

Trollope Anthony

Travelling Sketches



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THE FAMILY THAT GOES ABROAD BECAUSE IT'S THE THING TO DO

That men and women should leave their homes at the end of summer and go somewhere, – though it be only to Margate, – has become a thing so fixed that incomes the most limited are made to stretch themselves to fit the rule, and habits the most domestic allow themselves to be interrupted and set at naught. That we gain much in health there can be no doubt. Our ancestors, with their wives and children, could do without their autumn tour; but our ancestors did not work so hard as we work. And we gain much also in general knowledge, though such knowledge is for the most part superficial, and our mode of acquiring it too often absurd. But the English world is the better for the practice. "Home-staying youths have ever homely wits," and we may fairly suppose that our youths are less homely in this particular after they have been a day or two in Paris, and a week or two in Switzerland, and up and down the Rhine, than they would have been had they remained in their London lodgings through that month of September, – so weary to those who are still unable to fly away during that most rural of months.

Upon the whole we are proud of our travelling; but yet we must own that, as a nation of travellers, we have much to learn; and it always seems that the travelling English family which goes abroad because it's the thing to do, with no clearly defined object as to the pleasure to be obtained or the delights to be expected, – with hardly a defined idea of the place to be visited, has, as a class, more to learn than any other class of tourists.

In such family arrangements daughters of course predominate. Sons can travel alone or with their own friends. This arrangement they generally prefer, and for it they are always able to give substantial reasons, in which their mammas may, or may not, put implicit confidence. Daughters can travel alone too occasionally, as I hope to be able to show by-and-by in a sketch of that much abused but invaluable English lady, the Unprotected Female Tourist. But such feminine independence is an exception to the rule, and daughters are generally willing to submit themselves to that paternal and maternal guidance from which the adult male tourist so stoutly revolts. Paterfamilias of course is there, paying the bills, strapping up the cloaks, scolding the waiters, obeying, but not placidly obeying, the female behests to which he is subject, and too frequently fretting uncomfortably beneath the burden of the day, the heat and the dust, the absence of his slippers, and the gross weight of his too-matured proportions. And he has, too, other inward grievances of which he can say nothing to any ear. Something of the salt of youth is left to him, – something of the spirit, though but little of the muscle, – and he thinks of his boys who are far afield, curtailed in their exploits by no petticoats, abridged by no stiff proprieties; and he wishes that he was with them, feeling that his trammels are heavy. The mother, of course, is there, kind to all her party, but too often stiff and hard to all beyond it, anxious that papa should have his comforts, anxious that her girls should see everything, but afraid to let them see too much, sometimes a little cross when the work becomes too hard or the pace of the pony is too rough, somewhat dowdy in her cotton dress, and ill-suited to the hat which she wears. She possesses every virtue under the sun. Of human beings she is the least selfish. Her heart is full of love, and all who know her dote upon her. At home she is charming, at home she is graceful and sweet to be seen. But on her travels things do not go easily with her, and her temper will sometimes become ruffled. The daughters are determined to do the thing well, to see everything, to be stopped by no English prejudices, to be at their ease, or at any rate look as though they were; to talk French boldly

in spite of their little slips; to wear their dresses jauntily, and make the best of themselves; to have all their eyes open, and carry home with them something from every day's work. Who will say that they are wrong? Nay, who will not declare that they are right in all this? But they overdo the thing in their intense desire to utilize every moment; they are, alas, sometimes a little ashamed of papa and mamma; and as they return down the Rhine, having begun in Switzerland, and done Baden Baden, Frankfort, and Homburg on their way, their dresses are not quite so jaunty, nor their gloves so neat, nor their hats in such perfect trim, as when those articles were inspected on the evening before they left home. That resolve to make the best of themselves has been somewhat forgotten during the stern realities of their journeys. A French girl will remember her crinoline and her ribbons throughout every moment of her long day's work, – will think of them through it all, preserving herself that she may preserve them, if they were worth a thought at the beginning. If she is minded to end dowdily, she will begin dowdily. But the trouble of such continued care is too much for an English girl. She lapses first into indifference, and from indifference to aversion; till at last she takes an absolute pride in the absence of those little prettinesses which she had at first been determined to maintain so stoutly. Who has not seen her at the Dover railway station on her return home, as she stands there grasping with one hand an Alpine stock and an umbrella, while she leans listlessly on the other, regardless of the torn extremities of her gloves and the battered form of her hat?

Such is the family that goes abroad because it is the thing to do. The spirit that instigates them to roam afield is no hankering after fashion. The father and mother, and daughters also, of the family of which I speak, are well aware that such tourings are too common to confer fashion or distinction. The days in which we heard that —

Mrs. Grill is very ill,
And nothing will improve her,
Unless she sees the Tuileries,
And waddles down the Louvre, —

are well nigh over, and are certainly over for such sensible people as I am describing. It is not fashion that they seek, nor is it chiefly amusement. Paterfamilias, when he starts, knows that he will not be amused, and already wishes that the journey was over, and that he could be back at his club. Mamma dreads it somewhat, and has more of misgiving than of pleasant anticipation. She has not much of happiness when papa is cross, and he is usually cross when he is uncomfortable. And then the people at the inns are so often uncivil; and she fears the beds! And the girls look for no unalloyed satisfaction. They know that they have hard work before them, and the dread of those slips in their French is not pleasant to them. But it is the thing to do. Not to have seen Florence, Rome, Munich, and Dresden, not to be at home as regards the Rhine, not to have ridden over the Gemmi or to have talked to Alpine climbers at Zermatt, is to be behind the world. And then there is so much to be done in Europe! *Ars longa, vita brevis*. Last year papa wouldn't move, – that is, he wouldn't move beyond Cromer. Carry is, alas! twenty-nine; Fanny is twenty-seven; even Sophie, – the childish Sophie, – is twenty-four. Under such circumstances, who can dare to think of ease, or even of pleasure? Years are flowing by, and the realities of life, – still doubtful realities, but with so much of pain in the doubt! – are coming on. Who can say how soon the income arising from paternal energy may be at an end, and that the modest means of pensioned age may render all such work impracticable? It is imperative that the places be seen, that the lions be killed and ticked off as difficulties done with and overcome. What may be the exact balance of advantage to any of them when the tour is over, neither Carry nor Fanny stops to inquire; but they put their heads together and determine that the thing must be arranged. They feel that they are right. "It is education," says Fanny, with her eyes glittering. "Home-staying youths have ever homely wits," says Sophie, thinking perhaps too much of her own advantage in point of years. "I will talk to papa in earnest," says Carry, with resolute mildness. She does talk

to papa in earnest, conscious that she is thereby doing her duty; and thus the family goes abroad, because it is the thing to do.

In the old days, – days, let us say, that are now some hundred and fifty years old, – young Englishmen used to travel for their education; but it entered into the minds of those who sent them that they should see something of the society of the countries which they visited. And in such travelling time was given for such intercourse. But with the ordinary English tourist, and especially with the ordinary English tourist family, there is no such attempt now, no hope of any such good fortune. Carry and Fanny mean to talk French boldly, but they intend to do so in railway carriages, at hotel dinners, and to the guides and waiters. No preparation is made for any attempt at social intercourse. Letters of introduction are not obtained, nor is there time allowed for any sojourn which would make an entrance into society possible. That does not come even into Fanny's programme, though Fanny is enthusiastic. Scenery, pictures, architecture, and a limited but minute geographical inquiry, are the points to which it is intended that attention shall be given. And of these much is learned. A true love of scenery is common to almost all who will take the trouble to seek it. I think that it is, at any rate, common to all English men and women. Of pictures the knowledge acquired is most frequently what may be called dead knowledge. Carry soon learns to know a Rubens from a Raphael, and almost learns to know a Titian from a Tintoretto. She stores her memory with facts as to individual pictures, remembers dates, and can tell you who was the teacher of whom. She is sometimes a little restless and mildly impatient during her labours in the galleries, and rejoices often when the hard day's work is done and the custodian bids her depart. But her toils have not been barren, and she enjoys after a fashion what she has learned. Architecture comes easier, as the time given to it is necessarily less, and the attention may be more vaguely applied. But, on that account, less is carried away, and the memories of the cathedral have dwindled to nothing, while the positions of the world-famous pictures are still remembered. As to the geography, it comes unsought, and remains unappreciated; but it is not on that account the less valuable. How few of our young ladies can define the position of Warsaw; while so many know accurately that of Wiesbaden!

Many accusations have been made against travelling English families, touching that peculiarity of theirs in going hither and thither without an attempt to see and know the people of the countries they visit; and it is alleged, and truly alleged, that Frenchmen and Germans coming here do make efforts to come among us and see us, and learn of what like we are. But I think that we can defend ourselves on that score. We travel among Frenchmen and Germans in bulk, while they come among us by twos and threes. Our twos and our threes see as much of them as they see of us. With them families do not go abroad because it is the thing to do. How many an Englishman stays in Paris two days to see the city; whereas no Frenchman comes to London for such a flying visit, unless he be a *commis voyageur*, or has some business in hand.

The family that travels because it is the thing to do, is, I am sure, in the right. Fanny understood her point when she said that it was education. It is education; but if one can judge from the faces, voices, and manners of the persons undergoing it, it is not often pleasure. The work has been too hard, the toil too unremitting, the endeavour to make the most of the short six weeks too unrelenting, to allow of much of the softness of summer enjoyment. The stern Fanny, who, as she has gone on her way, has made the foreign Bradshaw all her own, has allowed no rest to her weary father, no ease to her over-driven mother. "If we don't do Munich now, we shall never do it," she has said with energy. And thus the sullen father and the despairing mother have been dragged along further dusty railroads, to another hot city of pictures, in which Paterfamilias found nothing to comfort him but the beer, and mamma no alleviation but the excessive punctuality and neatness of the washerwoman.

But, at last, they are at home, – the penance is over, and the true pleasure begins. They have done the work and have garnered the wages. Papa is sufficiently happy in feeling that he cannot be again taken away from his dressing-room and cellar, at any rate, for ten months; and mamma, as she once more creeps into her own bed, thanks God that she has been enabled to go through her duty.

Carry and Fanny hide their travelling gear with some little feeling of shame, and, as they toil at their journals for the first week of their return, take pride in thinking that they have seen at any rate as much as their neighbours.

THE MAN WHO TRAVELS ALONE

Men who travel alone may be divided into two classes. There is the man who cannot get a companion, and the man who does not want one. There is also, between these two solitary men, an intermediate solitary man, who travels alone because he cannot find the companion that would exactly suit him. But, whatever may be the cause of his solitude, the man who travels alone is not, I think, to be envied.

If he be a studious, thoughtful man, taking delight in museums and houses of assembly, given to chemistry and the variations of European politics, fond of statistics and well-instructed in stuffed vermin, he may be as happy travelling alone as he would be alone in his library; but such a man is exceptional, and I am not now speaking of him. He is a student and not a tourist. He is going to school and not out for a holiday. The man who travels alone, with whom we have to do, is one who goes abroad for a little health, for a good deal of recreation if he can find it, and for the pleasure of looking about him and seeing the world. The improvement in health he may find; but the recreation will be doubtful, unless he be one by nature averse to gregarious habits.

When we see such a one, – and such a one is often seen straying along the Rhine or wandering listlessly among the mountains, – we always suppose him to be alone because he cannot help it. We are never kind enough to give him credit for a choice for solitude; and we avoid him sedulously because we have it in our power to give him that one thing that he wants. Such is the human nature of tourists, which in this respect is very like to the human nature of people who stay at home. We like to have at our houses those whom it is difficult to obtain, and do not care to entertain those who are always ready to come to us.

It must be admitted that the ill-nature of tourist parties in this respect is justified to a great degree by the experienced results of any exceptional good-nature into which soft-hearted persons may be occasionally betrayed. Who among us that has been thus soft-hearted on an occasion has not repented in sackcloth and ashes? The solitary tourist when once taken up can hardly be dropped; he appears, and reappears, and comes up again till the original friends of the original good-natured sinner become gloomy and sullen and talk of strong measures. Whispers of an enforced separation are murmured about, and Jones, who has picked the man up, and who "found that there was something in him" as they sat next each other in a railway carriage, is made to understand by Smith and Walker, that unless he can contrive to drop Mr. Robinson, he must be dropped himself. It is not so easy to drop Mr. Robinson. The paths of Switzerland, and the roads into Italy, are open to all the world.

Poor Robinson! we will cling to him for a while, and endeavour to show the nature of the misery which he suffers. At home he is an honest fellow, and those who know him best say that he is a gentleman. He is quite equal to the men whom he meets on his tour, and who look down upon him because of his solitude. The time will probably come when he will be no longer alone, when he will have a wife and children, and a house into which Jones would think it a blessing to be admitted.

But at present Robinson is alone, and has known himself to be thrown aside by the men whose society he coveted. He had come out on his tour with much compunction, dreading his solitude, believing in his heart of hearts that it would be better for him to go with his sisters to Broadstairs. But he had accused himself of being unmanly, he had buckled on his armour in the shape of a Murray's guide, a vocabulary, and a Bradshaw, and had started by the Ostend boat, assuring himself that many others had done the same before him, and had returned home proudly to tell the tale of their wanderings. On the railway to Cologne he had picked up with Jones, and for twenty-four hours the prospects of a blessed union had cheered him. He had followed the friends to their hotel with some half-word of excuse. He had sat by Smith at the first dinner, dividing Smith from a pretty young countrywoman, and had found Smith to be somewhat unpleasant. Had he understood his game he would have taken himself to the other side of Smith. Wanting to gain much, he should have

surrendered something. In the evening he had smoked with Jones, whose good-nature had not as yet been outraged. Then had Walker and Smith roundly brought their friend to task, and Jones having asked the poor fellow which way he meant to travel on the morrow, had plainly told him that he and his party intended to take another route.

Some chance reader of these words may, perhaps, one day have felt such rebuke, and be able to understand its harshness. "Ah, yes! very well," said Robinson. "Then I dare say we shall not meet again. I couldn't very well alter my plan now." There was a dash of manliness about him, and he could show some gallantry before the traitor friend who had become his foe. But when he went up to his room, the tears were almost in his eyes, and as he turned into bed, he resolved that on the morrow he would betake himself home.

But on the morrow his heart was higher, and he persevered. He saw the three odious men as they started from the inn door, and was able to perceive that they were not gentlemen. Smith he thought he had seen behind a counter. As for Walker, he had caught Walker tripping with his *hs*, and was glad to be rid of him. Before his breakfast was over he had taught himself almost to believe that he had dropped the equivocal party, and had told himself that he should be very careful how he selected his acquaintance.

But not the less was he very melancholy, and at the end of the second day from that morning had fallen into a dreary state of misanthropy. Ideas had begun to float through his brain which he believed to be philosophical, but which all tended to the no-good-in-anything school of thought. He had assumed a constrained look of contempt, and would hardly notice the waiter, as he declined one after another the dishes brought to him at dinner. In the evening he roamed about moodily in the twilight, asking himself psychological questions about suicide; not, indeed, intending to kill himself, but having a fancy for the subject as one of great interest. He thought that he might, perhaps, have killed himself had he not felt that his doing so would be deleterious to his sisters. As for Jones, or Smith, or Walker, in his present mood he would not have spoken to them. He was in love with solitude, and would have been severe to any Jones or any Walker who might have intruded upon him.

But on the next day he makes another effort, having encountered our friend Paterfamilias, with his wife and three daughters, upon a Rhine steamboat. Like a prudent young man in such circumstances, he first speaks a word to the father, and the father admits the word graciously. Fathers so situated are always oblivious of their daughters, and never remember that they, when young men, used to make similar attempts. But mothers never forget, and with accurate measures of mental yard and foot, take inventory of all comers, weighing every gesture, and knowing the value of every stitch in the man's garment, and of every tone in the man's voice. The stitches and tones belonging to Robinson were not much in his favour. When a man is at discount with himself he is usually below par with all the world beside. When in the course of a couple of hours Robinson had remarked to Sophie, – the youthful Sophie, – that the Rhine was the monarch of rivers, the mother speaks a cautious word to Carry, the eldest daughter, and just as misanthropy was giving place to a genial love for all his kind under a pleasant smile on Sophie's mouth, the whole family whisk themselves away, and our friend is again alone.

He has Childe Harold in his pocket, and the labour of learning a stanza or two by heart carries him on into Switzerland. In ascending the Rigi he again comes across Jones and Walker. Alas for human nature, he is only too happy to be recognized by those whom he had assured himself that he despised! A civil word half spoken by a panting voice, a nod of recognition which could hardly not have been given, draws him once more into their social circle, and he forgets the counter, and the doubtful *hs*, and the bearishness of the obdurate Smith. If they will only open their arms to him, and let him be one of them! A fear comes upon him that they may suspect him to be impecunious, and he adapts his conversation to the idea, striving to make it apparent, by words carefully turned for the purpose, that he is quite another sort of person than that. Walker sees the attempt, and measures the man accordingly, – but measures him wrongly. Poor Robinson has been mean, – is mean; he

has sunk beneath the weight of his solitude to a lowness that is not natural to him; but he has not the meanness of which they suspect him. "If you let that man hang on to you any longer, he'll be borrowing money of you," says Smith. Jones remarks that it takes two men to play at that game; but on the following morning the three friends, having necessarily been domiciled with Robinson on the top of the mountain that night, are careful to descend without him, and the poor wretch knows that he has again been dropped. The trio, as they descend the hill, are very merry withal respecting the Robinson difficulty, indulging that joy of ascendancy which naturally belongs to us when we have discovered anyone low enough to require our assistance.

Along the lakes and over the mountains goes the wretched man, still in solitude. He tells himself in moments of sober earnest that he has made a mistake, and has subjected himself to great misery in attempting to obtain alone delights which by their very nature require companionship. Robinson is not a student. He cares nothing for minerals, and knows nothing of botany. Neither the social manners of the people among whom he is wandering, nor the formation of the earth's crust in those parts, are able to give him that excitement which he requires. The verdure of the Alps, the peaks of the mountains, the sun rising through the mists, would give him pleasure if he had with him another soul to whom he could exclaim in the loving intimacy of free intercourse, "By George, Tom, that is jolly! It's all very well talking of Cumberland, but one must come to Switzerland to see that." Every man cannot be a Childe Harold; and even to be a Childe Harold one must begin by a stout determination to be unhappy, and to put up with it. In his own lodgings in London Robinson has lived a good deal alone, and, though he has not liked it, he has put up with it. It has been the business of his life. But he has it not in him to travel alone and to enjoy it. If, indeed, the Foreign Office in Whitehall had entrusted him with a letter or even a teapot, to carry to the Foreign Office at Vienna, he would have executed his mission with manly fidelity, and would have suffered nothing on the journey. The fact that he had a teapot to convey would have been enough for his support. But then work is always so much easier than play.

But he goes on wearily, and still makes an effort or two. As he falls down into Italy, looking with listless, unseeing eyes at all the prettinesses of the Ticino, he comes upon another Robinson, and there is a chance for him. But he has unconsciously learned and despised his own littleness, and in that other lonely one he fears to find one as small, or it may be smaller than himself. He gathers his toga round him, in the shape of knapsack and walking-stick, with somewhat of dignity, and looks at his brother with suspicious eye. His brother makes some faint effort at fraternization, such as he had made before, and then Robinson, – our Robinson, – is off. He wants a companion sorely, but he does not want one who shall be so low in the world's reckoning as to want him. So he passes on, and having at last tramped out with weary feet his six weeks of wretched vacation, he returns home rejoicing to think that on the morrow he shall be back amidst the comforts of his desk and stool, and the society of his fellow-labourers.

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