

ANTHONY
TROLLOPE

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The Two
Heroines
of
Plumplington



Leslie B. Stewart \$100

November 26, 1954

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Barsetshire Revisited

THE TWO HEROINES OF PLUMPLINGTON. By Anthony Trollope. Introduction by John Hampden. Illustrated. 112 pp. New York: Oxford University Press. \$3.

By DeLANCEY FERGUSON

A FRESH book by Anthony Trollope, and about Barsetshire at that, ought to be headline news. How it happens. John Hampden explains.

Trollope had forsworn Barsetshire after he killed Mrs. Proudie in "The Last Chronicle of Barset" in 1866. But shortly before his death, in 1882, he was commissioned to write a novelette for the Christmas number of a second-rate magazine, *Good Words*. For his setting, he returned to the county he had not visited in sixteen years. Lacking time and energy to refresh his memory of places and people, he created Plumplington, a brand new town with 20,000 inhabitants and three banks. Before "The Two Heroines" appeared in print, Trollope was dead; his fame went into temporary eclipse and his last tale remained buried in the files.

It would be pleasant to report that "The Two Heroines" is a recovered masterpiece. It isn't. It's a Christmas novelette, thin to the point of transparency, written to order for a late Victorian magazine. Emily Greenmantle and Polly Peppercorn, only daughters of well-to-do citizens of Plumplington, have fallen in love with men of whom their fathers disapprove. It is obvious from the start that the girls are going to get their way,

and their men, and they do, with a slight assist from the rector, Dr. Freeborn. That's all there is to the story, as a story. But though the old master was turning out a frank pot-boiler, he was still the old master.

THE chief interest for the modern reader lies in Trollope's skillful portrayal of the gradations in provincial society. Three layers of gentility, or would-be gentility, are involved. Mr. Greenmantle's family "sank into insignificance if you looked beyond his grandfather"; Mr. Peppercorn was the self-made manager of a brewery. Each aspired to higher rank; hence Greenmantle did not want his daughter to marry a clerk in his bank, and Peppercorn resented Polly's choice of a lover who was starting where her father had. But to the rector, who "could talk glibly of his ancestors in the time of Charles I," both fathers were parvenus, to be humored along until they accepted the inevitable.

Compared with the rest of the Barset portraits, these are merely crayon sketches. But they are sketches from the same hand that painted Archdeacon Grantly and Dr. Thorne, Mrs. Proudie and Lily Dale.

Biographer and critic, Mr. Ferguson is former chairman of the Department of English at Brooklyn College.

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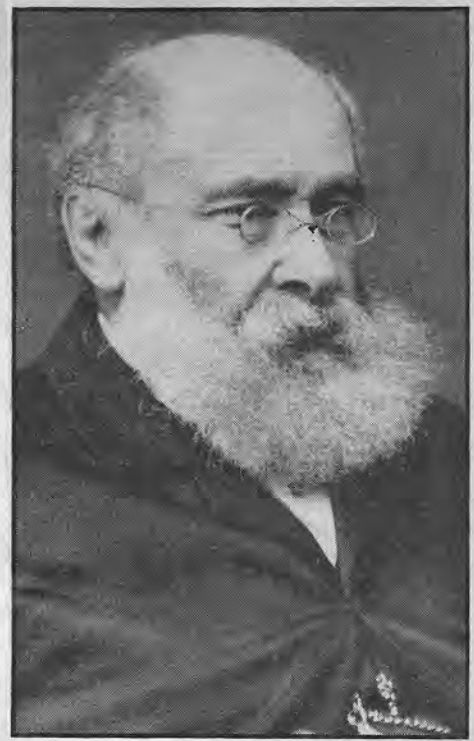
Farewell to Barsestshire

In a London club one day in 1866, two clergymen were complaining about the continued reappearance of the same characters in Anthony Trollope's novels. Their grievances took on strength when they came to the provincially imperious, sharp-tongued "Bishopess," Mrs. Proudie, and they were suddenly interrupted by a fellow club member, Trollope himself, who had been eavesdropping. "As for Mrs. Proudie," he announced, "I will go home and kill her off before the week is over." He did exactly that and ended his famous Barsestshire series with the book, "The Last Chronicle of Barset."

It took sixteen years for Trollope to return to Barsestshire in "The Two Heroines of Plumplington." Even then he avoided the complications and connections of Barchester and invented Plumplington, "the second town" of his fictitious English county, Barsestshire. However, mention of the Duke of Omnium, the Hiram's Hospital affair, and other Barsestiana establishes "Two Heroines" as a bona fide member of the series.

Broken Barriers: The almost unknown story, now appearing for the first time in book form, is a peaceful, heavily Victorian tale of two girls, each of whom, to the consternation of her father, plans a marriage beneath her station. With the help of the local rector, Dr. Freeborn, the girls bring round their grudging fathers, and all ends well. Mr. Peppercorn's daughter, Polly, finds happiness with her young friend, the poor but honest Jack Hollycombe; and Mr. Greenmantle's daughter, Emily, with her true love, Philip Hughes. "I am prepared to withdraw my opposition," Mr. Greenmantle finally concedes to young Mr. Hughes. "You're welcome to come into my drawing room when it may suit you to pay your respects to Miss Greenmantle."

When Trollope finished "Two Heroines," he was 67, and his reputation in Victorian England had already begun to dim around the edges. With more than 50 novels already behind him, he was beginning to have some personal doubts about the survival of his talent. "I have lived with my characters," he wrote in his autobiography. "I know the tone of the voice and the color of the hair, every flame of the eye, and the very clothes they wear. Of each man could I assert



Brown Brothers

Trollope: He killed off Mrs. Proudie

whether he would have said these or the other words; of every woman, whether she would then have smiled or so have frowned . . . When I shall feel that this intimacy ceases, then I shall know that the old horse should be turned out to grass."

On Dec. 6, 1882, the same month "Two Heroines" appeared, Trollope died of a stroke.* It was left for twentieth-century enthusiasts to revive the popularity of his wise and witty novels, some of the best-loved in the language, and none more famous than the tales of archdeacons and solicitors, bishops and marriageable young women, who lived their lives in England's imaginary county of Barsestshire.

►**Summing Up:** An interesting literary curiosity, harking back to some famous predecessors. (THE TWO HEROINES OF PLUMPLINGTON. By Anthony Trollope. Illustrated by Lynton Lamb. 112 pages. Oxford University Press. \$3.)

*Brought on by prolonged laughter, induced while reading a contemporary satire on English public-school life.

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ANTHONY TROLLOPE

THE TWO HEROINES OF
PLUMPLINGTON

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INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN HAMPDEN

ILLUSTRATED WITH LITHOGRAPHS
BY
LYNTON LAMB



NEW YORK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1954



Brown Brothers
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