THE CLAVERINGS

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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INTRODUCTION

CRITICS of late years have shown a tendency to put Anthony Trollope in his rightful place, and I am glad to remember that writing a eulogy of him twenty years ago I must have been, in my way, one of the first to do so after long neglect. I do not think they have quite reinstated him yet, and in so far as they have moved him up, so to speak, they have sometimes had a slight air of apology and patronage in their labour. Yet at least they have placed him among the best of the mid-Victorians. In truth his place is higher. As an observer of manners he is one of the most impeccable realists in our literature, and he has gone far, many times, in the deeper interpretation of character. We are so much the victims of fashion in these matters, as though we could not see the strength or grace of a man's body because it wore the coat of an old period. I have a great respect for the best of the younger generation of critics: they have sincerity, at least, and an earnestness which in a few instances is not afraid of appearing (just the least little bit) owlish. Like other people they have their faults, however, and I fancy I can suggest two of these. One is to be unduly influenced by qualities of a writer irrelevant to his work, his religious views (it may be), or social theories, or what not—though this, indeed, is a fault of critics in all ages—and the

other, more particularly theirs, is to insist overmuch on form. I have read with great interest the work of Mr. Percy Lubbock on the form of the novel, a work, if I may say so, of remarkably lucid analysis. He showed the development of the form of fiction to a more artistic completeness and a greater mental unity. Truly much is to be gained by an artistic form, but as I read I reminded myself that the form of a novel is of less moment than the genius of the novelist. Mr. Lubbock showed no sign of being less aware of this fact than I, but I have read criticism which did not bear it constantly in mind, and in this matter Trollope must suffer. His form, no doubt, is early or primitive; he unfolds his panorama and strolls along commenting on it, not dissimulating his sympathies and antipathies; you see his events now from his point of view, now from that of his characters. This may not be the best conceivable way of writing a novel, but more important than that are the scope and variety and interest of the panorama and the shrewdness and insight of the comments. And moreover, as Mr. Lubbock does not deny, every mode has its advantages also.

When I wrote twenty years ago I compared Trollope to his advantage with Thackeray (painfully, for I am loyal to Thackeray) in the matter of faithful presentment of a similar situation. But this faithfulness of Trollope has been stated sufficiently for the moment, and it may be more profitable now to think of him more generally and in regard to our contem-

poraries rather than his. I would not use the method of comparison aggressively, however. That is too facile a mode of appreciation; we can admire this without disparaging that, and to divide our love is not to take away, as Shelley has taught us. It is objected to Trollope, as to others of his generation, that he did not deal with certain phases of life with which contemporary fiction deals freely, such as adultery, unmarried cohabitation, prostitution, and so forth. It is a pity, perhaps, because he would have dealt ably with them, but is it not unduly dogmatic to assume that what he *did* deal with is less interesting, inferior material for his art? Take the central situation of this novel, *The Claverings*. A young man is jilted by a beautiful and worldly young woman for a disreputable peer, with whom she goes to Italy. The peer treats her abominably, starts an unfounded scandal about her, and dies. Meanwhile the young man has fallen in love with another girl and is engaged to her. The first young woman returns widowed from Italy, friendless in consequence of the scandal, and with the young man and his love in her thoughts. The young man befriends her and is diffident about blurting out his engagement. She tells him part and hints more of the horrible experience she has had, and complains of her friendlessness. He loses his head and takes her in his arms, Trollope showing subtly how she had 'asked for it' as they say, and so gives her the idea that he still wants to marry her, as she wants now to marry him. Well, why are this young man's

difficult situation and his feelings and conflicts less interesting than the feelings, say, of a young man going on the loose ? Or take the situation of Hugh Clavering and his wife. There is no adultery involved, it is true, but the spaniel love of the poor woman for this handsome, utterly selfish and callous, ' in appearance every inch an English gentleman ', her pathetic efforts, his bored avoidance of her caresses, all this surely is as much a piece of authentic life and as interesting a piece as a Divorce Court story ? We should be more catholic in our appreciations, and if we rejoice that our novelists give us what their predecessors avoided should none the less admire what these included. There is no table of precedence in the materials of art.

There are recent developments of the novel with which Trollope's work is, to be sure, in very obvious contrast. One of these, as I understand, is to dispense with a story altogether and give the reader atmosphere only. If I were thirty years younger, I think this method would tempt me to try my hand again at writing fiction, for it was the necessity of a story that always stood in my way. Fine things can be achieved in this way, as the late Miss Katherine Mansfield showed us, though I think another brilliant writer, who seems to eliminate characters as well as story, goes too far. But is there any harm, if the atmosphere is truly given, in having a story as well ? Over and over again Trollope has given an atmosphere with a fine certainty of touch. In *The Claverings*, for example: the Rector's

study, the dinner at the great house, the Brompton home of Florence Burton's brother, Mr. Saul's room in the farm, have many atmospheres been more surely and truthfully rendered than these? In regard to two other developments, I hope one may prefer Trollope's method without being too much of an old fogey. One is the system of Miss Richardson and Mr. Joyce, in which a character's thoughts and emotions pour out incoherently just as they are supposed to occur, all of them, however trivial, the task of selection and arrangement being left to the reader. If the character were a real person, and the thoughts and emotions accurately given, an impossibility, the result might have some value for science, but since the character is imaginary there is no such value, and Trollope's system of keeping to the thoughts and emotions germane to the matter in hand seems to have more value for art. The other development is the result of psycho-analysis. The novelist invents a 'complex' for a character and makes him act accordingly. The character is sacrificed to the 'complex' and the result is not something human. Better, I think, with Trollope, to render a human being well understood and seen and to leave the inferring of a complex to the psycho-analysts.

The last paragraph was intended to suggest that fashion for fashion Trollope's is as good as some more modern. I would not be controversial, however, and let us come more particularly to *The Claverings*. Here I find myself limited by the fear that some reader

may make the mistake of reading this introduction before he has read the novel: I would not give away the story too much. Its central situation I have already defended. Trollope himself, in the modest curtness of his *Autobiography*, thought his hero's weakness 'the fault of the book'. I cannot agree; it is the very weakness and vacillation of the young man which make the interest of the situation and produce its subtle comedy. But better than this, I think, of greater value in its probing of humanity, is the relation, mentioned above, of Sir Hugh and his wife. Trollope is not concerned to hide his own opinions, of course, but his restrained contempt for the man's unimaginative brutality does not prevent a full understanding of the type, and his tenderness for the unhappy wife does not obscure her essential feebleness and unworthiness. It is a fine study. Trollope was just over fifty when *The Claverings* appeared in 1866, and his wisdom was mature; nowhere in his work are his comments sounder or shrewder than here. As this of Archie, Sir Hugh's feckless brother, and his kind: 'But the job before him was a peculiar job, and that Archie well knew. In some inexplicable manner he put himself into the scales and weighed himself, and discovered his own weight with fair accuracy . . . How he did this—how such men as Archie Clavering do do it—I cannot say; but they do weigh themselves, and know their own weight, and shove themselves aside as being too light for any real service in the world. This they do,

though they may fluster with their voices and walk about with their noses in the air, and swing their canes, and try to look as large as they may.' That is only worldly knowledge, you may say, but it is a rare worldly knowledge, the fruit of very exceptional powers of observation. There is wisdom of a bold sort, boldly expressed, about these brothers and an event towards the end—but I will not tell the story. I do not, then, quite agree with Trollope that 'the chief merit of *The Claverings* is in the genuine fun of some of the scenes', but I do agree that this is a great merit and more conspicuous here than elsewhere in his work. It does contribute largely to make this, what I think it is, the most enjoyable reading of all his novels. The inimitable Doodles, Sophie Gordeloup, the dinner at The Blue Posts, the scene with Sophie and Hugh in Berkeley Square—these are splendid fun at which one both smiles and laughs aloud, and contemporary novelists, who give us so much else, give us so little laughter. One has to believe, for it is his own statement, that he wrote at a level speed for the same number of hours every day before breakfast, and it has always seemed odd to me that this statement should have excited scorn for his lack of artistic feeling rather than admiration for so perfect a control of powers so considerable. But I feel quite certain that, whatever was the case with straightforward narrative or didactic reflections, these brilliant scenes of fun were inspired and thought out and chuckled over before he sat down to his desk.

It is impossible to discuss any novel of Trollope's without insisting on its value as a document for the habits and manners and speech and attitude to life of his generation, and *The Claverings* is one of the most valuable because its range is so extensive. Trollope knew more of the world than most novelists. He had travelled (though I do not rank this so high as some do) all about the world, in America, the West Indies, Australia, Egypt, and so forth. He had lived in different parts of England and Ireland. He was an able Government official, was at home in the hunting field, and in London lived much in society. We may credit him *à priori* with a probable breadth of view, and we duly find it; he had also a remarkable faculty for observation and an extraordinarily accurate ear. In this novel he is not concentrated on the clergy, and takes of them only a couple of types—the rector, who was also a country gentleman, and an uncouth enthusiast, to whose essential nobility of soul he does full justice. He deals with country gentlemen, retired captains, civil engineers, minor hangers-on of diplomacy, brilliantly fashionable women, modest and serviceable women. Of course we find curious differences. The whole treatment of Lady Ongar, shunned by everybody without an atom of evidence against her, merely because her husband had said he was going to divorce her, is a startling example of Victorian timidity. Her sister's comment—'Who can say what is absolutely wrong and what only imprudent?'—is a masterly stroke of illustration. (By the way,

Count Pateroff, who was prepared to take her off her husband's hands for money and on the husband's death tried to force her to marry him, and yet remained good-humoured and gentlemanlike in his baseness, is a character both convincing in its truth and remote from stock types.) Then the unabashed predominance of money in all matrimonial affairs. When the hero brings his betrothed to his house, almost the first question of his father, an exceptionally generous man, is, 'What money is she to have?' You find this attitude even freer from blushes in Miss Austen, to be sure. Fanny Clavering's submission to her parents' view of a proposal as a matter of course is another difference. Then there are innumerable slight differences from our own times which one might note, in habits, modes of address and what not, to me at least of perpetual interest. But what, after all, I think might well make the strongest impression on the reader is the *likeness*, in their speech and manners and views of life, of these people of sixty years ago to their counterparts to-day. Immense changes no doubt there have been, as we are always being told, and yet how much likeness remains. To my ear, at least, the speech of Trollope's upper class people, with its homeliness and curtness, is far more like that of such people in our own time than their speech as reported in almost any later novel I can think of. Harry's quarrel with his masterful cousin, or Captain Boodle fearfully wondering if there is any truth in Spiritualism—I could pile up instance after instance

of what you might hear to-day, but are not likely to see so well reported. But of this and other causes for interest, and of Trollope's many excellences, let so much have been said. If the reader by chance has made the mistake I was afraid of, he will be impatient for the story.

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ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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CHAPTER I

JULIA BRABAZON

THE gardens of Clavering Park were removed some three hundred yards from the large, square, sombre-looking stone mansion which was the country-house of Sir Hugh Clavering, the eleventh baronet of that name; and in these gardens, which had but little of beauty to recommend them, I will introduce my readers to two of the personages with whom I wish to make them acquainted in the following story. It was now the end of August, and the parterres, beds, and bits of lawn were dry, disfigured, and almost ugly, from the effects of a long drought. In gardens to which care and labour are given abundantly, flower-beds will be pretty, and grass will be green, let the weather be what it may; but care and labour were but scantily bestowed on the Clavering Gardens, and everything was yellow, adust, harsh, and dry. Over the burnt turf, towards a gate that led to the house, a lady was walking, and by her side there walked a gentleman.

'You are going in, then, Miss Brabazon,' said the gentleman, and it was very manifest from his tone that he intended to convey some deep reproach in his words.

'Of course I am going in,' said the lady. 'You asked me to walk with you, and I refused. You have now waylaid me, and therefore I shall escape,—unless I am prevented by violence.' As she spoke she stood still for a moment, and looked into his face with a smile which seemed to indicate that if such violence were used, within rational bounds, she would not feel herself driven to great anger.

But though she might be inclined to be playful, he was by no means in that mood. 'And why did you refuse me when I asked you?' said he.

'For two reasons: partly because I thought it better to avoid any conversation with you——'

'That is civil to an old friend.'

'But chiefly,' and now as she spoke she drew herself up, and dismissed the smile from her face, and allowed her eyes to fall upon the ground; 'but chiefly because I thought that Lord Ongar would prefer that I should not roam alone about Clavering Park with any young gentleman while I am down here; and that he might specially object to my roaming with you, were he to know that you and I were—old acquaintances. Now I have been very frank, Mr. Clavering, and I think that that ought to be enough.'

'You are afraid of him already, then?'

'I am afraid of offending any one whom I love, and especially any one to whom I owe any duty.'

'Enough! indeed it is not. From what you know of me, do you think it likely that that will be enough?' He was now standing in front of her, between her and the gate, and she made no effort to leave him.

'And what is it you want? I suppose you do not mean to fight Lord Ongar, and that if you did you would not come to me.'

'Fight him! No; I have no quarrel with him. Fighting him would do no good.'

'None in the least; and he would not fight if you were to ask him; and you could not ask without being false to me.'

'I should have had an example for that, at any rate.'

'That 's nonsense, Mr. Clavering. My falsehood, if you should choose to call me false, is of a very different nature, and is pardonable by all laws known in the world.'

'You are a jilt,—that is all.'

'Come, Harry, don't use hard words,' and she put her hand kindly upon his arm. 'Look at me, such as I am, and at yourself, and then say whether anything but misery could come of a match between you and me. Our ages by the register are the same, but I am ten years older than you by the world. I have two hundred a year, and I owe at this moment six hundred pounds. You have, perhaps, double as much, and would lose half of that if you married. You are an usher at a school.'

'No, madam, I am not an usher at a school.'

'Well, well, you know I don't mean to make you angry.'

'At the present moment, I am a schoolmaster, and if I remained so, I might fairly look forward to a liberal income. But I am going to give that up.'

'You will not be more fit for matrimony because you are going to give up your profession. Now Lord Ongar has—heaven knows what;—perhaps sixty thousand a year.'

'In all my life I never heard such effrontery,—such barefaced shameless worldliness!'

'Why should I not love a man with a large income?'

'He is old enough to be your father.'

'He is thirty-six, and I am twenty-four.'

'Thirty-six!'

'There is the peerage for you to look at. But, my dear Harry, do you not know that you are perplexing me and yourself too, for nothing? I was fool enough when I came here from Nice, after papa's death, to let you talk nonsense to me for a month or two.'

'Did you or did you not swear that you loved me?'

'Oh, Mr. Clavering, I did not imagine that your strength would have condescended to take such advantage over the weakness of a woman. I remember no oaths of any kind, and what foolish assertions I may have made, I am not going to repeat. It must have become manifest to you during these two years that all that was a romance. If it be a pleasure to you to look back to it, of that pleasure I cannot deprive you. Perhaps I also may sometimes look back. But I shall never speak of that time again; and you, if you are as noble as I take you to be, will not speak of it either. I know you would not wish to injure me.'

'I would wish to save you from the misery you are bringing on yourself.'

'In that you must allow me to look after myself. Lord Ongar certainly wants a wife, and I intend to be true to him,—and useful.'

'How about love?'

'And to love him, sir. Do you think that no man can win a woman's love, unless he is filled to the brim with poetry, and has a neck like Lord Byron, and is handsome like your worship? You are very handsome, Harry, and