

THOMAS ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE : A VICTORIAN ANGLO-FLORENTINE

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THE name of Thomas Adolphus Trollope occurs frequently in the correspondence and memoirs of English writers who lived in Florence during the middle years of the last century. Yet his works are largely unread today. His novels have been overshadowed by those of his brother Anthony ; his historical and journalistic essays are seldom spoken of, although his mother's acute observations in *Domestic Manners of the Americans* have now received the reappraisal they deserved. Yet Thomas, her favourite son, not only had some pretensions to being a serious historian, he also had a singularly fortunate and tranquil career. Sometimes an unwise financial manager, he was still never the victim of the desperate pecuniary need which had driven his mother to take up writing during her marriage. Nor was he seized by that agonizing compulsion to prove himself which, in the case of Anthony, stimulated the development of great gifts as a novelist. His labour was industrious, but it cannot be said that he achieved lasting distinction in any branch of writing. As he confessed with disarming modesty in his autobiography, " I suppose my pen work has never taken so much out of me as it does out of many men, because the ever-running little stream has been too shallow to draw much from the deeper wells of thought ".¹

The present essay does not attempt to make exaggerated claims for Trollope as a literary figure. And yet he offers some interesting problems. He never wrote a good novel, and yet his novels are curious repositories both of first-hand observation in Italy and of Victorian clichés about Italian character. As a journalist, he is one of the most interesting of those Englishmen who hoped for a regenerated Italy. As a man in society, he is one

¹ *What I Remember*, 3 vols. (London, 1887-9), iii. 286.

of the most engaging of that group of Anglo-Florentines who met in the Villino Trollope to debate the prospects of the emergent nation. And as a historian, he was the author of a four-volume history of Florence which anticipates many of those arguments later to appear in the still more ambitious work of John Addington Symonds. Although several of his novels are set in England and some of his travel sketches are concerned with France and Switzerland, I propose to limit myself to his writings on Italy, and especially to his work as a historian—which best displays his strengths and limitations.¹

I

Thomas Trollope spent most of his adult life in Italy, but only after a period of unsettlement caused by the disarray of the family's affairs so familiar to readers of Anthony's *Autobiography*. His wide if casual reading, his divergent interests, and at times his pronounced tendency toward dilettantism, initially may have represented a reaction against the scholarly "asceticism" of his father.² After a period of schooling at Winchester, he joined his mother in America, a country which he regarded somewhat more kindly than she.³ He returned to England and entered Oxford, where his career was injured by a quarrel between his

¹ A complete listing of Trollope's works can, of course, be consulted in the British Museum catalogue; by "writings on Italy" I also intend to include some of the novels cited in this paper. An effort to track down all Trollope's newspaper correspondence would probably be futile, and I have concentrated here on his contributions to the *Daily News* and *Standard* (London) in the eighteen-sixties and eighteen-seventies. For valuable assistance in the preparation of this paper, I am indebted to the Faculty Summer Fellowship programme of the University of Nebraska Research Council and to the staff of the British Museum and the British Museum Newspaper Library, Colindale.

² *What I Remember*, i. 58.

³ Both sons took exception to their mother's strictures; see Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, ed. Bradford A. Booth (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1947), p. 20; *What I Remember*, i. 233-4. From his observation of the Anglo-American colony in Rome in later years, Thomas was to conclude that in manners and ideas the English and American remained close kin; in his novel *Artingale Castle* the frank and open young American George Fraser, not the stuffy and rather dull-witted Sir Hildebrand, is heir to the estate—perhaps Trollope's way of singling out this symbolic kinship and suggesting something like a conception of a "natural" aristocracy of talent.

father and Whately of Alban Hall and further complicated by his own idleness and his enthusiasm for all reading except that which was prescribed. He travelled, taught at school briefly at Birmingham, and in 1838 decided to become the companion of his mother on her travels. He was already writing voluminously,¹ and his first book, *A Summer in Brittany*, appeared in 1840. In September, 1843, he and his mother decided to move to Florence, where they had many friends and where the cost of living was not so great.

In Florence Trollope rapidly became an interested student of and sympathizer with the liberal cause. A friend wrote home from Florence in October 1847 to say that he had met Tom Trollope on the street. "He was very enthusiastic about Italian destinies, and very busy about a newspaper which is to be published on Saturday."² The newspaper was *The Tuscan Athenaeum*, which lasted only a few months but which today is still a revealing document in the history of English liberals in Italy.³ In Florence, too, he met his first wife, Theodosia Garrow, who was to acquire a modest reputation as a translator and journalist. Other acquaintances over the ensuing years were Lord Holland, the British Minister, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Dickens, the Brownings and their friend Isabella Blagden, Landor, Alfred Austin, and the American Kate Field, whose description of the "quaintly fascinating" Villino Trollope, "with its marble pillars, its grim men in armour, starting like sentinels from the walls, and its curiosities greeting you at every step", entertained American readers.⁴ To judge from his autobiography, the friendship which influenced Trollope the

¹ "I find myself writing and sending off a surprising number of 'articles' on all sorts of subjects—reviews, sketches of travel, biographical notices, fragments from the byeways of history, and the like, to all kinds of periodical publications, many of them long since dead and forgotten" (*What I Remember*, ii. 1-2).

² The friend was Francis Jeune, former headmaster of King Edward's School in Birmingham, later Bishop of Peterborough; letter quoted in Frances Eleanor Trollope, *Frances Trollope: Her Life and Literary Work from George III. to Victoria*, 2 vols. (London, 1895), ii. 99.

³ A complete file exists in the New York Public Library.

⁴ [Kate Field], "English Authors in Florence", *The Atlantic Monthly*, xiv (December 1864), 663-4.

most was that with George Eliot, whom he met during the period of her research for *Romola*.¹ He himself wrote much, including a series of historical works—*A Decade of Italian Women*, *The Girlhood of Catherine de' Medici*, *Filippo Strozzi*, *History of the Commonwealth of Florence*, and others—which reveal the close relationship between his interest in contemporary Florence and his researches in the past. “All these historical books were written *con amore*. The study of bygone Florentines had an interest for me which was quickened by the daily and hourly study of living Florentines. It was curious to mark in them resemblances of character, temperament, idiosyncrasy, defects, and merits, to those of their forefathers who move and breathe before us in the pages of such old chroniclers as Villani, Segni, Varchi, and the rest, and in sundry fire-graven strophes and lines of their mighty poet.”² The completion of the *History*, not long after his wife's death in April 1865, did not mean a respite from his labours. A letter Trollope wrote to Kate Field on June 4, 1866, talks of his plans :

I am now the representative of the Daily News in Italy, a matter which takes a monstrous cantle out of my time. I am writing a new novel. I am restoring, and in fact nearly rebuilding the villa I have bought, in which work I am my own architect, and have to look after the workmen myself. And in addition to all this my friends seem to consider that I am a perfectly idle man, whom it is fair to load with all their various affairs. I declare that a good 25 per cent of my time is occupied in doing the business of other people.³

Nonetheless, he published eight novels between 1866 and 1872.

¹ *What I Remember*, ii. 284-5 (Trollope's comments on *Romola*); *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 7 vols. (New Haven, 1954-5), *passim*; especially George Eliot's description of her journey to the monasteries of the Val d'Arno (iii. 421-5) and her letter to Thomas Trollope on sources for *Romola* and various problems of Italian linguistic usage (iii. 431-2). In a letter to Oscar Browning, George Eliot described herself as “vexed to think that Mr. Trollope's History [of Florence] answers worse commercially than his novels” (26 July 1867 [iv. 376]). I have suggested elsewhere the possible influence of Trollope's biography of Filippo Strozzi on George Eliot's characterization of Tito (*Victorian Newsletter*, No. 25 [Spring 1964], pp. 20-22); *La Beata*, with its study of artistic temperament (see section II of this paper) may also have helped to shape George Eliot's conception.

² *What I Remember*, ii. 212-13.

³ “Victorian Authors at Florence: Letters by T. Adolphus Trollope to Kate Field Now First Published”, ed. Zoltán Haraszti, *More Books: Being the Bulletin of the Boston Public Library*, ii (1927), 143.

The Florentine period saw the appearance of most of Trollope's major works. After his second marriage¹ he spent two decades in Rome as correspondent to the *London Standard*, a post which Alfred Austin had procured for him. No doubt because of his advancing years and the demanding nature of his job, he published somewhat less in book form, although there were still the two books *The Papal Conclaves* (1876) and *Story of the Life of Pius IX* (1877), his last rambling efforts to write history on the grand scale. After the publication of *The Homes and Haunts of the Italian Poets* (1881), written in collaboration with his wife, Trollope issued nothing in book form until his autobiography. *What I Remember* is a leisurely and serene look backward, more discursive and relaxed than Anthony's autobiography, but far the inferior work. Its geniality suggests its limitation; the man behind it is attractive, but his imagination mediocre. But the book shows no lessening of its author's zest for travel, his love of antiquarian byways, his sometimes penetrating judgements of people he met. Some of them represented a departing generation. In 1878 Trollope had visited the death chamber of Victor Emmanuel, whom he had always admired, and less than a month afterwards he was among the throngs which passed the body of Pius IX, who had been Pope more than thirty years. In the king Trollope had seen the incarnation of all that was best and noblest in the Italian character, a man who had struggled to keep his country out of the hands of the extremists of Right and Left; Trollope had watched the Pope turn from a brief flirtation with liberalism in the eighteen-forties to a policy which satisfied the most reactionary elements in the Vatican. The passing of the two great public figures marked a symbolic end to his own career. He and his wife finally settled in a cottage in Devon, where he died on 11 November 1892.

II

Trollope's Italian novels show a close understanding of their setting. For us they are valuable, if at all, as fictionalized

¹ To Frances Eleanor Ternan, sister of the woman whose name rumours had already linked to that of Dickens.

journalism rather than as specimens of the novel form.¹ There are some naive, lovely, innocent Victorian heroines with Italian names : Annunziata Leti in *La Beata* (1861), Maddalena in *Giulio Malatesta* (1863), Guilia in *Beppo the Conscript* (1864), Gemma in *Gemma* (1866). There is also an array of worldly, self-seeking clergy : for example, Canon Capucci, in *La Beata*, who commissions a painting of St. Filomena from an ambitious artist, Filippo Lonari ; and Canon Guidi, in *Marietta* (1862), who engineers an elaborate and rather silly poison plot and who goes free in the end—ultimately, we are told, to become a Cardinal.² Less villainous but equally disreputable are the parish priest in *Beppo the Conscript*, who counsels Beppo to take to the hills in order to avoid conscription in Victor Emmanuel's patriotic army, and the priest in *The Dream Numbers* (1868), who plots to get the winnings of a poor ignorant parishioner in the government lottery. Novel after novel attacks the Church as an institution. Monasticism is treated as an unmitigated evil : Filippo Lonari, encountering the girl whom he deserted and whose dying appeal to visit her he had callously rejected, dashes away to a monastic retreat for a fanatical course of penance ; in *Giulio Malatesta*, a polished, worldly Canon tries to end the perverse love of Stella for Giulio by forcing her into a convent ; in *A Siren* (1870) Father Fabiano, an old monk, attends to the crumbling, deserted Church of St. Apollinaire as a punishment for some mysterious crime he is said to have committed against his order. One cleric is kindly portrayed : the Canon Giacomo de' Lunardo in *Marietta*, a genial, undogmatic man whose finest pleasures are good wine and a round of amateur string quartet playing. He seems to resemble more closely one of Anthony's English clergymen. What is strange is that despite a first-hand knowledge of the Italian Church, Trollope never

¹ Trollope also wrote several novels with an English setting : *Lindisfarne Chase* (1864), *Artingale Castle* (1867), *The Garstangs of Garstang Grange* (1869), *Durnton Abbey* (1871), *The Stilwinches of Combe Mavis* (1872).

² The figure of the worldly-wise, comfort-loving Cardinal may owe something to Wiseman. For a learned juridical pamphlet, Canon Guidi in later years is promoted to the bishopric of Hippopotamos *in partibus*, which recalls Wiseman's title of Bishop of Melipotamus *in partibus infidelium*. The villainous attributes, of course, are not Wiseman's, nor Blougram's.

really advances beyond the conventions of the Gothic novel ; his wealth of information is subservient to his observance of those conventions. His clerics, almost uniformly evil, are inevitably two-dimensional.

Not only does Trollope fail in portraying convincing characters. His uncertainty as to purpose muddles the response of the reader. Melodramatic episodes are interspersed with close, accurate studies of setting ; plot and theme do not work together. At times *La Beata* is a sad tale of a wronged woman ; and at times it verges on a comedy of manners. An English family, the Patringhams, are introduced and good-humouredly satirized, but they get in the way of the action and are summarily dropped in the later sections of the novel. Trollope also touches on the question of the morality of art and the artist, but only enough to perplex the reader. The references to famous paintings are conventional, and neither the talented but unscrupulous Pippo nor the jovial, honest Tito (whose reach seldom or never exceeds his grasp) are suitable agents for a high moral theme. Trollope is more concerned with showing the connection between artistic talent and political advancement in a corrupt society and displaying the degeneracy of a city in which the pure *La Beata*, who might in an earlier day have been a model for Fra Angelico, is reduced to working for a painter interested only in netting a handsome commission. By far the best sections of the book are those which depict the decaying vitality of a society amidst its great historical monuments and its sumptuous ceremonies and forms.¹

Marietta is an even more revealing failure. It depicts with apparent authenticity of detail the impoverished aristocracy and rising middle class in nineteenth-century Florence, and examines some features of the relationship between town and country. The stage is set for a drama of social ambition.

¹ Trollope quotes without comment Lewes's paraphrase of Jane Carlyle's reaction to *La Beata* : " In her opinion you would have done better to make two books of it, one the love story, and one a description of Florentine life. . . . Now, although I cannot by any means agree with that criticism of hers, I fancy the origin of it was some such feeling, as I have endeavoured to indicate in saying you are often critical when you should be simply objective " (*What I Remember*, ii. 304).

Marietta wishes to recover the palazzo which has passed out of her family's hands. She engages the counsel of her former lover, now (of course) a Canon, who idolizes money and power as much as she idolizes her ancestors. Marietta, in the end, does have the satisfaction of seeing her brother Sebastian get the palazzo; the Canon does become a Cardinal, although clearly from Trollope's point of view (and ours, if we can believe the plot) he deserves to be hanged. But are we to assume that the Cardinal is troubled by conscience, as the last paragraph seems to hint? Or that, having seen her ancestor worship take a nearly disastrous turn, we should rejoice in Marietta's triumph at the end? Has she been tempered by suffering, or has her good luck excused her from self-revelation? And is Sebastian, portrayed as a lad of weak if amiable temperament, now prepared to assume the responsibility for two fortunes—his own and his bride's? In the figures of Sebastian's prosperous, middle-class in-laws, Trollope seems to imply that the old money needs the transfusion from the new commercial wealth. But even this is not clear, and the novel remains uneasily divided between melodrama and social comment, Gothic romance and a distinctly Victorian study of social evolution and decay.

Other works of fiction by Trollope demonstrate the interference of the journalist with the novelist. In *Giulio Malatesta*, the digressive political material shows that his interests lie chiefly in the propagandizing which time and setting afford. He describes vividly the setting-forth of Pisan volunteers in March 1848, in cold, bleak, rainy weather, for their heroic encounter with Radetzky at Goito. But historical events do not complement or illuminate the fictional narrative. Then, too, psychological consistency is not Trollope's *forte*; he cannot unfold character through events. Presented with the freedom of the novelist, the journalist is at a loss; and clumsy exposition replaces dramatic development, as in this description of the relationship between Giulio and Stella:

It might have been anticipated that the manner in which the great master-passion would manifest itself in those two natures would have been exactly the reverse of that which was in fact the case; that the proud, reserved, melancholy, unhoping nature of the man would have yielded to the passion slowly, cautiously,

strugglingly, and gradually; and that the warm-natured, impulsive, happy-hearted girl whose past had done nothing towards teaching her misgiving or caution, would have fallen at once into the toils. It was not so! And the fact that the exact reverse was the case is illustrative of the manifold variety and complexity of the qualities which go to the producing of the diversities of human character.¹

And what possibilities the historical setting offers are squandered in an absurd plot which depends on an illegal marriage and the consequences for an heir some twenty years afterward. Similarly, in *Gemma* the political interest recedes as Trollope gets down to the dirty doings, chiefly a poison plot. A curious reader today will find only slight reward in the accurate and painstaking descriptions of Siena, just as in *Leonora Casaloni* he will find only the descriptions of the squalid life of the country of more than passing interest. Again, in *The Dream Numbers*, Trollope is most persuasive in such incidental touches as the description of the impoverished people thronging the lottery shop. The plot is so outrageous that Trollope uneasily inserts footnotes attesting the historical truth of some of the chief details. In *A Siren* he exploits some of the dramatic possibilities of the pleasure-seeking, hollow ritual of the carnival; but the necessity of preserving the murder mystery forestalls any conceivable attainment of psychological depth in the treatment of the villain. The siren herself, an opera-star of tarnished reputation, is sometimes a nuisance to the other characters, at other times a prostitute with a heart of gold, and hardly convincing in either role. The incongruous trappings of the story and its soggy style² do not improve matters.

Repeatedly, then, Trollope made his situations too melodramatic for his reader to take the moral point seriously. The result is that his novels are potboilers, and not very skilful performances at that. Their chief value for the literary historian lies in the remarkable fact that although Trollope's own

¹ *Giulio Malatesta*, 3 vols. (London, 1863), i. 287-8.

² The level of the style may be not unfairly indicated by this description of the Marchese's jealousy: "There was a raging hell in his heart. And yet he stood there, and gazed eagerly, greedily one would have said. And every minute, and every movement blasted his eyes, and stabbed his heart, and poured poison into his veins" (*A Siren*, 3 vols. [London, 1870], i. 30-31).

knowledge of Italy was no mere amateur's, he willingly catered to the preconceptions of a Protestant, middle-class English audience. His judgement in the autobiography to the contrary,¹ the English novels are not notably worse, and one of them—*Durnton Abbey*—aims higher. But in all of his novels, the machinery of melodrama is a detriment. Two recent writers on the Trollope family point to the fact that Thomas provided the plot for Anthony's *Doctor Thorne*, and show why that plot was not suited to Anthony's abilities :

Arranged events could not, in his point of view, possess reality. Characters, when properly conceived, necessitated action, but the action must not dominate the characters. His refusal to keep secrets from his readers sprang from this distrust of prearrangement and surprise. Tom, who had the historian's mild contempt for the novel, provided a plot loosely in accord with his own thesis that human behaviour is the product of circumstances, but too melodramatic and improbable to be congenial to his brother.²

Perhaps, too, this historian's "mild contempt for the novel" and, indeed, for his own novels, accounts as well for the slight interest they held for his own audience. "We fear that his novels are often considered dull," Oscar Browning wrote in the *Fortnightly*, "and not without reason."³

III

Trollope went to Italy at a time when the struggle for freedom had not yet been resolved, and when the plight of the country was awakening the imaginations of the Victorians as it had those of the generation of Byron and Shelley. Between 1847 and 1850 he contributed a number of articles to the *Athenaeum* which were later collected and published under the title *Impressions of a*

¹ "Those [novels] which I wrote on English subjects are unquestionably bad. I had been living the best part of a life-time out of England; I knew but little comparatively of English life, and I had no business to meddle with such subjects" (*What I Remember*, ii. 214-15).

² Lucy Poate Stebbins and Richard Poate Stebbins, *The Trollopes: The Chronicle of a Writing Family* (London, 1946), p. 157.

³ Oscar Browning, "Trollope's History of Florence", *The Fortnightly Review*, iv (1866), 85. A more sympathetic writer took the chilly reception of the novels as evidence of English insularity when it came to Italian subject-matter ("Our Novels: The Sensational School", *Temple Bar*, xxix [1870], 422-3).

Wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France, and Spain. Although some of the letters were casual travel sketches, others show a growing awareness of Italian politics and an impatience with those of his countrymen whose interest in Italy seemed to him narrowly antiquarian. "The fact is, our countrymen visit the Eternal City for the most part solely as a museum", he complained. "They acquaint themselves with its antiquities—study its marbles, pictures, churches—bask in its sun; but as a living city of nineteenth-century men they know little or nothing of it."¹ A decade later, in *Filippo Strozzi*, he was to predict confidently that Englishmen returning from Italy would "no longer babble only of 'their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff' Events have already begun to awaken our . . . countrymen to the fact, that there is on that sunny side of the mountains a live and struggling nation with high aspirations."²

Trollope sought evidence to explain those aspirations in both the old chroniclers and the events unfolding during his long residence in Italy. Perhaps the most prominent theme in his journalism as well as his novels is the reactionary policy represented by the Church. In the late eighteen-forties it was clear that if the Papacy were to reform itself, Pius IX would be the man to perform the task. As early as January 1848 Trollope feared that Pius's liberalism was both unenlightened and "timorous", a view which later events bore out.³ He respected the pontiff as a man, if a somewhat purblind one; in *The Story of the Life of Pius IX* he was careful to say that the Pope was neither saint nor profligate, and found his conversion to the conservative Church party fully as sincere as his earlier liberalism. But although the biography portrays the Pope as a man who sincerely thought himself bound to a higher duty and who adhered to that duty even at the sacrifice of expediency,⁴ it

¹ *Impressions of a Wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France, and Spain* (London, 1850), pp. 33-34.

² *Filippo Strozzi: A History of the Last Days of the Old Italian Liberty* (London, 1860), p. vii.

³ *Impressions of a Wanderer*, p. 36.

⁴ Trollope is more moderate in *The Story of the Life of Pius IX* than in *Paul the Pope and Paul the Friar: A Story of an Interdict* (London, 1861), where he describes Pius IX as "a wrong-headed, ignorant, and weak old man, muttering unregarded curses, feebly essaying to wield the blunted spiritual sword once

shows no relenting in Trollope's dislike for such doctrines as papal infallibility.¹

In the opening chapter of his novel *Beppo the Conscript* Trollope had laid the blame for the plight of Italy on the Counter-Reformation, which had put unlimited power in the hands of the priests and made the confessional a device for fostering "unmanly" depravity. The Counter-Reformation had brought peace but also stagnation; by the time it had done its work, Trollope argued, the population was no longer capable of governing itself. It is clear that Trollope saw a lesson for his own day here. In some letters to the *Daily News* of London in 1867 he discussed the meaning of the phrase "a free church in a free state". The Church had a right to spiritual freedom, but could not be exempt from the normal requirements of civil society. It could preach as it wished, but in civil matters—tax, property—it must accept the limitations imposed by the government. "When the civil government says to a church—You shall not speak the truth that is in you; you shall not be spiritually free; you shall not preach and teach—then the time and occasion for martyrdom begins, and not before."² Elsewhere he pointed out that the church had been "for so many ages and generations a word of fear, a mischief, and a bane, that [the Italians] cannot divest themselves of the notion that it would be madness not tie its hands now that, at last, they have got it down".³

If the Papacy was a problem in the new Italy of the sixties and seventies as well as the old, another problem was Italy's ability for self-government. Trollope's historical studies taught him a certain scepticism; in *Impressions of a Wanderer* he admitted that although "a people can only become fit for self-government by practising it," nonetheless "the self government of the Tuscans is becoming marvellously like no government at

brandished to such effect by his predecessors, and, though impotently, yet to a certain degree mischievously, striving to hold back mankind in their upward struggle towards light, truth, liberty, and happiness" (p. 235).

¹ In *Paul the Pope and Paul the Friar* he had asserted of the interdict that "to any mind habituated to a free and reverent contemplation of the Creator and his creation, no most debased form of fetish-worship, or devil-worship, can present a set of notions more monstrous, more horrible, more atheistical" (p. 233).

² *Daily News*, 9 January 1867, p. 5/1. ³ *Ibid.* 14 February 1867, p. 5/3.

all".¹ A decade later, looking back on the disastrous finale of the experiment of 1849-50, he tried to show that Tuscany had gone much further toward genuine self-government. Earlier difficulties had been caused by the republicans on the far Left who were stimulated by the same sort of dangerous zeal so pronounced in the French Revolution. Others among them had been idealistic followers of Gioberti "bent on realizing an union between theocracy and democracy, which should give birth to a millenarian perfection of social arrangements".² The country was doomed to failure in 1848, caught between the demagogues on the Left and the Moderates, who were without the wisdom or energy to bolster their good intentions by deeds.

It is not surprising that Trollope was also far more sceptical than many of his countrymen about Mazzini and Garibaldi. For him they were not romantic heroes. What he called the "factious, noisy, naughty-child-like populace" had been manipulated by cynical rabble-rousers like Mazzini who urged courses they themselves knew impracticable.³ He scoffed at Mazzini's argument that the Pope could make terms like "God" and "the People" harmonious. "Here, as on every other occasion, Mazzini showed himself a consummate master of the art of knowing how best to influence those whom he would lead."⁴ He was gentler to Garibaldi, admiring the old man's simple, trusting faith in republicanism even while deploring the impracticability of the political schemes he urged in his later years. In *The Standard* he argued against the extension of the franchise, a favourite Garibaldean scheme, on the grounds that it would bring to the polls large groups of voters "who would be merely the disciplined instruments of the Vatican, captained by the clergy of the rural districts". And he dismissed Garibaldi's proposal of a progressive tax as socialism and hence to be disregarded.⁵

By the mid-eighteen-sixties Trollope's correspondence in the press was more often than not weary and disillusioned. The

¹ *Impressions of a Wanderer*, p. 114.

² *Tuscany in 1849 and in 1859* (London, 1859), p. 65.

³ *Ibid.* p. 166 and *passim*.

⁴ *The Story of the Life of Pius IX*, 2 vols. (London, 1877), i. 202.

⁵ *Standard*, 22 April 1879, p. 5/7; 25 April 1879, p. 5/7; 2 May 1879, p. 5/3.

visionary era of Garibaldi and the joyful sight of Leopold's ignominious departure from Florence had been replaced by the spectacle of continual wrangling in the Chamber of Deputies and a kaleidoscopic succession of cabinets and ministers. The inability of the minority group to organize a strong opposition, Trollope felt, was responsible for the absence of either spurs or reins on the party in power; and the character of the Italians themselves, rendered naturally suspicious by long years of despotism, stood in the way of any significant integration of political forces.¹ Even when well-intentioned, the Left was too far lost in theoretic speculations about "the honour of the Italian flag, the woes of Venice [still under Austrian rule]... the abominations of the Papacy, and the craft and overbearing oppression of France" to concern itself with such mundane matters as taxation, the size of the army, or the much-needed increase of the agricultural labouring force. Certainly the Right was to blame too in its timidity in the face of the Clerical party and its failure to confront the necessity of civil service reform.² But most dangerous was the absence of a significant force of moderate opinion.³ The danger posed by Socialism and Communism was, he seems to have felt, negative rather than positive; the Left might never rule, but it would successfully prevent anyone else from ruling very well unless there were significant changes in the parliamentary system.⁴

While he had many sharp criticisms to make of Italy, Trollope rose to her defence when he felt she was unjustly maligned abroad. In *Tuscany in 1849 and in 1859* he had complained of England's

¹ *Daily News*, 16 January 1866, p. 5/1-2.

² *Standard*, 23 June 1874, p. 5/4-5.

³ Trollope viewed Right and Left as united in their desire to embarrass Victor Emmanuel's government. "If the conviction that an alliance with Red Republicanism, Socialism, Communism, or any other 'ism' against the constituted order of society affords a fair hope of building up the power of the Church... has entered the minds of the rulers of the Church, such an alliance will be made." (*Ibid.* 2 December 1876, p. 2/2).

⁴ Trollope believed the parliamentary system as it functioned in Italy had "neither the advantages of a constitutional government, nor those of a despotism" (*Daily News*, 17 August 1866, p. 5/1); in addition, he saw it as being still riven by dissensions surviving from the days of conspiracy and exile (*Standard*, 1 July 1873, p. 4/2).

inability to recognize the necessity of doing away with "the iniquitous treaties of 1815" if Italy's condition was to be mended. The English were all too ready to encourage the rulers of Italy in their illusion that "the chronic ills of the Peninsula could be cured by a *quantum suff.* of such reforms in the internal administration, as should in no wise put an irreverent hand on the sacred ark of diplomatic handiwork".¹ As a result, the Italians now found it difficult to believe that England's blind opposition to their ambitions was due merely to "the treaty fetish", the "'nothing like leather' of men whose life-long occupation has been to rule mankind by virtue of parchment and red tape".² To a correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette* who complained that Italians never listened to advice, he replied that "no one can have lived in this country long enough to know the people well without being thoroughly convinced that a very large proportion of Italians are keenly . . . conscious of their shortcomings and of the length of leeway in the race of civilization which they have to make up".³

In his autobiography Alfred Austin tells of Anthony Trollope's charge that Austin had made Thomas a Conservative. "Nothing could have been less true. Life had done for his brother what he attributed to me."⁴ Austin was right. Thomas Trollope believed that government should evolve in an orderly manner and that it should support reform; his preference for the benevolence of a Shaftesbury to what he saw as the dangerous ambition of "Radical socialists"⁵, his support of the Conservatives in 1892 because they were, to him, the more progressive party⁶—such facts bear this out. He was unique among Englishmen neither in his distrust of violence nor his belief in moderation and widespread education. Nor was he alone in asserting that legislation was no automatic remedy for social evils, any more than the "parchment and red tape" of diplomacy was for wars abroad. By the time he took up journalism as regular employment

¹ *Tuscany in 1849 and in 1859*, p. 88.

² *Ibid.* p. 98.

³ *Standard*, 5 May 1874, p. 5/6.

⁴ Alfred Austin, *The Autobiography of Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate, 1835-1910*, 2 vols. (London, 1911), i. 180.

⁵ *What I Remember*, ii. 9-10.

⁶ "The General Election: A Working Man's Advice", broadside printed at Budleigh Salterton, now in the British Museum.

one could no longer lament the sufferings of Italy under a foreign yoke. With self-government had come less dramatic, more workaday problems not susceptible to the quack cure of "constitution-making". In one column Trollope, troubled by the spectre of clerical resurgence in Italy, asserted that governmental repression was an intolerable answer for the spirit of the age. "What then is to be done?" he asked. "Education! It is the only helpful remedy for the mischief. But it is, unfortunately, one slow in its operation, and the evil is urgent."¹ Trollope the journalist is interesting now chiefly for his recognition that time was running out on the experiment.

IV

Although his journalism is closely related to his preoccupations as a historian, those qualities which stand Trollope in good stead as a journalist are not always virtues in the other role. His eye for the specific and concrete, the vividness with which he could describe an actual event, make much of his journalism at least mildly interesting even though the issues have faded. But in his historical writing this talent expresses itself too often in anecdotes, illustrations suitable to the casual sketch but divorced from the broader questions which his pretensions as a "philosophical" historian raise. In *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence, Filippo Strozzi*, and one or two other volumes, he develops a unifying theme with some skill. But in the later work, *The Papal Conclaves*, the digressions take over almost entirely, and the volume becomes a species of historical chit-chat. *Sketches from French History* (1878) may in its very title represent a tacit admission that chit-chat is his principal interest, for he no longer even pretends to sustain a unified narrative.² And he does not have the rhetoric of a Carlyle to support him.

¹ *Standard*, 13 July 1877, p. 5/7.

² "For all those, who have not the time or inclination to become careful students of history, an isolated fact, provided it be of absolute historical authenticity, will often throw a vivid light on any state of society, and enable them to form for themselves a life-like picture of it, which would not otherwise be attainable to them" (*Sketches from French History* [London, 1878], p. 455). Trollope was by this time an old man, and his newspaper work seems to have consumed most of his energy.

Some remarks on Trollope as a historical theorist and scholar are necessary here. To take the theorist first: his deficiencies are well typified by an essay, "On Imagination as a National Characteristic". Unfortunately, Trollope did not know a great deal either about the imagination or about cultural history, and his vague sketch proposes several rather dubious gauges of "the imaginative faculty of a people"—literature, religion, popular superstition, and "the mode in which . . . those great and universal human passions are felt and are regarded, which belong partly to the material and partly to the spiritual portion of man's being".¹ Here is another sample, from the opening pages of *Tuscany in 1849 and in 1859*:

If there be one point more than another on which we are entitled to assume that we know with certainty the plan of the Divine government of this world, it is that human free-agency is the appointed means and condition of human development and progress. Universal history, which, in its more comprehensive lessons, is but the manifestation of the Divine laws working to their ordained results athwart the impediments opposed to their slow but certain evolution by human error and unintelligence, has no more unmistakable teaching. In never failing proportion to the degree in which individual free-agency has been secured to the members of bodies social, have these become prosperous, powerful, noble, progressive.

The converse, he continues, is also true: political suppression leads to social retrogression. There are, of course, many gradations of despotism:

That exercise of free-agency which the Creator has decreed to be necessary to the perfect development of the human creature, has been in different times and countries more or less compressed in very various degrees. And all these experiments have resulted in unvarying manifestation of the law. Each state has been seen to be durable and each society prosperous, happy, and improving, in exact correspondence with the degree of its freedom.²

This is Trollope at his worst. The tone in the first passage is that of the evolutionary meliorist who seeks sanction for his brand of liberalism in vaguely-articulated "Divine laws"; both passages contain such phrases as "in never failing proportion to the degree in which" and "in exact correspondence with" to imply an accuracy of measurement more imaginary than real.

¹ "On Imagination as a National Characteristic", *St. Paul's*, iv (1869), 63.

² *Tuscany in 1849 and in 1859*, pp. 1-3.

On the other hand, he sometimes appears to admonish a society for its sins ; thus we read that pestilence and famine in seventeenth-century Florence “ were visitations of God as certainly as are marsh-fevers from the fens on the sluggards who will not drain them, and all the other penal and teaching evils, resulting from man’s mismanagement of the moral and material elements which the all-wise Creator has destined to furnish his rewards, his punishments, and his education ”.¹ Such asides are troubling because of Trollope’s insistence elsewhere that he is not acting as a judge but as a historical scientist studying cause and effect.² When he argues in his essay on LaFontaine that “ we are to test . . . his *worth*, not his responsibility—his worth to us and to his generation, not his responsibility to his Creator ”,³ the distinction between scientist and moralist, in view of Trollope’s belief that history is the record of moral and political progress, seems almost entirely nullified.

If Trollope’s theory is a heap of contradictions, what of his method? He was not in any sense an original scholar. His knowledge of the chief chroniclers and historians is a close one, but he fails to check the traditional writers against the original source materials. He reveals something of himself when, in the course of a discussion of Ammirato, he remarks that a biography of the man would be instructive if anyone “ would undertake the tedious task of hunting up the materials for it among the vast quantity of dry and dusty volumes in which it would be necessary to seek them ”.⁴ It was just this kind of discipline to which Trollope was unwilling to submit himself. To some extent, however, he kept abreast of current research. He knew Villari personally, and was proud of Villari’s testimony to the worth of his own history of Florence.⁵ He also knew

¹ *Diamond Cut Diamond : A Story of Tuscan Life and Other Stories*, 2 vols. (London, 1875), ii. 4.

² The historian, he says in an essay on Caterina Sforza, is not a “ bedside physician ” trying to relieve suffering, but “ a *post-mortem* anatomist ” concerned with relationships between cause and effect (*A Decade of Italian Women*, 2 vols. [London, 1859], i. 269).

³ *Sketches from French History*, p. 281.

⁴ *The Girlhood of Catherine de’ Medici* (London, 1856), pp. 312-13.

⁵ *What I Remember*, ii. 212.

and admired Giampietro Vieusseux, to whom he later paid tribute both as an Italian patriot and a scholar.¹ After a trip to Gubbio he registered a number of objections to Dennistoun's *History of the Dukes of Urbino*, then virtually the only source on a little-studied subject.² He was also aware of the increasing sophistication of historical perspective on the Renaissance; as early as 1861 he criticized the conventional Byronic view of Venice,³ and later he heartily approved of any "sober and accurately historical account of the famed tribunal and its doings, which must have the effect of dissipating some portion of the romance and all the mystery that has hitherto belonged to the subject".⁴ He was extremely impressed by the indefatigable labours of Rawdon Brown, who was working in the Venetian archives when Trollope visited him in 1871.⁵ But to some extent Trollope's busy life as a journalist and his distaste for demanding research is complicated by his dislike of what he regarded as pedantry. In a fictional sketch, "The Atkinses in Rome", he satirizes German scholarship in the figure of "Herr Doppelstaub", who defends the archaeologists. In a discussion with Julian Alford, the young American sculptor who is Trollope's spokesman throughout, Doppelstaub asserts that the removal of vine from the ancient wall near Hadrian's villa is necessary, for although beauty is a very good thing in its place, science is more important. Alford replies that the act is a species of vandalism, and that even with additional evidence, archaeologists will do little more than dispute interminably and bitterly. Alford argues that "it is folly to be wise, with the wisdom which the archaeologist would thrust upon us".⁶ The pursuit of beauty is more important than sterile antiquarian disputes.

¹ "Giampietro Vieusseux, the Florentine Bookseller", *St. Paul's*, ii (1868), 727-35; cf. letter XIV in *Impressions of a Wanderer*.

² *A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches* (London, 1862), pp. 143 ff.

³ *Paul the Pope and Paul the Friar*, chap. i.

⁴ "The Records of the Venetian Inquisition", in *A Family Party in the Piazza of St. Peter, and Other Stories*, 3 vols. (London, 1877), iii. 142.

⁵ "I came away with a feeling of wondering admiration for the courage of the explorer who should venture to engulf himself in what seemed to me such a trackless maze of almost inconceivable extent . . ." (*What I Remember*, iii. 210).

⁶ "The Atkinses in Rome", in *A Family Party*, i. 273-7.

But Trollope at times seems equally impatient with questions of aesthetics. His most serious deficiency as a student of the Renaissance is his lack of genuine appreciation for its cultural achievements, and at times he seems to have distrusted art. In *A Siren*, he made the dubious assertion that "in countries where art is deemed to be the most at home, and where it is in the largest degree the occupation of large sections of the people, it is deemed that a less strict [moral] rule . . . is laid on them than on the others".¹ In *The Girlhood of Catherine de' Medici* he dismissed the literature and scholarship of the court of Leo X as products of a dilettante culture (which had none of the ambiguous interest for him that it was to have for Symonds),² and in *Filippo Strozzi* he manifested an equal impatience with the dilettantism of the English traveller in his own day.³ To say that Trollope was a philistine in artistic matters would be a trifle severe. He did expect art to perform a moral function. Of the Apollo Belvedere, he complained that it did not appeal "to any lofty moral ideal in the breast of the spectator. The exclusive admirers of classical art reply that they want no such appeal to any moral ideal—that it is not the business of art to make any such. I differ from them *toto coelo*, but have no space here to attempt to fight out the question."⁴

Trollope's moral view aligns him more closely with Ruskin than with Pater and Symonds, and it is associated in part with a lack of sympathy for classical civilization quite unlike the Hellenistic enthusiasms of Pater and Symonds. He preferred the monuments of the Middle Ages to the Roman antiquities in Italy; Julian Alford again speaks for his author in "The Atkinses in Rome" when he sees the ruins of a medieval castle:

. . . I do feel that the fact of our belonging to that vast social system, which Christianity has more indirectly, perhaps, than directly created, and which is so entirely different and separated from all else that has ever been in the world, makes them and all that they did and thought, their evil deeds as well as their

¹ *A Siren*, i. 203.

² *The Girlhood of Catherine de' Medici*, pp. 34-35. The passage is an attack on the view of the "Leonine age" which had gained currency through the writings of William Roscoe at the turn of the century; Trollope implies quite clearly that Roscoe's own age was guilty of much the same kind of dilettantism.

³ p. 142, n. 2.

⁴ *Standard*, 29 July 1874, p. 5/3.

better qualities, nearer to me . . . than the men of the former civilization can ever be. The fact is . . . that I am a Gothic-minded man.¹

Trollope also recoiled from the pagan element in the Renaissance, believing that the revival of ancient literature had tended "to injure and degrade the great and grand art of the fifteenth century",² and he objected to using the adjective "classical" when one's intention was to praise a work of art. "To me it seems that the infinitely greater richness, depth, and multiplicity of modern life demands that the artistic representation of its thoughts and emotions should seek its materials over a wider field than the artist of classical antiquity dreamed of ranging over."³ In Trollope's novel *Artigale Castle*, an architect who has been restoring the cathedral is cited with obvious approval as "one of the earliest of the race of scholars and men of taste who, towards the close of the Georgian era, discovered that the birth of art did not date from the 'Renaissance', that we in England . . . possessed [architectural] treasures of a far higher order and value than aught that we had ever succeeded in creating by attempting to imitate Greek or Roman art".⁴ And in his emphasis on the moral lessons to be gained from the study of architectural style, Trollope was markedly Ruskinian.⁵

The influence of Ruskin shows in other ways as well. In *Lindisfarne Chase*, another of Trollope's English novels, we are suddenly presented in mid-narrative with a Ruskinian

¹ *A Family Party*, i. 264-5.

² "A Very Naughty Artist", *Temple Bar*, xxix (1870), 473.

³ *Standard*, 29 July 1874, p. 5/2

⁴ *Artigale Castle*, 3 vols. (London, 1867), i. 190.

⁵ In *Leonora Casaloni* (3 vols. [London, 1868], i. 26-27) he referred to St. Peter's as "the rank fungus growth of a period when the causes which had begun to sap the strength of the Church . . . were already in existence", while the Lateran represented "the times when Mother Church was still a civilizing and beneficent agent, and had not yet become the bane and enemy of humanity. Every form and detail of ornamentation carries the mind back to the best ages of architectural art." He also believed that the prince's dwelling in Gubbio reflected the decay of an effete and corrupt social system, whereas the Palazzo Publico in the same city was inspired by "the sentiment of independence, and free self-government. . . . The simple grandeur of its massive strength is as durable as the social principle which it symbolizes" (*A Lenten Journey*, p. 83). Obviously such remarks as these do not prove him to be the systematic student of architectural detail which Ruskin was.

discourse on the old handicraft and modern mass production.¹ In a short story, "The Lottery Dealer", a young woman artist finds a French brooch vulgar because it can be duplicated. "The maker put none of his individuality into it", she complains, "and it is, therefore . . . all body and no brain, and no heart." When her young friend points to the superior accuracy of modern work, Laura replies :

I love the careless inaccuracies of the old workers. Their care was occupied otherwise. These little departures from mechanical accuracy mark the individuality of the artist. An artist is not a machine, to work with machine-like precision. . . . I like the careless inexactitude that marks the humanity of the artist without injuring the expression of his thought. . . .²

But Trollope was not always sympathetic to Ruskin, especially when the latter's expertise was devoted to apparently pedantic or biased aims. He spent several mornings in Venice looking at the Byzantine work Ruskin had studied, and discovered that his predecessor's facts and figures were "invariably correct", although perhaps Ruskin had allowed his "hobby" to get the better of him "in the imputation of far-fetched and subtle design".³ Only one man in a hundred really understood and cared for the *trecentisti*, Trollope declared, and all too many people followed the fashion in substituting for "raptures on 'the Correggiosity of Correggio'" a pleasure in "the Giottesqueness of Giotto!"⁴ Trollope's sketch on Tintoretto disclaims any qualifications on the part of the author to discuss the subject, but objects also to Ruskin's judgement of the "Miracle of St. Mark". "Possibly the excellent habit of mind which Mr. Ruskin has acquired by the life-long practice of forming opinions on fundamental principles, wholly independent of the popular notions and popular voice on such subjects,

¹ *Lindisfarne Chase*, 3 vols. (London, 1864), i. 27-28. More accurately, however, the passage reflects Trollope's reading in Carlyle and to some extent his knowledge of the benevolence of the earlier humanitarian reformers such as Shaftesbury: "The best possible mechanism, whether applied by dynamic science to the shaping and chasing of metal, or by social science to the cheering of poverty and the relief of suffering, must not be expected to do the work of individually applied sympathy, heart and soul."

² "The Lottery Dealer", in *Diamond Cut Diamond*, ii. 189-90.

³ *What I Remember*, iii. 217-18.

⁴ *A Lenten Journey*, pp. 115-16.

and the very frequent cases in which he has had occasion to find such notions and such voice worthless, may have superinduced an undue tendency to oppose the opinion of the vulgar *quand même*.”¹ The tone betrays Trollope’s weakness: a repeated failure to advance beyond the most general and stereotyped utterances on “fundamental principles” in art, and a kind of determined amateurishness which he doubtless inherited from his mother.² After a visit to Assisi, he wrote: “For myself, I humbly confess, that the materialistic tendencies of my mind are such as to force me to find more pleasure in looking at a landscape by Constable, Calcott, or Cowper, than in the contemplation of any representation of a miracle by St. Francis ever painted.”³

Yet his views remain basically those of Ruskin. Like both Ruskin and Browning, too, he tended to make an ideal of incompleteness, of even unfulfilled aspiration to greatness. What he called “the superior healthfulness” of the papal times arose, he believed, chiefly from “the fact that it *was* an age of struggling. . . . And the rich Italian nature and the rich Italian soil *did* produce great men and great things under the rough energy-generating influence of those stormy times.”⁴ The thirteenth century seemed to him “the real spring-tide of modern Italian civilization, long anterior to that so-called *Renaissance* period which has so generally and so erroneously been considered such”. The sixteenth century “was unquestionably the birth-time of much in Italy; but it was the death time of much more”.⁵ Its first nine decades marked the culmination of Venetian art,

and the fact will at once suggest itself that politically, socially, and morally, Venice had already passed the culminating point, and was on the decline; and it will not be forgotten that a similar chronological phenomenon may be observed

¹ “The Thunderbolt of Painting”, in *A Family Party*, iii. 236-7.

² The impetuous judgements of Frances Trollope on Italian antiquities provide a pleasant contrast to the monotonous approvals bestowed on them by guide-books. “As to the AUTHORITIES, the critics *par excellence*, they seem to me to have made the matter a thousand times worse by all their explanations” (*A Visit to Italy*, 2 vols. [London, 1842], i. 178).

³ *A Lenten Journey*, p. 116.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁵ “A Tuscan Romeo and Juliet”, in *La Beata*, 3rd edn. (London, 1862), pp. 259-60.

with regard to other schools. The coincidence is very far from being an accidental one, and points to a whole chapter of considerations in the history of social progress, which this, however, is not the place to examine.¹

The implication is clear : art tends to reach its culmination in a period marked by social decay. A conversation between Julian Alford and Marian Atkins, the American girl in "The Atkinses in Rome", makes a related point. The two are viewing the city at night from the top of the Colosseum, and Marian reflects aloud on the centuries of pain and suffering associated with the site. "And then I was thinking . . . how far it was an advantage and how far a disadvantage to America to possess no such past and no such memorials of it." Alford points out that such a past is responsible, in part, for the sufferings of Italy today. Marian agrees she would not want to be the countrywoman of the people who have been fashioned so. "But I confess that I am sometimes tempted to regret the absence in our country of things that, while they act as a connecting link between the present and the past, form as it were a perpetual school for the perception and appreciation of mere beauty as dissociated from any ideas of the profitable and useful." Julian replies, "Yes. And an artist should be the last to fail in perceiving and acknowledging the value of such memorials ; but surely they may cost a people too much."² Trollope's distrust of the pedantry of a "Doppelstaub" is matched only by his intense dislike of "mere beauty . . . dissociated from any ideas of the profitable and useful".

V

Trollope's *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence* was written over a period of several years.³ On 30 October 1863 he wrote to his American friend Kate Field that he was getting back to his "poor History of Florence so long laid aside".⁴ On Christmas Day, 1864, he told her that he had got as far as

¹ *A Family Party*, iii. 225.

² *Ibid.* i. 220-1.

³ The full title is *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence, from the Earliest Independence of the Commune to the Fall of the Republic in 1531*, 4 vols. (London, 1865), so far as I know the only edition, from which all further volume and page references are taken.

⁴ *More Books*, ii (1927), 140.

the death of Savonarola, and had to have the work completed by his deadline the following May.¹ If Trollope did meet the May limit, he composed the equivalent of nearly 300 printed pages in the next five months.

One is tempted to speculate as to why Trollope's history never attained the stature he hoped for it. One cannot account for its oblivion simply on the grounds of its being superseded by Burckhardt and Symonds, for there is little evidence of its having attracted much notice before their works appeared in England.² Today one searches in vain for a mention of the Florentine history in Wallace Ferguson's *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*. Certainly much of what Trollope says was not new. He had been anticipated by Henry Edward Napier, whose *Florentine History* (1846-7) was a careful, detailed, sometimes eloquent account which avoided the Medicean partisanship of the Roscoe school on the one hand and the somewhat simple-minded liberalism of the followers of Sismondi on the other.³ Napier had distrusted the role played by the people in their search for "absolute uncompromising power", but he saw the Medicean alternative as more insidiously dangerous. Trollope was no sympathizer of Lorenzo, but he criticized the role of the populace and questioned some of the liberal interpretations of the era. Indeed, Oscar Browning complained that in his treatment of the Ciompi tumults of 1378 Trollope showed "a want of sympathy that is at variance with his usually liberal opinions".⁴

Professor J. R. Hale has observed that Napier failed to arrive at any conception of a Renaissance as such. "Each

¹ *More Books*, ii (1927), 141.

² *The Age of the Despots*, the first volume in Symonds's history, appeared in 1875. S. G. C. Middlemore's translation of the third edition of Burckhardt's work was published in 1878. For George Eliot's comment on the sale of Trollope's work, see p. 136, n. 1.

³ William Roscoe's *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici, Called the Magnificent* (1795) and *The Life and Pontificate of Leo X* (1805) set the tone for much of the pro-Medicean commentary in England in the nineteenth century; see J. R. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1954) and the same author's later study, "Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici: Their Reputation in England from the 16th to the 19th Century", *English Miscellany*, viii (1957), 179-94.

⁴ *The Fortnightly Review*, iv (1866), 76.

century was simply later than the previous one and earlier than the next. To readers accustomed to a Renaissance, the presentation of his material appears invertebrate, lacking a theme."¹ Trollope, unlike Napier, did have an idea of the Renaissance, although he tended to use the term pejoratively.² But it was an idea limited by the fact that Trollope's interests ran to political rather than cultural history. He did find a unifying theme in the spectacle of ceaseless Florentine factionalism; but even so, for a generation which has advanced from Burckhardt and Symonds to Schevill and Hans Baron, Trollope's history lacks focus. The work is not arranged by topics in the manner Symonds and Burckhardt were to adopt with such striking success, but rather resembles the old chronicles, over which Trollope pored with an antiquarian's enthusiasm and from which he translated copiously. The same names occur over and over in the notes: Villani, the Ammirati, Dino Compagni, and others. The discussion of Savonarola is essentially a summary of Villari's findings. The method is that of a talented journalist, writing at great speed.³ The history, as I have already suggested, is unified by Trollope's almost obsessive insistence on the inability of medieval and early Renaissance Florence to govern itself, but the necessity of dramatizing the detail sometimes obscures what should have been a larger view of the subject. Because he is stressing the theme of gradual but insistent decay, Trollope does little or nothing to correct the stereotyped nineteenth-century view of a society moving with scarcely a halt toward Medicean despotism; and, perhaps also because of his year-by-year ordering of the material, he gives the reader little sense of the overall evolution of the Florentine constitutional system.

¹ Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance*, p. 146.

² Section IV above; it is interesting to note that the earliest recorded use of the word in English is as late as 1840, and is taken from Trollope's first book, *A Summer in Brittany*.

³ The ever frank and kindly Lewes wrote to Trollope some time in 1865: "I don't think I ever told you how very much your *History of Florence* interested me. I am shockingly ignorant of the subject, and not at all competent to speak, except as one of the public; but you made the political life of the people clear to me. I only regretted here and there a newspaper style which was not historic" (quoted, with Trollope's usual candor, in *What I Remember*, ii. 315).

Trollope, like earlier liberal writers, laments the fall of the Florentine republic in 1531, but traces that fall not only to external pressures but to the weakness of the legal structure, the readiness with which law had always been defied in Florence, and the mistaken Tuscan notion of liberty as consisting "not so much in escaping from the undue interference of others with their own volitions, as in attaining the power to interfere with the volitions of their neighbours" (I, 91). Furthermore, he argues, the dangers of violence were increased not only by personal feuds but by "the smallness of the community, and the consequent directness and immediateness of the action exercised by individuals on the social organization. . . ." (I, 92). The love of liberty became a love of libertinism; the belief that the people should rule led to the practice of authoritarianism in another form.

At the outset of the history Trollope asks whether or not there existed "some latent vice, some predisposing tendency to decay and dissolution in the constitution of the municipal form of social organization, by which the phenomena of the case [of Florence] can be accounted for" (I, 4). The "despotic tendencies" of the Florentine people are compared to "the ominous symptoms that sometimes, even in the heyday of youth, betray the germ of mortal disease lurking in the constitution" (I, 154). The method of restoring public order in 1378 was no better, for "there are in the body social as in the body physical maladies, the greatest danger from which arises from the remedies that are adopted to get rid of them for the nonce" (II, 176). Trollope implies here, as elsewhere, that the political body can be subjected to something like the scrutiny of the biologist; he is also trying to make the story more vivid, to give it a significance for his contemporaries. In some respects, indeed, he is writing a tract in which the real, if disguised, subject is nineteenth-century Italy. His tone is sometimes regrettably schoolmasterish,¹ and

¹ "But it is very important that [the] descendants [of the old Florentines] should understand what were the errors which ensured their failure; and the urgent need that they should read the lesson of their past aright, is all the greater in that an observer of the national character at the present day, will be struck by evidences of the same idiosyncrasy still existing in the race. . . . that tendency to under-rate the value of a principle, and to proportionably over-rate the importance of any single and immediate object" (i. 224-5).

he laments that the "repeated attempts to bring the whole of the peninsula under one sceptre" were frustrated, for had Italy been united, she would not now be so behindhand in her journey toward freedom, "weighted down with all the ineptitudes and incapacities which have resulted from all she has undergone in the interval" (II, 453-4). But Trollope also believes that Florence's resistance to the Visconti "was the cause of civilization and human improvement" (II, 454). She thus helped give to Europe what she herself lost.

In one sense, Trollope is better equipped with historical perspective than some of his contemporaries. He wisely cautions against the attempt to make Dante into a kind of nineteenth-century liberal, attributing it to the modern tendency to be "deceived by the shadows of modern notions thrown on that dim background by the strong light of recent hopes and theories" (I, 328). He also reminds his readers that a sixteenth-century Florentine's notion of freedom was quite different from theirs. But Trollope's attempts to enliven his story with analogies designed to make the general reader feel at home often lead to distortion of a very peculiar kind. The Ghibellines become "high Tories", the Guelphs "Whigs" (I, 105). The Neri

were essentially a Whig party, with oligarchical feelings, and a tendency to monopolize and secure the good things of place and power to the members of a restricted number of powerful families. They made loud professions of being pure old Whigs—only using, of course, the word Guelphs in the place of the English party name (I, 242-3).

The Bianchi, in exile, became a threat in the same way as if nowadays, every time a Tory ministry fell, "every Tory of note in the kingdom were forthwith sent to find sympathy for his grievances, make political friendships, and plot wars in Paris or St. Petersburg, or other such atmosphere [sic] of despotism" (I, 308-9).

Although the history exhibits much distrust of the role taken by the people, Trollope is careful to say that Florence fell not because she was a democracy, but because of a "gross want of patriotism among her leading men" (I, 345). Modern Europe owes her "that one fundamental principle from which so much has followed and been evolved. No right-divine rulers! No

government save by the consent of the governed ! ” (I, 379). He also tends toward the *laissez-faire* attitude of the Manchester school ; there are asides on free trade and on “ government-meddling with the price and supply of corn ”. “ It may be safely asserted ”, he writes, “ that the quantity of mischief and suffering inflicted on mankind by the tyranny of its rulers in medieval and modern Europe . . . has been less in amount than that which has arisen from the attempts—mostly well-intentioned—of governors to regulate the lives, actions, and interests of men in matters which do not fall within the proper functions of civil government ” (II, 84). His hatred of both Emperor and Pope, especially when they acted in unholy alliance, his anti-Catholicism, his belief that priests like Savonarola ought not to meddle in civil government, and his sometimes violent anti-Mediceanism obviously grow out of his concern for Italy’s struggle to regain her freedom in his own day. And yet he remained all too aware of the traps into which reformers were apt to fall. He expresses his dislike of “ clever constitution-making ” as a panacea for political ailments (II, 6), and fears that “ the extremest verge of democracy lies close beside despotic autocracy ” (II, 207). He also suggests that there may be an analogy between the Florentine’s “ love of democratic liberty ” and the Englishman’s “ love of constitutionalism, which he is so anxious to recommend to all the world in the fulness of his conviction of the benefits he has himself received from it ” (III, 39-40).

This scepticism about liberal nostrums lends the history a cautionary note. Trollope agrees with Napier that one can not expect a fifteenth-century Florentine to behave like a nineteenth-century Englishman, although the descendants of the Renaissance Florentine might, in nineteenth-century Italy, manifest some of the same hereditary traits. But Trollope’s study, so circumspect in some ways, contains some disabling weaknesses. The remarks on art and literature are sketchy and conventional. Giotto and Brunelleschi are treated dutifully but summarily ; Dante is regarded more as a political hero than a great poet ; Michelangelo seems to be remembered primarily as the man who helped design the fortifications for the great

siege. In his remarks on intellectual history, Trollope is superficial and impatient. "Pure Platonism was pure heathenism", he declares (III, 143), and the scholarly occupations of Lorenzo's court served "not only to divert men's minds from serious thought, but to render them unfitted and incapable for evermore for meddling with the interests, duties, and occupations of a free citizen" (III, 449).¹ Trollope manages to avoid the extreme position that art is impotent as an agent of moral reform, but his bias remains essentially northern and Protestant; thus Italian historians and theorists like Machiavelli take a "cold and passionless tone" toward evils in the disposition of society, a tone which always strikes "jarringly on an English ear" (III, 441).

The paradox of the Renaissance which had fascinated English writers was the presence of a flourishing culture in a violent and despotic society. Was it not true, according to received liberal doctrine, that great art flourished only in a free and open society of free men? Trollope takes up the claims Roscoe had made for learning in the age of Lorenzo, and attempts to discount them. In Florence, Trollope argues, "the fervid and exuberant vitality, that threw off the plethora of its force in the boils and blains of civil discord" was a vitality favourable to genius (I, 232). The bane of Renaissance civil life was the glory of its culture. But the rule of Lorenzo was hollow, its aura delusive, its patronage of genius designed to corrupt the unwary. Trollope's premise is that "the intellectual life of a nation fallen under despotism dies surely, but by a process analogous to atrophy, and not by sudden stroke" (III, 451). The loss of political liberty is not immediately reflected in a nation's cultural life; there is an interim period during which the incipient tyrant encourages the flourishing of the arts because they are an ornament to his court. In

¹ Oscar Browning complained of Trollope's "unreasonable contempt for the scholars who composed the Platonic Academy" (*The Fortnightly Review*, iv [1866], 82.) Trollope even more drastically overstates the case elsewhere; pagan ideas, he thought, were "more essentially . . . natural to the peoples of the old Italian soil than ever the Christian ideas . . . had been. And thus it came to pass that the whole of the cultivated portion of the body social in Italy became at once Pagan to all intents and purposes at the first touch of the new learning" ("The Italian Academies", *St. Paul's*, ii [1868], 82).

Florence this crucial moment of hesitation came during Lorenzo's rule. "The reason why the noblest art cannot be had except in a free community is not because the artist is such a patriot or lover of liberty, that he will not work for a tyrant's pay." Rather, artists draw inspiration from their milieu, and when that milieu is "ignoble", then "the mind that can produce noble art is not itself produced" (III, 451).

As I have already suggested, the evidence is that Trollope never made up his mind whether he was a moralist writing history or a historical scientist dispassionately observing, in the case of Renaissance Florence, the progress of a disease. When he pleads for realism in historiography, he announces his displeasure with that "large school of moralists who delight to teach, despite mankind's daily accumulating experience of facts, that spiritual graces ever find their reward in material profit; and which can see in the Divine government of the universe only an extended application of the nursery rule which assigns its skilfully arranged joys and sorrows as the immediately following consequences of good or ill behaviour" (IV, 407). In *Filippo Strozzi* (1860) he had already objected to historians or readers of history "constituting [themselves] a quite superfluous and intensely incompetent grand jury for the finding or ignoring of bills of indictment, to be tried at the last great assize".¹ And yet one can not avoid the feeling that throughout the history of Florence which he wrote, the nineteenth century is sitting in judgement on the three preceding ones. As Trollope says at the end, good comes even out of a drama with a dismal ending like that of 1531 :

For amelioration is the universal law. At however unfavourable a moment in the national life of any people the observer may take his standpoint, still it is true that the good time is to be looked for, not in the past, but in the future. . . . And the conviction that so it has been, and so will continue to be, is faith in God—the only faith that can justify His ways to man (IV, 554).

¹ *Filippo Strozzi*, p. 57. On the other hand, Trollope did object to the "mischievous fictions" of Zola and the naturalists because they might "lead the unwary to lose sight of the clear and well-defined boundary line between right and wrong, or at all events to believe that certain errors do *not* inevitably produce degrading consequences, that the wages of sin is *not* necessarily and invariably spiritual and moral death" (*Sketches from French History*, pp. 268-9).

Trollope here is not the scientific observer of cause and effect, but the supporter of Italian liberty, supplementing his Broad Church God with the same vague evolutionary meliorism we have noted elsewhere. It is a comfortable conclusion, but it undoes the *History of the Commonwealth of Florence*, and it limits whatever appeal Trollope might have had for a more sceptical generation today. He never resolved the conflict between the role expected of him by a middle-class audience satisfied with Macaulayan reassurances, and the scepticism which came from his own prolonged researches in Italian history and his observations of the contemporary scene.