



The Vicar of Bullhampton

Anthony Trollope

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Frank Fenwick, the vicar of the title and a likeable and energetic clergyman, sets out to prove a young man's innocence in a murder and to prevent the eviction of a prostitute from her home. Choosing a prostitute as a central female character, Trollope addresses a topical question of his time: how women should maintain due and proper regard for themselves without adopting either the manners of a prostitute or the political excesses of a feminist.

The Vicar of Bullhampton Details

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From Reader Review *The Vicar of Bullhampton* for online ebook

Johan says

What a wonderful writer Trollope is, I admit that Dickens is the greater contemporary writer, but Trollope's women are so alive. While with Dickens women are either sluts or saints, Trollope manages to create women of flesh and blood. This novel is highly recommended to experienced Trollope readers, others new to Anthony's universe, should begin with the Barchester novels or the Paliser ones.

Jane says

I picked up 'The Vicar of Bullhampton' because I was looking for a Trollope that didn't centre around a will or a court case. I should have read the synopsis a little more carefully because there is a court case - one concerned with crime this time, not inheritance - but I didn't mind too much, because I found much to enjoy in the three entangling stories involving said vicar.

This isn't my favourite Trollope - and it's very nearly a curate's egg - but I did find a great deal to enjoy.

I was very taken with the vicar - Frank Fenwick - who was a good and compassionate man, with a stubborn streak that stopped him being too perfect. I was equally taken with his wife, Janet, and I loved the relationship between the two of them. They had a real, believable genuinely happy marriage.

The first story is a classic Trollope love triangle, concerning the possible marriage of Mary Lowther, a childhood friend of the vicar's wife. The Fenwicks promoted a match with Harry Gilmore, a Bullhampton squire and an old friend of the vicar. He fell in love with her; Mary recognised that he was a good man, but knew that she did not him as a wife should love her husband. When Gilmore proposed, she does not reject him outright, but she asked for time to consider. Because she knew that he was a good match, and that maybe she would never find her true love. Mary did find true love, with her second cousin, Captain Walter Marrantable. But their circumstances meant that they were not in a position to marry, and that they maybe never would be.

My feelings about Mary changed over the course of the story. I worried at first that she would be another Alice Vavasor; when I realised that she wasn't I came to like her and feel a great deal of sympathy and empathy; sadly that didn't last. I'm afraid that Mary - as is often the way with people in love - became oblivious to the feelings of others. And it didn't help that her family story was a little too broad and the development of her true love a little difficult to believe.

It wasn't that it was bad, but I know that Trollope can do much, much better, and I enjoyed the other strands of the story more.

The second story is of the family of Bullhampton's miller, Jacob Brattle. His youngest son, Sam, had been a hard worker at the mill, but when he fell in with bad company his standards slipped and he was absent far too often. When a Bullhampton farmer was murdered in the course of a burglary suspicion fell on Sam's associates, and it was known that he had been with them. The vicar had known Sam since he was a young boy, he believed him when he said that he was innocent, and he did his best to help.

He also tried to reconcile the miller with his daughter Carry. She had been seduced by a soldier, she had been

thrown out by her appalled father, and since then she had been living as a 'fallen woman'. This being a Victorian novel Trollope did not address the question of how she survived as a woman alone, but his meaning was clear. Her situation was complicated by her involvement with one of her brother's associates; but that might also be the key to saving her brother and reuniting her with her father

I loved the twists and turns of this story, and I loved the very real emotions and reactions of different family members. But what made this book exceptional was the portrayal of the 'fallen woman'. She wasn't repentant and striving to be virtuous, she wasn't defiant and falling further, she was simply a young woman struggling to come to terms with the consequences of what had happened and the harsh realities of this situation.

This is what I love about Trollope. He's utterly conventional, writing about the natural roles for women being marriage and motherhood, but on the other hand he clearly hoped for a society that had understanding and compassion for those who struggled to reach those goals.

This book illuminates those different sides of Trollope better than any of the others I have read.

I couldn't completely believe the way the story of the Brattle family played out, but it felt right - emotionally and psychologically - and I wanted to believe it.

The third story concerned the Marquis of Trowbridge, Bullhampton's principal landowner. He was so appalled when the vicar took up Sam and Carry Brattle's causes, that he gives the Methodist minister, Mr Puddleham, a plot of land on which to build a new chapel - a plot of land right opposite the vicarage gates. The Fenwicks were aghast as a red brick edifice grew higher and higher, but they had no idea what they could do about it. Until Mrs. Fenwick's brother-in-law, a brilliant London barrister, looked into things

This story balanced the others beautifully, with a well judged mixture of drama and comedy.

Indeed the balance was what struck me about the whole book: three stories different in tone and content, considering many aspects of the human condition, considering many sides of society, And yet they sat quite naturally together, speaking, profoundly and movingly, about forgiveness, about acceptance, and about reconciliation.

I found much to love. Wonderful, real, believable human characters and relationships; lovely letters, reported by an author telling the tale in his own inimitable style; and a large village - or maybe a small town - in the Wiltshire countryside.

And in the end the strength of the whole allowed me to let go of the weaknesses of some of the parts.

Dale says

I loved this book. I really liked the way the vicar was a person of his time, and yet beyond his time - someone who was generally able to see past the prejudices and behaviours of his age, and yet was immersed in that environment and subject to the confines of it.

Highlyeccentric says

Now, this was an interesting read. I found it dense / heavy going for quite some of the way, but the wide cast and very different intertwined plots were all treated with equal care and respect. It's hard to say what the unifying theme of the book is - perhaps something about living with consequences of one's actions.

I was pleased to see that Trollope didn't cut Gilmore too much slack for being a pestering, whiny git, even though the narrative is very sympathetic to him as a person. The Vicar and his wife also have to eat humble pie for pressuring Mary into entertaining unwelcome advances, and so they ought. But I just didn't LIKE her alternative suitor or really find their relationship convincing. Sigh.

The miller was perhaps the most interesting character, and the Vicar's relationship with him also fascinating. The Vicar's sense of helplessness when faced with the miller's pain and the inaptitude of the Vicar's pastoral skills for dealing with an avowed atheist were very well drawn.

One thing I do wish was that we had got some sense from Carry Brattle herself of what had lead her to be 'very bad'. Her boredom with her halfway houses was clear and sympathetically drawn, and it seemed like everyone else had an opinion on the propensity of women 'like that' to be drawn back to more interesting if dissolute ways, but what had prompted it in the first place? It seemed like Trollope was really trying to make Carry a sympathetic character, but he missed that.

Jim says

I have discovered from reading so many of his novels that Trollope wrote eight or nine great novels for every merely good one. He is so consistently on message -- and so consistently in control of his material -- that few authors give me so much pleasure when opening a new book of theirs. In addition, Trollope comes across as a force for reason and morality in a world where the verities are beginning to crumble. He **is** a man of his time and place, so one has to be somewhat used to Victorian modes of thought to appreciate him.

The Vicar of Bullhampton is a good one of his novels to begin with. It is wholly self contained and deals with an interesting theme: The hero, The Rev. Frank Fenwick, is a truly good man who at times places himself in harm's way to act as he feels a Christian should in a world where everything seems to serve as an obstacle or even a threat.

K. says

Reread for book group Jan 2016.

Thoroughly enjoyed again. Not to my brain's credit that a reread four years later can seem like reading a new book, I could remember main characters but couldn't remember details (like who Mary actually ended up with or if the murderer's were ever found).

Still, really love Trollope's characters. He's so good at making real, live people.

This time I was interested in his thoughts on the differences between female friends and male friends, his

description of what two man friends are like to each other is priceless and absolutely true.

Also more struck with the way the poor miller felt about the waywardness of his children and how much their actions hurt him. As my children get older I am beginning to realize that the sufferings a parent might endure with young children are nothing to what a parent might endure when the children are older. Choices are so much more costly.

It's been a bit since I've read a Trollope. It was good to revisit that friendship. Cozy but thoughtful. Warm but active.

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This review contains one small sort of spoiler. Sorry if it bothers you.

Complex. This is Trollope's first finished novel after retiring from his 35 year postal office career—his first book as a full-time writer. It is masterful and perplexing all at once.

The writing is absolutely superb. Trollope's thoughts on paper at his very best. The characters are as real as you could ever hope for, complete, real, complex, endearing, maddening and baffling all at once. Real people are very often puzzling and yet lovable at once. Trollope has always captured this phenomenon perfectly.

The heart is also brilliant. Humor, pathos, empathy, indignation are all in store for readers of this marvelous book.

The one thing lacking in this book, perhaps, is that there is simply not enough of the main character, the namesake, the Vicar of Bullhampton. I wanted more of him and could have dispensed with, say, the "heroine," Mary Lowther—whom I think Trollope wanted us to love, but was lacking and quite unsympathetic, as were her two "Beaus." If there could be said to be a failure in this book's execution, in my opinion it would be in the case of Mary and her two men. I really didn't hold much sympathy for any of them, or at least very little. For Mary and Walter, none, for Harry Gilmore, some, but probably not as much as he deserved.

For me, that "failure" was mostly overshadowed by the absolute magnificence of the other characters. The Vicar and his darling wife, Jacob Brattle and all his family, even the smaller parts of the Marquis & son, Mr. Puddleham, Miss Marrable and other minor characters, with probably the Brattles being the most admirable execution of characterization. Trollope brings them all to life, even if they are of the smallest consequence. Each time I read him, I am amazed at the way he makes men and women so loveable, even when they aren't perfect. It makes me think that he must have held great love and understanding in his heart for the people around him. He seemed to understand that even the most perfect has imperfections which do not necessarily mar, and that even the most vile can hold on to something that speaks to us and makes us feel sympathy and a willingness to forgive.

The theme of this book is forgiveness, from small grievances to enormous wrongs. It was well, well done. Of the miller and his daughter, I can hardly express how much their reconciliation moved me. That was large and empowering. And yet, Trollope also can make forgiveness of small wrongs, such as between the Vicar and the Marquis a matter of thought and marvelous wonder. Just beautiful.

Trollope's down-to-earth wisdom and love for mankind speak more of true Christianity than many a tract or piece of religious literature meant to soften hearts could be. His pithy remarks always are to the point...meaning, perhaps, that he makes a point without preaching much more palatably and perfectly than most anyone else could do.

For the time period, this book treated of a totally tabooed subject, the all-but impossible regeneration of a “fallen” woman. Trollope considers this in a much more realistic fashion than did Gaskell in *Ruth*, although her book was wonderful. He doesn’t turn the woman into a repentant angel, rather he portrays her as a real person who has to come to grips with the reality of her life just as we all do, while the people she has hurt have to do likewise. Although many of my favorite lines below seem to imply that this book is largely religious and treats mostly of the woman, such is not the case. She is really only a small part of the general theme and as always, Trollope’s religion mainly comes out in the general feel of beneficence rather than preachiness. Case in point, the Miller Brattle.

Some of my favorite passages (and I have markers and notes everywhere):

“There is no curse upon the poor heavier than that which comes from the early breach of all ties of duty between fathers and their sons, and mothers and their daughters.” (43)

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The two ministers, Mr. Puddleham & the Vicar (Mr. Fenwick) are speaking of the poor girl, Carry Brattle, who had been led into vice some years previous. Mr. Puddleham has used some harsh language and called her a prostitute.

“But I think you were a little wrong as to another statement.”

“What statement, Mr. Fenwick?”

“What you said about poor Carry Brattle. You don’t know it as a fact.”

“Everybody says so.”

“How do you know she has not married, and become an honest woman?”

“It is possible, of course. Though as for that,—when a young woman has once gone astray----“

“As did Mary Magdalene, for instance!”

“Mr. Fenwick, it was a very bad case.”

“And isn’t my case very bad, --and yours? Are we not in a bad way,--unless we believe and repent? Have we not all so sinned as to deserve eternal punishment?”

“Certainly, Mr. Fenwick.”

“Then there can’t be much difference between her and us. She can’t deserve more than eternal punishment. If she believes and repents, all her sins will be white as snow.”

“Certainly, Mr. Fenwick.”

“Then speak of her as you would of any other sister or brother,--not as a thing that must always be vile because she has fallen once. Women will so speak,--and other men. One sees something of a reason for it. But you and I, as Christian ministers, should never allow ourselves to speak so thoughtlessly of sinners.” (113-114)

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“The longer I live the more convinced I become that a man shouldn’t keep his own sores open.” (164)

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“Is it that, then;--your own misfortune and not the girl’s sin that would harden your heart against your own child? You will let her perish in the streets, not because she has fallen, but because she has hurt you in her fall! Is that to be a father? Is that to be a man?” (174)

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“Though he was fond of a fight he had taught himself to know that in no way could he do the business of his life more highly or more usefully than as a peacemaker.” (229)

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“It is hard to say who makes the greatest mistakes, women who treat their own selves with too great a reverence, or they who do so with too little.” (241)

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“What this woman had been saying to him was only what the world had said to her,--the world that knows so much better how to treat an erring sinner than did Our Savior when on earth.” (264)

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“At last the whole matter resolved itself to this; --was it possible for her to divest her idea of life of all romance, and to look for contentment and satisfaction in the performance of duties to others?” (316)

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“She was becoming sick of the importance to which she imputed to herself in thinking of herself.” (322)

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“It is the lack of object, of all aim, in the lives of houseless wanderers that gives to them the most terrible element of their misery.” (336)

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“...when you have a doubt as to your duty, you can’t be wrong in delaying that, the doing of which would gratify your own ill will.” (367)

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“These and such like are the troubles that sit heavy on a man’s heart. If search for bread, and meat, and raiment, be set aside, then, beyond that, our happiness and misery here depends chiefly on success or failure in small things. Though a man when he turns into bed may be sure that he has unlimited thousands at his command, though all society be open to him, though he know himself to be esteemed handsome, clever, and fashionable, even though his digestion be good, and he have no doctor to deny him tobacco, champagne, or made dishes, still, if he be conscious of failure there where he has striven to succeed, even though it be in the humbling of an already humble adversary, he will stretch, and roll, and pine,--a wretched being. How happy is he who can get his fretting done for him by deputy!” (389)

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“The truth is, that the possession of a grievance is the one state of human blessedness.” (398)

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“If they only know’d what them as cares for ‘em ‘d has to bear, maybe they’d think a little.” (410) says the Miller about his wayward children.

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“...if you ever come to have one foot bad o’ the gout, it won’t make you right to know that the other ain’t got it. Y’ll have the pain a gnawing of you from the bad food till you clean forget all the rest o’ your body.” (411) still the Miller speaking of his good children versus his bad ones—the good ones are hardly a comfort to him when he still has to endure the bad ones.

Karen says

Very enjoyable. Lots of interesting characters, although I ran out of patience with Squire Gilmore's suffering. Mary's plight is quite striking in the classic Victorian-girls-must-be-married sense. The Vicar is another one of Trollope's delightful clergymen, whose feud with the Marquis supplies the heat and the humor. Trollope's depiction of the Methodist minister shows his typical disdain for dissenters. One of my favorites.

Marts (Thinker) says

As Vicar, Mr. Fenwick has much to deal with... Mary and her 'loves', young Sam who is in much trouble, Carry who eventually returns home, an entire church built on Glebe Land which belongs to his vicarage, the hard miller Brattle, a murder, court proceedings, and broken-hearted Gilmore...

A rather exciting tale with trilling little events on every page, and through all its characters and situations depicting the importance of forgiveness and peace of mind...

Nancy says

Anthony Trollope is an amazing writer. His work is as fresh today as it was when it was first published in 1870.

The Church of England vicar of Bullhampton has his hands full with a murder and a young woman who is seen to have "lost her virtue" over a miscalculation due to her innocence. This last incident is one of very few that dates this work and reminds us of how far we have come, ironically, both in tolerance and in loss of moral standards.

Vicar Fenwick also has a woman in his parish who is prepared to marry a man she does not love and, if that weren't enough, he has a Baptist congregation ready to build a church at his garden gate.

Through it all, Vicar Frank Fenwick works hard to be true to his faith, his congregation and the people of his parish. He is generous and sincere in helping people both psychologically and financially without being maudlin. This is not a "preachy" book. Fenwick is a likable man who has initial doubts about himself and his handling of situations, and he does not flaunt his good character.

While Fenwick can seem naive, he leads his flock well and is a shining example of what we should all strive to be in kindness, consideration and forgiveness of others. Ultimately, he has faith in himself and confidence in his decisions once they are formulated. He optimistically believes in people's better natures and is found to be justified most of the time.

The expressions used in the book often are not dated. For example, a character has an idea and is "hot about it." Another character announces you could "go farther and do worse."

Trollope's book reminds me of Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. For all of its story threads, it is tightly woven and maintains its interest.

Quote: " But then sins committed against oneself are so much more sinful than any other sins."

Mary Ann says

I've read a lot of Trollope in the past year, and I have to say that this is one of my favorites. He tackles the issue of the "fallen" woman with such compassion - way ahead of his time.

Betsy says

This is not one of Trollope's better known novels, and, not knowing anything about it, it came as a delightful surprise. Trollope created some very real, warm, living and breathing characters in the Brattle family, and in the Vicar and his good wife. I could have wished for much more moxie from the supposed heroine, Mary, and I found her story to be only mildly interesting, but indeed the Vicar, Francis Fenwick, is the true central character of the book, and one likes him all the better for his openly revealed and acknowledged errors and flaws, knowing that his faith and his love for his parishioners are genuine. The Vicar has a marvelous sense of humor, tending toward sarcasm, which does for a time land him in hot water, and he also is fascinating as Trollope's feminist mouthpiece. The "fallen" Carry Brattle was young and impetuous, and certainly had poor taste in men, but the Vicar defended her against those who somehow wanted to make her sin to be far worse than anyone else's -- declaring (against the backdrop of a murder and murder trial!) that the harm was only to herself, and that forgiveness and redemption are most assuredly available to her, if they are to anyone. Our Vicar makes plain his belief that a young woman who is seduced by a sweetheart's words is not a harlot, and should not be called one. If she is cast out and forced to live that life because she has made a mistake in judgment, then that is the fault of her family and community. Of course, Trollope has shown us in other novels the hypocrisy that an affair is forgiven or even celebrated by Society if the woman in question is already married and has position and money. He is compassionate in showing that the only shame that Carry's father lives under is that of his own perception, and then he closes the novel by stating that Carry and her dutiful sister Fanny are doomed to remain single, without their own homes and families -- Carry because she is too pretty, and Fanny because she is too plain.

For all of his missteps and sometimes misguided enthusiasms, the Vicar does real work of healing among the Brattles simply by being trusting and loving, and this is a fine old lesson for us all.

David says

Not many nineteenth-century novels contain sympathetic portrayals of prostitutes, but this one does. The vicar's defense of Carry Brattle, the fallen daughter of a miller, is only one of several plot strands in this novel.

I think this is one of Trollope's best, but you don't find a lot of people who have read it. Perhaps because it's a bit dark. And I think that is probably why it's not one of the ones that pops into my head when I'm asked for Trollope recommendations. But no Trollope novel lacks completely for comedy, and this has its share. In particular, I love the revenge attempted by the land-owning marquis for the vicar's failure to bend to the marquis's will: the marquis gives the plot he owns next to the vicar's house to -- Methodists!, so that they can build a church there.

Tom James says

An interesting story that combines a murder trial, the rescue of a fallen woman, a rivalry between the established church and the dissenting Methodists, and a typical love story in which the groom is not rich enough to support the woman he loves. The first three plots are interesting; the love story is too typical and has been done too many times, especially by Trollope. I liked the novel, but I would have preferred something a little less typical in the love story. I appreciated the fact that the vicar experiences misunderstanding and character assassination because of his desire to show Christian charity toward a woman who has sunk into a life of prostitution. I also appreciated Trollope's desire to treat most of his characters fairly, without caricaturing them.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

I do so enjoy reading Trollope. He isn't deep, and perhaps doesn't give the reader much to chew over either during or after. His characterizations are excellent.

Mr. Fenwick, the Vicar of the title, is not so much the central character as the man who knows all of the characters of the major plot and the various sub-plots. He and his wife have a very solid marriage and wish for the same for two of their close friends. This leads them to play match-maker and is the main plot line. Near to the vicarage is the family of Jacob Brattle, a miller, whose daughter is the prostitute referenced in most of the descriptions of the novel. And for comic relief, Trollope gives us the Marquis of Trowbridge, who lives at Turnover Castle, who thinks more highly of himself than he deserves, and who thinks far less of the vicar than *he* deserves.

The female lead in the love story is named Mary Lowther. By the time I was well past the halfway mark, I began thinking of her as Mary Loathe Her. I don't know what people thought of this woman at the time the novel was published. She was as real as Trollope could make her - and he is very good with female characterizations, unlike Dickens, who is not - but I came to have little sympathy for her.

This is a thoroughly-enjoyed, but not wonderful, novel. As such, it will have to be satisfied with its four stars, though there were segments when it aspired to five.

Joyce Oliver stahle says

I thought it was a good book. It is an easy read.

I liked how the author would pull you aside and tell you the story behind the story. He would be whispering in your ear; I really liked that detail.

Audrey says

I love Trollope. He is so good at exploring the group dynamics of a society (although only a small mainly upper middle class section). I think he's especially good at smaller groups - a family, a few friends and showing how we misunderstand each other - our friends, our enemies, and ourselves. I don't think there's a

better chronicler or our in-between states of mind (okay, okay, Shakespeare. Hamlet. I know!): indecision, drifting malaise, an unsureness about what our next steps should be - or would it be better to leave well enough alone? And then, when we've put ourselves wrong, his generosity and magnanimousness, his kindness is what you would hope from your best friends.

Hope says

There are three main characters in this novel: Mr. Fenwick (the vicar), Mary Lowther (a single woman who must choose between suitors), and Caroline Brattle (a fallen woman). Septimus Harding (in Trollope's *The Warden*) is one my favorite literary characters and I was hoping this vicar might measure up to him in some way. Fenwick is an appealing character because of his earnestness in avoiding village quarrels and in his desire to help Caroline leave her past behind. But he is much more of a hot-head than dear Septimus.

I love Trollope and am willing to wade through a LOT of wordy prose to find his humorous quips. But this book was more of a slog than usual. After 400 pages I skimmed to the end.

I enjoyed this quote near the beginning of the book about Miss Marrable's tastes in reading: "Pretty as she was, and small, and nice, and lady-like, she liked her literature rather strong."

Judy says

This is one of my favourite Trollope novels (I've read them all!) because the central character of the stubborn and likeable vicar, Frank Fenwick, is so vividly alive - his relationship with his wife is also a refreshing example of a happy marriage in literature where there's nothing cloying or over-sweet about it. Also very interesting that a prostitute is a central character. I really ought to reread this one.:)

Michael Jones says

The Vicar and his wife end up being a bit like Emma from Austen. Playing matchmaker just doesn't work no matter how much the circumstances seem exactly right.

This book has some precious dialogue about sin and redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, and Christian charity. The Vicar Fenwick takes great risks to reconcile a young woman out of prostitution. He suggests that a nobleman locally should love this daughter of a miller in the same way he loves his own daughters. This is totally intolerable to the man. This puts the vicar completely on the edge of respectability-- exactly the place where good pastor should be!

Watching him dig himself out of the hole was enjoyable for me.

The book definitely drags in spots, so I would give five stars to the good spots and two stars for the really slow parts. But the writing is high-quality for the time.

This book also has much to offer for young people considering marriage--some of the ways in which things proceed gives much insight.

This book suffers from a lack of good action sequences-- there were great opportunities for these, but instead, the way things resolve is a little too mundane.

Lauren says

After reading *The Way We Live Now* and then this book, I don't know how I haven't read Anthony Trollope before now. He is great. This book has interesting characters, an intriguing story, and writing that is funny, poignant, and insightful.
