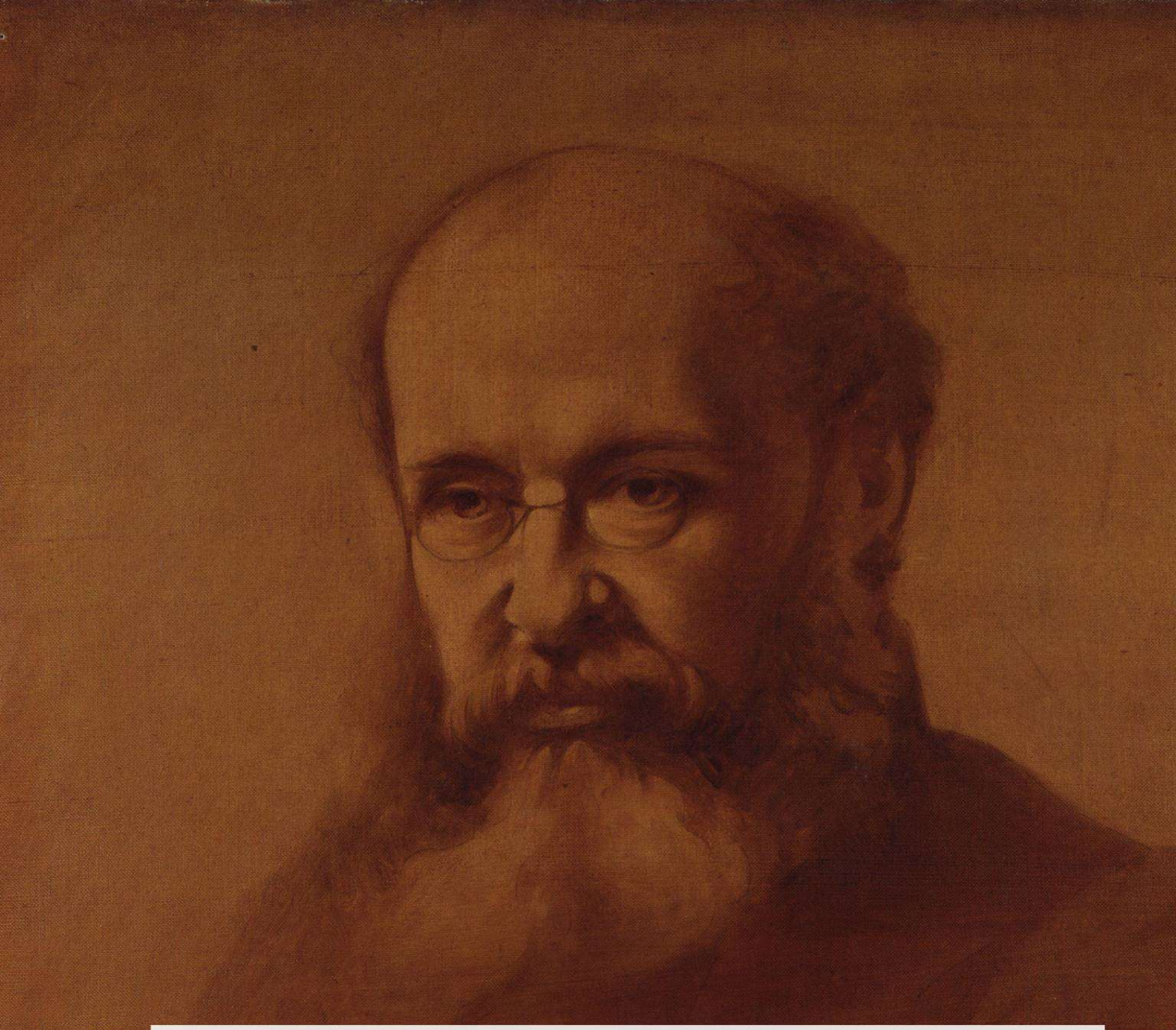

Anthony Trollope

Framley Parsonage

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CHAPTER I.

"OMNES OMNIA BONA DICERE."

When young Mark Robarts was leaving college, his father might well declare that all men began to say all good things to him, and to extol his fortune in that he had a son blessed with so excellent a disposition.

This father was a physician living at Exeter. He was a gentleman possessed of no private means, but enjoying a lucrative practice, which had enabled him to maintain and educate a family with all the advantages which money can give in this country. Mark was his eldest son and second child; and the first page or two of this narrative must be consumed in giving a catalogue of the good things which chance and conduct together had heaped upon this young man's head.

His first step forward in life had arisen from his having been sent, while still very young, as a private pupil to the house of a clergyman, who was an old friend and intimate friend of his father's. This clergyman had one other, and only one other, pupil—the young Lord Lufton; and between the two boys, there had sprung up a close alliance.

While they were both so placed, Lady Lufton had visited her son, and then invited young Robarts to pass his next holidays at Framley Court. This visit was made; and it ended in Mark going back to Exeter with a letter full of praise from the widowed peeress. She had been delighted, she said, in having such a companion for her son, and expressed a hope that the boys

might remain together during the course of their education. Dr. Robarts was a man who thought much of the breath of peers and peeresses, and was by no means inclined to throw away any advantage which might arise to his child from such a friendship. When, therefore, the young lord was sent to Harrow, Mark Robarts went there also.

That the lord and his friend often quarrelled, and occasionally fought,—the fact even that for one period of three months they never spoke to each other—by no means interfered with the doctor's hopes. Mark again and again stayed a fortnight at Framley Court, and Lady Lufton always wrote about him in the highest terms.

And then the lads went together to Oxford, and here Mark's good fortune followed him, consisting rather in the highly respectable manner in which he lived, than in any wonderful career of collegiate success. His family was proud of him, and the doctor was always ready to talk of him to his patients; not because he was a prizeman, and had gotten medals and scholarships, but on account of the excellence of his general conduct. He lived with the best set—he incurred no debts—he was fond of society, but able to avoid low society—liked his glass of wine, but was never known to be drunk; and, above all things, was one of the most popular men in the university.

Then came the question of a profession for this young Hyperion, and on this subject, Dr. Robarts was invited himself to go over to Framley Court to discuss the matter with Lady Lufton. Dr. Robarts returned with a very strong conception that the Church was the profession best suited to his son.

Lady Lufton had not sent for Dr. Robarts all the way from Exeter for nothing. The living of Framley was in the gift of the Lufton family, and the next presentation would be in Lady Lufton's hands, if it should fall vacant

before the young lord was twenty-five years of age, and in the young lord's hands if it should fall afterwards. But the mother and the heir consented to give a joint promise to Dr. Robarts. Now, as the present incumbent was over seventy, and as the living was worth £900 a year, there could be no doubt as to the eligibility of the clerical profession.

And I must further say, that the dowager and the doctor were justified in their choice by the life and principles of the young man—as far as any father can be justified in choosing such a profession for his son, and as far as any lay impropriator can be justified in making such a promise. Had Lady Lufton had a second son, that second son would probably have had the living, and no one would have thought it wrong;—certainly not if that second son had been such a one as Mark Robarts.

Lady Lufton herself was a woman who thought much on religious matters, and would by no means have been disposed to place any one in a living, merely because such a one had been her son's friend. Her tendencies were High Church, and she was enabled to perceive that those of young Mark Robarts ran in the same direction. She was very desirous that her son should make an associate of his clergyman, and by this step she would insure, at any rate, that. She was anxious that the parish vicar should be one with whom she could herself fully co-operate, and was perhaps unconsciously wishful that he might in some measure be subject to her influence. Should she appoint an elder man, this might probably not be the case to the same extent; and should her son have the gift, it might probably not be the case at all. And therefore it was resolved that the living should be given to young Robarts.

He took his degree—not with any brilliancy, but quite in the manner that his father desired; he then travelled for eight or ten months with Lord

Lufton and a college don, and almost immediately after his return home was ordained.

The living of Framley is in the diocese of Barchester; and, seeing what were Mark's hopes with reference to that diocese, it was by no means difficult to get him a curacy within it. But this curacy he was not allowed long to fill. He had not been in it above a twelvemonth, when poor old Dr. Stopford, the then vicar of Framley, was gathered to his fathers, and the full fruition of his rich hopes fell upon his shoulders.

But even yet more must be told of his good fortune before we can come to the actual incidents of our story. Lady Lufton, who, as I have said, thought much of clerical matters, did not carry her High Church principles so far as to advocate celibacy for the clergy. On the contrary, she had an idea that a man could not be a good parish parson without a wife. So, having given to her favourite a position in the world, and an income sufficient for a gentleman's wants, she set herself to work to find him a partner in those blessings.

And here also, as in other matters, he fell in with the views of his patroness —not, however, that they were declared to him in that marked manner in which the affair of the living had been broached. Lady Lufton was much too highly gifted with woman's craft for that. She never told the young vicar that Miss Monsell accompanied her ladyship's married daughter to Framley Court expressly that he, Mark, might fall in love with her; but such was in truth the case.

Lady Lufton had but two children. The eldest, a daughter, had been married some four or five years to Sir George Meredith, and this Miss Monsell was a dear friend of hers. And now looms before me the novelist's great difficulty. Miss Monsell,—or, rather, Mrs. Mark Robarts,—must be described. As Miss Monsell, our tale will have to take no prolonged note of

her. And yet we will call her Fanny Monsell, when we declare that she was one of the pleasantest companions that could be brought near to a man, as the future partner of his home, and owner of his heart. And if high principles without asperity, female gentleness without weakness, a love of laughter without malice, and a true loving heart, can qualify a woman to be a parson's wife, then was Fanny Monsell qualified to fill that station.

In person she was somewhat larger than common. Her face would have been beautiful but that her mouth was large. Her hair, which was copious, was of a bright brown; her eyes also were brown, and, being so, were the distinctive feature of her face, for brown eyes are not common. They were liquid, large, and full either of tenderness or of mirth. Mark Robarts still had his accustomed luck, when such a girl as this was brought to Framley for his wooing.

And he did woo her—and won her. For Mark himself was a handsome fellow. At this time the vicar was about twenty-five years of age, and the future Mrs. Robarts was two or three years younger. Nor did she come quite empty-handed to the vicarage. It cannot be said that Fanny Monsell was an heiress, but she had been left with a provision of some few thousand pounds. This was so settled, that the interest of his wife's money paid the heavy insurance on his life which young Robarts effected, and there was left to him, over and above, sufficient to furnish his parsonage in the very best style of clerical comfort,—and to start him on the road of life rejoicing.

So much did Lady Lufton do for her *protégé,* and it may well be imagined that the Devonshire physician, sitting meditative over his parlour fire, looking back, as men will look back on the upshot of their life, was well contented with that upshot, as regarded his eldest offshoot, the Rev. Mark Robarts, the vicar of Framley.

But little has as yet been said, personally, as to our hero himself, and perhaps it may not be necessary to say much. Let us hope that by degrees he may come forth upon the canvas, showing to the beholder the nature of the man inwardly and outwardly. Here it may suffice to say that he was no born heaven's cherub, neither was he a born fallen devil's spirit. Such as his training made him, such he was. He had large capabilities for good—and aptitudes also for evil, quite enough: quite enough to make it needful that he should repel temptation as temptation only can be repelled. Much had been done to spoil him, but in the ordinary acceptation of the word he was not spoiled. He had too much tact, too much common sense, to believe himself to be the paragon which his mother thought him. Self-conceit was not, perhaps, his greatest danger. Had he possessed more of it, he might have been a less agreeable man, but his course before him might on that account have been the safer.

In person he was manly, tall, and fair-haired, with a square forehead, denoting intelligence rather than thought, with clear white hands, filbert nails, and a power of dressing himself in such a manner that no one should ever observe of him that his clothes were either good or bad, shabby or smart.

Such was Mark Robarts when at the age of twenty-five, or a little more, he married Fanny Monsell. The marriage was celebrated in his own church, for Miss Monsell had no home of her own, and had been staying for the last three months at Framley Court. She was given away by Sir George Meredith, and Lady Lufton herself saw that the wedding was what it should be, with almost as much care as she had bestowed on that of her own daughter. The deed of marrying, the absolute tying of the knot, was performed by the Very Reverend the Dean of Barchester, an esteemed friend of Lady Lufton's. And Mrs. Arabin, the dean's wife, was of the party, though the distance from Barchester to Framley is long, and the roads

deep, and no railway lends its assistance. And Lord Lufton was there of course; and people protested that he would surely fall in love with one of the four beautiful bridesmaids, of whom Blanche Robarts, the vicar's second sister, was by common acknowledgment by far the most beautiful.

And there was there another and a younger sister of Mark's—who did not officiate at the ceremony, though she was present—and of whom no prediction was made, seeing that she was then only sixteen, but of whom mention is made here, as it will come to pass that my readers will know her hereafter. Her name was Lucy Robarts.

And then the vicar and his wife went off on their wedding tour, the old curate taking care of the Framley souls the while.

And in due time they returned; and after a further interval, in due course, a child was born to them; and then another; and after that came the period at which we will begin our story. But before doing so, may I not assert that all men were right in saying all manner of good things to the Devonshire physician, and in praising his luck in having such a son?

"You were up at the house to-day, I suppose?" said Mark to his wife, as he sat stretching himself in an easy chair in the drawing-room, before the fire, previously to his dressing for dinner. It was a November evening, and he had been out all day, and on such occasions the aptitude for delay in dressing is very powerful. A strong-minded man goes direct from the hall-door to his chamber without encountering the temptation of the drawing-room fire.

"No; but Lady Lufton was down here."

"Full of arguments in favour of Sarah Thompson?"

"Exactly so, Mark."

"And what did you say about Sarah Thompson?"

"Very little as coming from myself; but I did hint that you thought, or that I thought that you thought, that one of the regular trained schoolmistresses would be better."

"But her ladyship did not agree?"

"Well, I won't exactly say that;—though I think that perhaps she did not."

"I am sure she did not. When she has a point to carry, she is very fond of carrying it."

"But then, Mark, her points are generally so good."

"But, you see, in this affair of the school she is thinking more of her *protégée* than she does of the children."

"Tell her that, and I am sure she will give way."

And then again they were both silent. And the vicar having thoroughly warmed himself, as far as this might be done by facing the fire, turned round and began the operation *à tergo*.

"Come, Mark, it is twenty minutes past six. Will you go and dress?"

"I'll tell you what, Fanny: she must have her way about Sarah Thompson. You can see her to-morrow and tell her so."

"I am sure, Mark, I would not give way, if I thought it wrong. Nor would she expect it."

"If I persist this time, I shall certainly have to yield the next; and then the next may probably be more important."

"But if it's wrong, Mark?"

"I didn't say it was wrong. Besides, if it is wrong, wrong in some infinitesimal degree, one must put up with it. Sarah Thompson is very respectable; the only question is whether she can teach."

The young wife, though she did not say so, had some idea that her husband was in error. It is true that one must put up with wrong, with a great deal of wrong. But no one need put up with wrong that he can remedy. Why should he, the vicar, consent to receive an incompetent teacher for the parish children, when he was able to procure one that was competent? In such a case,—so thought Mrs. Robarts to herself,—she would have fought the matter out with Lady Lufton.

On the next morning, however, she did as she was bid, and signified to the dowager that all objection to Sarah Thompson would be withdrawn.

"Ah! I was sure he would agree with me," said her ladyship, "when he learned what sort of person she is. I know I had only to explain;"—and then she plumed her feathers, and was very gracious; for, to tell the truth, Lady Lufton did not like to be opposed in things which concerned the parish nearly.

"And, Fanny," said Lady Lufton, in her kindest manner, "you are not going anywhere on Saturday, are you?"

"No, I think not."

"Then you must come to us. Justinia is to be here, you know"—Lady Meredith was named Justinia—"and you and Mr. Robarts had better stay

with us till Monday. He can have the little book-room all to himself on Sunday. The Merediths go on Monday; and Justinia won't be happy if you are not with her."

It would be unjust to say that Lady Lufton had determined not to invite the Robartses if she were not allowed to have her own way about Sarah Thompson. But such would have been the result. As it was, however, she was all kindness; and when Mrs. Robarts made some little excuse, saying that she was afraid she must return home in the evening, because of the children, Lady Lufton declared that there was room enough at Framley Court for baby and nurse, and so settled the matter in her own way, with a couple of nods and three taps of her umbrella.

This was on a Tuesday morning, and on the same evening, before dinner, the vicar again seated himself in the same chair before the drawing-room fire, as soon as he had seen his horse led into the stable.

"Mark," said his wife, "the Merediths are to be at Framley on Saturday and Sunday; and I have promised that we will go up and stay over till Monday."

"You don't mean it! Goodness gracious, how provoking!"

"Why? I thought you wouldn't mind it. And Justinia would think it unkind if I were not there."

"You can go, my dear, and of course will go. But as for me, it is impossible."

"But why, love?"

"Why? Just now, at the school-house, I answered a letter that was brought to me from Chaldicotes. Sowerby insists on my going over there for a week or so; and I have said that I would."

"Go to Chaldicotes for a week, Mark?"

"I believe I have even consented to ten days."

"And be away two Sundays?"

"No, Fanny, only one. Don't be so censorious."

"Don't call me censorious, Mark; you know I am not so. But I am so sorry. It is just what Lady Lufton won't like. Besides, you were away in Scotland two Sundays last month."

"In September, Fanny. And that is being censorious."

"Oh, but, Mark, dear Mark; don't say so. You know I don't mean it. But Lady Lufton does not like those Chaldicotes people. You know Lord Lufton was with you the last time you were there; and how annoyed she was!"

"Lord Lufton won't be with me now, for he is still in Scotland. And the reason why I am going is this: Harold Smith and his wife will be there, and I am very anxious to know more of them. I have no doubt that Harold Smith will be in the government some day, and I cannot afford to neglect such a man's acquaintance."

"But, Mark, what do you want of any government?"

"Well, Fanny, of course I am bound to say that I want nothing; neither in one sense do I; but nevertheless, I shall go and meet the Harold Smiths."

"Could you not be back before Sunday?"

"I have promised to preach at Chaldicotes. Harold Smith is going to lecture at Barchester, about the Australasian archipelago, and I am to preach a

charity sermon on the same subject. They want to send out more missionaries."

"A charity sermon at Chaldicotes!"

"And why not? The house will be quite full, you know; and I dare say the Arabins will be there."

"I think not; Mrs. Arabin may get on with Mrs. Harold Smith, though I doubt that; but I'm sure she's not fond of Mrs. Smith's brother. I don't think she would stay at Chaldicotes."

"And the bishop will probably be there for a day or two."

"That is much more likely, Mark. If the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Proudie is taking you to Chaldicotes, I have not a word more to say."

"I am not a bit more fond of Mrs. Proudie than you are, Fanny," said the vicar, with something like vexation in the tone of his voice, for he thought that his wife was hard upon him. "But it is generally thought that a parish clergyman does well to meet his bishop now and then. And as I was invited there, especially to preach while all these people are staying at the place, I could not well refuse." And then he got up, and taking his candlestick, escaped to his dressing-room.

"But what am I to say to Lady Lufton?" his wife said to him, in the course of the evening.

"Just write her a note, and tell her that you find I had promised to preach at Chaldicotes next Sunday. You'll go, of course?"

"Yes: but I know she'll be annoyed. You were away the last time she had people there."

"It can't be helped. She must put it down against Sarah Thompson. She ought not to expect to win always."

"I should not have minded it, if she had lost, as you call it, about Sarah Thompson. That was a case in which you ought to have had your own way."

"And this other is a case in which I shall have it. It's a pity that there should be such a difference; isn't it?"

Then the wife perceived that, vexed as she was, it would be better that she should say nothing further; and before she went to bed, she wrote the note to Lady Lufton, as her husband recommended.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRAMLEY SET, AND THE CHALDICOTES SET.

It will be necessary that I should say a word or two of some of the people named in the few preceding pages, and also of the localities in which they lived.

Of Lady Lufton herself enough, perhaps, has been written to introduce her to my readers. The Framley property belonged to her son; but as Lufton Park—an ancient ramshackle place in another county—had heretofore been the family residence of the Lufton family, Framley Court had been apportioned to her for her residence for life. Lord Lufton himself was still unmarried; and as he had no establishment at Lufton Park—which indeed had not been inhabited since his grandfather died—he lived with his mother when it suited him to live anywhere in that neighbourhood. The widow would fain have seen more of him than he allowed her to do. He had a shooting-lodge in Scotland, and apartments in London, and a string of horses in Leicestershire—much to the disgust of the county gentry around him, who held that their own hunting was as good as any that England could afford. His lordship, however, paid his subscription to the East Barsetshire pack, and then thought himself at liberty to follow his own pleasure as to his own amusement.

Framley itself was a pleasant country place, having about it nothing of seignorial dignity or grandeur, but possessing everything necessary for the comfort of country life. The house was a low building of two stories, built

at different periods, and devoid of all pretensions to any style of architecture; but the rooms, though not lofty, were warm and comfortable, and the gardens were trim and neat beyond all others in the county. Indeed, it was for its gardens only that Framley Court was celebrated.

Village there was none, properly speaking. The high road went winding about through the Framley paddocks, shrubberies, and wood-skirted home fields, for a mile and a half, not two hundred yards of which ran in a straight line; and there was a cross-road which passed down through the domain, whereby there came to be a locality called Framley Cross. Here stood the "Lufton Arms," and here, at Framley Cross, the hounds occasionally would meet; for the Framley woods were drawn in spite of the young lord's truant disposition; and then, at the Cross also, lived the shoemaker, who kept the post-office.

Framley church was distant from this just a quarter of a mile, and stood immediately opposite to the chief entrance to Framley Court. It was but a mean, ugly building, having been erected about a hundred years since, when all churches then built were made to be mean and ugly; nor was it large enough for the congregation, some of whom were thus driven to the dissenting chapels, the Sions and Ebenezers, which had got themselves established on each side of the parish, in putting down which Lady Lufton thought that her pet parson was hardly as energetic as he might be. It was, therefore, a matter near to Lady Lufton's heart to see a new church built, and she was urgent in her eloquence, both with her son and with the vicar, to have this good work commenced.

Beyond the church, but close to it, were the boys' school and girls' school, two distinct buildings, which owed their erection to Lady Lufton's energy; then came a neat little grocer's shop, the neat grocer being the clerk and sexton, and the neat grocer's wife, the pew-opener in the church. Podgens

was their name, and they were great favourites with her ladyship, both having been servants up at the house.

And here the road took a sudden turn to the left, turning, as it were, away from Framley Court; and just beyond the turn was the vicarage, so that there was a little garden path running from the back of the vicarage grounds into the churchyard, cutting the Podgenses off into an isolated corner of their own;—from whence, to tell the truth, the vicar would have been glad to banish them and their cabbages, could he have had the power to do so. For has not the small vineyard of Naboth been always an eyesore to neighbouring potentates?

The potentate in this case had as little excuse as Ahab, for nothing in the parsonage way could be more perfect than his parsonage. It had all the details requisite for the house of a moderate gentleman with moderate means, and none of those expensive superfluities which immoderate gentlemen demand, or which themselves demand—immoderate means. And then the gardens and paddocks were exactly suited to it; and everything was in good order;—not exactly new, so as to be raw and uncovered, and redolent of workmen; but just at that era of their existence in which newness gives way to comfortable homeliness.

Other village at Framley there was none. At the back of the Court, up one of those cross-roads, there was another small shop or two, and there was a very neat cottage residence, in which lived the widow of a former curate, another *protégé* of Lady Lufton's; and there was a big, staring brick house, in which the present curate lived; but this was a full mile distant from the church, and farther from Framley Court, standing on that cross-road which runs from Framley Cross in a direction away from the mansion. This gentleman, the Rev. Evan Jones, might, from his age, have been the vicar's father; but he had been for many years curate of Framley; and

though he was personally disliked by Lady Lufton, as being Low Church in his principles, and unsightly in his appearance, nevertheless, she would not urge his removal. He had two or three pupils in that large brick house, and if turned out from these and from his curacy, might find it difficult to establish himself elsewhere. On this account mercy was extended to the Rev. E. Jones, and, in spite of his red face and awkward big feet, he was invited to dine at Framley Court, with his plain daughter, once in every three months.

Over and above these, there was hardly a house in the parish of Framley, outside the bounds of Framley Court, except those of farmers and farm labourers; and yet the parish was of large extent.

Framley is in the eastern division of the county of Barsetshire, which, as all the world knows, is, politically speaking, as true blue a county as any in England. There have been backslidings even here, it is true; but then, in what county have there not been such backslidings? Where, in these pinchbeck days, can we hope to find the old agricultural virtue in all its purity? But, among those backsliders, I regret to say, that men now reckon Lord Lufton. Not that he is a violent Whig, or perhaps that he is a Whig at all. But he jeers and sneers at the old county doings; declares, when solicited on the subject, that, as far as he is concerned, Mr. Bright may sit for the county, if he pleases; and alleges, that being unfortunately a peer, he has no right even to interest himself in the question. All this is deeply regretted, for, in the old days, there was no portion of the county more decidedly true blue than that Framley district; and, indeed, up to the present day, the dowager is able to give an occasional helping hand.

Chaldicotes is the seat of Nathaniel Sowerby, Esq., who, at the moment supposed to be now present, is one of the members for the Western Division of Barsetshire. But this Western Division can boast none of the

fine political attributes which grace its twin brother. It is decidedly Whig, and is almost governed in its politics by one or two great Whig families.

It has been said that Mark Robarts was about to pay a visit to Chaldicotes, and it has been hinted that his wife would have been as well pleased had this not been the case. Such was certainly the fact; for she, dear, prudent, excellent wife as she was, knew that Mr. Sowerby was not the most eligible friend in the world for a young clergyman, and knew, also, that there was but one other house in the whole county the name of which was so distasteful to Lady Lufton. The reasons for this were, I may say, manifold. In the first place, Mr. Sowerby was a Whig, and was seated in Parliament mainly by the interest of that great Whig autocrat the Duke of Omnium, whose residence was more dangerous even than that of Mr. Sowerby, and whom Lady Lufton regarded as an impersonation of Lucifer upon earth. Mr. Sowerby, too, was unmarried—as indeed, also, was Lord Lufton, much to his mother's grief. Mr. Sowerby, it is true, was fifty, whereas the young lord was as yet only twenty-six, but, nevertheless, her ladyship was becoming anxious on the subject. In her mind, every man was bound to marry as soon as he could maintain a wife; and she held an idea—a quite private tenet, of which she was herself but imperfectly conscious—that men in general were inclined to neglect this duty for their own selfish gratifications, that the wicked ones encouraged the more innocent in this neglect, and that many would not marry at all, were not an unseen coercion exercised against them by the other sex. The Duke of Omnium was the very head of all such sinners, and Lady Lufton greatly feared that her son might be made subject to the baneful Omnium influence, by means of Mr. Sowerby and Chaldicotes.

And then Mr. Sowerby was known to be a very poor man, with a very large estate. He had wasted, men said, much on electioneering, and more in gambling. A considerable portion of his property had already gone into the

hands of the duke, who, as a rule, bought up everything around him that was to be purchased. Indeed it was said of him by his enemies, that so covetous was he of Barsetshire property, that he would lead a young neighbour on to his ruin, in order that he might get his land. What—oh! what if he should come to be possessed in this way of any of the fair acres of Framley Court? What if he should become possessed of them all? It can hardly be wondered at that Lady Lufton should not like Chaldicotes.

The Chaldicotes set, as Lady Lufton called them, were in every way opposed to what a set should be according to her ideas. She liked cheerful, quiet, well-to-do people, who loved their Church, their country, and their Queen, and who were not too anxious to make a noise in the world. She desired that all the farmers round her should be able to pay their rents without trouble, that all the old women should have warm flannel petticoats, that the working men should be saved from rheumatism by healthy food and dry houses, that they should all be obedient to their pastors and masters—temporal as well as spiritual. That was her idea of loving her country. She desired also that the copses should be full of pheasants, the stubble-field of partridges, and the gorse covers of foxes;—in that way, also, she loved her country. She had ardently longed, during that Crimean war, that the Russians might be beaten—but not by the French, to the exclusion of the English, as had seemed to her to be too much the case; and hardly by the English under the dictatorship of Lord Palmerston. Indeed, she had had but little faith in that war after Lord Aberdeen had been expelled. If, indeed, Lord Derby could have come in!

But now as to this Chaldicotes set. After all, there was nothing so very dangerous about them; for it was in London, not in the country, that Mr. Sowerby indulged, if he did indulge, his bachelor mal-practices. Speaking of them as a set, the chief offender was Mr. Harold Smith, or perhaps his wife. He also was a member of Parliament, and, as many thought, a rising

man. His father had been for many years a debater in the House, and had held high office. Harold, in early life, had intended himself for the cabinet; and if working hard at his trade could ensure success, he ought to obtain it sooner or later. He had already filled more than one subordinate station, had been at the Treasury, and for a month or two at the Admiralty, astonishing official mankind by his diligence. Those last-named few months had been under Lord Aberdeen, with whom he had been forced to retire. He was a younger son, and not possessed of any large fortune. Politics as a profession was therefore of importance to him. He had in early life married a sister of Mr. Sowerby; and as the lady was some six or seven years older than himself, and had brought with her but a scanty dowry, people thought that in this matter Mr. Harold Smith had not been perspicacious. Mr. Harold Smith was not personally a popular man with any party, though some judged him to be eminently useful. He was laborious, well-informed, and, on the whole, honest; but he was conceited, long-winded, and pompous.

Mrs. Harold Smith was the very opposite of her lord. She was a clever, bright woman, good-looking for her time of life—and she was now over forty—with a keen sense of the value of all worldly things, and a keen relish for all the world's pleasures. She was neither laborious, nor well-informed, nor perhaps altogether honest—what woman ever understood the necessity or recognized the advantage of political honesty?—but then she was neither dull nor pompous, and if she was conceited, she did not show it. She was a disappointed woman, as regards her husband; seeing that she had married him on the speculation that he would at once become politically important; and as yet Mr. Smith had not quite fulfilled the prophecies of his early life.

And Lady Lufton, when she spoke of the Chaldicotes set, distinctly included, in her own mind, the Bishop of Barchester, and his wife and

daughter. Seeing that Bishop Proudie was, of course, a man much addicted to religion and to religious thinking, and that Mr. Sowerby himself had no peculiar religious sentiments whatever, there would not at first sight appear to be ground for much intercourse, and perhaps there was not much of such intercourse; but Mrs. Proudie and Mrs. Harold Smith were firm friends of four or five years' standing—ever since the Proudies came into the diocese; and therefore the bishop was usually taken to Chaldicotes whenever Mrs. Smith paid her brother a visit. Now Bishop Proudie was by no means a High Church dignitary, and Lady Lufton had never forgiven him for coming into that diocese. She had, instinctively, a high respect for the episcopal office; but of Bishop Proudie himself she hardly thought better than she did of Mr. Sowerby, or of that fabricator of evil, the Duke of Omnium. Whenever Mr. Robarts would plead that in going anywhere he would have the benefit of meeting the bishop, Lady Lufton would slightly curl her upper lip. She could not say in words, that Bishop Proudie—bishop as he certainly must be called—was no better than he ought to be; but by that curl of her lip she did explain to those who knew her that such was the inner feeling of her heart.

And then it was understood—Mark Robarts, at least, had so heard, and the information soon reached Framley Court—that Mr. Supplehouse was to make one of the Chaldicotes party. Now Mr. Supplehouse was a worse companion for a gentlemanlike, young, High Church, conservative county parson than even Harold Smith. He also was in Parliament, and had been extolled during the early days of that Russian war by some portion of the metropolitan daily press, as the only man who could save the country. Let him be in the ministry, the *Jupiter* had said, and there would be some hope of reform, some chance that England's ancient glory would not be allowed in these perilous times to go headlong to oblivion. And upon this the ministry, not anticipating much salvation from Mr. Supplehouse, but willing, as they usually are, to have the *Jupiter* at their back, did send for

that gentleman, and gave him some footing among them. But how can a man born to save a nation, and to lead a people, be content to fill the chair of an under-secretary? Supplehouse was not content, and soon gave it to be understood that his place was much higher than any yet tendered to him. The seals of high office, or war to the knife, was the alternative which he offered to a much-belaboured Head of Affairs—nothing doubting that the Head of Affairs would recognize the claimant's value, and would have before his eyes a wholesome fear of the *Jupiter*. But the Head of Affairs, much belaboured as he was, knew that he might pay too high even for Mr. Supplehouse and the *Jupiter*; and the saviour of the nation was told that he might swing his tomahawk. Since that time he had been swinging his tomahawk, but not with so much effect as had been anticipated. He also was very intimate with Mr. Sowerby, and was decidedly one of the Chaldicotes set.

And there were many others included in the stigma whose sins were political or religious rather than moral. But they were gall and wormwood to Lady Lufton, who regarded them as children of the Lost One, and who grieved with a mother's grief when she knew that her son was among them, and felt all a patron's anger when she heard that her clerical *protégé* was about to seek such society. Mrs. Robarts might well say that Lady Lufton would be annoyed.

"You won't call at the house before you go, will you?" the wife asked on the following morning. He was to start after lunch on that day, driving himself in his own gig, so as to reach Chaldicotes, some twenty-four miles distant, before dinner.

"No, I think not. What good should I do?"

"Well, I can't explain; but I think I should call: partly, perhaps, to show her that as I had determined to go, I was not afraid of telling her so."

"Afraid! That's nonsense, Fanny. I'm not afraid of her. But I don't see why I should bring down upon myself the disagreeable things she will say. Besides, I have not time. I must walk up and see Jones about the duties; and then, what with getting ready, I shall have enough to do to get off in time."

He paid his visit to Mr. Jones, the curate, feeling no qualms of conscience there, as he rather boasted of all the members of Parliament he was going to meet, and of the bishop who would be with them. Mr. Evan Jones was only his curate, and in speaking to him on the matter he could talk as though it were quite the proper thing for a vicar to meet his bishop at the house of a county member. And one would be inclined to say that it was proper: only why could he not talk of it in the same tone to Lady Lufton? And then, having kissed his wife and children, he drove off, well pleased with his prospect for the coming ten days, but already anticipating some discomfort on his return.

On the three following days, Mrs. Robarts did not meet her ladyship. She did not exactly take any steps to avoid such a meeting, but she did not purposely go up to the big house. She went to her school as usual, and made one or two calls among the farmers' wives, but put no foot within the Framley Court grounds. She was braver than her husband, but even she did not wish to anticipate the evil day.

On the Saturday, just before it began to get dusk, when she was thinking of preparing for the fatal plunge, her friend, Lady Meredith, came to her.

"So, Fanny, we shall again be so unfortunate as to miss Mr. Robarts," said her ladyship.

"Yes. Did you ever know anything so unlucky? But he had promised Mr. Sowerby before he heard that you were coming. Pray do not think that he

would have gone away had he known it."

"We should have been sorry to keep him from so much more amusing a party."

"Now, Justinia, you are unfair. You intend to imply that he has gone to Chaldicotes, because he likes it better than Framley Court; but that is not the case. I hope Lady Lufton does not think that it is."

Lady Meredith laughed as she put her arm round her friend's waist. "Don't lose your eloquence in defending him to me," she said. "You'll want all that for my mother."

"But is your mother angry?" asked Mrs. Robarts, showing by her countenance, how eager she was for true tidings on the subject.

"Well, Fanny, you know her ladyship as well as I do. She thinks so very highly of the vicar of Framley, that she does begrudge him to those politicians at Chaldicotes."

"But, Justinia, the bishop is to be there, you know."

"I don't think that that consideration will at all reconcile my mother to the gentleman's absence. He ought to be very proud, I know, to find that he is so much thought of. But come, Fanny, I want you to walk back with me, and you can dress at the house. And now we'll go and look at the children."

After that, as they walked together to Framley Court, Mrs. Robarts made her friend promise that she would stand by her if any serious attack were made on the absent clergyman.

"Are you going up to your room at once?" said the vicar's wife, as soon as they were inside the porch leading into the hall. Lady Meredith

immediately knew what her friend meant, and decided that the evil day should not be postponed. "We had better go in and have it over," she said, "and then we shall be comfortable for the evening." So the drawing-room door was opened, and there was Lady Lufton alone upon the sofa.

"Now, mamma," said the daughter, "you mustn't scold Fanny much about Mr. Robarts. He has gone to preach a charity sermon before the bishop, and under those circumstances, perhaps, he could not refuse." This was a stretch on the part of Lady Meredith—put in with much good nature, no doubt; but still a stretch; for no one had supposed that the bishop would remain at Chaldicotes for the Sunday.

"How do you do, Fanny?" said Lady Lufton, getting up. "I am not going to scold her; and I don't know how you can talk such nonsense, Justinia. Of course, we are very sorry not to have Mr. Robarts; more especially as he was not here the last Sunday that Sir George was with us. I do like to see Mr. Robarts in his own church, certainly; and I don't like any other clergyman there as well. If Fanny takes that for scolding, why—"

"Oh! no, Lady Lufton; and it's so kind of you to say so. But Mr. Robarts was so sorry that he had accepted this invitation to Chaldicotes, before he heard that Sir George was coming, and—"

"Oh, I know that Chaldicotes has great attractions which we cannot offer," said Lady Lufton.

"Indeed, it was not that. But he was asked to preach, you know; and Mr. Harold Smith—" Poor Fanny was only making it worse. Had she been worldly wise, she would have accepted the little compliment implied in Lady Lufton's first rebuke, and then have held her peace.

"Oh, yes; the Harold Smiths! They are irresistible, I know. How could any man refuse to join a party, graced both by Mrs. Harold Smith and Mrs. Proudie—even though his duty should require him to stay away?"

"Now, mamma—" said Justinia.

"Well, my dear, what am I to say? You would not wish me to tell a fib. I don't like Mrs. Harold Smith—at least, what I hear of her; for it has not been my fortune to meet her since her marriage. It may be conceited; but to own the truth, I think that Mr. Robarts would be better off with us at Framley than with the Harold Smiths at Chaldicotes,—even though Mrs. Proudie be thrown into the bargain."

It was nearly dark, and therefore the rising colour in the face of Mrs. Robarts could not be seen. She, however, was too good a wife to hear these things said without some anger within her bosom. She could blame her husband in her own mind; but it was intolerable to her that others should blame him in her hearing.

"He would undoubtedly be better off," she said; "but then, Lady Lufton, people can't always go exactly where they will be best off. Gentlemen sometimes must—"

"Well—well, my dear, that will do. He has not taken you, at any rate; and so we will forgive him." And Lady Lufton kissed her. "As it is,"—and she affected a low whisper between the two young wives—"as it is, we must e'en put up with poor old Evan Jones. He is to be here to-night, and we must go and dress to receive him."

And so they went off. Lady Lufton was quite good enough at heart to like Mrs. Robarts all the better for standing up for her absent lord.