

The American Senator

by

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1. Dillsborough

I never could understand why anybody should ever have begun to live at Dillsborough, or why the population there should have been at any time recruited by new comers. That a man with a family should cling to a house in which he has once established himself is intelligible. The butcher who supplied Dillsborough, or the baker, or the ironmonger, though he might not drive what is called a roaring trade, nevertheless found himself probably able to live, and might well hesitate before he would encounter the dangers of a more energetic locality. But how it came to pass that he first got himself to Dillsborough, or his father, or his grandfather before him, has always been a mystery to me. The town has no attractions, and never had any. It does not stand on a bed of coal and has no connection with iron. It has no water peculiarly adapted for beer, or for dyeing, or for the cure of maladies. It is not surrounded by beauty of scenery strong enough to bring tourists and holiday travellers. There is no cathedral there to form, with its bishops, prebendaries, and minor canons, the nucleus of a clerical circle. It manufactures nothing specially. It has no great horse fair, or cattle fair, or even pig market of special notoriety. Every Saturday farmers and graziers and buyers of corn and sheep do congregate in a sleepy fashion about the streets, but Dillsborough has no character of its own, even as a market town. Its chief glory is its parish church, which is ancient and inconvenient, having not as yet received any of those modern improvements which have of late become common throughout England; but its parish church, though remarkable, is hardly celebrated. The town consists chiefly of one street which is over a mile long, with a square or market-place in the middle, round which a few lanes with queer old names are congregated, and a second small open space among these lanes, in which the church stands. As you pass along the street north-west, away from the railway station and from London, there is a steep hill, beginning to rise just beyond the market-place. Up to that point it is the High Street, thence it is called Bullock's Hill. Beyond that you come to Norrington Road,--Norrington being the next town, distant from Dillsborough about twelve miles. Dillsborough, however, stands in the county of Rufford, whereas at the top of Bullock's Hill you enter the county of Ufford, of which Norrington is the assize town. The Dillsborough people are therefore divided, some two thousand five hundred of them belonging to Rufford, and the remaining five hundred to the neighbouring county. This accident has given rise to not a few feuds, Ufford being a large county, with pottery, and ribbons, and watches going on in the farther confines; whereas Rufford is small and thoroughly agricultural. The men at the top of Bullock's Hill are therefore disposed to think themselves better than their fellow-townfolks, though they are small in number and not specially thriving in their circumstances. At every interval of ten years, when the census is taken, the population of Dillsborough is always found to have fallen off in some slight degree. For a few

months after the publication of the figures a slight tinge of melancholy comes upon the town. The landlord of the Bush Inn, who is really an enterprising man in his way and who has looked about in every direction for new sources of business, becomes taciturn for a while and forgets to smile upon comers; Mr. Ribbs, the butcher, tells his wife that it is out of the question that she and the children should take that long-talked-of journey to the sea-coast; and Mr. Gregory Masters, the well-known old-established attorney of Dillsborough, whispers to some confidential friend that he might as well take down his plate and shut up his house. But in a month or two all that is forgotten, and new hopes spring up even in Dillsborough; Mr. Runciman at the Bush is putting up new stables for hunting-horses, that being the special trade for which he now finds that there is an opening; Mrs. Ribbs is again allowed to suggest Mare-Slocumb; and Mr. Masters goes on as he has done for the last forty years, making the best he can of a decreasing business.

Dillsborough is built chiefly of brick, and is, in its own way, solid enough. The Bush, which in the time of the present landlord's father was one of the best posting inns on the road, is not only substantial, but almost handsome. A broad coach way, cut through the middle of the house, leads into a spacious, well-kept, clean yard, and on each side of the coach way there are bay windows looking into the street,--the one belonging to the commercial parlour, and the other to the so-called coffee-room. But the coffee-room has in truth fallen away from its former purposes, and is now used for a farmer's ordinary on market days, and other similar purposes. Travellers who require the use of a public sitting-room must all congregate in the commercial parlour at the Bush. So far the interior of the house has fallen from its past greatness. But the exterior is maintained with much care. The brickwork up to the eaves is well pointed, fresh, and comfortable to look at. In front of the carriage-way swings on two massive supports the old sign of the Bush, as to which it may be doubted whether even Mr. Runciman himself knows that it has swung there, or been displayed in some fashion, since it was the custom for the landlord to beat up wine to freshen it before it was given to the customers to drink. The church, too, is of brick--though the tower and chancel are of stone. The attorney's house is of brick, which shall not be more particularly described now as many of the scenes which these pages will have to describe were acted there; and almost the entire High Street in the centre of the town was brick also.

But the most remarkable house in Dillsborough was one standing in a short thoroughfare called Hobbs Gate, leading down by the side of the Bush Inn from the market-place to Church Square, as it is called. As you pass down towards the church this house is on the right hand, and it occupies with its garden the whole space between the market-place and Church Square. But though the house enjoys the privilege of a large garden,--so large that the land being in the middle of a town would be of great value were it not that Dillsborough is in its decadence,--still it stands flush up to the street upon which the front door opens. It has an imposing flight of stone steps guarded by iron rails leading up to it, and on each side of the door there is a row of three windows, and on the two upper stories rows of seven windows. Over the door there is a covering, on which there

are grotesquely-formed, carved wooden faces; and over the centre of each window, let into the brickwork, is a carved stone. There are also numerous underground windows, sunk below the earth and protected by iron railings. Altogether the house is one which cannot fail to attract attention; and in the brickwork is clearly marked the date, 1701,--not the very best period for English architecture as regards beauty, but one in which walls and roofs, ceilings and buttresses, were built more substantially than they are to-day. This was the only house in Dillsborough which had a name of its own, and it was called Hoppet Hall, the Dillsborough chronicles telling that it had been originally built for and inhabited by the Hoppet family. The only Hoppet now left in Dillsborough is old Joe Hoppet, the ostler at the Bush; and the house, as was well known, had belonged to some member of the Morton family for the last hundred years at least. The garden and ground it stands upon comprise three acres, all of which are surrounded by a high brick wall, which is supposed to be coeval with the house. The best Ribston pippins,--some people say the only real Ribston pippins,--in all Rufford are to be found here, and its Burgundy pears and walnuts are almost equally celebrated. There are rumours also that its roses beat everything in the way of roses for ten miles round. But in these days very few strangers are admitted to see the Hoppet Hall roses. The pears and apples do make their way out, and are distributed either by Mrs. Masters, the attorney's wife, or Mr. Runciman, the innkeeper. The present occupier of the house is a certain Mr. Reginald Morton, with whom we shall also be much concerned in these pages, but whose introduction to the reader shall be postponed for awhile. The land around Dillsborough is chiefly owned by two landlords, of whom the greatest and richest is Lord Rufford. He, however, does not live near the town, but away at the other side of the county, and is not much seen in these parts unless when the hounds bring him here, or when, with two or three friends, he will sometimes stay for a few days at the Bush Inn for the sake of shooting the coverts. He is much liked by all sporting men, but is not otherwise very popular with the people round Dillsborough. A landlord if he wishes to be popular should be seen frequently. If he lives among his farmers they will swear by him, even though he raises his rental every ten or twelve years and never puts a new roof to a barn for them. Lord Rufford is a rich man who thinks of nothing but sport in all its various shapes, from pigeon-shooting at Hurlingham to the slaughter of elephants in Africa; and though he is lenient in all his dealings, is not much thought of in the Dillsborough side of the county, except by those who go out with the hounds. At Rufford, where he generally has a full house for three months in the year and spends a vast amount of money, he is more highly considered. The other extensive landlord is Mr. John Morton, a young man, who, in spite of his position as squire of Bragton, owner of Bragton Park, and landlord of the entire parishes of Bragton and Mallingham, the latter of which comes close up to the confines of Dillsborough,--was at the time at which our story begins, Secretary of Legation at Washington. As he had been an absentee since he came of age, soon after which time he inherited the property, he had been almost less liked in the neighbourhood than the lord. Indeed, no one in Dillsborough knew much about him, although Bragton Hall was but four miles from the town,

and the Mortons had possessed the property and lived on it for the last three centuries. But there had been extravagance, as will hereafter have to be told, and there had been no continuous residence at Bragton since the death of old Reginald Morton, who had been the best known and the best loved of all the squires in Rufford, and had for many years been master of the Rufford hounds. He had lived to a very great age, and, though the great-grandfather of the present man, had not been dead above twenty years. He was the man of whom the older inhabitants of Dillsborough and the neighbourhood still thought and still spoke when they gave vent to their feelings in favour of gentlemen. And yet the old squire in his latter days had been able to do little or nothing for them,--being sometimes backward as to the payment of money he owed among them. But he had lived all his days at Bragton Park, and his figure had been familiar to all eyes in the High Street of Dillsborough and at the front entrance of the Bush. People still spoke of old Mr. Reginald Morton as though his death had been a sore loss to the neighbourhood.

And there were in the country round sundry yeomen, as they ought to be called,--gentlemen-farmers as they now like to style themselves,--men who owned some acres of land, and farmed these acres themselves. Of these we may specially mention Mr. Lawrence Twentyman, who was quite the gentleman-farmer. He possessed over three hundred acres of land, on which his father had built an excellent house. The present Mr. Twentyman, Lawrence Twentyman, Esquire, as he was called by everybody, was by no means unpopular in the neighbourhood. He not only rode well to hounds but paid twenty-five pounds annually to the hunt, which entitled him to feel quite at home in his red coat. He generally owned a racing colt or two, and attended meetings; but was supposed to know what he was about, and to have kept safely the five or six thousand pounds which his father had left him. And his farming was well done; for though he was, out-and-out, a gentleman-farmer, he knew how to get the full worth in work done for the fourteen shillings a week which he paid to his labourers,--a deficiency in which knowledge is the cause why gentlemen in general find farming so expensive an amusement. He was a handsome, good-looking man of about thirty, and would have been a happy man had he not been too ambitious in his aspirations after gentry. He had been at school for three years at Cheltenham College, which, together with his money and appearance and undoubted freehold property, should, he thought, have made his position quite secure to him; but, though he sometimes called young Hampton of Hampton Wick "Hampton," and the son of the rector of Dillsborough "Mainwaring," and always called the rich young brewers from Norrington "Botsey,"--partners in the well-known firm of Billbrook & Botsey; and though they in return called him "Larry" and admitted the intimacy, still he did not get into their houses. And Lord Rufford, when he came into the neighbourhood, never asked him to dine at the Bush. And--worst of all,--some of the sporting men and others in the neighbourhood, who decidedly were not gentlemen, also called him "Larry." Mr. Runciman always did so. Twenty or twenty-five years ago Runciman had been his father's special friend, before the house had been built and before the days at Cheltenham College. Remembering this Lawrence was too good a fellow to rebuke Runciman; but to younger men of

that class he would sometimes make himself objectionable. There was another keeper of hunting stables, a younger man, named Stubbings, living at Stanton Corner, a great hunting rendezvous about four miles from Dillsborough; and not long since Twentyman had threatened to lay his whip across Stubbings' shoulders if Stubbings ever called him "Larry" again. Stubbings, who was a little man and rode races, only laughed at Mr. Twentyman who was six feet high, and told the story round to all the hunt. Mr. Twentyman was more laughed at than perhaps he deserved. A man should not have his Christian name used by every Tom and Dick without his sanction. But the difficulty is one to which men in the position of Mr. Lawrence Twentyman are often subject.

Those whom I have named, together with Mr. Mainwaring the rector, and Mr. Surtees his curate, made up the very sparse aristocracy of Dillsborough. The Hamptons of Hampton Wick were Ufford men, and belonged, rather to Norrington than Dillsborough. The Botseys, also from Norrington, were members of the U.R.U., or Ufford and Rufford United Hunt Club; but they did not much affect Dillsborough as a town. Mr. Mainwaring, who has been mentioned, lived in another brick house behind the church, the old parsonage of St. John's. There was also a Mrs. Mainwaring, but she was an invalid. Their family consisted of one son, who was at Brasenose at this time. He always had a horse during the Christmas vacation, and if rumour did not belie him, kept two or three up at Oxford. Mr. Surtees, the curate, lived in lodgings in the town. He was a painstaking, clever, young man, with aspirations in church matters, which were always being checked by his rector. *Quieta non movere* was the motto by which the rector governed his life, and he certainly was not at all the man to allow his curate to drive him into activity.

Such, at the time of our story, was the little town of Dillsborough.

2. The Morton Family

I can hardly describe accurately the exact position of the Masters family without first telling all that I know about the Morton family; and it is absolutely essential that the reader should know all the Masters family intimately. Mr. Masters, as I have said in the last chapter, was the attorney in Dillsborough, and the Mortons had been for centuries past the squires of Bragton.

I need not take the reader back farther than old Reginald Morton. He had come to the throne of his family as a young man, and had sat upon it for more than half a century. He had been a squire of the old times, having no inclination for London seasons, never wishing to keep up a second house, quite content with his position as quire of Bragton, but with considerable pride about him as to that position. He had always liked to have his house full, and had hated petty oeconomies. He had for many years hunted the county at his own expense, the amusement at first not having been so expensive as it afterwards became. When he began the work, it had been considered sufficient to hunt twice a week. Now the Rufford and Ufford hounds have four days, and sometimes a bye. It went much against Mr. Reginald Morton's pride when he was first driven to take a subscription.

But the temporary distress into which the family fell was caused not so much by his own extravagance as by that of two sons, and by his indulgence in regard to them. He had three children, none of whom were very fortunate in life. The eldest, John, married the daughter of a peer, stood for Parliament, had one son, and died before he was forty, owing something over 20,000 pounds. The estate was then worth 7,000 pounds a year. Certain lands not lying either in Bragton or Mallingham were sold, and that difficulty was surmounted, not without a considerable diminution of income. In process of time the grandson, who was a second John Morton, grew up and married, and became the father of a third John Morton, the young man who afterwards became owner of the property and Secretary of Legation at Washington. But the old squire outlived his son and his grandson, and when he died had three or four great-grand-children playing about the lawns of Bragton Park. The peer's daughter had lived, and had for many years drawn a dower from the Bragton property, and had been altogether a very heavy incumbrance.

But the great trial of the old man's life, as also the great romance, had arisen from the career of his second son, Reginald. Of all his children, Reginald had been the dearest to him. He went to Oxford, and had there spent much money; not as young men now spend money, but still to an extent that had been grievous to the old squire. But everything was always paid for Reginald. It was necessary, of course, that he should have a profession, and he took a commission in the army. As a young man he went to Canada. This was in 1829, when all the world was at peace, and his only achievement in Canada was to marry a young woman who is reported to have been pretty and good, but who had no advantages either

of fortune or birth. She was, indeed, the daughter of a bankrupt innkeeper in Montreal. Soon after this he sold out and brought his wife home to Bragton. It was at this period of the squire's life that the romance spoken of occurred. John Morton, the brother with the aristocratic wife, was ten or twelve years older than Reginald, and at this time lived chiefly at Bragton when he was not in town. He was, perhaps, justified in regarding Bragton as almost belonging to him, knowing as he did that it must belong to him after his father's lifetime, and to his son after him. His anger against his brother was hot, and that of his wife still hotter. He himself had squandered thousands, but then he was the heir. Reginald, who was only a younger brother, had sold his commission. And then he had done so much more than this! He had married a woman who was not a lady! John was clearly of opinion that at any rate the wife should not be admitted into Bragton House. The old squire in those days was not a happy man; he had never been very strong-minded, but now he was strong enough to declare that his house-door should not be shut against a son of his,--or a son's wife, as long as she was honest. Hereupon the Honourable Mrs. Morton took her departure, and was never seen at Bragton again in the old squire's time. Reginald Morton came to the house, and soon afterwards another little Reginald was born at Bragton Park. This happened as long ago as 1835, twenty years before the death of the old squire. But there had been another child, a daughter, who had come between the two sons, still living in these days, who will become known to any reader who will have patience to follow these pages to the end. She married, not very early in life, a certain Sir William Ushant, who was employed by his country in India and elsewhere, but who found, soon after his marriage, that the service of his country required that he should generally leave his wife at Bragton. As her father had been for many years a widower, Lady Ushant became the mistress of the house. But death was very busy with the Mortons. Almost every one died, except the squire himself and his daughter, and that honourable dowager, with her income and her pride who could certainly very well have been spared. When at last, in 1855, the old squire went, full of years, full of respect, but laden also with debts and money troubles, not only had his son John, and his grandson John, gone before him, but Reginald and his wife were both lying in Bragton Churchyard. The elder branch of the family, John the great-grandson, and his little sisters, were at once taken away from Bragton by the honourable grandmother. John, who was then about seven years old, was of course the young squire, and was the owner of the property. The dowager, therefore, did not undertake an altogether unprofitable burden. Lady Ushant was left at the house, and with Lady Ushant, or rather immediately subject to her care, young Reginald Morton, who was then nineteen years of age, and who was about to go to Oxford. But there immediately sprang up family lawsuits, instigated by the honourable lady on behalf of her grandchildren, of which Reginald Morton was the object. The old man had left certain outlying properties to his grandson Reginald, of which Hoppet Hall was a part. For eight or ten years the lawsuit was continued, and much money was expended. Reginald was at last successful, and became the undoubted owner of Hoppet Hall; but in the meantime he went to Germany for his

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