

TROLLOPE

*Interviews and
Recollections*

—
Edited by
R. C. Terry



Trollope
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For Paul and David

I feel that Trollope and I are living here together, for I seem to spend so much of my time with him, especially in the long hours after midnight. We then wander about Bassetshire in a heavyish carriage drawn by two slow horses with long tails and the motors whiz by us, but with Anthony on the box we do reach our destination which they perhaps don't.

(Letters of J. M. Barrie, ed. Viola Meynell, 1942)

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List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the editorial matter:

- ANZ* Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand*, 2 vols (1873)
- Auto.* Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (1883; Oxford: World's Classics, 1961)
- Commentary* Michael Sadleir, *Trollope: A Commentary* (1927; rev. edn 1945)
- FT* Frances Eleanor Trollope, *Frances Trollope: Her Life and Literary Work from George III to Victoria*, 2 vols (1895)
- Letters* *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, ed. N. John Hall, 2 vols (Stanford, 1983)
- WIR* Thomas Adolphus Trollope, *What I Remember*, 2 vols (1887)

Introduction

The pitfalls of writing lives were much in Trollope's mind at the time he was himself the subject of a sketch by T. H. S. Escott. His own short study of Thackeray had appeared in May 1879, he had already completed a life of Lord Palmerston, and his *Life of Cicero* would appear in 1880. 'How hard it is to put into words all the nebulous ideas as to another man's identity', he remarked to Escott.¹ His reservations about biographical studies had been voiced with typical vigour some years earlier. He found Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* distasteful for its personal disclosures and raged at the mock humility in Macready's *Reminiscences*:

These books do not make me pleased with humanity. It is disgusting to see the self-consciousness and irritated crying for applause such men as Macready & Dickens have exhibited; – & which dear old Thackeray did exhibit also. It astonishes me not that men should feel it, but that they shew it. I am sure of myself that whenever such a disease has been oppressing me I have been able to tread it out. (*Letters*, II, 671)

No one would accuse Trollope of crying for applause. Indeed, his distaste for personal disclosure suggests, like Mr Chadband's sermon to Jo, that in putting him on show – even though what follows is not a biography – we are about to address a very tough subject.

Like others in the series, however, this book is close kin to biography, and its justification may be urged against Trollope's forthright comments above that, in presenting the man in his habit as he lived, at least it seeks safety in numbers, drawing on the testimonies of those who knew him, some as intimate friends, some as casual and not always felicitous acquaintances. It has the advantage, therefore, of cumulative and dissonant views in a variety of voices, agreeable, querulous, flattering or disapproving, as the speakers reveal something of themselves as well as of him. I

think Trollope might consider this kind of record worthwhile – he might even concede it the truest sort of biography.

Although less abundantly chronicled than either Dickens or Thackeray, Trollope enjoyed a double life as civil servant and author, travelled extensively throughout the world, pursued a vigorous social round in London clubs, and hunted with a frantic and foolhardy passion. These occupations brought him into contact with many whose testimonies make up this collection. And, despite Trollope's warnings, an editor is enticed into imposing some kind of unity on this portrait which scholar or general reader may conveniently relate to available biographies.²

'What sort of person was Anthony Trollope?' The question was asked again by N. John Hall in 1982, a question, he suggested, as difficult to answer as the more important one concerning the nature of his appeal as a novelist. A. L. Rowse, too, in the same volume celebrating the Trollope centenary, puzzled over the novelist, concluding that the paradox lay in his genius: 'Trollope was such an obsessed person, for all his apparent normality.' In a recent book, Andrew Wright included a chapter entitled 'What the Autobiography Says and Leaves Unsaid' arguing that the author's forthrightness concealed much despite the tone of frank confession. Even his letters, Hall said, 'reveal the inner man only indirectly'; he can be found in them, 'but one must work at it'.³ As Michael Sadleir observed in his pioneering study in 1927, 'Of self-portraiture he was very sparing' (*Commentary*, p. 110). Certainly to know Trollope well, what follows should be read in conjunction with *An Autobiography*, published posthumously in 1883, and that recent treasure-house of anecdotes, the two-volume edition of *The Letters of Anthony Trollope* published in 1983.

Unlike Dickens and Thackeray, Trollope offered that mixed blessing to scholarly posterity, an account of his life. The *Autobiography* bears witness to Trollope's forceful personality: his intense ambition, craving for love and popularity, and passion for doing everything at full stretch – work at the Post Office, literary endeavours of many kinds, hunting and social pursuits down to the most meticulous counting of pages written and sums earned. At the same time he is reticent about many personal matters where we long for enlightenment, and positively misleading where a judgement of his own merits is concerned. For all its clarity the *Autobiography* seems half designed to throw us off the scent, and Victorian distaste for self-display does not entirely