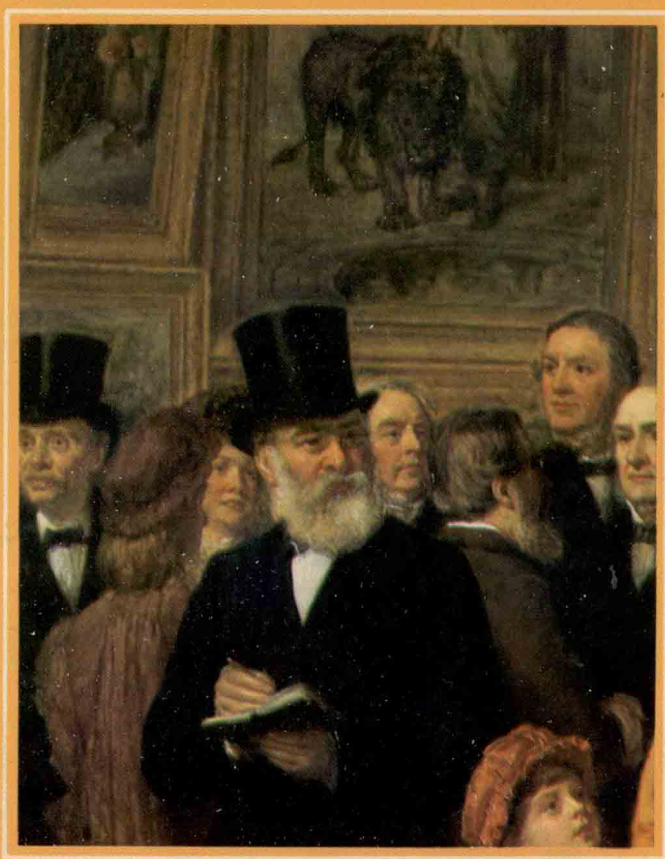


THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



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An Autobiography

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INTRODUCTION

One of Trollope's most famous scenes occurs near the end of *The Last Chronicle of Barset*:

On the next day . . . Mr Crawley, having been summoned by the archdeacon into the library for a little private conversation, found that he got on better with him. How the archdeacon conquered him may perhaps be best described by a further narration of what Mr. Crawley said to his wife. 'I told him that in regard to money matters, as he called them, I had nothing to say. I only trusted that his son was aware that my daughter had no money, and never would have any. "My dear Crawley," the archdeacon said,—for of late there seems to have grown up in the world a habit of greater familiarity than that which I think did prevail when last I moved much among men;—"my dear Crawley, I have enough for both." "I would we stood on more equal grounds," I said. Then as he answered me, he rose from his chair. "We stand," said he, "on the only perfect level on which such men can meet each other. We are both gentlemen." "Sir," I said, rising also, "from the bottom of my heart I agree with you. I could not have spoken such words; but coming from you who are rich to me who am poor, they are honourable to the one and comfortable to the other.'"

Trollope regarded *The Last Chronicle* as on the whole the best of his novels and his high opinion of it (unlike most of his judgements of his own work) has

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always been widely shared. The archdeacon's conquest of Crawley—along with Crawley's famous rebuke to Mrs Proudie ('The distaff were more fitting for you') and the obsequies for Mr Harding—signals the final pacification of Bassetshire and the climactic assertion of its immunity to destructive forces, whether internal or external. And in assimilating Crawley—persecuted, impoverished, an outcast Samson or tortured St Paul—the dear county of Trollope's imagination can also be seen, in retrospect, assimilating the surly unkempt schoolboy first revealed to the public in Trollope's *Autobiography*: the boy who had trudged the muddy lanes of Harrow as Crawley trudged those of Hoggstock, and who had also played out glorious heroic roles in his fantasies.

Trollope was fifty when he wrote *The Last Chronicle* and had reached the summit of his literary and social success. His *Autobiography*, written ten years later, is above all a celebration of his success, which had admitted him to the 'society of the well-born and of the wealthy' and had gained him a welcome there as little compromising to his dignity as the Archdeacon's welcome to Crawley:

I have heard the question argued—On what terms should a man of inferior rank live with those who are manifestly superior to him? . . . I have always said that where the difference in position is quite marked . . . the overtures to intimacy should always come from the higher rank; but if the intimacy be ever fixed, then that rank should be held of no account. It seems to me that intimate

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friendship admits of no standing but that of equality.
(p. 170)

Any reader of Trollope's novels will recognize the confident tone of this, the reassuring implication that commonsense, self-respect, and a little *savoir-faire* will smooth out most social difficulties: in his novels success is apt to come too easily to his young men and to fit itself to them as naturally as their own skin. But just as these happy endings sometimes appear mere formalities, setting aside rather than settling most of the previous conflicts and uncertainties, so the happy ending of Trollope's own story—the achievement of fame, fortune, and popularity, the rubbing shoulders with peers, statesmen, and sages—appears curiously matter-of-fact, even matter-of-course, compared to the dogged energy that brought it about, yet continued unabated as if completely disregarding it. Prosperity obviously agreed with Trollope, and money delighted him, excited him, and drove him as it did Defoe and Balzac; but his measure of the value of wealth was not, like theirs, what money could buy: in his *Autobiography* the only possessions for which he expresses any special regard are his books and his horses; and his novels, though precise enough about his characters' incomes, rarely detail their belongings. Not even the deference paid to money and success, the entrée they procure into that 'special set which dominates all other sets in our English world',¹ constitute the real measure of their

¹ *Phineas Redux*, chapter 40.

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value in Trollope's eyes. What he prizes above all is not the rewards of success but the cost, the price paid in self-discipline, unremitting work, and stoical acceptance of setbacks. The success his *Autobiography* celebrates is essentially a triumph of character.

No less than his novels, however, the *Autobiography* debars heroics. Although, as one or two of the original reviewers observed, it can be read as an advertisement for sheer hard work, it by no means glorifies either work or the rewards work brings. We know—from some of Trollope's letters written about the same time as the *Autobiography*—that the habit of writing became compulsive, an addiction; and the few faint hints he gives us, in his account of his life, of the possible imaginative exhilaration of the creative process, the joys of 'living with' the creatures of his imagination, hardly counteract the chilling effect of the mechanical, early-morning ritual that ground out 250 words per quarter-hour, with or without 'inspiration' and regardless of hangovers. Reviewers of course lauded Trollope's modesty, his complete freedom from 'conceit'. And most were prepared to concede—politely rather than enthusiastically—that his methods of composition had served him well, however unsuitable they might prove for novelists in general. No one wished to quarrel with his own evaluation of himself as toil-worn craftsman rather than inspired thinker, or to question his Carlylean view that toil itself might be genius, at any rate genius sufficient to create

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socially useful and even durable Art. Henry James's pronouncement that Trollope's 'great, his inestimable merit was a complete appreciation of the usual' was implicitly endorsed in practically every judgement of Trollope as he presented himself in the *Autobiography*. If he was the Hero as Man of Letters, he was so in the pragmatic Johnsonian mould, though with many of the sharper edges removed: beneath a mettlesome exterior he was the kindly, genial, wise, and generous man of the world whom many of the reviewers remembered as a friend. These were the personal attributes that they found reflected in his books (except a few of the later ones), and it only heightened their admiration to discover—or be reminded—that they persisted in spite of a miserable adolescence, a prolonged phase of shabby hobbledy-hoydom (shortened and softened in his portrayal of this aspect of himself in Johnny Eames), and a life-long slavery to his servant's early-morning calls and to the constant fear that his muse might (like Charley Tudor and Phineas Finn¹) fail in punctuality.

Trollope would have been gratified, one imagines, by the *Contemporary Review's* summary of the effect of his self-portrait: 'A happy, healthy nature, manifestly, in spite of a singularly depressing boyhood and a strangely unpromising young manhood.' This appears to be precisely the idea of himself that Trollope tried to project in the *Autobiography*, or,

¹ See note to p. 49, below.

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perhaps it would be truer to say, tried to realize and objectify for his own satisfaction. Modern biographers and critics have, inevitably, challenged it, pointing to evidence of psychological obsessions, of melancholia, deepening pessimism and work-dependence both in Trollope's letters and in his novels (particularly some of those written in the last twelve to fifteen years of his life). And reading between the lines of his *Autobiography*, it is easy enough to uncover corroborative suggestions, traces of lingering resentment against his parents and schoolboy persecutors, scars of poverty and humiliation that prosperity, respect, and self-respect have not effaced. Trollope himself admits that 'Something of the disgrace of my school-days has clung to me all through life' and that listening to former school-fellows' reminiscences of Harrow and Winchester still embarrasses him because he feels 'no right to talk of things from most of which I was kept in estrangement' (p. 17). Remembering some boys at another school he attended who let him be punished unjustly rather than admit their own guilt, he fulminates against them as 'lily-livered curs', remembers their names well, and is tempted to print them; 'All that,' he notes, was 'fifty years ago, and it burns me now as though it were yesterday' (p. 6). Yet although, for Trollope, this is very strong language indeed, and although we know that his rather cool assessment of his mother (particularly at the end of chapter 2) struck his elder brother as less

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than fair, neither his *Autobiography* nor his novels and letters offer any real evidence of a radically damaged psyche. His memories of the miseries of his early life may at times be bitter and exaggerated, but whose are not?

The general surprise at Trollope's revelation of his unhappy adolescence was perhaps compounded by the resemblance—which nearly all the original reviewers noted—to the revelations in John Forster's recent *Life of Dickens* (1872-4). These too had caused surprise, but Dickens's novels had in some measure prepared his readers for them, whereas Trollope's include virtually no childhoods, happy or unhappy. Trollope, in a letter to George Eliot and G. H. Lewes, took vehement exception to the first volume of Forster's *Life*:

Forsters first volume is distasteful to me,—as I was sure it would be. Dickens was no hero; he was a powerful, clever, humorous, and, in many respects, wise man;—very ignorant, and thick-skinned, who had taught himself to be his own God, and to believe himself to be a sufficient God for all who came near him;—not a hero at all. Forster tells of him things which should disgrace him,—as the picture he drew of his own father, & the hard words he intended to have published of his own mother; but Forster himself is too coarse-grained, (though also a very powerful man) to know what is and what is not disgraceful; what is or is not heroic.

This bad example must still have been strongly in Trollope's mind when he came to write his *Auto-*

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biography, less than four years later. Indeed, but for the publication of Forster's biography, it may be doubted whether Trollope would have returned, and kept returning, so emphatically to the humiliations of his own boyhood; but he must also have hoped that readers would appreciate the contrast between Dickens's derogations and his own resolute avoidance of self-pity and of breaches of the fifth commandment. Dickens, in Trollope's view, disgraced himself by recording his antipathies towards his parents; his biographer colluded in his disgrace by not erasing the record: both, Trollope implies, mistook false and facile heroics—the brave, sensitive child battling for survival in a hostile, uncomprehending world—for true heroism, which will not let a man forget what he owes to his own dignity or enhance his own at the expense of others'. More than twenty years earlier, in *The Warden*, Trollope had tried to demonstrate an alternative to Dickens's sensational treatment of social abuses; in the *Autobiography* he presents an alternative method of self-dramatization, and especially of intimate self-revelation.

What emerges, as has often been pointed out, is hardly a confessional autobiography and was expressly not intended to be such: but for a man of Trollope's temperament, it surely represented a significant exposing of his secret sores, a potentially embarrassing surrender of privacy. His family motto was *Audio sed taceo*, and although all the anecdotes we have about his behaviour in company (including

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some that he tells against himself) suggest that listening and remaining silent were among the virtues he most conspicuously lacked, it is clear that he kept the inner citadel of his emotional life inaccessible—perhaps even to his own conscious mind. In his novels the most acutely embarrassing moments that confront his characters are nearly always smoothed over by tactful words and timely external distractions: emotional defences never crumble completely as they do in most Victorian novels. In the *Autobiography* the same authorial discretion, the same bland formulae, the same perfect ear for the phrase that reduces the unspeakable to words without quite nullifying it—all the subtle resources of Trollope's fictional art are put to work at once to keep the reader at bay and to welcome him to the cosy circle of the author's confidence. The anonymous reviewer of the *Autobiography* in *The Times* found it 'extremely frank' and more 'sensational' than any of his novels; but another reviewer, W. Lucas Collins, who had been a close friend of Trollope, felt that many readers would regret that he had not 'told us something more about himself'.¹ The truth is that Trollope tells us exactly what and exactly as much as he wishes us to know. To this limited, but by no means contemptible extent the *Autobiography* is one of the masterpieces of his art, and one suspects that what finally led him to write it was not vanity, not

¹ See *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1883, p. 10, and 13 Oct. 1883, p. 8; for Collins's review see *Blackwood's*, cxxxiv (Nov. 1883), 577-96.

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the desire to expose himself to public view or to forestall other biographers who might scrutinize more closely and less sympathetically, but the artistic challenge, the opportunity for a consummate characterization.

How far Trollope believed that the character he painted in the *Autobiography* was the 'real' Anthony Trollope there is no way of knowing. He would have been pleased that most of those who had known him found the character amiable and admirable and felt that they recognized the sitter in the portrait. Certainly it has proved as appealing and as durable as any of the characters in his novels, and it has circumscribed subsequent biographers at least to the extent that the few who have ventured to propose an alternative, or even a 'deeper', character have failed to create a believable one. In calling it '*An* Autobiography', rather than '*My* Autobiography' or simply 'Autobiography', Trollope perhaps recognized that it was only one possible characterization of himself. He insists, at any rate, that he has not attempted a record of his inner life: 'No man ever did so truly,—and no man ever will. Rousseau probably attempted it, but who doubts but that Rousseau has confessed in much the thoughts and convictions rather than the facts of his life?'

In the sentence immediately preceding this passage *An Autobiography* has become 'this so-called autobiography', and the sentence after begins the best-known passage in the book:

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If the rustle of a woman's petticoat has ever stirred my blood; if a cup of wine has been a joy to me; if I have thought tobacco at midnight in pleasant company to be one of the elements of an earthly Paradise; if now and again I have somewhat recklessly fluttered a £5 note over a card-table;—of what matter is that to any reader? I have betrayed no woman. Wine has brought me no sorrow. It has been the companionship of smoking that I have loved, rather than the habit. I have never desired to win money, and I have lost none. To enjoy the excitement of pleasure, but to be free from its vices and ill effects,—to have the sweet, and leave the bitter untasted,—that has been my study. The preachers tell us that this is impossible. It seems to me that hitherto I have succeeded fairly well. I will not say that I have never scorched a finger,—but I carry no ugly wounds.

For what remains to me of life I trust for my happiness still chiefly to my work—hoping that when the power of work be over with me, God may be pleased to take me from a world in which, according to my view, there can then be no joy; secondly, to the love of those who love me; and then to my books. . . .

Now I stretch out my hand, and from the further shore I bid adieu to all who have cared to read any among the many words that I have written. (pp. 365–7)

This, for Trollope, is unusually eloquent and, with its many echoes of the Latin poets, unusually 'literary', and it impresses a character upon our minds perhaps as memorably as any of the words he wrote for or about Mrs Proudie or Josiah Crawley or Lady Glencora Palliser. But, as Trollope himself must have

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sensed, this character is only a fragment of his true nature, no more himself than the deeper reaches of personality that he deliberately shunned or than the Trollope who has come down to us in scores of amusing reminiscences: 'old Trollope banging about', Trollope the 'incarnate gale of wind', 'crusty, quarrelsome, wrong-headed . . . old Tony Trollope', the Trollope whom Edmund Yates quotes—almost credibly—as roaring out at a meeting of postal surveyors, 'I differ from you entirely! What was it you said?'¹ This Trollope is certainly glimpsed in various parts of the *Autobiography*, as is the philosopher who bids us farewell in Virgilian phrase in the final paragraph; and we can accept that they must be facets of one and the same character. But, tantalizingly, it remains only a character—existing halfway between a Trollope novel and the real world of Victorian England.

P. D. Edwards, 1979

¹ These views of Trollope are presented by, respectively, J. A. Froude (quoted on p. 48 of T. H. S. Escott's book on Trollope: see Select Bibliography, below); Wilkie Collins (in a letter reprinted in Robert Ashley, *Wilkie Collins* (London: Arthur Barker, 1952), p. 105); G. A. Sala (written on the title page of his copy of the *Autobiography*: see below, facing p. xviii; *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences* (London: Bentley, 1884), ii. 228.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text of this edition has been photographically reproduced from that of the Oxford Trollope edition (1950). In his Preface to that edition Frederick Page indicated that he had 'for the first time [brought] a printed text of the *Autobiography* into accordance with Trollope's manuscript, now in the British Museum'. Page's policy of religiously giving preference to the manuscript reading over that of the first edition (2v., Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1883) explains some of the curious and inconsistent spellings of proper names, notably George Eliot and Becky Sharp. The former World's Classics edition, as reset in 1953, incorporated most of Page's manuscript readings but preferred the 1883 reading in some cases (including the spelling 'George Eliot') where the book's corrections of the manuscript were clearly warranted, and in others (such as the spelling 'Becky Sharpe' [*sic*]) where the 1883 correction was at least an improvement.

There are no compositors' marks on the manuscript in the British Museum, nor any other indications that it was the copy of the text used by the printer of the first edition: Page therefore conjectured that another copy may have been made for the printer. In adopting manuscript readings where-

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ever these vary from the first edition, Page evidently took it for granted that the conjectural copy was not made or corrected by Trollope himself and that Trollope's son Henry was responsible for all the substantive emendations found in the first edition. But it is hard to imagine why either Trollope or his son would have bothered having the manuscript copied, and there is nothing in the nature of the variants between manuscript and first edition to suggest an intervening copy.

Trollope's working papers in the Bodleian indicate that he began writing *An Autobiography* in October 1875 and completed it on 30 April 1876. He revised it in 1879, adding a number of footnotes chiefly to bring it up to date. Both his and Frederick Page's footnotes are retained in the present edition; but the two appendixes to the Oxford Trollope edition containing a full list of variations between manuscript and first edition and a chronology of Trollope's writings have been omitted, and the index has been modified.