Trollope came to the writing of his *Autobiography* late in life, after a long season of fame that had latterly begun to decline. In the 1883 preface — the *Autobiography* was published, by Trollope's direction, posthumously — Henry Trollope wrote: 'I see from my father's manuscript, and from his papers, that the first two chapters of this memoir were written in the later part of 1875, that he began the third chapter early in January 1876, and that he finished the record before the middle of April in that year' (p. xviii). Having been born on 24 April 1815, Trollope was thus in his sixty-first year when he began the *Autobiography*: if he was going to set down an apology for his life, he must do so before long. Yet of all authors Trollope must be among those most disposed to rate their authorial powers modestly. In 1875 he assuredly did not feel himself to be abused or unjustly neglected. On the contrary he felt that he had received, had in fact earned, his share of the world's rewards, in fame and fortune.

Although the work begins by disclaiming the intention of speaking 'of the little details of my private life', in favour of writing of the literary life and what such a career entails, Trollope plunges forthwith into a most pitiable account of his early years as the neglected youngest son of an improvident father and of a mother whose absence in America during his boyhood defined, all too cruelly — though he does not say so — her capacity to survive apart from him.

> My boyhood was, I think, as unhappy as that of a young gentleman could well be, my misfortunes arising from a mixture of poverty and gentle standing on the part of my father, and from an utter want on my own part of that juvenile manhood which enables some boys to hold up their heads even among the distresses which such a position is sure to produce.

*Autobiography*, p. 1
Such is the second paragraph of the *Autobiography* and such is the introduction or the first statement of the theme of early misery which Trollope traces throughout childhood, youth, and young manhood — from Harrow to Winchester and back to Harrow again; to the family exile in Belgium; and to the early years of employment at the Post Office in St Martin's-le-Grand, where the impoverished hobbledehoy contemplated, not for the first time, suicide.

Nothing went right at school. At Harrow he was a day-boy among boarders. He was not well-favoured physically and could not or did not redeem on the playing fields the idleness and unpopularity of his life in the classroom. For two years at a private school at Sunbury, from ten to twelve, 'I was always in disgrace', having among other things been made scapegoat for 'some nameless horror'. At twelve he was sent to Winchester — while, at the same time, his mother went off to America in a vain attempt to repair the declining family fortunes by opening a bazaar in Cincinnati; and while his father, having failed at the bar, turned with signal imprudence to farming, 'the last step preparatory to his final ruin'. As a boy at Winchester, thrashed constantly by his elder brother Tom, and afterward deeply embarrassed by the family financial distresses (for the school bills could not be paid and Anthony was deprived even of pocket money), 'I considered whether I could not find my way up to the top of that college tower, and from thence put an end to every thing.' (p. 8).

The efforts to outwit the sheriff's deputies who had come to take possession of all the Trollope property, the flight to Bruges, the heroic writing and nursing by Frances Trollope as her husband and two of their children died within a few months: these chapters in the early life of Anthony Trollope are less bleak to read about than, by his own account, they were in the living through. In fact, of the first twenty-six years of his life, he asserts:

I fear that my mode of telling will have left an idea simply of their absurdities; but in truth I was wretched, —sometimes almost unto death, and have often cursed the hour in which I was born. There had clung to me a feeling that I had been looked upon always as an evil, an encumbrance, a useless thing, as a creature of whom those connected with him had to be ashamed.

*Autobiography*, p. 51