THE LITERARY THEORY
OF
WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

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CHAPTER I

THACKERAY'S PURPOSE IN THE BURLEQUES

Thackeray's Burlesques are directed against every tendency opposed to realism, or, in other words, to the truthful representation of life as it is, which appeared in the fiction of the period. The romances of Scott had produced a whole series of pseudo-historical novels from the hands of such authors as Mrs. Gore, G. P. R. James, and Harry Lever. There also was a school of novelists who used the novel for purposes of propaganda, religious, political, or social, as the case might be. Then there were those who belonged to the romantic school. Some of these writers, such as Cooper, portrayed man in a state of nature as the ideal hero. Others preached the doctrine of natural impulses and of disregarding all laws but those of instinct. Thackeray, in his Burlesques, seizes upon the essential fallacy of each of these ideas and heaps ridicule upon it. His method, in most cases, is the simple one of out-herding Herod. The burlesques show clearly what he thought fiction should not be. One of the first to be attacked is the propaganda type.

In the "Plan for a Prize Novel", the author writes to his "dear Snooks", - "Unless he writes with a purpose, you know, a novelist in our days is good for nothing. This one writes with a socialist purpose; that with a conservative purpose; this author or authoress with a most delicate skill insinuates Catholicism into you, and you find yourself all but a Papist in the third volume; another doctors you with Low Church remedies to work inwardly upon you, and which you swallow down unsuspiciously, as children do calomel in jelly. Fiction advocates all sorts of truths and causes"¹ - thereupon he suggests an advertisement novel which will mention

¹Plan for a Prize Novel - p. 105 - Burlesques & Miscellanies.
various shops in a recommendatory way, for a compensation, of course. Disraeli was the foremost writer of these propaganda novels and Thackeray ridicules his "Coningsby" in the burlesque, "Codlingsby". "Coningsby" says Disraeli, "was written with a twofold purpose, first, to vindicate the just claims of the Tory party to be the popular political confederation of the country; and second, to do justice to the race which has founded Christianity." To accomplish the first of these purposes Disraeli introduces a number of conventional characters who talk politics, and exclaim "The Nation is ruined!" at least once each chapter. The second purpose he accomplishes by means of a mysterious Hebrew gentleman, of fabulous wealth, and most extraordinary knowledge, who appears and disappears with inexplicable suddenness. This mysterious Mr. Sidoni discourses suavely upon the importance of his race, and the reader is given to understand that the fate of the nation really rests upon this man and his fellow tribesmen. Whether either the Tory party or Mr. Sidoni actually saves the nation remains a matter of doubt. We are pretty certain, however, that they could if they would, and that, after all, is the important part. It is said that Disraeli never forgave Thackeray for writing "Codlingsby". Indeed, at first sight, the satire seems rather crude. Thackeray seems to be ridiculing the Jewish race more than anything else but it is the absurdity and exaggeration of Disraeli's assertions rather than the Jews that Thackeray aims at. In "Coningsby" we read, "Sidoni was descended from a very ancient and noble family of Arragon. Besides several prelates, they counted among their number

2 Coningsby - Book 4, Chapter 10, p. 215.
an arch bishop of Toledo, and a Sidoni had exercised the paramount office of Grand Inquisitor. Yet strange as it may sound, this illustrious family, in common with two thirds of the Aragonese nobility, secretly adhered to the ancient faith and ceremonies of their fathers!" After this, it is impossible to blame Thackeray's Mendoza for whispering to Codlingsby - "Hush! au revoir, dear Codlingsby. His Majesty is one of us, so is the Pope of Rome; so is --- ---,"¹ a whisper conceals the rest. It is not only the propaganda but the inexcusable bad taste of much of the book that Thackeray is ridiculing. A novelist who is capable of saying that a dish of fried eggs looks "like little tufts of primroses",² deserves worse than a burlesque.

In "Crinoline" Thackeray shows that he can make fun of himself as well as of other people. "Crinoline" is written in the Yellow-plush style carried to the nth degree. The learned Yellowplush, however, discourses in the Disraeli manner. His reflections on English politics are about as sound as those of the average novelist who writes on foreign affairs. His descriptions of England which he gathers by "walking round and round Lester Square, all day, and every day with the same company" remind one that Thackeray also wrote his impressions of France, Ireland, and the Near East, and that he was alive to the fact that he probably gave as false an impression of things as they really are, as did Disraeli and those of his ilk whom he ridiculed.

In "Barbazure" the satire is directed against the pseudo-historical novels of George P. R. James. James' novel, "One in a Thousand"

¹"Codlingsby" - p. 34 - Burlesques & Miscellanies - Thackeray.
²"Coningsby" - Book 3 - Chapter 1, p. 111 - Disraeli.
is perhaps typical of the kind of thing Thackeray is trying to ridicule. Dwarfs, mysterious Italians, brave, not to say super-human knights, disguised pages, beautiful ladies, and corrupt courtiers, all mingle in an atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy supposed to represent the court of Henri Quatre. The life depicted in this novel is essentially false. It is melodramatic in the extreme. The manner and dialogue are not accordant with the spirit of the time portrayed. The heroes, too, are artificial impossibilities but James has attempted to create an air of reality and historical accuracy by elaborate descriptions of the scenery, of the appearance, and of the dress of the characters. These grotesque unrealities apparently were regarded as interesting people by the novel reading public of the time, and Thackeray rose to protest against this sham. In "Barbazure", as per G. P. R. G., the hero is accompanied by a page, "youth was on his brow, his eyes were dark and dewy like spring violets; and spring roses bloomed upon his cheek - roses alas! that bloom and die with life's spring! -- etc., etc.!"¹ Mountain scenes are always dark and mystic, nature, herself, is in sympathy with the feelings of Romani de Clos Vougeot and his page Filibert. The heroine is in the clutches of the fiendish Baron Raoul Barbazure who has imprisoned the fair Fatima in his gloomy tower. All this corresponds to the sorrows of the fair Eugenie pursued relentlessly by the villain, de Aubin.² But instead of her friend Beatrice, the wily Italian, Thackeray gives us Sister Anne. Just as in George de Barnwell.

¹Barbazure: p. 55 - Burlesques & Miscellanies - Thackeray.
²One In a Thousand: G. P. R. James.
where Thackeray sees the likeness between Lytton's hero and the old apprentice yarn, in Barbazura he points out the resemblance between the melodramatic intrigues of James' books and the old ferocious Bluebeard of nursery fame.

"Lords and Liveries" by the author of "Dukes and Djeuners", "Hearts & Diamonds", "Marchionesses and Milliners", is an amusing travesty of the fashionable novels of Mrs. Catherine Frances Gore. Once more Thackeray attacks the false standards of such works as "Mothers and Daughters", by that prolix authoress. This novel affects to be a tale of aristocratic London society. The effect of historical reality is produced by a copious scattering of aristocratic titles. In one short chapter alone, the following distinguished personages appear,¹ Lady Maria Willington, The Heir of Heddeston, Lord Frederick Lorimer, Lord Barringhurst, Monsieur de Bethizy, Lord Montagu Stapylford, Miss Minnie de Vesci, Sir Thomas Westland, Lady Robert Lorton, and the Hon. Lucy Barringhurst. All these people are unable to express themselves except in an absurd Anglo-French jargon. The style is grotesquely affected; apparently the members of the English nobility always address each other by their full titles, even in intimate conversation. Their only aim in life is to marry money, and they are utterly incapable of feeling any of the usual human emotions. In "Lords and Liveries" Thackeray exaggerates none of these features. He concentrates them so that the mockery becomes noticeable but a number of

¹Mothers and Daughters - Mrs. Gore - Vol. 3. - Chapter 10.
the incidents are lifted bodily from Mrs. Gore's book. The death from measles of Cyril Delaval, the tutor of Altamont de Peltonville, seems a bit derivative, but measles plays a correspondingly important part in "Mothers and Daughters." The language Thackeray's characters use is no more absurd than that of Mrs. Gore's. The Burlesque hero, Altamont, really has more "pep" than has Mrs. Gore's Heir of Heddeston. Altamont disguises himself as a butler and this wins the fair Amythyst's heart, while the most exciting thing the Heir can do is to drag the adorable Minnie out of three feet of water into which she has tumbled. The thing Thackeray is attacking most savagely here is the essential snobbishness of readers who can accept such a misrepresentation of life and enjoy it. I am afraid, however, that his Burlesque in this case was so successful that the people who relished Mrs. Gore probably wished Thackeray had expanded "Lords and Liveries" into a three volume work.

Harry Lever, the popular writer of Irish Tales of doubtful accuracy, is the subject of the burlesque in "Phil Fogarty, by Harry Rollicker." Lever's novel, "Harry Lorrequer" is the especial object of the satire. Lever's books all have Irishmen for heroes - for the most part they are young soldiers without money but with a great deal of wit and a superabundance of swagger and conceit. Harry Lorrequer falls out of one scrape and into another. He has numerous love affairs which he carries on with considerable sang-froid. The Wild Irish, according to Lever, are capable of anything. In all seriousness we are told that a certain peasant disguises himself as a

1 "Mothers & Daughters - Mrs. Gore - p. 28, Vol. 2."
savage in a side show where he devours chunks of raw meat and gibbers pure Irish instead of a South Sea Island tongue. When his astounded landlord recognizes him, the peasant explains that this is an easier way to pay his rent than raising potatoes would be. Thackeray, in "Phil Fogarty", makes especial fun of the way Lever's heroes hobnob with nobility. Their swaggering boastfulness and extraordinary prowess are also hit off.

The same thing is done in "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan". Although longer than the Prize Novelist Burlesques, and written with too much plot and individuality to be merely a parody, the spirit and style is a hilarious imitation of the Irish novels of Charles Lever. Major Goliah Gahagan tells his own story. His Appearance, as described by himself is remarkable. "I am", he says, "six feet and four inches in height, and of matchless symmetry and proportion. My hair and beard are of the most brilliant auburn, so bright, as scarcely to be distinguished at a distance from scarlet. My eyes are bright blue, overshadowed by bushy eyebrows of the color of my hair, and a terrific gash of the deepest purple, which goes over my forehead, the eyelid, and the cheek, and finishes at the ear, gives my face a more strictly military appearance than can be conceived. When I have been drinking, as is pretty often the case, this gash becomes ruby bright, and as I have another which took off a piece of my underlip, and shows five of my front teeth, I leave you to imagine that seldom lighted on the earth a more extraordinary vision." The whole sketch is an extravagant and ludicrous as this description, and the rollicking humour is as ludicrous as Dickens' own. Both these burlesques are wholly good natured and Lever is said to have humorously complained that Thackeray compelled him to change his style of writing because after reading Thackeray's burlesques
no one could take Lever's heroes seriously.

"Rebecca and Rowena," more than any other of Thackeray's burlesques seems to have been written for the sheer fun of the thing. There is no doubt that Thackeray really admired Scott, but he saw much that was untrue in his novels as well as in those of his less successful imitators. Thackeray objects humorously to the fact that the modern romance carries the hero only to his wedding day and does not continue the biography until he reaches a "decent" age. The fact that the hero of a romance suffers all sorts of misfortunes until he finally wins the hand of the heroine and then finds the rest of his life a path of roses, does not appeal to Thackeray's sense of the actual. He makes fun too of the conventional ending which marries Ivanhoe to Rowena, the conventional heroine, rather than to Rebecca, the actual one. Thackeray also shows the crude and uncouth side of the life of the middle ages, whereas Scott shows only the ideal. The whole thing is highly exaggerated but really is funnier than any other of the burlesques. Ivanhoe, the hen-pecked, is far more human than is Ivanhoe, the gallant hero of Scott's romance.

The "Stars and Stripes" is a ludicrous imitation of Cooper's Leather Stocking tales. The dialect, pride, and swaggering boastfulness of the Yankee, as depicted by Cooper, are burlesqued, but the chief satire is directed against the "noble red man". Thackeray takes Tauta, the redoubtable chief of the Nose Ring tribe to the court of Louis XVI. Tauta and Benjamin Franklin manage to impress Louis and Marie Antoinette with the importance of the North American Republic. The fallacy in the idea that the Indian in his native state lives an ideal life is cleverly pointed out.
Thackeray's Tatua is decorated in his war paint, but instead of being the gorgeous creature of Cooper's books we see that he is painted and tattooed in a hideous fashion. His blanket is fringed with various tufts of hair extracted from the scalps of his enemies, "the snowy tresses of extreme age, the flaxen down of infancy" are all there. A necklace of human teeth jingles about his neck, and bracelets of the same composition adorn his arms. For amusement he shoots cockades from the hats of the Swiss bodyguard. On the whole Thackeray's Tatua is perhaps a more accurate picture of the North American savage than are Cooper's fanciful denizens of the forest.

In "George de Barnwell" Thackeray has caricatured the unreality of plot, the affectation of style, and the somewhat pompous erudition exhibited in the novels of Sir George Edward Bulwer Lytton. "Eugene Aram" is the especial object of Thackeray's satire. The hero of that pleasant tale is a scholar, and incidentally a thief, and an accomplice in murder. The latter facts, however, are of comparative unimportance. Lytton's novel exalts the hero. The reader is made to feel that murder isn't so bad after all. A man may be a gentleman and a scholar and still consort with highwaymen and take part in their crimes. Eugene Aram committed these various indiscretions in a moment of weakness, so naturally he may become intimately connected with respectable people; may even prepare to marry the niece of the man he has killed; may cause her death, and that of her father; and still, because he has "that divine virtue - the foundation of all virtues, heathen or Christian, that which Epictetus made clear, and Christ sacred - Fortitude"¹ he is a hero and a martyr. Thackeray sees at once the falsity

¹ Eugene Aram: Lytton - Book 4, Chapter 7, p. 384.
and unsoundness of such an idea. He connects Eugene Aram with George Lillo's old play, "George Barnwell". Barnwell is not a gentleman but is a learned apprentice who is led to rob and kill because of his passion for Millwood, just as Eugene Aram is led to commit the same crimes by his desire to pursue knowledge. George Barnwell has none of the engaging qualities of Eugene but his weakness of will, the esteem with which he is regarded by Trueman and Maria, and his heroic farewell before his execution all savor strongly of Lytton's hero. Thackeray has emphasized these most striking resemblances. His George de Barnwell is counted by the learned men of the day. Pope, Addison, Swift, Steele, all bow before George's superior genius. Eugene Aram is the pride and admiration of England. Lord --- is his friend to the last, and the scholars of England bow to the superior knowledge of the learned criminal. There are other parallels so nearly alike it would be hard to tell which are the real and which the burlesque passages. In Eugene Aram we read - ¹ "We know henceforth that the criminal is not all evil; the angel within is not easily expelled; it survives sin; ay and many sins, and leaves us sometimes in amaze and marvel at the good that lingers round the heart even of the hardest offender." In "George de Barnwell" we read - ² "And you who read! you unconvicted Convict, you murderer, tho' haply you have slain no one, you Felon in posse if not in esse, deal gently with one who has used the opportunity that has failed thee - and believe that the Truthful and the Beautiful bloom sometimes in the dock, and the convicts tawny gabardine." Thackeray's purpose in this particular burlesque is found in the

¹ Eugene Aram - Lytton.

Words of Dr. Fuzwig as he clamps the prisoner's marble and manacled hand -
"and the tragedy of Tomorrow will teach the world that Homicide is not to be permitted even to the most amiable genius, and that the lover of the Ideal, and the Beautiful, as thou art, my son, must respect the Real likewise."

The romantic school of the sentimental variety is again the subject for attack in Thackeray's verse "The Sorrows of Werther." Goethe's "Die Leiden des jungen Werthers" is a stormy tale full of passion and sentiment. There is much violent suffering on the part of the hero due to the fact that the poor man hasn't sense enough to retire gracefully from the scene when the girl he loves marries another man. Instead he storms around, makes love to her, and then shoots himself. This, boldly, is the outline of the tale but Goethe has dressed it up so romantically that the young ladies of the early nineteenth century are said to have cried their eyes out over the fate of the poor young simpleton. Thackeray has seized upon the scene which the utter lack of humor in the work makes possible. The, to Werther, enchanting scene where Lottie, all dressed for the party, cuts huge slabs of rye bread for the six or eight hungry youngsters who haven't any better manners than to demand their food from her, and her only, is the subject of his verse - "Werther had a love for Charlotte

Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
She was cutting bread and butter."

Then after the tragedy -

"Charlotte having seen his body
Borne before her on a shutter
Like a well conducted person
Went on cutting bread and butter."

Thus sounds romanticism when treated rationally!

This is what Thackeray accomplishes in his burlesques. He throws the cold light of reason on the popular fallacies of the day. The idea that there can be no absolute standards of right and wrong, that motives rather than the deeds are important, and that sentiment and history can be combined successfully by sacrificing truth. Besides these fundamental matters, Thackeray aims always at what he calls Snobbery. The vulgarity of basing value on outward possessions, or rank, and the poor taste of boasting of wealth, power, or knowledge, are the especial objects of his ridicule. Thackeray stands for the genuine in matters of taste, as well as in manners, morals, and philosophy.
THACKERAY AS A CRITIC

As a critic Thackeray's appreciation seems always to have been guided by considerations which do not bear distinctly upon pure literary merit. In the "Paris Sketch Book", he says, "We are not to expect to gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, we may, at least demand, in all persons assuming the character of moralist or philosopher (he might have added artist or author), soberness and regularity of life; for we are apt to distrust the intellect that we fancy can be swayed either by circumstances or passion."\(^1\) Even if the merit of a production, judged impartially, does not depend on the personal character of the author, this view of Thackeray's is interesting when considered in relation to his own art. There are absolute standards of right and wrong for Thackeray, and he never forgets them. In the "Round about Papers" he laments that he is unable to write a story which shows no "egotism", by which he means no personal inflection or comment. With his ideas regarding morality and art, for Thackeray to write without bringing himself into the story would be impossible.

In the Yellowplush Memoirs,\(^2\) a work is condemned as being "nonsense, sheer nonsense, and what is worse, affected nonsense." Mr. Yellowplush dilates upon the advisability of calling a spade a spade. "It is," says that philosopher, addressing Sir George Edward Lytton, "generally best in poetry to understand puffickly what you mean yourself, and to express your meaning clearly afterwards - in the simpler words the better praps. You may, for instans, call a coronet a coronal (an ancestral coronal) if you like, as you might call a hat a 'swart sombrero', 'a glossy four and nine',

\(^{1}\)Paris Sketch Book - p. 277.
'a silken helm to storm impermeable and lightsome as the breezy gossamer', but in the long run its as well to call it a hat. It is a hat; and that name's quite as poetical as another. I think its Plato or Aristotle who observes that what we would call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Confess now Barnet, don't you long to call it a Polyanthus?"1

The pathetic fallacy is also condemned as being opposed to realism. Mr. Yellowplush in his Epistle to the Literati, again takes Lytton to task for this. "Once in a pome, this universal simphity is very well: but once is enuff, my dear Bartnet; and that once should be in some great suckmtans surely, such as the meeting of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost, or Jewpeter and Jewnc in Homer, where there seems, as it were, a reason for it. But sea captings should not be spouting and invoking Gods, heavens, stars, angels, and other stilistial influences. We can all do it Barnet, nothing in life is easier. I can compare my livery buttons to the stars, or the clouds of my backo pipe to the dark volumns that ishew from Mt. Hetha; or I can say that angels are looking down from there, and the tobacco silf, like a happy sole released, is circling round, and upwards, and shaking sweetness down. All this is as easy as drink; but its not poatry, Barnet, nir natural. People, when their mother's reckonize them, don't howl about the suckum ambiant air, and paws to think of the happy leaves a rustling - at least one mistrusts them if they do."2

The naturalistic school is condemned once more, this time in the Paris Sketch Book. Speaking of the school of George Sand, Thackeray writes - "We were beasts, and we can't tell when our tails dropped off; we

2Epistle to the Literati - Charles J. Yellowplush Memoirs - p. 190.
shall be angels: but when our wings begin to sprout who knows? In the meantime, a man of genius, follow our counsel: lead an easy life, don't stick at trifles; never mind about duty, it is only made for slaves; if the world reproach you, reproach the world in return, you have a good loud tongue in your head: if your strait-laced morals injure your mental respiration, fling off the old fashioned stays, and leave your limbs free to rise, free as nature pleases; and when you have grown pretty sick of your liberty, and yet unfit to return to restraint, curse the world, and scorn it, and be miserable like my Lord Byron and other philosophers of his kidney: or else mount a step higher, and with conceit still more monstrous, and mental vision still more wretchedly debauched and weak, suddenly find yourself filled with maudlin compassion for the human race and a desire to set them right after your own fashion. There is a quarrelsome stage of drunkenness when a man can yet walk and speak, when he can call names and fling plates and wine glasses at his neighbors' head with pretty good aim: then comes the pathetic stage, when the patient becomes wondrous philosophic and weeps wildly as he lies in the gutter, and fancies he is at home in bed - where he ought to be: but this is an allegory.¹

Tales with unhappy endings do not please Thackeray. He is not of the school that carries realism to the bitter end. He confesses that, while he admires Scott, he has never been able to reread "The Bride of Lammermoor," or "Kenilworth," because the finale is unhappy and people die and are murdered in the end.²

¹Paris Sketch Book - p. 303.
²Round About Papers - p. 87.
Of all things, however, the one Thackeray hated worst was the inspirational claims made by many of the French writers. In the Paris Sketch Book he says - "Pantheism is the word now; we are all deluged with a host of gods accordingly. M. de Balzac feels himself to be inspired; Victor Hugo is a god; Madame Sand is a god; that tawdry man of genius Jules Janin, who writes theatrical reviews for the "Debats", has divine intuitions; and there is scarcely a beggarly, beardless scribbler of poems and prose, but tells you in his preface, of the "saintete of the sacerdoc litteraire"; or a dirty student sucking tobacco and beer, and reeling home with a grisette, who is not convinced of the necessity of a new "Messianism", and will hiccup, to such as will listen, chapters of his own drunken Apocalypse."

Although Thackeray might belaborer Ainsworth, Madame Sand, Lytton and the rest because he honestly believed their works were harmful, he was not backward in expressing his praise of his contemporaries. He wrote enthusiastically of Cruikshank, and Leech, Macaulay, Irving, Hood, Lever, Brontë, Scott, Dickens, and Dumas. Dumas' novels he especially admires. Athos, Count de la Fere, is his favorite character in fiction. He wishes he might pass through a hundred more volumes. Novels, he says, he likes "strong, with no love making, no observations about society, little dialogue except when the characters are bullying each other; plenty of fighting; a villain in the cupboard who is to suffer tortures just before the finis. I don't like your melancholy Finis. I never read the history of a consumptive

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1 Paris Sketch Book - p. 276.
2 Round About Papers - p. 315.
In Scott, the characters he particularly loves are Captain Waverly, Ivanhoe, and Quentin Durward, Saladin, Claverhouse, and Major Dalgetty. In spite of "The Stars and Stripes", he admires some of Cooper's characters, who he says are quite the equal of Scott's men. In Thackeray's opinion "La Longue Carabine" is one of the prize men of fiction and ranks with Uncle Toby, Sir Roger, and Falstaff. Pickwick also receives his praise. He finds in that novel "true character under false names, and a better idea of the state and ways of the people than we could gather from any more pompos or authentic history." While these are only a few of the commendatory comments made by Thackeray, they are typical in so far as they point out that it is always truth that he admires - either honesty of purpose or fidelity in character delineation.

The English Humorist series of lectures contains Thackeray's view of the humorists of the eighteenth century. Strictly speaking, they are not critical essays at all, but are a series of brilliant portraits of these men of letters. Thackeray's view is essentially that of a novelist. He pictures the man in the background of contemporary life and shows him to us as he appeared to his contemporaries, and not as we, judging from his works, would have him appear. This undoubtedly is not good technical criticism but it is an interesting point of view and has the merit of being somewhat unusual. The important question in Thackeray's mind is "Would we have liked to have lived with him?" - this, he says, is the question in

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1. Found about Papers - p. 300.
dealing with an author's life and peculiarities every writer must put to himself. While this may be an interesting speculative problem, it hardly seems an adequate standard of criticism. It is an especially inadequate standard when used with the lack of precision employed by Thackeray.

The portrait of Jonathan Swift is by far the most unsympathetic one he draws. He accepts unhesitatingly a number of facts of more or less doubtful authenticity. Esther Johnson was the natural daughter of Sir William Temple — Swift was secretly married to Stella — Vanessa broke her heart upon hearing of the marriage and died forthwith. These are interesting bits of gossip but there is no evidence to justify the assumption that they are anything more. Thackeray's entire attitude toward Swift is reminiscent of the Irish Bishop who read Gulliver's Travels and remarked that the story was so full of improbable lies that he, for his part, doubted its truth. Thackeray, like the Bishop, seems to fail to distinguish between Swift in earnest and Swift in jest. He thinks the Modest Proposal a "jibe against parenthood". "Steele, or Goldsmith, or Fielding," he says, "all melt at the thought of childhood, while Mr. Dean enters the nursery with the tread and gayety of an ogre." It seems hardly credible that Thackeray should not have seen the deadly earnestness of Swift's "Modest Proposal". There is a fury against injustice and oppression concealed under the superficial irony which is indicative of a more sincere regard for Childhood than any sentimental effusions on the subject.

What Thackeray does admire in Swift is his letters to Stella. These and the fact that he left a lock of her hair enclosed in a paper on which he had written, "Only a woman's hair", go far toward redeeming his
character in the eyes of his critic. A man who could write the maudlin prattle of those letters evidently had some heart even though he could contemplate with equanimity the marketing of Irish children for esculent purposes. Allowance must, of course, be made for the fact that Thackeray's essay was delivered as a lecture, and as such could not contain material not of an interesting nature to the general public. It is not this, however, but his attitude toward Swift to which I object. The standard by which he judges Swift is inadequate. Swift can not be considered simply as a man. He was an important figure in literature and in politics, and should be considered as such. If Thackeray was looking for a key phrase by which to judge Swift a better one than the "lock of hair" is to be found in a line of his epitaph - "ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerae nequit". Thackeray's indignation perhaps never was so cruel, or else never tore his heart. He seems, at any rate, to have been unable to realise the passionate sincerity of Swift.

Lamb, in his essay on the Artificial Comedy, upholds Congreve's plays on the ground that they are outside the moral world. He laments that we no longer go to the theater to escape from the pressure of reality but only to confirm our experience of it. Congreve's plays, according to Lamb, are on that neutral ground of character which stands between vice and virtue, where neither properly is called in question. It is a perpetual happy breathing place from the burden of a perpetual moral questioning. Thackeray's treatment of the same subject is, of course, wholly different. He calls the English comedy of the Restoration a "disreputable, daring, laughing, painted French baggage - a wild, dishevelled Lais, with eyes bright with wit and wine." There is not, he says, a pretense of morals, and he refuses to quote
from Congreve’s plays. In Thackeray’s estimation of a writer there is no neutral ground. He acknowledges that Congreve is brilliant, clever, and witty, but he has no moral purpose and this makes his "tawdry playhouse" taper invisible.

In contrast to Congreve, in the same lecture, Thackeray discusses Addison. Of Addison he approves whole-heartedly and enthusiastically. Addison is conventional, cultivated, peaceful. He knows little of the seamy side of life and so does not discuss it. His feeling does not impress Thackeray as being affected. The somewhat negative virtues of the man are held up for admiration. His life, according to Thackeray, was one of those most to be envied. It was prosperous and beautiful. He died a calm death and left a spotless name. All this is true. Whether or not it is an adequate critical estimate is another matter.

In his essay on Steele, Thackeray draws a picture of life in Queen Anne’s day which is comparable in its vivid picturesqueness to parts of Henry Esmond. The account of that famous publication, the British Apollo, is interesting and diverting. The contrast between the latter and such previous publications is well drawn. Steele himself is dealt with most sympathetically. He is presented as the ideal gentleman of the age. His vices, over eating and drinking, are the common ones of the day, and they are the ones of all others that Thackeray finds it easiest to condone. This appreciation is not the critical estimate of a literary personage, but the portrait of a gallant gentleman.

Matthew Prior, who is an attractive figure, and an amiable man, is appreciated accordingly by Thackeray. Gay, too, is an attractive figure as presented by his critic. The facts of his life would indicate that
he was somewhat of a "sponge", but Thackeray is oblivious of this fact and draws a most sympathetic portrait of the creator of "The Beggar's Opera".

Pope, on the whole, receives sympathetic treatment. The wasp-like characteristics of the little man are tenderly dealt with. He admits there are frailties and meannesses in his life but admires the "great soul which flashes out and conquers transcendent in the presence of a great occasion." "Pope's manners were refined and polished," says Thackeray, "and with his extraordinary sensibility, with his known taste, with his delicate frame, with his power and dread of ridicule, Pope could have been no other than what we call a highly bred person."

It seems here especially that Thackeray's own "high breeding" stands in the way of his critical ability. It is manifestly unfair to attack a poor crippled soul so Thackeray praises him. Swift is capable of bearing attack, so is abused. A study of the Swift-Pope correspondence would, it seems to me, incline the balance of favor in the other direction.

 Hogarth is shown as a brave London citizen with John Bull habits, prejudices and pleasures. "His morals are simple. People are naughty and they are punished. This is the point of most of his famous pictures, "Marriage a la Mode, The Rake's Progress, 'Industry and Idleness'. He has no pity for rogues but is a delightful Mr. Pickwick sort of a person, chiefly valuable for affording us a picture of London life of his time. "His honesty of purpose is what makes him especially valuable to Thackeray.

 Smollett, too, is chiefly valuable for the faithful pictures
of English life that he draws. Thackeray's criticism of this, and the other great novelists of the preceding century, is especially interesting in the light of his own achievements. "Humphrey Clinker" he calls the most laughable story that has ever been written since the art of novel writing began. Whether or not this is precisely the judgment of later critics is immaterial. Thackery realised that Smollett's characters were a distinct contribution to the immortals of fiction and his appreciation of them is pleasant. It is Fielding's realism that Thackeray praises. The fact that Fielding noted the things he saw in life and recorded them evidently impressed and influenced Thackeray. The virtues which make Fielding worth loving are "an admirable natural love of truth, the keenest instinctive antipathy to hypocrisy, the happy satirical gift of laughing it to scorn. He is one of the manliest and kindest of human beings: in the midst of all his imperfections he respects female innocence and infatue tenderness, as you would suppose such a great hearted, courageous soul would respect and care for them. He could not be so brave, generous, truth telling as he is, were he not so infinitely merciful, pitiful, and tender." Many of Thackeray's admirers would apply the same paragraph to him! When he comes to a critical estimate of Fielding's works he again differs from the orthodox critics. He admires Joseph Andrews above any other of Fielding's characters. Parson Adams, generally considered the hero of the book, receives little more than passing mention from Thackeray. Of Tom Jones Thackeray does not approve. A hero with a flawed reputation is no hero. To have invented Amelia, on the contrary, Thackeray considers not only a triumph of art but a good action as well. When all
is said and done it is the "brave, gentle heart, and courageous spirit" which Thackeray admires in the "manly, English Harry Fielding."

The lecture on Sterne gives a racy account of that novelist's life. Thackeray calls him not a great humorist but a great jester. He condemns his sentiment as being forced. "Tears and fine feelings," says Thackeray, "and a white pocket handkerchief, and a funeral sermon, and horses and feathers, and a procession of mutes, and a hearse with a dead donkey inside, are merely tricks, and are unworthy of the dignity of a novelist."

Goldsmith, "the most beloved of English writers," receives a large share of Thackeray's praise. Next to Fielding he admires Goldsmith's personality more than any other of the humorists. Goldsmith's faults are all amiable ones. He is weak, good natured, and imposed upon by hordes of people who fleece him. Several anecdotes are told illustrative of Goldsmith's kindness of heart. "The Vicar of Wakefield" is praised as an illustration of the "sweet nature" of its author. In the "Round about Papers," however, Thackeray places The Vicar and My Uncle Toby among the masterpieces of the English school. This essay concludes the series of English Humorists. If not particularly profound criticism they at least are extremely interesting examples of the opinion of a great master on others of his own profession.

Besides sketches and criticism of the work of various artists Thackeray has two essays of considerable length, one on George Cruikshank, which appeared in the Westminster Review of June, 1840, and one on John Leech in the Quarterly Review for December, 1854. Leech was the chief
illustrator for Punch, and Thackeray's appreciation of his work in that periodical is hearty. It is his realism, of course, which meets with Thackeray's approval. The social pictures Leech draws are authentic. He observes the manners of the age; all his people are different, and are delightfully natural and absurd. His backgrounds, too, are as true to nature as are the actors themselves. In other words, he paints life as he sees it to be. Thackeray also approves heartily of Cruikshank. Anyone who appeals to children has Thackeray's support, and Cruikshank's illustrations for children's books are especially happy. The German Fairy Tales met with Thackeray's special approbation, and he says Cruikshank has the art of making even dull books for children bright by his pictures. As with the novelists, Thackeray finds the secret of Cruikshank's success in the fact that he lived among the public and has with them a general wide hearted sympathy. He laughs at the things they laugh at; has a kindly spirit of enjoyment; he pities and loves the poor, and jokes at the follies of the great. Greatest of all is his honesty of purpose. He addresses all in a perfectly sincere and manly way. His caricatures express his own opinions and not those of some purchaser.

For the French he has the typically British view. Against idlers, pretenders, and boasters he is particularly severe. Cruikshank stands for realism in art - therefore he meets with the approval of Thackeray.

When all is said and done there is a great deal to be said for Thackeray's critical point of view. While it may not do ample justice to pure beauty of style or power of expression, it does recognize that art, unless based upon some absolute standard of moral excellence, can not endure. After all, honesty of purpose is only Thackeray's name for
realism. He is absolutely certain that life is governed by definite standards of right and wrong, and his optimism makes him equally certain that, in the long run, right always prevails. Novelists, or artists, who do not compose with this idea in mind, according to Thackeray, are not portraying life as it is. Fidelity of character, delineation and honesty of purpose, both demand recognition of this principle. Thackeray also holds to the notion that to write with a moral purpose a man must live with a moral purpose. Art, to him, can never be separated from the artist. If, sometimes, he seems to confound gentility and good breeding with morality it is a fault of emphasis on the negative rather than the positive qualities of morality. I think Thackeray always feels the true morality underlying good breeding even when he seems to give greater emphasis to the outer characteristics.
CHAPTER III

REALISM IN THACKERAY'S ART

It is to be assumed that Thackeray wrote his novels with the intention of portraying life as it is. His burlesques and criticisms having been directed against all anti-realistic tendencies, his novels, perforce, must exemplify just what he understood realism to be.

It is obvious that to Thackeray realism did not necessitate the effacement of the author from the pages of his novel. He may appear under one guise or another but he is always present. In "Vanity Fair", the novel which first made Thackeray popular, he takes the position of manager of the performance, a kind of "deus ex machina" who makes the puppets dance as he wills, and who may come before the screen at any time and comment on the action. It is true that, once introduced to the story itself, the reader forgets all about the puppet show until recalled by the closing sentence - "come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out". There has been plenty of moralization and comment throughout the story, but it has not been the comment of a showman who stands aloof from his puppets. It is rather that of a sympathetic participant in the joys and griefs of those whose lives he is portraying. Thackeray's comment seems to me to be a natural part of the story. It is what a reflective reader might think for himself as he reads, but, as Thackeray presents it, it is no more "obtruded moralizing and personal intervention of the showman" than is the chorus in a Greek Play. There
is something flattering to the reader in thus being taken into the author's confidence. It might be objected that it would be more flattering to the reader if Thackeray gave him credit for judgment enough to form his own opinions of the characters. But Thackeray is not at all didactic in his comments. He is talking about these people in a confidential way and is not at all sure that he understands their motives. He has his own opinion about it which he presents to you and which you are free to accept or reject as you choose. Occasionally he admits, as in the case of Becky Sharp, that he doesn't know to what extent she is guilty. He has his opinion and you may have yours, and you and Thackeray may pause for a little discussion of the question before you go on to what happens next.

These pauses for gossip add greatly to the realism of the novels. Although, occasionally, as in "Philip", there is too much of this sort of thing, in the greater novels, "Vanity Fair", "Pendennis", and "The Newcomes", there is just enough to be delightful. It is just a little, good-natured chat about one's neighbors - nothing malicious, but just a friendly interest in what people we know are doing, and why they are doing it. For instance, after seeing Rebecca laying plans for her campaign to extract a proposal from Jos Sedley, Thackeray indulges in a little chat on her motives -

"If Miss Rebecca Sharp had determined in her heart upon making the conquest of this big beau I don't think, ladies, we have any right to blame her: for though the task of husband hunting is generally, and with becoming modesty, intrusted by young persons to their ma'ams, recollect that Miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her, and that if she did not get a husband for herself, there was no one else in the wide world who would take the trouble off her hands. What causes young people
to 'come out', but the noble ambition of matrimony? What sends them
trooping to watering places? What keeps them dining till five o'clock in
the morning through the whole mortal season? What causes them to labour at
piano forte sonatas, and learn four songs from a fashionable master at
a guinea a lesson, and to play the harp if they have handsome arms and neat
elbows? What causes respectable parents to take up their carpets, set
their houses topsy-turvy, and spend a fifth of their year's income in
ball suppers and iced champagne? It is sheer love of their species, and an
unadulterated wish to see their young people happy and dancing. Psha!
they want to marry their daughters: and, as honest Mrs. Sedley has, in the
depths of her kind heart already arranged a score of little schemes for the
settlement of her Amelia, so also has our beloved, but unprotected, Rebecca
determined to do her very best to secure the husband who was even more
necessary for her than for her friend."¹

Thackeray was criticised for this new element, and, always
susceptible to criticism he changed his method. "Henry Esmond," which
followed shortly after "Vanity Fair" and "Pendennis", is something altogether
different from anything else Thackeray ever wrote. Is it superior in many
respects to any of his other books, but it lacks some of the intimate quali-
ties of the less artistically constructed novels? One of the reasons for
this is that Thackeray, himself, is not present in the story. If "Esmond"
were all that Thackeray had written, his artistic fame would perhaps be as
great, but one of his most attractive characters, the novelist himself,

¹Vanity Fair - p. 22.
would not have been created. After "Esmond", Thackeray again returned to personal comment, but with a difference. To suit his critics, he disguised himself as Pendennis in "The Newcomes"; but Arthur Pendennis is a very thin disguise for W. M. Thackeray. The story loses by this shadowy portrayal of the author. When Thackeray himself was commenting on the people in his books he did not have to stop to explain how he happened to be on the scene at the time. Arthur Pendennis continually has to do this. Thackeray's own comments might be cynical, humorous, or sentimental. Arthur Pendennis must keep within the bounds of what a person of his disposition would be likely to say. In "Philip and his Adventures through the World" the same thing occurs, only in greatly exaggerated form. In "The Virginians" Thackeray has gone back to his original method, and the personal comment is done much more artistically.

Thackeray's mastery of the art of digression is best exemplified in the "Round About Papers". They are the last of his completed works and pretend to be nothing more than discursive papers on a variety of subjects. From "A Chalk Mark on the Door", he wanders to education, honesty, and the servant problem. These papers are leisurely in manner, quiet in tone, and always delightfully droll. As examples of Thackeray as a "personal commentator", they can not be surpassed.

Personal comment, however, is only one feature of Thackeray's style, nor does his style depend solely on this trait for its realistic effect. When Thackeray is writing impersonally he is just as realistic as when he is addressing the reader directly. He is always simple, unaffected, and his ease and grace resembles that of Addison. "Henry Esmond" is undoubtedly the
best example of Thackeray as a stylist. He is writing here in the person of Esmond, a courtly gentleman of Queen Anne's day. There is nothing in the book to suggest for an instant that it is not this cultured gentleman who is writing the story. The style is personal to the supposed narrator, just as the "Round About Papers" are personal to Thackeray. The impression made by Lady Castlewood on young Esmond is perfectly in keeping with the boy's character, and at the same time is one of the most beautifully suggestive scenes in the book:

"And with this she dropped a stately curtsy, and taking her candle, went away through the tapestry door, which led to her apartments. Esmond stood by the fireplace, blankly staring after her. Indeed he scarce seemed to see until she was gone, and then her image was impressed upon him, and remained forever fixed in his memory. He saw her retreating, the taper lighting her marble face, her scarlet lip quivering, and her shining golden hair."¹

There are some mechanical attempts on Thackeray's part to create a realistic atmosphere which are artistically unfortunate, although not realistically so. Chief of these faults is the repetition of the same names in all the novels. This becomes tiresome. We hear of Rawdon Crawley in "The Newcomes", and in "Philip", long after he has finished his career in "Vanity Fair". Harry Foker is continually frisking in and out of the different books. The Pendennis become very flat after their third appearance. Their idyllic happiness and goodness is somewhat cloying after their youth

¹Henry Esmond - p. 105.
has passed. A background of the same less important personages is not so
bad. The Earl of Bareacres, Sir Huddleston Fuddleston, and Lord Magnus
Charters, all of whom are more or less shadowy figures seem to be part of the
setting; but when characters we know intimately reappear in book after book,
it presupposes a knowledge of all the author's previous books, and suggests
a "Little Colonel Series".

The stage setting is realistically done. There is no great
variety of scene. Indeed, the one time Thackeray tried variety, in
"Catherine", he failed. The great novels are all laid in semi-aristocratic
society. The fashionable watering places, both in England, and on the con-
tinent, noblemen's estates, London clubs, court, with an occasional digression
to a bailiff's quarters or a sponging house, are about all the places to which
we are introduced. There is one trip to Virginia, but it is an English family,
and English customs that are portrayed, and the principal characters are
soon brought to England. There is nothing romantic about Thackeray's por-
trayal of fashionable life. His castles are not castles of Otranto, but
are cold edifices, often falling to ruin because the inhabitants are too
poor to repair them. There is no romantic description of scenery for the sake
of its beauty or its suitability to the emotion of the action.

Where there are descriptions they are usually in letters writ-
ten by characters, and the description helps in understanding the character
rather than anything else. Rebecca's description of Queen's Crawley is
an example of this. Her letter is ludicrous and the inhabitants of that
gloomy place are well taken off. Then we are made to feel that had Rebecca
been a true gentlewoman she would not have seen all she did, or having seen
it she would not have commented upon it. On the whole the background, as such, plays a comparatively small part. It is the relation of the setting to the character that counts. Harry Warrington's emotions upon seeing Castlewood are the important thing. Castlewood itself is not.

Thackeray's use of historical happenings as they must have affected the characters in whom we are interested, is one of the most realistic features of his books. We meet Dick Steele, not with the halo of a man of letters, but as a tipsy captain, with many good impulses, but with a weak will. "Dearest Prue" is a vain, ignorant woman - "she has never read but one of the 'Tatlers' and thought it utter nonsense." Poor Dick is woefully hen-pecked but deserves it. Addison is a shabby gentleman who doesn't talk until he has consumed more wine than is good for him. It is in Esmond, that most perfect of historical novels, that these people appear. They are not dragged in just because they happened to be living at the time, but they belong in the story just as do the powder and patches of Mistress Beatrix. The Young Pretender is treated with none of the tenderness or romanticism Scott would have used. He has loyal subjects who are willing to risk their all for him but because of his own weaknesses he is unable to profit by their sacrifices.

In "The Virginians", Washington and Wolfe appear. The former is a somewhat cold and priggish young man, but is decidedly superior to the English officers. Again, these people are shown to us in an unromantic light. We see Washington pursued by Mrs. Esmond Warrington, and on the verge of fighting a duel with her two sons, who don't approve of Mr. Washington as a step-father. Colonel Wolfe is shown to us "dangling at the apron strings of the fair Miss Lowther", and snubbed by the fast young officers with whom he is associated. The description of Richarison, is one of the most realistic
things Thackeray has done. Harry Warrington and Colonel Wolfe are walking in a garden at Tunbridge Wells, with my Lord March. Dr. Johnson is pointed out to them. Says my lord - "That fat man he's walking with is another of your writing fellows - a printer - his name's Richardson. He wrote 'Clarissa' you know."

"Great 'heavens!' my lord, is that the great Richardson? Is that the man who wrote 'Clarissa'?" called out Colonel Wolfe, and Mr. Warrington in a breath.

Harry ran forward to look at the old gentleman toddling along the walk with a train of admiring ladies surrounding him.

"Indeed, my very dear sir," one was saying, "you are too great and good to live in such a world: but sure, you were sent to teach it virtue."

"Oh, my Miss Mulso! who shall teach the teacher?" said the good, fat old man, raising a kind round face skywards. "Even he has his faults and errors! Even his age and experience does not prevent him from stumbling. Heaven bless my soul Mr. Johnson! I ask your pardon if I have trodden on your corn."

"You have done both, sir. You have trodden on the corn and received the pardon," said Mr. Johnson, and went on mumbling some verses, swaying to and fro, his eyes turned toward the ground, his hands behind him, and occasionally endangering with his great stick, the honest meek eyes of his companion author.

"They do not see very well, my dear Mulso," he says to the young lady, "but such as they are I would keep my lash from Mr. Johnson's cudgel. Your servant, sir!", here he made a low bow and took off his hat to Mr. Warrington, who shrank back with many blushes after saluting the great
author. The great author was accustomed to be adored. A gentler wind never puffed mortal vanity. Enraptured spinster flung tea leaves around him and incensed him with the coffee pot. Matrons kissed the slippers they had worked for him. There was a halo of virtue round his night cap. All Europe had thrilled, panted, admired, trembled, wept, over the pages of the immortal little kind honest man, with the round paunch. Harry came back, quite glowing and proud at having a bow from him. ¹

The most famous of Thackeray's historical scenes is his famous "back stair" picture of the Battle of Waterloo. We don't know anything about the political importance of the battle, the glorious heroism of the soldiers, or the suffering of the wounded. What we do see is Jos Sedley showing off his military mustaches, while Isidor, the valet, has greedy eyes on the semi-military costume which Jos, in his terror, has discarded. We also see Becky selling her horses for a fabulous price, and stitching her bank notes and diamonds in her dress. Then there is the picture of Lady Bareacres and her daughter Blanche sitting in the inn yard in a horseless carriage, while Becky gloats over their plight from the window above. Last of all we have the end of the day - "No more firing was heard at Brussels - the pursuit rolled far away. Darkness came down on field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart." ²

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¹The Virginians, Vol. 1 - p. 327, 328.
²The Essays on the Four Georges treat historical events in the same personal way. Men and manners rather than political events are shown us. In the essay on the First George he says - "We are not the historic muse but her ladyship's attendant, tale bearer, valet-de-chambre, for whom no man is a hero." (The Four Georges - p. 29) He is an expounder, not of history, but of manners and life. Political crises, military exploits, and policies of government interest Thackeray little. What he is interested in is the character, the home life, and the human foibles of
In plot construction, Thackeray's novels have many faults, but these faults can not be said to be offenses against realism. Most of his books were published serially and were written from week to week. Naturally they are not as well rounded as they would be had they been completed and revised before publication. The one novel which was completed before it was published is an example of systematic construction and perfect development of plot. But as a rule Thackeray's favorite formula for plot construction seems to be the birth, education and love affairs of a young man, with considerable emphasis on the lives of his grandparents, and more than a hint concerning the careers of his grandchildren. The movement always is leisurely. There is plenty of time for digression, and there is always time to stop the progress of the plot to become acquainted with the numerous characters that enter the scene. Taken all in all there are very few people who read Thackeray for the plot's sake. It is unreasonable to think of the people we know as being involved in a plot, of their lives constituting a rising action, a falling action, and a denouement. Rather we think of them moving smoothly along, with perhaps a few adventures, common place for the most part, but occasionally rising to crises. There may be a tragedy now and then; often there are happy times; but for the most part, there is little excitement. It is just in this vein that Thackeray treats

the four Georges. Among the nobler features of George the First, he finds justice, courage, and moderation. George the Second is "dapper, little George, who fights like a Trojan". George the Third's household life is the interesting feature of that monarch's reign. George the Fourth is treated humorously. Throughout the four essays it is the same personal note that is emphasized.
the lives of the people in his novels. We no more expect extraordinary events, and unravellings of plot in the lives of these people, than we do in those of our friends. We are interested in their actions under trying circumstances, but we are more interested in them as people, than as actors in a drama. Thackeray's plots are not 'slices from real life'; they are panoramic views of the society Thackeray best knew.

This art in plot construction was not a happy accident on Thackeray's part. He began writing with another idea in mind. In his two earliest works of any importance, "Catherine", and "Barry Lyndon", he did not portray life that he knew. "Catherine" is an attempt at realism, but it is unsuccessful. Thackeray can not portray low criminal life successfully. He probably never knew a criminal of the Catherine type. He is unable to deal with the motives of characters of this sort, and picturing action without motive is not Thackeray's forte. "Barry Lyndon" appeared three years before "Vanity Fair". It shows an advance in understanding of what Thackeray really could do successfully. Barry is not a criminal in the low sense of the word. He is a gentleman who associates with the aristocracy, and does nothing worse than fleece young spendthrifts who gamble with him; drive his stepson from home into dangerous service abroad; mistreat and abuse his wife, and rob her of her property. This was a type Thackeray probably was familiar with, and "Barry Lyndon" shows a great advance in realism. It also showed Thackeray the possibilities of polite society as a medium for his novels. It was but a step from this to "Vanity Fair", and there Thackeray had found the plane on which he could be realistic naturally.

Characters, after all, are the most important things in Thackeray's books. People who have never read Thackeray know who Becky
Sharp is. People who have read him and have forgotten the plot and the story remember Helen Pendennis, and Colonel Newcome. Just as Thackeray did not at once find himself in the matter of plot, so he likewise experimented in characterization. He was continually experimenting in character sketches. As early as 1840 he had written sketches of the "Fashionable Authoress", and "The Artist", and had begun the "Yellowplush Papers". While Charles James Yellowplush is a caricature, and his creation was undoubtedly influenced by Dickens, still the creation of this character showed that Thackeray understood the possibilities of the "below stairs gentry". The valet is an important personage in most of Thackeray's books. Nearly always he is admirably drawn. He never plays an unduly important part in the story but serves the purpose of a commentator on the actions of his masters in the parlor.

Morgan, Major Pendennis' valet, is a typical product of the Major's philosophy of life, and its reaction on the Major would be comic were not the old man's plight so pathetic.

In character parts, such as Captain Costigan and Mrs. Major O'Dowd, Thackeray is exceptionally realistic. No one pretends to think Dickens' characters realistic. They portray types. Thackeray, too, portrays types but he creates individuals at the same time. Captain Costigan is a drunken, boastful, swaggering, generous, old Irishman without much sense, but he has enough individuality to be distinctly Captain Costigan, and not typical of all drunken, boastful, swaggering, generous, old Irishmen. When Thackeray wishes merely to indicate a type without caring much about the individual he can do so in a phrase. Seldom has the stupid nobleman been hit off more effectively than in Thackeray's phrase about Sir Francis Clavering — "There was a happy vacuity about the Baronet. He could face a dinner, a death, a
church, a marriage, with the same indifferent air."

Thackeray's young men are unusually distinctive for the type. There is little to distinguish David Copperfield from Nicholas Nickleby, or Martin Chuzzlewit. But Arthur Pendennis, Clive Newcome, Henry Esmond, and the Warrington Boys stand out as distinct personages. It is true there are a number of points of similarity. Either they are not overly brilliant, and very attractive physically, or they are dark and melancholy, but extremely clever. Usually they begin life well provided with wealth, and lose it, either at the gaming table or in paying their relatives' debts, or by marrying an impecunious maiden, thus forfeiting their inheritance. After a period of poverty they take to law or journalism, and soon are living very comfortably. It must be admitted that the comfort usually does not appear until some rich relative dies and leaves a comfortable sum to the imprudent young people. In spite of these similarities each of these characters is individual. None of them is negative to the extent that Dickens' young men are. They all have individual tempers, and are far from being heroes. Indeed the last thing that Thackeray wanted to do was to portray perfect people. In the preface to Pendennis he states his theory in respect to this point.

"Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a man. We must drape him, and give him a little conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the natural in our art. Many ladies have remonstrated, and subscribers left me because in the course of the story I described a young

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1Pendennis - p. 256 - vol. 1.
resisting and affected by temptation. My object was to say that he had the passions to feel and the manliness and generosity to overcome them. You will not hear — it is best to know it — what moves in the real world, what passes in society, in the club, colleges, mess rooms, what is the life and talk of her sons. A little more frankness than is customary has been attempted in this story, with no bad desire on the writer's part, it is hoped, and with no ill consequence to the reader. If the truth is not always pleasant, at any rate truth is best, and from whatever chair — those whence graver writers and thinkers argue, as from that at which the story writer sits."

In accordance with this theory, Thackeray does not mince matters in telling of Arthur Pendennis' life. His early love affair with "the Fotheringay" shows the young man in a very natural, if not particularly sagacious light. At Oxbridge he is well characterized — "Among the young men Pen became famous and popular: not that he did much, but that there was a general determination that he could do a great deal if he chose. Men used to say that they had been walking with Pendennis, and were as pleased to be seen in his company as some of us would be if we walked with a Duke down Pall Mall. He and the Proctor capped each other when they met, as if they were rival powers, and the men hardly knew which was the greater."¹ The newspaper life is also described in a realistic fashion, and is evidently based upon Thackeray's experience. The Blanche Arrow episode, and the Fanny Bolton affair do not display Pen in a very heroic light but they do make a realistic figure out of the conventional young man hero.

The doctrine of realism as exemplified in Thackeray's characters is the classical one. It is not the evils of a cruel world that bring sorrow and misfortune to ideal characters, but it is the weakness, stupidity, and sin of the characters themselves that causes their misfortunes. And the characters, whether weak or strong show development and change constantly.

The realism of Thackeray's women is a much debated question. If we admit that all good women are moved by two passions, jealousy of all other women, and irrational love for some man, either husband or son, then Thackeray's women are the most realistic ever portrayed. Thackeray's view of woman's place is typically Victorian. She clearly is put onto this world to adore and to be adored. She is to be a kind of goddess to whom the erring youth may return after he has had his fling in the world. One can't help admitting that Thackeray's women are attractive to read about. Whether they would be so agreeable to live with is another matter. Becky Sharp is, of course, the shining exception to this rule - and she, after all, is a kind of warning to would-be clever women. I do not think Thackeray hates her - no one could hate a woman so charmingly clever as Becky, but, after all, Thackeray wants us to understand that cleverness is a dangerous thing. It is not hard to believe that had Becky had her "five thousand a year" she would have been a good woman. Thackeray proves he is a realist by pursuing Becky relentlessly to the bitter end.

There are two characters in Thackeray who stand out above all he ever drew. One represents the worldly man, the other the ideal gentleman. The first is Major Pendennis, the second Colonel Newcome. The Major is a wicked, worldly old man. He is selfish, unscrupulous, a sycophant, and
an out and out sham. He is really Arthur's evil genius all through the book. But there is something fascinating about the old Major with his wig box, cosmetics, and worship of the aristocracy. He encourages Arthur in his extravagant ways, but is utterly disgusted with him when he comes to grief through following his uncle's advice. It is this delightful inconsistency that is one of his most realistic traits. One can not help feeling that he would have been a delightful person to meet. Probably Thackeray knew many of his ilk in the London clubs. He is just as much a part of the London of Thackeray's day as were the clubs he frequented.

Colonel Newcome is the perfect portrait of an imperfect gentleman. The Colonel has his faults. He is hot tempered, weak willed, and lacks good business sense. But the picture Thackeray draws of him is wonderfully touching. There are few more truly pathetic things in literature than the growth of the estrangement between Clive and his father. Thackeray does not strike a single false note in his whole portrayal of the Colonel. Even the death scene is simple and unemotional. It fits the Colonel's character perfectly. "At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll. Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed, feebly beat time. And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said, 'Adsum,' and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called: and lo, he, whose heart was as that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of his Master."
CHAPTER IV.

THACKERAY AND SOME LATER REALISTS.

The critics seem to have realized soon after the publication of "Vanity Fair" that a new realist had appeared. In 1848 a critical article in the English Review somewhat floridly admits that "Thackeray seeks for no hot house plants, no exotics, however fragrant: nothing is forced, nothing artificial, the very gravel which strews the paths betwixt his flower beds seems as if it must have lain there for years."¹ "The Literary World" was impressed with the realism of "Pendennis". The Major, especially, seemed realistic to this critic - "We feel his reality from the nap of his hat to the soles of his boots - as a club character he is inimitable."² In 1864 the "Gentleman's Magazine" defines Thackeray's position as directly representative of Fielding. "Other men wrote more popular stories, but he excelled all men in an intellectual representation of intellectual English life - in reflecting the thought, sentiment, task of the classes whose character determines the opinion of posterity about each generation."³ The same year the Dublin Review links Balzac's "subtle analysis of human life and passion"⁴ with that of Thackeray.

Leslie Stephen admires Thackeray's unflinching resolution to "see facts as they really are".⁵ Anthony Trollope, who deplored Thackeray's slovenly method of production, says in his "Autobiography", "I do not hesitate to name Thackeray first (among novelists). His knowledge of human nature

⁴Dublin University Magazine - Vol. 64 - p. 260.
⁵Life of Leslie Stephen - p. 169.
was supreme and his characters stand out as human beings, with a force and
a truth which has not, I think, been within the reach of any English novelist
in any period. It is evident from all Thackeray's best work that he lived
with the characters he was creating. He had always a story to tell until
quite late in life: and he shows us that this was so, not by the interest
he had in his own plots - for I doubt whether his plots did occupy much of
his mind - but by convincing us that his characters were alive to himself.
With Becky Sharp, with Lady Castlewood, and her daughter, with Esmond, with
Warrington, Pendennis, and the Major, with Colonel Newcome, and with Barry
Lyndon, he must have lived in perpetual intercourse. Therefore he has made
these people seem real to us."

The keynote of Thackeray's realism was sounded in the comment made
shortly after his death in a New York paper. "The characters drawn by Mr.
Thackeray were less ideal creatures than real men and women, and we being
human could never be indifferent to the doings of this living and breathing
humanity, and could never hear too much about our kin." It is in this respect
that Thackeray differed from his predecessor. Probably no one since Fielding
had created characters as life-like as those of Thackeray. The effect can
be noted in his immediate successors. Mark Pattison, writing in 1875 notes
the attempt made by the novelists who followed to imitate Thackeray's
sketches of university life. Dr. Farrar's "Julian Home", Thomas Hughes
"Tom Brown", Lockhart's "Reginald Dalton", Kingsley's "Alton Locke" all

1 Anthony Trollope; Autobiography - p. 275.
draw upon Oxford and Cambridge for a portion of their plots. Of all these draughtsmen, says Pattison, "the one who approached nature most nearly is the author of Pendennis! There is a sad reality about Arthur's career - high hopes at the outset quenched in the petty miseries of debt - brilliant talents wasted, not in debauchery but in achieving social distinction - social distinction which was confined to the undergraduate world - 'the freshmen did not know which was greatest, Pendennis of Boniface, or the Proctor'."

There are other indications of Thackeray's influence. Saintsbury sees "a partial following of the manners of Thackeray in such books as Anthony Trollope's 'The Warden.'" The series or cycle of Trollope's books also may have been suggested by Thackeray. Bulwer-Lytton and Charles Lever both left their earlier type of novel writing to turn to something more nearly akin to actuality. Lytton did this in the Caxton novels, and Lever abandoned the rollicking "'Jarry Lorrequer" sort of thing to write sketches of foreign travel and home life. The novels of the Brontës are concerned with actual experience, although not of the type Thackeray used. Kingsley, in "Westward Ho" and in "Pygmalion", blended history and fiction in a manner more suggestive of Thackeray than of Scott.

In the novels of George Gissing I think the manner of treatment, if not the subject matter, suggests Thackeray. Like Dickens he writes of the lower classes. But Dickens' poor people are always pathetic or humorous.

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Gissing's, for the most part, are dull and apathetic. Gissing's view of life from the bottom is just as realistic as Thackeray's from the top. He attacks hypocrisy and sham just as does Thackeray. But Thackeray's servants and valets are the typical old fashioned servant class. They are conventionally English in all matters. Gissing introduces a new class - the factory hands. These men are bitterly hostile to all that is established. The religious controversy of the time plays a big part in their lives. In "Thyrza", the hero Egremont descends into the slums and offers a course of lectures on Religion to workingmen. "His point of view", says Gissing, "was strictly aesthetic: he aimed at replacing religious enthusiasm, as commonly understood, by aesthetic. The loveliness of the Christian legend - from that he started."¹ Imagine Arthur Pendennis preaching aesthetic Christianity to the servants at Clavering Arms.

This suggests one reason why later critics do not find Thackeray as realistic as do earlier ones. About the middle of the century the great scientific, and religious, and social upheaval produced writers who, like Gissing, were interested in "problems". Thackeray belonged to an older school which was removed from many of the more modern movements. Aesthetic Christianity, and socialism were not a part of Thackeray's life. His point of view was not that of a radical reformer of laws, school systems, or the labour question. The reform he aimed at was rather an internal than an individual matter. Sham and hypocrisy are not to be exterminated by any external force, but rather by an inward reform. They cover, it seems to me,

¹Thyrza: p. 175 - George Gissing.
a wider field and offer a more universal realistic appeal than do subjects which are confined to one class or group of society. But this broader appeal is not so obviously realistic as are objective attacks on more obvious evils.

George Meredith, whose first important book came out in 1859, along with Thackeray's "Virginians", shows this decided difference in point of view. That he is a realist is not to be disputed. Mr. Brownell ranks him and Thackeray as the two men whose "criticism of life" is equally profound. But the criticism is different. Thackeray always seems to be criticizing people and conduct from a moralist's point of view. Meredith is more concerned with the intellectual caliber of his characters. He is just as insistent on honesty as is Thackeray, but Thackeray's morality is based on religious motives while Meredith's is purely intellectual. "Richard Feverel" in outline is similar to "The Newcomes". Both books deal with the relations existing between a father and a son. Thackeray's son and father live in the old age when a son was to be indulged and a father honored. Meredith's live in an age when the father is more concerned with the development of a theory of education than he is with the human part of the boy. The boy, Richard, is the most realistic character in the book, chiefly because, like Thackeray's characters and unlike most others of Meredith, he is characterized by what he does rather than by what he says. Of Meredith's women Laetitia is decidedly a Thackerayian type, but Clara Middleton is the typical clever woman of a later day than Thackeray.

Like Thackeray, Meredith is frequently on the stage. He gives the reader his impressions of his characters far more decidedly than does Thackeray. But he lacks the personal feeling that Thackeray has for his
people and, in consequence, one is interested in their intellectual development rather than in their personality. It is hard to imagine Meredith writing of his people as did Thackeray: "I am going today to the Hotel del Terasse, where Becky used to live, and shall pass by Captain Osborne's lodgings, where I recollect meeting him and his little wife— who has married again somebody told me; but it is always the way with these grand passions— Mrs. Dobbins, or some such name, she is now; always an over-rated woman, I thought. How curious it is! I believe perfectly in all these people and feel quite an interest in the Inn in which they lived."

This seems to me to be the essential difference between Meredith and Thackeray. Thackeray's people are men and women whom he knew and loved. Meredith's are interesting theoretical constructions, but they are distinctly creations of the author, and are not drawn directly from life.

Arnold Bennett too, is decidedly realistic. But with him realism has come to mean an emphasis on all that is most disagreeable in life. The angles and uncouth traits of people are emphasized. In reading his books I continually feel that he is seeing things that should not be seen. The squabbles of a husband and wife may be an interesting development in the careers of two such singular creatures as Hilda Lessways and Edwin Clayhanger, but it seems almost as ill bred to read about their wrangles as it would be to lean over the back fence and listen to the neighbors "scrapping" in the next yard. The things that Thackeray treats as unimportant incidents

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1Letters of W. M. Thackeray - 1847 - To Mrs. Brookfield.
in the lives of his characters are the all-important thing in Bennett's books.

Bennett has created a background in the Five Towns which makes his people seem as real as Thackeray's. The difference being that his people are queer while Thackeray's are not. Bennett's plots are more subtle than Thackeray's - they deal with the subjective side of life, while Thackeray is usually objective.

The only writer who at all resembles Thackeray in style and manner seems to me to be Samuel Butler. There are passages in the first part of "The Way of All Flesh" that are enough like Thackeray to have been "lifted" from one of his books. Here is a bit of comment on the feelings of a man who has boasted that he sat for two hours in the chair of the Tribune at Rome -

"I wonder how often he looked at his watch to see if his two hours were up. I wonder how often he told himself that he was quite as big a gun, if the truth were known, as any of the men whose works he saw before him, how often he wondered whether any of the visitors were recognizing him and admiring him for sitting such a long time in the same chair, and how often he was vexed at seeing them pass him by and take no notice of him. But perhaps if the truth were known his two hours were not quite two hours."

Another observation that is quite in Thackeray's style deals with the relations between parents and children -

"It is not as a general rule the eating of sour grapes that causes children's teeth to be set on edge. Well-to-do parents seldom eat many sour grapes; the danger to the children lies in the parents eating too

1Way of All Flesh - Butler - p. 16-17.
many sweet ones."  

The trouble with Butler is that he has discovered that it is just as easy to be satirical at the expense of all the conventions as it is to attack merely their abuses. Thackeray never does more than attack misuse and misunderstanding of these conventions. Butler's hero discovers that the church is corrupt, fathers and mothers tyrannical, and wives unfaithful; so the church, and the family are condemned unhesitatingly, and entirely. This is carrying satire to a point where it exceeds the realistic elements in his book.

On the whole it seems to me that the difference between Thackeray's realism, and that of these later men is that Thackeray, as he says, "has no head above his eyes"; he writes what he has seen, and such faults as "a tendency toward caricature, an excess of sentiment, and obtruded moralizing" are the results of observation with the eyes. Thackeray's eyes are always tender and sympathetic. His wit never gets the better of his love for the people he has created. In his letters he constantly talks of his people as if they were intimate friends. They are never mere types to him. Later realists are concerned with psychology, heredity, evolution, and sociology. Their characters, for the most part, are types in which they are intellectually interested. They observe theoretically rather than realistically. Butler in "The Way of All flesh" carries his theorizing to the extent that a father's deepest regret upon hearing that his son is imprisoned is "that he has lost the power of plaguing his first born"; and

\[\text{Way of All Flesh - Butler - p. 23.}\]
the son, when he inherits wealth unexpectedly, rejoices, "not for the pleasure it causes me, but for the pain it will cause all my friends." This is clever but it is unkind and it is not realistic. Thackeray, who surrounds his characters with a fund of kindliness and sympathy could not have committed a similar crime against either taste or realism.

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1The Way of All Flesh - Butler - p. 374.
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