Trollope Anthony

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Trollope A.

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Содержание

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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 be glad to accept, for herself and her daughter, half of the wealth at stake, which half would be to her almost unlimited riches, on the condition that their rank was secured to them, – their rank and all the privileges of honest legitimacy. But as to such an arrangement the necessary delay offered no doubt a serious impediment, and it was considered that the wisest course would be to propose the marriage. But who should propose it, and how should it be proposed? Sir William was quite willing to make the suggestion to the young Lord or the young Lord's family, whose consent must of course be first obtained; but who should then break the ice to the Countess? "I suppose we must ask our friend, the Serjeant," said Mr. Flick. Serjeant Bluestone was the leading counsel for our Countess, and was vehemently energetic in this case. He swore everywhere that the Solicitor-General hadn't a leg to stand upon, and that the Solicitor-General knew that he hadn't a leg. Let them bring that Italian Countess over if they dared. He'd countess her, and discountess her too! Since he had first known the English courts of law there had been no case hard as this was hard. Had not the old Earl been acquitted of the charge of bigamy, when the unfortunate woman had done her best to free herself from her position? Serjeant Bluestone, who was a very violent man, taking up all his cases as though the very holding of a brief opposite to him was an insult to himself, had never before been so violent. "The Serjeant will take it as a surrender," said Mr. Flick.

"We must get round the Serjeant," said Sir William. "There are ladies in the Lovel family; we must manage it through them." And so it was arranged by the young Lord's lawyers that an attempt should be made to marry him to the heiress.

The two cousins had never seen each other. Lady Anna had hardly heard of Frederic Lovel before her father's death; but, since that, had been brought up to regard the young Lord as her natural enemy. The young Lord had been taught from his youth upwards to look upon the soi-disant Countess and her daughter as impostors who would some day strive to rob him of his birthright; – and, in these latter days, as impostors who were hard at work upon their project. And he had been told of the intimacy between the Countess and the old tailor, – and also of that between the so-called Lady Anna and the young tailor. To these distant Lovels, – to Frederic Lovel who had been brought up with the knowledge that he must be the Earl, and to his uncle and aunt by whom he had been brought up, – the women down at Keswick had been represented as vulgar, odious, and disreputable. We all know how firm can be the faith of a family in such matters. The Lovels were not without fear as to the result of the attempt that was being made. They understood quite as well as did Mr. Flick the glory of the position which would attend upon success, and the wretchedness attendant upon a pauper earldom. They were nervous enough, and in some moods frightened. But their trust in the justice of their cause was unbounded. The old Earl, whose memory was horrible to them, had purposely left two enemies in their way. There had been the Italian mistress backed up by the will; and there had been this illegitimate child. The one was vanquished; but the other – ! Ah, – it would be bad with them indeed if that enemy could not be vanquished too! They had offered £30,000 to the enemy; but the enemy would not accept the bribe. The idea of ending all their troubles by a marriage had never occurred to them. Had Mrs. Lovel been asked about it, she would have said that Anna Murray, – as she always studiously called the Lady Anna, was not fit to be married.

The young Lord, who a few months after his cousin's death had been old enough to take his seat in the House of Peers, was a gayhearted, kindly young man, who had been brought home from sea at the age of twenty on the death of an elder brother. Some of the family had wished that he should go on with his profession in spite of the earldom; but it had been thought unfit that he should be an earl and a midshipman at the same time, and his cousin's death while he was still on shore settled the question. He was a fair-haired, well-made young lad, looking like a sailor, and every inch a gentleman. Had he

believed that the Lady Anna was the Lady Anna, no earthly consideration would have induced him to meddle with the money. Since the old Lord's death, he had lived chiefly with his uncle Charles Lovel, having passed some two or three months at Lovel Grange with his uncle and aunt. Charles Lovel was a clergyman, with a good living at Yoxham, in Yorkshire, who had married a rich wife, a woman with some two thousand a year of her own, and was therefore well to do in the world. His two sons were at Harrow, and he had one other child, a daughter. With them also lived a Miss Lovel, Aunt Julia, – who was supposed of all the Lovels to be the wisest and most strong-minded. The parson, though a popular man, was not strong-minded. He was passionate, loud, generous, affectionate and indiscreet. He was very proud of his nephew's position as head of the family, – and very full of his nephew's wrongs arising from the fraud of those Murray women. He was a violent Tory, and had heard much of the Keswick Radical. He never doubted for a moment that both old Thwaite and young Thwaite were busy in concocting an enormous scheme of plunder by which to enrich themselves. To hear that they had both been convicted and transported was the hope of his life. That a Radical should not be worthy of transportation was to him impossible. That a Radical should be honest was to him incredible. But he was a thoroughly humane and charitable man, whose good qualities were as little intelligible to old Thomas Thwaite, as were those of Thomas Thwaite to him.

To whom should the Solicitor-General first break the matter? He had already had some intercourse with the Lovels, and had not been impressed with a sense of the parson's wisdom. He was a Whig Solicitor-General, for there were still Whigs in those days, and Mr. Lovel had not much liked him. Mr. Flick had seen much of the family, – having had many interviews with the young lord, with the parson, and with Aunt Julia. It was at last settled by Sir William's advice that a letter should be written to Aunt Julia by Mr. Flick, suggesting that she should come up to town.

"Mr. Lovel will be very angry," said Mr. Flick.

"We must do the best we can for our client," said Sir William. The letter was written, and Miss Lovel was informed in Mr. Flick's most discreet style, that as Sir William Patterson was anxious to discuss a matter concerning Lord Lovel's case in which a woman's voice would probably be of more service than that of a man, perhaps Miss Lovel would not object to the trouble of a journey to London. Miss Lovel did come up, and her brother came with her.

The interview took place in Sir William's chambers, and no one was present but Sir William, Miss Lovel, and Mr. Flick. Mr. Flick had been instructed to sit still and say nothing, unless he were asked a question; and he obeyed his instructions. After some apologies, which were perhaps too soft and sweet, – and which were by no means needed, as Miss Lovel herself, though very wise, was neither soft nor sweet, – the great man thus opened his case. "This is a very serious matter, Miss Lovel."

"Very serious indeed."

"You can hardly perhaps conceive how great a load of responsibility lies upon a lawyer's shoulders, when he has to give advice in such a case as this, when perhaps the prosperity of a whole family may turn upon his words."

"He can only do his best."

"Ah yes, Miss Lovel. That is easy to say; but how shall he know what is the best?"

"I suppose the truth will prevail at last. It is impossible to think that a young man such as my nephew should be swindled out of a noble fortune by the intrigues of two such women as these. I can't believe it, and I won't believe it. Of course I am only a woman, but I always thought it wrong to offer them even a shilling." Sir William smiled and rubbed his head, fixing his eyes on those of the lady. Though he smiled she could see that there was real sadness in his face. "You don't mean to say you doubt?" she said.

"Indeed I do."

"You think that a wicked scheme like this can succeed before an English judge?"

"But if the scheme be not wicked? Let me tell you one or two things, Miss Lovel; – or rather my own private opinion on one or two points. I do not believe that these two ladies are swindlers."

"They are not ladies, and I feel sure that they are swindlers," said Miss Lovel very firmly, turning her face as she spoke to the attorney.

"I am telling you, of course, merely my own opinion, and I will beg you to believe of me that in forming it I have used all the experience and all the caution which a long course of practice in these matters has taught me. Your nephew is entitled to my best services, and at the present moment I can perhaps do my duty to him most thoroughly by asking you to listen to me." The lady closed her lips together, and sat silent. "Whether Mrs. Murray, as we have hitherto called her, was or was not the legal wife of the late Earl, I will not just now express an opinion; but I am sure that she thinks that she was. The marriage was formal and accurate. The Earl was tried for bigamy, and acquitted. The people with whom we have to do across the water, in Sicily, are not respectable. They cannot be induced to come here to give evidence. An English jury will be naturally averse to them. The question is one simply of facts for a jury, and we cannot go beyond a jury. Had the daughter been a son, it would have been in the House of Lords to decide which young man should be the peer; – but, as it is, it is simply a question of property, and of facts as to the ownership of the property. Should we lose the case, your nephew would be – a very poor man."

"A very poor man, indeed, Sir William."

"His position would be distressing. I am bound to say that we should go into court to try the case with very great distrust. Mr. Flick quite agrees with me."

"Quite so, Sir William," said Mr. Flick.

Miss Lovel again looked at the attorney, closed her lips tighter than ever, but did not say a word.

"In such cases as this prejudices will arise, Miss Lovel. It is natural that you and your family should be prejudiced against these ladies. For myself, I am not aware that anything true can be alleged against them."

"The girl has disgraced herself with a tailor's son," almost screamed Miss Lovel.

"You have been told so, but I do not believe it to be true. They were, no doubt, brought up as children together; and Mr. Thwaite has been most kind to both the ladies." It at once occurred to Miss Lovel that Sir William was a Whig, and that there was in truth but little difference between a Whig and a Radical. To be at heart a gentleman, or at heart a lady, it was, to her thinking, necessary to be a Tory. "It would be a thousand pities that so noble a property should pass out of a family which, by its very splendour and ancient nobility, is placed in need of ample means." On hearing this sentiment, which might have become even a Tory, Miss Lovel relaxed somewhat the muscles of her face. "Were the Earl to marry his cousin – "

"She is not his cousin."

"Were the Earl to marry the young lady who, it may be, will be proved to be his cousin, the whole difficulty would be cleared away."

"Marry her!"

"I am told that she is very lovely, and that pains have been taken with her education. Her mother was well born and well bred. If you would get at the truth, Miss Lovel, you must teach yourself to believe that they are not swindlers. They are no more swindlers than I am a swindler. I will go further, – though perhaps you, and the young Earl, and Mr. Flick, may think me unfit to be intrusted any longer with this case, after such a declaration, – I believe, though it is with a doubting belief, that the elder lady is the Countess Lovel, and that her daughter is the legitimate child and the heir of the late Earl."

Mr. Flick sat with his mouth open as he heard this, – beating his breast almost with despair. His opinion tallied exactly with Sir William's. Indeed, it was by his opinion, hardly expressed, but perfectly understood, that Sir William had been led. But he had not thought that Sir William would be so bold and candid.

"You believe that Anna Murray is the real heir?" gasped Miss Lovel.

"I do, – with a doubting belief. I am inclined that way, – having to form my opinion on very conflicting evidence." Mr. Flick was by this time quite sure that Sir William was right, in his opinion, – though perhaps wrong in declaring it, – having been corroborated in his own belief by the reflex of it on a mind more powerful than his own. "Thinking as I do," continued Sir William, – "with a natural bias towards my own client, – what will a jury think, who will have no such bias? If they are cousins, – distant cousins, – why should they not marry and be happy, one bringing the title, and the other the wealth? There could be no more rational union, Miss Lovel."

Then there was a long pause before any one spoke a word. Mr. Flick had been forbidden to speak, and Sir William, having made his proposition, was determined to await the lady's reply. The lady was aghast, and for awhile could neither think nor utter a word. At last she opened her mouth. "I must speak to my brother about this."

"Quite right, Miss Lovel."

"Now I may go, Sir William?"

"Good morning, Miss Lovel." And Miss Lovel went.

"You have gone farther than I thought you would, Sir William," said Mr. Flick.

"I hardly went far enough, Mr. Flick. We must go farther yet if we mean to save any part of the property for the young man. What should we gain, even if we succeeded in proving that the Earl was married in early life to the old Sicilian hag that still lives? She would inherit the property then; – not the Earl."

CHAPTER VI.
YOXHAM RECTORY

Miss Lovel, wise and strong-minded as she was, did not dare to come to any decision on the proposition made to her without consulting some one. Strong as she was, she found herself at once to be too weak to speak to her nephew on the subject of her late interview with the great lawyer without asking her brother's opinion. The parson had accompanied her up to London, in a state of wrath against Sir William, in that he had not been sent for instead of his sister, and to him she told all that had been said. Her brother was away at his club when she got back to her hotel, and she had some hours in which to think of what had taken place. She could not at once bring herself to believe that all her former beliefs were vain and ill founded.

But if the opinion of the Solicitor-General had not prevailed with her, it prevailed still less when it reached her brother second-hand. She had been shaken, but Mr. Lovel at first was not shaken at all. Sir William was a Whig and a traitor. He had never known a Whig who was not a traitor. Sir William was throwing them over. The Murray people, who were all Whigs, had got hold of him. He, Mr. Lovel, would go at once to Mr. Hardy, and tell Mr. Hardy what he thought. The case should be immediately taken out of the hands of Messrs. Norton and Flick. Did not all the world know that these impostors were impostors? Sir William should be exposed and degraded, – though, in regard to this threatened degradation, Mr. Lovel was almost of opinion that his party would like their Solicitor-General better for having shown himself to be a traitor, and therefore proved himself to be a good Whig. He stormed and flew about the room, using language which hardly became his cloth. If his nephew married the girl, he would never own his nephew again. If that swindle was to prevail, let his nephew be poor and honest. He would give half of all he had towards supporting the peerage, and was sure that his boys would thank him for what he had done. But they should never call that woman cousin; and as for himself, might his tongue be blistered if ever he spoke of either of those women as Countess Lovel. He was inclined to think that the whole case should immediately be taken out of the hands of Norton and Flick, without further notice, and another solicitor employed. But at last he consented to call on Mr. Norton on the following morning.

Mr. Norton was a heavy, honest old man, who attended to simple conveyancing, and sat amidst the tin boxes of his broad-acred clients. He had no alternative but to send for Mr. Flick, and Mr. Flick came. When Mr. Lovel showed his anger, Mr. Flick became somewhat indignant. Mr. Flick knew how to assert himself, and Mr. Lovel was not quite the same man in the lawyer's chambers that he had been in his own parlour at the hotel. Mr. Flick was of opinion that no better counsel was to be had in England than the Solicitor-General, and no opinion more worthy of trust than his. If the Earl chose to put his case into other hands, of course he could do so, but it would behove his lordship to be very careful lest he should prejudice most important interests by showing his own weakness to his opponents. Mr. Flick spoke in the interests of his client, – so he said, – and not in his own. Mr. Flick was clearly of opinion that a compromise should be arranged; and having given that opinion, could say nothing more on the present occasion. On the next day the young Earl saw Mr. Flick, and also saw Sir William, and was then told by his aunt of the proposition which had been made. The parson retired to Yoxham, and Miss Lovel remained in London with her nephew. By the end of the week Miss Lovel was brought round to think that some compromise was expedient. All this took place in May. The cause had been fixed for trial in the following November, the long interval having been allowed because of the difficulty expected in producing the evidence necessary for rebutting the claims of the late Earl's daughter.

By the middle of June all the Lovels were again in London, – the parson, his sister, the parson's wife, and the Earl. "I never saw the young woman in my life," said the Earl to his aunt.

"As for that," said his aunt, "no doubt you could see her if you thought it wise to do so."

"I suppose she might be asked to the rectory?" said Mrs. Lovel.

"That would be giving up altogether," said the rector.

"Sir William said that it would not be against us at all," said Aunt Julia.

"You would have to call her Lady Anna," said Mrs. Lovel.

"I couldn't do it," said the rector. "It would be much better to give her half."

"But why should she take the half if the whole belongs to her?" said the young lord. "And why should I ask even for the half if nothing belongs to me?" At this time the young lord had become almost despondent as to his alleged rights, and now and again had made everybody belonging to him miserable by talking of withdrawing from his claim. He had come to understand that Sir William believed that the daughter was the real heir, and he thought that Sir William must know better than others. He was down-hearted and low in spirits, but not the less determined to be just in all that he did.

"I have made inquiry," said Aunt Julia, "and I do believe that the stories which we heard against the girl were untrue."

"The tailor and his son have been their most intimate friends," said Mr. Lovel.

"Because they had none others," said Mrs. Lovel.

It had been settled that by the 24th of June the lord was to say whether he would or would not take Sir William's advice. If he would do so, Sir William was to suggest what step should next be taken as to making the necessary overtures to the two ladies. If he would not, then Sir William was to advise how best the case might be carried on. They were all again at Yoxham that day, and the necessary communication was to be made to Mr. Flick by post. The young man had been alone the whole morning thinking of his condition, and undoubtedly the desire for the money had grown on him strongly. Why should it not have done so? Is there a nobleman in Great Britain who can say that he could lose the fortune which he possesses or the fortune which he expects without an agony that would almost break his heart? Young Lord Lovel sighed for the wealth without which his title would only be to him a terrible burden, and yet he was resolved that he would take no part in anything that was unjust. This girl, he heard, was beautiful and soft and pleasant, and now they told him that the evil things which had been reported against her had been slanders. He was assured that she was neither coarse, nor vulgar, nor unmaidenly. Two or three old men, of equal rank with his own, – men who had been his father's friends and were allied to the Lovels, and had been taken into confidence by Sir William, – told him that the proper way out of the difficulty had been suggested to him. There could be nothing, they said, more fitting than that two cousins so situated should marry. With such an acknowledgment of her rank and birth everybody would visit his wife. There was not a countess or a duchess in London who would not be willing to take her by the hand. His two aunts had gradually given way, and it was clear to him that his uncle would give way, – even his uncle, – if he would but yield himself. It was explained to him that if the girl came to Yoxham, with the privilege of being called Lady Anna by the inhabitants of the rectory, she would of course do so on the understanding that she should accept her cousin's hand. "But she might not like me," said the young Earl to his aunt.

"Not like you!" said Mrs. Lovel, putting her hand up to his brow and pushing away his hair. Was it possible that any girl should not like such a man as that, and he an earl?

"And if I did not like her, Aunt Lovel?"

"Then I would not ask her to be my wife." He thought that there was an injustice in this, and yet before the day was over he had assented.

"I do not think that I can call her Lady Anna," said the rector. "I don't think I can bring my tongue to do it."

CHAPTER VII.
THE SOLICITOR-GENERAL PERSEVERES

There was considerable difficulty in making the overture to the two ladies, – or rather in making it to the elder lady; for the suggestion, if made to the daughter, must of course come to her from her mother. It had been decided at last that the Lady Anna could not be invited to the rectory till it had been positively settled that she should be the Lady Anna without further opposition; and that all opposition to the claim should be withdrawn, at any rate till it was found that the young people were not inclined to be engaged to each other. "How can I call her Lady Anna before I have made up my mind to think that she is Lady Anna?" said the parson, almost in tears. As to the rest of the family, it may be said that they had come silently to think that the Countess was the Countess and that the Lady Anna was the Lady Anna; – silently in reference to each other, for not one of them except the young lord had positively owned to such a conviction. Sir William Patterson had been too strong for them. It was true that he was a Whig. It was possible that he was a traitor. But he was a man of might, and his opinion had domineered over theirs. To make things as straight as they could be made it would be well that the young people should be married. What would be the Earldom of Lovel without the wealth which the old mad Earl had amassed?

Sir William and Mr. Flick were strongly in favour of the marriage, and Mr. Hardy at last assented. The worst of it was that something of all this doubt on the part of the Earl and his friends was sure to reach the opposite party. "They are shaking in their shoes," Serjeant Bluestone said to his junior counsel, Mr. Mainsail. "I do believe they are not going to fight at all," he said to Mr. Goffe, the attorney for the Countess. Mr. Mainsail rubbed his hands. Mr. Goffe shook his head. Mr. Goffe was sure that they would fight. Mr. Mainsail, who had worked like a horse in getting up and arranging all the evidence on behalf of the Countess, and in sifting, as best he might, the Italian documents, was delighted. All this Sir William feared, and he felt that it was quite possible that the Earl's overture might be rejected because the Earl would not be thought to be worth having. "We must count upon his coronet," said Sir William to Mr. Flick. "She could not do better even if the property were undoubtedly her own."

But how was the first suggestion to be made? Mr. Hardy was anxious that everything should be straightforward, – and Sir William assented, with a certain inward peevishness at Mr. Hardy's stiff-necked propriety. Sir William was anxious to settle the thing comfortably for all parties. Mr. Hardy was determined not only that right should be done, but also that it should be done in a righteous manner. The great question now was whether they could approach the widow and her daughter otherwise than through Serjeant Bluestone. "The Serjeant is such a blunderbuss," said the Solicitor-General. But the Serjeant was counsel for these ladies, and it was at last settled that there should be a general conference at Sir William's chambers. A very short note was written by Mr. Flick to Mr. Goffe, stating that the Solicitor-General thought that a meeting might be for the advantage of all parties; – and the meeting was arranged. There were present the two barristers and the one attorney for each side, and many an anxious thought was given to the manner in which the meeting should be conducted. Serjeant Bluestone was fully resolved that he would hold his own against the Solicitor-General, and would speak his mind freely. Mr. Mainsail got up little telling questions. Mr. Goffe and Mr. Flick both felt that it would behove them to hold their peace, unless questioned, but were equally determined to hang fast by their clients. Mr. Hardy in his heart of hearts thought that his learned friend was about to fling away his case. Sir William had quite made up his mind as to his line of action. He seated them all most courteously, giving them place according to their rank, – a great arm-chair for Serjeant Bluestone, from which the Serjeant would hardly be able to use his arms with his

accustomed energy, – and then he began at once. "Gentlemen," said he, "it would be a great pity that this property should be wasted."

"No fear of that, Mr. Solicitor," said the Serjeant.

"It would be a great pity that this property should be wasted," repeated Sir William, bowing to the Serjeant, "and I am disposed to think that the best thing the two young people can do is to marry each other." Then he paused, and the three gentlemen opposite sat erect, the barristers as speechless as the attorneys. But the Solicitor-General had nothing to add. He had made his proposition, and was desirous of seeing what effect it might have before he spoke another word.

"Then you acknowledge the Countess's marriage, of course," said the Serjeant.

"Pardon me, Serjeant, we acknowledge nothing. As a matter of course she is the Countess till it be proved that another wife was living when she was married."

"Quite as a matter of course," said the Serjeant.

"Quite as a matter of course, if that will make the case stronger," continued Sir William. "Her marriage was formal and regular. That she believed her marriage to be a righteous marriage before God, I have never doubted. God forbid that I should have a harsh thought against a poor lady who has suffered so much cruel treatment."

"Why have things been said then?" asked the Serjeant, beginning to throw about his left arm.

"If I am not mistaken," said Mr. Mainsail, "evidence has been prepared to show that the Countess is a party to a contemplated fraud."

"Then you are mistaken, Mr. Mainsail," said Sir William. "I admit at once and clearly that the lady is not suspected of any fraud. Whether she be actually the Countess Lovel or not it may, – I fear it must, – take years to prove, if the law be allowed to take its course."

"We think that we can dispose of any counter-claim in much less time than that," said the Serjeant.

"It may be so. I myself think that it would not be so. Our evidence in favour of the lady, who is now living some two leagues out of Palermo, is very strong. She is a poor creature, old, ignorant, – fairly well off through the bounty of the late Earl, but always craving for some trifle more, – unwilling to come to this country, – childless, and altogether indifferent to the second marriage, except in so far as might interfere with her hopes of getting some further subsidy from the Lovel family. One is not very anxious on her behalf. One is only anxious, – can only be anxious, – that the vast property at stake should not get into improper hands."

"And that justice should be done," said Mr. Hardy.

"And that justice should be done of course, as my friend observes. Here is a young man who is undoubtedly Earl of Lovel, and who claims a property as heir to the late Earl. And here is a young lady, I am told very beautiful and highly educated, who is the daughter of the late Earl, and who claims that property believing herself to be his legitimate heiress. The question between them is most intricate."

"The onus probandi lies with you, Mr. Solicitor," said the Serjeant.

"We acknowledge that it does, but the case on that account is none the less intricate. With the view of avoiding litigation and expense, and in the certainty that by such an arrangement the enjoyment of the property will fall to the right owner, we propose that steps shall be taken to bring these two young people together. The lady, whom for the occasion I am quite willing to call the Countess, the mother of the lady whom I hope the young Earl will make his own Countess, has not been sounded on this subject."

"I should hope not," said the Serjeant.

"My excellent friend takes me up a little short," said Sir William, laughing. "You gentlemen will probably consult together on the subject, and whatever may be the advice which you shall consider it to be your duty to give to the mother, – and I am sure that you will feel bound to let her know the proposition that has been made; I do not hesitate to say that we have a right to expect that it shall be made known to her, – I need hardly remark that were the young lady to accept the young lord's hand

we should all be in a boat together in reference to the mother's rank, and to the widow's claim upon the personal property left behind him by her late husband."

And so the Solicitor-General had made his proposition, and the conference was broken up with a promise that Mr. Flick should hear from Mr. Goffe upon the subject. But the Serjeant had at once made up his mind against the compromise now proposed. He desired the danger and the dust and the glory of the battle. He was true to his clients' interests, no doubt, – intended to be intensely true; but the personal, doggish love of fighting prevailed in the man, and he was clear as to the necessity of going on. "They know they are beat," he said to Mr. Goffe. "Mr. Solicitor knows as well as I do that he has not an inch of ground under his feet." Therefore Mr. Goffe wrote the following letter to Messrs. Norton and Flick: —

Raymond's Buildings, Gray's Inn,
1st July, 183 – .

Dear Sirs,

In reference to the interview which took place at the chambers of the Solicitor-General on the 27th ult., we are to inform you that we are not disposed, as acting for our clients, the Countess of Lovel and her daughter the Lady Anna Lovel, to listen to the proposition then made. Apart from the very strong feeling we entertain as to the certainty of our client's success, – which certainly was not weakened by what we heard on that occasion, – we are of opinion that we could not interfere with propriety in suggesting the marriage of two young persons who have not as yet had any opportunity of becoming acquainted with each other. Should the Earl of Lovel seek the hand of his cousin, the Lady Anna Lovel, and marry her with the consent of the Countess, we should be delighted at such a family arrangement; but we do not think that we, as lawyers, – or, if we may be allowed to say so, that you as lawyers, – have anything to do with such a matter.

We are, dear Sirs,
Yours very faithfully,
Goffe and Goffe.

Messrs. Norton and Flick.

"Balderdash!" said Sir William, when he had read the letter. "We are not going to be done in that way. It was all very well going to that Serjeant as he has the case in hand, though a worse messenger in an affair of love – "

"Not love, as yet, Mr. Solicitor," said Mr. Flick.

"I mean it to be love, and I'm not going to be put off by Serjeant Bluestone. We must get to the lady by some other means. Do you write to that tailor down at Keswick, and say that you want to see him."

"Will that be regular, Sir William?"

"I'll stand the racket, Mr. Flick." Mr. Flick did write to Thomas Thwaite, and Thomas Thwaite came up to London and called at Mr. Flick's chambers.

When Thomas Thwaite received his commission he was much rejoiced. Injustice would be done him unless so much were owned on his behalf. But, nevertheless, some feeling of disappointment which he could not analyze crept across his heart. If once the girl were married to Earl Lovel there would be an end of his services and of his son's. He had never really entertained an idea that his son would marry the girl. As the reader will perhaps remember, he had warned his son that he must seek a sweetheart elsewhere. He had told himself over and over again that when the Countess came to her own there must be an end of this intimacy, – that there could be nothing in common between him, the radical tailor of Keswick, and a really established Countess. The Countess, while not yet really

established, had already begged that his son might be instructed not to call her daughter simply by her Christian name. Old Thwaite on receiving this intimation of the difference of their positions, though he had acknowledged its truth, had felt himself bitterly aggrieved, and now the moment had come. Of course the Countess would grasp at such an offer. Of course it would give her all that she had desired, and much more than she expected. In adjusting his feelings on the occasion the tailor thought but little of the girl herself. Why should she not be satisfied? Of the young Earl he had only heard that he was a handsome, modest, gallant lad, who only wanted a fortune to make him one of the most popular of the golden youth of England. Why should not the girl rejoice at the prospect of winning such a husband? To have a husband must necessarily be in her heart, whether she were the Lady Anna Lovel, or plain Anna Murray. And what espousals could be so auspicious as these? Feeling all this, without much of calculation, the tailor said that he would do as he was bidden. "We have sent for you because we know that you have been so old a friend," said Mr. Flick, who did not quite approve of the emissary whom he had been instructed by Sir William to employ.

"I will do my best, sir," said Mr. Thwaite, making his bow. Thomas Thwaite, as he went along the streets alone, determined that he would perform this new duty imposed upon him without any reference to his son.

CHAPTER VIII.
IMPOSSIBLE!

"They sent for me, Lady Lovel, to bid me come to your ladyship and ask your ladyship whether you would consent to a marriage between the two young people." It was thus that the tailor repeated for the second time the message which had been confided to him, showing the gall and also the pride which were at work about his heart by the repeated titles which he gave to his old friend.

"They desire that Anna should marry the young lord!"

"Yes, my lady. That's the meaning of it."

"And what am I to be?"

"Just the Countess Lovel, – with a third of the property as your own. I suppose it would be a third; but you might trust the lawyers to settle that properly. When once they take your daughter among them they won't scrimp you in your honours. They'll all swear that the marriage was good enough then. They know that already, and have made this offer because they know it. Your ladyship needn't fear now but what all the world will own you as the Countess Lovel. I don't suppose I'll be troubled to come up to London any more."

"Oh, my friend!" The ejaculation she made feeling the necessity of saying something to soothe the tailor's pride; but her heart was fixed upon the fruition of that for which she had spent so many years in struggling. Was it to come to her at last? Could it be that now, now at once, people throughout the world would call her the Countess Lovel, and would own her daughter to be the Lady Anna, – till she also should become a countess? Of the young man she had heard nothing but good, and it was impossible that she should have fear in that direction, even had she been timorous by nature. But she was bold and eager, hopeful in spite of all that she had suffered, full of ambition, and not prone to feminine scruples. She had been fighting all her life in order that she and her daughter might be acknowledged to be among the aristocrats of her country. She was so far a loving, devoted mother that in all her battles she thought more of her child than of herself. She would have consented to carry on the battle in poverty to the last gasp of her own breath, could she thereby have insured success for her surviving daughter. But she was not a woman likely to be dismayed at the idea of giving her girl in marriage to an absolute stranger, when that stranger was such a one as the young Earl Lovel. She herself had been a countess, but a wretched, unacknowledged, poverty-stricken countess, for the last half of her eventful life. This marriage would make her daughter a countess, prosperous, accepted by all, and very wealthy. What better end could there be to her long struggles? Of course she would assent.

"I don't know why they should have troubled themselves to send for me," said the tailor.

"Because you are the best friend that I have in the world. Whom else could I have trusted as I do you? Has the Earl agreed to it?"

"They didn't tell me that, my lady."

"They would hardly have sent, unless he had agreed. Don't you think so, Mr. Thwaite?"

"I don't know much about such things, my lady."

"You have told – Daniel?"

"No, my lady."

"Oh, Mr. Thwaite, do not talk to me in that way. It sounds as though you were deserting me."

"There'll be no reason for not deserting now. You'll have friends by the score more fit to see you through this than old Thomas Thwaite. And, to own the truth, now that the matter is coming to an end, I am getting weary of it. I'm not so young as I was, and I'd be better left at home to my business."

"I hope that you may disregard your business now without imprudence, Mr. Thwaite."

"No, my lady; – a man should always stick to his business. I hope that Daniel will do so better than his father before him, – so that his son may never have to go out to be servant to another man."

"You are speaking daggers to me."

"I have not meant it then. I am rough by nature, I know, and perhaps a little low just at present. There is something sad in the parting of old friends."

"Old friends needn't be parted, Mr. Thwaite."

"When your ladyship was good enough to point out to me my boy's improper manner of speech to Lady Anna, I knew how it must be. You were quite right, my lady. There can be no becoming friendship between the future Lady Lovel and a journeyman tailor. I was wrong from the beginning."

"Oh, Mr. Thwaite! without such wrong where should we have been?"

"There can be no holding ground of friendship between such as you and such as we. Lords and ladies, earls and countesses, are our enemies, and we are theirs. We may make their robes and take their money, and deal with them as the Jew dealt with the Christians in the play; but we cannot eat with them or drink with them."

"How often have I eaten and drank at your table, when no other table was spread for me?"

"You were a Jew almost as ourselves then. We cannot now well stand shoulder to shoulder and arm to arm as friends should do."

"How often has my child lain in your arms when she was a baby, and been quieter there than she would be even in her mother's?"

"That has all gone by. Other arms will be open to receive her." As the tailor said this he remembered how his boy used to take the little child out to the mountain side, and how the two would ramble away together through the long summer evenings; and he reflected that the memory of those days was no doubt still strong in the heart of his son. Some shadow of the grief which would surely fall upon the young man now fell upon the father, and caused him almost to repent of the work of his life. "Tailors should consort with tailors," he said, "and lords and ladies should consort together."

Something of the same feeling struck the Countess also. If it were not for the son, the father, after all that he had done for them, might be almost as near and as dear to them as ever. He might have called the Lady Anna by her Christian name, at any rate till she had been carried away as a bride by the Earl. But, though all this was so exquisitely painful, it had been absolutely necessary to check the son. "Ah, well," she said; "it is hardly to be hoped that so many crooked things should be made straight without much pain. If you knew, Mr. Thwaite, how little it is that I expect for myself!"

"It is because I have known it that I am here."

"It will be well for her, – will it not, – to be the wife of her cousin?"

"If he be a good man. A woman will not always make herself happy by marrying an Earl."

"How many daggers you can use, Mr. Thwaite! But this young man is good. You yourself have said that you have heard so."

"I have heard nothing to the contrary, my lady."

"And what shall I do?"

"Just explain it all to Lady Anna. I think it will be clear then."

"You believe that she will be so easily pleased?"

"Why should she not be pleased? She'll have some maiden scruples, doubtless. What maid would not? But she'll exult at such an end to all her troubles; – and what maid would not? Let them meet as soon as may be and have it over. When he shall have placed the ring on her finger, your battle will have been won."

Then the tailor felt that his commission was done and he might take his leave. It had been arranged that in the event of the Countess consenting to the proposed marriage, he should call upon Mr. Flick to explain that it was so. Had she dissented, a short note would have been sufficient. Had such been the case, the Solicitor-General would have instigated the young lord to go and try what he himself could do with the Countess and her daughter. The tailor had suggested to the mother that she

should at once make the proposition known to Lady Anna, but the Countess felt that one other word was necessary as her old friend left her. "Will you go back at once to Keswick, Mr. Thwaite?"

"To-morrow morning, my lady."

"Perhaps you will not tell your son of this, – yet?"

"No, my lady. I will not tell my son of this, – yet. My son is high-minded and stiff-necked, and of great heart. If he saw aught to object to in this marriage, it might be that he would express himself loudly." Then the tailor took his leave without even shaking hands with the Countess.

The woman sat alone for the next two hours, thinking of what had passed. There had sprung up in these days a sort of friendship between Mrs. Bluestone and the two Miss Bluestones and the Lady Anna, arising rather from the forlorn condition of the young lady than from any positive choice of affection. Mrs. Bluestone was kind and motherly. The girls were girlish and good. The father was the Jupiter Tonans of the household, – as was of course proper, – and was worshipped in everything. To the world at large Serjeant Bluestone was a thundering, blundering, sanguine, energetic lawyer, whom nobody disliked very much though he was so big and noisy. But at home Serjeant Bluestone was all the judges of the land rolled into one. But he was a kind-hearted man, and he had sent his wife and girls to call upon the disconsolate Countess. The disconsolate Lady Anna having no other friends, had found the companionship of the Bluestone girls to be pleasant to her, and she was now with them at the Serjeant's house in Bedford Square. Mrs. Bluestone talked of the wrongs and coming rights of the Countess Lovel wherever she went, and the Bluestone girls had all the case at their fingers' ends. To doubt that the Serjeant would succeed, or to doubt that the success of the Countess and her daughter would have had any other source than the Serjeant's eloquence and the Serjeant's zeal, would have been heresy in Bedford Square. The grand idea that young Jack Bluestone, who was up at Brasenose, should marry the Lady Anna, had occurred only to the mother.

Lady Anna was away with her friends as the Countess sat brooding over the new hopes that had been opened to her. At first, she could not tear her mind away from the position which she herself would occupy as soon as her daughter should have been married and taken away from her. The young Earl would not want his mother-in-law, – a mother-in-law who had spent the best years of her life in the society of a tailor. And the daughter, who would still be young enough to begin a new life in a new sphere, would no longer want her mother to help her. As regarded herself, the Countess was aware that the life she had led so long, and the condition of agonizing struggling to which she had been brought, had unfitted her for smiling, happy, prosperous, aristocratic luxury. There was but one joy left for her, and that was to be the joy of success. When that cup should have been drained, there would be nothing left to her. She would have her rank, of course, – and money enough to support it. She no longer feared that any one would do her material injury. Her daughter's husband no doubt would see that she had a fitting home, with all the appanages and paraphernalia suited to a dowager Countess. But who would share her home with her, and where should she find her friends? Even now the two Miss Bluestones were more to her daughter than she was. When she should be established in her new luxurious home, with servants calling her my lady, with none to contradict her right, she would no longer be enabled to sit late into the night discussing matters with her friend the tailor. As regarded herself, it would have been better for her, perhaps, if the fight had been carried on.

But the fight had been, not for herself, but for her child; and the victory for her girl would have been won by her own perseverance. Her whole life had been devoted to establishing the rights of her daughter, and it should be so devoted to the end. It had been her great resolve that the world should acknowledge the rank of her girl, and now it would be acknowledged. Not only would she become the Countess Lovel by marriage, but the name which had been assumed for her amidst the ridicule of many, and in opposition to the belief of nearly all, would be proved to have been her just and proper title. And then, at last, it would be known by all men that she herself, the ill-used, suffering mother, had gone to the house of that wicked man, not as his mistress, but as his true wife!

Hardly a thought troubled her, then, as to the acquiescence of her daughter. She had no faintest idea that the girl's heart had been touched by the young tailor. She had so lived that she knew but little of lovers and their love, and in her fear regarding Daniel Thwaite she had not conceived danger such as that. It had to her simply been unfitting that there should be close familiarity between the two. She expected that her daughter would be ambitious, as she was ambitious, and would rejoice greatly at such perfect success. She herself had been preaching ambition and practising ambition all her life. It had been the necessity of her career that she should think more of her right to a noble name than of any other good thing under the sun. It was only natural that she should believe that her daughter shared the feeling.

And then Lady Anna came in. "They wanted me to stay and dine, mamma, but I did not like to think that you should be left alone."

"I must get used to that, my dear."

"Why, mamma? Wherever we have been, we have always been together. Mrs. Bluestone was quite unhappy because you would not come. They are so good-natured! I wish you would go there."

"I am better here, my dear." Then there was a pause for a few moments. "But I am glad that you have come home this evening."

"Of course, I should come home."

"I have something special to say to you."

"To me, mamma! What is it, mamma?"

"I think we will wait till after dinner. The things are here now. Go up-stairs and take off your hat, and I will tell you after dinner."

"Mamma," Lady Anna said, as soon as the maid had left the room, "has old Mr. Thwaite been here?"

"Yes, my dear, he was here."

"I thought so, because you have something to tell me. It is something from him?"

"Not from himself, Anna; – though he was the messenger. Come and sit here, my dear, – close to me. Have you ever thought, Anna, that it would be good for you to be married?"

"No, mamma; why should I?" But that surely was a lie! How often had she thought that it would be good to be married to Daniel Thwaite and to have done with this weary searching after rank! And now what could her mother mean? Thomas Thwaite had been there, but it was impossible that her mother should think that Daniel Thwaite would be a fit husband for her daughter. "No, mamma; – why should I?"

"It must be thought of, my dearest."

"Why now?" She could understand perfectly that there was some special cause for her mother's manner of speech.

"After all that we have gone through, we are about to succeed at last. They are willing to own everything, to give us all our rights, – on one condition."

"What condition, mamma?"

"Come nearer to me, dearest. It would not make you unhappy to think that you were going to be the wife of a man you could love?"

"No; – not if I really loved him."

"You have heard of your cousin, – the young Earl?"

"Yes, mamma; – I have heard of him."

"They say that he is everything that is good. What should you think of having him for your husband?"

"That would be impossible, mamma."

"Impossible! – why impossible? What could be more fitting? Your rank is equal to his; – higher even in this, that your father was himself the Earl. In fortune you will be much more than his equal. In age you are exactly suited. Why should it be impossible?"

"Oh, mamma, it is impossible!"

"What makes you say so, Anna?"

"We have never seen each other."

"Tush! my child. Why should you not see each other?"

"And then we are his enemies."

"We are no longer enemies, dearest. They have sent to say that if we, – you and I, – will consent to this marriage, then will they consent to it also. It is their wish, and it comes from them. There can be no more proper ending to all this weary lawsuit. It is quite right that the title and the name should be supported. It is quite right that the fortune which your father left should, in this way, go to support your father's family. You will be the Countess Lovel; and all will have been conceded to us. There cannot possibly be any fitter way out of our difficulties." Lady Anna sat looking at her mother in dismay, but could say nothing. "You need have no fear about the young man. Every one tells me that he is just the man that a mother would welcome as a husband for her daughter. Will you not be glad to see him?" But the Lady Anna would only say that it was impossible. "Why impossible, my dear; – what do you mean by impossible?"

"Oh, mamma, it is impossible!"

The Countess found that she was obliged to give the subject up for that night, and could only comfort herself by endeavouring to believe that the suddenness of the tidings had confused her child.

CHAPTER IX.
IT ISN'T LAW

On the next morning Lady Anna was ill, and would not leave her bed. When her mother spoke to her, she declared that her head ached wretchedly, and she could not be persuaded to dress herself.

"Is it what I said to you last night?" asked the Countess.

"Oh, mamma, that is impossible," she said.

It seemed to the mother that the mention of the young lord's name had produced a horror in the daughter's mind which nothing could for the present subdue. Before the day was over, however, the girl had acknowledged that she was bound in duty, at any rate, to meet her cousin; and the Countess, forced to satisfy herself with so much of concession, and acting upon that, fixed herself in her purpose to go on with the project. The lawyers on both sides would assist her. It was for the advantage of them all that there should be such a marriage. She determined, therefore, that she would at once see Mr. Goffe, her own attorney, and give him to understand in general terms that the case might be proceeded with on this new matrimonial basis.

But there was a grievous doubt on her mind, – a fear, a spark of suspicion, of which she had unintentionally given notice to Thomas Thwaite when she asked him whether he had as yet spoken of the proposed marriage to his son. He had understood what was passing in her mind when she exacted from him a promise that nothing should as yet be said to Daniel Thwaite upon the matter. And yet she assured herself over and over again that her girl could not be so weak, so vain, so foolish, so wicked as that! It could not be that, after all the struggles of her life, – when at last success, perfect success, was within their grasp, when all had been done and all well done, when the great reward was then coming up to their very lips with a full tide, – it could not be that in the very moment of victory all should be lost through the base weakness of a young girl! Was it possible that her daughter, – the daughter of one who had spent the very marrow of her life in fighting for the position that was due to her, – should spoil all by preferring a journeyman tailor to a young nobleman of high rank, of ancient lineage, and one, too, who by his marriage with herself would endow her with wealth sufficient to make that rank splendid as well as illustrious? But if it were not so, what had the girl meant by saying that it was impossible? That the word should have been used once or twice in maidenly scruple, the Countess could understand; but it had been repeated with a vehemence beyond that which such natural timidity might have produced. And now the girl professed herself to be ill in bed, and when the subject was broached would only weep, and repeat the one word with which she had expressed her repugnance to the match.

Hitherto she had not been like this. She had, in her own quiet way, shared her mother's aspirations, and had always sympathised with her mother's sufferings; and she had been dutiful through it all, carrying herself as one who was bound to special obedience by the peculiarity of her parent's position. She had been keenly alive to the wrongs that her mother endured, and had in every respect been a loving child. But now she protested that she would not do the one thing necessary to complete their triumph, and would give no reason for not doing so. As the Countess thought of all this, she swore to herself that she would prefer to divest her bosom of all soft motherly feeling than be vanquished in this matter by her own child. Her daughter should find that she could be stern and rough enough if she were really thwarted. What would her life be worth to her if her child, Lady Anna Lovel, the heiress and only legitimate offspring of the late Earl Lovel, were to marry a – tailor?

And then, again, she told herself that there was no sufficient excuse for such alarm. Her daughter's demeanour had ever been modest. She had never been given to easy friendship, or to that propensity to men's acquaintance which the world calls flirting. It might be that the very absence of such propensity, – the very fact that hitherto she had never been thrust into society among her

equals, – had produced that feeling almost of horror which she had expressed. But she had been driven, at any rate, to say that she would meet the young man; and the Countess, acting upon that, called on Mr. Goffe in his chambers, and explained to that gentleman that she proposed to settle the whole question in dispute by giving her daughter to the young Earl in marriage. Mr. Goffe, who had been present at the conference among the lawyers, understood it all in a moment. The overture had been made from the other side to his client.

"Indeed, my lady!" said Mr. Goffe.

"Do you not think it will be an excellent arrangement?"

In his heart of hearts Mr. Goffe thought that it would be an excellent arrangement; but he could not commit himself to such an opinion. Serjeant Bluestone thought that the matter should be fought out, and Mr. Goffe was not prepared to separate himself from his legal adviser. As Serjeant Bluestone had said after the conference, with much argumentative vehemence, – "If we were to agree to this, how would it be if the marriage should not come off? The court can't agree to a marriage. The court must direct to whom the property belongs. They profess that they can prove that our marriage was no marriage. They must do so, or else they must withdraw the allegation. Suppose the Italian woman were to come forward afterwards with her claim as the widow, where then would be my client's position, and her title as dowager countess, and her claim upon her husband's personal estate? I never heard anything more irregular in my life. It is just like Patterson, who always thinks he can make laws according to the light of his own reason." So Serjeant Bluestone had said to the lawyers who were acting with him; and Mr. Goffe, though he did himself think that this marriage would be the best thing in the world, could not differ from the Serjeant.

No doubt there might even yet be very great difficulties, even though the young Earl and Lady Anna Lovel should agree to be married. Mr. Goffe on that occasion said very little to the Countess, and she left him with a feeling that a certain quantity of cold water had been thrown upon the scheme. But she would not allow herself to be disturbed by that. The marriage could go on without any consent on the part of the lawyers, and the Countess was quite satisfied that, should the marriage be once completed, the money and the titles would all go as she desired. She had already begun to have more faith in the Solicitor-General than in Mr. Goffe or in Serjeant Bluestone.

But Serjeant Bluestone was not a man to bear such treatment and be quiet under it. He heard that very day from Mr. Goffe what had been done, and was loud in the expression of his displeasure. It was the most irregular thing that he had ever known. No other man except Patterson in the whole profession would have done it! The counsel on the other side – probably Patterson himself – had been to his client, and given advice to his client, and had done so after her own counsel had decided that no such advice should be given! He would see the Attorney-General, and ask the Attorney-General what he thought about it. Now, it was supposed in legal circles, just at this period, that the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General were not the best friends in the world; and the latter was wont to call the former an old fogey, and the former to say of the latter that he might be a very clever philosopher, but certainly no lawyer. And so by degrees the thing got much talked about in the profession; and there was perhaps a balance of opinion that the Solicitor-General had done wrong.

But this was certain, – that no one could be put into possession of the property till the court had decided to whom it belonged. If the Earl withdrew from his claim, the widow would simply be called on to prove her own marriage, – which had in truth been proved more than once already, – and the right of her legitimate child would follow as a matter of course. It was by no means probable that the woman over in Italy would make any claim on her own behalf, – and even, should she do so, she could not find the means of supporting it. "They must be asses," said the Solicitor-General, "not to see that I am fighting their battle for them, and that I am doing so because I can best secure my own client's interests by securing theirs also." But even he became nervous after a day or two, and was anxious to learn that the marriage scheme was progressing. He told his client, Lord Lovel, that it would be well that the marriage should take place before the court sat in November. "In that case

settlements will, of course, have been made, and we shall simply withdraw. We shall state the fact of this new marriage, and assert ourselves to be convinced that the old marriage was good and valid. But you should lose no time in the wooing, my lord." At this time the Earl had not seen his cousin, and it had not yet been decided when they should meet.

"It is my duty to explain to you, Lady Lovel, as my client," said Serjeant Bluestone to the Countess, "that this arrangement cannot afford a satisfactory mode to you of establishing your own position."

"It would be so happy for the whole family!"

"As to that I can know nothing, Lady Lovel. If your daughter and the Earl are attached to each other, there can be no reason on earth why they should not be married. But it should be a separate thing. Your position should not be made to depend upon hers."

"But they will withdraw, Serjeant Bluestone."

"How do you know that they will withdraw? Supposing at the last moment Lady Anna were to decline the alliance, would they withdraw then? Not a bit of it. The matter would be further delayed, and referred over to next year. You and your daughter would be kept out of your money, and there would still be danger."

"I should not care for that; – if they were married."

"And they have set up this Italian countess, – who never was a countess, – any more than I am. Now they have put her up, they are bound to dispose of her. If she came forward afterwards, on her own behalf, where would you all be then?"

"My daughter would, at any rate, be safe."

The Serjeant did not like it at all. He felt that he was being thrown over, not only by his client the Countess, – as to which he might have been indifferent, knowing that the world at large, the laity as distinguished from the lawyers, the children of the world as all who were not lawyers seemed to him to be, will do and must be expected to do, foolish things continually. They cannot be persuaded to subject themselves to lawyers in all their doings, and, of course, go wrong when they do not do so. The infinite simplicity and silliness of mankind and womankind at large were too well known to the Serjeant to cause him dismay, let them be shown in ever so egregious a fashion. But in this case the fault came from another lawyer, who had tampered with his clients, and who seemed to be himself as ignorant as though he belonged to the outside world. And this man had been made Solicitor-General, – over the heads of half the profession, – simply because he could make a speech in Parliament!

But the Solicitor-General was himself becoming uneasy when at the end of a fortnight he learned that the young people, – as he had come to call them on all occasions, – had not as yet seen each other. He would not like to have it said of him that he had thrown over his client. And there were some who still believed that the Italian marriage had been a real marriage, and the Italian wife alive at the time of the Cumberland marriage, – though the Italian woman now living had never been the countess. Mr. Hardy so believed, and, in his private opinion, thought that the Solicitor-General had been very indiscreet.

"I don't think that we could ever dare to face a jury," said Sir William to Mr. Hardy when they discussed the matter, about a fortnight after the proposition had been made.

"Why did the Earl always say that the Italian woman was his wife?"

"Because the Earl was a very devil."

"Mr. Flick does not think so."

"Yes, he does; but Mr. Flick, like all attorneys with a bad case, does not choose to say quite what he thinks, even to his own counsel. Mr. Flick does not like to throw his client over, nor do I, nor do you. But with such a case we have no right to create increased expenses, and all the agony of prolonged fallacious hope. The girl is her father's heir. Do you suppose I would not stick to my brief if I did not feel sure that it is so?"

"Then let the Earl be told, and let the girl have her rights."

"Ah! there you have me. It may be that such would be the juster course; but then, Hardy, cannot you understand that though I am sure, I am not quite sure; that though the case is a bad one, it may not be quite bad enough to be thrown up? It is just the case in which a compromise is expedient. If but a quarter, or but an eighth of a probability be with you, take your proportion of the thing at stake. But here is a compromise that gives all to each. Who would wish to rob the girl of her noble name and great inheritance if she be the heiress? Not I, though the Earl be my client. And yet how sad would it be to have to tell that young man that there was nothing for him but to submit to lose all the wealth belonging to the family of which he has been born the head! If we can bring them together there will be nothing to make sore the hearts of any of us."

Mr. Hardy acknowledged to himself that the Solicitor-General pleaded his own case very well; but yet he felt that it wasn't law.

CHAPTER X.
THE FIRST INTERVIEW

For some days after the intimation of her mother's purpose, Lady Anna kept her bed. She begged that she might not see a doctor. She had a headache, – nothing but a headache. But it was quite impossible that she should ever marry Earl Lovel. This she said whenever her mother would revert to that subject, – "I have not seen him, mamma; I do not know him. I am sure it would be impossible." Then, when at last she was induced to dress herself, she was still unwilling to be forced to undergo the interview to which she had acknowledged that she must be subjected. At last she consented to spend a day in Bedford Square; to dine there, and to be brought home in the evening. The Countess was at this time not very full of trust in the Serjeant, having learned that he was opposed to the marriage scheme, but she was glad that her daughter should be induced to go out, even to the Serjeant's house, as after that visit the girl could have no ground on which to oppose the meeting which was to be arranged. She could hardly plead that she was too ill to see her cousin when she had dined with Mrs. Bluestone.

During this time many plans had been proposed for the meeting. The Solicitor-General, discussing the matter with the young lord, had thought it best that Lady Anna should at once be asked down to Yoxham, – as the Lady Anna; and the young lord would have been quite satisfied with such an arrangement. He could have gone about his obligatory wooing among his own friends, in the house to which he had been accustomed, with much more ease than in a London lodging. But his uncle, who had corresponded on the subject with Mr. Hardy, still objected. "We should be giving up everything," he said, "if we were once to call her Lady Anna. Where should we be then if they didn't hit it off together? I don't believe, and I never shall believe, that she is really Lady Anna Lovel." The Solicitor-General, when he heard of this objection, shook his head, finding himself almost provoked to anger. What asses were these people not to understand that he could see further into the matter than they could do, and that their best way out of their difficulty would be frankly to open their arms to the heiress! Should they continue to be pig-headed and prejudiced, everything would soon be gone.

Then he had a scheme for inviting the girl to his own house, and to that scheme he obtained his wife's consent. But here his courage failed him; or, it might be fairer to say, that his prudence prevailed. He was very anxious, intensely eager, so to arrange this great family dispute that all should be benefited, – believing, nay feeling positively certain that all concerned in the matter were honest; but he must not go so far as to do himself an absolute and grievous damage, should it at last turn out that he was wrong in any of his surmises. So that plan was abandoned.

There was nothing left for it but that the young Earl should himself face the difficulty, and be introduced to the girl at the lodging in Wyndham Street. But, as a prelude to this, a meeting was arranged at Mr. Flick's chambers between the Countess and her proposed son-in-law. That the Earl should go to his own attorney's chambers was all in rule. While he was there the Countess came, – which was not in rule, and almost induced the Serjeant to declare, when he heard it, that he would have nothing more to do with the case. "My lord," said the Countess, "I am glad to meet you, and I hope that we may be friends." The young man was less collected, and stammered out a few words that were intended to be civil.

"It is a pity that you should have conflicting interests," said the attorney.

"I hope it need not continue to be so," said the Countess. "My heart, Lord Lovel, is all in the welfare of our joint family. We will begrudge you nothing if you will not begrudge us the names which are our own, and without which we cannot live honourably before the world." Then some other few words were muttered, and the Earl promised to come to Wyndham Street at a certain hour. Not a word was then said about the marriage. Even the Countess, with all her resolution and all her courage, did not find herself able in set terms to ask the young man to marry her daughter.

"She is a very handsome woman," said the lord to the attorney, when the Countess had left them.

"Yes, indeed."

"And like a lady."

"Quite like a lady. She herself was of a good family."

"I suppose she certainly was the late Earl's wife, Mr. Flick?"

"Who can say, my lord? That is just the question. The Solicitor-General thinks that she would prove her right, and I do not know that I have ever found him to be wrong when he has had a steadfast opinion."

"Why should we not give it up to her at once?"

"I couldn't recommend that, my lord. Why should we give it up? The interests at stake are very great. I couldn't for a moment think of suggesting to you to give it up."

"I want nothing, Mr. Flick, that does not belong to me."

"Just so. But then perhaps it does belong to you. We can never be sure. No doubt the safest way will be for you to contract an alliance with this lady. Of course we should give it up then, but the settlements would make the property all right." The young Earl did not quite like it. He would rather have commenced his wooing after the girl had been established in her own right, and when she would have had no obligation on her to accept him. But he had consented, and it was too late for him now to recede. It had been already arranged that he should call in Wyndham Street at noon on the following day, in order that he might be introduced to his cousin.

On that evening the Countess sat late with her daughter, purposing that on the morrow nothing should be said before the interview calculated to disturb the girl's mind. But as they sat together through the twilight and into the darkness of night, close by the open window, through which the heavily laden air of the metropolis came to them, hot with all the heat of a London July day, very many words were spoken by the Countess. "It will be for you, to-morrow, to make or to mar all that I have been doing since the day on which you were born."

"Oh! mamma, that is so terrible a thing to say!"

"But terrible things must be said if they are true. It is so. It is for you to decide whether we shall triumph, or be utterly and for ever crushed."

"I cannot understand it. Why should we be crushed? He would not wish to marry me if this fortune were not mine. He is not coming, mamma, because he loves me."

"You say that because you do not understand. Do you suppose that my name will be allowed to me if you should refuse your cousin's suit? If so, you are very much mistaken. The fight will go on, and as we have not money, we shall certainly go to the wall at last. Why should you not love him? There is no one else that you care for."

"No, mamma," she said slowly.

"Then, what more can you want?"

"I do not know him, mamma."

"But you will know him. According to that, no girl would ever get married. Is it not a great thing that you should be asked to assume and to enjoy the rank which has belonged to your mother, but which she has never been able to enjoy?"

"I do not think, mamma, that I care much about rank."

"Anna!" The mother's mind as she heard this flew off to the young tailor. Had misery so great as this overtaken her after all?

"I mean that I don't care so much about it. It has never done us any good."

"But if it is a thing that is your own, that you are born to, you must bear it, whether it be in sorrow or in joy; whether it be a blessing or a curse. If it be yours, you cannot fling it away from you. You may disgrace it, but you must still have it. Though you were to throw yourself away upon a chimney-sweeper, you must still be Lady Anna, the daughter of Earl Lovel."

"I needn't call myself so."

"Others must call you so. It is your name, and you cannot be rid of it. It is yours of right, as my name has been mine of right; and not to assert it, not to live up to it, not to be proud of it, would argue incredible baseness. 'Noblesse oblige.' You have heard that motto, and know what it means. And then would you throw away from you in some childish phantasy all that I have been struggling to win for you during my whole life? Have you ever thought of what my life has been, Anna?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Would you have the heart to disappoint me, now that the victory is won; – now that it may be made our own by your help? And what is it that I am asking you to do? If this man were bad, – if he were such a one as your father, if he were drunken, cruel, ill-conditioned, or even heavy, foolish, or deformed; had you been told stories to set you against him, as that he had been false with other women, I could understand it. In that case we would at any rate find out the truth before we went on. But of this man we hear that he is good, and pleasant; an excellent young man, who has endeared himself to all who know him. Such a one that all the girls of his own standing in the world would give their eyes to win him."

"Let some girl win him then who cares for him."

"But he wishes to win you, dearest."

"Not because he loves me. How can he love me when he never saw me? How can I love him when I never saw him?"

"He wishes to win you because he has heard what you are, and because he knows that by doing so he can set things right which for many years have been wrong."

"It is because he would get all this money."

"You would both get it. He desires nothing unfair. Whatever he takes from you, so much he will give. And it is not only for this generation. Is it nothing to you that the chiefs of your own family who shall come after you shall be able to hold their heads up among other British peers? Would you not wish that your own son should come to be Earl Lovel, with wealth sufficient to support the dignity?"

"I don't think it would make him happy, mamma."

"There is something more in this, Anna, than I can understand. You used not to be so. When we talked of these things in past years you used not to be indifferent."

"I was not asked then to – to – marry a man I did not care for."

"There is something else, Anna."

"No, mamma."

"If there be nothing else you will learn to care for him. You will see him to-morrow, and will be left alone with him. I will sit with you for a time, and then I will leave you. All that I ask of you is to receive him to-morrow without any prejudice against him. You must remember how much depends on you, and that you are not as other girls are." After that Lady Anna was allowed to go to her bed, and to weep in solitude over the wretchedness of her condition. It was not only that she loved Daniel Thwaite with all her heart, – loved him with a love that had grown with every year of her growth; – but that she feared him also. The man had become her master; and even could she have brought herself to be false, she would have lacked the courage to declare her falsehood to the man to whom she had vowed her love.

On the following morning Lady Anna did not come down to breakfast, and the Countess began to fear that she would be unable to induce her girl to rise in time to receive their visitor. But the poor child had resolved to receive the man's visit, and contemplated no such escape as that. At eleven o'clock she slowly dressed herself, and before twelve crept down into the one sitting-room which they occupied. The Countess glanced round at her, anxious to see that she was looking her best. Certain instructions had been given as to her dress, and the garniture of her hair, and the disposal of her ribbons. All these had been fairly well obeyed; but there was a fixed, determined hardness in her face which made her mother fear that the Earl might be dismayed. The mother knew that her child had never looked like that before.

Punctually at twelve the Earl was announced. The Countess received him very pleasantly, and with great composure. She shook hands with him as though they had known each other all their lives, and then introduced him to her daughter with a sweet smile. "I hope you will acknowledge her as your far-away cousin, my lord. Blood, they say, is thicker than water; and, if so, you two ought to be friends."

"I am sure I hope we may be," said the Earl.

"I hope so too, – my lord," said the girl, as she left her hand quite motionless in his.

"We heard of you down in Cumberland," said the Countess. "It is long since I have seen the old place, but I shall never forget it. There is not a bush among the mountains there that I shall not remember, – ay, into the next world, if aught of our memories are left to us."

"I love the mountains; but the house is very gloomy."

"Gloomy indeed. If you found it sad, what must it have been to me? I hope that I may tell you some day of all that I suffered there. There are things to tell of which I have never yet spoken to human being. She, poor child, has been too young and too tender to be troubled by such a tale. I sometimes think that no tragedy ever written, no story of horrors ever told, can have exceeded in description the things which I endured in that one year of my married life." Then she went on at length, not telling the details of that terrible year, but speaking generally of the hardships of her life. "I have never wondered, Lord Lovel, that you and your nearest relations should have questioned my position. A bad man had surrounded me with such art in his wickedness, that it has been almost beyond my strength to rid myself of his toils." All this she had planned beforehand, having resolved that she would rush into the midst of things at once, and if possible enlist his sympathies on her side.

"I hope it may be over now," he said.

"Yes," she replied, rising slowly from her seat, "I hope it may be over now." The moment had come in which she had to play the most difficult stroke of her whole game, and much might depend on the way in which she played it. She could not leave them together, walking abruptly out of the room, without giving some excuse for so unusual a proceeding. "Indeed, I hope it may be over now, both for us and for you, Lord Lovel. That wicked man, in leaving behind such cause of quarrel, has injured you almost as deeply as us. I pray God that you and that dear girl there may so look into each other's hearts and trust each other's purposes, that you may be able to set right the ill which your predecessor did. If so, the family of Lovel for centuries to come may be able to bless your names." Then with slow steps she left the room.

Lady Anna had spoken one word, and that was all. It certainly was not for her now to speak. She sat leaning on the table, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, not daring to look at the man who had been brought to her as her future husband. A single glance she had taken as he entered the room, and she had seen at once that he was fair and handsome, that he still had that sweet winsome boyishness of face which makes a girl feel that she need not fear a man, – that the man has something of her own weakness, and need not be treated as one who is wise, grand, or heroic. And she saw too in one glance how different he was from Daniel Thwaite, the man to whom she had absolutely given herself; – and she understood at the moment something of the charm of luxurious softness and aristocratic luxury. Daniel Thwaite was swarthy, hard-handed, blackbearded, – with a noble fire in his eyes, but with an innate coarseness about his mouth which betokened roughness as well as strength. Had it been otherwise with her than it was, she might, she thought, have found it easy enough to love this young earl. As it was, there was nothing for her to do but to wait and answer him as best she might.

"Lady Anna," he said.

"My lord!"

"Will it not be well that we should be friends?"

"Oh, – friends; – yes, my lord."

"I will tell you all and everything; – that is, about myself. I was brought up to believe that you and your mother were just – impostors."

"My lord, we are not impostors."

"No; – I believe it. I am sure you are not. Mistakes have been made, but it has not been of my doing. As a boy, what could I believe but what I was told? I know now that you are and always have been as you have called yourself. If nothing else comes of it, I will at any rate say so much. The estate which your father left is no doubt yours. If I could hinder it, there should be no more law."

"Thank you, my lord."

"Your mother says that she has suffered much. I am sure she has suffered. I trust that all that is over now. I have come here to-day more to say that on my own behalf than anything else." A shadow of a shade of disappointment, the slightest semblance of a cloud, passed across her heart as she heard this. But it was well. She could not have married him, even if he had wished it, and now, as it seemed, that difficulty was over. Her mother and those lawyers had been mistaken, and it was well that he should tell her so at once.

"It is very good of you, my lord."

"I would not have you think of me that I could come to you hoping that you would promise me your love before I had shown you whether I had loved you or not."

"No, my lord." She hardly understood him now, – whether he intended to propose himself as a suitor for her hand or not.

"You, Lady Anna, are your father's heir. I am your cousin, Earl Lovel, as poor a peer as there is in England. They tell me that we should marry because you are rich and I am an earl."

"So they tell me; – but that will not make it right."

"I would not have it so, even if I dared to think that you would agree to it."

"Oh, no, my lord; nor would I."

"But if you could learn to love me – "

"No, my lord; – no."

"Do not answer me yet, my cousin. If I swore that I loved you, – loved you so soon after seeing you, – and loved you, too, knowing you to be so wealthy an heiress – "

"Ah, do not talk of that."

"Well; – not of that. But if I said that I loved you, you would not believe me."

"It would not be true, my lord."

"But I know that I shall love you. You will let me try? You are very lovely, and they tell me you are sweet-humoured. I can believe well that you are sweet and pleasant. You will let me try to love you, Anna?"

"No, my lord."

"Must it be so, so soon?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Why that? Is it because we are strangers to each other? That may be cured; – if not quickly, as I would have it cured, slowly and by degrees; slowly as you can wish, if only I may come where you shall be. You have said that we may be friends."

"Oh yes, – friends, I hope."

"Friends at least. We are born cousins."

"Yes, my lord."

"Cannot you call me by my name? Cousins, you know, do so. And remember this, you will have and can have no nearer cousin than I am. I am bound at least to be a brother to you."

"Oh, be my brother!"

"That, – or more than that. I would fain be more than that. But I will be that, at least. As I came to you, before I saw you, I felt that whenever we knew each other I could not be less to you than that. If I am your friend, I must be your best friend, – as being, though poor, the head of your family. The Lovels should at least love each other; and cousins may love, even though they should not love enough to be man and wife."

"I will love you so always."

"Enough to be my wife?"

"Enough to be your dear cousin, – your loving sister."

"So it shall be, – unless it can be more. I would not ask you for more now. I would not wish you to give more now. But think of me, and ask yourself whether you can dare to give yourself to me altogether."

"I cannot dare, my lord."

"You would not call your brother, lord. My name is Frederic. But Anna, dear Anna," – and then he took her unresisting hand, – "you shall not be asked for more now. But cousins, new-found cousins, who love each other, and will stand by each other for help and aid against the world, may surely kiss, – as would a brother and a sister. You will not grudge me a kiss." Then she put up her cheek innocently, and he kissed it gently, – hardly with a lover's kiss. "I will leave you now," he said, still holding her hand. "But tell your mother thus: – that she shall no longer be troubled by lawyers at the suit of her cousin Frederic. She is to me the Countess Lovel, and she shall be treated by me with the honour suited to her rank." And so he left the house without seeing the Countess again.

CHAPTER XI.
IT IS TOO LATE

The Countess had resolved that she would let their visitor depart without saying a word to him. Whatever might be the result of the interview, she was aware that she could not improve it by asking any question from the young lord, or by hearing any account of it from him. The ice had been broken, and it would now be her object to have her daughter invited down to Yoxham as soon as possible. If once the Earl's friends could be brought to be eager for the match on his account, as was she on her daughter's behalf, then probably the thing might be done. For herself, she expected no invitation, no immediate comfort, no tender treatment, no intimate familiar cousinship. She had endured hitherto, and would be contented to endure, so that triumph might come at last. Nor did she question her daughter very closely, anxious as she was to learn the truth.

Could she have heard every word that had been spoken she would have been sure of success. Could Daniel Thwaite have heard every word he would have been sure that the girl was about to be false to him. But the girl herself believed herself to have been true. The man had been so soft with her, so tender, so pleasant, – so loving with his sweet cousinly offers of affection, that she could not turn herself against him. He had been to her eyes beautiful, noble, – almost divine. She knew of herself that she could not be his wife, – that she was not fit to be his wife, – because she had given her troth to the tailor's son. When her cousin touched her check with his lips she remembered that she had submitted to be kissed by one with whom her noble relative could hold no fellowship whatever. A feeling of degradation came upon her, as though by contact with this young man she was suddenly awakened to a sense of what her own rank demanded from her. When her mother had spoken to her of what she owed to her family, she had thought only of all the friendship that she and her mother had received from her lover and his father. But when Lord Lovel told her what she was, – how she should ever be regarded by him as a dear cousin, – how her mother should be accounted a countess, and receive from him the respect due to her rank, – then she could understand how unfitting were a union between the Lady Anna Lovel and Daniel Thwaite, the journeyman tailor. Hitherto Daniel's face had been noble in her eyes, – the face of a man who was manly, generous, and strong. But after looking into the eyes of the young Earl, seeing how soft was the down upon his lips, how ruddy the colour of his cheek, how beautiful was his mouth with its pearl-white teeth, how noble the curve of his nostrils, after feeling the softness of his hand, and catching the sweetness of his breath, she came to know what it might have been to be wooed by such a one as he.

But not on that account did she meditate falseness. It was settled firm as fate. The dominion of the tailor over her spirit had lasted in truth for years. The sweet, perfumed graces of the young nobleman had touched her senses but for a moment. Had she been false-minded she had not courage to be false. But in truth she was not false-minded. It was to her, as that sunny moment passed across her, as to some hard-toiling youth who, while roaming listlessly among the houses of the wealthy, hears, as he lingers on the pavement of a summer night, the melodies which float upon the air from the open balconies above him. A vague sense of unknown sweetness comes upon him, mingled with an irritating feeling of envy that some favoured son of Fortune should be able to stand over the shoulders of that singing syren, while he can only listen with intrusive ears from the street below. And so he lingers and is envious, and for a moment curses his fate, – not knowing how weary may be the youth who stands, how false the girl who sings. But he does not dream that his life is to be altered for him, because he has chanced to hear the daughter of a duchess warble through a window. And so it was with this girl. The youth was very sweet to her, intensely sweet when he told her that he would be a brother, perilously sweet when he bade her not to grudge him one kiss. But she knew that she was not as he was. That she had lost the right, could she ever have had the right, to live his life, to drink of

his cup, and to lie on his breast. So she passed on, as the young man does in the street, and consoled herself with the consciousness that strength after all may be preferable to sweetness.

And she was an honest girl from her heart, and prone to truth, with a strong glimmer of common sense in her character, of which her mother hitherto had been altogether unaware. What right had her mother to think that she could be fit to be this young lord's wife, having brought her up in the companionship of small traders in Cumberland? She never blamed her mother. She knew well that her mother had done all that was possible on her behalf. But for that small trader they would not even have had a roof to shelter them. But still there was the fact, and she understood it. She was as her bringing up had made her, and it was too late now to effect a change. Ah yes; – it was indeed too late. It was all very well that lawyers should look upon her as an instrument, as a piece of goods that might now, from the accident of her ascertained birth, be made of great service to the Lovel family. Let her be the lord's wife, and everything would be right for everybody. It had been very easy to say that! But she had a heart of her own, – a heart to be touched, and won, and given away, – and lost. The man who had been so good to them had sought for his reward, and had got it, and could not now be defrauded. Had she been dishonest she would not have dared to defraud him; had she dared, she would not have been so dishonest.

"Did you like him?" asked the mother, not immediately after the interview, but when the evening came.

"Oh yes, – how should one not like him?"

"How indeed! He is the finest, noblest youth that ever my eyes rested on, and so like the Lovels."

"Was my father like that?"

"Yes indeed, in the shape of his face, and the tone of his voice, and the movement of his eyes; though the sweetness of the countenance was all gone in the Devil's training to which he had submitted himself. And you too are like him, though darker, and with something of the Murrays' greater breadth of face. But I can remember portraits at Lovel Grange, – every one of them, – and all of them were alike. There never was a Lovel but had that natural grace of appearance. You will gaze at those portraits, dear, oftener even than I have done; and you will be happy where I was, – oh – so miserable!"

"I shall never see them, mamma."

"Why not?"

"I do not want to see them."

"You say you like him?"

"Yes; I like him."

"And why should you not love him well enough to make him your husband?"

"I am not fit to be his wife."

"You are fit; – none could be fitter; none others so fit. You are as well born as he, and you have the wealth which he wants. You must have it, if, as you tell me, he says that he will cease to claim it as his own. There can be no question of fitness."

"Money will not make a girl fit, mamma."

"You have been brought up as a lady, – and are a lady. I swear I do not know what you mean. If he thinks you fit, and you can like him, – as you say you do, – what more can be wanted? Does he not wish it?"

"I do not know. He said he did not, and then, – I think he said he did."

"Is that it?"

"No, mamma. It is not that; not that only. It is too late!"

"Too late! How too late? Anna, you must tell me what you mean. I insist upon it that you tell me what you mean. Why is it too late?" But Lady Anna was not prepared to tell her meaning. She had certainly not intended to say anything to her mother of her solemn promise to Daniel Thwaite. It had been arranged between him and her that nothing was to be said of it till this law business should be all

over. He had sworn to her that to him it made no difference, whether she should be proclaimed to be the Lady Anna, the undoubted owner of thousands a year, or Anna Murray, the illegitimate daughter of the late Earl's mistress, a girl without a penny, and a nobody in the world's esteem. No doubt they must shape their life very differently in this event or in that. How he might demean himself should this fortune be adjudged to the Earl, as he thought would be the case when he first made the girl promise to be his wife, he knew well enough. He would do as his father had done before him, and, he did not doubt, – with better result. What might be his fate should the wealth of the Lovels become the wealth of his intended wife, he did not yet quite foreshadow to himself. How he should face and fight the world when he came to be accused of having plotted to get all this wealth for himself he did not know. He had dreams of distributing the greater part among the Lovels and the Countess, and taking himself and his wife with one-third of it to some new country in which they would not in derision call his wife the Lady Anna, and in which he would be as good a man as any earl. But let all that be as it might, the girl was to keep her secret till the thing should be settled. Now, in these latter days, it had come to be believed by him, as by nearly everybody else, that the thing was well-nigh settled. The Solicitor-General had thrown up the sponge. So said the bystanders. And now there was beginning to be a rumour that everything was to be set right by a family marriage. The Solicitor-General would not have thrown up the sponge, – so said they who knew him best, – without seeing a reason for doing so. Serjeant Bluestone was still indignant, and Mr. Hardy was silent and moody. But the world at large were beginning to observe that in this, as in all difficult cases, the Solicitor-General tempered the innocence of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent. In the meantime Lady Anna by no means intended to allow the secret to pass her lips. Whether she ever could tell her mother, she doubted; but she certainly would not do so an hour too soon. "Why is it too late?" demanded the Countess, repeating her question with stern severity of voice.

"I mean that I have not lived all my life as his wife should live."

"Trash! It is trash. What has there been in your life to disgrace you. We have been poor and we have lived as poor people do live. We have not been disgraced."

"No, mamma."

"I will not hear such nonsense. It is a reproach to me."

"Oh, mamma, do not say that. I know how good you have been, – how you have thought of me in every thing. Pray do not say that I reproach you!" And she came and knelt at her mother's lap.

"I will not, darling; but do not vex me by saying that you are unfit. There is nothing else, dearest?"

"No, mamma," she said in a low tone, pausing before she told the falsehood.

"I think it will be arranged that you shall go down to Yoxham. The people there even are beginning to know that we are right, and are willing to acknowledge us. The Earl, whom I cannot but love already for his gracious goodness, has himself declared that he will not carry on the suit. Mr. Goffe has told me that they are anxious to see you there. Of course you must go, – and will go as Lady Anna Lovel. Mr. Goffe says that some money can now be allowed from the estate, and you shall go as becomes the daughter of Earl Lovel when visiting among her cousins. You will see this young man there. If he means to love you and to be true to you, he will be much there. I do not doubt but that you will continue to like him. And remember this, Anna; – that even though your name be acknowledged, – even though all the wealth be adjudged to be your own, – even though some judge on the bench shall say that I am the widowed Countess Lovel, it may be all undone some day, – unless you become this young man's wife. That woman in Italy may be bolstered up at last, if you refuse him. But when you are once the wife of young Lord Lovel, no one then can harm us. There can be no going back after that." This the Countess said rather to promote the marriage, than from any fear of the consequences which she described. Daniel Thwaite was the enemy that now she dreaded, and not the Italian woman, or the Lovel family.

Lady Anna could only say that she would go to Yoxham, if she were invited there by Mrs. Lovel.

CHAPTER XII.
HAVE THEY SURRENDERED?

As all the world heard of what was going on, so did Daniel Thwaite hear it among others. He was a hard-working, conscientious, moody man, given much to silence among his fellow workmen; – one to whom life was serious enough; not a happy man, though he had before him a prospect of prosperity which would make most men happy. But he was essentially a tender-hearted, affectionate man, who could make a sacrifice of himself if he thought it needed for the happiness of one he loved. When he heard of this proposed marriage, he asked himself many questions as to his duty and as to the welfare of the girl. He did love her with all his heart, and he believed thoroughly in her affection for himself. He had, as yet, no sufficient reason to doubt that she would be true to him; – but he knew well that an earl's coronet must be tempting to a girl so circumstanced as was Lady Anna. There were moments in which he thought that it was almost his duty to give her up, and bid her go and live among those of her own rank. But then he did not believe in rank. He utterly disbelieved in it; and in his heart of hearts he felt that he would make a better and a fitter husband to this girl than would an earl, with all an earl's temptation to vice. He was ever thinking of some better world to which he might take her, which had not been contaminated by empty names and an impudent assumption of hereditary, and therefore false, dignity. As regarded the money, it would be hers whether she married him or the Earl. And if she loved him, as she had sworn that she did, why should he be false to her? Or why, as yet, should he think that she would prefer an empty, gilded lordling to the friend who had been her friend as far back as her memory could carry her? If she asked to be released, then indeed he would release her, – but not without explaining to her, with such eloquence as he might be able to use, – what it was she proposed to abandon, and what to take in place of that which she lost. He was a man, silent and under self-control, but self-confident also; and he did believe himself to be a better man than young Earl Lovel.

In making this resolution, – that he would give her back her troth if she asked for it, but not without expressing to her his thoughts as he did so, – he ignored the masterfulness of his own character. There are men who exercise dominion, from the nature of their disposition, and who do so from their youth upwards, without knowing, till advanced life comes upon them, that any power of dominion belongs to them. Men are persuasive, and imperious withal, who are unconscious that they use burning words to others, whose words to them are never even warm. So it was with this man when he spoke to himself in his solitude of his purpose of resigning the titled heiress. To the arguments, the entreaties, or the threats of others he would pay no heed. The Countess might bluster about her rank, and he would heed her not at all. He cared nothing for the whole tribe of Lovels. If Lady Anna asked for release, she should be released. But not till she had heard his words. How scalding these words might be, how powerful to prevent the girl from really choosing her own fate, he did not know himself.

Though he lived in the same house with her he seldom saw her, – unless when he would knock at the door of an evening, and say a few words to her mother rather than to her. Since Thomas Thwaite had left London for the last time the Countess had become almost cold to the young man. She would not have been so if she could have helped it; but she had begun to fear him, and she could not bring herself to be cordial to him either in word or manner. He perceived it at once, and became, himself, cold and constrained.

Once, and once only, he met Lady Anna alone, after his father's departure, and before her interview with Lord Lovel. Then he met her on the stairs of the house while her mother was absent at the lawyer's chambers.

"Are you here, Daniel, at this hour?" she asked, going back to the sitting-room, whither he followed her.

"I wanted to see you, and I knew that your mother would be out. It is not often that I do a thing in secret, even though it be to see the girl that I love."

"No, indeed. I do not see you often now."

"Does that matter much to you, Lady Anna?"

"Lady Anna!"

"I have been instructed, you know, that I am to call you so."

"Not by me, Daniel."

"No; – not by you; not as yet. Your mother's manners are much altered to me. Is it not so?"

"How can I tell? Mine are not."

"It is no question of manners, sweetheart, between you and me. It has not come to that, I hope. Do you wish for any change, – as regards me?"

"Oh, no."

"As to my love, there can be no change in that. If it suits your mother to be disdainful to me, I can bear it. I always thought that it would come to be so some day."

There was but little more said then. He asked her no further question; – none at least that it was difficult for her to answer, – and he soon took his leave. He was a passionate rather than a tender lover, and having once held her in his arms, and kissed her lips, and demanded from her a return of his caress, he was patient now to wait till he could claim them as his own. But, two days after the interview between Lord Lovel and his love, he a second time contrived to find her alone.

"I have come again," he said, "because I knew your mother is out. I would not trouble you with secret meetings but that just now I have much to say to you. And then, you may be gone from hence before I had even heard that you were going."

"I am always glad to see you, Daniel."

"Are you, my sweetheart? Is that true?"

"Indeed, indeed it is."

"I should be a traitor to doubt you, – and I do not doubt. I will never doubt you if you tell me that you love me."

"You know I love you."

"Tell me, Anna – ; or shall I say Lady Anna?"

"Lady Anna, – if you wish to scorn me."

"Then never will I call you so, till it shall come to pass that I do wish to scorn you. But tell me. Is it true that Earl Lovel was with you the other day?"

"He was here the day before yesterday."

"And why did he come."

"Why?"

"Why did he come? you know that as far as I have yet heard he is still your mother's enemy and yours, and is persecuting you to rob you of your name and of your property. Did he come as a friend?"

"Oh, yes! certainly as a friend."

"But he still makes his claim."

"No; – he says that he will make it no longer, that he acknowledges mamma as my father's widow, and me as my father's heir."

"That is generous, – if that is all."

"Very generous."

"And he does this without condition? There is nothing to be given to him to pay him for this surrender."

"There is nothing to give," she said, in that low, sweet, melancholy voice which was common to her always when she spoke of herself.

"You do not mean to deceive me, dear, I know; but there is a something to be given; and I am told that he has asked for it, or certainly will ask. And, indeed, I do not think that an earl, noble, but poverty-stricken, would surrender everything without making some counter claim which would lead him by another path to all that he has been seeking. Anna, you know what I mean."

"Yes; I know."

"Has he made no such claim."

"I cannot tell."

"You cannot tell whether or no he has asked you to be his wife?"

"No; I cannot tell. Do not look at me like that, Daniel. He came here, and mamma left us together, and he was kind to me. Oh! so kind. He said that he would be a cousin to me, and a brother."

"A brother!"

"That was what he said."

"And he meant nothing more than that, – simply to be your brother?"

"I think he did mean more. I think he meant that he would try to love me so that he might be my husband."

"And what said you to that?"

"I told him that it could not be so."

"And then?"

"Why then again he said that we were cousins; that I had no nearer cousin anywhere, and that he would be good to me and help me, and that the lawsuit should not go on. Oh, Daniel, he was so good!"

"Was that all?"

"He kissed me, saying that cousins might kiss?"

"No, Anna; – cousins such as you and he may not kiss. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you."

"If you mean to be true to me, there must be no more of that. Do you not know that all this means that he is to win you to be his wife? Did he not come to you with that object?"

"I think he did, Daniel."

"I think so too, my dear. Surrender! I'll tell you what that surrender means. They perceive at last that they have not a shadow of justice, or even a shadow of a chance of unjust success in their claim. That with all their command of money, which is to be spent, however, out of your property, they can do nothing; that their false witnesses will not come to aid them; that they have not another inch of ground on which to stand. Their great lawyer, Sir William Patterson, dares not show himself in court with a case so false and fraudulent. At last your mother's rights and yours are to be owned. Then they turn themselves about, and think in what other way the prize may be won. It is not likely that such a prize should be surrendered by a noble lord. The young man is made to understand that he cannot have it all without a burden, and that he must combine his wealth with you. That is it, and at once he comes to you, asking you to be his wife, so that in that way he may lay his hands on the wealth of which he has striven to rob you."

"Daniel, I do not think that he is like that!"

"I tell you he is not only like it, – but that itself. Is it not clear as noon-day? He comes here to talk of love who had never seen you before. Is it thus that men love?"

"But, Daniel, he did not talk so."

"I wonder that he was so crafty, believing him as I do to be a fool. He talked of cousinship and brotherhood, and yet gave you to know that he meant you to be his wife. Was it not so?"

"I think it was so, in very truth."

"Of course it was so. Do brothers marry their sisters? Were it not for the money, which must be yours, and which he is kind enough to surrender, would he come to you then with his brotherhood, and his cousinship, and his mock love? Tell me that, my lady! Can it be real love, – to which there has been no forerunning acquaintance?"

"I think not, indeed."

"And must it not be lust of wealth? That may come by hearsay well enough. It is a love which requires no great foreknowledge to burn with real strength. He is a gay looking lad, no doubt."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.