4 “You Are Just the Person to Write, Why Don’t You?”

When Ada and John Galsworthy married, at the fashionable St George’s, Hanover Square, on 23 September 1905, she signed her name as Ada Nemesis Pearson Cooper Galsworthy, the daughter of Emanuel Cooper. John’s two sisters were the witnesses signing the marriage certificate. Marrot’s biography also claims that she was “the daughter of Emanuel Cooper, MD, of Norwich”, although it says not another word about her or her background before her first marriage to Arthur Galsworthy on 30 April 1891. Later documents, like a 1936 passport and a French identity card from the First World War, consistently give her date of birth as 21 November 1866, the date that is also used in the elaborate family tree that Galsworthy began and Rudolf Sauter completed. Yet, as Catherine Dupré has demonstrated, in her 1976 biography, Ada was probably not Dr Cooper’s daughter and was probably born, illegitimately, on 21 November 1864. A prominent obstetrician in Norwich during the 1860s and 1870s, Dr Cooper was fond of making elaborate wills. He first mentions Ada in a will dated 24 August 1866, describing her as less than two years’ old and living with her brother, Arthur Charles, two years older than she, and her mother at 36 Victoria Street in Norwich, a house Dr Cooper owned but did not live in. Little is known about the life of Anna Julia Pearson (1838–1913), Ada’s mother. She never married Dr Cooper and there is no evidence that he fathered her children or knew her at all before 1865 or 1866. The children were probably not born in Norwich, and later legal documents refer to them as “strangers in blood” to Dr Cooper. Why Anna Julia Pearson came to Norwich and who fathered her children are unknown, as is whether “Pearson” was a maiden or married.
name. She probably became Dr Cooper’s mistress in 1865 or 1866, and he, at least twenty years older than she, supported her and her babies fairly comfortably and left her economically secure for life. That Anna gave her daughter the middle name of “Nemesis” may indicate that she had not felt nearly so secure at the time of Ada’s birth.

Dr Cooper was regarded in Norwich as generous and eccentric. Ralph Hale Mottram (1883–1971), the son and grandson of the principal bankers at Gurney’s Bank, Norwich, described him as “only redeemed from being an oddity by a very high professional reputation”:

Of Yorkshire extraction and mildly Quaker persuasion he had, by the time of Ada’s birth, the reputation of being the foremost accoucheur in the Norwich district, in which so many remarkable names have been made in the medical world, from the times of Dr Caius and Sir Thomas Browne to the present day. . . . I can say only that the best known fact of his private life was that he employed his leisure in planning and seeing built a handsome, and I think stylistically correct, Mausoleum, midget in dimension, but in the classic taste, which is still the most conspicuous object in the Rosary Cemetery at Norwich today. Here, on Sunday afternoons, he used to sit, smoking a clay pipe and (possibly) reflecting on our future state. . . . Called to the bedsides of the titled, landed and what we nowadays feel to have been incredibly privileged classes, to preside over the entry into the world of future lords and ladies, members of Parliament and county hostesses, I fancy he began to think that he was no ordinary mortal. The proof is to be found in the long list of noble names set down to be executors of his will, not one of whom ever acted in that capacity.7

The one executor who did serve and who managed the family’s financial affairs was Ralph’s father, James Mottram. When Emanuel Cooper died, in January 1878, his elaborate fifteen-page will, dated 22 April 1870, left £3,000 for “my adopted daughter Ada Nemesis Pearson Cooper”, and the same sum for “my adopted son”.8 He added the stipulation that no one was to be buried in his mausoleum except his adopted son, adopted daughter, “their mother Anna Julia Pearson”, and his servant, Maria Bayes (the latter two were also left considerable, although