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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE  
1815—1915

IN this instance the novelist is more interesting than his novels, superior though they confessedly are. His is the story of affluence wrested from penury, high mental efficiency in spite of inadequate schooling, the breaking of the solitary into society, a bright end from a dark beginning. And for this fascinating narrative with its subtle exhilaration we are debtors to the subject himself. Other men may have analyzed their careers as thoroughly as Mr. Trollope did his, but none of them ever gave their findings with such stark frankness. Augustine's Confessions, on the one hand, are a personal disclosure, it is true, but they relate mainly to religious experience, while the Confessions of Rousseau are so patently inflated and gilded by his imaginative genius as not to be reliable for evidence. Then, too, Trollope distinctly deprecates anything of that nature, so that his autobiography, as might be anticipated, is entirely different. Hawthorne said that Trollope cut out a piece of the earth and put it under a glass so you could see people going about their tasks and living their lives all unconscious of observation. What he did with the imaginary beings of his novels he did with his own real self. He detached himself from the human conglomerate. You see him at work and at play, the real Anthony Trollope, in every period of life, in every occupation, the motives that actuated him, his ideals, the circumstances tending to the formation of the same and the methods adopted for their attainment. If he is severe with contemporary writers their admirers have the satisfaction that he was not a whit less severe with himself. In the most impersonal way he reviews and criticises his work as a whole and item by item.

Little soiled hands stretch appealingly out of the chapter entitled "My Education." Does luckless boyhood make more pitiful plea anywhere in literature? One fairly sees him threading his way up the muddy lanes between the tumble-down farmhouse that was his home and the school where to all intents he was

a charity-pupil. It was a place in which the theories of Draco held sway, namely, "Hang a little boy for stealing apples and other little boys will not steal apples." Five scourgings a day was the maximum, and he got them all. His teachers knew him by his boots and trousers and he knew them by their ferules. One shares with Trollope the resentment which he cherished for half a century against the headmaster who stopped him on the street to ask, with the thunder of Jove in his voice, whether it was possible that Harrow School was disgraced by so disreputably dirty a little boy. One finds himself gratified, as Trollope was, in the compensating reflection that, while a kindlier master actually reached an archbishopric, the Jovistic one never got beyond a deanship. He might not have been able to define the paradox of mixing poverty and gentle standing, but he felt it, and it was something intolerable. He coveted that juvenile manhood which enables some boys to hold up their heads. Pity the isolation of those days in which an intimacy with the very boys who spurned him would have been his Elysium. The worst horror of it all was the fixed belief that the solitude and poverty of his boyhood insured poverty and solitude for life. On the adverse fate of his father the mature man declares he often meditated for hours. It was one long tragedy. Finely educated, of great parts, physically strong, addicted to no vices, affectionate by nature, born to fair fortune, yet everything went wrong. His ill temper drove clients from him. His literary work, though prodigious, was fatuous, and his ruinous delusion was that money might be made from farming without any previous training. The choice at length was between exile and the debtor's prison. The mournful sequel was a grave in a foreign land. Yet it is an open question whether Trollope is not, after all, a considerable debtor to his unfortunate father. It may have been the denial of amusement and gratification in his youth which led him to the wholesome indulgences of his manhood. Sight of his father's reams of unmarketable manuscript may have spurred him to produce something that people would wish to have and to set as high a price upon it as the market would pay. He took the wooden monks and nuns of his father's illusory ecclesiastical encyclopædia, converted them into bishops,

deans, rectors, wardens, and gave them wives, mothers, aunts, and sweethearts, throwing in a multitude of other folk for good measure.

That is a fascinating portrait which Trollope frames in the chapter which bears the title "My Mother." Her countenance was the one illuminating ray of his eerie boyhood. As if to give us pledge of fidelity in the sketch, he does not hesitate to criticize her. She affected a Liberal role. She welcomed patriot exiles who had distant ideas of sacrificing themselves upon the altar of liberty. In after years, however, when marquesses had been gracious to her, she became a Tory and thought archduchesses were sweet. With her, politics was, at best, a thing of the heart. She was neither clear-sighted nor accurate. In her attempts to describe morals, manners, and even facts, she was unable to avoid the pitfalls of exaggeration. This apparently undutiful criticism is more than offset by the high lights upon the picture. This emotional, unlogical woman slipped into the breach and retrieved the ruined fortunes of the family and, strange to say, by the very instrument which had wrought the havoc—the pen! Running parallel with her visible occupation, that of nurse and household manager, was her invisible calling of novelist, which she plied hours before the family began to stir for the day. Doctors' vials and ink-bottles were the symbols of her double craft. Her whole heart was by the bedside of the dying members of her family, yet she continued the work which was the sole means of providing comforts, and even necessities. She divided herself into two parts, keeping her intellect clear from the trouble of the world and fit for duty. She was unselfish, affectionate, industrious, with great capacity for enjoyment and high physical gifts, had creative power, considerable humor and genuine feeling of romance. "She could dance with other people's legs, eat and drink with other people's palates, be proud with the luster of other people's finery. Any mother can do that for her own daughter, but she could do it for any girl. Laughter of those she loved was an exquisite pleasure to her. Of all people she was the most joyous, at least the most capable of joy." Trollope's sketch of his mother is a revelation of himself. It was from her he got that intimate knowledge of

female character, that discernment of the trifles which influence women, in short, that characteristic which has been called the feminine element of his mind. His very methods of composition and his adroitness in marketing his wares can be easily traced to his mother's example.

Trollope's facetious saying that he became anxious for the "welfare of letters" put his long career in the postal service in a nutshell. He was genuinely attached to the department and "steeped himself in postal waters." He puts his postal creed in the following phrases: That the public in little villages should be enabled to buy postage stamps; should have their letters delivered free and at an early hour; that pillar-boxes should be put up for them (he originated the device in England); letter carriers and sorters should not be overworked and should be adequately paid; should have some hours to themselves, especially on Sunday; should be made to earn their wages; should not be crushed by the damnable system of so-called merit. That he ran the two professions parallel to each other for almost a life-time illustrates at once his versatility and his industry. He never used time which belonged to the state for his own emolument. He says, "A man who takes public money without earning it is to me so odious that I can find no pardon for him in my heart." The government proved its satisfaction with him by repeatedly making him commissioner to make postal treaties with foreign nations. What he said of his work as a novelist he might have said of his public service: "It was not on my conscience that I ever scamped my work." When still a young man a relative inclined to patronize asked him what his ambition was. "A seat in the House," was his laconic reply. The sarcastic retort was that, as far as the deponent's knowledge went, few post-office clerks became members of Parliament. That long-remembered taunt no doubt spurred Trollope on to his own political venture. The outcome of it was a sizable bill for expenses and a place at bottom of the poll, as his doctrines were all "leather and prunella" to the men whose votes he solicited. As he could not have a seat on the "benches" he had to crave one in the gallery. From that coign of vantage he could tell of the proceedings almost as well as though his fortune had



allowed him to fall asleep in the House itself. His so-called Parliamentary Series gives such insight in the machinery of English government as no formal history could ever afford. Two aphorisms are evidently suggested by his experience: "To serve one's country without pay is the grandest work a man can do," and, "Of all studies the study of politics is one in which a man can make himself most useful to his fellow-creatures."

No man of his times and craft was in the way of being better misunderstood than Anthony Trollope. On the face of the returns he was sordid, extortionate with his publishers, thrusting his wares on the market in quantities out of proportion to any normal gauge, a public servant, yet using the government's time for private emolument, and with it all a gluttonous, vociferous, hound-riding, egotistical pleasure-seeker. Yet the story of his life as written by himself is in no sense an apologia. Need of vindication, explanation, or even extenuation seems not so much as to have crossed his mind. Some other reason for the autobiography must be sought. Nor is it hard to find. This meat-eating, ale-drinking fox-hunter has the audacity to count himself actually a preacher and to affirm his novel a pulpit! He proposed to make his sacred desk salutary and agreeable to his audience, naïvely suggesting that ordinary sermons are not often thought to be so. Trollope is thought to have given the finishing stroke to the prejudice against novel-reading as an immoral practice—a prejudice against which Walter Scott had made the first thrust with *Waverley*. But he was not willing that fiction should be just tolerated. He said, "At present there exists a feeling that novels at their best are but innocent. They are read as men eat pastry after dinner, not without some inward conviction that the taste is vain, if not vicious. It is neither vain nor vicious." Again: "Prejudice against the reading of novels is overcome, but prejudice still exists in reference to the appreciation in which they are professed to be held, and robs them of that high character which they may claim to have earned by their grace, honesty and good teaching." So far from being merely innocent he looked upon the novel as a school for manners and morals. He realized the all but universal hearing that might be obtained. He said, "If I can teach politicians that they can

do their business better by truth than by falsehood I do a great service, but it is done to a limited number of persons. But if I can make young men and women believe that truth in love will make them happy, then, if my writings be popular, I shall have a very large class of pupils." He freely gave the palm to poetry as the highest style of literature, but at the same time realized the comparative smallness of its clientage compared with fiction, and believed the latter to be the greater teacher because it could spread the truth much wider. The masses do not read the great poets, or, reading them, often miss their message at least in part. Conscious of the power the novelist wields by reason of his wider hearing, he proposed to impregnate the mind of the novel-reader with the feeling that "truth prevails where falsehood fails; that a girl will be loved as she is pure and sweet and unselfish; that a man will be honored in proportion as he is true, honest, and brave; that things meanly done are odious, and things nobly done beautiful and gracious."

It is one of the paradoxes of literature that this burly, blustering, aggressive man should treat the feminine character with so deft and gentle a hand and portray the tender passion in both sexes with a perfect fidelity. He treats of love with absolute frankness. He intends that girls shall know from him what to expect when lovers come, and young men what may be the charms of love. His lovers long for each other and are not ashamed to say so. He thinks that the honest love of an honest man is a treasure which a good girl may fairly hope to win. Yet it would have been his horror if word of his had polluted the "sweet young hearts whose delicacy and cleanliness of thought is matter of pride with us." He was very zealous not to lend attraction to the sin which he indicated. It gave him greatest satisfaction to believe that no girl could rise from the reading of his pages less modest than she was before, and that some had been even taught and strengthened in modesty. He said, "If I have not made the strength and virtue predominate over the faults and vice I have not painted the picture as I intended." His aim was to portray sin so that the girl who reads shall say, "O! Not like that; let me not be like that!" and that every youth shall say, "Let me not have such a one as that to

press to my bosom! Anything but that!" But Trollope did not merely hold a brief to virtue, he was a zealous and effective pleader for all moral qualities. He says admirably, "In these times, when the desire to be honest is pressed so hard by the ambition to be great; in which riches are the easiest road to greatness; when the temptations to which men are subjected dull their eyes to the perfected iniquities of others, it is so hard for a man to decide vigorously that the pitch so many are handling will defile him if touched, men's conduct will be actuated much by that which is depicted to them as leading to glorious or inglorious results." As one reads sentiments like these the scarlet coat of hound-rider dissolves and the somber frock of preacher replaces it. Trollope has achieved in the reader the chief aim of his biography; namely, the justification of his profession as a novelist.

As a preacher prizes opportunities to preach, and omits none, Trollope allowed no abatement in the volume of his homilies of fancy. But, realizing also that no one feels it a duty to read a novel as one does a volume of history or science, he deliberately proposed to win readers by giving them pleasure. He never risked being dull in order to be profound. He said sententiously, "Of all needs a book has the chief is that it be readable," and, "A novelist must write because he has a story to tell and not because he has to tell a story." By habitually ruling out the extraneous he avoided the pitfall of the pulpit. He admitted no sentence, not even any word, that did not directly tend to the main object in view. Another winning quality is his lucidity. His pages are pellucid. This was not by chance, or just the fortunate trait of his mind. Like Macaulay, he made it his study and aim. Again, he was a finished observer of human life. He took daily and minute toll of his fellows, not that he might make literal transcripts of them; he flatly denies that in any instance he ever did this; but that he might know how under given conditions certain characters would inveterately act. He proposed to give a picture of common life enlivened with humor and sweetened with pathos. Thus he was beforehand with color-photography by half a century. He caught the moral tints as well as lights and shades, on the one hand, of the English cathedral close and its unique population, which

has ever since and steadily been fading from current life; and, on the other hand, of the English Parliament, which also is suffering its mutations.

Well may William Dean Howells pronounce Anthony Trollope a profound moralist; and Leslie Stephen call him sturdy, wholesome, kindly; and Walter Savage Landor admire him for his unaffected openness; and Hawthorne declare his novels to be solid; and Mrs. Oliphant say that the best of him will be inscribed in the social annals of England; and Escott predict that among the leading literary features of the twentieth century will be a permanent revival of popular interest in the novels and in the man who wrote them.

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