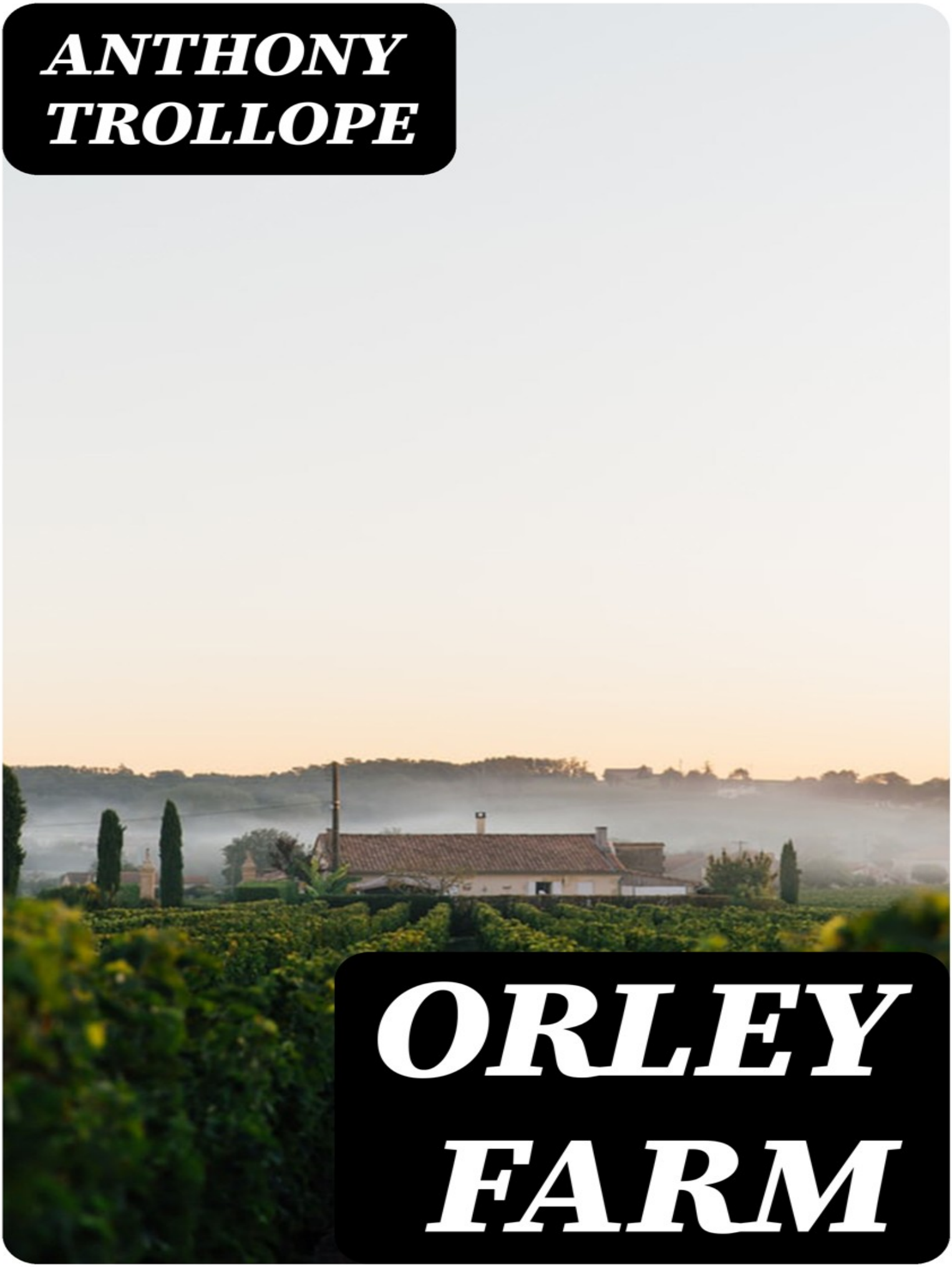
ANTHONY TROLLOPE



ORLEY FARM

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Orley Farm

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VOLUME I.

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CHAPTER I.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE GREAT ORLEY FARM CASE.

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It is not true that a rose by any other name will smell as sweet. Were it true, I should call this story "The Great Orley Farm Case." But who would ask for the ninth number of a serial work burthened with so very uncouth an appellation? Thence, and therefore,—Orley Farm.

I say so much at commencing in order that I may have an opportunity of explaining that this book of mine will not be devoted in any special way to rural delights. The name might lead to the idea that new precepts were to be given, in the pleasant guise of a novel, as to cream-cheeses, pigs with small bones, wheat sown in drills, or artificial manure. No such aspirations are mine. I make no attempts in that line, and declare at once that agriculturists will gain nothing from my present performance. Orley Farm, my readers, will be our scene during a portion of our present sojourn together, but the name has been chosen as having been intimately connected with certain legal questions which made a considerable stir in our courts of law.

It was twenty years before the date at which this story will be supposed to commence that the name of Orley Farm

first became known to the wearers of the long robe. At that time had died an old gentleman, Sir Joseph Mason, who left behind him a landed estate in Yorkshire of considerable extent and value. This he bequeathed, in a proper way, to his eldest son, the Joseph Mason, Esq., of our date. Sir Joseph had been a London merchant; had made his own money, having commenced the world, no doubt, with half a crown; had become, in turn, alderman, mayor, and knight; and in the fulness of time was gathered to his fathers. He had purchased this estate in Yorkshire late in life—we may as well become acquainted with the name, Groby Park—and his eldest son had lived there with such enjoyment of the privileges of an English country gentleman as he had been able to master for himself. Sir Joseph had also had three daughters, full sisters of Joseph of Groby, whom he endowed sufficiently and gave over to three respective loving husbands. And then shortly before his death, three years or so, Sir Joseph had married a second wife, a lady forty-five years his junior, and by her he also left one son, an infant only two years old when he died.

For many years this prosperous gentleman had lived at a small country house, some five-and-twenty miles from London, called Orley Farm. This had been his first purchase of land, and he had never given up his residence there, although his wealth would have entitled him to the enjoyment of a larger establishment. On the birth of his youngest son, at which time his eldest was nearly forty years old, he made certain moderate provision for the infant, as he had already made moderate provision for his young wife; but it was then clearly understood by the eldest

son that Orley Farm was to go with the Groby Park estate to him as the heir. When, however, Sir Joseph died, a codicil to his will, executed with due legal formalities, bequeathed Orley Farm to his youngest son, little Lucius Mason.

Then commenced those legal proceedings which at last developed themselves into the great Orley Farm Case. The eldest son contested the validity of the codicil; and indeed there were some grounds on which it appeared feasible that he should do so. This codicil not only left Orley Farm away from him to baby Lucius, but also interfered in another respect with the previous will. It devised a sum of two thousand pounds to a certain Miriam Usbech, the daughter of one Jonathan Usbech who was himself the attorney who had attended upon Sir Joseph for the making out of this very will, and also of this very codicil. This sum of two thousand pounds was not, it is true, left away from the surviving Joseph, but was to be produced out of certain personal property which had been left by the first will to the widow. And then old Jonathan Usbech had died, while Sir Joseph Mason was still living.

All the circumstances of the trial need not be detailed here. It was clearly proved that Sir Joseph had during his whole life expressed his intention of leaving Orley Farm to his eldest son; that he was a man void of mystery, and not given to secrets in his money matters, and one very little likely to change his opinion on such subjects. It was proved that old Jonathan Usbech at the time in which the will was made was in very bad circumstances, both as regards money and health. His business had once not been bad, but he had eaten and drunk it, and at this period was feeble and

penniless, overwhelmed both by gout and debt. He had for many years been much employed by Sir Joseph in money matters, and it was known that he was so employed almost up to the day of his death. The question was whether he had been employed to make this codicil.

The body of the will was in the handwriting of the widow, as was also the codicil. It was stated by her at the trial that the words were dictated to her by Usbech in her husband's hearing, and that the document was then signed by her husband in the presence of them both, and also in the presence of two other persons—a young man employed by her husband as a clerk, and by a servant-maid. These two last, together with Mr. Usbech, were the three witnesses whose names appeared in the codicil. There had been no secrets between Lady Mason and her husband as to his will. She had always, she said, endeavoured to induce him to leave Orley Farm to her child from the day of the child's birth, and had at last succeeded. In agreeing to this Sir Joseph had explained to her, somewhat angrily, that he wished to provide for Usbech's daughter, and that now he would do so out of moneys previously intended for her, the widow, and not out of the estate which would go to his eldest son. To this she had assented without a word, and had written the codicil in accordance with the lawyer's dictation, he, the lawyer, suffering at the time from gout in his hand. Among other things Lady Mason proved that on the date of the signatures Mr. Usbech had been with Sir Joseph for sundry hours.

Then the young clerk was examined. He had, he said, witnessed in his time four, ten, twenty, and, under pressure,

he confessed to as many as a hundred and twenty business signatures on the part of his employer, Sir Joseph. He thought he had witnessed a hundred and twenty, but would take his oath he had not witnessed a hundred and twenty-one. He did remember witnessing a signature of his master about the time specified by the date of the codicil, and he remembered the maid-servant also signing at the same time. Mr. Usbech was then present; but he did not remember Mr. Usbech having the pen in his hand. Mr. Usbech, he knew, could not write at that time, because of the gout; but he might, no doubt, have written as much as his own name. He swore to both the signatures—his own and his master's; and in cross-examination swore that he thought it probable that they might be forgeries. On re-examination he was confident that his own name, as there appearing, had been written by himself; but on re-cross-examination, he felt sure that there was something wrong. It ended in the judge informing him that his word was worth nothing, which was hard enough on the poor young man, seeing that he had done his best to tell all that he remembered. Then the servant-girl came into the witness-box. She was sure it was her own handwriting. She remembered being called in to write her name, and seeing the master write his. It had all been explained to her at the time, but she admitted that she had not understood the explanation. She had also seen the clerk write his name, but she was not sure that she had seen Mr. Usbech write. Mr. Usbech had had a pen in his hand; she was sure of that.

The last witness was Miriam Usbech, then a very pretty, simple girl of seventeen. Her father had told her once that

he hoped Sir Joseph would make provision for her. This had been shortly before her father's death. At her father's death she had been sent for to Orley Farm, and had remained there till Sir Joseph died. She had always regarded Sir Joseph and Lady Mason as her best friends. She had known Sir Joseph all her life, and did not think it unnatural that he should provide for her. She had heard her father say more than once that Lady Mason would never rest till the old gentleman had settled Orley Farm upon her son.

Not half the evidence taken has been given here, but enough probably for our purposes. The will and codicil were confirmed, and Lady Mason continued to live at the farm. Her evidence was supposed to have been excellently given, and to have been conclusive. She had seen the signature, and written the codicil, and could explain the motive. She was a woman of high character, of great talent, and of repute in the neighbourhood; and, as the judge remarked, there could be no possible reason for doubting her word. Nothing also could be simpler or prettier than the evidence of Miriam Usbech, as to whose fate and destiny people at the time expressed much sympathy. That stupid young clerk was responsible for the only weak part of the matter; but if he proved nothing on one side, neither did he prove anything on the other.

This was the commencement of the great Orley Farm Case, and having been then decided in favour of the infant it was allowed to slumber for nearly twenty years. The codicil was confirmed, and Lady Mason remained undisturbed in possession of the house, acting as guardian for her child till he came of age, and indeed for some time

beyond that epoch. In the course of a page or two I shall beg my readers to allow me to introduce this lady to their acquaintance.

Miriam Usbech, of whom also we shall see something, remained at the farm under Lady Mason's care till she married a young attorney, who in process of time succeeded to such business as her father left behind him. She suffered some troubles in life before she settled down in the neighbouring country town as Mrs. Dockwrath, for she had had another lover, the stupid young clerk who had so villainously broken down in his evidence; and to this other lover, whom she had been unable to bring herself to accept, Lady Mason had given her favour and assistance. Poor Miriam was at that time a soft, mild-eyed girl, easy to be led, one would have said; but in this matter Lady Mason could not lead her. It was in vain to tell her that the character of young Dockwrath did not stand high, and that young Kenneby, the clerk, should be promoted to all manner of good things. Soft and mild-eyed as Miriam was, Love was still the lord of all. In this matter she would not be persuaded; and eventually she gave her two thousand pounds to Samuel Dockwrath, the young attorney with the questionable character.

This led to no breach between her and her patroness. Lady Mason, wishing to do the best for her young friend, had favoured John Kenneby, but she was not a woman at all likely to quarrel on such a ground as this. "Well, Miriam," she had said, "you must judge for yourself, of course, in such a matter as this. You know my regard for you."

"Oh yes, ma'am," said Miriam, eagerly.

"And I shall always be glad to promote your welfare as Mrs. Dockwrath, if possible. I can only say that I should have had more satisfaction in attempting to do so for you as Mrs. Kenneby." But, in spite of the seeming coldness of these words, Lady Mason had been constant to her friend for many years, and had attended to her with more or less active kindness in all the sorrows arising from an annual baby and two sets of twins—a progeny which before the commencement of my tale reached the serious number of sixteen, all living.

Among other solid benefits conferred by Lady Mason had been the letting to Mr. Dockwrath of certain two fields, lying at the extremity of the farm property, and quite adjacent to the town of Hamworth in which old Mr. Usbech had resided. These had been let by the year, at a rent not considered to be too high at that period, and which had certainly become much lower in proportion to the value of the land, as the town of Hamworth had increased. On these fields Mr. Dockwrath expended some money, though probably not so much as he averred; and when noticed to give them up at the period of young Mason's coming of age, expressed himself terribly aggrieved.

"Surely, Mr. Dockwrath, you are very ungrateful," Lady Mason had said to him. But he had answered her with disrespectful words; and hence had arisen an actual breach between her and poor Miriam's husband. "I must say, Miriam, that Mr. Dockwrath is unreasonable," Lady Mason had said. And what could a poor wife answer? "Oh! Lady Mason, pray let it bide a time till it all comes right." But it never did come right; and the affair of those two fields

created the great Orley Farm Case, which it will be our business to unravel.

And now a word or two as to this Orley Farm. In the first place let it be understood that the estate consisted of two farms. One, called the Old Farm, was let to an old farmer named Greenwood, and had been let to him and to his father for many years antecedent to the days of the Masons. Mr. Greenwood held about three hundred acres of land, paying with admirable punctuality over four hundred a year in rent, and was regarded by all the Orley people as an institution on the property. Then there was the farm-house and the land attached to it. This was the residence in which Sir Joseph had lived, keeping in his own hands this portion of the property. When first inhabited by him the house was not fitted for more than the requirements of an ordinary farmer, but he had gradually added to it and ornamented it till it was commodious, irregular, picturesque, and straggling. When he died, and during the occupation of his widow, it consisted of three buildings of various heights, attached to each other, and standing in a row. The lower contained a large kitchen, which had been the living-room of the farm-house, and was surrounded by bake-house, laundry, dairy, and servants' room, all of fair dimensions. It was two stories high, but the rooms were low, and the roof steep and covered with tiles. The next portion had been added by Sir Joseph, then Mr. Mason, when he first thought of living at the place. This also was tiled, and the rooms were nearly as low; but there were three stories, and the building therefore was considerably higher. For five-and-twenty years the farm-house, so arranged, had sufficed for the common wants of

Sir Joseph and his family; but when he determined to give up his establishment in the City, he added on another step to the house at Orley Farm. On this occasion he built a good dining-room, with a drawing-room over it, and bed-room over that; and this portion of the edifice was slated.

The whole stood in one line fronting on to a large lawn which fell steeply away from the house into an orchard at the bottom. This lawn was cut in terraces, and here and there upon it there stood apple-trees of ancient growth; for here had been the garden of the old farm-house. They were large, straggling trees, such as do not delight the eyes of modern gardeners; but they produced fruit by the bushel, very sweet to the palate, though probably not so perfectly round, and large, and handsome as those which the horticultural skill of the present day requires. The face of the house from one end to the other was covered with vines and passion-flowers, for the aspect was due south; and as the whole of the later addition was faced by a verandah, which also, as regarded the ground-floor, ran along the middle building, the place in summer was pretty enough. As I have said before, it was irregular and straggling, but at the same time roomy and picturesque. Such was Orley Farm-house.

There were about two hundred acres of land attached to it, together with a large old-fashioned farm-yard, standing not so far from the house as most gentlemen farmers might perhaps desire. The farm buildings, however, were well hidden, for Sir Joseph, though he would at no time go to the expense of constructing all anew, had spent more money than such a proceeding would have cost him doctoring existing evils and ornamenting the standing edifices. In

doing this he had extended the walls of a brewhouse, and covered them with creepers, so as to shut out from the hall door the approach to the farm-yard, and had put up a quarter of a mile of high ornamental paling for the same purpose. He had planted an extensive shrubbery along the brow of the hill at one side of the house, had built summer-houses, and sunk a ha-ha fence below the orchard, and had contrived to give to the place the unmistakable appearance of an English gentleman's country-house. Nevertheless, Sir Joseph had never bestowed upon his estate, nor had it ever deserved, a more grandiloquent name than that which it had possessed of old.

Orley Farm-house itself is somewhat more than a mile distant from the town of Hamworth, but the land runs in the direction of the town, not skirting the high road, but stretching behind the cottages which stand along the pathway; and it terminates in those two fields respecting which Mr. Dockwrath the attorney became so irrationally angry at the period of which we are now immediately about to treat. These fields lie on the steep slope of Hamworth Hill, and through them runs the public path from the hamlet of Roxeth up to Hamworth church; for, as all the world knows, Hamworth church stands high, and is a landmark to the world for miles and miles around.

Within a circuit of thirty miles from London no land lies more beautifully circumstanced with regard to scenery than the country about Hamworth; and its most perfect loveliness commences just beyond the slopes of Orley Farm. There is a little village called Coldharbour, consisting of some half-dozen cottages, situated immediately outside Lady Mason's

gate,—and it may as well be stated here that this gate is but three hundred yards from the house, and is guarded by no lodge. This village stands at the foot of Cleeve Hill. The land hereabouts ceases to be fertile, and breaks away into heath and common ground. Round the foot of the hill there are extensive woods, all of which belong to Sir Peregrine Orme, the lord of the manor. Sir Peregrine is not a rich man, not rich, that is, it being borne in mind that he is a baronet, that he represented his county in parliament for three or four sessions, and that his ancestors have owned The Cleeve estate for the last four hundred years; but he is by general repute the greatest man in these parts. We may expect to hear more of him also as the story makes its way.

I know many spots in England and in other lands, world-famous in regard to scenery, which to my eyes are hardly equal to Cleeve Hill. From the top of it you are told that you may see into seven counties; but to me that privilege never possessed any value. I should not care to see into seventeen counties, unless the country which spread itself before my view was fair and lovely. The country which is so seen from Cleeve Hill is exquisitely fair and lovely;—very fair, with glorious fields of unsurpassed fertility, and lovely with oak woods and brown open heaths which stretch away, hill after hill, down towards the southern coast. I could greedily fill a long chapter with the well-loved glories of Cleeve Hill; but it may be that we must press its heather with our feet more than once in the course of our present task, and if so, it will be well to leave something for those coming visits.

"Ungrateful! I'll let her know whether I owe her any gratitude. Haven't I paid her her rent every half-year as it came due? what more would she have? Ungrateful, indeed! She is one of those women who think that you ought to go down on your knees to them if they only speak civilly to you. I'll let her know whether I'm ungrateful."

These words were spoken by angry Mr. Samuel Dockwrath to his wife, as he stood up before his parlour-fire after breakfast, and the woman to whom he referred was Lady Mason. Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was very angry as he so spoke, or at any rate he seemed to be so. There are men who take a delight in abusing those special friends whom their wives best love, and Mr. Dockwrath was one of these. He had never given his cordial consent to the intercourse which had hitherto existed between the lady of Orley Farm and his household, although he had not declined the substantial benefits which had accompanied it. His pride had rebelled against the feeling of patronage, though his interest had submitted to the advantages thence derived. A family of sixteen children is a heavy burden for a country attorney with a small practice, even though his wife may have had a fortune of two thousand pounds; and thus Mr. Dockwrath, though he had never himself loved Lady Mason, had permitted his wife to accept all those numberless kindnesses which a lady with comfortable means and no children is always able to bestow on a favoured neighbour who has few means and many children. Indeed, he himself had accepted a great favour with reference to the holding of those two fields, and had acknowledged as much when first he took them into his hands some sixteen or seventeen

years back. But all that was forgotten now; and having held them for so long a period, he bitterly felt the loss, and resolved that it would ill become him as a man and an attorney to allow so deep an injury to pass unnoticed. It may be, moreover, that Mr. Dockwrath was now doing somewhat better in the world than formerly, and that he could afford to give up Lady Mason, and to demand also that his wife should give her up. Those trumpery presents from Orley Farm were very well while he was struggling for bare bread, but now, now that he had turned the corner,—now that by his divine art and mystery of law he had managed to become master of that beautiful result of British perseverance, a balance at his banker's, he could afford to indulge his natural antipathy to a lady who had endeavoured in early life to divert from him the little fortune which had started him in the world.

Miriam Dockwrath, as she sat on this morning, listening to her husband's anger, with a sick little girl on her knee, and four or five others clustering round her, half covered with their matutinal bread and milk, was mild-eyed and soft as ever. Hers was a nature in which softness would ever prevail;—softness, and that tenderness of heart, always leaning, and sometimes almost crouching, of which a mild eye is the outward sign. But her comeliness and prettiness were gone. Female beauty of the sterner, grander sort may support the burden of sixteen children, all living,—and still survive. I have known it to do so, and to survive with much of its youthful glory. But that mild-eyed, soft, round, plumpy prettiness gives way beneath such a weight as that: years

alone tell on it quickly; but children and limited means combined with years leave to it hardly a chance.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said the poor woman, worn with her many cares.

"Sorry; yes, and I'll make her sorry, the proud minx. There's an old saying, that those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

"But, Samuel, I don't think she means to be doing you any harm. You know she always did say— Don't, Bessy; how can you put your fingers into the basin in that way?"

"Sam has taken my spoon away, mamma."

"I'll let her know whether she's doing any harm or no. And what signifies what was said sixteen years ago? Has she anything to show in writing? As far as I know, nothing of the kind was said."

"Oh, I remember it, Samuel; I do indeed!"

"Let me tell you then that you had better not try to remember anything about it. If you ain't quiet, Bob, I'll make you, pretty quick; d'ye hear that? The fact is, your memory is not worth a curse. Where are you to get milk for all those children, do you think, when the fields are gone?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, Samuel."

"Sorry; yes, and somebody else shall be sorry too. And look here, Miriam, I won't have you going up to Orley Farm on any pretence whatever; do you hear that?" and then, having given that imperative command to his wife and slave, the lord and master of that establishment walked forth into his office.

On the whole Miriam Usbech might have done better had she followed the advice of her patroness in early life, and

married the stupid clerk.

CHAPTER II.

LADY MASON AND HER SON.

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I trust that it is already perceived by all persistent novel readers that very much of the interest of this tale will be centred in the person of Lady Mason. Such educated persons, however, will probably be aware that she is not intended to be the heroine. The heroine, so called, must by a certain fixed law be young and marriageable. Some such heroine in some future number shall be forthcoming, with as much of the heroic about her as may be found convenient; but for the present let it be understood that the person and character of Lady Mason is as important to us as can be those of any young lady, let her be ever so gracious or ever so beautiful.

In giving the details of her history, I do not know that I need go back beyond her grandfather and grandmother, who were thoroughly respectable people in the hardware line; I speak of those relatives by the father's side. Her own parents had risen in the world,—had risen from retail to wholesale, and considered themselves for a long period of years to be good representatives of the commercial energy and prosperity of Great Britain. But a fall had come upon them,—as a fall does come very often to our excellent commercial representatives—and Mr. Johnson was in the "Gazette." It would be long to tell how old Sir Joseph Mason was concerned in these affairs, how he acted as the

principal assignee, and how ultimately he took to his bosom as his portion of the assets of the estate, young Mary Johnson, and made her his wife and mistress of Orley Farm. Of the family of the Johnsons there were but three others, the father, the mother, and a brother. The father did not survive the disgrace of his bankruptcy, and the mother in process of time settled herself with her son in one of the Lancashire manufacturing towns, where John Johnson raised his head in business to some moderate altitude, Sir Joseph having afforded much valuable assistance. There for the present we will leave them.

I do not think that Sir Joseph ever repented of the perilous deed he did in marrying that young wife. His home for many years had been desolate and solitary; his children had gone from him, and did not come to visit him very frequently in his poor home at the farm. They had become grander people than him, had been gifted with aspiring minds, and in every turn and twist which they took, looked to do something towards washing themselves clean from the dirt of the counting-house. This was specially the case with Sir Joseph's son, to whom the father had made over lands and money sufficient to enable him to come before the world as a country gentleman with a coat of arms on his coach-panel. It would be inconvenient for us to run off to Groby Park at the present moment, and I will therefore say no more just now as to Joseph junior, but will explain that Joseph senior was not made angry by this neglect. He was a grave, quiet, rational man, not however devoid of some folly; as indeed what rational man is so devoid? He was burdened with an ambition to establish a family as the

result of his success in life; and having put forth his son into the world with these views, was content that that son should act upon them persistently. Joseph Mason, Esq., of Groby Park, in Yorkshire, was now a county magistrate, and had made some way towards a footing in the county society around him. With these hopes, and ambition such as this, it was probably not expedient that he should spend much of his time at Orley Farm. The three daughters were circumstanced much in the same way: they had all married gentlemen, and were bent on rising in the world; moreover, the steadfast resolution of purpose which characterised their father was known by them all,—and by their husbands: they had received their fortunes, with some settled contingencies to be forthcoming on their father's demise; why, then, trouble the old gentleman at Orley Farm?

Under such circumstances the old gentleman married his young wife,—to the great disgust of his four children. They of course declared to each other, corresponding among themselves by letter, that the old gentleman had positively disgraced himself. It was impossible that they should make any visits whatever to Orley Farm while such a mistress of the house was there;—and the daughters did make no such visits. Joseph, the son, whose monetary connection with his father was as yet by no means fixed and settled in its nature, did make one such visit, and then received his father's assurance—so at least he afterwards said and swore—that this marriage should by no means interfere with the expected inheritance of the Orley Farm acres. But at that time no young son had been born,—nor, probably, was any such young son expected.

The farm-house became a much brighter abode for the old man, for the few years which were left to him, after he had brought his young wife home. She was quiet, sensible, clever, and unremitting in her attention. She burthened him with no requests for gay society, and took his home as she found it, making the best of it for herself, and making it for him much better than he had ever hitherto known it. His own children had always looked down upon him, regarding him merely as a coffer from whence money might be had; and he, though he had never resented this contempt, had in a certain measure been aware of it. But there was no such feeling shown by his wife. She took the benefits which he gave her graciously and thankfully, and gave back to him in return, certainly her care and time, and apparently her love. For herself, in the way of wealth and money, she never asked for anything.

And then the baby had come, young Lucius Mason, and there was of course great joy at Orley Farm. The old father felt that the world had begun again for him, very delightfully, and was more than ever satisfied with his wisdom in regard to that marriage. But the very genteel progeny of his early youth were more than ever dissatisfied, and in their letters among themselves dealt forth harder and still harder words upon poor Sir Joseph. What terrible things might he not be expected to do now that his dotage was coming on? Those three married ladies had no selfish fears—so at least they declared, but they united in imploring their brother to look after his interests at Orley Farm. How dreadfully would the young heir of Groby be curtailed in his dignities and seignories if it should be found

at the last day that Orley Farm was not to be written in his rent-roll!

And then, while they were yet bethinking themselves how they might best bestir themselves, news arrived that Sir Joseph had suddenly died. Sir Joseph was dead, and the will when read contained a codicil by which that young brat was made the heir to the Orley Farm estate. I have said that Lady Mason during her married life had never asked of her husband anything for herself; but in the law proceedings which were consequent upon Sir Joseph's death, it became abundantly evident that she had asked him for much for her son,—and that she had been specific in her requests, urging him to make a second heir, and to settle Orley Farm upon her own boy, Lucius. She herself stated that she had never done this except in the presence of a third person. She had often done so in the presence of Mr. Usbech the attorney,—as to which Mr. Usbech was not alive to testify; and she had also done so more than once in the presence of Mr. Furnival, a barrister,—as to which Mr. Furnival, being alive, did testify —very strongly.

As to that contest nothing further need now be said. It resulted in the favour of young Lucius Mason, and therefore, also, in the favour of the widow;—in the favour moreover of Miriam Usbech, and thus ultimately in the favour of Mr. Samuel Dockwrath, who is now showing himself to be so signally ungrateful. Joseph Mason, however, retired from the battle nothing convinced. His father, he said, had been an old fool, an ass, an idiot, a vulgar, ignorant fool; but he was not a man to break his word. That signature to the codicil might be his or might not. If his, it had been obtained by

fraud. What could be easier than to cheat an old doting fool? Many men agreed with Joseph Mason, thinking that Usbech the attorney had perpetrated this villainy on behalf of his daughter; but Joseph Mason would believe, or say that he believed—a belief in which none but his sisters joined him,—that Lady Mason herself had been the villain. He was minded to press the case on to a Court of Appeal, up even to the House of Lords; but he was advised that in doing so he would spend more money than Orley Farm was worth, and that he would, almost to a certainty, spend it in vain. Under this advice he cursed the laws of his country, and withdrew to Groby Park.

Lady Mason had earned the respect of all those around her by the way in which she bore herself in the painful days of the trial, and also in those of her success,—especially also by the manner in which she gave her evidence. And thus, though she had not been much noticed by her neighbours during the short period of her married life, she was visited as a widow by many of the more respectable people round Hamworth. In all this she showed no feeling of triumph; she never abused her husband's relatives, or spoke much of the harsh manner in which she had been used. Indeed, she was not given to talk about her own personal affairs; and although, as I have said, many of her neighbours visited her, she did not lay herself out for society. She accepted and returned their attention, but for the most part seemed to be willing that the matter should so rest. The people around by degrees came to know her ways, they spoke to her when they met her, and occasionally went through the ceremony of a morning call; but did not ask her to their tea-parties,

and did not expect to see her at picnic and archery meetings.

Among those who took her by the hand in the time of her great trouble was Sir Peregrine Orme of The Cleeve,—for such was the name which had belonged time out of mind to his old mansion and park. Sir Peregrine was a gentleman now over seventy years of age, whose family consisted of the widow of his only son, and the only son of that widow, who was of course the heir to his estate and title. Sir Peregrine was an excellent old man, as I trust may hereafter be acknowledged; but his regard for Lady Mason was perhaps in the first instance fostered by his extreme dislike to her stepson, Joseph Mason of Groby. Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby was quite as rich a man as Sir Peregrine, and owned an estate which was nearly as large as The Cleeve property; but Sir Peregrine would not allow that he was a gentleman, or that he could by any possible transformation become one. He had not probably ever said so in direct words to any of the Mason family, but his opinion on the matter had in some way worked its way down to Yorkshire, and therefore there was no love to spare between these two county magistrates. There had been a slight acquaintance between Sir Peregrine and Sir Joseph; but the ladies of the two families had never met till after the death of the latter. Then, while that trial was still pending, Mrs. Orme had come forward at the instigation of her father-in-law, and by degrees there had grown up an intimacy between the two widows. When the first offers of assistance were made and accepted, Sir Peregrine no doubt did not at all dream of any such result as this. His family pride, and especially the pride

which he took in his widowed daughter-in-law, would probably have been shocked by such a surmise; but, nevertheless, he had seen the friendship grow and increase without alarm. He himself had become attached to Lady Mason, and had gradually learned to excuse in her that want of gentle blood and early breeding which as a rule he regarded as necessary to a gentleman, and from which alone, as he thought, could spring many of those excellences which go to form the character of a lady.

It may therefore be asserted that Lady Mason's widowed life was successful. That it was prudent and well conducted no one could doubt. Her neighbours of course did say of her that she would not drink tea with Mrs. Arkwright of Mount Pleasant villa because she was allowed the privilege of entering Sir Peregrine's drawing-room; but such little scandal as this was a matter of course. Let one live according to any possible or impossible rule, yet some offence will be given in some quarter. Those who knew anything of Lady Mason's private life were aware that she did not encroach on Sir Peregrine's hospitality. She was not at The Cleeve as much as circumstances would have justified, and at one time by no means so much as Mrs. Orme would have desired.

In person she was tall and comely. When Sir Joseph had brought her to his house she had been very fair,—tall, slight, fair, and very quiet,—not possessing that loveliness which is generally most attractive to men, because the beauty of which she might boast depended on form rather than on the brightness of her eye, or the softness of her cheek and lips. Her face too, even at that age, seldom betrayed emotion,

and never showed signs either of anger or of joy. Her forehead was high, and though somewhat narrow, nevertheless gave evidence of considerable mental faculties; nor was the evidence false, for those who came to know Lady Mason well, were always ready to acknowledge that she was a woman of no ordinary power. Her eyes were large and well formed, but somewhat cold. Her nose was long and regular. Her mouth also was very regular, and her teeth perfectly beautiful; but her lips were straight and thin. It would sometimes seem that she was all teeth, and yet it is certain that she never made an effort to show them. The great fault of her face was in her chin, which was too small and sharp, thus giving on occasions something of meanness to her countenance. She was now forty-seven years of age, and had a son who had reached man's estate; and yet perhaps she had more of woman's beauty at this present time than when she stood at the altar with Sir Joseph Mason. The quietness and repose of her manner suited her years and her position; age had given fulness to her tall form; and the habitual sadness of her countenance was in fair accordance with her condition and character. And yet she was not really sad,—at least so said those who knew her. The melancholy was in her face rather than in her character, which was full of energy,—if energy may be quiet as well as assured and constant.

Of course she had been accused a dozen times of matrimonial prospects. What handsome widow is not so accused? The world of Hamworth had been very certain at one time that she was intent on marrying Sir Peregrine Orme. But she had not married, and I think I may say on her

behalf that she had never thought of marrying. Indeed, one cannot see how such a woman could make any effort in that line. It was impossible to conceive that a lady so staid in her manner should be guilty of flirting; nor was there any man within ten miles of Hamworth who would have dared to make the attempt. Women for the most part are prone to love-making—as nature has intended that they should be; but there are women from whom all such follies seem to be as distant as skittles and beer are distant from the dignity of the Lord Chancellor. Such a woman was Lady Mason.

At this time—the time which is about to exist for us as the period at which our narrative will begin—Lucius Mason was over twenty-two years old, and was living at the farm. He had spent the last three or four years of his life in Germany, where his mother had visited him every year, and had now come home intending to be the master of his own destiny. His mother's care for him during his boyhood, and up to the time at which he became of age, had been almost elaborate in its thoughtfulness. She had consulted Sir Peregrine as to his school, and Sir Peregrine, looking to the fact of the lad's own property, and also to the fact, known by him, of Lady Mason's means for such a purpose, had recommended Harrow. But the mother had hesitated, had gently discussed the matter, and had at last persuaded the baronet that such a step would be injudicious. The boy was sent to a private school of a high character, and Sir Peregrine was sure that he had been so sent at his own advice. "Looking at the peculiar position of his mother," said Sir Peregrine to his young daughter-in-law, "at her very peculiar position, and that of his relatives, I think it will be