Trollope Revises Trollope¹

ANDREW WRIGHT

Trollope’s productive energy and enormous accomplishment, his admittedly obsessive drive to write every day in or out of season, offer – sometimes all too plausibly – the temptation to find the result insufficiently finished. To be sure, it is easy enough to discover in his novels a certain untidiness in plot-making, the assignment of different names to a single character, imperfect consistency in geography: Frank Robbins and John W. Clark are among the many readers of Trollope who have remarked on such matters.² Nor did Trollope ever undertake so comprehensive a revision of his work as did Henry James for the New York Edition (and that James relished the opportunity is made splendidly plain in the prefaces and in his letters). Of course, Trollope was never granted such an opportunity, but there is little evidence that he would have grasped the nettle with such forcefulness as did James. So much must be granted, but these facts sometimes conceal the attentive seriousness which Trollope devoted to his work, especially when these facts are coupled with the somewhat disingenuous disclaimers of the Autobiography on the doctrine of inspiration, together with his notorious comparison of the craft of fiction to those of the tallow-chandler and the cobbler.

Yet there is also in the Autobiography another and more credible account of the impulse behind the production of the forty-seven novels – not to mention the bulky record of his travels to the West Indies, to North America, to Australia and New Zealand, to South Africa; the studies of Cicero, Thackeray, Palmerston; the short stories and the journalism. In the Autobiography Trollope writes most persuasively of the force behind his enormous output: ‘I was always going about’, he says, ‘with some castle in the air firmly built within my mind. Nor were these efforts in architecture spasmodic, or subject to constant change from day to day. For weeks, for months, if I remember rightly, from year to year, I..."
would carry on the same tale, binding myself down to certain laws, to certain proportions, and proprieties, and unities. Explicitly this castle-building came about as a desperate alternative to the ruinous circumstances of his early life as the son of an improvident father, a neglectful mother, and a bullying elder brother. It was, again explicitly, an alternative to suicide. Given the circumstances, and given his intelligence and talent, it is no wonder that Trollope was able to produce more work of importance than any other first-class novelist before or since. Yet this urgent impulse has, not altogether surprisingly, been insufficiently taken into account. The centenary of his death provides opportunity to redress the balance. The present essay, however, is not a piece of speculation: it is a study of Trollope at work on his manuscripts.

Such study is in its infancy. In ‘The Text of Trollope’s Phineas Redux’ R. W. Chapman indicated almost by the way (the essay is a consideration of various textual anomalies in the World’s Classics edition of Phineas Redux) that he had examined the manuscript of the Autobiography in the British Museum but acknowledged that he had made no very particular study of it; he even supposed, as he admitted in this essay, that there was no surviving manuscript of any of Trollope’s novels. Robert H. Taylor, in ‘The Manuscript of Trollope’s The American Senator Collated with the First Edition? produced a fine study of a kind that was not to be attempted again in such detail for many years. Later, Frederick Page provided in the Oxford Trollope edition of the Autobiography of 1950 ‘a printed text in accordance with Trollope’s manuscript’. P. D. Edwards collated the manuscript of He Knew He Was Right in the Pierpont Morgan Library with the first edition for the University of Queensland edition of 1974. Mary Hamer’s exemplary study of the Framley Parsonage manuscript at Harrow School corrects some misapprehensions about Trollope’s working habits, and will be discussed more fully in the course of the present essay; unfortunately about half the manuscript is missing, but the remaining portion provides adequate ground for demonstration of the steps taken by Trollope in the revision of that novel from first draft onward. And there is no lack of manuscript evidence. In a most valuable appendix to ‘Trollope at Full Length’, Gordon Ray listed manuscripts of thirty-three novels and indicated locations for them, together with an assessment in each case of the level of correction: all bear signs of at least minor correction, eight