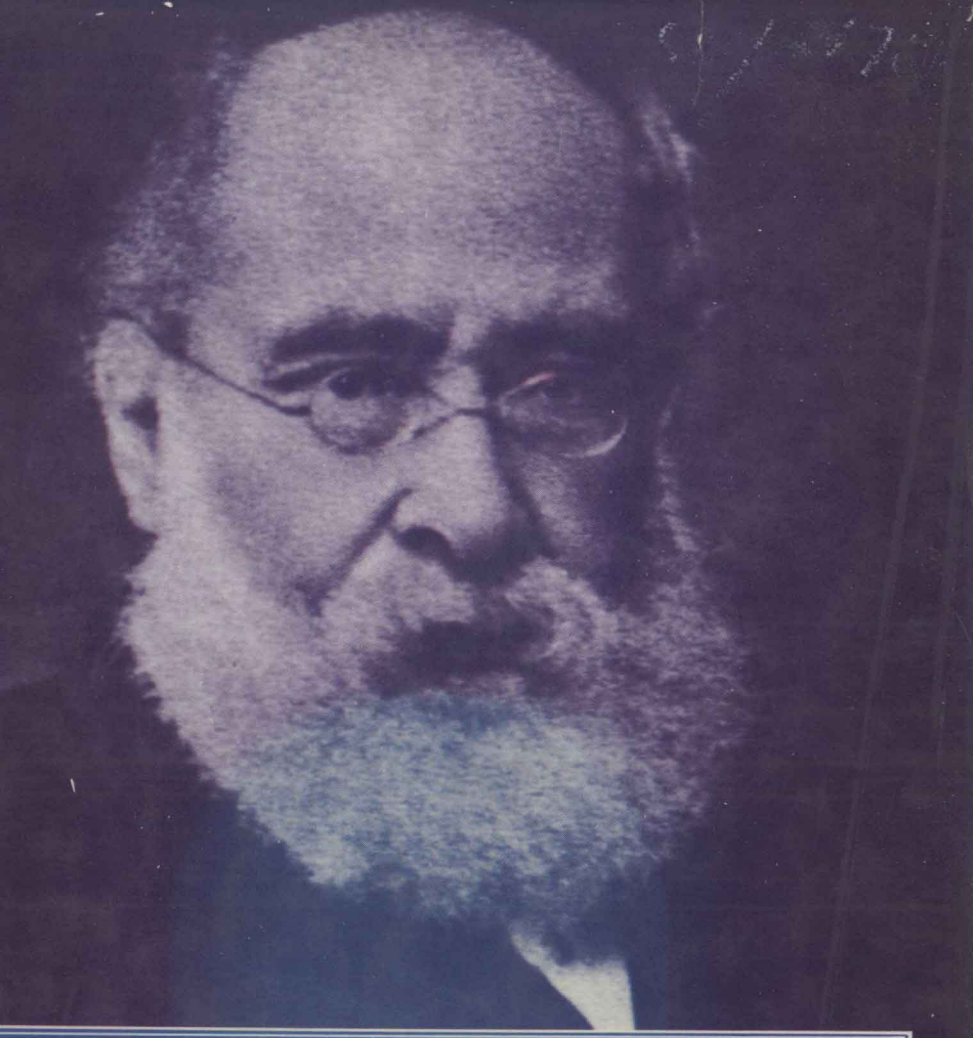

THE TROLLOPE CRITICS

Edited by N. John Hall

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Introduction

The criticism of Trollope's works brought together in this collection has been drawn from books and articles published since his death. Much of the material contemporary with Trollope is available in Donald Smalley's *Critical Heritage* (1969), and David Skilton in *Anthony Trollope and His Contemporaries* (1972) has provided judicious commentary on this criticism and greatly extended the bibliography of such reviews and articles. Studies of individual novels have not been included since it would have been impossible to make a representative selection for an author who produced forty-seven novels of surprisingly even quality. For the 'essential Trollope' was there at the very start, in *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, published in 1847, as it was in the *The Landleaguers*, left unfinished at his death in 1882. Moreover, the never-ending practice of ranking the novels goes on with little consensus. Among the forty-seven titles are at least twenty first-rate novels and some half dozen – or is it a dozen? – masterworks of Victorian fiction, but one is hard put to find two Trollopians in agreement about which are which. However, the reader, with the help of the index, may easily find substantial discussions of particular novels, including those of the Barsetshire and Palliser series, as well as, for instance, *He Knew He Was Right, Ayala's Angel* and *Mr. Scarborough's Family.*

From a reading of the books and articles on Trollope published since his death there emerges the chief justification for concentrating on evaluations of his work as a whole: the unanswered question of exactly wherein Trollope's distinctive excellence lies. Each of these essays attempts to solve 'the Trollope problem', each tries 'to declare his quiddity'. In 1927 Michael Sadleir wrote: 'Trollope's quality remains intangible, baffles resolution. In theme familiar, in treatment undistinguished, his work is nevertheless potent in appeal, unrivalled in its power to hold the attention of readers of any kind and of any generation . . . it is almost irritating that books in themselves so lustily prosaic should be so hard of definition'.[1] More than fifty years later, the mystery of Trollope's appeal still eludes anything like complete explanation. But a prodigious amount of criticism has been produced, and the writers represented in this collection have, I believe, contributed much that is enlightening and provocative.

The twenty essays range from Henry James's appraisal, written in 1883 shortly after Trollope's death, to examples from the upsurge of critical work done within the past few years. Arranged in chronological order, these essays tell something, however indirectly, of Trollope's critical reputation. But the story of his reputation is a large subject in itself. The history of the 'Trollope revival' since the early 1920s is fairly clear, associated as it rightly is with Michael Sadleir's publications of that decade and the extensive reissues of some thirty Trollope titles by Oxford's World's Classics in the 1920s and 1930s. It is noteworthy, however, that when Sadleir's important *Trollope: A Commentary* was published in 1927, nearly two dozen Trollope titles were already in print. Trollope's great following among British readers during the Second World War is well known, and Elizabeth Bowen gave a convincing account of this wartime popularity in her radio play published as *Anthony Trollope: A New Judgement* (1946). In recent years the number of his readers has again increased, doubtless to some extent as a result of the popular television series 'The Pallisers'. Readers today on both sides of the Atlantic find many Trollope titles in print.

In academic circles, acceptance of Trollope has been decidedly slow. He has always been more of a favourite with 'ordinary readers' and fellow novelists than with academics and professional critics. Perhaps the most celebrated dismissal of Trollope came from F. R. Leavis, who spoke of Henry James and George Eliot as far above 'the ruck of Gaskells and Trollopes and Merediths' and quoted with approval an examination paper that called Trollope 'a lesser Thackeray', explaining in turn that even Thackeray has 'nothing to offer the reader whose demand goes beyond "creation of characters" and so on . . . for the reader it is merely a matter of going on and on; nothing has been done by the close to justify the space taken – except, of course, that time has been killed'.[2] Van Wyck Brooks's estimate is more qualified but nearly as dismissive: 'one has to be interested in England to enjoy Trollope, but to enjoy Balzac, all one needs is to be interested in life'.[3] It is certainly a fact that Trollope has received less than his due in books surveying English literature or the novel, and still less recognition in university curricula and reading lists. But slowly, and after the at first relatively isolated labours of Professor Bradford Booth, who founded *The Trollopian* in 1945 (later renamed *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*), edited Trollope's *Letters* in 1951, and published widely on his chosen subject, academic eminence has at last come to Trollope. In 1977–8 alone, eight full-length studies of Trollope were published. The selected bibliography appended to this collection, large as it is, includes only part

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of the published work on Trollope and omits altogether the numerous Ph.D. dissertations concerning him.

More controversial, and requiring more consideration, is the story of Trollope's reputation from his death until the First World War. The received account, largely that given in 1927 by Michael Sadleir in his *Commentary*, was that after Trollope's heyday in the 1860s, his popularity with both readers and critics gradually declined, to the extent that upon his death he was decidely *démodé* and headed for oblivion. Then came Trollope's posthumous *Autobiography*, with its emphasis upon craftsmanship rather than inspiration and its tale of 'mechanical' work habits. This book, we are told, extinguished Trollope's reputation altogether with the new generation. Sadleir's reading of events has been challenged, most effectively and most recently by R. C. Terry in his book *Anthony Trollope: The Artist in Hiding*. Terry contends that the legend of Trollope's downfall and oblivion has been much exaggerated. Sadleir, says Terry, 'saw himself as a lonely pioneer for a writer with fairly dubious claims on posterity . . . he made more than he need have done of the alleged disappearance of the novelist'. In the first place, Trollope's following at his death was still immense, and practically all the obituary notices proclaimed his continued popularity. Even *The Times*' notice, by Mrs Humphry Ward, which Sadleir quoted to prove his point, was distinctly more positive than Sadleir thought. Terry examines the obituary notices and the criticism of the following years, including very favourable reviews of the supposedly death-dealing *Autobiography*, and demonstrates satisfactorily that 'the period of neglect lasted at most some dozen years between the eighties and the turn of the century'. He assembles a list of critics from both America (where, if anything, the revival began still earlier) and England who supported or took notice of the renewed interest in Trollope. 'It is quite clear', concludes Terry, 'from reprints and articles that the early years of the century saw Trollope's reputation rising rapidly. On 9 September 1909, *The Times Literary Supplement* devoted its entire front page to the novelist. Trollope was back in vogue.'[4]

One aspect of Trollope's alleged disappearance that ought to receive more attention (although Terry says something on the subject and offers some evidence that Trollope 'remained a sound commercial investment for Mudie for at least seventy years'), is the republication of his books. The number of titles brought back into print in a given period is of course a more accurate barometer of an author's popularity than critical response during those years. In England, during the 1880s and 1890s, Ward, Lock's 'Select Library of Fiction' – taken over from Chapman & Hall – issued no

fewer than thirty-two Trollope titles at two shillings (2*s*. 6*d* in cloth). The Select Library comprised some 500 works, undated but numbered, and it is worth noting that Trollope's were the first in the series, numbers 1–32:

Doctor Thorne
The Macdermots of Ballycloran
Rachel Ray
The Kellys and the O'Kellys
Tales of All Countries
Castle Richmond
The Bertrams
Miss Mackenzie
The Belton Estate
Lotta Schmidt
An Editor's Tales
Ralph the Heir
La Vendée
Lady Anna
The Vicar of Bullhampton
Sir Harry Hotspur
Is He Popenjoy?
An Eye for an Eye
Cousin Henry
Dr. Wortle's School
Harry Heathcote
Orley Farm
Can you Forgive Her?
Phineas Finn
He Knew He Was Right
The Eustace Diamonds
Phineas Redux
The Prime Minister
The Duke's Children
Ayala's Angel
South and West Australia
New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania

The omission of all the Barsetshire novels except *Doctor Thorne* was doubtless by arrangement with Chapman & Hall, who brought out the series in 1878, 1887 and 1891–3.

The following is an incomplete tally[5] of other London publishers' Trollope titles, issued during the period of neglect, or supposed neglect, 1885–1915:

Chatto & Windus:	*John Caldigate*, 1885, 1909
	Marion Fay, 1885, 1889, 1899
	The Landleaguers, 1885
	The American Senator, 1886
	Kept in the Dark, 1891
	Why Frau Frohmann Raised Her Prices, 1892
	The Way We Live Now, 1907
Smith, Elder:	*The Small House at Allington*, 1885, 1894, 1902, 1903
	Framley Parsonage, 1886, 1890, 1896
Longman:	*The Warden*, 1886
	Barchester Towers, 1886, 1891, 1900

Macmillan:	*Thackeray*, 1892, 1900, 1902, 1906, 1909, 1912 *The Three Clerks*, 1900
Bentley:	*The Three Clerks*, 1900
John Lane, New Pocket Library:	*Doctor Thorne*, 1901 *The Warden*, 1901 *Barchester Towers*, 1901 *Framley Parsonage*, 1903 *The Bertrams*, 1904 *The Three Clerks*, 1904 *Castle Richmond*, 1905 *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, 1905 *Orley Farm*, 1906 *The Small House*, 1906 *Rachel Ray*, 1906 *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*, 1906 *Can You Forgive Her?*, 1908
Blackie:	*Barchester Towers*, 1903 *Framley Parsonage*, 1904
Long:	*The Three Clerks*, 1903
Bell:	The six Barsetshire novels, 1906 (with frequent reprintings of individual titles e.g. *The Warden*, 1909, 1910, 1913) *Phineas Finn*, 1911 *Phineas Redux*, 1911, 1913
Dent:	The six Barsetshire novels, 1906–9 *The Golden Lion of Granpère*, 191–?
Oxford, World's Classics:	*The Three Clerks*, 1907
Cassell:	*Barchester Towers*, 1909
Collins:	*Barchester Towers*, 1909 *Framley Parsonage*, 1909 *Orley Farm*, 1910 *The Claverings*, 1910
Routledge:	The six Barsetshire novels, 1909
Nelson:	Five of the six Barsetshire novels, 1913–15
Bohn's Popular Library:	The six Barsetshire novels, 1913

In America, Trollope's works were at least equally accessible. The thirty-two titles of Ward, Lock were distributed in New York, as were the thirteen John Lane titles (in some cases one year later) and those of Nelson. The six Dent titles were of course available from Dutton in New York. But the American house that did the most to keep Trollope before his readers was Dodd, Mead, with nineteen titles. Publishers with Trollope on their list during the thirty-year period include:

Munro, Seaside Library:	*The Warden*, 1885 *Harry Heathcote*, 1885 *The Prime Minister*, 1885 *Ralph the Heir*, 1886 *The Golden Lion*, 1886, 1896
Millar:	*An Old Man's Love*, 1885
Dodd, Mead:	The six Barsetshire novels, 1892 (with frequent reprintings of individual titles, e.g. *The Warden*, 1893, 1894, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1905, 1908, 1912, 1913) The six Parliamentary novels, 1892–3 (with frequent reprintings of individual titles, e.g. *Can You Forgive Her?*, 1893, 1897, 1900, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1906, 1908, 1911, 1912) *An Autobiography*, 1905, 1911 *Orley Farm*, 1905, 1906, 1911, 1913 *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, 1906, 1910, 1913 *Is He Popenjoy?*, 1907, 1913 *John Caldigate*, 1907, 1911, 1913 (these last four titles also issued together as 'The Manor House Novels') *The Belton Estate*, 1912
Knight (Boston):	*Christmas at Thompson Hall*, 1894
Lupton:	*The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, 1894?
Lovell, Corgell:	*The Prime Minister*, 1895?
Page (Boston):	*Christmas at Thompson Hall*, 1897
Harper:	*Thackeray*, 1899, 1902
Gebbie (Philadelphia):	The six Barsetshire novels, 1900. The six Palliser novels, 1900–2

Fowle:	*Thackeray*, 189–?, 1905?
Century:	*Barchester Towers*, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1906

It is clear that Trollope never suffered anything resembling total eclipse: evidently the commonplace about Trollope being much *read* has proved true during every decade since he first rose to great popularity in the 1860s. Trollope's novels continued to be commercially attractive to publishers, even, to some extent, during the years of his poorest showing, the 1890s; and during the first decade of the twentieth century there was a veritable flood of reprintings.

To this brief overview of the early years of Trollope's reputation I wish to add excerpts from writers who, although omitted from this collection because of limitations of space, produced criticism important either in its own right or as representative of a generation. The first such critic, George Saintsbury, can in fact represent two generations, so far apart were his pronouncements on Trollope. In 1895, his stance was doubtless typical of other members of the critical establishment:

> I admit that in the days of the 'Chronicles of Barset', Mr. Trollope gave me a very great deal of pleasure. . . .
>
> I do not know that I myself ever took Mr. Trollope for one of the immortals; but really between 1860 and 1870 it might have been excusable so to take him. . . . From almost the beginning until quite the end, Mr. Trollope . . . showed the faculty of constructing a thoroughly readable story. You might not be extraordinarily enamoured of it; you might not care to read it again; you could certainly feel no enthusiastic reverence for or gratitude to its author. But it was eminently satisfactory . . . .
>
> And yet even such work is doomed to pass—with everything that is of the day and the craftsman, not of eternity and art. . . . The fault of the Trollopian novel is in the quality of the Trollopian art. It is shrewd, competent, not insufficiently supported by observation, not deficient in more than respectable expressive power, careful, industrious, active enough. But it never has the last exalting touch of genius, it is everyday, commonplace, and even not infrequently vulgar. These are the three things that great art never is.[6]

'Comparative oblivion' is prophesied for Trollope. But a quarter of a century later Saintsbury forthrightly revised his estimate of 'this amazingly prolific, and at the same time singularly substantial, novelist'. The later

novels, Saintsbury admits, are better than he had thought, though not coming up to the standard of those of the Barsetshire period. But *Barchester Towers* he calls 'one of the best of English novels short of the absolute "Firsts" '. Moreover, *The Small House at Allington* and *Can You Forgive Her?* fall very little short of *The Last Chronicle* and *Barchester Towers*. 'There are few *men* in fiction I *like* better, and should more like to have known, than Archdeacon Grantly.' Saintsbury sums up: 'I do not think that [Trollope] will, by the best judges, ever be thought worthy of the very highest place among novelists or among English novelists. He has something no doubt of the "*for* all time", but he is not exactly "*of* all time". Or, to put the calculus the other way, he is by no means only "*for* an age"; but he is to a certain lowering though not disqualifying degree "*of* an age".' This may seem grudging praise, but when it comes to naming names Saintsbury puts only Jane Austen, Scott, Dickens and Thackeray before Trollope among nineteenth-century English novelists.[7]

Herbert Paul, writing in 1897, was even more pessimistic about Trollope's hold on posterity than Saintsbury had been in 1895:

> Trollope was in his lifetime more popular than any of his contemporaries. Twenty years ago it would hardly have been an exaggeration to say that half the novels on the railway bookstalls were his. Now his books are never seen there, and seldom seen anywhere else. Why was he popular? Why has he ceased to be so? . . . It is to be feared that Trollope's books are dead. But it is a pity. . . . *Barchester Towers* is one of the most readable of books, and I do not envy the man who preserves his gravity over Bertie Stanhope or Mrs. Proudie. . . . His popularity was due partly to his cleverness, liveliness, and high spirits, but partly also to his never overtaxing the brains of his readers, if, indeed, he can be said to have taxed them at all. The change in the position of his books produced, and produced so rapidly, by the death of the author may, I think, be thus explained. He stimulated the taste for which he catered. He created the demand which he supplied.[8]

The early Saintsbury and Paul essays, with their somewhat wistful dismissal of Trollope, mark the low point in the novelist's reputation. Both critics slip into the practice of praising the readability of something they then proceed to belittle. It is an old and continuing habit of critics of Trollope's fiction. As early as 1863 an anonymous reviewer of *Rachel Ray* touched upon this phenomenon: 'It may seem rather hard that critics should read Mr. Trollope's novels and enjoy them, and then abuse them for being what they are.'[9] (Two years later, the young Henry James began

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a review of *Miss Mackenzie*: 'We have long entertained for Mr. Trollope a partiality of which we have yet been somewhat ashamed.')[10]

In 1901, Leslie Stephen, while not rating Trollope very high, foresaw a modest revival. He told how he had at one time been a devoted reader of the novels, but that on rereading one of his old favourites he found the book 'as insipid as yesterday's newspaper':

> Of course I explained the phenomenon by my own improvement in good taste, and for a long time I held complacently that Trollope should be left to the vulgar herd. Lately I have begun to doubt this plausible explanation. An excellent critic of Victorian novelists (Mr. Herbert Paul) told us, it is true, the other day that Trollope was not only dead, but dead beyond all hopes of resurrection. There are symptoms, however, which may point rather to a case of suspended vitality. . . . Nobody can claim for Trollope any of the first-rate qualities which strain the powers of subtle and philosophical criticism; but perhaps it would be well if readers would sometimes make a little effort to blunt their critical faculty. . . .
>
> We can see plainly enough what we must renounce in order to enjoy Trollope. We must cease to bother ourselves about art. We must not ask for exquisite polish of style. We must be content with good homespun phrases which give up all their meaning on the first reading. We must not desire brilliant epigrams suggesting familiarity with aesthetic doctrines or theories of the universe. A brilliant modern novelist is not only clever, but writes for clever people. . . . Trollope writes like a thorough man of business or a lawyer stating a case. . . . To accept such writing in the corresponding spirit implies, no doubt, the confession that you are a bit of a Philistine, and can put up with the plainest of bread and butter, and dispense with all the finer literary essences. I think, however, that at times one's state is the more gracious for accepting the position. There is something so friendly and ample and shrewd about one's temporary guide that one is the better for taking a stroll with him and listening to gossiping family stories, even though they be rather rambling and never scandalous. . . .
>
> But taking Trollope to represent the point of view from which there is a certain truthfulness in the picture – and no novelist can really do more than give one set of impressions – posterity may after all consider his novels as a very instructive document. . . . The middle of the nineteenth century – our descendants may possibly say – was really a time in which a great intellectual, political, and social revolution was beginning to make itself perceptible. . . . And yet in this ancient novelist we

> see the society of the time, the squires and parsons and officials, and the women whom they courted, entirely unconscious of any approaching convulsions. . . . Then [our descendants] will look back to the early days of Queen Victoria as a delightful time, when it was possible to take things quietly, and a good, sound sensible optimism was the prevalent state of mind. How far the estimate would be true is another question; but Trollope, as representing such an epoch, will supply a soothing if rather mild stimulant for the imagination, and it will be admitted that if he was not among the highest intellects of his benighted time, he was as sturdy, wholesome, and kindly a human being as could be desired.[11]

Stephen clearly was not among those who like art that conceals art. It is one of the curious twists of literary history, that in Stephen's case one can, through the comments of his own daughter, see the difference a generation makes. Virginia Woolf had high, if qualified, praise for Trollope. For her he represented an earlier tradition brought to perfection. In 1928 she applauded Meredith for his innovations because 'it is a possible contention that after those two perfect novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Small House at Allington*, English fiction had to escape from the dominion of that perfection'.[12] In an essay written the following year, she placed Trollope among the 'Truth-tellers' (with Defoe, Swift, Borrow, W. E. Norris and Maupassant): 'We get from their novels the same sort of refreshment and delight that we get from seeing something actually happen in the street below.' And again, 'We believe in Barchester as we do in the reality of our own weekly bills. Nor, indeed, do we wish to escape from the consequences of our belief, for the truth of the Slopes and the Proudies, the truth of the evening party where Mrs. Proudie has her dress torn off her back under the light of eleven gas jets, is entirely acceptable. At the top of his bent Trollope is a big, if not first-rate novelist.'[13]

By 1906, Lewis Melville, although apparently unaware of the recent republication of many Trollope titles, discussed the novelist in an essay that can be taken as representative of the gradually progressing critical acceptance that accompanied the first Trollope revival:

> Every writer has his ups and downs in the estimation of the generations immediately succeeding his own; but of all the mighty none have fallen so low as Anthony Trollope. His has been the worst fate that can befall a writer: he has not been abused: he has been ignored; and he is not disappearing: he has disappeared. . . .
>
> Perhaps the temporary eclipse of Trollope is due largely to his

> *Autobiography*. . . . The public naturally has not gone below the surface; and it has accepted Trollope's statements without reservation.

Melville then lists his favourite Trollope titles: the six Barsetshire novels, as well as *The Three Clerks*, *Orley Farm*, *Can You Forgive Her?*, the two Phineas books, *The Prime Minister* and 'perhaps' *The Eustace Diamonds*. Upon this 'very sound basis' Trollope's fame depends. Melville continues: 'Trollope did not take for his province the matters of life and death. He was pre-eminently a chronicler of small-beer, and at his best when dealing with such trifles as the appointment to a deanery or a wardenship, and the subsequent intrigues.' Of the passage where Mr Crawley, his pride conquered, thanks Lucy Robarts for her services to his stricken family, Melville says 'There is nothing finer in Trollope, and perhaps nothing better in English fiction.' The essay concludes:

> Trollope's best books are veritable human documents, and his scenes are as true to life as are his characters. . . . Within his limits he did excellent work; and the fact that he was for many years prior to his death the most popular of English writers of fiction is a tribute alike to his powers and to the public which had the discernment to recognise them. He must for ever rank high among the exponents of English country life in mid-Victorian times; and the day cannot be far distant when he will take his place, not perhaps with the greatest English novelists, but certainly not far below them.[14]

One can be reasonably certain that Sadleir's version of the 'disappearance' and the critical disparagement of Trollope was based largely on Paul and Melville.[15] At any rate he did not base it upon William Dean Howells. For during the very years of severest critical neglect, the prominent American novelist and man of letters was giving an altogether different reading. Were it not that Howells's references to Trollope are scattered and brief (except for some essays on heroines in which Howells is not at his best), he would certainly be included in the collection proper. Howells, who knew Trollope but disliked him strongly, came late to an appreciation of his novels. But by 1889 he was saying:

> The art of fiction, as Jane Austen knew it, declined from her. . . . The only observer of English middle-class life since Jane Austen worthy to be named with her was not George Eliot. . . . It was Anthony Trollope who was most like her in simple honesty and instinctive truth, as unphilosophized as the light of common day; but he was so warped

> from a wholesome ideal as to wish at times to be like the caricaturist Thackeray, and to stand about in his scene, talking it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth of art resides. Mainly, his instinct was too much for his ideal, and with a low view of life in its civic relations and a thoroughly *bourgeois* soul, he yet produced works whose beauty is surpassed only by the effect of a more poetic writer in the novels of Thomas Hardy.[16]

Six years later he was setting a still higher value on that 'simple honesty and instinctive truth':

> You cannot be at perfect ease with a friend who does not joke, and I suppose this is what deprived me of a final satisfaction in the company of Anthony Trollope, who jokes heavily or not at all, and whom I should otherwise make bold to declare the greatest of English novelists; as it is, I must put before him Jane Austen, whose books, late in life, have been a youthful rapture with me. Even without much humor Trollope's books have been a vast pleasure to me through their simple truthfulness. Perhaps if they were more humorous they would not be so true to the British life and character present in them in the whole length and breadth of its expansive commonplaceness. It is their serious fidelity which gives them a value unique in literature, and which if it were carefully analyzed would afford a principle of the same quality in an author who was undoubtedly one of the finest of artists as well as the most Philistine of men.[17]

In 1899 Howells wrote in an essay that was unpublished during his lifetime:

> In all that time [the nineteenth century] the most artistic, that is to say the most truthful English novelist was Anthony Trollope, and he was so unconscious of his excellence, that at times he strove hard for the most inartistic, the most untruthful attitudes of Thackeray.[18]

And finally, in 1901, Howells began a discussion of Trollopian heroines by lamenting that the Victorian period should be represented by Dickens and Thackeray rather than by the 'far greater artists' George Eliot and Trollope. In his view Trollope's 'immense acquaintance with society in all its ranks and orders has taken the mind of his critics from his profound and even subtle proficiency in the region of motive'. Of Lily Dale's career

in *The Small House at Allington*, Howells says, 'It is a great story, whose absolute fidelity to manners, and whose reliance on the essential strength of motive must exalt it in the esteem of those accustomed to think of what they read.' He begins his discussion of Mrs Proudie by asserting that Trollope is 'the most English of the English novelists'. And in this essay, revising his earlier judgement, he now finds Trollope a 'true humorist' as well as a 'profound moralist':

> He surpassed the only contemporaries worthy to be named with him in very essential things as far as he surpassed those two great women [Jane Austen and George Eliot] in keeping absolutely the level of the English nature. He was a greater painter of manners than Thackeray because he was neither a sentimentalist nor a caricaturist; and he was of a more convincing imagination than Dickens because he knew and employed the probable facts in the case and kept himself free of all fantastic contrivances.

And in regard to his specific subject, heroines, Howells concludes:

> Upon the whole I should be inclined to place Trollope among the very first of those supreme novelists to whom the ever-womanly has revealed itself. . . it is not the very soul of the sex that shows itself in [his portraits] but it is the mind, the heart, the conscience, the manner; and this for one painter is enough. . . . Trollope has shown them as we mostly see them when we meet them in society and as we know them at home; and if it were any longer his to choose, he might well rest content with his work. For my part I wish I might send my readers to the long line of his wise, just, sane novels, which I have been visiting anew for the purposes of these papers, and finding as delightful as ever, and, thanks to extraordinary gifts for forgetting, almost as fresh as ever.[19]

The first essay in this collection is that by Henry James, published in July 1883 after Trollope's death in December 1882. It is a fitting beginning because, aside from James's pre-eminence as novelist, critic and theoretician of the novel, this piece has become for many the cornerstone of Trollopian criticism. For James himself, it was something of an *amende honorable* for the scathing remarks he had made in reviewing Trollope in the mid-1860s. Of *Can You Forgive Her?* he had said, 'Of course we can, and forget her, too, for that matter.' He had called *The Belton Estate* 'a *stupid* book. . . . It is essentially, organically, consistently stupid. . . . It is without a single

idea.'[20] Twenty years later, as an established novelist, he made large though circumscribed claims for Trollope, in the process putting the questions that have dominated Trollope criticism ever since, set down in the phrases that have been ringing in the ears of Trollope's critics for nearly a hundred years: Trollope's 'great, his inestimable merit was a complete appreciation of the usual'; he 'takes the good-natured, temperate conciliatory view' of all human complexities; he 'represents in an eminent degree [the] natural decorum of the English spirit'; he was 'a man of genius' in virtue of his 'happy instinctive perception of human varieties. . . . He had no airs of being able to tell you *why* people in a given situation would conduct themselves in a particular way; it was enough for him that he felt their feelings and struck the right note, because he had, as it were, a good ear. If he was a knowing psychologist, he was so by grace.' James stresses the social and moral interest of Trollope's stories. He says Trollope should be judged 'in the lump'. Of Trollope's presentation of the English girl, James writes, 'he took possession of her, and turned her inside out'; he 'plant[s] her so well on her feet. . . . She is always definite and natural.' In a most notable commendation – coming from Henry James – he declares that Trollope's American portraits 'hit it off more happily than the attempt to depict American character from the European point of view is accustomed to do' and that with regard to the American girl, 'Trollope's treatment of this complicated being is full of good humour and of that fatherly indulgence, that almost motherly sympathy, which characterizes his attitude, throughout toward the youthful feminine.' Trollope, says James, often 'achieved a conspicuous intensity of the tragical'; he points out Trollope's extraordinary facility in using letters as an 'unfailing resource' in his fiction. Will Trollope endure? 'Trollope did not write for posterity . . . but these are just the writers whom posterity is apt to put in its pocket. . . . Trollope will remain one of the most trustworthy, though not one of the most eloquent, of the writers who have helped the heart of man to know itself.' On the other hand, James's reservations are almost as pointed as his praise: Trollope's 'fertility was gross, importunate. . . . He abused his gift, overworked it, rode his horse too hard. As an artist he never took himself seriously.'

The political novels James finds 'distinctly dull'; indeed he confesses that he has 'not been able to read them.' Trollope 'had no "views" whatever on the subject of novel-writing'. As for style, 'he is seated on the back of a heavy-footed prose'. He 'had as little as possible of the quality of irony'. And, most damagingly, Trollope 'took suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, make believe. . . . These little slaps at credulity. . . are very discouraging.' James's

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