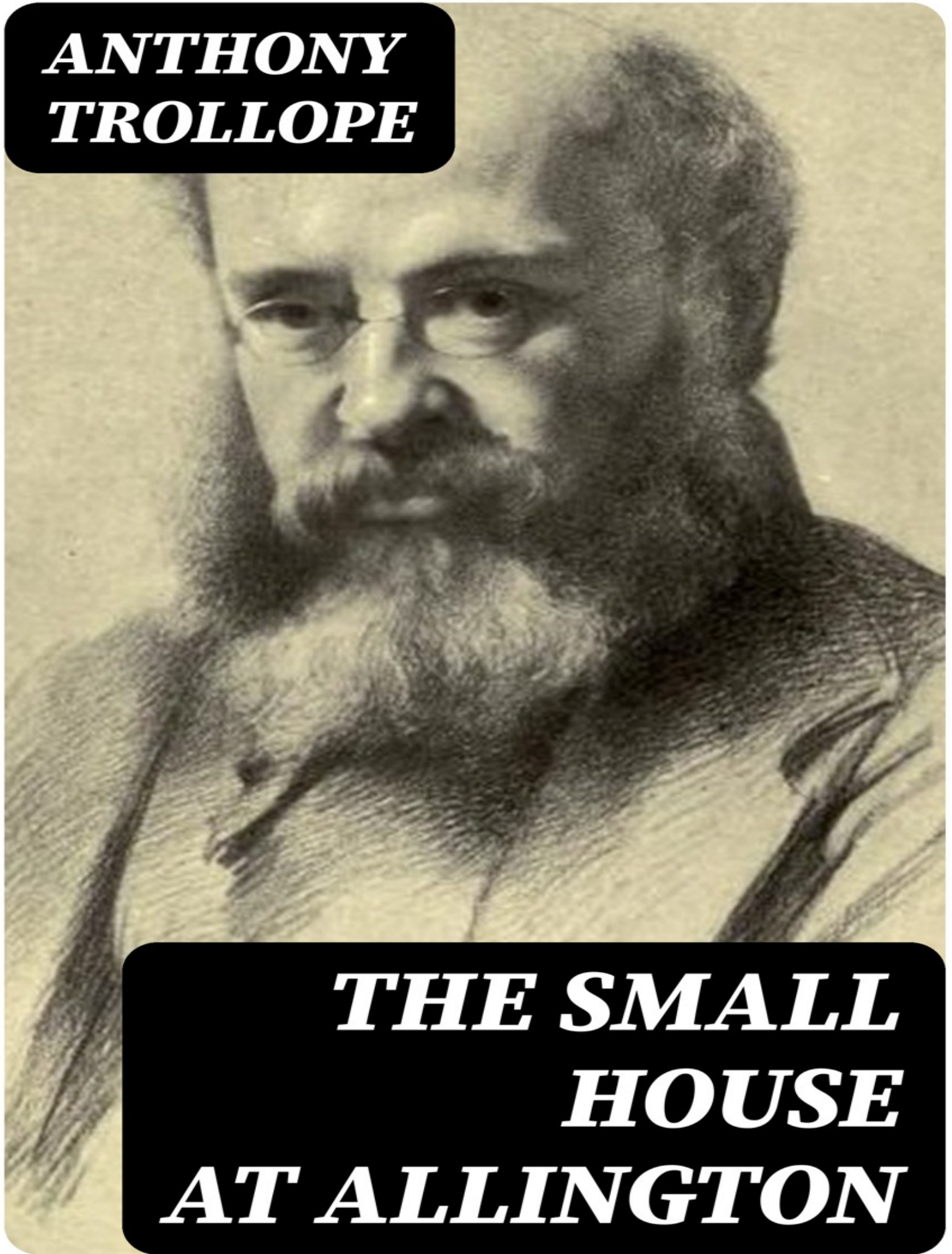


***ANTHONY
TROLLOPE***



***THE SMALL
HOUSE
AT ALLINGTON***

Anthony Trollope

The Small House at Allington

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Chapter I.

The Squire of Allington

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Of course there was a Great House at Allington. How otherwise should there have been a Small House? Our story will, as its name imports, have its closest relations with those who lived in the less dignified domicile of the two; but it will have close relations also with the more dignified, and it may be well that I should, in the first instance, say a few words as to the Great House and its owner.

The squires of Allington had been squires of Allington since squires, such as squires are now, were first known in England. From father to son, and from uncle to nephew, and, in one instance, from second cousin to second cousin, the sceptre had descended in the family of the Dales; and the acres had remained intact, growing in value and not decreasing in number, though guarded by no entail and protected by no wonderful amount of prudence or wisdom. The estate of Dale of Allington had been coterminous with the parish of Allington for some hundreds of years; and though, as I have said, the race of squires had possessed nothing of superhuman discretion, and had perhaps been guided in their walks through life by no very distinct principles, still there had been with them so much of adherence to a sacred law, that no acre of the property had ever been parted from the hands of the existing squire. Some futile attempts had been made to increase the territory, as indeed had been done by Kit Dale, the father of Christopher Dale, who will appear as our squire of Allington when the persons of our drama are introduced. Old Kit Dale, who had married money, had bought outlying farms,—a bit of ground here and a bit there,—talking, as he did so, much

of political influence and of the good old Tory cause. But these farms and bits of ground had gone again before our time. To them had been attached no religion. When old Kit had found himself pressed in that matter of the majority of the Nineteenth Dragoons, in which crack regiment his second son made for himself quite a career, he found it easier to sell than to save—seeing that that which he sold was his own and not the patrimony of the Dales. At his death the remainder of these purchases had gone. Family arrangements required completion, and Christopher Dale required ready money. The outlying farms flew away, as such new purchases had flown before; but the old patrimony of the Dales remained untouched, as it had ever remained.

It had been a religion among them; and seeing that the worship had been carried on without fail, that the vestal fire had never gone down upon the hearth, I should not have said that the Dales had walked their ways without high principle. To this religion they had all adhered, and the new heir had ever entered in upon his domain without other encumbrances than those with which he himself was then already burdened. And yet there had been no entail. The idea of an entail was not in accordance with the peculiarities of the Dale mind. It was necessary to the Dale religion that each squire should have the power of wasting the acres of Allington,—and that he should abstain from wasting them. I remember to have dined at a house, the whole glory and fortune of which depended on the safety of a glass goblet. We all know the story. If the luck of Edenhall should be shattered, the doom of the family would be sealed. Nevertheless I was bidden to drink out of the fatal glass, as were all guests in that house. It would not have contented the chivalrous mind of the master to protect his doom by lock and key and padded chest. And so it was with the Dales of Allington. To them an entail would have been a lock and key and a padded chest; but the old chivalry of their house denied to them the use of such protection.

I have spoken something slightly of the acquirements and doings of the family; and indeed their acquirements had been few and their doings little. At Allington, Dale of Allington had always been known as a king. At Guestwick, the neighbouring market town, he was a great man—to be seen frequently on Saturdays, standing in the marketplace, and laying down the law as to barley and oxen among men who knew usually more about barley and oxen than did he. At Hamersham, the assize town, he was generally in some repute, being a constant grand juror for the county, and a man who paid his way. But even at Hamersham the glory of the Dales had, at most periods, begun to pale, for they had seldom been widely conspicuous in the county, and had earned no great reputation by their knowledge of jurisprudence in the grand jury room. Beyond Hamersham their fame had not spread itself.

They had been men generally built in the same mould, inheriting each from his father the same virtues and the same vices,—men who would have lived, each, as his father had lived before him, had not the new ways of the world gradually drawn away with them, by an invisible magnetism, the upcoming Dale of the day,—not indeed in any case so moving him as to bring him up to the spirit of the age in which he lived, but dragging him forward to a line in advance of that on which his father had trodden. They had been obstinate men; believing much in themselves; just according to their ideas of justice; hard to their tenants but not known to be hard even by the tenants themselves, for the rules followed had ever been the rules on the Allington estate; imperious to their wives and children, but imperious within bounds, so that no Mrs Dale had fled from her lord's roof, and no loud scandals had existed between father and sons; exacting in their ideas as to money, expecting that they were to receive much and to give little, and yet not thought to be mean, for they paid their way, and gave money in parish charity and in county charity. They had ever

been steady supporters of the Church, graciously receiving into their parish such new vicars as, from time to time, were sent to them from King's College, Cambridge, to which establishment the gift of the living belonged,—but, nevertheless, the Dales had ever carried on some unpronounced warfare against the clergyman, so that the intercourse between the lay family and the clerical had seldom been in all respects pleasant.

Such had been the Dales of Allington, time out of mind, and such in all respects would have been the Christopher Dale of our time, had he not suffered two accidents in his youth. He had fallen in love with a lady who obstinately refused his hand, and on her account he had remained single; that was his first accident. The second had fallen upon him with reference to his father's assumed wealth. He had supposed himself to be richer than other Dales of Allington when coming in upon his property, and had consequently entertained an idea of sitting in Parliament for his county. In order that he might attain this honour he had allowed himself to be talked by the men of Hamersham and Guestwick out of his old family politics, and had declared himself a Liberal. He had never gone to the poll, and, indeed, had never actually stood for the seat. But he had come forward as a liberal politician, and had failed; and, although it was well known to all around that Christopher Dale was in heart as thoroughly conservative as any of his forefathers, this accident had made him sour and silent on the subject of politics, and had somewhat estranged him from his brother squires.

In other respects our Christopher Dale was, if anything, superior to the average of the family. Those whom he did love he loved dearly. Those whom he hated he did not ill-use beyond the limits of justice. He was close in small matters of money, and yet in certain family arrangements he was, as we shall see, capable of much liberality. He endeavoured to do his duty in accordance with his lights, and had succeeded

in weaning himself from personal indulgences, to which during the early days of his high hopes he had become accustomed. And in that matter of his unrequited love he had been true throughout. In his hard, dry, unpleasant way he had loved the woman; and when at least he learned to know that she would not have his love, he had been unable to transfer his heart to another. This had happened just at the period of his father's death, and he had endeavoured to console himself with politics, with what fate we have already seen. A constant, upright, and by no means insincere man was our Christopher Dale,—thin and meagre in his mental attributes, by no means even understanding the fullness of a full man, with power of eyesight very limited in seeing aught which was above him, but yet worthy of regard in that he had realised a path of duty and did endeavour to walk therein. And, moreover, our Mr Christopher Dale was a gentleman.

Such in character was the squire of Allington, the only regular inhabitant of the Great House. In person, he was a plain, dry man, with short grizzled hair and thick grizzled eyebrows. Of beard, he had very little, carrying the smallest possible grey whiskers, which hardly fell below the points of his ears. His eyes were sharp and expressive, and his nose was straight and well formed,—as was also his chin. But the nobility of his face was destroyed by a mean mouth with thin lips; and his forehead, which was high and narrow, though it forbid you to take Mr Dale for a fool, forbid you also to take him for a man of great parts, or of a wide capacity. In height, he was about five feet ten; and at the time of our story was as near to seventy as he was to sixty. But years had treated him very lightly, and he bore few signs of age. Such in person was Christopher Dale, Esq., the squire of Allington, and owner of some three thousand a year, all of which proceeded from the lands of that parish.

And now I will speak of the Great House of Allington. After all, it was not very great; nor was it surrounded by

much of that exquisite nobility of park appurtenance which graces the habitations of most of our old landed proprietors. But the house itself was very graceful. It had been built in the days of the early Stuarts, in that style of architecture to which we give the name of the Tudors. On its front it showed three pointed roofs, or gables, as I believe they should be called; and between each gable a thin tall chimney stood, the two chimneys thus raising themselves just above the three peaks I have mentioned. I think that the beauty of the house depended much on those two chimneys; on them, and on the mullioned windows with which the front of the house was closely filled. The door, with its jutting porch, was by no means in the centre of the house. As you entered, there was but one window on your right hand, while on your left there were three. And over these there was a line of five windows, one taking its place above the porch. We all know the beautiful old Tudor window, with its stout stone mullions and its stone transoms, crossing from side to side at a point much nearer to the top than to the bottom. Of all windows ever invented it is the sweetest. And here, at Allington, I think their beauty was enhanced by the fact that they were not regular in their shape. Some of these windows were long windows, while some of them were high. That to the right of the door, and that at the other extremity of the house, were among the former. But the others had been put in without regard to uniformity, a long window here, and a high window there, with a general effect which could hardly have been improved. Then above, in the three gables, were three other smaller apertures. But these also were mullioned, and the entire frontage of the house was uniform in its style.

Round the house there were trim gardens, not very large, but worthy of much note in that they were so trim,—gardens with broad gravel paths, with one walk running in front of the house so broad as to be fitly called a terrace. But this, though in front of the house, was sufficiently removed from it to allow of a coach-road running inside it to the front door.

The Dales of Allington had always been gardeners, and their garden was perhaps more noted in the county than any other of their properties. But outside the gardens no pretensions had been made to the grandeur of a domain. The pastures round the house were but pretty fields, in which timber was abundant. There was no deer-park at Allington; and though the Allington woods were well known, they formed no portion of a whole of which the house was a part. They lay away, out of sight, a full mile from the back of the house; but not on that account of less avail for the fitting preservation of foxes.

And the house stood much too near the road for purposes of grandeur, had such purposes ever swelled the breast of any of the squires of Allington. But I fancy that our ideas of rural grandeur have altered since many of our older country seats were built. To be near the village, so as in some way to afford comfort, protection, and patronage, and perhaps also with some view to the pleasantness of neighbourhood for its own inmates, seemed to be the object of a gentleman when building his house in the old days. A solitude in the centre of a wide park is now the only site that can be recognised as eligible. No cottage must be seen, unless the cottage *orné* of the gardener. The village, if it cannot be abolished, must be got out of sight. The sound of the church bells is not desirable, and the road on which the profane vulgar travel by their own right must be at a distance. When some old Dale of Allington built his house, he thought differently. There stood the church and there the village, and, pleased with such vicinity, he sat himself down close to his God and to his tenants.

As you pass along the road from Guestwick into the village you see the church near to you on your left hand; but the house is hidden from the road. As you approach the church, reaching the gate of it which is not above two hundred yards from the high road, you see the full front of the Great House. Perhaps the best view of it is from the

churchyard. The lane leading up to the church ends in a gate, which is the entrance into Mr Dale's place. There is no lodge there, and the gate generally stands open,—indeed, always does so, unless some need of cattle grazing within requires that it should be closed. But there is an inner gate, leading from the home paddock through the gardens to the house, and another inner gate, some thirty yards farther on, which will take you into the farmyard. Perhaps it is a defect at Allington that the farmyard is very close to the house. But the stables, and the straw-yards, and the unwashed carts, and the lazy lingering cattle of the homestead, are screened off by a row of chestnuts, which, when in its glory of flower, in the early days of May, no other row in England can surpass in beauty. Had any one told Dale of Allington,—this Dale or any former Dale,—that his place wanted wood, he would have pointed with mingled pride and disdain to his belt of chestnuts.

Of the church itself I will say the fewest possible number of words. It was a church such as there are, I think, thousands in England—low, incommodious, kept with difficulty in repair, too often pervious to the wet, and yet strangely picturesque, and correct too, according to great rules of architecture. It was built with a nave and aisles, visibly in the form of a cross, though with its arms clipped down to the trunk, with a separate chancel, with a large square short tower, and with a bell-shaped spire, covered with lead and irregular in its proportions. Who does not know the low porch, the perpendicular Gothic window, the flat-roofed aisles, and the noble old grey tower of such a church as this? As regards its interior, it was dusty; it was blocked up with high-backed ugly pews; the gallery in which the children sat at the end of the church, and in which two ancient musicians blew their bassoons, was all awry, and looked as though it would fall; the pulpit was an ugly useless edifice, as high nearly as the roof would allow, and the reading-desk under it hardly permitted the parson to keep

his head free from the dangling tassels of the cushion above him. A clerk also was there beneath him, holding a third position somewhat elevated; and upon the whole things there were not quite as I would have had them. But, nevertheless, the place looked like a church, and I can hardly say so much for all the modern edifices which have been built in my days towards the glory of God. It looked like a church, and not the less so because in walking up the passage between the pews the visitor trod upon the brass plates which dignified the resting-places of the departed Dales of old.

Below the church, and between that and the village, stood the vicarage, in such position that the small garden of the vicarage stretched from the churchyard down to the backs of the village cottages. This was a pleasant residence, newly built within the last thirty years, and creditable to the ideas of comfort entertained by the rich collegiate body from which the vicars of Allington always came. Doubtless we shall in the course of our sojourn at Allington visit the vicarage now and then, but I do not know that any further detailed account of its comforts will be necessary to us.

Passing by the lane leading to the vicarage, the church, and to the house, the high road descends rapidly to a little brook which runs through the village. On the right as you descend you will have seen the "Red Lion," and will have seen no other house conspicuous in any way. At the bottom, close to the brook, is the post-office, kept surely by the crossest old woman in all those parts. Here the road passes through the water, the accommodation of a narrow wooden bridge having been afforded for those on foot. But before passing the stream, you will see a cross street, running to the left, as had run that other lane leading to the house. Here, as this cross street rises the hill, are the best houses in the village. The baker lives here, and that respectable woman, Mrs Frummage, who sells ribbons, and toys, and soap, and straw bonnets, with many other things too long to

mention. Here, too, lives an apothecary, whom the veneration of this and neighbouring parishes has raised to the dignity of a doctor. And here also, in the smallest but prettiest cottage that can be imagined, lives Mrs Hearn, the widow of a former vicar, on terms, however, with her neighbour the squire which I regret to say are not as friendly as they should be. Beyond this lady's modest residence, Allington Street, for so the road is called, turns suddenly round towards the church, and at the point of the turn is a pretty low iron railing with a gate, and with a covered way, which leads up to the front door of the house which stands there, I will only say here, at this fag end of a chapter, that it is the Small House at Allington. Allington Street, as I have said, turns short round towards the church at this point, and there ends at a white gate, leading into the churchyard by a second entrance.

So much it was needful that I should say of Allington Great House, of the Squire, and of the village. Of the Small House, I will speak separately in a further chapter.

Chapter II.

The Two Pearls of Allington

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“But Mr Crosbie is only a mere clerk.”

This sarcastic condemnation was spoken by Miss Lilian Dale to her sister Isabella, and referred to a gentleman with whom we shall have much concern in these pages. I do not say that Mr Crosbie will be our hero, seeing that that part in the drama will be cut up, as it were, into fragments. Whatever of the magnificent may be produced will be diluted and apportioned out in very moderate quantities among two or more, probably among three or four, young gentlemen—to none of whom will be vouchsafed the privilege of much heroic action.

“I don’t know what you call a mere clerk, Lily. Mr Fanfaron is a mere barrister, and Mr Boyce is a mere clergyman.” Mr Boyce was the vicar of Allington, and Mr Fanfaron was a lawyer who had made his way over to Allington during the last assizes. “You might as well say that Lord De Guest is a mere earl.”

“So he is—only a mere earl. Had he ever done anything except have fat oxen, one wouldn’t say so. You know what I mean by a mere clerk? It isn’t much in a man to be in a public office, and yet Mr Crosbie gives himself airs.”

“You don’t suppose that Mr Crosbie is the same as John Eames,” said Bell, who, by her tone of voice, did not seem inclined to undervalue the qualifications of Mr Crosbie. Now John Eames was a young man from Guestwick, who had been appointed to a clerkship in the Income-tax office, with eighty pounds a year, two years ago.

“Then Johnny Eames is a mere clerk,” said Lily; “and Mr Crosbie is— After all, Bell, what is Mr Crosbie, if he is not a

mere clerk? Of course, he is older than John Eames; and, as he has been longer at it, I suppose he has more than eighty pounds a year."

"I am not in Mr Crosbie's confidence. He is in the General Committee Office, I know; and, I believe, has pretty nearly the management of the whole of it. I have heard Bernard say that he has six or seven young men under him, and that —; but, of course, I don't know what he does at his office."

"I'll tell you what he is, Bell; Mr Crosbie is a swell." And Lilian Dale was right; Mr Crosbie was a swell.

And here I may perhaps best explain who Bernard was, and who was Mr Crosbie. Captain Bernard Dale was an officer in the corps of Engineers, was the first cousin of the two girls who have been speaking, and was nephew and heir presumptive to the squire. His father, Colonel Dale, and his mother, Lady Fanny Dale, were still living at Torquay—an effete, invalid, listless couple, pretty well dead to all the world beyond the region of the Torquay card-tables. He it was who had made for himself quite a career in the Nineteenth Dragoons. This he did by eloping with the penniless daughter of that impoverished earl, the Lord De Guest. After the conclusion of that event circumstances had not afforded him the opportunity of making himself conspicuous; and he had gone on declining gradually in the world's esteem—for the world had esteemed him when he first made good his running with the Lady Fanny—till now, in his slippered years, he and his Lady Fanny were unknown except among those Torquay Bath chairs and card-tables. His elder brother was still a hearty man, walking in thick shoes, and constant in his saddle; but the colonel, with nothing beyond his wife's title to keep his body awake, had fallen asleep somewhat prematurely among his slippers. Of him and of Lady Fanny, Bernard Dale was the only son. Daughters they had had; some were dead, some married, and one living with them among the card-tables. Of his parents Bernard had latterly not seen much; not more, that

is, than duty and a due attention to the fifth commandment required of him. He also was making a career for himself, having obtained a commission in the Engineers, and being known to all his compeers as the nephew of an earl, and as the heir to a property of three thousand a year. And when I say that Bernard Dale was not inclined to throw away any of these advantages, I by no means intend to speak in his dispraise. The advantage of being heir to a good property is so manifest,—the advantages over and beyond those which are merely fiscal,—that no man thinks of throwing them away, or expects another man to do so. Moneys in possession or in expectation do give a set to the head, and a confidence to the voice, and an assurance to the man, which will help him much in his walk in life—if the owner of them will simply use them, and not abuse them. And for Bernard Dale I will say that he did not often talk of his uncle the earl. He was conscious that his uncle was an earl, and that other men knew the fact. He knew that he would not otherwise have been elected at the Beaufort, or at that most aristocratic of little clubs called Sebright's. When noble blood was called in question he never alluded specially to his own, but he knew how to speak as one of whom all the world was aware on which side he had been placed by the circumstances of his birth. Thus he used his advantage, and did not abuse it. And in his profession he had been equally fortunate. By industry, by a small but wakeful intelligence, and by some aid from patronage, he had got on till he had almost achieved the reputation of talent. His name had become known among scientific experimentalists, not as that of one who had himself invented a cannon or an antidote to a cannon, but as of a man understanding in cannons and well fitted to look at those invented by others; who would honestly test this or that antidote; or, if not honestly, seeing that such thin-minded men can hardly go to the proof of any matter without some prejudgment in their minds, at any rate with such appearance of honesty

that the world might be satisfied. And in this way Captain Dale was employed much at home, about London; and was not called on to build barracks in Nova Scotia, or to make roads in the Punjaub.

He was a small slight man, smaller than his uncle, but in face very like him. He had the same eyes, and nose, and chin, and the same mouth; but his forehead was better,—less high and pointed, and better formed about the brows. And then he wore moustaches, which somewhat hid the thinness of his mouth. On the whole, he was not ill-looking; and, as I have said before, he carried with him an air of self-assurance and a confident balance, which in itself gives a grace to a young man.

He was staying at the present time in his uncle's house, during the delicious warmth of the summer,—for, as yet, the month of July was not all past; and his intimate friend, Adolphus Crosbie, who was or was not a mere clerk as my readers may choose to form their own opinions on that matter, was a guest in the house with him. I am inclined to say that Adolphus Crosbie was not a mere clerk; and I do not think that he would have been so called, even by Lily Dale, had he not given signs to her that he was a “swell.” Now a man in becoming a swell,—a swell of such an order as could possibly be known to Lily Dale,—must have ceased to be a mere clerk in that very process. And, moreover, Captain Dale would not have been Damon to any Pythias of whom it might fairly be said that he was a mere clerk. Nor could any mere clerk have got himself in either at the Beaufort or at Sebright's. The evidence against that former assertion made by Lily Dale is very strong; but then the evidence as to her latter assertion is as strong, Mr Crosbie certainly was a swell. It is true that he was a clerk in the General Committee Office. But then, in the first place, the General Committee Office is situated in Whitehall; whereas poor John Eames was forced to travel daily from his lodgings in Burton Crescent, ever so far beyond Russell Square, to his

dingy room in Somerset House. And Adolphus Crosbie, when very young, had been a private secretary, and had afterwards mounted up in his office to some quasi authority and senior-clerkship, bringing him in seven hundred a year, and giving him a status among assistant secretaries and the like, which even in an official point of view was something. But the triumphs of Adolphus Crosbie had been other than these. Not because he had been intimate with assistant secretaries, and was allowed in Whitehall a room to himself with an armchair, would he have been entitled to stand upon the rug at Sebright's and speak while rich men listened,—rich men, and men also who had handles to their names! Adolphus Crosbie had done more than make minutes with discretion on the papers of the General Committee Office. He had set himself down before the gates of the city of fashion, and had taken them by storm; or, perhaps, to speak with more propriety, he had picked the locks and let himself in. In his walks of life he was somebody in London. A man at the West End who did not know who was Adolphus Crosbie knew nothing. I do not say that he was the intimate friend of many great men; but even great men acknowledged the acquaintance of Adolphus Crosbie, and he was to be seen in the drawing-rooms, or at any rate on the staircases, of Cabinet Ministers.

Lilian Dale, dear Lily Dale—for my reader must know that she is to be very dear, and that my story will be nothing to him if he do not love Lily Dale—Lilian Dale had discovered that Mr Crosbie was a swell. But I am bound to say that Mr Crosbie did not habitually proclaim the fact in any offensive manner; nor in becoming a swell had he become altogether a bad fellow. It was not to be expected that a man who was petted at Sebright's should carry himself in the Allington drawing-room as would Johnny Eames, who had never been petted by any one but his mother. And this fraction of a hero of ours had other advantages to back him, over and beyond those which fashion had given him. He was a tall, well-

looking man, with pleasant eyes and an expressive mouth,—a man whom you would probably observe in whatever room you might meet him. And he knew how to talk, and had in him something which justified talking. He was no butterfly or dandy, who flew about in the world's sun, warmed into prettiness by a sunbeam. Crosbie had his opinion on things,—on politics, on religion, on the philanthropic tendencies of the age, and had read something here and there as he formed his opinion. Perhaps he might have done better in the world had he not been placed so early in life in that Whitehall public office. There was that in him which might have earned better bread for him in an open profession.

But in that matter of his bread the fate of Adolphus Crosbie had by this time been decided for him, and he had reconciled himself to fate that was now inexorable. Some very slight patrimony, a hundred a year or so, had fallen to his share. Beyond that he had his salary from his office, and nothing else; and on his income, thus made up, he had lived as a bachelor in London, enjoying all that London could give him as a man in moderately easy circumstances, and looking forward to no costly luxuries,—such as a wife, a house of his own, or a stable full of horses. Those which he did enjoy of the good things of the world would, if known to John Eames, have made him appear fabulously rich in the eyes of that brother clerk. His lodgings in Mount Street were elegant in their belongings. During three months of the season in London he called himself the master of a very neat hack. He was always well dressed, though never overdressed. At his clubs he could live on equal terms with men having ten times his income. He was not married. He had acknowledged to himself that he could not marry without money; and he would not marry for money. He had put aside from him, as not within his reach, the comforts of marriage. But— We will not, however, at the present moment inquire more curiously into the private life and circumstances of our new friend Adolphus Crosbie.

After the sentence pronounced against him by Lilian, the two girls remained silent for awhile. Bell was, perhaps, a little angry with her sister. It was not often that she allowed herself to say much in praise of any gentleman; and, now that she had spoken a word or two in favour of Mr Crosbie, she felt herself to be rebuked by her sister for this unwonted enthusiasm. Lily was at work on a drawing, and in a minute or two had forgotten all about Mr Crosbie; but the injury remained on Bell's mind and prompted her to go back to the subject. "I don't like those slang words, Lily."

"What slang words?"

"You know what you called Bernard's friend."

"Oh; a swell. I fancy I do like slang. I think it's awfully jolly to talk about things being jolly. Only that I was afraid of your nerves I should have called him stunning. It's so slow, you know, to use nothing but words out of a dictionary."

"I don't think it's nice in talking of gentlemen."

"Isn't it? Well, I'd like to be nice—if I knew how."

If she knew how! There is no knowing how, for a girl, in that matter. If nature and her mother have not done it for her, there is no hope for her on that head. I think I may say that nature and her mother had been sufficiently efficacious for Lilian Dale in this respect.

"Mr Crosbie is, at any rate, a gentleman, and knows how to make himself pleasant. That was all that I meant. Mamma said a great deal more about him than I did."

"Mr Crosbie is an Apollo; and I always look upon Apollo as the greatest—you know what—that ever lived. I mustn't say the word, because Apollo was a gentleman."

At this moment, while the name of the god was still on her lips, the high open window of the drawing-room was darkened, and Bernard entered, followed by Mr Crosbie.

"Who is talking about Apollo?" said Captain Dale.

The girls were both stricken dumb. How would it be with them if Mr Crosbie had heard himself spoken of in those last words of poor Lily's? This was the rashness of which Bell

was ever accusing her sister, and here was the result! But, in truth, Bernard had heard nothing more than the name, and Mr Crosbie, who had been behind him, had heard nothing.

“‘As sweet and musical as bright Apollo’s lute, strung with his hair,’” said Mr Crosbie, not meaning much by the quotation, but perceiving that the two girls had been in some way put out and silenced.

“What very bad music it must have made,” said Lily; “unless, indeed, his hair was very different from ours.”

“It was all sunbeams,” suggested Bernard. But by that time Apollo had served his turn, and the ladies welcomed their guests in the proper form.

“Mamma is in the garden,” said Bell, with that hypocritical pretence so common with young ladies when young gentlemen call; as though they were aware that mamma was the object specially sought.

“Picking peas, with a sun-bonnet on,” said Lily.

“Let us by all means go and help her,” said Mr Crosbie; and then they issued out into the garden.

The gardens of the Great House of Allington and those of the Small House open on to each other. A proper boundary of thick laurel hedge, and wide ditch, and of iron spikes guarding the ditch, there is between them; but over the wide ditch there is a foot-bridge, and at the bridge there is a gate which has no key; and for all purposes of enjoyment the gardens of each house are open to the other. And the gardens of the Small House are very pretty. The Small House itself is so near the road that there is nothing between the dining-room windows and the iron rail but a narrow edge rather than border, and a little path made with round fixed cobble stones, not above two feet broad, into which no one but the gardener ever makes his way. The distance from the road to the house is not above five or six feet, and the entrance from the gate is shut in by a covered way. But the garden behind the house, on to which the windows from the

drawing-room open, is to all the senses as private as though there were no village of Allington, and no road up to the church within a hundred yards of the lawn. The steeple of the church, indeed, can be seen from the lawn, peering, as it were, between the yew-trees which stand in the corner of the churchyard adjoining to Mrs Dale's wall. But none of the Dale family have any objection to the sight of that steeple. The glory of the Small House at Allington certainly consists in its lawn, which is as smooth, as level, and as much like velvet as grass has ever yet been made to look. Lily Dale, taking pride in her own lawn, has declared often that it is no good attempting to play croquet up at the Great House. The grass, she says, grows in tufts, and nothing that Hopkins, the gardener, can or will do has any effect upon the tufts. But there are no tufts at the Small House. As the squire himself has never been very enthusiastic about croquet, the croquet implements have been moved permanently down to the Small House, and croquet there has become quite an institution.

And while I am on the subject of the garden I may also mention Mrs Dale's conservatory, as to which Bell was strenuously of opinion that the Great House had nothing to offer equal to it—"For flowers, of course, I mean," she would say, correcting herself; for at the Great House there was a grapery very celebrated. On this matter the squire would be less tolerant than as regarded the croquet, and would tell his niece that she knew nothing about flowers. "Perhaps not, Uncle Christopher," she would say. "All the same, I like our geraniums best;" for there was a spice of obstinacy about Miss Dale,—as, indeed, there was in all the Dales, male and female, young and old.

It may be as well to explain that the care of this lawn and of this conservatory, and, indeed, of the entire garden belonging to the Small House, was in the hands of Hopkins, the head gardener to the Great House; and it was so simply for this reason, that Mrs Dale could not afford to keep a

gardener herself. A working lad, at ten shillings a week, who cleaned the knives and shoes, and dug the ground, was the only male attendant on the three ladies. But Hopkins, the head gardener of Allington, who had men under him, was as widely awake to the lawn and the conservatory of the humbler establishment as he was to the grapery, peach-walls, and terraces of the grander one. In his eyes it was all one place. The Small House belonged to his master, as indeed did the very furniture within it; and it was lent, not let, to Mrs Dale. Hopkins, perhaps, did not love Mrs Dale, seeing that he owed her no duty as one born a Dale. The two young ladies he did love, and also snubbed in a very peremptory way sometimes. To Mrs Dale he was coldly civil, always referring to the squire if any direction worthy of special notice as concerning the garden was given to him.

All this will serve to explain the terms on which Mrs Dale was living at the Small House,—a matter needful of explanation sooner or later. Her husband had been the youngest of three brothers, and in many respects the brightest. Early in life he had gone up to London, and there had done well as a land surveyor. He had done so well that Government had employed him, and for some three or four years he had enjoyed a large income, but death had come suddenly on him, while he was only yet ascending the ladder; and, when he died, he had hardly begun to realise the golden prospects which he had seen before him. This had happened some fifteen years before our story commenced, so that the two girls hardly retained any memory of their father. For the first five years of her widowhood, Mrs Dale, who had never been a favourite of the squire's, lived with her two little girls in such modest way as her very limited means allowed. Old Mrs Dale, the squire's mother, then occupied the Small House. But when old Mrs Dale died, the squire offered the place rent-free to his sister-in-law, intimating to her that her daughters would obtain considerable social advantages by living at Allington.

She had accepted the offer, and the social advantages had certainly followed. Mrs Dale was poor, her whole income not exceeding three hundred a year, and therefore her own style of living was of necessity very unassuming; but she saw her girls becoming popular in the county, much liked by the families around them, and enjoying nearly all the advantages which would have accrued to them had they been the daughters of Squire Dale of Allington. Under such circumstances it was little to her whether or no she were loved by her brother-in-law, or respected by Hopkins. Her own girls loved her, and respected her, and that was pretty much all that she demanded of the world on her own behalf.

And Uncle Christopher had been very good to the girls in his own obstinate and somewhat ungracious manner. There were two ponies in the stables of the Great House, which they were allowed to ride, and which, unless on occasions, nobody else did ride. I think he might have given the ponies to the girls, but he thought differently. And he contributed to their dresses, sending them home now and again things which he thought necessary, not in the pleasantest way in the world. Money he never gave them, nor did he make them any promises. But they were Dales, and he loved them; and with Christopher Dale to love once was to love always. Bell was his chief favourite, sharing with his nephew Bernard the best warmth of his heart. About these two he had his projects, intending that Bell should be the future mistress of the Great House of Allington; as to which project, however, Miss Dale was as yet in very absolute ignorance.

We may now, I think, go back to our four friends, as they walked out upon the lawn. They were understood to be on a mission to assist Mrs Dale in the picking of the peas; but pleasure intervened in the way of business, and the young people, forgetting the labours of their elder, allowed themselves to be carried away by the fascinations of croquet. The iron hoops and the sticks were fixed. The mallets and the balls were lying about; and then the party

was so nicely made up! "I haven't had a game of croquet yet," said Mr Crosbie. It cannot be said that he had lost much time, seeing that he had only arrived before dinner on the preceding day. And then the mallets were in their hands in a moment.

"We'll play sides, of course," said Lily. "Bernard and I'll play together." But this was not allowed. Lily was well known to be the queen of the croquet ground; and as Bernard was supposed to be more efficient than his friend, Lily had to take Mr Crosbie as her partner. "Apollo can't get through the hoops," Lily said afterwards to her sister; "but then how gracefully he fails to do it!" Lily, however, had been beaten, and may therefore be excused for a little spite against her partner. But it so turned out that before Mr Crosbie took his final departure from Allington he could get through the hoops; and Lily, though she was still queen of the croquet ground, had to acknowledge a male sovereign in that dominion.

"That's not the way we played at—" said Crosbie, at one point of the game, and then stopped himself.

"Where was that?" said Bernard.

"A place I was at last summer,—in Shropshire."

"Then they don't play the game, Mr Crosbie, at the place you were at last summer,—in Shropshire," said Lily.

"You mean Lady Hartletop's," said Bernard. Now, the Marchioness of Hartletop was a very great person indeed, and a leader in the fashionable world.

"Oh! Lady Hartletop's!" said Lily. "Then I suppose we must give in;" which little bit of sarcasm was not lost upon Mr Crosbie, and was put down by him in the tablets of his mind as quite undeserved. He had endeavoured to avoid any mention of Lady Hartletop and her croquet ground, and her ladyship's name had been forced upon him. Nevertheless, he liked Lily Dale through it all. But he thought that he liked Bell the best, though she said little; for Bell was the beauty of the family.

During the game Bernard remembered that they had especially come over to bid the three ladies to dinner at the house on that day. They had all dined there on the day before, and the girls' uncle had now sent directions to them to come again. "I'll go and ask mamma about it," said Bell, who was out first. And then she returned, saying, that she and her sister would obey their uncle's behest; but that her mother would prefer to remain at home. "There are the peas to be eaten, you know," said Lily.

"Send them up to the Great House," said Bernard.

"Hopkins would not allow it," said Lily. "He calls that a mixing of things. Hopkins doesn't like mixings." And then when the game was over, they sauntered about, out of the small garden into the larger one, and through the shrubberies, and out upon the fields, where they found the still lingering remnants of the haymaking. And Lily took a rake, and raked for two minutes; and Mr Crosbie, making an attempt to pitch the hay into the cart, had to pay half-a-crown for his footing to the haymakers; and Bell sat quiet under a tree, mindful of her complexion; whereupon Mr Crosbie, finding the hay-pitching not much to his taste, threw himself under the same tree also, quite after the manner of Apollo, as Lily said to her mother late in the evening. Then Bernard covered Lily with hay, which was a great feat in the jocose way for him; and Lily in returning the compliment, almost smothered Mr Crosbie,—by accident.

"Oh, Lily," said Bell.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mr Crosbie. It was Bernard's fault. Bernard, I never will come into a hayfield with you again." And so they all became very intimate; while Bell sat quietly under the tree, listening to a word or two now and then as Mr Crosbie chose to speak them. There is a kind of enjoyment to be had in society, in which very few words are necessary. Bell was less vivacious than her sister Lily; and when, an hour after this, she was dressing herself for dinner,

she acknowledged that she had passed a pleasant afternoon, though Mr Crosbie had not said very much.

Chapter III.

The Widow Dale of Allington

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As Mrs Dale, of the Small House, was not a Dale by birth, there can be no necessity for insisting on the fact that none of the Dale peculiarities should be sought for in her character. These peculiarities were not, perhaps, very conspicuous in her daughters, who had taken more in that respect from their mother than from their father; but a close observer might recognise the girls as Dales. They were constant, perhaps obstinate, occasionally a little uncharitable in their judgment, and prone to think that there was a great deal in being a Dale, though not prone to say much about it. But they had also a better pride than this, which had come to them as their mother's heritage.

Mrs Dale was certainly a proud woman,—not that there was anything appertaining to herself in which she took a pride. In birth she had been much lower than her husband, seeing that her grandfather had been almost nobody. Her fortune had been considerable for her rank in life, and on its proceeds she now mainly depended; but it had not been sufficient to give any of the pride of wealth. And she had been a beauty; according to my taste, was still very lovely; but certainly at this time of life, she, a widow of fifteen years' standing, with two grownup daughters, took no pride in her beauty. Nor had she any conscious pride in the fact that she was a lady. That she was a lady, inwards and outwards, from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet, in head, in heart, and in mind, a lady by education and a lady by nature, a lady also by birth in spite of that deficiency respecting her grandfather, I hereby state as a fact—*meo periculo*. And the squire, though he had no special love for

her, had recognised this, and in all respects treated her as his equal.

But her position was one which required that she should either be very proud or else very humble. She was poor, and yet her daughters moved in a position which belongs, as a rule, to the daughters of rich men only. This they did as nieces of the childless squire of Allington, and as his nieces she felt that they were entitled to accept his countenance and kindness, without loss of self-respect either to her or to them. She would have ill done her duty as a mother to them had she allowed any pride of her own to come between them and such advantage in the world as their uncle might be able to give them. On their behalf she had accepted the loan of the house in which she lived, and the use of many of the appurtenances belonging to her brother-in-law; but on her own account she had accepted nothing. Her marriage with Philip Dale had been disliked by his brother the squire, and the squire, while Philip was still living, had continued to show that his feelings in this respect were not to be overcome. They never had been overcome; and now, though the brother-in-law and sister-in-law had been close neighbours for years, living as one may say almost in the same family, they had never become friends. There had not been a word of quarrel between them. They met constantly. The squire had unconsciously come to entertain a profound respect for his brother's widow. The widow had acknowledged to herself the truth of the affection shown by the uncle to her daughters. But yet they had never come together as friends. Of her own money matters Mrs Dale had never spoken a word to the squire. Of his intention respecting the girls the squire had never spoken a word to the mother. And in this way they had lived and were living at Allington.

The life which Mrs Dale led was not altogether an easy life,—was not devoid of much painful effort on her part. The theory of her life one may say was this—that she should