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AUSTEN - TROLLOPE

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About 150 years ago, two authors published their accounts of life in certain sectors of society in England and in the United States.

Their books are "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen and "Domestic Manners of the Americans" by Anthony Trollope's mother.

AUSTEN

Miss Austen's tale of the Bennet family and how they fared is sheer delight.

There were five daughters of Mr. Bennet and his wife: Jane, Mary, Elizabeth, Caroline and Lydia. "Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of meager understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news."

This family became acquainted with Mr. Bingley who had leased a large estate nearby and brought his two sisters and his close friend, Fitzgerald Darcy, ~~there~~ thru. Bingley was charming and fell in love with Jane and she with him. However, before he had an opportunity to declare himself to her his sisters whisked him off to London. Jane hoped he would come back after a few weeks but he didn't. She attempted to console herself with the thought that he never really loved her, and did her best - without much success - to put him out of her heart.

All agreed that Mr. Darcy was proud and disagreeable. Darcy at first "soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features and the report of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tides of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend."

Mrs. Bennet spoke for everyone except Mr. Bennet, who did not venture an opinion, and Elizabeth, who did say she could never marry Darcy. Her mother was the most outspoken; to her husband she said "... Lizzy does not lose much by not suiting his fancy . . . he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there is no enduring him! He walked here and he walked there, fancying himself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given him one of your set-downs. I quite detest the man!"

Elizabeth had her turn when Darcy announced to her, "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

Elizabeth's reply certainly seemed to end forever any chance of Darcy's success.

"From the very beginning, from the first moment, I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish distain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation

on which succeeding events have built so immovably a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry."

Elizabeth, her uncle and aunt, on a vacation trip, went to Jambton to visit some childhood companion of her aunt. Pemberley, the country estate of Darcy, was close by. Elizabeth was prevailed upon to see it, having been assured that Darcy would not be there. She was utterly charmed by the park surrounding Pemberley House, by the great taste with which Darcy had furnished it and by the housekeeper who had known and loved Darcy since he was four years old. She said, "I have never had a cross word from him in my life - - He is the best master that ever lived - - There is not one of his tenants or servants but will give him a good name." Miss Austen tells us, "There was certainly at this moment in Elizabeth's mind a more gentle sensation toward the original than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed upon him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many peoples' happiness were in his guardianship;

how much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow; how much of good or evil must be done by him. Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favorable to his character; and as ~~she~~ Elizabeth stood before the canvas on which he was presented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression."

Darcy, realizing he should not have kept Bingley from seeing Jane in London, brought Bingley with him to Longbourne. Jane and Bingley were more than ever in love and soon were engaged to be married. Darcy once again pressed his suit with Elizabeth, whose visit to Pemberley and the continued kindness of Darcy there had completely altered her opinion of him. In short, they too became engaged.

After the two couples wed, Mr. Bingley and Jane remained at Netherfield only a year. The darling wish of his sisters was then gratified; he bought an estate in a neighboring county to Derbyshire; and Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other.

This tale of life in rural England is truly a masterpiece.

We now turn to Mrs. Trollope's account of life in America as she found it at the same time. She was there for more than three years, traveling by steamboat from New Orleans up the Mississippi River, and then eastward to New York.

On the boats, "the total want of all the ~~couteries~~ courtesies of the table, the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured, the strange uncouth phrases and pronounciaton; the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, til the whole blade seemed to enter into the mouth; and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife made us feel that the dinner hour was to be anything rather than an hour of enjoyment." As the distance from New Orleans increased, the air of wealth and comfort exhibited in its immediate neighborhood disappeared, and but for one or two clusters of wooden houses, calling themselves towns, and borrowing some pompous name, generally from Greece or Rome, we might have thought ourselves the first of the human race who had ever penetrated into this

territory of bears and alligators. But still, from time to time, appeared the hut of the woodcutter, who supplies the steamboats with fuel, at the risk, or rather with the assurance of early death, in exchange for dollars and whiskey. These sad dwellings are nearly all of them inundated during the winter, and the best of them are constructed on piles, which permit the water to reach its highest level without drowning the wretched inhabitants. These unhappy beings are invariably the victims of ague, which they ~~must~~ meet recklessly, sustained by the incessant use of ardent spirits. Their complexion is of a blueish white, that suggests the idea of dropsy; this is invariable, and the poor little ones wear exactly the same ghastly hue. A miserable cow and a few pigs, standing knee deep in water, distinguish the more prosperous of these dwellings, and on the whole I should say, that I never witnessed human nature reduced so low, as it appeared in the wood cutters' huts on the unwholesome banks of the Mississippi."

"On the first of January, 18~~1~~28, we embarked on board the Belvidere, a large and handsome boat; though not the largest or handsomest of the many which displayed themselves along the wharfs; but she was going to stop

at Memphis, the point of the river nearest to Miss Wright's residence, and she was the first that departed after we had got through the custom-house, and finished our sight-seeing. We found the room destined for the use of the ladies dismal enough, as its only windows were below the stern gallery; but both this and the gentlemen's cabin were handsomely fitted up, and the latter well carpeted; but oh! that carpet! I will not, I may not describe its condition; indeed it requires the pen of a Swift to do it justice. Let no one, who wishes to receive agreeable impressions of American manners, commence their travels in a Mississippi steam boat; for myself, it is with all sincerity I declare, that I would infinitely prefer sharing the apartment of a party of well-conditioned pigs to the being confined to its cabin."

"I hardly know any annoyance so deeply repugnant to English feelings, as the incessant, remorseless spitting of Americans. I feel that I owe my readers an apology for the repeated use of this, and several other odious words; but I cannot avoid them, without suffering the fidelity of description to escape me. It is possible that in this phrase, 'Americans,' I may be too general. The United States form a continent of almost distinct

nations, and I must now, and always, be understood to speak only of that portion of them which I have seen. In conversing with Americans I have constantly found that if I alluded to any thing which they thought I considered as uncouth, they would assure me it was local, and not national; the accidental peculiarity of a very small part, and by no means a specimen of the whole. 'That is because you know so little of America,' is a phrase I have listened to a thousand times, and in nearly as many different places. It may be so - and having made this concession, I protest against the charge of injustice in relating what I have seen."

"Among other sights of desolation which mark this region, condemned of nature, the lurid glare of a burning forest was almost constantly visible after sun-set; and when the wind so willed, the smoke arising from it floated in heavy vapour over our heads. Not all the novelty of the scene, not all its vastness, could prevent its heavy horror wearying the spirits. Perhaps the dinners and suppers I have described may help to account for this; but certain it is, that when we had wondered for a week at the ceaseless continuity of forest; had first admired, and then wearied of the festooned drapery of Spanish moss; when we had learned to distinguish the

different masses of timber that passed us, or that we passed, as a 'snag,' a 'log,' or a 'sawyer;' when we had finally made up our minds that the gentlemen of the Kentucky and Ohio military establishments, were not of the same genus as those of the Tuilleries and St. James's, we began to wish that we could sleep more hours away. As we advanced to the northward, we were no longer cheered by the beautiful border of palmettos; and even the amusement of occasionally spying out a sleeping crocodile was over.

"We were soon settled in our new dwelling, which looked neat and comfortable enough, but we speedily found that it was devoid of nearly all the accommodation that Europeans conceive necessary to decency and comfort. No pump, no cistern, no drain of any kind, no dustman's cart, or any other visible means of getting rid of the rubbish, which vanishes with such celerity in London, that one has no time to think of its existence; but which accumulated so rapidly at Cincinnati, that I sent for my landlord to know in what manner refuse of all kinds was to be disposed of."

"'Your Help will just have to fix them all into the middle of the street, but you must mind, old woman, that it is the middle. I expect you

don't know as we have got a law what forbids throwing such things at the sides of the streets; they must just all be cast right into the middle, and the pigs soon takes them off.'"

"In truth the pigs are constantly seen doing Herculean service in this way through every quarter of the city; and though it is not very agreeable to live surrounded by herds of these unsavoury animals, it is well they are so numerous, and so active in their capacity of scavengers, for without them the streets would soon be choked up with all sorts of substances, in every stage of decomposition."

Mrs. Trollope describes a typical social evening as follows:

"Had I passed as many evenings in company in any other town that I ever visited as I did in Cincinnati, I should have been able to give some little account of the conversations I had listned to; but, upon reading over my notes, and then taxing my memory to the utmost to supply the deficiency, I can scarcely find a trace of any thing that deserves the name. Such as I have, shall be given in their place. But, whatever may be the talents of the persons who meet together in society, the very shape, form, and arrangement of the meeting is sufficient to paralyze

conversation. The women invariably herd together at one part of the room and the men at the other; but, in justice to Cincinnati, I must acknowledge that this arrangement is by no means peculiar to that city, or to the western side of the Alleghanies. Sometimes a small attempt at music produces a partial reunion; a few of the most daring youths, animated by the consciousness of curled hair and smart waistcoats, approach the piano-forte, and begin to mutter a little to the half-grown pretty things, who are comparing with one another 'how many quarters' music they have had.' Where the mansion is of sufficient dignity to have two drawing-rooms, the piano, the little ladies, and the slender gentlemen are left to themselves, and on such occasions the sound of laughter is often heard to issue from among them. But the fate of the more dignified personages, who are left in the other room, is extremely dismal. The gentlemen spit, talk of elections and the price of produce, and spit again. The ladies look at each other's dresses till they know every pin by heart; talk of Parson Sombody's last sermon on the day of judgment, on Dr. T'otherbody's new pills for dyspepsia, till the 'tea' is announced, when they all console themselves together for whatever they ~~many~~ May have

suffered in keeping awake, by taking more tea, coffee, hot cake and custard, hoe cake, johny cake, waffle cake, and dodger cake, pickled peaches, and preserved cucumbers, ham, turkey, hung beef, apple sauce, and pickled oysters, than ever were prepared in any other country of the known world. After this massive meal is over, they return to the drawing-room, and it always appeared to me that they remained together as long as they could bear it, and then they rise en masse, cloak, bonnet, shawl, and exit."

"At New York, as every where else, they (girls) show within, during the time of service, like beds of tulips, so gay, so bright, so beautiful, are the long rows of French bonnets and pretty faces; rows but rarely broken by the unribboned heads of the male population; the proportion is about the same as I have remarked elsewhere. Excepting at New York, I never saw the other side of the picture, but there I did. On the opposite side of the North River, about three miles higher up, is a place called Hoboken. A gentleman who possessed a handsome mansion and the grounds there, also possessed the right of ferry, and to render this productive, he has resticted his pleasure grounds to a few beautiful

acres, laying out the remainder simply and tastefully as a public walk. It is hardly possible to imagine one of greater attraction; a broad belt of light underwood and flowering shrubs, studded at intervals with lofty forest trees, runs for two miles along a cliff which overhangs the matchless Hudson; sometimes it feathers the rocks down to its very margin, and at others leaves a pebbly shore, just rude enough to break the gentle waves, and make a music which mimics softly the loud chorus of the ocean. Through this beautiful little wood, a broad well-gravelled terrace is led by every point which can exhibit the scenery to advantage; narrower and wilder paths diverge at intervals, some into the deeper shadow of the woods, and some shelving gradually to the pretty coves below."

"The price of entrance to this little Eden, is the six cents you pay at the ferry. We went there on a bright Sunday afternoon, expressly to see the humours of the place. Many thousand persons were scattered through the grounds; of these we ascertained, by repeatedly counting, that nineteen-twentieths were men. The ladies were at church."

"The luxury of the New York aristocracy is not confined to the

city; hardly an acre of Manhatten Island but shows some pretty villa or stately mansion. The most chosen of these are on the north and east rivers, to whose margins their lawns descend. Among these, perhaps, the loveliest is one situated in the beautiful village of Bloomingdale; here, within the space of sixteen acres, almost every variety of garden scenery may be found. To describe all its diversity of hill and dale, of wood and lawn, of rock and river, would be in vain; nor can I convey an idea of it by comparison, for I never saw any thing like it. How far the elegant hospitality which reigns there may influence my impressions, I know not; but, assuredly, no spot I have ever seen dwells more freshly on my memory, nor did I ever find myself in a circle more calculated to give delight in meeting, and regret at parting, than that of Woodlawn."

"The long peace in Europe has given time for each to catch from each what was best in customs and manners, and the rapid advance of refinement and general information has been the result."

"To those who have been accustomed to this state of things, the contrast upon crossing to the new world is inconceivably annoying; and it cannot be doubted that this is one great cause of the general feeling

of irksomeness, and fatigue of spirits, which hangs upon the memory while recalling the hours passed in American society."

"A single word indicative of doubt, that any thing, or every thing, in that country is not the very best in the world, produces an effect which must be seen and felt to be understood. If the citizens of the United States were indeed the devoted patriots they call themselves, they would surely not thus encrust themselves in the hard, dry, stubborn persuasion, that they are the first and best of the human race, that nothing is to be learnt, but what they are able to teach, and that nothing is worth having, which they do not possess."

"The art of man could hardly discover a more effectual antidote to improvement, than this persuasion; and yet I never listened to any public oration, or read any work, professedly addressed to the country, in which they did not labour to impress it on the minds of the people."

"To hint to the generality of Americans that the silent current of events may change their beloved government, is not the way to please them; but in truth they need be tormented with no such fear. As long as by common consent they can keep down the pre-eminence which nature

has assigned to great powers, as long as they can prevent human respect and human honour from resting upon high talent, gracious manners, and exalted station, so long may they be sure of going on as they are."

"I have been told, however, that there are some among them who would gladly see a change; some, who with the wisdom of philosophers, and the fair candour of gentlemen, shrink from a profession of equality which they feel to be untrue, and believe to be impossible."

"I can well believe that such there are, though to me no such opinions were communicated, and most truly should I rejoice to see power pass into such hands."

"If this ever happens, if refinement once creeps in among them, if they once learn to cling to the graces, the honours, the chivalry of life, then we shall say farewell to American equality, and welcome to European fellowship one of the finest countries on the earth."

More than 100 years later Mrs. Trollope's book caught the eye and captured the heart of Joseph Henry Jackson. In his review he said:

"If there is one nation on the face of the earth that is sensitive to criticism - any kind of criticism whatever - it's ourselves."

"Maybe we'll grow up enough to get over it some day. Meantime the ~~incident~~ is a forcible reminder of ano~~ther~~ Englishwoman who came to America over a century ago - ~~to Ohio, too, as a matter of fact~~ - criticised this country, and has been reviled for it ever since."

"This brave soul was Mrs. Frances Trollope, mother of the novelist Anthony Trollope, and her book, published in 1832, made her the best-hated woman author Americans had ever known."

"In the suppressed passages of his 'Life on the Mississippi,' some of which are reproduced in this edition, Mark Twain wrote honestly of Mrs. Trollope and her book."

"Mrs. Trollope, said Twain, was fair; she neither gilded nor white-washed America. 'She lived three years in this civilization of ours,' he continued, 'in the body of it, not on the surface, as is the case with most tourists. She knew her subject, and she set it forth fairly and squarely. She deserved gratitude - but it is an error to suppose she got it.'"

"As Twain noted, Mrs. Trollope looked at America from inside. She had come to Cincinnati on business - to open a department store. She

lost all she had before she was done. As the reader will see from Professor Smalley's introduction, her ideas were simply too advanced; the bazaar she built was far ahead of its time, with its four-story Egyptian-columned front, its music gallery, its 'modern' gas lighting. In the end she was bankrupt, returned to England and published her book."

"What it reflects, written with sprightliness and humor, is an America very like what existed, as the student of our society will know."

"It was a rough, raw, crude America, yet piously hypocritical about its shortcomings."

"Those who had made money strained to be genteel and only made themselves ridiculous as the bourgeois gentilhomme always does. Mrs. Trollope writes of girls who hid their faces and screamed on encountering a male; one even went into the vapors at meeting a 4-year-old boy on the stairs. She notes the coarseness of men at the theater, their hawking and spitting, their lolling and lounging and ogling the women. Cincinnati was the kind of place where, when a painter put up a picture of a Swiss maiden in costume in a public park he was made to return and add a flounce to her petticoat because the ankles showed."

"As Dickens noted later, the spittoon was prominent everywhere in that early America. Hotels were outraged at a request for fresh sheets; ones used only two or three times were good enough for anybody, and English visitors were just being picky. 'I never saw an American man walk or stand well,' wrote Mrs. Trollope; American men lounged and, in consequence, were round-shouldered. The American male thought of nothing but business. The number of odd religious sects astonished her, too, and Americans were constantly telling her how good this country was compared to England in particular and the rest of the world in general."

"Yet she liked America, too, and said so. Her book concludes: 'If refinement once creeps in among them (the Americans), then we shall welcome to European fellowship one of the finest countries on earth.' Perhaps the good lady did look down her nose a little there, though such expressions were hardly enough to warrant the American venom that was poured on her and her book."

"'The Domestic Manners of the Americans' makes good, lively reading today. Its criticisms, many of them, still apply in principle. We are still the touchiest of nations; we still resent criticism of any

kind; we are still cocksure, often unmannerly about our greatness, still at bottom unsure of ourselves in many ways. Mrs. Trollope didn't know the term 'overcompensate,' but that's what she meant. ~~All you need~~ to do is to look at the 25 illustrations, made by Auguste Hervieu for the original edition and here reproduced, and you'll see she was right, and that, as one grudging critic admitted at the time, she 'might have written a worse book.'"