid from his estate;—but ready money was wanted, immediate ready money, to be at the disposal of the Countess to any amount needed by her agent, and this was hardly to be obtained. By this time public sympathy ran almost entirely with the Earl. Though it was acknowledged that the late lord was mad, and though it had become a cause of rejoicing that the Italian woman had been sent away penniless, howling into obscurity, because of the old man's madness, still it was believed that he had written the truth when he declared that the marriage had been a mock marriage. It would be better for the English world that the young Earl should be a rich man, fit to do honour to his position, fit to marry the daughter of a duke, fit to carry on the glory of the English peerage, than that a woman, ill reputed in the world, should be established as a Countess, with a daughter dowered with tens of thousands, as to whom it was already said that she was in love with a tailor's son. Nothing could be more touching, more likely to awaken sympathy, than the manner in which Josephine Murray had been carried away in marriage, and then roughly told by the man who should have protected her from every harshly blowing wind of heaven, that he had deceived her and that she was not his wife. No usage to which woman had ever been subjected, as has been said before, was more adapted to elicit compassion and energetic aid. But

nineteen years had now passed by since the deed was done, and the facts were forgotten. One energetic friend there still was,—or we may say two, the tailor and his son Daniel. But public belief ran against the Countess, and nobody who was anybody in the world would give her her title. Bets were laid, two and three to one against her; and it was believed that she was an impostor. The Earl had all the glory of success over his first opponent, and the loud boasting of self-confident barristers buoyed up his cause.

But loud-boasting barristers may nevertheless be wise lawyers, and the question of a compromise was again mooted. If the lady would take thirty thousand pounds and vanish, she should have the money clear of deduction, and all expenses should be paid. The amount offered was thought to be very liberal, but it did not amount to the annual income that was at stake. It was rejected with scorn. Had it been quadrupled, it would have been rejected with equal scorn. The loud-boasting barristers were still confident; but—. Though it was never admitted in words still it was felt that there might be a doubt. What if the contending parties were to join forces, if the Countess-ship of the Countess were to be admitted, and the heiress-ship of the Lady Anna, and if the Earl and the Lady Anna were to be united in holy wedlock? Might there not be a safe solution from further difficulty in that way?

CHAPTER III.

LADY ANNA.

The idea of this further compromise, of this something more than compromise, of this half acknowledgment of their own weakness, came from Mr. Flick, of the firm of Norton and Flick, the solicitors who were employed in substantiating the Earl's position. When Mr. Flick mentioned it to Sir William Patterson, the great barrister, who was at that time Solicitor-General and leading counsel on behalf of Lord Lovel, Sir William Patterson stood aghast and was dismayed. Sir William intended to make mince-meat of the Countess. It was said of him that he intended to cross-examine the Countess off her legs, right out of her claim, and almost into her grave. He certainly did believe her to be an impostor, who had not thought herself to be entitled to her name when she first assumed it.

"I should be sorry, Mr. Flick, to be driven to think that anything of that kind could be expedient."

"It would make sure of the fortune to the family," said Mr. Flick.

"And what about our friend, the Countess?"

"Let her call herself Countess Lovel, Sir William. That will break no bones. As to the formality of her own marriage, there can be no doubt about that."

"We can prove by Grogram that she was told that another wife was living," said Sir William. Grogram was an old butler who had been in the old Earl's service for thirty years.

"I believe we can, Sir William; but—. It is quite clear that we shall never get the other wife to come over and face an English jury. It is of no use blinking it. The gentleman whom we have sent over doubts her altogether. That there was a marriage is certain, but he fears that this woman is not the old Countess. There were two sisters, and it may be that this was the other sister."

Sir William was a good deal dismayed, but he recovered himself. The stakes were so high that it was quite possible that the gentleman who had been sent over might have been induced to open his eyes to the possibility of such personation by overtures from the other side. Sir William was of opinion that Mr. Flick himself should go to Sicily. He was not sure that he, Sir William, her Majesty's Solicitor-General, would not make the journey in person. He was by no means disposed to give way. "They tell me that the girl is no better than she should be," he said to Mr. Flick.

"I don't think so bad as that of her," said Mr. Flick.

"Is she a lady,—or anything like a lady?"

"I am told she is very beautiful."

"I dare say;—and so was her mother before her. I never saw a handsomer woman of her age than our friend the Countess. But I could not recommend the young lord to marry an underbred, bad girl, and a bastard who claims to be his cousin,—and support my proposition merely on the ground of her looks."

"Thirty-five thousand a year, Sir William!" pleaded the attorney.

"I hope we can get the thirty-five thousand a year for our client without paying so dear for them."

It had been presumed that the real Countess, the original Countess, the Italian lady whom the Earl had married in early life, would be brought over, with properly attested documentary evidence in her pocket, to prove that she was the existing Countess, and that any other Countess must be either an impostor or a deluded dupe. No doubt the old Earl had declared, when first informing Josephine Murray that she was not his wife, that his real wife had died during the few months which had intervened since his mock marriage; but it was acknowledged on all sides, that the old Earl had been a villain and a liar. It was no part of the duty of the young Earl, or of those who acted for him, to defend the character of the old Earl. To wash that blackamoor white, or even to make him whity-brown, was not necessary to anybody. No one was now concerned to account for his crooked courses. But if it could be shown that he had married the lady in Italy,—as to which there was no doubt,—and that the lady was still alive, or that she had been alive when the second marriage took place, then the Lady Anna could not inherit the property which had been freed from the grasp of the Italian mistress. But it seemed that the lady, if she lived, could not be made to come. Mr. Flick did go to Sicily, and came back renewing his advice to Sir William that Lord Lovel should be advised to marry the Lady Anna.

At this time the Countess, with her daughter, had moved their residence from Keswick up to London, and was living in very humble lodgings in a small street turning out of the New Road, near the Yorkshire Stingo. Old Thomas Thwaite had accompanied them from Cumberland, but the rooms had been taken for them by his son, Daniel Thwaite, who was at this time foreman to a somewhat celebrated tailor who carried on his business in Wigmore Street; and he, Daniel Thwaite, had a bedroom in the house in which the Countess lodged. The

arrangement was not a wise one, as reports had already been spread abroad as to the partiality of the Lady Anna for the young tailor. But how should she not have been partial both to the father and to the son, feeling as she did that they were the only two men who befriended her cause and her mother's? As to the Countess herself, she, perhaps, alone of all those who interested themselves in her daughter's cause, had heard no word of these insinuations against her child. To her both Thomas and Daniel Thwaite were dear friends, to repay whom for their exertions with lavish generosity,—should the means to do so ever come within her reach,—was one of the dreams of her existence. But she was an ambitious woman, thinking much of her rank, thinking much even of the blood of her own ancestors, constantly urgent with her daughter in teaching her the duties and privileges of wealth and rank. For the Countess never doubted that she would at last attain success. That the Lady Anna should throw herself away upon Daniel Thwaite did not occur to her as a possibility. She had not even dreamed that Daniel Thwaite would aspire to her daughter's hand. And yet every shop-boy and every shop-girl in Keswick had been so saying for the last twelvemonth, and rumours which had hitherto been confined to Keswick and its neighbourhood, were now common in London. For the case was becoming one of the celebrated causes of the age, and all the world was talking of the Countess and her daughter. No momentary suspicion had crossed the mind of the Countess till after their arrival in London; and then when the suspicion did touch her it was not love that she suspected,—but rather an unbecoming familiarity which she attributed to her child's ignorance of the great life which awaited her. "My dear," she said one day when Daniel Thwaite had left them, "you should be less free in your manner with that young man."

"What do you mean, mamma?" said the daughter, blushing.

"You had better call him Mr. Thwaite."

"But I have called him Daniel ever since I was born."

"He always calls you Lady Anna."

"Sometimes he does, mamma."

"I never heard him call you anything else," said the Countess, almost with indignation. "It is all very well for the old man, because he is an old man and has done so much for us."

"So has Daniel;—quite as much, mamma. They have both done everything."

"True; they have both been warm friends; and if ever I forget them may God forget me. I trust that we may both live to show them that they are not forgotten. But it is not fitting that there should exist between you and him the intimacy of equal positions. You are not and cannot be his equal. He has been born to be a tailor, and you are the daughter and heiress of an Earl."

These last words were spoken in a tone that was almost awful to the Lady Anna. She had heard so much of her father's rank and her father's wealth,—rank and wealth which were always to be hers, but which had never as yet reached her, which had been a perpetual trouble to her, and a crushing weight upon her young life, that she had almost learned to hate the title and the claim. Of course it was a part of the religion of her life that her mother had been duly married to her father. It was beyond a doubt to her that such was the case. But the constant battling for denied rights, the assumption of a position which could not be attained, the use of titles which were simply ridiculous in themselves as connected with the kind of life which she was obliged to lead,—these things had all become odious to her. She lacked the ambition which gave her mother strength, and would

gladly have become Anna Murray or Anna Lovel, with a girl's ordinary privilege of loving her lover, had such an easy life been possible to her.

In person she was very lovely, less tall and robust than her mother had been, but with a sweeter, softer face. Her hair was less dark, and her eyes were neither blue nor bold. But they were bright and soft and very eloquent, and when laden with tears would have softened the heart,—almost of her father. She was as yet less powerful than her mother, both in body and mind, but probably better calculated to make a happy home for a husband and children. She was affectionate, self-denying, and feminine. Had that offer of compromise for thirty, twenty, or for ten thousand pounds been made to her, she would have accepted it willingly,—caring little for her name, little even for fame, so that she might have been happy and quiet, and at liberty to think of a lover as are other girls. In her present condition, how could she have any happy love? She was the Lady Anna Lovel, heir to a ducal fortune,—but she lived in small close lodgings in Wyndham Street, New Road. She did not believe in the good time coming as did her mother. Their enemy was an undoubted Earl, undoubtedly owner of Lovel Grange of which she had heard all her life. Would it not be better to take what the young lord chose to give them and to be at rest? But she did not dare to express such thoughts to her mother. Her mother would have crushed her with a look.

"I have told Mr. Thwaite," the mother said to her daughter, "what we were saying this morning."

"About his son?"

"Yes,—about his son."

"Oh, mamma!"

"I was bound to do so."

"And what did he say, mamma?"

"He did not like it, and told me that he did not like it;—but he admitted that it was true. He admitted that his son was no fitting intimate for Lady Anna Lovel."

"What should we have done without him?"

"Badly indeed; but that cannot change his duty, or ours. He is helping us to struggle for that which is our own; but he would mar his generosity if he put a taint on that which he is endeavouring to restore to us."

"Put a taint, mamma!"

"Yes;—a taint would rest upon your rank if you as Lady Anna Lovel were familiar with Daniel Thwaite as with an equal. His father understands it, and will speak to him."

"Mamma, Daniel will be very angry."

"Then will he be very unreasonable;—but, Anna, I will not have you call him Daniel any more."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TAILOR OF KESWICK.

Old Thomas Thwaite was at this time up in London about the business of the Countess, but had no intention of residing there. He still kept his shop in Keswick, and still made coats and trousers for Cumberland statesmen. He was by no means in a condition to retire from business, having spent the savings of his life in the cause of the Countess and her daughter. Men had told him that, had he not struck the Earl in the yard of the Crown at Keswick, as horses were being brought out for the lord's travelling carriage, ample provision would have been made by the rich old sinner for his daughter. That might have been so, or might not, but the saying instigated the tailor to further zeal and increased generosity. To oppose an Earl, even though it might be on behalf of a Countess, was a joy to him; to set wrong right, and to put down cruelty and to relieve distressed women was the pride of his heart,—especially when his efforts were made in antagonism to one of high rank. And he was a man who would certainly be thorough in his work, though his thoroughness should be ruinous to himself. He had despised the Murrays, who ought to have stuck to their distant cousin, and had exulted in his heart at thinking that the world would say how much better and truer had been the Keswick tailor than the well-born and comparatively wealthy Scotch relations. And the poets of the lakes, who had not as yet become altogether Tories, had taken him by the hand and praised him. The rights of the Countess and the wrongs of the Countess had become his life. But he still kept on a diminished business in the north, and it was now needful

that he should return to Cumberland. He had heard that renewed offers of compromise were to be made,—though no idea of the proposed marriage between the distant cousins had been suggested to him. He had been discussing the question of some compromise with the Countess when she spoke to him respecting his son; and had recommended that certain terms should, if possible, be effected. Let the money be divided, on condition that the marriage were allowed. There could be no difficulty in this if the young lord would accede to such an arrangement, as the marriage must be acknowledged unless an adverse party should bring home proof from Italy to the contrary. The sufficiency of the ceremony in Applethwaite Church was incontestable. Let the money be divided, and the Countess be Countess Lovel, and Lady Anna be the Lady Anna to all the world. Old Thomas Thwaite himself had seemed to think that there would be enough of triumph in such a settlement. "But the woman might afterwards be bribed to come over and renew her claim," said the Countess. "Unless it be absolutely settled now, they will say when I am dead and gone that my daughter has no right to her name." Then the tailor said that he would make further inquiry how that might be. He was inclined to think that there might be a decision which should be absolute, even though that decision should be reached by compromise between the now contending parties.

Then the Countess had said her word about Daniel Thwaite the son, and Thomas Thwaite the father had heard it with ill-concealed anger. To fight against an Earl on behalf of the Earl's injured wife had been very sweet to him, but to be checked in his fight because he and his were unfit to associate with the child of that injured wife, was very bitter. And yet he had sense to know that what the Countess said to him was true. As far as words

went, he admitted the truth; but his face was more eloquent than his words, and his face showed plainly his displeasure.

"It is not of you that I am speaking," said the Countess, laying her hand upon the old man's sleeve.

"Daniel is, at any rate, fitter than I," said the tailor. "He has been educated, and I never was."

"He is as good as gold. It is not of that I speak. You know what I mean."

"I know very well what you mean, Lady Lovel."

"I have no friend like you, Mr. Thwaite;—none whom I love as I do you. And next to you is your son. For myself, there is nothing that I would not do for him or you;—no service, however menial, that I would not render you with my own hands. There is no limit to the gratitude which I owe you. But my girl is young, and if this burden of rank and wealth is to be hers,—it is proper that she do honour to it."

"And it is not honourable that she should be seen speaking—to a tailor?"

"Ah,—if you choose to take it so!"

"How should I take it? What I say is true. And what you say is true also. I will speak to Daniel." But she knew well, as he left her, that his heart was bitter against her.

The old man did speak to his son, sitting with him up in the bed-room over that which the Countess occupied. Old Thomas Thwaite was a strong man, but his son was in some respects stronger. As his father had said of him, he had been educated,—or rather instructed; and instruction leads to the power of thinking. He looked deeper into things than did his father, and was governed by wider and greater motives. His father had been

a Radical all his life, guided thereto probably by some early training, and made steadfast in his creed by feelings which induced him to hate the pretensions of an assumed superiority. Old Thwaite could not endure to think that one man should be considered to be worthier than another because he was richer. He would admit the riches, and even the justice of the riches,—having been himself, during much of his life, a rich man in his own sphere; but would deny the worthiness; and would adduce, in proof of his creed, the unworthiness of certain exalted sinners. The career of the Earl Lovel had been to him a sure proof of the baseness of English aristocracy generally. He had dreams of a republic in which a tailor might be president or senator, or something almost noble. But no rational scheme of governance among mankind had ever entered his mind, and of pure politics he knew no more than the journeyman who sat stitching upon his board.

But Daniel Thwaite was a thoughtful man who had read many books. More's Utopia and Harrington's Oceana, with many a tale written in the same spirit, had taught him to believe that a perfect form of government, or rather of policy, under which all men might be happy and satisfied, was practicable upon earth, and was to be achieved,—not merely by the slow amelioration of mankind under God's fostering ordinances,—but by the continued efforts of good and wise men who, by their goodness and wisdom, should be able to make the multitude believe in them. To diminish the distances, not only between the rich and the poor, but between the high and the low, was the grand political theory upon which his mind was always running. His father was ever thinking of himself and of Earl Lovel; while Daniel Thwaite was considering the injustice of the difference between ten thousand aristocrats and thirty million of people, who were for the most part ignorant and hungry. But it was not

that he also had not thoughts of himself. Gradually he had come to learn that he need not have been a tailor's foreman in Wigmore Street had not his father spent on behalf of the Countess Lovel the means by which he, the son, might already have become a master tradesman. And yet he had never begrudged it. He had been as keen as his father in the cause. It had been the romance of his life, since his life had been capable of romance;—but with him it had been no respect for the rank to which his father was so anxious to restore the Countess, no value which he attached to the names claimed by the mother and the daughter. He hated the countess-ship of the Countess, and the ladyship of the Lady Anna. He would fain that they should have abandoned them. They were to him odious signs of iniquitous pretensions. But he was keen enough to punish and to remedy the wickedness of the wicked Earl. He reverenced his father because he assaulted the wicked Earl and struck him to the ground. He was heart and soul in the cause of the injured wife. And then the one thing on earth that was really dear to him was the Lady Anna.

It had been the romance of his life. They had grown up together as playmates in Cumberland. He had fought scores of battles on her behalf with those who had denied that she was the Lady Anna,—even though he had then hated the title. Boys had jeered him because of his noble little sweetheart, and he had exulted at hearing her so called. His only sister and his mother had died when he was young, and there had been none in the house but his father and himself. As a boy he had ever been at the cottage of the Countess, and he had sworn to Lady Anna a thousand times that he would do and die in her service. Now he was a strong man, and was more devoted to her than ever. It was the great romance of his life. How could it be brought to pass that the acknowledged daughter of an Earl, dowered with

enormous wealth, should become the wife of a tailor? And yet such was his ambition and such his purpose. It was not that he cared for her dower. It was not, at any rate, the hope of her dower that had induced him to love her. His passion had grown and his purpose had been formed before the old Earl had returned for the last time to Lovel Grange,—when nothing was known of the manner in which his wealth might be distributed. That her prospect of riches now joined itself to his aspirations it would be an affectation to deny. The man who is insensible to the power which money brings with it must be a dolt; and Daniel Thwaite was not a dolt, and was fond of power. But he was proud of heart, and he said to himself over and over again that should it ever come to pass that the possession of the girl was to depend on the abandonment of the wealth, the wealth should be abandoned without a further thought.

It may be imagined that with such a man the words which his father would speak to him about the Lady Anna, suggesting the respectful distance with which she should be approached by a tailor's foreman, would be very bitter. They were bitter to the speaker and very bitter to him who heard them. "Daniel," said the father, "this is a queer life you are leading with the Countess and Lady Anna just beneath you, in the same house."

"It was a quiet house for them to come to;—and cheap."

"Quiet enough, and as cheap as any, I dare say;—but I don't know whether it is well that you should be thrown so much with them. They are different from us." The son looked at his father, but made no immediate reply. "Our lot has been cast with theirs because of their difficulties," continued the old man, "but the time is coming when we had better stand aloof."

"What do you mean, father?"

"I mean that we are tailors, and these people are born nobles."

"They have taken our help, father."

"Well; yes, they have. But it is not for us to say anything of that. It has been given with a heart."

"Certainly with a heart."

"And shall be given to the end. But the end of it will come soon now. One will be a Countess and the other will be the Lady Anna. Are they fit associates for such as you and me?"

"If you ask me, father, I think they are."

"They don't think so. You may be sure of that."

"Have they said so, father?"

"The Countess has said so. She has complained that you call her daughter simply Anna. In future you must give her a handle to her name." Daniel Thwaite was a dark brown man, with no tinge of ruddiness about him, a thin spare man, almost swarthy, whose hands were as brown as a nut, and whose cheeks and forehead were brown. But now he blushed up to his eyes. The hue of the blood as it rushed to his face forced itself through the darkness of his visage, and he blushed, as such men do blush,—with a look of indignation on his face. "Just call her Lady Anna," said the father.

"The Countess has been complaining of me then?"

"She has hinted that her daughter will be injured by your familiarity, and she is right. I suppose that the Lady Anna Lovel ought to be treated with deference by a tailor,—even though the tailor may have spent his last farthing in her service."

"Do not let us talk about the money, father."

"Well; no. I'd as lief not think about the money either. The world is not ripe yet, Daniel."

"No;—the world is not ripe."

"There must be earls and countesses."

"I see no must in it. There are earls and countesses as there used to be mastodons and other senseless, over-grown brutes roaming miserable and hungry through the undrained woods,—cold, comfortless, unwieldy things, which have perished in the general progress. The big things have all to give way to the intellect of those which are more finely made."

"I hope men and women will not give way to bugs and fleas," said the tailor, who was wont to ridicule his son's philosophy.

The son was about to explain his theory of the perfected mean size of intellectual created beings, when his heart was at the present moment full of Anna Lovel. "Father," he said, "I think that the Countess might have spared her observations."

"I thought so too;—but as she said it, it was best that I should tell you. You'll have to marry some day, and it wouldn't do that you should look there for your sweetheart." When the matter was thus brought home to him, Daniel Thwaite would argue it no further. "It will all come to an end soon," continued the old man, "and it may be that they had better not move till it is settled. They'll divide the money, and there will be enough for both in all conscience. The Countess will be the Countess, and the Lady Anna will be the Lady Anna; and then there will be no more need of the old tailor from Keswick. They will go into another world, and we shall hear from them perhaps about Christmas time with a hamper of game, and may be a little wine, as a gift."

"You do not think that of them, father."

"What else can they do? The lawyers will pay the money, and they will be carried away. They cannot come to our house, nor

can we go to theirs. I shall leave to-morrow, my boy, at six o'clock; and my advice to you is to trouble them with your presence as little as possible. You may be sure that they do not want it."

Daniel Thwaite was certainly not disposed to take his father's advice, but then he knew much more than did his father. The above scene took place in the evening, when the son's work was done. As he crept down on the following morning by the door of the room in which the two ladies slept, he could not but think of his father's words, "It wouldn't do that you should look there for your sweetheart." Why should it not do? But any such advice as that was now too late. He had looked there for his sweetheart. He had spoken, and the girl had answered him. He had held her close to his heart, and had pressed her lips to his own, and had called her his Anna, his well-beloved, his pearl, his treasure; and she,—she had only sighed in his arms, and yielded to his embrace. She had wept alone when she thought of it, with a conscious feeling that as she was the Lady Anna there could be no happy love between herself and the only youth whom she had known. But when he had spoken, and had clasped her to his heart, she had never dreamed of rebuking him. She had known nothing better than he, and desired nothing better than to live with him and to be loved by him. She did not think that it could be possible to know any one better. This weary, weary title filled her with dismay. Daniel, as he walked along thinking of her embrace, thinking of those kisses, and thinking also of his father's caution, swore to himself that the difficulties in his way should never stop him in his course.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOLICITOR-GENERAL MAKES A PROPOSITION.

When Mr. Flick returned from Sicily he was very strongly in favour of some compromise. He had seen the so-called Italian Countess,—who certainly was now called Contessa by everybody around her,—and he did not believe that she had ever been married to the old Earl. That an Italian lady had been married to the old lord now twenty-five years ago, he did believe,—probably the younger sister of this woman,—and he also believed that this wife had been dead before the marriage at Applethwaite. That was his private opinion. Mr. Flick was, in his way, an honest man,—one who certainly would have taken no conscious part in getting up an unjust claim; but he was now acting as legal agent for the young Earl, and it was not his business to get up evidence for the Earl's opponents. He did think that were he to use all his ingenuity and the funds at his disposal he would be able to reach the real truth in such a manner that it should be made clear and indubitable to an English jury; but if the real truth were adverse to his side, why search for it? He understood that the English Countess would stand her ground on the legality of the Applethwaite marriage, and on the acquittal of the old Earl as to the charge of bigamy. The English Countess being firm, so far as that ground would make her firm, it would in reality be for the other side—for the young Earl—to prove a former marriage. The burden of the proof would be with him, and not with the English Countess to disprove it. Disingenuous lawyers—Mr. Flick, who

though fairly honest could be disingenuous, among the number—had declared the contrary. But such was the case; and, as money was scarce with the Countess and her friends, no attempt had been made on their part to bring home evidence from Sicily. All this Mr. Flick knew, and doubted how far it might be wise for him further to disturb that Sicilian romance. The Italian Countess, who was a hideous, worn-out old woman, professing to be forty-four, probably fifty-five, and looking as though she were seventy-seven, would not stir a step towards England. She would swear and had sworn any number of oaths. Documentary evidence from herself, from various priests, from servants, and from neighbours there was in plenty. Mr. Flick learned through his interpreter that a certain old priest ridiculed the idea of there being a doubt. And there were letters,—letters alleged to have been written by the Earl to the living wife in the old days, which were shown to Mr. Flick. Mr. Flick was an educated man, and knew many things. He knew something of the manufacture of paper, and would not look at the letters after the first touch. It was not for him to get up evidence for the other side. The hideous old woman was clamorous for money. The priests were clamorous for money. The neighbours were clamorous for money. Had not they all sworn anything that was wanted, and were they not to be paid? Some moderate payment was made to the hideous, screeching, greedy old woman; some trivial payment—as to which Mr. Flick was heartily ashamed of himself—was made to the old priest; and then Mr. Flick hurried home, fully convinced that a compromise should be made as to the money, and that the legality of the titles claimed by the two English ladies should be allowed. It might be that that hideous hag had once been the Countess Lovel. It certainly was the case that the old Earl in latter years had so called her, though he had never once seen her during his last residence in Sicily. It might be that the clumsy fiction of the letters had been perpetrated

with the view of bolstering up a true case with false evidence. But Mr. Flick thought that there should be a compromise, and expressed his opinion very plainly to Sir William Patterson. "You mean a marriage," said the Solicitor-General. At this time Mr. Hardy, Q.C., the second counsel acting on behalf of the Earl, was also present.

"Not necessarily by a marriage, Sir William. They could divide the money."

"The girl is not of age," said Mr. Hardy.

"She is barely twenty as yet," said Sir William.

"I think it might be managed on her behalf," said the attorney.

"Who could be empowered to sacrifice her rights?" said Mr. Hardy, who was a gruff man.

"We might perhaps contrive to tide it over till she is of age," said the Solicitor-General, who was a sweet-mannered, mild man among his friends, though he could cross-examine a witness off his legs,—or hers, if the necessity of the case required him to do so.

"Of course we could do that, Sir William. What is a year in such a case as this?"

"Not much among lawyers, is it, Mr. Flick? You think that we shouldn't bring our case into court."

"It is a good case, Sir William, no doubt. There's the woman,—Countess, we will call her,—ready to swear, and has sworn, that she was the old Earl's wife. All the people round call her the Countess. The Earl undoubtedly used to speak of her as the Countess, and send her little dribbles of money, as being his Countess, during the ten years and more after he left Lovel Grange. There is the old priest who married them."

"The devil's in it if that is not a good case," said Mr. Hardy.

"Go on, Mr. Flick," said the Solicitor-General.

"I've got all the documentary evidence of course, Sir William."

"Go on, Mr. Flick."

Mr. Flick scratched his head. "It's a very heavy interest, Sir William."

"No doubt it is. Go on."

"I don't know that I've anything further to say, except that I'd arrange it if I could. Our client, Sir William, would be in a very pretty position if he got half the income which is at stake."

"Or the whole with the wife," said the Solicitor-General.

"Or the whole with the wife, Sir William. If he were to lose it all, he'd be,—so to say, nowhere."

"Nowhere at all," said the Solicitor-General. "The entailed property isn't worth above a thousand a year."

"I'd make some arrangement," said Mr. Flick, whose mind may perhaps have had a not unnatural bend towards his own very large venture in this concern. That his bill, including the honorarium of the barristers, would sooner or later be paid out of the estate, he did not doubt;—but a compromise would make the settlement easy and pleasant.

Mr. Hardy was in favour of continued fighting. A keener, honester, more enlightened lawyer than Mr. Hardy did not wear silk at that moment, but he had not the gift of seeing through darkness which belonged to the Solicitor-General. When Mr. Flick told them of the strength of their case, as based on various heads of evidence in their favour, Mr. Hardy believed Mr. Flick's words and rejected Mr. Flick's opinion. He believed in his heart that the English Countess was an impostor, not herself believing

in her own claim; and it would be gall and wormwood to him to give to such a one a moiety of the wealth which should go to support the ancient dignity and aristocratic grace of the house of Lovel. He hated compromise and desired justice,—and was a great rather than a successful lawyer. Sir William had at once perceived that there was something in the background on which it was his duty to calculate, which he was bound to consider,—but with which at the same time it was inexpedient that he should form a closer or more accurate acquaintance. He must do the best he could for his client. Earl Lovel with a thousand a year, and that probably already embarrassed, would be a poor, wretched creature, a mock lord, an earl without the very essence of an earldom. But Earl Lovel with fifteen or twenty thousand a year would be as good as most other earls. It would be but the difference between two powdered footmen and four, between four hunters and eight, between Belgrave Square and Eaton Place. Sir William, had he felt confident, would of course have preferred the four footmen for his client, and the eight hunters, and Belgrave Square; even though the poor English Countess should have starved, or been fed by the tailor's bounty. But he was not confident. He began to think that that wicked old Earl had been too wicked for them all. "They say she's a very nice girl," said Sir William.

"Very handsome indeed, I'm told," said Mr. Flick.

"And in love with the son of the old tailor from Keswick," said Mr. Hardy.

"She'll prefer the lord to the tailor for a guinea," said Sir William.

And thus it was decided, after some indecisive fashion, that their client should be sounded as to the expedience of a compromise. It was certain to them that the poor woman would