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the Americans

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*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*

ELSIE B. MICHIE



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## DOMESTIC MANNERS OF THE AMERICANS

FRANCES MILTON TROLLOPE, generally known as Fanny, was born in 1779 near Bristol. The daughter of the Reverend William Milton, she grew up at almost the same time and in virtually the same milieu as Jane Austen. In 1803, after her mother's death and her father's remarriage, she moved to London with her elder sister, Mary, and her younger brother, Henry, who had taken a position as clerk at the War Office. There she met and married Thomas Adolphus Trollope, a lawyer with a strong interest in ecclesiastical history. Fanny bore seven children, four boys and three girls, five of whom survived to adulthood, including the well-known novelist Anthony Trollope. In 1813 the family moved to a farm near Harrow, where Fanny entertained literary and political figures, organized amateur theatricals, and wrote satirical verses. But the family struggled financially and in 1827, when the social reformer Frances Wright invited Fanny to go with her to America, Trollope leapt at the chance, taking with her her son Henry and her two daughters. After spending almost four years there, she returned to England and, at the age of 53, published her first book, the enormously successful *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). From then on her writing supported the family; it included five more travel books, an essay in verse, and thirty-four novels. In 1846, more than ten years after the death of her husband, Frances Trollope moved to Florence, where she lived with her eldest son and entertained guests who included Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Harriet Beecher Stowe. She died in 1863.

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## INTRODUCTION

FIRST published in 1832, Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* recounts her experiences in America between 1827 and 1830, describing her voyage up the Mississippi from New Orleans, a two-year stay in Cincinnati, and a subsequent tour of Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. The book was a transatlantic best-seller; going through four editions in Britain and America in its first year, it was quickly translated into French, German, Dutch, and Spanish. It was so widely read that Trollope's name became a verb: to 'trollopize' meant to criticize the manners of others, particularly Americans. Famous for its scathing and still amusing depictions of American life, including spitting, pigs in the street, religious fanaticism, and the unequal treatment of women, slaves, and Native Americans, *Domestic Manners* made Fanny Trollope a literary name and became one of the most influential travel books of the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>.

Commenting on Trollope in 1839, the critic for the *New Monthly Review* argued that 'no other author of the present day has been at once so much read, so much admired and so much abused'.<sup>2</sup> Both entertaining and aggravating, her powerfully satirical writing uncovers those flaws its subjects wished to keep hidden. As Mark Twain put it in describing her portrait of America in *Domestic Manners*: 'she skinned this thing and showed the world (and it) just what it was. She did it with a calm, firm hand; indeed with a gentle hand mainly; and always with a well meaning hand—but she skinned it, all the same.'<sup>3</sup> Trollope herself said that she 'sought in vain' in America 'for the playful vivacity and the keenly-cutting satire, whose sharp edge, however painful to the patient, is of such high utility in lopping off

<sup>1</sup> *Domestic Manners* helped to shape Dickens's *American Notes* (1842) and Martin Chuzzlewit (1843–4), Anthony Trollope's *North America* (1862), Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and Henry James's *American Scene* (1904–5). Even non-Anglo-American authors felt the reach of Trollope's book. The Mexican patriot Lorenzo de Zavala cites *Domestic Manners* throughout *Viaje a los Estados Unidos del Norte de América* (1834). The French novelist Stendhal annotated his copy of *Domestic Manners* and used Trollope's observations in his unfinished novel of 1834, *Lucien Leuwen*.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Frances Eleanor Trollope, *Frances Trollope: Her Life and Literary Work from George III to Victoria* (London: Bentley, 1895), i, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Twain, 'The Suppressed Passages', *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Heritage, 1944), 392.

the excrescences of bad taste, and levelling to its native clay the heavy growth of dulness' (p. 217). Bringing that wit to bear on a nation particularly sensitive about its identity after celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the American Revolution, Trollope created a travel narrative so outrageously and entertainingly cutting that even fifty years after its publication Americans smarted under her lash. In 1883 Twain's editors made him delete praise of Trollope from the final manuscript of *Life on the Mississippi*.

Yet Trollope directed her book towards a British as much as an American audience, making herself a surrogate for a European reader who, she assumes, has little experience of America. Attempting to grasp the complex racial and gender composition of New Orleans in the opening chapter of *Domestic Manners*, she exclaims: 'How very childish does ignorance make us! and how very ignorant we are upon almost every subject, where hear-say evidence is all we can get!' (p. 13). European visitors, in their first encounter with a relatively new nation, whose history and literature had not yet become familiar, would find 'America so totally unlike all the nations with which their reading had made them acquainted' (p. 67). Thinking about her sons' education at the elite boarding school Harrow, Trollope realizes that they have studied the ancient world—Greece and Rome—and know European culture well; but 'at our public schools America (except perhaps as to her geographical position) is hardly better known than Fairy Land; and the American character has not been much more deeply studied than that of the Anthropophagi'. In visiting America for the first time, therefore, her son Henry found 'all . . . new, and every thing amusing' (p. 68).<sup>4</sup> In *Domestic Manners* Trollope sets out to fill this gap by providing accounts that derive not from hearsay or myth but from first-hand knowledge. As she explains in the preface, she is committed to 'describing, faithfully, the daily aspect of ordinary life' (p. 3). Often emphasizing what she later calls 'the petty soul-degrading transactions of every-day life' (p. 171), she counters utopian imaginings by providing a nitty-gritty account of what it was like to live in a nation that did not yet fully experience itself as part of world history.

<sup>4</sup> In using the word 'anthropophagi' (literally, 'man-eaters'), Trollope linked her project to a history of European travel writing that dated back to the Renaissance. The term appears in both 'The Travels of Sir John Mandeville' (c.1357) and Shakespeare's *Othello* (c.1603), when Othello describes his adventures in foreign lands.



Trollope deliberately conceived *Domestic Manners* as a transatlantic work, shaping her book out of both European and American travel writing. Ten years after she wrote it she mocked herself in *The Barnabys in America; or, Adventures of the Widow Wedded* (1842–3) by creating a con-woman heroine who sets out to make money by writing ‘an out-and-out good book of travels upon the United States’.<sup>5</sup> In that novel Trollope calls Americans ‘the Transatlantics’, identifies her abiding interest in ‘the great transatlantic subject of negro slavery’, and insists that travel books engage in ‘the usual transatlantic process of interrogation’.<sup>6</sup> When she wrote *Domestic Manners* she anticipated that it would bring down ‘a transatlantic anathema on my head’ (p. 219), and she was right. Her depictions of Americans as excessively absorbed in the pursuit of money and less cultivated than their European counterparts led her to be excoriated in the American press and satirized in cartoons, poems, plays, and effigies. At the same time, she became one of the most widely read English authors in America, second only to Walter Scott. In England her vivid portraits of American speech and behaviour made Americanisms like ‘going the whole hog’ all the rage. But her attack on American democracy was also condemned for being a thinly disguised critique of the first Reform Act. Published on 19 March 1832, three days before the bill had its final reading in the House of Commons, *Domestic Manners* captured the ambivalent feelings of the nation at the onset of social reforms that would, over the course of the nineteenth century, transform England into a more democratic society.<sup>7</sup>

### *Frances Trollope and Attitudes to America*

Frances Milton Trollope (1779–1863) did not become a published author until she was 53 years old. Daughter of a Church of England priest and a mother who died when she was five years old, Trollope grew up at the same time as Jane Austen, receiving little formal education but acquiring an extensive knowledge of English and European

<sup>5</sup> *The Barnabys in America; or, Adventures of the Widow Wedded*, ed. Tamara S. Wagner, vol. iii of *The Widow and Wedlock Novels of Frances Trollope*, ed. Brenda Ayres (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), 57.

<sup>6</sup> *The Barnabys in America*, 131, 85, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Worth notes that ‘the original publication date of *Domestic Manners* was January 1832’, ‘“An Extraordinary Species of Tyranny”: Frances Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans*’, *Symbiosis* 5/1 (April 2001), 24.

literature and history. In 1803, with her sister Mary and brother Henry, Frances Milton moved to London, where she met, and in 1809 married, the barrister and ecclesiastical historian Thomas Anthony Trollope; she bore him seven children, five of whom survived to adulthood, including the future novelist Anthony Trollope. At her husband's insistence, the family moved to a farm near Harrow School, where all the Trollope boys would be educated.

During this period, Frances Trollope entertained a variety of guests, both English and European, in her home, and seems to have been particularly interested in political émigrés. She maintained a lively intellectual household, whose members put on amateur theatricals, for which she wrote satirical verses mocking the local evangelical vicar. But the move from London to the country proved financially disastrous. The collapse of agricultural revenues meant that the farm cost more to run than it brought in. A substantial property that Thomas Anthony Trollope had assumed he would inherit went elsewhere after his elderly uncle married and unexpectedly fathered an heir. Increasingly suffering from severe headaches that plagued him for the rest of his life, Thomas Anthony became ill tempered and proved incapable of dealing with the financial crisis that drove the family towards bankruptcy. At this critical juncture, Frances Trollope received an invitation to travel to America from Frances Wright, a radical freethinker whom she had met when the family had visited Paris in 1823.

Wright had studied with the utilitarian social reformer Jeremy Bentham and had close connections to General Lafayette, famous for his role in the American Revolutionary War. Although Wright idealized American democracy in her book *Views of Society and Manners in the United States* (1821), she would later shock Americans by lecturing publicly about women's rights, wearing Turkish trousers, and criticizing organized religion. She was, in Walt Whitman's words, 'a brilliant woman, of beauty and estate, who was never satisfied unless she was busy doing good—public good, private good'.<sup>8</sup> Wright saw America as a new Eden, in which colonies could be set up to exemplify revolutionary ideals and counter the ills of modern industrial society. As Trollope comments in *Domestic Manners*: 'In Paris I have often observed that it was a sort of fashion to speak of America

<sup>8</sup> Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York: Appleton, 1908), ii, 45.

as a new Utopia, especially among the young liberals' (p. 152). That utopian movement included both French thinkers, such as Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, and the Englishmen Robert Owen and his son Robert Dale Owen, who founded the New Harmony community in Indiana.<sup>9</sup> Accepting the invitation to join Wright at Nashoba, the utopian community she had founded near Memphis, Tennessee, which was designed to prove blacks as intelligent as whites, Frances Trollope travelled to America, accompanied by her son Henry, her two daughters, and the émigré painter Auguste Hervieu, who had been exiled from France for his participation in French secret societies. Hervieu, who hoped to make a living in America as a painter, ended up illustrating *Domestic Manners* as well as a number of Trollope's subsequent travel books and novels.

By the time Trollope went to America in 1827, the early idealistic images propagated both by political theorists and novelists were on the wane, as anti-American sentiment began to grow across Europe. Trollope shared in this shift from utopian imaginings to social critique. Her book contains traces of idealism in its admiring descriptions of landscapes that exude a primeval natural beauty, which resemble those of the French Romantic author François-René de Chateaubriand in their reference to 'the eternal forests of the western world' (p. 12). But *Domestic Manners* also records Trollope's disillusionment, as she experienced in America 'the flatness of reality after the imagination has been busy!' (p. 32). After touring New Orleans and travelling up the Mississippi to Memphis, Trollope found that the utopian community she had intended to join was a landscape of mud and unfinished cabins, inhabited by a motley collection of people who seemed to be dying of fever and malnutrition. A concrete manifestation of the failure of idealism, Wright's unrealized utopia sets the stage for the portraits that fill the rest of *Domestic Manners*, portraits of people whom Trollope found to be stunted in their spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth by lack of refinements and by a political system that touted the idea of equality without being able to deliver it.

Those portraits are particularly vivid because Trollope experienced America not as a tourist but as someone who had to survive there. Almost penniless when she arrived at Nashoba, she borrowed 300 dollars

<sup>9</sup> Trollope described Fourier as 'a deep-thinking, though fanciful philosopher', *The Lottery of Marriage*, ed. Elsie B. Michie, vol. iv of *The Widow and Wedlock Novels of Frances Trollope*, ed. Brenda Ayres (London: Pickering and Chatto), 205, author's note.

from Wright's commune to continue up the Mississippi and the Ohio to Cincinnati, at that time the emerging cultural centre of the west. Trollope lived in Cincinnati for more than two years, supporting herself and her children by various schemes to make money, both successful and unsuccessful. The first of these involved creating what proved to be an extraordinarily popular exhibit, based on Dante's *Inferno*, for Joseph Dorfeuille's Western Museum. Hervieu painted transparencies of the souls in hell, and the American sculptor Hiram Powers, whom they met in Cincinnati, created wax figures that were eventually electrified so that those who touched them received a shock. Like *Domestic Manners*, the 'Infernal Regions' succeeded by being transatlantic; it combined Trollope's knowledge of European culture with an astute understanding of American beliefs. Dante's *Inferno* was particularly important to her as a vehicle for representing the misery of travelling through America. As she explains in the opening of *Domestic Manners*, casting her journey as a version of the poet's descent into hell: 'I never beheld a scene so utterly desolate as this entrance of the Mississippi. Had Dante seen it, he might have drawn images of another Bolgia from its horrors' (p. 9). In her museum exhibit, Trollope transformed Dante's beloved text into a popular sensation by imbuing it with the American preoccupation with hellfire and damnation, which she had experienced in the sermons of itinerant preachers and at a camp meeting, where vivid descriptions of the pit of hell drove participants to hysterical conversions.

The success of the 'Infernal Regions', which remained a Cincinnati institution for years, led Trollope to plan an even more ambitious project. She aimed to create what modern critics have identified as the first shopping mall, a building she called the Bazaar, built in the Egyptian style, possessing the most recent technical innovations, such as gas lighting, and including shops and restaurants as well as spaces for artistic performances and exhibits. Here again she attempted to use her growing familiarity with America, a country 'where every class is occupied in getting money, and no class in spending it' and '[w]here every man is engaged in driving hard bargains with his fellows' (p. 242). In creating the Bazaar, Trollope imagined that she, too, could become part of, even successful in, this universal American pursuit of wealth, while at the same time bringing to Americans the European culture that she asserted they needed to refine that vulgar single-mindedness. As she explains late in

*Domestic Manners*: 'I can conceive that no place in the known world can furnish so striking a proof of the immense value of literary habits as the United States, not only in enlarging the mind, but what is of infinitely more importance, in purifying the manners' (p. 185). But her attempt to use American commercial practices to sell refinement to Americans was a complete failure. Building the Bazaar left Trollope once again on the verge of bankruptcy, having erected an unusable building that came to be known as Trollope's Folly. Yet her experiences in Cincinnati eventually bore financial fruit, as she used them to create the unforgettable travel narrative that is *Domestic Manners*.

Part of what makes her book different from other European accounts of America is that Trollope experienced Cincinnati not as a tourist but as what anthropologists call a 'participant observer': an individual who becomes part of a community in order subsequently to chronicle its practices. In 1829, towards the end of her stay in Cincinnati, and in 1830, as she travelled east to visit Virginia, Washington, DC, Pennsylvania, and New York, Trollope began work on her book. Borrowing the notebooks her son Henry had brought with him on the trip, she recorded her impressions as events happened, including whole conversations with the people she met. Such note-taking was characteristic of travel writing in the period. Captain Basil Hall, whose *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* came out while Trollope was in America, invariably kept journals in which he recorded particulars of his experiences.<sup>10</sup> This practice became increasingly common as American and European travel writing shifted away from concentrating on geography and descriptions of nature and statistics to discussing people and manners. By the end of the eighteenth century, particularly after the publication of J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), accounts of America, written by both French and English authors, were expected to derive from experience rather than simple observation.

For male writers such as Crèvecoeur and Hall, as well as Alexis de Tocqueville, the first volume of whose *Democracy in America* appeared

<sup>10</sup> Trollope read and reread Hall's book as she worked out the shape of her narrative about America. Chapter XXXI of *Domestic Manners* describes the reception of Hall's book in America. She also read Americans' accounts of travel in their own country, including the works of Timothy Flint, the editor of the *Western Monthly Magazine*, whom she had met in Cincinnati: both *Francis Berrian; or The Mexican Patriot* (1826), a novel that is largely a travelogue, and *The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley* (1827).

three years after *Domestic Manners*, people and manners led to discussions of political philosophy. Such an explicitly political approach was eschewed by nineteenth-century women travel writers. As Trollope explains: 'I am in no way competent to judge of the political institutions of America; and if I should occasionally make an observation on their effects, as they meet my superficial glance, they will be made in the spirit, and with the feeling of a woman' (pp. 36–7). Women's narratives focused on domestic details and personal anecdotes rather than the public sphere.<sup>11</sup> Trollope describes what it is like to hire servants and buy food from the market, and what she should do with her rubbish. (Her landlord explains that she must put it in the middle of the street, where the pigs will eat it.) These personal encounters serve to illustrate the effects of the country's governing ethos. As she explains in her preface, her book explores 'the influence which the political system of the country has produced on the principles, tastes, and manners, of its domestic life' (p. 3). Thus, for example, when she describes how her neighbours in Cincinnati allow their cow to roam free all day long, grazing on everyone's property, and returning home only at night, she labels that cow 'republican' to underscore that its behaviour exemplifies American democratic beliefs. Evoking everyday life with the vivid particularity that made her a successful novelist, Trollope used those details to comment acerbically on the political changes taking place on both sides of the Atlantic in the early 1830s.

### *Democracy and Inequality*

*Domestic Manners of the Americans* differentiates itself from other travel writing by having a clear set of themes to which Trollope returns throughout the work: manners, religion, gender inequities, and slavery. Those themes were so obvious that, when she created a satiric portrait of herself in *The Barnabys in America*, Trollope listed them. The novel's con-woman heroine realizes that it will be easier to write a book about America if she first asks Americans the questions she wants to answer, presenting her subjects with the following:

'In what manner does the republican form of government appear to affect the social habits of the people?

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Anne Royall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the United States* (1826) and *Letters from Alabama* (1830).

'How far does the absence of a national form of worship produce the results anticipated from it?

'At what degree of elevation may the education of the ladies of the Union be considered to stand, when compared to that received by the females of other countries?

'And what are [slavery's] real effects both on the black and the white population?'<sup>12</sup>

In *Domestic Manners* Trollope approaches these issues as a Tory radical. As a conservative she celebrated the hierarchies of Church and State and deprecated the political changes that were undermining those institutions. As her fellow Tory Thomas Carlyle argued in his famous essay 'Signs of the Times' (1829), the social, economic, and political changes of the period were destroying the network of ties that had traditionally bound people together. But as a radical, Trollope also opposed the unequal treatment of slaves, Native Americans, women, and, in Britain, factory labourers. Simultaneously railing against the rude behaviour arising from the American insistence on equality and condemning America for not treating all of its citizens as equals, *Domestic Manners* embodies the powerfully ambivalent feelings of an era that sought to preserve the past while moving forward into a freer future.

As it opens, *Domestic Manners* turns immediately to slavery. Arriving in America by way of New Orleans, Trollope is surprised at '[t]he large proportion of blacks seen in the streets, all labour being performed by them; the grace and beauty of the elegant Quadroons . . . all help to afford that species of amusement which proceeds from looking at what we never saw before' (p. 12). Within a page, general observations give way to specifics, as she comes across 'A young Negress [who] was employed on the steps of the house; that she was a slave made her an object of interest to us. She was the first slave we had ever spoken to, and I believe we all felt that we could hardly address her with sufficient gentleness. She little dreamed, poor girl, what deep sympathy she excited' (p. 13). But when the girl looks back, it becomes clear that she finds the travellers' sympathy amusing rather than moving. This interchange forces Trollope to rethink her preconceptions:

I left England with feelings so strongly opposed to slavery, that it was not without pain I witnessed its effects around me. At the sight of every Negro man, woman, and child that passed, my fancy wove some little romance of

<sup>12</sup> *The Barnabys in America*, 142.

misery, as belonging to each of them; since I have known more on the subject, and become better acquainted with their real situation in America, I have often smiled at recalling what I then felt. (p. 13)

This encounter establishes the pattern of *Domestic Manners*; descriptions move from observation to interaction, as the author, and presumably her readers, come to a more complex understanding of the social processes she describes.

Trollope does not, in fact, fully grasp the implications of slavery until she finds herself in slave states, where, ironically, she is treated with the gentility that elsewhere she finds lacking in America. Experiencing a degree of comfort that reminds her of being back in England, Trollope is at first blind to the brutalizing effects of a system in which 'the greatest and best feelings of the human heart were paralyzed by the relative positions of slave and owner' (p. 164). As always in *Domestic Manners* she illustrates this perception with a specific anecdote, telling the story of an 8-year-old slave girl who has mistakenly eaten a biscuit laced with arsenic that had been put out in the kitchen to kill rats. Trollope emphasizes the callousness of the white owners in putting out the poison in the first place, and their horror when she administers an emetic and takes the slave girl in her lap to get her to vomit up the noxious substance. When the owners exclaim in revulsion 'My! If Mrs Trollope has not taken her in her lap, and wiped her nasty mouth!' (p. 165), Trollope comments that 'The idea of really sympathising in the sufferings of a slave, appeared to them as absurd as weeping over a calf that had been slaughtered by the butcher' (p. 165).

Trollope intends to create a similar sympathy for Native Americans. Although she initially notes 'the occasional groups of wild and savage looking Indians' (p. 12) she sees in New Orleans, she generally refuses to characterize them as savages, a term frequently used by both British and American travel writers of the period. Instead she depicts Native Americans as both tragic and civilized figures. Focusing on their expulsion from their lands, she notes that the most powerful sermon she heard in America came from a member of the Pequod tribe explaining the plight of his people. The Native American artefacts exhibited at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington fascinate her, the 'many . . . little productions of male and female Indians, all proving clearly that they are perfectly capable of civilization' (p. 146). She is similarly careful to describe the objects



that blacks possess, dwelling on the details of their clothing at the camp meeting, where women are in pink gauze and silver lace, and in New York, where she records having seen ‘a young negress in the extreme of the fashion, and accompanied by a black beau, whose toilet was equally studied; eye-glass, guard-chain, nothing was omitted’ (p. 235). In stressing the cultural possessions of non-white peoples, Trollope implicitly answers the question that Frances Wright posed when she set up her utopia: whether blacks were capable of the same intellectual development as whites. Like slavery, the case of Native Americans confirms the falseness of the American assertion of a belief in equality. The act that was to bring about the forced relocation of Native Americans, known as the Trail of Tears—the Indian Removal Act of 1830—was being debated in Congress when Trollope passed through Washington, DC. She argues, quoting an editorial from a New York paper, that it will strike ‘a formidable blow at the reputation of the United States’ (p. 146).

When she discusses the unequal treatment of women in America, Trollope is less interested in sympathy than in mobilizing them to action. From the earliest chapters of *Domestic Manners*, she criticizes the American practice of separating men from women in public arenas. On the steamboat that travels along the Ohio River, at the balls in Cincinnati, and at the museum exhibits in Philadelphia she mocks the American prudery that insists that women cannot eat with men or view the same group of classical sculptures. Having twice visited American schools for girls, she lists an elaborate curriculum, but notes how quickly the students are assumed to master it. In Cincinnati, ‘[o]ne lovely girl of sixteen took her degree in mathematics, and another was examined in moral philosophy. They blushed so sweetly, and looked so beautifully puzzled and confounded, that it might have been difficult for an abler judge than I was to decide how far they merited the diploma they received’ (p. 57). The problem, even for these educated girls, she observes, is that American society directs all women’s attention to maintaining the home and none towards larger social issues. Trollope illustrates the situation with another anecdote, charting ‘the day of a Philadelphia lady of the first class’ (p. 186) as she proceeds from breakfast to shopping to charitable societies, never once being asked to use her mind. Women’s sequestration leads to the bad manners that Trollope finds everywhere in the country. Men would neither spit in public nor drink so much if