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THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT

SOCIAL SATIRE IN THE NOVELS OF THACKERAY

A THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE AND METHOD

The subject of William Makepeace Thackeray and his work has been but barely explored in consideration of the possibilities for study in a figure so significant of his age. The most complete and valuable critical work available to date is John W. Dodd's Thackeray, A Critical Portrait, published in 1941 by the Oxford University Press.

Work on Thackeray's life was delayed and hampered by his express wish to his family that no biography be written. Students of literature are indebted to Anthony Trollope and to Herman Merivale and Frank T. Marzials for interpreting Thackeray's command as an antipathy to a prevalent type of sentimental eulogy. They thought it not contrary to the feelings of their friend to publish accounts of his life which would not be marred by affectation or hyperbole. The most valuable works which have been added to the efforts of these first biographers are a two-volume life by Lewis Saul Benjamin and collections of letters, some of which are still being released, from time to time, by his family.

Much of Thackeray's personal experience was poured

into his novels. Consequently, almost every discussion of his works includes comparison of the author with the characters among whom he divided his life, Arthur Pendennis, Clive Newcome, and Philip Firmin. So many events in the careers of these young men coincide with the facts of Thackeray's life that critics are tempted to attribute to the author the remaining experiences of his creatures, but these have no verification in the biographical data available. For example, Mr. Merivale suggests, because of Pen's affair with the Fotheringay, "that in the narrow precincts of the Exeter Theatre, Thackeray wooed, loved and lost,"[1] though he is careful to admit that there is no legend to substantiate the hypothesis.

This hunt for autobiography in Thackeray's works leads to the complementary search for originals of the other characters. Prototypes are plainly visible, and, again, nearly all discussions of this author devote some space to the possibilities among Thackeray's friends. The possibilities are multiple and some debate has ensued from differences in claims, especially regarding the Colonel of The Newcomes. P. Q. Krishnaswami collected some of these theories and added his own conclusions in articles for The Cornhill Magazine during 1927 and '28.

1. Herman Merivale and Frank T. Marzials, Life Of W. M. Thackeray, p. 56.

Careful checking of chronology in the Thackeray novels by W. A. Hirst has revealed mistakes imperceptible to the casual reader but not frequent or serious enough to discredit the remarkable dovetailing of events which makes a chain of all the novels from Vanity Fair to The Virginians, as Mr. Hirst describes in his exact and practical study.

An almost totally neglected field of criticism in Thackeray's drawings is suggested by Dodds. Inferior in technical skill to his contemporaries, Leech, Cruikshank, Doyle and DuMaurier, he is not thought of as an artist. But he was the only novelist to illustrate his own works, and his drawings, imperfect as they are, most aptly interpret and reinforce his criticism of life. Becky, reduced to caricature, is a vixenish Mona Lisa; Amelia, a pretty imbecile; and Thackeray himself, a flat-nosed, bespectacled jester in fool's uniform, with a humorous mask in his lap and an expression of wistful melancholy on his face.[2]

His ballads might also be looked to as illustrative of the purpose and concepts of his novels. His love of burlesque and hatred of sham find expression in terse, felicitous rhymes that should delight the critics who complain of his more expansive side-essay treatments in the novels.

Thackeray's literary ancestors and his relation to

2. John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait, pp. 13-15.

the other novelists of his age furnish another approach to the complete appreciation of his work. His roots are in the Eighteenth Century, but, though he passed over the romantics to join with Fielding, he did not entirely escape their atmosphere. He writes with the critical, wistful grace of Goldsmith, Steele, and Addison. He has an affinity with Richardson, Austen and Scott in the matter of family life and relationship. Comparison with Scott and Dickens, carried out on a purely objective basis, clarifies the art of each of these three literary giants. This approach is directly and positively presented by Ernest Albert Baker in his History Of The English Novel and by Chauncey W. Wells in an essay, Thackeray And The Victorian Compromise.

These questions are mentioned here with the realization that a separate, thorough investigation of each would add desirable depth to the point under consideration in this paper. This study is concentrated upon Thackeray's use of character for social satire. Its purpose is to present from the novels a plain, composite picture of the objects of satire in early Victorian society and a collection of social generalizations deduced therefrom. Its method is to organize the matter of the three great novels of Victorian manners under frequently recurring types of character.

In doing this, no attempt is made to frame the whole of Thackeray; for copiousness, variety, and the absence of

any deliberate plan are his peculiar characteristics as a novelist. Nor is it implied that Thackeray consciously devised these types of character and fitted his material to them. But it is clear, from the whole of Thackeray's work, from his ballads, from his sketches, from the numerous papers for Fraser's and Punch and from his lectures, as well as from the novels, that his mind was naturally bent upon seeing circumstances in social life which shaped the motives and conduct of individuals, and often reduced them to common denominators even while they retained their individualizing features.

This organization should assist the claims of greatness for Thackeray as the social historian of his age, and should relieve some of the misunderstandings regarding his technique of characterization and deficiency of plot. Baker defines the novel as "the interpretation of human life by means of fictitious narrative in prose."[3] Wells expands the definition to insist on "a full blend of society's ideals and customs," explaining that

> .... the novelist may omit to record public events, ... but must not omit the stir of events and the effect of institutions upon the lives of men and women, upon social groups, upon society as a whole .... and he must not miss the cast of thought, the tone and temper of his age.[4]

According to these concepts, Thackeray's excellence as a

3. Ernest Albert Baker, History Of The English Novel, I, 15.
4. Chauncey W. Wells, "Thackeray And the Victorian Compromise," Essays In Criticisms, I, 180-82.

novelist is beyond dispute.

The appreciation of Thackeray attempted in this paper suffers by the omission of his greatest work, The History Of Henry Esmond. This novel deviates from his general pattern in several respects, most obviously by its presentation of the life and manners of an earlier century. It is worthy of an exclusive study, along similar lines of organization, together with its sequel The Virginians in which is completed the life-span of Beatrix, Thackeray's fullest portrait of a woman. The Adventures of Philip has been given no space in this discussion because it adds so little to the concepts fully developed by the completion of The Newcomes.

CHAPTER II

THACKERAY'S SOCIAL MILIEU

Biographers trace Thackeray's ancestry back through an interesting progression of odd spellings and a collection of civil servants, clerics, school-men, physicians, yeomen, and land-holders, to one John de Thakwra in the fourteenth Century, "who held of the Abbot of St. Mary of Fountains a dwelling-house and thirty acres at Hartwich."[1] The line, as accounted for, from thence to Thackeray's father, was healthy, vigorous, and fertile. The first William Makepeace, a sixteenth child, was grandfather to the novelist. He married Amelia Richmond Webb of Calcutta and founded the famous Anglo-Indian branch of the Thackeray family. Although he returned to live in England, of his twelve children, nine went to India to make their fortunes, among them, Richmond, the father of the novelist.

After his education at Eton, Richmond obtained a writership in the Bengal Civil Service, achieved proficiency in Arabic and Persian at Fort William College in Calcutta, and was subsequently appointed a collector of revenue and a judge, in which positions he was well liked and rapidly

1. Merivale and Marzials, op. cit., p. 33.

advanced. In 1810, he married Anne Becher, a Calcutta girl of great beauty, from a family long established in the Bengal Civil Service. Richmond and Anne took up official residence at Alipur, and to them was born, on July 18, 1811, an only son, William Makepeace Thackeray.

William was but five years old when his father died of an illness suffered for many years. The following year, he was sent to England to begin his education at Chiswick, entrusted to the care of an aunt. En route from the East, his ship stopped at St. Helena, and the sensitive six-year-old was taken to see the great Napoleon in exile. There is little doubt that this first impression survived to furnish some part of the inspiration for the Second Funeral Of Napoleon and The Chronicle Of The Drum, which appeared in 1841.

In 1822, Thackeray was sent to Charterhouse School. Being rather timid and gentle and with little skill at games, his popularity among the pupils was small and his fear of the stern unsympathetic Headmaster, great. The "Slaughterhouse" caricature in his early works explains the following excerpt from a note to his mother:

> I really think I am becoming terribly industrious, though I can't get Dr. Russell to think so. It is so hard when you endeavour to work hard, to find your attempts nipped in the bud . . . . There are but 370 in the school. I wish there were only 369.[2]

2. Ibid., p. 43.

During his last years at Charterhouse, Thackeray enjoyed the consolation of holidays with his mother and step-father at Larkbeare near Ottery-St. Mary; for, by 1821, a wedding had been effected which he had expressly desired in a letter to his mother on February 12, 1818:

> I hope Captain Smyth is well; give my love to him and tell him he must bring you home to your affectionate little son.[3]

In 1828, Thackeray left Charterhouse, where he had exhibited some precocity in devouring novels and writing verse parodies, developed a firm loyalty to Addison and Steele, and suffered, in a friendly scuffle with George Stovin Venables, a broken nose which he wore and caricaturized to the grave.

After a year at home with his mother and Major Carmichael Smyth, Thackeray entered Trinity College at Cambridge for the Lent term (which put him at a regretful disadvantage with the Michaelmas freshmen at examination time). He had, for a tutor, Dr. Whewell, who was later to be Master of Trinity, and for associates in college, such highly-destined men as Alfred Tennyson and his brothers; Arthur Hallam, Edward Fitzgerald, Mitchell Kemble, John Allen, William Brookfield, Monckton Milnes, James Spedding, John Sterling, William Kinglake, and the aforementioned George Venables from Charterhouse. Letters

3. Ibid., p. 41.

home pictured his delight in boat races, the induction dinner, tea-parties, wine-parties, hikes, sketching, debates, essay contests, his self-designed and self-decorated rooms, and the achievement of an elaborate hand-writing which he turned to practical use later in drawing initial letters for his sketches and novels.

His first taste of fame at Trinity came with the praise bestowed upon his anonymous burlesque of Tennyson's Timbuctoo, the year's prize poem at the university. He extended his spirit of satire in articles for two student journals, The Snob, and its successor, The Gownsman. Thus, early, he struck the theme, Vanitas Vanitatum, which rings through all of his works. So, as Dr. Thompson described, "he led a somewhat lazy but pleasant and 'gentlemanlike' life . . . . careless of University distinction;"[4] and though the letters home embodied, "strong resolutions" to "think in Greek" and "to begin a more regular course of reading,"[5] he left Cambridge at 19 without a degree, but with a vivid appreciation of English poetry and of the old English novelists, a good general basis of classical scholarship, and a set of enduring friends.

Thus equipped, he set sail for Paris, Rome, Dresden and Weimar. From his delight with the French capital came his touch of true Parisian in many of his best ballads, especially in the Ballad Of The Bouillabaisse, and in the

4. Ibid., p. 61.
5. Ibid., pp. 67-68.

characters of Madame de Florac and her son, of la Duchesse d'Ivry, and of Antoinette, who flavor his novels. After some study of drawing at Paris, he travelled on to Rome, where he learned a real reverence for Catholicism in its art (which did not, however, unless some passages and one ballad be discounted, include Catholicism's Pope). Circling back, Thackeray practiced his German at Godesberg before going on to Weimar. At Weimar, all else was forgotten in the thrill of meeting the Goethes and of visiting the birth place of Schiller, for whom Thackeray confirmed his intense preference.

Ironically, we next find Thackeray, in spite of such powerful influences toward art and literature, in chambers at Hare Court, Middle Temple, at the age of 20, studying civil law, with the hopes of making a livelihood at the bar. He was serious enough in this pursuit to canvass for Charles Buller in the Reform Year of 1832. But as he came of age, and into an inheritance of five-hundred pounds a year, more alluring schemes proposed themselves; and Thackeray dropped his tedious, cold-blooded law books. They had not furnished him a profession, but they were to yield good fruit in the chapters and characters descriptive of a similar phase in the life of Pendennis.

The new schemes began with an investment in The National Standard -- a Journal of Literature, Science, Music, Theatricals, and the Fine Arts. Thackeray's editorship brought no success, for his name was unknown

to the public. After barely more than a year, the magazine died. To make matters more serious, Thackeray had been fleeced at cards. Then came the failure of an Indian bank to which he and Major Smyth had entrusted the remainder of his funds! Bitter losses! From them, we gain the characterization of the gambling Deuceace who wanders through the sketches and novels, looking for victims, the incident of the Colonel's misfortune with Clive's money in The Newcomes, and the journalistic struggles of Pendennis, Clive, Phillip, Honeyman and Sherrick.

Undaunted by the first failure, the Major and his step-son plunged into another journalistic venture with The Constitutional. On its promise, Thackeray married Isabella Shawe, August 20, 1836. Six months after the marriage, the last number of The Constitutional went to press, leaving the young bridegroom without a job and without an income.

But if these ventures in journalism had not provided a secure livelihood, they had, at least, admitted Thackeray to the society of the Fraserians, an assembly of literati which included Dr. Maginn, Barry Cornwall, Edward Irving, James Hogg, Theodore Hook, Count D'Orsay, Lockhart, Southey, Coleridge, and Carlyle. Of his first efforts for Fraser's, the most significant were a burlesque of Bulwer's Eugene Aram; a crime story, Catherine, unalleviated by any goodness; and an infinitely more delightful gem, The Great Hoggarty Diamond. While he lived on the sum sent to him

as foreign correspondent for Fraser's, the versatile Thackeray was casting about for work as an illustrator; for he had gone to Paris, after his losses, to study art, with the serious intent of making caricature in illustration his career. Flore et Zephyr, published in 1836, offered plain proof of his promise in both fields.

Between the years 1837 and 1842, a steady stream of novelettes, stories, adaptations, reviews, art criticism, ballads and miscellaneous articles made deepest that bent in Thackeray's soul in which lay the seed of six great novels. These did little to bring him public acclaim, however, because they were written under numerous pseudonyms. How could readers know that Launcelot Wagstaff, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, Samuel Titmarsh, Charles Yellowplush, and George Fitzgerald, appearing in Fraser's, The New Monthly, Ainsworth's, The Times, and Westminster Review, were all one man, William Makepeace Thackeray?

This fury of effort may be attributed to the addition, between the years 1837 and 1840, of three daughters to Thackeray's responsibilities. The first, christened Anne Isabella, inherited her father's talent for literary creation, wrote several charming novels, and is best known (as Mrs. Ritchie) for the reminiscences of her famous father graciously offered to biographers and compiled, later, by Hester T. Ritchie, in Thackeray and His Daughter[6]

6. Ritchie, Anna Isabella, Thackeray and His Daughter. Ed. by Hester T. Ritchie. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924.

A second daughter, Jane, died in infancy. The third daughter, Harriet Marion, became the wife of Sir Leslie Stephen.

After Harriet's birth, Thackeray's wife became mentally ill. The distracted husband sought all means to effect a cure, but nothing would avail. The very mention of his name so affected the pitiful woman that she had to be taken away from her family. Critics who cry "cynic" to the man who suffered the agony of such a bereavement after only a few short years of tender happiness, must pass over his congratulation to the newly-wed Follett Synge:

> Though my own marriage was a wreck .... I would do it over again, for behold Love is the crown and completion of all earthly good. A man who is afraid of his fortune never deserved one.... The very best and pleasantest house I knew in my life had but £300 to keep it.[7]

With that house emptied of the wife, for whom a new residence and a kind caretaker were found, and of the babies, who were sent to their grandmother in Paris, Thackeray, for the next six or seven years, lived a Bohemian existence in the society and clubs of London, interspersed with a good deal of travelling. But his activity denied the characteristic of idleness generally attributed to that mode of living. On May 24, 1844, Edward Fitzgerald wrote of him:

7. Merivale and Marzials, op. cit., p. 108.

> Thackeray is in full vigour, play and pay, in London, writing in a dozen reviews and a score of newspapers: and while health lasts he sails before the wind.[8]

The dozen reviews included those mentioned above plus The Morning Chronicle and Punch.

A trip to Dublin in 1843 yielded a lasting friendship with Charles Lever, and The Irish Sketch Book, of value both entertaining and historical. A Mediterranean voyage in 1844, with a visit to the Holy Land and Rome, was recorded with due reverence in the sketch book, From Cornhill to Cairo. This same year, Fraser's published a story hinted at by the unrelieved actuality of the crime career of Catherine, but graced with an historical setting and witchery of style prophetic of Henry Esmond. This was The History Of Barry Lyndon in which a cruel, arrogant rogue points out his own damnation, even while he is so magnificently unconscious of iniquity as to mouth a defense of gambling masterful enough to be, in itself, sufficient reason for publication of the whole. Smollett, Fielding and Defoe are literary antecedents to Thackeray in this piece of work in which the sentimental crime novel received another killing blow.

By 1847, Thackeray had restored his home (taking up residence with his two daughters at No. 13, Young Street, Kensington), and had transferred his services, almost

8. Ibid., pp. 122-123.

entirely, from Fraser's to Punch, although Fraser's had just bought Vanity Fair after its rejection by Colburn's New Monthly.

Vanity Fair ran serially from January, 1847, to July, 1848. Popularized by a review from Abraham Hayward and by Currer Bell's lavish praise in her dedication of the second edition of Jane Eyre, it brought Thackeray his first success with his readers, and, by May, he had been taken up by society to be whirled about to dinners and parties. Some of his old friends thought Thackeray spoiled by his new position, blasé toward the world, and fickle in his political alliances. In society he would be pleasant one moment and curt the next. Those who took offense at this did not realize that Thackeray's health was failing, that he was weary, overstrung, and subject to attacks of depression. In political and philosophical convictions he had never been deeply rooted. A Liberal in his opinions, he was, by nature and personal taste, an aristocrat. His versatility, sensitiveness, and scorn for concealing his feelings led him into a complexity of personality difficult to tolerate at times; but they never affected his fundamental tenderness, loyalty and generosity. His studies in Political Economy did not prevent him from buying out the looking-glasses from an old maker whose children were crying for bread, or from filling a pillbox with sovereigns for a needy widow and writing on the label, "One to be taken

when needed." [9] These and other tales are told of how he helped anyone in need for whom his sympathy was evoked, often when he could ill afford it, always for the sheer delight of giving and in a manner so humorous and graceful that the term "charity" could not be imposed between the gift and the giver.

Vanity Fair was "pre-viewed" in the Snob Papers in Punch. Here the subjects of satire had been laid out while their pretense, meanness, and vulgarity were attacked and pursued to a point which antagonized readers, particularly because Thackeray had broadened his definition of snob until he had hit every species. Any reader was almost sure to find himself related to the snob-daughters-of-wealth or the sons of birth whom they married, the snob peerage-worshippers, the snobs-royal, the military snobs, the travelling snobs, the country snobs, the literary snobs, or the club snobs; for their critic had not spared even himself the hard label, "one who meanly admires mean things."

Other famous Punch contributions from Thackeray, between the years 1845 and 1851, were Jeames's Diary, A Legend Of The Rhine, Cox's Diary, The Fatal Boots, Rebecca and Rowena, and Punch's Prize Novelists. Rebecca and Rowena mocked Scott's romanticism, planned a different end for the beautiful Jewess, and has been rated the best

9. Ibid., pp. 76-77.

burlesque ever written.[10] It was a harmless piece of jest; but there were hurt feelings to be assuaged after the less finely wrought mockery of Punch's Prize Novelists had gone to press. The Twentieth Century can laugh at the sanity of Thackeray's criticism and overlook its excesses; but fancy how contemporaries received his blunt satire of Bulwer's "drivelling" crime novels, of Disraeli's exoticism and elaborateness, of Mrs. Gore's use of "silver fork" titles and French terms. Charles Lever accepted his guest's parody of his exuberant Irish adventure stories in rare good humor. Less certain is the reaction of the French authors who were farcically portrayed writing stories of English life after reading one novel in the original and visiting in a shabby hotel. In Thackeray's criticism of Fenimore Cooper, even the Americans, with their self-complacency and superiority complex, were made butts of the fun-poking.

Altogether, in his ten years with Punch, Thackeray contributed well over 400 bits of writing and something under 400 drawings.[11] In 1850, his connection with that famous comic magazine died out and he finally resigned formally because of its assaults upon the Emperor of France, which he deemed injudicious. There was, however, no bad

10. W. H. Pollock, "Thackeray," Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed., XXVI, 717.
11. See Dodds's discussion of these in Thackeray: A Critical Portrait, Ch. V.

feeling in this separation, for Thackeray was well aware of the debt he owed to these sponsors.

In November 1848, the first number of Pendennis appeared. Most aubobiographical of all the novels, it is, also, the most wandering in its plot. It was interrupted half way through by an illness which nearly killed its author. Edward Fitzgerald suggested giving it up at this point, but Thackeray was too interested in its characters to do this. Though it has provoked much unfavorable criticism, the book takes it place, today, alongisde Vanity Fair and The Newcomes, without apologies. Its richness of experience, variety in the fields of life represented, and, particularly, its incomparable old Major save it from its dullness and fatigue.

During the composition of Pendennis, Thackeray enjoyed another trip to Paris and the excitement of candidacy for membership in the Athenaeum Club. In spite of the sponsorship of Milman and Hallam, and votes from Macaulay, Mahon and Croker, the author of Vanity Fair was refused at this time an honor which would have afforded him immense satisfaction. The satirical vein to which Punch had given full play had made serious enemies.

Though Thackeray's versatility was well appreciated by this time, it led him, in 1851, to step forward in a capacity which fairly astonished his friends. With his nervousness and fear of failure barely under control, Thackeray took the lectern at Willis's Rooms to deliver

a series of discourses on the English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century. He was frank about his reasons for turning lecturer. His whole concern in life was to leave his daughters in financial security. For their sake, he would make whatever sacrifice showed promise of rebuilding the fortune lost in youth. Contrary to the forebodings of some acquaintances, the lectures were well attended and well received. Harriet Martineau wrote of them:

> There is quite a furore for his lectures. They are sort of essays, characterized by his own peculiar originality and power, and delivered with a finished taste and ease ....[12]

To her description, Caroline Fox adds: "He reads in a definite, rather dry manner, but makes you understand thoroughly what he is about."[13] Reserve, quiet humour, and clear thinking are attributes sufficient to merit attention. Manchester, Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh lent their ears.

Thackeray's next offering was to show more magnificent fruit of his fondness for the eighteenth century. In 1852, for the small sum of a thousand pounds, he published The History Of Henry Esmond. At the time, Esmond received scant recognition. George Eliot called it "the most uncomfortable book you can imagine,"[14] and even the enthusiastic Charlotte Bronte condemned it as "too much

12. Merivale and Marzials, op. cit., p. 166.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 176.

history and too little story."[15]

This was the first book which Thackeray had planned, polished, and offered to the public as an artistic whole; yet, over it, he had to shake his head sadly and say, "Nobody reads it." But he made no mistake in pointing to it as his masterpiece; for it has since been acclaimed, without disproof, as the greatest historical novel ever written in the English language. Its scholarly exactitude in reproducing the language, thoughts, conduct and events of the past is hidden in such an ease of style and freshness of characterization that the artistic illusion is perfect: the past is made present.

Still anxious to make a fortune for his little girls, Thackeray set sail, on October 30, 1852, for America, to deliver the Lectures on the Humorists at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, and Charleston. He was kindly received, made friends with the country and its people, and returned to London in 1853 considerably enriched with American dollars.

Though he had grown terribly lonesome for home, after only three weeks in London, he was off again to Paris for a month, and in July of the same year, had settled at Baden for awhile to begin The Newcomes. The Newcomes was another meandering story like Pendennis, but better liked for its characters and greater liveliness. The first number was

15. Ibid.

published in October 1853; the last, in August 1855. In the meantime, Thackeray had been gathering and organizing material for a series of lectures on The Four Georges, with his eye turned again toward the United States. On October 11, 1855, he was tendered a farewell dinner at the London tavern, with Dickens as chairman; and on the thirteenth, he was headed once more toward the hospitality of the Reeds, of Bayard Taylor and of Longfellow in America.

The Four Georges, satirical sketches of the monarchs of mighty England, were even more popular with the Yankees than The Humorists. An Englishman, willing to hold up to the ridicule of rebels, four fine specimens of the kingship of the British Empire, must have been a rare treat! If Thackeray suffered criticism for so doing, perhaps his love of truth will atone for any suggestion of treason to the past. At any rate, he did not lack the courage to repeat the lectures after his return to England, at Exeter, Plymouth, Clifton, Birmingham, Oxford, Leamington, and Norwich, averaging fifty guineas a night, and at Edinburgh, where three per cent of the population came out to hear them.

Success served as a sharp stimulus to Thackeray. Instead of resting on his popularity and position, he next aspired, in 1857, to enter Parliament, replacing Mr. Neate, professor of Political Economy, in the constituency of the City of Oxford. As a Liberal, he advocated the ballot, the allotment of power to men of ability rather

than to men of rank, extension of suffrage, and triennial meetings of parliament. His campaign against his rival, Cardwell, was a courteous one. The votes, variously recorded 1017 - 1070[16] and 1018 - 1085,[17] showed a close race, with Thackeray on the losing end. He took his defeat with good sense, announcing most gracefully, after the declaration from the polls:

> I will retire and take my place with my pen and ink at my desk, and leave to Mr. Cardwell a business which I am sure he understands better than I do.[18]

Resulting from this resolution, came The Virginians, a sequel to Esmond, linking that novel to Pendennis by giving the history of the twin grandsons of Henry Esmond, who were the ancestors of the George Warrington of Pendennis. Thackeray's fondness for such connections grew with him and prompted such pleasantly surprising reintroductions as that of "de Barry" from Barry Lyndon (1844) in the society of Will Esmond at the close of The Virginians (1859). Little touches like this help us realize how real Thackeray's characters were to him, -- how, having given them life, he could not ignore them.

It was during publication of The Virginians that Edmund Yates, in an article for Town Talk, belabored Thackeray with personal references to his appearance,

16. Anthony Trollope, Thackeray, p. 48.
17. Merivale and Marzials, op. cit., p. 191.
18. Ibid., p. 192.

bearing, want of heart, and sarcasm. Though Thackeray had, himself, in younger years, been sharply critical of those about him, and even, in an instance or two, guilty of this same sort of attack, he was extremely mortified by Yates's tone. He appealed to the Garrick club on the ground that the facts used could have been known only to a member. Yates enlisted the mediation of Dickens, but he was ejected in spite of such strong support. As a result, a sad estrangement ensued between Dickens and Thackeray, who, up to this time, had been frank friends and mutual admirers. At the accusation of jealousy, Sir Theodore Martin came forth in defense of Thackeray, quoting him as having once said, "Get David Copperfield; by Jingo, it's beautiful; it beats the yellow chap of this month hollow."[19] (The "yellow chap" was Pendennis.) Sir Martin was with Thackeray on the steps of the Athenaeum, just a few days before his death, when he extended apology to Dickens by offering his hand.

To heal the humiliation of this incident came the honor of an invitation from Smith and Elder to the editorial chair of a new magazine, The Cornhill. Thackeray accepted with delight and enthusiasm. From this position he could command and offer to the public the literary services of the best writers of the day. He was wined and dined at the Palais Royal in Paris to his immense gratification.

19. Ibid., p. 234.

But he was to discover painful thorns in the cushioned editorial chair. The regular duties were somewhat irksome to him, though he managed always to produce an excellent periodical. What he could not endure was the necessity of rejecting unsuitable contributions sent with pitiful pleas for publication and recompense. From his first number of November, 1859, it was but two-and-a-third years to his valedictory issue of March, 1862.

The first number of Cornhill introduced Trollope's Framley Parsonage, a novel which this friend had hurried to prepare at the urgent request of the editor; for Thackeray, intending to begin a novel of his own, had ready only Lovel, The Widower, a story reworked from an old play. The editor did publish, later, The Adventures Of Philip On His Way Through The World; a novel again autobiographical in many aspects, satirical in its presentation of society, and rich in character, not among the principals of the tale, this time, but in the "supporting cast."

The Cornhill embodied, also, the charm and mellow wisdom of Thackeray's Roundabout Papers. If these are not strong enough to shout down accusations of "staleness", "decline", and senility", let critics look to Dennis Duval, the fragment left in the sumptuous Queen Anne residence at Palace Green, which bears promise of a parallel to Esmond in its freshness and power. Smugglers, Hugenot refugees, Roman Catholic squires, and gentlemen of the King's navy predict action on a scale never conceived for Pendennis

or The Newcomes and abandoned early in The Virginians.

But friends who saw Thackeray at The Garrick Club on December 16, 1863, were struck by the change suffering had wrought in his face and frame; and, though he was in good spirits at dinner with Dr. Merriman on the seventeenth, it seems significant to us now that his conversation was reminiscing and summary, that he should then have named The Cane-bottomed Chair as his favorite ballad and Vanity Fair as his best work. On Wednesday, December 23, he suffered intensely painful and frequent spasms; on Christmas eve, he was found dead.

He was but 52 years old. His mother died on the following Christmas eve; his wife survived him by thirty years. He was buried in Kensal Green, and a bust by Marochetti was put up to his memory in Westminster Abbey. To his children, he left an income of £750 a year, a handsome recompense for the inheritance which slipped through his youthful fingers.

The story of his life, it may be noticed, is almost entirely the story of his work. Little else is known of Thackeray except for some other everyday incidents cherished in the memories of his friends. Among these was Badger, at Cambridge, for whom Thackeray gave up a whole morning of classical study when he was feeling ill. Another was Charles Buller, at whose death, he wrote the thoughtful quatrain:

> Who knows the inscrutable design?
> Blessed be he who took and gave:
> Why should your mother, Charles, not mine,
> Be weeping at her darling's grave?[20]

Most intimate were the Brookfields, William and Jane, to whom Thackeray turned for solace after his home had been broken up and while his girls were too young to furnish the tenderness he could not live without. The Brighton salon of Horace Smith and his daughters was another favorite rendezvous for the lonely man. It furnished the opening chapters of Pendennis. With the Crokers, Thackeray built a friendship out of a natural and vented aversion by going to Mrs. Croker with an apology for his unkind thoughts when he learned that her husband had offered to quarter homeless boys!

These were the people who knew William Makepeace Thackeray, who knew his "Cervantean nature .... the dark thread of disillusion .... the bright one of faith," blending into a balanced vision, the mocking oblique glance at men as they are, and the reverent view of men as they might be.[21] Disappointment was the keynote of his novels; religion, the keynote of his life.[22] Though he never chose a definite creed, and gave no evidence of the Victorian struggle between belief and disbelief, his

20. Ibid., p. 226.
21. Chauncey W. Wells, op. cit., I, 187.
22. See discussions of this in Merivale and Marzials, op. cit., pp. 13 ff., 31 ff., 210, passim; and in Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, The Spiritual Drama In The Life Of Thackeray, pp. 12 ff., 46 ff., 99, passim.

conduct was determined by a steady reverence for the Almighty and the cheerful hope that "the tangle will somewhere be lovingly unwound." [23] Shifting from bitterness to sentimentalism, Thackeray settled at a

> .... gentle, retrospective wistfulness, a sort of pervasive world sorrow for man's pathetic lot, for his puny egotisms, self-deceptions, frustrate ambitions and his abortive achievements.[24]

No one of his friends understood him better than did Anthony Trollope who explains his inconsistencies thus:

> Thackeray was always trifling, and yet always serious. In attempting to understand his character it is necessary for you to bear within your own mind the idea that he was always, within his own bosom, encountering melancholy with buffoonery, and meanness with satire. The very spirit of burlesque dwelt within him -- a spirit which does not see the grand the less because of the travesties which it is always engendering.[25]

Because he scattered his interests and efforts among journalism, art, and law, because he wrote for years under pseudonyms, because he refused to compromise his intellectual standards to reach his public, and because, as Dodds points out, a man

> .... who goes about puncturing the bubbles of pretension, with however humorous a melancholy, will never enjoy the following of a man who guffaws loudly and weeps riotously,[26]

Thackeray's success was delayed. But he was recognized,

23. Merivale, and Marzials, op. cit., p. 32.
24. Dodds, op. cit., p. 57.
25. Trollope, op. cit., p. 32.
26. Dodds, op. cit., p. 19.

finally, in his own time, as a reviewer, essayist, literary critic, lecturer, and novelist; and he is remembered, today, as the social historian of his age.

CHAPTER III

THACKERAY'S PRESENTATION OF CHARACTERS AS SOCIAL TYPES

Long before Vanity Fair established its author's position as a novelist, his peculiar presentation of life was determined. Departing from the traditional method of following the fortune and fate of a single hero or heroine, Thackeray introduces great crowds of people, skillfully inter-related by the action of his story which is minimized to keep the atmosphere that of daily existence. Among these crowds, whole families stand out and individuals representative of various social positions or professions appear, persons and groups whose plans and progress are objectively unfolded to the reader in plots of parallel development and interest. Here is no profound, pointed analysis of the soul, but a panorama of life as it is, where motives are mixed, where masses of people are self-deceived, and where the range of setting and experience is so broad that we are bound to catch reflections of ourselves as we walk the land, reflections calculated to reduce the sense of self-importance and to adjust perspective through the lens of common sense and by the hand of gentle satire.

For though he did not always escape the sentimentality of his age, Thackeray aimed at the ideal of reason and clearsightedness of his eighteenth-century masters. His particular scorn for the crime novels of contemporaries who sought sympathy for the weakness of their heroes and heroines was vented in the over-powering evil of Catherine and in the gay irony of Barry Lyndon. He disdained extremes in the opposite direction as well, and could no more picture a dashing, invincible prince for a hero than he could romanticize a murderer or libertine.

> Thackeray, like all great humorists from Cervantes to Fielding saw that most men are an inscrutable mixture of the heroic and the ridiculous, the noble and the ignoble; human nature is an infinitely complex thing, and its complexity needs to be underlined and accented rather than simplified for the sentimental reader.[1]

As Thackeray himself points out, this complexity of character is superimposed upon a fundamental intricacy of fate:

> The prize be sometimes with the fool
> The race not always to the swift.
> The strong may yield, the good may fall,
> The great man be a vulgar clown,
> The knave be lifted over all,
> The kind cast pitilessly down.[2]

The gap between man's aspiration and his achievement, the contrast between the real and the apparent, the expenditure of love upon unworthy objects, the success of rascality,

1. John W. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 115-116.
2. Lewis S. Benjamin, William Makepeace Thackeray, I, 246.

the suffering of innocence, the dullness of virtue and the liveliness of self-indulgence were, to the sharp sight of Thackeray's satire, the result, partly of chance and circumstance for which man may be pardoned and pitied. But they are much more the result of the affectations and hypocrisies of the world, of the petty shame, petty arrogance and petty subterfuge of weak, vain, and self-absorbed people which must be pursued with detective power and exposed for the reader's profit.[3]

> For Thackeray, a man of wide culture, was from his youth up saturated with the urbane, reflective spirit of the eighteenth century classics, and had learned to scan the human spectacle from the same serene standpoint. He had little patience with the elaborate euphemisms and thrilling idealizations of the romantic school; he found his proper range and orbit in reverting decisively to older standards of veracity, of seeing things as they are and representing them with candor and honesty.[4]

To accomplish this purpose, Thackeray employed specific methods. Borrowing the device of arm-chair soliloquizing from his beloved Addison and Steele, he adapted it admirably to story-telling, allowing an interlocutor to report objectively what he sees and hears the people on the scene doing, and to comment ironically from time to time on their motives. Sometimes the story-teller is an old acquaintance from a previous novel. Pendennis, for example, records

3. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 116-119, and David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists, pp. 79-80.
4. Ernest Albert Baker, op. cit., VII, 333-334.

the history of The Newcomes and becomes, thereby, more actually and permanently alive than in his own tale. The reader enjoys the double value of the reactions of the characters to circumstance and of the response of the reporter to their reactions. Critics have branded these interpolations "diffuse digressions" which impede the progress of the story. But since Thackeray regarded the novel "not merely as a representation but also as an interpretation of life,"[5] and since he proposed to present a panoramic exposé of society, the "digressions" must be granted as intrusions indispensable to his form and purpose. These offend only when reiteration makes them trite. They are, on the whole, so gracefully set forth and so effective in drawing the reader into his judgment of the men and women representing humanity, that to dispense with them would be to divest the novels of their greatest charm. An early example from Vanity Fair will show how these comments contribute to the perfectly accomplished conviction that the characters are living and acting members of society. After Thackeray has had Becky Sharp meet Joseph Sedley, the collector of Boggley Wollah, he turns to the reader with natural ease to discuss the situation:

> 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

5. Ibid., p. 382.

> modesty, entrusted by young persons to their mammas, 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 dancing till five o'clock in the morning through a whole mortal season? What causes them to labor at pianoforte sonatas, and to 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 and to wear Lincoln Green toxophilite hats and feathers, but that they may bring down some "desirable" young man with those killing bows and arrows of theirs? 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? Is it sheer love of their species and an unadulterated wish to see 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 whole score of little schemes for the settlement of her Amelia, so also had 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.[6]

Thackeray did not conceive a plot and then build characters to suit its action; but, as was more natural to his week by week writing, he created two or three principal characters and let them live. In a letter to Cordy Jeaffreson, he acknowledged this technique: "I don't control my characters. I am in their hands and they

6. Vanity Fair, pp. 20-21.

take me where they please."[7] And to Mrs. Brookfield he mused, "I wonder what will happen to Pendennis and Fanny Bolton. Writing and sending it to you, it seems as if it were true."[8] So true, indeed, did it seem to the author's contemporaries that folks chided him for using them as models and that critics, since, have spent time and talent tracing his originals. But it was never Thackeray's intention to reproduce an acquaintance. He was interested, not in any individual, but in a law of conduct of which some individual happened to be a handy example. He drew, in words, as he drew in his illustrations, not physical features but a moral judgment, a criticism of a class of people. As Mr. Dodds suggests, it was not from lack of technical skill that his maidens were nearly all vacuous brunettes, his butlers splay-footed, and his elderly men debonairly conceited bucks.[9] With his love of absurdity and nonsense cutting the edge of his satire, he was drawing with accuracy types of people who generally pass for something much finer than they are.

This world of Thackeray's novels is peopled almost wholly from the upper middle class. Thackeray had little concern for the poor. The "great folks" enter his scenes only incidentally, even in Esmond. His dramatis personnae

7. Benjamin, op. cit., I, 254.
8. Ibid.
9. Dodds, op. cit., p. 14.

are the "second-best:"[10] educated gentlemen; aristocrats in title, bourgeoisie in manners and habits; products of the treaty between the new rich and the old blue-bloods. The wealthy are directed by their ambition to add title to wealth by manipulation of the marriages of their children. The nobility are moved by their eagerness to make a fortune in the same market. This great compromise of Victorian England furnished the most finely drawn and the most frequently recurring figures in Thackeray's works: the campaigner, the social climber, the young dandy, the man-about-town, the vapid wife, and, most famously, the woman of daring wit and beauty whose whole delight is in conquest. To redeem his world from utter selfishness, he has drawn some innocents: a few faithful women and high-minded, noble-hearted men who, though allowed to approach the ridiculous in some directions, remain not the less distinguished for their fundamental humility and kindness.

We single out such characters from a vast and moving spectacle of Kings and statesmen at Waterloo or Brussels, of fashionables in a provincial drawing-room or in their cabriolets and barouches, of silk-stockinged footmen gossiping over pots of beer, of fox-hunting clergy and

10. Frank Swinnerton, "William Makepeace Thackeray," The Great Victorians, ed. by H. J. and Hugh Massingham, p. 475.

rooted county families, of city merchants at their vast, solid meals with their talk of 'change, and, eventually, of the cheap glitter of a continental casino where card sharpers and adventuresses ply their trade.[11]

And in this great gallery of people, as Alice Meynell ruefully points out, Thackeray has no saints. Helen Pendennis and Lady Castlewood are capable of cruelty. Amelia Sedley is an egoist. Lady Jane is jealous; Colonel Newcome, haughty. Esmond squanders his best years in vain love for a material beauty. Even poor Dobbin falls from the pedestal when he turns upon his plain sister with a taunt.[12] But, as Lewis S. Benjamin reasons, seeing the same defect,

> If Thackeray has not joined pure goodness to pure intellect, if he has not combined in one person the strength of intellect of a Becky and the goodness of an Amelia or the nobility of a Henry Esmond or a Thomas Newcome with the brilliance of an Arthur Pendennis, it was certainly not because he could not do so, or because he was incapable of appreciating a perfect man or woman, but because such folk are rarely, if ever, met with in the world.[13]

Adding to the conviction of veracity in his picture of life is the sense of time sustained in Thackeray's novels. Every story is connected to the others by the relation of fictitious to historical events and by the

11. David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists, pp. 21 and 85.
12. Alice Meynell, Dickens As A Man of Letters, p. 39.
13. Benjamin, op. cit., I, 250-251.

re-introduction of characters. Not only the more conspicuous like Becky, Beatrix and the Pendennises, but also less centralized figures like the Major, Warrington and Rawdon Crawley, and even those of brief importance like Costigan, Mr. Honeyman and the comical Lady Bareacres, live from novel to novel, their casual reappearances showing "the inevitable influence of years on character, wearing down love, slackening ambition, making faint memory itself...."[14]

Considering the limitations imposed upon him by his age and his ideal of keeping his books such that they could be read aloud in the family, we conclude that it is only by reason of the clear, fluent, easy style which Thackeray developed to be the instrument of his great creative imagination, that he succeeds in showing us his society without offering an entirely dull and vapid picture. It was his felicitous aptitude to select the right, significant detail and so to do, with the twist of an ironic phrase, what would require a page of sermonizing from a less artistic author. Who has surpassed this clear statement of the denied but undeniable distinctions of class at the English universities where "Figs" of Swishtail Seminary writes to his mother "who was fond of him, although she was a grocer's wife;" and the playful but still more serious criticism of higher education in the

14. Cecil, op. cit., p. 87.

dilemma of Pitt Crawley at college, who "failed, somehow, in spite of a mediocrity which ought to have insured any man a success?"[15]

Though he hated enthusiastic writing, Thackeray could present great scenes in a manner beyond criticism. His conception of incident becomes another means of setting his characters lucidly before us. The brilliant return of Henry Esmond to the cathedral at evensong after ten years' absence eternizes the abiding love of Rachel and the brittle beauty of Beatrix.[16] The much quoted death scene from The Newcomes "in which the Colonel says 'Adsum' when his name is called," stamps in our memory his brave and childlike heart.[17] The quite as skillful sentence from Vanity Fair in which George Osborne is reported "lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart"[18] is an ample assignment of an insignificant and fickle soul. The matchless repudiation of the Pretender in Esmond[19] reveals the redeeming humility and lack of malice in this royal scapegoat. But most worthy of insertion here, because it so deftly draws four characters in a very short space, is this parlor scene from Vanity Fair:

15. J. W. Dodds quotes these two examples from "Vanity Fair" in Thackeray: A Critical Portrait, p. 118.
16. Henry Esmond, p. 280 ff.
17. The Newcomes, p. 421.
18. Vanity Fair, p. 361.
19. Henry Esmond, pp. 605-609.

> 'Rawdon,' said Becky, very late one night, as a party of gentlemen were seated round her crackling drawing-room fire (for the men came to her house to finish the night, and she had ice and coffee for them, the best in London), 'I must have a sheep-dog.'
>
> 'A what?' said Rawdon, looking up from an écarté table.
>
> 'A sheep-dog!' said young Lord Southdown. 'My dear Mrs. Crawley, what a fancy! Why not have a Danish dog? I know of one as big as a camel-leopard, by Jove. It would almost pull your brougham. Or a Persian greyhound, eh (I propose, if you please); or a little pug that would go into one of Lord Steyne's snuff-boxes? There's a man at Bayswater got one with such a nose that you might hang your hat on it.'
>
> 'I mark the trick,' Rawdon gravely said. He attended to his game commonly, and didn't much meddle with the conversation except when it was about horses and betting.
>
> 'What can you want with a shepherd's dog,' the lively little Southdown continued.
>
> 'I mean a moral shepherd's dog,' said Becky, laughing and looking up at Lord Steyne.
>
> 'What the devil's that?' said his Lordship.
>
> 'A dog to keep the wolves off me,' Rebecca continued -- 'a companion.'
>
> 'Dear little innocent lamb, you want one,' said the Marquis; and his jaw thrust out, and he began to grin hideously, his little eyes leering towards Rebecca.[20]

So, in a new structure sensible for the scope of his social scene, in lucid language, and with purposeful playfulness, Thackeray drew his men and women, pitting opposite characters, not against each other, but against the world and the moral law. The strong Becky and weak Amelia, conscientious Dobbin and unscrupulous Lord Steyne, sweet Laura and spitfire Blanche struggle alongside each other

20. Vanity Fair, pp. 421-422.

for the success of their designs with a longing for ultimate security. The theme in every novel, though set in varying costume, setting and vocabulary, is the same. Thackeray would have agreed to this clear summary of his work:

> Always we see a man, a not unamiable creature -- for Thackeray could smile kindly at human nature in all but its worst delinquencies -- endowed for the most part with friendly instincts, natural affections; with a touching childishness in his unconquerable hopes and simplicities and naive yearnings for splendor and happiness and love; but irretrievably weak and ignorant and gullible and egotistic; knowing nothing of himself and little of other people, working himself to the bone for futile ambitions, sacrificing the precious for the unworthy object, taking his highest pride in distinctions worthless or non-existent; if he achieves his dearest ambition only to be disappointed, if he does manage to snatch a scrap of happiness, it is only by chance and through no merit of his own --Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair.[21]

21. Cecil, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

CHAPTER IV

VANITY FAIR: A NOVEL WITHOUT A HERO

Thackeray's most brilliant panorama of the nineteenth century world of compromise was presented in the pages of Vanity Fair. The social order of England, with all its iniquities, was unveiled in the careers of Rebecca Sharp and Amelia Sedley and in the histories of the families with which they were involved, the Osbornes and Sedleys of the city's new middle class, the Crawleys of smudged and faded country nobility, and the House of Gaunt, representing the wicked splendor of London aristocracy. In the ordinary sense of secrets and disclosures, adventures, or other conventional paraphernalia, this book has no plot. And, as the sub-title indicates, it has no hero. Amelia Sedley has been hailed by some as its heroine, but she is too weak a character for that position, while the strong and heroic Becky is too misdirected and unscrupulous. From the humdrum course of daily monotony, Thackeray, with the sheer power of his mind, contrived this "chronicle of commonplaces .... profoundly and uniformly interesting.[1]

The major reason for his success must be looked for in

1. Baker, op. cit., VII, 361.

the personality of Becky Sharp, first of the strong-minded, worldly, and charming women who dominate the scenes of Thackeray's novels. Born to a Bohemian artist and a French opera girl, Becky should have been well satisfied with the position of governess in a stratum of society where wealth and birth were rewarded rather than talent and effort. But Becky elected a career of defiance of this principle on the day of her departure from Miss Pinkerton's Academy, when she hurled back from the carriage the gift dictionary smuggled to her by Miss Jemima.

Her first conquest nearly established her in the middle class family of John Sedley, a merchant of the Stock Exchange. Becky artfully gained Mr. Sedley's admiration by appearing to enjoy his coarse jokes, won the sympathy of Mrs. Sedley and Amelia by touching references to her humble station, and manipulated the abnormally shy bachelor, Joseph, to the very point of proposal. The proposal was averted by the sly interference of George Osborne, Amelia's lover. George was the son of a wealthy tallow-chandler. Typical of the sons of the "new-rich" who were so quick to forget the humble origin of their parents, George adopted the snobbery of aristocracy to complement the dandyism of his dress, and so vowed that a governess of no wealth and of low extraction should not be admitted to the family into which he was pledged to marry.

Ironically, the Sedley family suffered sad reverses of fortune, and George was dispossessed by his father for

keeping his promise to Amelia. Then, because his vanity was not diminished by his misfortune, he fell victim to an infatuation for Becky while he was being fleeced at cards by her husband, Captain Crawley. These Sedley-Osborne-Crawley relationships score society for the value set upon extrinsic circumstances and its inability to estimate intrinsic personal worth. They show, too, how Becky found, in flattery, a weapon to substitute for wealth and breeding.

Rebecca's game goes on with increasing stakes and success after success. The debauched but wealthy Baronet, Sir Pitt, on his knees proposing to his governess, may have been a picture of horror to the fashionable world he deserted behind the gates of Queen's Crawley, but he was not without reason in his madness. His first wife was the high-born Griselda Binkie. She had made his life miserable with her tireless ambition to be worthy of her exalted station in life. After her death, he relaxed all pretensions of position and married a little pink-cheeked country girl, Rosa Dawson. But her monotonous mind and dreary dress soon tired him. Becky Sharp was different from both of these. She never criticized his laxity of manner, but she straightened out his accounts and restored his household to a respectable order. She was clever, capable, entertaining, and smart in appearance. Why would she not make a better Lady Crawley than either of the others? That a servant, Miss Betsy Horrocks, listening

at the keyhole, should fly with dread to report the scene, and that old Miss Crawley, the Baronet's sister, should be so enormously relieved to hear of Becky's refusal, points to the thinness of the veil of Liberalism hastily thrown over the shoulders of England after the French Revolution.

The flimsiness of the social system is more thoroughly exposed in the fascinating chapters that show Becky and Rawdon Crawley living handsomely on nothing per annum. Becky had refused the Baronet only because she had already secured his son in whom she saw the possibility of ultimately adding Aunt Matilda's £70,000 and the title of Lady Crawley to the immediate pleasures of a gay social life.

When Miss Crawley, at news of the elopement of her two favorites, showed a wrath worthy of the sanctimonious Conservative older nephew she had heretofore despised, Becky had to make the best of her miscalculation. Miss Crawley and the right of English primogeniture had given everything to Sir Pitt and had left Rawdon with neither income nor any preparation for earning an honest livelihood. Taking advantage of the fact that London society still looked upon Rawdon as the heir to Miss Crawley's fortune, Becky made full use of the credit system which encouraged people with the right connections to indulge their luxurious standards of living without the crude necessity of immediate payment. The bills that piled up fell into the hands of professional creditors who were content to let

them mount, accepting small sums as fractional payment, so long as some source of final settlement was secure. At first sign, however, that a man had lost his fortune or backing and could not repair it, his creditors swooped down upon him and the Fleet Street prison became his home unless his desperation stirred the pride or pity of a relative or friend.

A simple expediency was to dodge creditors by moving out from under them. After the battle of Waterloo, it appeared only natural for Becky, (who had built a family tree from her dubious French ancestry), and Miss Crawley's nephew, (who had sold out of the Army for a Colonelcy), to introduce themselves to the Parisian society in which their aunt had been so popular.

Since gambling was the accepted sport of gentlemen and gentlewomen both in public halls and in private salons, Becky was tolerant of Rawdon's propensity for this diversion. He was lucky with the cards and they kept his mind happily occupied while his wife exerted her talent and charms to entertain his friends.

Becky carried her end of the partnership so well that General Tufto invited the Crawleys to share his home, (only to suffer, a little later, fits of jealous rage at the rivals who flocked about this fascinating woman). In this society of early nineteenth century Paris, the fact that Becky was married and obviously devoted to her husband gave her a freedom she could never have exercised unattached. Of

course it did not stop the tongues of other men's wives, but the invitation lists were still subject to the approval of their husbands. Becky was wise enough never to actually overstep the boundaries of decency and convention, so that no definite accusation could ever be laid to her shame. She succeeded, because society was willing to compromise its moral code with its love of luxury and its envy of position, because it confused the accidents of birth and money with the essence of "good blood," and because it endeavored to assume externally the new spirit of equality, liberty, and fraternity while within its heart the old distinctions remained firmly rooted.

The art of dodging creditors developed into the fine skill of swindling, with the Crawleys' return to England. The traditional loyalty of Crawley servants to the family name was presumed upon to their ruin and to the comfortable establishment of Becky in a cozy home on Curzon Street. Bribery, of a subtle sort, provided another tool when Becky, with her enchanting understanding and the lure of a place in Parliament, added her psalm-singing, pharisaical brother-in-law to her list of contributors.

Becky's advancement in society was correlative with the progress of the unscrupulousness of her means. But even as Becky's daring mounts to the awesome point of insisting on an invitation to the dinner table of the great Marquis of Steyne, disaster impends for her, not by reason of the judgment of society but by a personal accident.

Rawdon's creditors catch him and clap him into a Fleet Street Prison. Becky, being engaged at the time with Lord Steyne, pleads helplessness in response to a desperate message from her husband, Rawdon, released by his sister-in-law, discovers his wife with Steyne. A £1000 note laid away in Becky's desk and bearing this nobleman's signature, is proof enough to Rawdon of his wife's faithlessness. Lord Steyne is as furious with Becky's deceitfulness as the outraged husband. Between these two, Becky's ruin is final, and every chance of becoming "Lady" Crawley is lost. The Marquis, symbol of the supremacy of wealth and position, averts a duel without forfeiting his honor by securing for Colonel Crawley the governorship of Coventry Island. Lady Jane takes the young Rawdon to Queen's Crawley. Becky, with a small annuity, wanders through the rest of the tale, sinking lower and lower in the company in which she is seen, adopting externals of propriety and piety, and becoming involved, at the end, rather creditably in uniting Dobbin with Amelia and not so creditably in the death of Joseph Sedley, first and last victim of her black-angel brilliance.

The roles of matrimonial compaigner and unscrupulous intriguer in society do not reveal the whole of Becky's character, for they suggest only meanness and wickedness where Thackeray intended a realistic mixture of these with finer qualities. From cover to cover she is the only character who remains undisturbed in her appraisal of life and of the world about her.

Having cooly calculated her chances for success in life at the outset, she wrestles dauntlessly with every situation. No defeat can break her down. She is never utterly despicable because, though she is incapable of love for those about her, she is also free from malice. Her mind is at all times occupied with the single ambition to enjoy life in a position worthy of her talents. Appreciative of the indispensability of "family" and wealth in the society of her times, she casts about for the means of supplying them, since she was denied both from birth. Not one opportunity slips by without action. No small good fortune is accepted when a larger gain can be foreseen by its sacrifice. Good sense, tact, self-possession against enormous odds, are the attributes by which she compels admiration. A consistent consideration of self, hers is the logical life without God. When it costs her nothing, she is generous. She shows her appreciation of innocence by subtly rescuing Amelia from the evil designs of Loder and Rook. Where her services are best recompensed, she serves with matchless skill and assiduity, not considering it below her station to labor over Sir Pitt's accounts and his son's pamphlet on Malt, to put up Miss Crawley's hair in curl papers and make her chocolate, or to cook a dish of salmi for Lord Steyne. The reader is not called upon to pity her when she meets the end to which her deeds assign her, for even then, she allows herself not an instant of self-pity, but finds a new place in life and proceeds to

content herself therewith. Her hardness toward her son is a natural adjunct of her other "virtues" and a necessary one, lest, through some such avenue, the grace of love should infiltrate; a contradiction which would change the whole course of this character.

"I think I could be a good woman if I had but five thousand a year,"[2] Becky said, comparing herself with Lady Jane in one of the rare and revealing introspections which Thackeray allows her to express. And then, considering how far above her original humble station she has risen, she continues:

> I have passed beyond it because I have brains .... and almost all the rest of the world are fools. I could not go back, and consort with those people now whom I used to meet in my father's studio. Lords come up to my door with stars and garters, instead of poor artists with screws of tobacco in their pockets. I have a gentleman for my husband, and an Earl's daughter for my sister, in the very house where I was little better than a servant a few years ago. But am I much better to do now in the world than I was when I was the poor painter's daughter, and wheedled the grocer round the corner for sugar and tea? Suppose I had married Francis, who was so fond of me -- I wouldn't have been much poorer than I am now. Heigho! I wish I could exchange my position in society, and all my relations, for a snug sum in the Three Per Cent. Consols ....[3]

Though she considered no other way of life practical for herself, Becky had delicacy enough to recognize and admire genuine goodness in others. Of her frank enemy,

2. Vanity Fair, p. 474.
3. Ibid.

Dobbin, she insisted to Amelia that he was "one of the best gentlemen I ever saw,"[4] and that, to him, dandified George Osborne was "no more to be compared .... than you are to Queen Elizabeth." [5] When Rawdon, after a warning from Sir Pitt and Lady Jane of his wife's indecorum, ordered Becky to refuse any future invitations which did not include him, she was pleased with her husband's gallantry, complied, and remarked sagaciously to Rawdon at her side in the carriage: "How nice it would be, and how happy we should always be, if we had but the money."[6] And Thackeray records that when Rawdon struck the great Marquis of Steyne and flung him to the ground, Rebecca, trembling before him "admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious."[7]

With her "detached power to see life judicially,"[8] Becky served as a "catalytic agent" on the other characters. Her wit is a refreshing contrast to Amelia's dullness. Amiable, modest and unselfish as Amelia is, her weakness in fostering an all-absorbing self-deceived, desperate devotion to the memory of a false husband compels a wholesome impatience when viewed in the light of Becky's cool appraisal of the merits and shortcomings of Rawdon Crawley and subsequent plans to employ these to the best advantage of both. Amelia, prevented by her all-consuming love from

4. Ibid., p. 776.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 594.
7. Ibid., p. 603.
8. Dodds, op. cit., p. 133.

correctly estimating her man, failed to hold his affections. Becky, with hardly more than a casual regard, inspired in Rawdon a deep, pure, and lasting love, devising a hundred ways to please him, to temper his passions, and to prevent his rashness so that he found himself continually grateful to his wife.

Amelia's over-indulgence is as dangerous to her child as Becky's neglect. Amelia, stunned into helplessness and tearful in her forgiving farewell at the crisis of Waterloo is pathetic. Becky, waving a gay goodbye and fearlessly taking stock of her means to meet the worst, is great. "I know of no trait in Amelia which a man would be ashamed to find in his own daughter,"[9] said Trollope, still, her virtues are not of great proportions. Her dismissal of Dobbin was not an exercise of duty but an indulgence of vanity. Only the clearsighted Becky was capable of shaking her loose from her slavery to sentiment. In Amelia, Thackeray satirizes society's acceptance of Miss Pinkerton's ideal for young ladies. In spite of her sweetness of temper and accomplishments in music, dancing, orthography and needlework, Amelia was not well equipped for the life she had to face.

A third type of feminine character was perfected by Thackeray in Vanity Fair in his portraiture of Miss Crawley, "epitome of worldliness and selfishness, sharp insight and

9. Trollope, op. cit., p. 104.

cynical wit."[10] This fat, apoplectic, old maiden aunt is the first of Thackeray's female tyrants. Aware of the false respect her wealth commanded from her brothers and nephews, she delighted in provoking their hypocritical attentions. How her terrible presence changes the course of their daily lives is best exposed by Becky's report to Amelia:

> My dear Miss Crawley has arrived with her fat horses, fat servants, fat spaniel -- the great rich Miss Crawley, with seventy thousand pounds in the five per cents., whom, or I had better say which, her two brothers adore. She looks very apoplectic, the dear soul; no wonder her brothers are anxious about her. You should see them struggling to settle her cushions, or to hand her coffee! 'When I come into the country,' she says, (for she has a great deal of humour), 'I leave my toady, Miss Briggs, at home. My brothers are my toadies, here, my dear, and a pretty pair they are!'
>
> When she comes into the country our Hall is thrown open, and for a month, at least, you would fancy old Sir Walpole was come to life again. We have dinner-parties, and drive out in the coach-and-four -- the footmen put on their newest canary-colored liveries, we drink claret and champagne as if we were accustomed to it every day. We have wax candles in the schoolroom, and fires to warm ourselves with. Lady Crawley is made to put on the brightest pea-green in her wardrobe, and my pupils leave off their thick shoes and tight old tartan pelisses, and wear silk stockings and muslin frocks, as fashionable baronets' daughters should .... What a charming reconciler and peacemaker money is!
>
> Another admirable effect of Miss Crawley and her seventy thousand pounds is to be seen in the conduct of the two brothers Crawley. I mean the baronet and the rector .... who hate each other all the year round, become quite loving at Christmas .... When Miss

10. Baker, op. cit., p. 360.

> Crawley arrives there is no such thing as quarrelling heard of -- the Hall visits the Rectory, and vice versa ....
>
> Our sermon books are shut up when Miss Crawley arrives, and Mr. Pitt, whom she abominates, finds it convenient to go to town. On the other hand, the young dandy -- 'blood', I believe, is the term --, Captain Crawley makes his appearance ....
>
> .... He brings his hunters home with him, lives with the Squires of the county, asks whom he pleases to dinner, and Sir Pitt dares not say no, for fear of offending Miss Crawley, and missing his legacy when she dies of her apoplexy.[11]

This, again, is as much a picture of society as an analysis of Miss Crawley. Thackeray strikes repeatedly at the hypocrisy of living on a mean scale and changing the face of things to impress company. The Baronet supped ordinarily on tripe and green onions with porter. His borough was "rotten" in more respects than the decrease of population could account for. But to his own sister, he pretends an adherence to the standards of a more splendid era which he has no intention of sustaining.

This vain Aunt Matilda is the one woman in the world of Vanity Fair strong-minded enough to defeat Becky Sharp's wit and audacity. She flattered her trouvaille with ultra-liberal eulogies, declaiming,

> What is birth, my dear? ;....is any one of them equal to you in intelligence or breeding? .... you have more brains than half the shire -- if merit had its reward, you ought to be a duchess -- no, there ought to be no duchesses at all -- but you ought to have no superior, and I consider you, my love, as

11. Vanity Fair, pp. 103-105.

my equal in every respect; ....[12]

But at the same time she also made her run errands, alter dresses, and read her patroness to sleep at night with French novels. And though she had rhapsodized, "I adore all imprudent matches,"[13] and had confided, "I have set my heart on Rawdon running away with someone,"[14] she had added the warning, "Rawdon has not a shilling but what I give him. He is criblé de dettes -- he must repair his fortunes and succeed in the world."[15] The Campaigner's pleased admiration of Becky's refusal of the Baronet's proposal was a fan to her fury at the elopement of the governess with her favorite nephew.

"The selfishness and self-will of the possessor of great wealth and fawning relations"[16] is active in two other Campaigners of widely differing position in Vanity Fair. Ungrammatical, countrified little Mrs. Bute Crawley is mean-minded and cunning in her never-tiring campaign against Becky for the legacy. Lady Bareacres, enviously determined to defeat Becky's social aspirations, is a comical caricature of aristocratic snobbery. This power to individualize and humanize several species of a class saves Thackeray's characters from being merely the social types

12. Ibid., pp. 110-11.
13. Ibid., p. 111.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. E. Rigby, "Vanity Fair: a Novel without a Hero," Quarterly Review, LXXXIV, 156.

he designed to display.

The ranks of this procession of egoists in Vanity Fair are not closed to the masculine sex. Most colossal figure in the vanguard is the great Lord Steyne whose palace better reflects the character of its master than his own short, broad-chested, bowlegged figure or leering face with a thousand wrinkles around its twinkling bloodshot eyes, its thick bushy eyebrows, savage buck teeth and underhung jaw. In the House of Gaunt are

> .... the famous petite appartements -- one, sir, fitted up all in ivory and white satin, another in ebony and black velvet; there is a little banqueting-room taken from Sallust's house at Pompeii, and painted by Cosway -- a little private kitchen in which every sauce-pan was silver and all the spits were gold. It was there that Egalité Orleans roasted partridges on the night when he and the Marquis of Steyne won a hundred thousand from a great personage at ombre. Half of the money went to the French Revolution, half to purchase Lord Gaunt's Marquisate and Garter, and the remainder ---[17]

If the historical original of Lord Steyne had a good and an attractive side, it was deliberately left out of Thackeray's portrait, so that in this shrewd and daring gambler, corrupt and unscrupulous egoist, might be seen "a vast symbol of successful selfishness which might well be called Beelzebub."[18] For it was to this ruthless, cynical tyrant that crowned heads bent their necks and the stiffest backs of society bowed.

17. Vanity Fair, pp. 525-26.
18. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 83.

> 'Lord Steyne is really too bad,' Lady Slingstone said; 'but everybody goes, and of course I shall see that my girls come to no harm'
> .... 'Where you see such persons as the Bishop of Ealing and Countess of Slingstone, you may be pretty sure, Jane,' the Baronet would say, 'that we cannot be wrong.'[19]

Aside to the reader, Thackeray confides:

> .... in Vanity Fair the sins of very great personages are looked at indulgently .... Some notorious carpers and squeamish moralists might be sulky with Lord Steyne, but they were glad enough to come when he asked them.[20]

No wonder the great nobleman was contemptuous in his sublimity.

Almost all the other men in Vanity Fair are specimens of worldliness on a smaller scale. Dandified George Osborne, deciding to buy an ornament for his waistcoat when he had set out to get a gift for Amelia, is a picture of the vanity of the Middle Class, seeking to give its children the airs and manners of aristocracy. His weakness is redeemed by his sufferance of Dobbin's prodding, his forfeiture of family and fortune to keep a promise for which he had but little heart, his repentance of disloyalty, and his honorable death on the battlefield which, told in two sentences, demonstrates Thackeray's mastery of an objective style and comprises one of the most effective death scenes in literature:

19. Vanity Fair, p. 533.
20. Ibid.

> No more firing was heard at Brussels -- the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.[21]

A more prominent military dandy of Vanity Fair is the wretchedly educated, self-indulgent, good-natured Rawdon Crawley. Entering the scene with the reputation of a rake and one duel victim to his credit, Rawdon develops a manliness in his pathetic devotion to his wife and son which proves him to be true-hearted, if slow-witted. His idealization of Becky costs him his fortune and his happiness, but in his disillusionment he is left a new and wiser set of values to take to Coventry Island.

To relieve these tragic figures, a third dandy of comically immense proportions and propensities is drawn. Purse-proud Joseph Sedley, up to the last scene, never dims his splashy splendor, even after his father's sad financial ruin. The Collector of Boggley-Wollah is as fat and bombastic as his title suggests. Awkward and ridiculously girl-shy, he nevertheless believes himself perfectly killing; and so is easy prey for Becky, both at the beginning and end of the novel. His boasting, laziness, and gluttony culminate in uncontrollable cowardice at Brussels where he goes wild with the fear of not escaping revengeful French troops, deserts his sister, and shaves off his prized mustachios, lest he be mistaken for a military man. In him,

21. Vanity Fair, p. 361.

vanity and self-absorption have no success, for they are unmixed with a single other quality more virile.

The incredible Sir Pitt, his sanctimonious elder son falling into an infatuation with his sister-in-law before the pure eyes of his wife, and relentlessly hard Mr. Osborne, tallow-chandler, refusing forgiveness to broken and bitter John Sedley who had helped him make his fortune, are further samples of the vulgarity of mankind. They were not intended to be otherwise, as Thackeray explained to his mother:

> Don't you see how odious all the people are in the book with the exception of Dobbin? .... What I want is to make a set of people without God in the world (only that is a cant phrase).[22]

"With the exception of Dobbin," ("Figs" he was called at college), the grocer's son, who achieved gentility through a commission in the army! This shy, ugly, honest, epitome of modesty and loyalty, having spent his life making George do right by Amelia whom he loved, wins her finally, "after 18 years .... on the last page of the third volume,"[23] only to be included, there, in the curtain lament: "Ah Vanitas Vanitatum! which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?"[24]

The characters singled out here for study appear in the novel amid a gallery of minor figures, so that a

22. George Saintsbury, A Consideration of Thackeray, p. 168.
23. Trollope, op. cit., p. 105.
24. Vanity Fair, p. 784.

"sense of crowded, bustling life" is sustained.[25] Their virtues and vices are brought to light as much by their dealings with servants, housekeepers, tradesmen, clergymen, adventurers, and social climbers who may live for only half a page, as through the major relationships of the Sedley, Osborne, Crawley and Gaunt family groups. Since little time is to be devoted to these people, Thackeray suggests a personality for each very briefly by assigning tricky titles as they appear. Lady Slingstone, Captain Swankey, Baron Schapsuger, Duchess Dowager of Stilton, Marchese Alessandro Strachino, Chevalier Tosti, Duc de la Gruyere, Baron Pitchly, Mr. Deuceace, and the O'Dowds all become representative of a class at first mention of their burlesque names.

The Battle of Waterloo and the Reform Bill are fit into the scene, without the least artificiality, to show the effect of political victories on the lives of the principals. There are only two historical personages, Sir Pitt and Lord Steyne, yet no character in the novel seems any less real than these. Casual mention of Mr. Fox by various characters heightens their verisimilitude and perfects the photograph of the manners and habits of social-climbing, stock-gambling, middle-class England just before Victoria. Always "by the seeming chances and

25. Dodds, op. cit., p. 123.

coincidences of common life,"[26] the reader is led from one set of circumstances to another, in which "injustice is as likely to be victorious as justice."[27]

It remains to Abraham Hayward's glory as a critic that he promoted this novel in The Edinburgh Review with the unequivocal estimate:

> Vanity Fair is assured of immortality as ninety-nine hundredths of modern novels are sure of annihilation.[28]

26. Rigby, op. cit., LXXXIV, 161-62.
27. Dodds, op. cit., p. 116.
28. Benjamin, op. cit., I, 236.

CHAPTER V

THE HISTORY OF PENDENNIS, His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy

Close on the heels of Vanity Fair, followed Pendennis. Thackeray had only the most general conception and little more than a beginning actually in writing when he sent it forth in its yellow jacket with its lengthy title and a drawing on the cover

> .... showing the opposing powers of good and evil personified struggling for possession of a young man -- on the one side the home, a young woman and children, on the other, the world, a siren and a couple of imps, one of whom is offering the toys of wealth.[1]

Though the title seems to promise a novel of character, the result was another novel of manners. Thackeray was not good at showing character in the process of development. Very rarely does he get below the surface to show the struggle of the individual will, deliberating and making a choice.

> His science was of man the social animal. He saw men in crowds, reacting together and found it difficult to insulate the individual for

1. Walter Jerrold, Introduction to Pendennis, ed. by Ernest Rhys, I, vii.

an intensive study.[2]

So Pendennis turned out to be another "vivid picture of mundane experience,"[3] further evidence that Thackeray's dominant critical trait as a novelist was:

> .... the ability to stand outside the social scene and view it with a calm objectivity, quite without rancour, maintaining a delicate poise which permitted an infiltration of pity and an analgesic humor.[4]

Begun at his Kensington home, Pendennis was worked on at the Garrick Club, at Brighton, Paris, Dieppe and Southampton. During its composition Thackeray suffered not only from a severe sickness but also from a loneliness for home, wife and children. This loneliness was more poignant for all the social lionization which the success of Vanity Fair had brought. It was lightened for a while by his love for Jane Brookfield, the wife of his best friend, until his regard was rebuffed by William who took offense one day at Thackeray's jesting frankness. From the pain of this period of the author's life came the philosophic irony of Pendennis, showing ambition yielding to calm weariness as youth passes into maturity, picturing the change and decay of beautiful things, suggesting to the reader to value not too highly what must pass away.[5] In Pendennis "all manner of things go wrong, and only a

2. Baker, op. cit., VII, 363-4.
3. Ibid., p. 365.
4. Dodds, op. cit., p. 137.
5. Ibid., pp. 147-48.

few go right,"[6] but Thackeray's "huge relish for the drolleries of human nature"[7] pervades and makes us laugh at injustice, falseness and heartbreak as products of the absurdities of the manners and morals of society.

Pendennis is the most autobiographical of Thackeray's novels, but it was not fashioned on a conscious plan for self-revelation. During its composition, Thackeray wrote to Mrs. Brookfield, of Pendennis,

> He is a very good-natured, generous young fellow and I begin to like him considerably. I wonder whether he is interesting to me for selfish reasons, and because I fancy we resemble each other in many points....[8]

The author and character did follow parallel careers. They lived in the same part of Devonshire, went to the same school, studied at the University, and left without obtaining a degree. Both lost money through carelessness, prepared for the Bar, gave up law for journalism, and became successful novelists. But Pendennis, conceited, noisy, and dissipated at college, loveless and ungrateful at home, is no more an exact reproduction of modest, manly and tender-hearted Thackeray than are the other characters of their prototypes. Thackeray borrowed from persons and places the details he needed for his social satire. He was falsely accused of misrepresenting an individual

6. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 112.
7. Dodds, op. cit., p. 148.
8. Merivale and Marzials, op. cit., pp. 152-53.

(as in the case of Maginn and Arcedeckne[9]) when his purpose was to typify a class or institution of society.

Arthur Pendennis, like George Osborne and Rawdon Crawley of Vanity Fair, was a young dandy of the upper middle class. He had aspired to military snobdom, but his mother's gentleness and a pretty literary talent determined an entirely different character for Pen.

His youngest appearance is as a good-natured schoolboy of average ability at Grey Friars. The gap between man's aspiration and his achievement is nowhere more plainly suggested than in this picture of the public school. At one extreme is the Doctor, assaulting his blundering pupil in awful terms:

> Miserable trifler! A boy who construes δε and, instead of δε but, at sixteen years of age, is guilty, not merely of folly, and ignorance, and dullness inconceivable, but of crime, of deadly crime .... the very next mistake that you make shall subject you to the punishment of the rod .... What ill-conditioned boy is there that dares to laugh?[10]

It must be supposed, from his wrath at Arthur's incompetence, that the master was quite unaware that prompting and ponies were the usual means of avoiding his harangues and floggings, that many of the young boys who dared to titter, dared also to smoke cigars, to practice inebriation, to fall in love, to fight a duel, and to talk among one another of matters and in terms which they would have

9. Benjamin, op. cit., I, 317-20.
10. Pendennis, I, 17.

blushed to hear mentioned before their mothers and sisters. But Thackeray has no scowl to fix upon such a system, only the grin and laughter of Pen's uncle who

> .... remembered having stood under that very pillar where Pen the younger now stood, and having been assaulted by the Doctor's predecessor years and years ago.[11]

At his Fairoaks estate, Pen's education was continued under the opposite extreme of indulgence, for Mr. Smirke, his tutor, was a dependent, was enamored of his pupil's widowed mother, and was wise enough to see that the only avenue to that fond heart was through flattery of her son. Still, when Pen went up to Boniface College, Oxbridge, he could construe the classics well enough to find his fellow-students so dull as to make the lectures unprofitable for him. In mathematics, he suffered the opposite annoyance. So he resorted to reading in private and became less and less interested in his studies and more and more occupied with his mounting reputation as a leader of fashion and a "tremendous fellow." His brilliance as an orator and poet were wildly acclaimed in his set, but his name did not appear on the University's Honour List. From the expense of generous wine parties, he was easily led into the risks of gambling. When the degree examinations came, at last, "Pen the superb, Pen the wit and dandy .... Pen the widow's darling"[12] was

11. Ibid., I, 18.
12. Ibid., I, 191-92.

plucked, and had nothing to take back to Fairoaks but debts and an egoistic remorse.

The responsibility for such careers of idleness and extravagance falls only in small part upon the faculty of the university and much more largely upon that class of society typified in Pen's uncle who sent him to Oxbridge to "form acquaintances who will be of greatest advantage through life to him,"[13] -- who measured his success at college by the following he enjoyed and by the splendor and discrimination of the parties he gave.

But Helen, his mother, and Laura, his sister by adoption, exerting a far more ennobling influence, persuade Pen to make a second attempt at the examination. This time he passes easily. But in the country, Pen's bright wit and laughter were seldom exercised except during the short distraction of a flirtation with Blanche Amory. His fond mother declared him a genius, "but then," Thackeray explains, "your geniuses are somewhat flat and moody at home."[14] So, at Laura's sensible suggestion and with Laura's small funds, Pen is sent back to London to try his fortune at the Inns of Court.

The Inns of Court provide a new scene of satire for Thackeray. Cleanliness and sanitation have been forgotten in the gloomy archways, narrow hallways, black stairways

13. Ibid., I, 145.
14. Ibid., I, 218.

and feebly lit rooms. Among the denizens of the Temple are some serious students who pour over their books and briefs without respite, making at once a success and a failure of life, and also many young bucks whose daily schedule is no more strenuous than Pen's. His day began with a long reading in the morning (not all of it relevant to law) followed by a walk in the park, a pull on the river, a stretch up the hill, and a modest dinner at a tavern. When the evening was not spent quietly at home, it was enjoyed with colleagues of The Back Kitchen at the Fielding's Head. Though his dwelling-place was humble, his companion an honest man of no pretensions, and his habits jolted down to a fair level of economy, Pen's purse was soon reduced once more to its last sovereign. The Bar had not yet supplied him with means of replenishing the small store Laura had unstintingly furnished. So, at Warrington's suggestion, Pen turns to literature, writes the verses for a plate by Lady Violet in Bacon's Spring Annual, and gets his first check (after Warrington's threat to take him over to Bacon's rival, Bungay).

The literary world to which the reader is forthwith introduced is another world of sham. From a debtor's prison in Fleet Street, Captain Shandon writes an eloquent prospectus for a new magazine for gentlemen with the presumptuous claim,

> 'The Statesman and the Capitalist, the Country Gentleman and the Divine, will be amongst our readers, because our writers are amongst them.

> We address ourselves to the higher circles of society; we care not to disown it - the Pall Mall Gazette is written by gentlemen for gentlemen; its conductors speak to the classes in which they live and were born. The field-preacher has his journal, the radical free-thinker has his journal: why should the Gentlemen of England be unrepresented in the Press?'[15]

High-born, dull-witted Percy Popjoy cannot even successfully pretend to a knowledge of the contents of novels published with his name as author. Hoolan, of the Ultra-Conservative Day, and Doolan, of the Liberal Dawn, lash each other fiercely in print, but peacefully share a carriage to the doors of their rival employers. Those publishers, Bungay and Bacon, married to sisters who have fallen into envy of each other, are motivated in their journals, not by any intelligent stand on affairs of church and state, but by the purely personal ambition ludicrously described by Thackeray:

> .... the gentleman present entered into some details regarding the political and literary management of the paper, and Mr. Bungay sate by listening and nodding his head, as if he understood what was the subject of their conversation, and approved of their opinions. Bungay's opinions, in truth, were pretty simple. He thought the Captain could write the best smashing article in England. He wanted the opposition house of Bacon smashed, and it was his opinion that the Captain could do that business. If the Captain had written a letter of Junius on a sheet of paper, or copied a part of the Church Catechism, Mr. Bungay would have been perfectly contented, and have considered

15. Ibid., I, 330.

> that the article was a smashing article.[16]

Arthur Pendennis has been guilty of some artificiality, but in this company he is the most genuine gentleman present. So candid was his criticism that it led him to praise a book by the rival Bacon. To Pen's noble defense, "I would rather starve .... than strike an opponent an unfair blow ....," the veteran Shandon philosophized,

> 'Gad .... you've a tender conscience, Mr. Pendennis. It's the luxury of all novices, and I may have had one once myself; but that sort of bloom wears off with the rubbing of the world ....'[17]

So it did with Pendennis, who was drawn to represent the average young man of his day and of his class. After the success of his novel, Walter Lorraine, his presentation at Court through the patronage of Lord Steyne, his recovery and escape from an infatuation for a porter's daughter, and his intimate acquaintance with the most fashionable families of society, Pen comes to utter to his honest friend Warrington sentiments of which he would have been ashamed before he had succumbed to the expert coaching of his worldly uncle, and entered into his cool deliberation to make a bargain at the marriage counter, sentiments that echo Shandon's:

16. Ibid., I, 331.
17. Ibid., I, 360.

> '.... why not acknowledge the world I stand upon and submit to the conditions of the society which we live in and live by? I am older than you, George, in spite of your grizzled whiskers, and have seen much more of the world ....'[18]
> '.... and if you hear of any good place under Government, I have no particular scruples that I know of, which would prevent me from accepting your offer.'[19]

But Pen, perhaps by virtue of his clearsighted appraisal of his uncle's principles and an undeviating reverence for his mother's idealism, but more likely by pure coincidence, is saved from scepticism and left to Laura with a heart humbled by the prospect of his happiness.

With Arthur Pendennis the reader may understandably lose patience and interest, but with his brisk, spotless, dignified uncle, sheer intellectual delight is always afforded.[20] Major Pendennis is the Campaigner of The History of Pendennis. Miss Crawley, of Vanity Fair, dwindles alongside of his infinitely more subtle style of management. Lady Rockminster, looking out for a worthy husband for Laura, is only a very mild specimen of the class. A superb old clubman, a hanger-on of the Marquis of Steyne, full of twaddling tales about great folks, as scrupulously faithful to his utilitarian code of "honor" as any martyr to the Ten Commandments, Major Pendennis is

18. Ibid., II, 245.
19. Ibid., II, 252.
20. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 153-55.

> .... a type which, allowing for differences of periods and manners, will exist as long as society exists and which has been seized and depicted by Thackeray as by no other novelist."[21]

A relic of the Regency, the Major is nowhere more amusing than in his adjustments to changing Victorian standards, to the exaltation of the literary man, to the introduction of scruples into a gentleman's sowing of wild oats, to the new possibility of servants rising above their masters. He is more than a match for his own valet when that scoundrel rebels without warning and threatens to ruin by blackmail the Major's bright prospects for the name of Pendennis. His stout-heartedness, ingenuity, and polite manner in reducing his attacker to a cringing victim draw a distinction of class which, in this instance, is entirely to the credit of the higher circles. It recalls to the reader an earlier example of the Major's delightful adroitness when he prevented the marriage of his nephew to an actress twelve years his superior in age and vastly his inferior in intellect and breeding.

Egotistical though he was, in his bachelor existence, and industrious in the preservation of his appearance and position, he was always beneficent to Helen and her son and made many a "sacrifice" for their sake. To Pen at Oxbridge he set down plainly and kindly, the worldly commandments by which a young man might make his way in society. Though

21. Pollock, op. cit., XXVI, 718.

they were false in principle, they were offered in sincerity of spirit, for the Major was speaking from his own experience of success, when he said to Arthur as they were lighting their candles to go to bed,

> 'God bless you, my dear boy .... You made that little allusion to Agincourt, where one of the Roshervilles distinguished himself, very neatly and well, although Lady Agnes did not quite understand it: but it was exceedingly well for a beginner— though you oughtn't to blush so, by the way— and I beseech you, my dear Arthur, to remember through life, that with an entree— with a good entree, mind,-- it is just as easy for you to have good society as bad, and that it costs a man, when properly introduced, no more trouble or soins to keep a good footing in the best houses in London than to dine with a lawyer in Bedford Square. Mind this, when you are at Oxbridge pursuing your studies, and for Heaven's sake be very particular in the acquaintances you make. The premier pas in life is the most important of all— did you write to your mother to-day?— No?— Well, do, before you go, and call and ask Mr. Foker for a frank— they like it.-- Good night. God bless you.'[22]

Here was certainly the "supreme height of polite snobdom."[23] But the Major's snobbery was of that refined, flexible sort to which the society of his time had trained itself, so that, seeing Pen's chum in the lodgings at Lamb Court drinking beer and cooking his own chops, he was, nevertheless, quite satisfied when he heard that Mr. Warrington was a younger son of Sir Miles Warrington of

22. Pendennis, I, 165.
23. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 118.

Suffolk.[24] His concern for Pen had carried him up three flights of abominable black stairs to deliver an advanced lesson to his nephew and to expose to the reader the meanness of a society which sought bargains in marriage and looked up to ostentation and idleness as the end of existence:

> 'Remember, it's as easy to marry a rich woman as a poor woman: and a devilish deal pleasanter to sit down to a good dinner than to a scrag of mutton in lodgings. Make up your mind to that. A woman with a good jointure is a doosid deal easier a profession than the law, let me tell you. Lookout; I shall be on the watch for you: and I shall die content, my boy, if I can see you with a good ladylike wife and a good carriage, and a good pair of horses, living in society, and seeing your friends, like a gentleman.'[25]

Lest anyone should envy the simple pleasures of that society and seek to emulate the Major, Thackeray shows him after a hard evening's work, leaving a great party at Gaunt House:

> . . . . ah, how ghastly they looked! That admirable and devoted Major above all, -- who had been for hours by Lady Clavering's side, ministering to her and feeding her body with everything that was sweet and flattering, -- Oh! what an object he was! The rings round his eyes were of the colour of bistre; those orbs themselves were like the plovers' eggs whereof Lady Clavering and Blanche had each tasted; the wrinkles in his old face were furrowed in deep gashes; and a silver stubble, like an elderly morning dew, was glittering on his chin, and alongside the dyed whiskers, now limp and out of curl.

24. Pendennis, I, 290.
25. Ibid., I, 292.

> There he stood, with admirable patience, enduring, uncomplaining, a silent agony; knowing that people could see the state of his face (for could he not himself perceive the conditions of others, males and females, of his own age?) -- longing to go to rest for hours past; aware that suppers disagreed with him, and yet having eaten a little so as to keep his friend, Lady Clavering, in good humour; with twinges of rheumatism in the back and knees; with weary feet burning in his varnished boots, -- so tired, oh, so tired and longing for bed! If a man, struggling with hardship and bravely overcoming it, is an object of admiration for the gods, that Power in whose chapels the old Major was a faithful worshipper must have looked upwards approvingly upon the constancy of Pendennis's martyrdom.[26]

The Becky Sharp of Pendennis is a lesser paragon of evils, Blanche Amory. She has Becky's ambition without Becky's true talent and firmness. She employs Becky's artfulness without Becky's subtlety and without Becky's excuse of necessity, for Blanche's admittance to society is assured by her mother's money and her step-father's name. At home, Blanche is surly and cruel to her family, "a bundle of nerves and affectations."[27] Abroad she affects a tenderness too extreme to be convincing. Into volumes of verse titled Mes Larmes and Mes Soupirs she pours her self-indulgence and sentimentalism. Yet with "a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief,"[28] she charmed foolish Arthur away from his

26. Ibid., II, 72.
27. Baker, op. cit., VII, 366.
28. Pendennis, II, 364.

modestly beautiful Laura, and practical-minded Harry Foker from his betrothed Lady Ann, and these two were among a score of incidental victims of less prominence in the story.

Shades of Becky Sharp may be seen, also, in Fanny Bolton and Emily Costigan. Fanny, a congenital coquette, is introduced only to supply the temptation in the life of Thackeray's average young man. "The Fotheringay," simple-minded daughter of the drunken Captain Costigan, has Becky's Bohemian background and her determination to seek wealth and position in marriage. With only a placid physical beauty and an automatic faithfulness to a few stage gestures learned from Bowes, she desolates that unfortunate little man, captivates young Arthur Pendennis, and finally, with the same calm, marries

> .... Sir Charles Mirabel, G.C.B. formerly envoy to the Court of Pumpernickel, who had taken so active a part in the negotiations before the Congress of Swammerdan, and signed, on behalf of H.B.M., the Peace of Pultusk.[29]

Emily's reappearances as gracious Lady Mirabel represent another compromise of society admitting Bohemia to its "higher circles" under the flag of title and wealth. They show, too, the success of stolid, patient climbing on the social ladder and a steady ignorance of slippery footing.

The good women of Pendennis distinctly outdo Amelia Sedley of Vanity Fair, though they bear the same stamp of

29. Ibid., I, 286.

sentimentality, of long-suffering and of relative obscurity in the social scene. Mrs. Pendennis, (Helen), is the intensely pious, all-absorbing mother whose love, innocence and beauty should have been sufficient protection to her son against his uncle's worldly code. But Helen's maternal affection is shot through with a streak of self-indulgence. In worshipping Pen, she loses her influence over him. Her faith in Pen and her prevailing kindness desert her in the Fanny Bolton affair, but her suspicion of the worst and inconsiderate cruelty to Fanny are perfectly consistent with the predominance of heart over head in her character.

Pen's other good angel is Laura Bell. Though she waits through two volumes for her lover, Laura is not just another Amelia.[30] She has sense of humor enough to see Pen's vanity and selfishness and, though she loves him in spite of his faults, she has the spunk to refuse his first pretty but insincere proposal. Laura is not an exciting personality, but she is invested with a natural loveliness and wholesome liveliness which shine much longer than Blanche Amory's flashy brilliance. Even in the brittle society which Thackeray depicts, her modest charm wins better recognition than Blanche's cheap appeal. Lady Rockminster takes her up; Pynsent and Warrington fall in love with her; but Laura remains unspoiled and patient, --one answer to those critics who accused Thackeray of cynicism

30. Dodds, op. cit., p. 156.

and despair in the portraiture of Pendennis.

George Warrington is another. Warrington is important not as an actor in the story but as a "kind of official commentator."[31] His kindliness, good sense, and hatred for shams and conventions lend weight to his caustic comments on Pen's laziness and dandyism. His ability to look at both sides of a question reflects the author's attitude toward Pen's romantic flights of thought. Thus, when Pen blames Capitalism for Shandon's poverty, Warrington points to the real cause:

> 'Was it the publisher, think you, who sent the author to prison? Is it Bungay who is tippling away the five-pound note which we saw just now, or Shandon?'[32]

And when Pen persists with the grand statement,

> 'I protest against that wretch of a middle-man whom I see between Genius and his great landlord, the Public, and who stops more than half of the laborer's earnings and fame,'

Warrington answers,

> 'Do you want a body of capitalists that shall be forced to purchase the works of all authors who may present themselves manuscript in hand? .... Rags are not a proof of genius; whereas capital is absolute, as times go, and is perforce the bargain-master. It has a right to deal with the literary inventor as with any other .... I can no more force Mr. Murray to purchase my book of travels or sermons than I can compel Mr. Tattersall to give me a hundred guineas for my horse.'[33]

31. Baker, op. cit., VII, 367.
32. Pendennis, I, 334.
33. Ibid., I, 335.

The satire of Victorians' indiscrimination in the worship of "genius" is more Thackerayan than the touch at a political question.

Pendennis is crowded with other characters from every walk of life, each distinctly significant of some weakness in the structure of society. There is Harry Foker, betrothed in youth by his father to his cousin, Lady Ann, for the addition of the Rosherville title to the fortune he had made with his brewery. There is poor Lady Clavering, the Begum, accepted in society because of her £10,000 a year and ridiculed for her vulgarity. Alcide Mirobolant, the French cook with the title Chevalier de Juillet, presuming to fall in love with an English lady and to fight a duel with an English dandy has to leave England to escape absurdity. Professional hangers-on of a less innocent and loyal sort than the Major are Ned Strong who manages both Sir F. Clavering and his enemy Colonel Altamont, and Wenham and Wagg, who sit wherever the feast is best, Wagg maligning the hostess aside to her guests when he is not flattering her aloud. There are besides all the figures that complete the life of the country town of Chatteris, of Oxbridge, of the theater, of the Inns of Court, of Vauxhall, of the publisher's ball, and of Gaunt House parties; tradesmen, servants, clergy, university dandies, military bucks, literary gents, gamblers, swindlers, all of them related by some real, if slight, thread to the history of Arthur Pendennis. Those whose appearance is

fleeting, again have names so suggestive as to fix in mind their position in the panorama. Miss Roundle and Captain Broadfoot, Cornet Perch, Sir Horace Fogey, Father Barbarossa, Reverend Ramshorn, Messrs. Doomsday, Grump and Paley, Captain Sumph and Lord Sumphington, Smart the keeper of Clavering Arms and Curling the wig-maker are conspicuous examples. Governor Crawley, Lord Steyne, the Countess of Southdown, Lord Bareacres and Deuceace reappear from Vanity Fair to draw us further into an illusion of actuality in the world Thackeray built and inhabited.

The coherence and unity of such a collection is the coherence and unity of life, life in the period of dandyism, "legacy of George IV, a social world of half-men with curled locks, slim waists, high insteps; and simpering misses with a smattering of French and other 'accomplishments.'"[34] Over the babble of their voices, Thackeray sounds again the theme of Vanitas Vanitatum:

> The evening was a great triumph for him: it ended. All triumphs and all evenings end.[35]

34. Wells, op. cit., 194-5.
35. Pendennis, I, 159.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEWCOMES: MEMOIRS OF A MOST RESPECTABLE FAMILY

Edited by Arthur Pendennis, Esq.

In The Newcomes, sequel to Pendennis, Thackeray became again the historian of society, thus avoiding recurrence of the difficulty with Pendennis.[1] Beginning with an amusing medley of the fables of La Fontaine most aptly pointed toward classes of society, the author prepares the reader for what is to come:

> This, then, is to be a story .... in which jackdaws will wear peacocks' feathers, and awaken the just ridicule of the peacocks; in which, while every justice is done to the peacocks themselves, the splendour of their plumage, the gorgeousness of their dazzling necks, and the magnificence of their tails, exception will yet be taken to the absurdity of their rickety strut, and the foolish discord of their pert squeaking, in which lions in love will have their claws pared by sly virgins; in which rogues will sometimes triumph, and honest folks, let us hope, come by their own; in which there will be black crape and white favours .... in which there will be dinners of herbs with contentment and without, and banquets of stalled oxen where there is care and hatred -- ay, and kindness and friendship too, along with the feast. It does not follow that all men are honest because they are poor; and I have

1. Baker, op. cit., VII, 369.

> known some who were friendly and generous although they had plenty of money. There are some great landlords who do not grind down their tenants; there are actually bishops who are not hypocrites; there are Liberal men even among the Whigs, and the Radicals themselves are not all Aristocrats at heart.[2]

Like Pendennis, The Newcomes was written in many places, abroad and at home, and with the interruption of the strictures of actual physical pain. Like Pendennis, it is autobiographical in many details, adding Thackeray's experience with art to the spheres of school, law, and journalism. Perhaps because the story drags in the middle, perhaps because the characters and situations are of a now familiar type, perhaps because the asides to the reader are more numerous than ever, perhaps because the author wrote frankly to his mother,--

> .... this is not written for glory but for quite as good an object, namely, money, which will profit the children more than reputation when there's an end of me and money and reputation are alike pretty indifferent,[3]--

a few critics find The Newcomes inferior, and one has gone so far as to declare it "unreadable," "written for cash."[4] In Thackeray's own time, it was the most popular of his books. "There is something to please everybody, and little to displease anyone," Saintsbury wrote.[5] To Stephenson, The Newcomes is indicative of the recovery of faith by the

2. The Newcomes, p. 5.
3. Dodds, op. cit., 192-3.
4. William Lyon Phelps. The Advance Of The English Novel, pp. 112-13.
5. Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 209.

modern world as well as by the author.[6] Dodds places it with Vanity Fair as "greatest in scope and variety" and, pointing out "the firmer grasp of character," "shrewder observation," "sharper satire," and "deeper humanity," declares it to contain the "balance of all that is best in Thackeray and least of what is faulty."[7]

The asides to the reader are not irrelevancies, but "an artistic extension of idea," Thackeray's peculiar method of "oblique characterization to imply qualities hard to put into words."[8] Such a "digression" is the soliloquy after the demise of Lady Kew. It integrates all the foregoing scattered items and fixes the character as a whole:

> Shall we, too, while the coffin yet rests on the outer earth's surface, enter the chapel whither these void remains of our dear sister departed are borne by the smug undertaker's gentlemen, and pronounce an elegy over that bedizened box of corruption? .... But to live to fourscore years, and be found dancing among the idle virgins! to have had near a century of allotted time, and then to be called away from the giddy notes of a Mayfair fiddle! To have to yield your roses too, and then drop out of the bony clutch of your old fingers a wreath that came from a Parisian bandbox! .... Here is one who reposes after a long feast where no love has been; after girlhood without kindly maternal nurture; marriage without affection; matronhood without its precious griefs and joys; after fourscore years of lonely vanity.[9]

6. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 17 and p. 185.
7. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 193-94.
8. Ibid., p. 201.
9. The Newcomes, II, 183-84.

If the story drags, it is because it has been forgotten by the author in his absorption with the characters. To a young lady who politely inquired one morning if he had had a good night, Thackeray answered, "How could I with Colonel Newcome making a fool of himself as he has done?"[10] The effect of this concern with his creations was to immerse the reader so completely in learning to know people that he too forgets about plot.[11] A lack supplied with a better plenty need not be deplored.

Thackeray's technique in characterization in The Newcomes differs from that of the novels previous only in the strength and sureness developed by practice. Again he claimed, during composition, that "the characters once created lead me and I follow where they direct. I cannot tell the events that wait on Ethel and Clive...."[12] The tensions for final crises are created by setting at work the delicate forces of attraction and repulsion.[13] The Colonel's nobility attracts Ethel's; his idealism repels her worldliness. Rosey's good nature attracts Clive; his independence of mind repels her hypnotic submission to her mother. These are the figures in the foreground of a "realistic, unmitigated, relentless, true picture of the grinding out of character through ordeal."[14]

10. Stephenson, op. cit., 159.
11. Dodds, op. cit., p. 196.
12. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 159.
13. Dodds, op. cit., p. 196.
14. Baker, op. cit., VII, 370.

The revelation of character by selection of the right detail and in great scenes does not suffer from repetition even though the types are the same and certain individuals reappear from other novels. There is no copying of Becky and Miss Crawley in the crisis between Ethel Newcome and Lady Kew at the Congress of Baden when Ethel confronts her grandmother with the letter revealing Lord Kew's past.

There is no failing of vigor, either, in the scenes that show the Colonel in the Cave of Harmony denouncing a ribald song, Clive at the banquet table dashing a glass of claret in his cousin's face, Lady Clara in hysterical fits with a nasty bruise on her face, and Mrs. Mackenzie berating Clive and the Colonel with bestial cruelty. But in none of these strong situations is Thackeray so close to the height of his power in character fixation as in the tender, unaffected description of the Colonel's death at Grey Friars:

> At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and 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 The Master.[15]

The theme, still dwelling on "Which of us is happy in this world?" is softened by a new note of endurance and

15. The Newcomes, II, 421.

forgiveness, "His will be done."[16]

The social world to which the main characters belong is, again, the borderline between the upper middle class and the aristocracy. The satire points more emphatically than ever at the "tawdry ambitions and mean envies" of the rich bourgeosie bent on bargaining their children for titles, and of the old aristocracy willing to dilute noble blood to make fortunes in the same market.[17]

These loveless contracts and their resultant misery affect all the principals and many of the minor characters in this drama of daily life. Clive, whose misery with the Campaigner would never have been occasioned had not Ethel forsaken him to enter into her grandmother's schemes for a "proper" alliance; Barnes, who brought Clara Pulleyn terror, divorce and disgrace with the fortune for which Lady Kew and Lord Dorkling drove her to him; and even the lonely Colonel, whose one love affair was not with his wife but with Madame de Florac, -- all these were parties to such bargains. Lady Kew boasted of having made the marriage between her daughter, Lady Ann, over whom she tyrannized, and Mr. Brian Newcome, whom she despised.

> 'Sir Brian Newcome,' she would say, 'is one of the most stupid and respectable of men; Ann is clever, but has not a grain of common sense. They make a very well assorted couple.'[18]

16. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 159.
17. Dodds, op. cit., p. 198.
18. The Newcomes, I, 114.

It was she who proposed the schemes which inspired her granddaughter, Ethel, at the Water-Colour Exhibitions, to reason:

> 'I think, grandmamma .... we young ladies in the world, when we are exhibiting, ought to have little green tickets pinned on our backs, with Sold written on them; it would prevent trouble and any future haggling, you know. Then at the end of the season the owner would come to carry us home.'[19]

That evening, the intrepid Ethel actually appeared at dinner with one of those green tickets pinned in the front of her white muslin frock and explained to her father, "I am No. 46 in the Exhibition of the Gallery of Painters in Water-colours."[20]

The French marriage de convenance, also founded on obedience to elders rather than on love, though not contracted out of English greed for money and position, is shown to result in no less evil. The Duchesse d' Ivry is a horrible example. At sixteen she was taken out of a convent to wed the Duc, a widower more than sixty years old, whose two sons and a grandson had been killed and who determined to perpetuate the line which had furnished queens to Europe. The Duchesse, satisfied for a while with her coronet, before long discovered that she was a "great, unappreciated soul." [21] From that point, she pursued all sorts of mischief in subtle and scandalous opposition to her husband and in unscrupulous satisfaction of her vanity. She

19. Ibid., I, 299.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., I, 336.

has the wiles of Blanche Amory and some of Becky Sharp's wit, but the lengths of wickedness to which she drew these are unmatched by her literary antecedents.

The Memoirs Of The Newcomes are built around three plots of parallel interest, the career of Colonel Newcome, the course of the loves of Clive and Ethel, and the history of Lady Clara and Barnes. In two generations of Newcomes and among the several branches of that family, Thackeray traces the subtle changes in affection and the growths of little hatreds caused by the impact of character upon character in an infinitely complex world.[22]

Clive Newcome, the "hero" of the story, is another of Thackeray's ambitious but idle youths. Some explanation of his weakness is hinted in the pictures of Clive at Grey Friars where his books, except the Peerage, remain in the background while his attention is engaged with tips, raspberry tarts, black eyes, and the rumshrub and cigars smuggled to him by a devoted little hunchback, J. J. Ridley,--where the formula of interrogation, when a new boy came to school, used to be: "What's your name? Who's your father? and How much money have you got?"[23] Though Thackeray's memories of Charterhouse are mellowed here in the Colonel's reverent reminiscing, his insistence on the deficiency of the public school in providing boys with good

22. Baker, op. cit., VII, 369.
23. The Newcomes, I, 37.

habits, a sound education, and an honest means of livelihood is still clear.

Clive begins his life in the world as a handsome, conceited young dandy, much like Arthur Pendennis, but more manly and truer in his affections. He, too, has an uncle for a mentor, but Colonel Newcome is as naive in his efforts to establish his nephew as Major Pendennis was worldly wise. Clive, with more money at his disposal, has none of Pen's glibness of tongue in the drawing-room. Pen, with the Major's aid, overcame the disdain which his uncle's circle of society had attached to his profession of journalism, but Clive, half-ashamed of his art himself, suffered absolute defeat from his relatives' contempt for painters.

Aunt Maria Hobson refused to let Clive associate with his cousins because

> 'He lives with artists, with all sorts of eccentric people. Our children are bred on quite a different plan. Hobson will succeed his father in the bank, and dear Samuel, I trust, will go into the Church.'[24]

Uncle Hobson concurs, though he used to like "that boy."

> 'But since he has taken this mad-cap freak of turning painter, there is no understanding the chap. Did you ever see such a set of fellows as the Colonel had got together at his party the other night? Dirty chaps in velvet coats and beards?' '.... Confound it, why doesn't my brother set him up in some respectable business? I ain't proud.'

24. Ibid., p. 200.

'.... I don't care what a fellow is if he is a good fellow. But a painter! hang it -- a painter's no trade at all --'[25]

Old Major Pendennis, from a sphere just above Aunt and Uncle Hobson's, confides to his literary nephew,

'Nothing could show a more deplorable ignorance of the world than poor Newcome supposing his son could make such a match as that with his cousin. Is it true that he is going to make his son an artist? I don't know what the dooce the world is coming to. An artist! By Gad, in my time a fellow would as soon have thought of making his son a hairdresser, or a pastry-cook, by Gad.'[26]

"Poor Newcome" himself felt secretly that his son was demeaning himself in pursuing his art, but, since Clive was not good at mathematics, and since the army was a bad place for a boy in peace time, the Colonel loyally defended his son's choice.

'He shall follow his own heart; as long as his calling is honest, it becomes a gentleman; and if he were to take a fancy to play on the fiddle -- actually on the fiddle -- I shouldn't object,'[27]

he replied to the Reverend Honeyman when that prelate remarked with bland dignity,

'My dear Clive, there are degrees in society which we must respect. You surely cannot think of being a professional artist. Such a profession is very well for your young protege: but for you --'[28]

25. Ibid., p. 201.
26. Ibid., p. 249.
27. Ibid., p. 137.
28. Ibid., p. 136.

Those secret fears were plain facts to worldly-bred Ethel Newcome who added her warning to all the others:

> 'You will order Clive not to sell his pictures, won't you? I know it is not wrong, but your son might look higher than to be an artist. It is a rise for Mr. Ridley, but a fall for him. An artist, an organist, a pianist, all these are very good people, but, you know, not de notre monde, and Clive ought to belong to it.'[29]

What came of Clive's defiance of society's stand? He did not apply himself hard enough to win the recognition accorded genius when genius has made its fortune. He hung between the idle life of a dandy and the industrious regime of an artist. He was sent away from Ethel repeatedly by Lady Kew whose fury at his pursuit of her favorite grandchild was unabated even by a piteous application from Colonel Newcome offering to add his entire fortune to Clive's fine person and qualities.

> Lady Kew wondered what the impudence of the world would come to. An artist propose for Ethel! One of her footmen might propose next ....[30]

Lord Kew's advice (a clever comic adaptation of Iago's to Roderigo) was in the right direction,

> 'Can you count purses with Sultan Farintosh? .... Put money in your purse. A brave young heart, all courage and love and honour! Put money in thy purse -- t'other coin don't pass in the market -- at least where old Lady Kew has the stall.'[31]

29. Ibid., p. 296.
30. Ibid., II, 151.
31. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

But the Colonel's fortune fell far short of Farintosh's and Farintosh had a marquisate to top his charms.

It was not that Lady Kew and her kind could not appreciate art. At the Water-Colour Exhibitions, she appears as "an excellent judge of works of art," hobbling from frame to frame, murmuring delightedly, "What splendid colour; what a romantic gloom; what a flowing pencil and dexterous hand!"[32] But she was mindful of the distinction between the picture and the painter as between the work and the servant.

So Clive gave up longing after Ethel and, to please his father, compromised to wed pretty Rosey Mackenzie, whose pre-nuptial enthusiasm for his painting wore off as she perceived how it distracted her husband's attention from his wife. Seeking the Colonel's sympathy against Clive's neglect, she set up a sad barrier between the father and son. So much misery comes to Clive in his wretched, lonely attempt to be dutiful to a jealous, vacuous wife and a shrewish mother-in-law, that Thackeray's epilogue to Pendennis's narrative rewarding him with Ethel, after Rosey's death, is a welcome relief even though it is only as real as Fable-land.

Ethel Newcome is the only woman of Thackeray's novels to whom the position of heroine may be assigned without reservations, "the only heroine whose beauty of character

32. Ibid., I, 298-99.

outweighs her blemishes."[33] She combines the attractiveness, self-possession, wit and verve of Becky Sharp and of the famous Beatrix from Esmond with the warm charity, gentleness and sympathy of Amelia Sedley, Rachel Esmond, Laura Bell and Helen Pendennis.[34] Self-esteem and dignity complement her nobility. She was, at times, too imperious and too critical:

> The young women were frightened at her sarcasm. She seemed to know what fadaises they whispered to their partners as they paused in the waltzes.... No wonder that the other Mayfair nymphs were afraid of this severe Diana, whose looks were so cold, and whose arrows were so keen.[35]

And she was vain of her splendid success at flirtation: "it was such fun taking away the gentlemen of Mary Queen of Scots' Court from her: such capital fun!"[36] But her faults save her from unreality and are self-admitted with a frankness which adds to her charm. She loved Lord Kew most after his just reproof to which she bent her head and acknowledged, "You are very brave and generous, Frank, and I am captious and wicked."[37] To Clive, to the Marquis of Farintosh, and in a final burst to Madame de Florac, she deplored her position in life with a humility that overpowered her haughtiness,

33. Baker, op. cit., pp. 371-72.
34. Dodds, op. cit., pp. 203-4.
35. The Newcomes, I, 253.
36. Ibid., p. 362.
37. Ibid., p. 368.

> 'Grandmamma has a fortune, which she says I am to have; since then they have insisted on my being with her. She is very clever, you know; she is kind too in her way; but she cannot live out of society. And I, who pretend to revolt, I like it too: and I, who rail and scorn flatterers -- oh, I like admiration! I am pleased when the women hate me, and the young men leave them for me .... I love beautiful dresses; I love fine jewels; I love a great name and a fine house -- oh, I despise myself, when I think of these things!'[38]

But her high spirit, subdued for a while, would break forth whenever affectation, insincerity, dullness or pomposity confronted it. Though she agreed, for the sake of her younger brothers and sisters, to Lady Kew's schemes for her marriage to title and money, she dared to flaunt and persecute her tyrannical grandmother with rebellious conduct and accusations:

> 'Oh .... what a life ours is, and how you buy and sell, and haggle over your children! .... Had he money, it would be different. You would receive him and welcome him, and hold out your hands to him; but he is only a poor painter, and we, forsooth, are bankers in the city; and he comes among us on sufferance, like those concert-singers whom mamma treats with so much politeness, and who go down and have supper by themselves. Why should they not be as good as we are?'[39]

Behind Ethel's apparent worldliness, lay a serene integrity which survived severe tests. She yielded her first lover in obedience to her family, renounced her second after receiving a malicious letter revealing the wildness of his

38. Ibid., II, 104.
39. Ibid., I, 351.

youth, and dismissed her last suitor because of the disgrace of her brother's divorce. She devoted herself to the care of Barnes's children and bore silently the estrangement of her uncle, the Colonel, who had loved her so generously until her rejection of Clive and pursuit of Farintosh made her appear cruel, selfish and vain even to his kind eyes.

The Newcomes is conspicuous not because of its heroine, great as she is, but for another innocent victim of Victorian compromise, who is even more extraordinarily brought to life in this novel. He is Colonel Newcome "who, as an English gentleman, has no equal in English fiction."[40] "If the whole race of gentlemen should disappear," Robert Louis Stevenson remarked, "the type could be restored from this one figure."[41] He has no prototype in the other Thackeray novels and his likeness is not to be found in the society of this century. Baker holds that he is too like his boyhood heroes, Sir Charles Grandison, Sir Roger de Coverley, and Don Quixote, for a critical age; that his impossible goodness has no place in the realistic art of the novel.[42] But the chivalrous Colonel was not perfect. He had the faults peculiar to the stamp of his character. His excessive desire for Clive's happiness led him into ruinous meddling. His hostility to Ethel and the extent of his vindictiveness toward Barnes were unreasonable. At the height of his good

40. Anthony Trollope, "William Makepeace Thackeray," The Cornhill Magazine, IX, 136.
41. Stephenson, op. cit., p. 166.
42. Baker, op. cit., VII, 373.

fortune, he grew ostentatious in his hospitality and presumed a knowledge of business and politics which ended in a drastic proof of his naïveté. He lacks the wit to understand Clive's taste for art and his young friends' shocking judgments in literature. But his large humility, innocence, trustfulness, generosity and courage so dwarf his weaknesses as to leave undisturbed the impression of ideal beauty of character.

This new figure among Thackeray's types of character becomes the object of a new point of satire when he enters the sphere of business in hopes of making a fortune for his son. His methods are the blunt, direct tactics of the army; his guiding principles, the simple code of honor which sufficed for his life among his gentlemen friends of the East Indian service; his means, the simple act of gathering deposits for a newly-formed bank. He had that total ignorance of the possibility of sudden and complete ruin which characterizes many of the aristocrats of Thackeray's works. (For though the Colonel knew how dubious was the account of his ancestry in the Peerage, he was satisfied to take advantage of the Newcome listing there and of the privileges of his military rank and was pleased to consider himself a "gentleman.")

Fancy this simple man entering into the field where shrewdness, punctuality, tireless hours over ledgers, endless conferences, perpetual alertness in and out of office, and the absolute separation of personal feeling from business

practice had made typical, successful bankers out of Hobson, Brian, and Barnes Newcome!

The early nineteenth century was a period of speculation and swindling of innocents. To satirize the get-rich-quick schemes and to note the dishonest traffic in which a noble Englishman might happily engage, Thackeray created the Bundelcund Bank.

> Founded, as the prospectus announced, at a time when all private credit was shaken by the failure of the great Agency Houses, of which the downfall had carried dismay and ruin throughout the presidency, the B. B. had been established on the only sound principle of commercial prosperity -- that of association. The native capitalists, headed by the great firm of Rummun Loll and Co., of Calcutta, had largely embarked in the B. B., and the officers of the two services and the European mercantile body of Calcutta had been invited to take shares in an institution which to merchants, native and English, civilians and military men, was alike advantageous and indispensable. How many young men of the latter services had been crippled for life by the ruinous cost of agencies, of which the profits to the agents themselves were so enormous! The shareholders of the B. B. were their own agents; and the greatest capitalist in India, as well as the youngest ensign in service, might invest at the largest and safest premium, and borrow at the smallest interest, by becoming, according to his means, a shareholder in the B. B. [43]

These sweeping promises were actually set into operation, for the correspondents of the Bundelcund Bank found diverse means of making profit with their capital.

43. The Newcomes, II, 119.

> With China they did an immense opium trade, of which the profits were so great, that it was only in private sittings of the B. B. managing committee that the details and accounts of these operations could be brought forward .... With New South Wales they carried on a vast trade in wool, supplying that great colony with goods, which their London agents enabled them to purchase in such a way as to give them the command of the market. As if to add to their prosperity, copper mines were discovered on lands in the occupation of the B. Banking Company, which gave the most astonishing returns .... The order from Birmingham for idols alone (made with their copper, and paid with their wool) was enough to make the Low Church party in England cry out; and a debate upon this subject actually took place in the House of Commons, of which the effect was to send up the shares of the Bundelcund Banking Company very considerably upon the London Exchange.[44]

Into this bank the Colonel poured all his savings and the savings of all those of his friends who trusted the bank because they trusted the Colonel. It did flourish and paid remarkable dividends so steadily that even the wary house of Hobson Brothers became its agents. Had the Colonel had the sense and heart to sell out at the first threat of insecurity as did his wise brothers, he could have averted the failure into which his enthusiasm and loyalty plunged his family and friends. For one day,

> .... the great Indian merchant who was at the head of the Bundelcund Banking Company's office at Calcutta, suddenly died of cholera .... it was announced throughout Calcutta that but 800 rupees were left in the treasury of the B. B. C. to meet engagements to the amount of four lakhs then immediately due ....

44. Ibid., pp. 119-20.

> When the accounts of that ghastly bankruptcy arrived from Calcutta, it was found that the merchant prince Rummun Loll owed the B. B. C. twenty-five lakhs of rupees .... that one of the auditors of the bank, the generally esteemed Charley Condor (a capital fellow, famous for his good dinners and for playing low comedy characters at the Chowringhee Theatre) was indebted to the bank in £90,000; and also it was discovered that the revered Baptist Bellman, Chief Registrar of the Calcutta Tape and Sealing-Wax Office (a most valuable and powerful amateur preacher who had converted two natives, and whose serious soirees were thronged at Calcutta), had helped himself to £73,000 more.[45]

Of what consolation now was the Colonel's past kindliness toward Clive, Rosey and Mrs. Mackenzie, his gnerosity to Ridley, his tolerance of Bohemian Fred Bayham? Away went his seat in Parliament; away went Rosey's chariots and horses, her jewels and gewgaws. From the wreckage, the Colonel had salvaged only his own stainless honor. With this he could not calm Rosey's hysterics nor silence her mother's abusive rage. The test of suffering separates the true from the false; and Clive, Ethel, and Léonore de Florac come to his side when revenge and pride are washed away with his fair weather friends in the flood of humiliation which overwhelmed the most gallant of English gentlemen.

Beside the warmheartedness of the Colonel, who failed, Thackeray sketched the mean spirit of Barnes Newcome, who succeeded, (in business), by carefully cultivating only those good qualities which are certain to pay dividends.

45. Ibid., pp. 332-33.

> Here was a young fellow as keen as the oldest curmudgeon. . . . He thought his life a most lucky and reputable one. . . . Barnes Newcome never missed going to church or dressing for dinner. He never kept a tradesman waiting for his money. He seldom drank too much, and never was late for business, or huddled over his toilet, however brief had been his sleep, or severe his headache. In a word, he was as scrupulously whited as any sepulchre in the whole bills of mortality.[46]

In his person, the exemplary, industrious young man of business replaces the idle dandy as the object of Thackeray's satire of Victorian youth. His efficiency as a banker does not save him from a cowardly terror of the Colonel's bamboo cane and of Jack Belsize whose sweetheart he married and cruelly abused. His hypocrisy, ridiculed by Monsieur de Florac, --

> 'How droll you English are! Did you not see how that little Barnes, as soon as he knew my title of Prince, changed his manner and became all respect toward me?'[47]

was climaxed during Barnes's campaign for a seat in Parliament when the newspapers announced:

> Sir Barnes Newcome Newcome, Bart., proposes to give two lectures, on Friday the 23rd, and Friday the 30th, instant. No. 1. The Poetry of Childhood: Doctor Watts, Mrs. Barbauld, Jane Taylor. No. 2. The Poetry of Womanhood, and the Affections: Mrs. Hemans, L. E. L.[48]

After the removal by policemen of a factory girl with two ragged children from a pew at the church where the

46. Ibid., I, 83-84.
47. Ibid., pp. 401-2.
48. Ibid., II, 287-88.

Baronet was to be married had revived the scandal of his early youth, and after the elopement of his wife and the subsequent divorce had completed his public disgrace, the lecture scene looks improbable. But Barnes has turned coat so often and so cooly during the course of events that it is not hard to accept even this of him.

The odious Barnes, however, was not the real enemy of the Colonel's chivalrous dreams, for he was only nominally the Head of the House of Newcome, remaining subject, as had his father, to Countess Dowager Lady Kew, the "antique tyrannical grandmother," "best of all Thackeray's masterly, strong-willed, worldly, elderly matriarchs."[49] Born Louisa Joanna Gaunt, she was the sister of the great Lord Steyne and "looked uncommonly like that lamented marquis" when balked or confronted with any object hateful to her."[50] Other likenesses are manifest in Lady Kew, who was subject to rapid changes of countenance. At one instance, she might easily be taken for Iago's daughter.[51] As affairs progress, she begins

> .... to look more and more like the wicked fairy of the stories, who is not invited to the Princess's Christening Feast, [with] this advantage over her likeness, that she was invited everywhere; though how she, at her age, could fly about to so many parties, unless she was a fairy, no one could say.[52]

49. Dodds, op. cit., p. 197.
50. The Newcomes, I, 415.
51. Ibid., p. 414.
52. Ibid., II, 28.

She was much higher in nature and rank than any of the other members of the family.

> 'Except the Gaunts, the Howards and one or two more, there is scarcely any good blood in England. You are lucky in sharing some of mine.'[53]

Accordingly, she ruled with an iron hand. When Clive, the "poor painter," called to visit Ethel, he was likely to find, in place of her flushing cheeks and bright eyes,

> .... the parchment-covered features and well known hooked beak of the old Countess of Kew. To support the glances from beneath the bushy black eyebrows on each side of that promontory was no pleasant matter. The whole family cowered under Lady Kew's eyes and nose, and she ruled by force of them. It was only Ethel whom these awful features did not utterly subdue and dismay.[54]

Lady Kew is the clearest personification of the social world at which Thackeray's snob satire was aimed. The nonsensical obedience which her bad temper commanded becomes a comical rebuke to mankind when the author notes, "Whereas for you and me, who have the tempers of angels .... nobody cares whether we are pleased or not.[55] But the accusation against Victorian sense of value almost loses its spirit of laughter at the family Congress of Baden, over which Lady Kew was to preside for the disposition of her grandchildren. This assembly evoked Thackeray's most scornful outcry against British virtue:

53. Ibid., p. 150.
54. Ibid., I, 326.
55. Ibid., 353-54.

> That tariff of British virtue is wonderfully organized. Heaven help the society which made its laws! Gnats are shut out of its ports, or are not admitted without scrutiny and repugnance, whilst herds of camels are let in. The law professes to exclude some .... articles of baggage, which are yet smuggled openly under the eyes of winking officers, and worn every day without shame. Shame! What is shame? Virtue is very often shameful according to the English social constitution, and shame honorable. Truth, if yours happens to differ from your neighbor's provokes your friend's coldness, your mother's tears, the world's persecution. Love is not to be dealt in save under restrictions which kill its sweet healthy free commerce. Sin in man is so light that scarce the fine of a penny is imposed; while for woman it is so heavy that no repentance can wash it out. .... You proud matrons in your Mayfair markets, have you never seen a virgin sold, or sold one? Have you never heard of a poor wayfarer fallen among robbers, and not a Pharisee to help him? of a poor woman fallen more sadly yet, abject in repentance and tears, and a crowd to stone her?[56]

For each generalization made here, there is a character and scene of illustration in The Newcomes. The slave trade whisked Ethel away from Clive to be dangled and danced before titles, and tore Clara Pulleyn from Jack Belsize to serve Barnes Newcome. Methodistical Lady Walham's piety provoked her Anglican mother-in-law's persecution. (Thackeray confused sincerity and detachment from the world with religious truth in his sketches of Established Church, Methodist, and Catholic worship, but since the distinction of doctrine was not in the consciousness of the characters

56. Ibid., pp. 297-98.

he depicted, his accusation is an appropriate mistake). The early sins of Barnes and Lord Kew cost them no loss of face in society, but Mrs. Delacey and Clara Pulleyn, Barnes's suffering victims, must remain social outcasts. Even the Duchesse d'Ivry, for all her wealth and rank, is shudderingly turned away from and referred to as "that woman." The Colonel falls among robbers and is stripped, while those who have benefitted from his largesse look on. And behind every piece of this mischief, sits Lady Kew, directly or indirectly responsible for its instigation.

But along with her mistaken notions as to how happiness can be secured, Lady Kew has some redeeming kindness, a little true nobility, and the virtue of a real regard for the welfare of her children and grandchildren. The other Campaigner of The Newcomes has no alleviating attributes. Mrs. Mackenzie's utter lack of refinement of mind, her dishonesty and her brutality make Lady Kew charming by comparison. Behind the bedroom door, this she-demon would slap her lackadaisical daughter, stamp on her little feet if they refused to enter slippers much too small, and lace poor Rosey so tight as nearly to choke her.[57] In company, she appeared with her arm around pretty Rosey's waist and with perpetual praises for that darling's goodness and gaiety. Ogling and artful before she has caught Clive for Rosey, she relaxes her pretensions as soon as she gets a hold on

57. Ibid., p. 233.

the reins in Clive's household. She is pleasant and agreeable enough, though naturally domineering, while the Colonel's good luck in the Bundelcund Bank supplies her with every luxury she orders for herself and Rosey. But after the bank failure, her rapacious, bitter nature is given full vent. Life for Clive is made one scene after another of rage, sarcasm, and false martyrdom. Thackeray's humor is of the grimmest sort when he shows the broken old Colonel answering tirades like this:

> 'He who has squandered his own money -- he who has squandered the money of that darling helpless child -- compose yourself, Rosey, my love! -- has completed the disgrace of the family, by his present mean and unworthy -- yes, I say mean and unworthy and degraded conduct. Oh my child, my blessed child! to think that your husband's father should have come to a workhouse!'[58]

with a sly laugh and the whispered remark to Arthur Pendennis, "between ourselves, some women are the deuce when they are angry, sir."[59] This was his only rebuke to the woman whose deceitfulness caused him to lead his son into this infernal torture, whose anger put his harried mind into a stupor, and whose tantrums finally drove her delicate daughter into a fit of hysterics and fever from which she never recovered.

Sham and affectation appear in clerical garb, also, in The Newcomes, in the satirical portrait of Reverend Charles

58. Ibid., II, 402.
59. Ibid., p. 408.

Honeyman. "No man in London understood the ring business or the pocket-handkerchief business better, or smothered his emotions more beautifully."[60] He had a gift for extracting large offerings from the faithful, yet he had to be rescued from debtor's prison when the indulgence of his refined and luxurious tastes too far exceeded his income as incumbent of Lady Whittlesea's Chapel. When the brisk Colonel invited his Reverend brother-in-law to breakfast at eight or nine, Mr. Honeyman, with a sigh, agreed to nine, for

> .... The incumbent of Lady Whittlesea's chapel seldom rose before eleven. For, to tell the truth, no French abbé of Louis XV was more lazy and luxurious, and effeminate, than our polite bachelor preacher.[61]

Entertaining scenes show Honeyman rhapsodizing gracefully in the pulpit, feeding daintily on lobster at his club, drinking tea at society's soirees, resting in his apartment with a French novel or fluttery notes from female admirers of his flock, and finally, after a desperate decline of popularity, introducing to the Anglican service, the talent and technique of the theatre, to bring back the fickle followers who had tired of his lugubrious sermons. To point out more plainly the advance of sentimentalism in religion, Thackeray sketched beside Honeyman the contrasting figure of the ascetic Saint Pedro of Alcantara.[62] In

60. Ibid., I, 85.
61. Ibid., p. 88.
62. Ibid., pp. 119-122.

these descriptions, Thackeray's graver satire gives place to the pure comic spirit, for it is impossible to frown over an incongruity presented in details so cleverly selected and paralleled.

Reverend Honeyman's sister who takes lodgers but treats her servants and tradesmen with just the right degree of aristocratic hauteur, illustrates that variety of vanity which clings, in self-deception, to relics of past splendor and which feeds, subconsciously, on the principle, "The true pleasure in life is to live with your inferiors."[63]

The minor roles in The Newcomes are scarcely distinguishable as such, for even the characters who appear infrequently are given such complete development and so specific a purpose that it is difficult to separate them from the principals. Typical of the French nation and its manners, the unique Paul de Florac and his saintly mother, Léonore, atone for the vanity of the Duc and Duchesse d'Ivry and for the violence of Victor Cabasse de Castilonnes. Lords Kew, Highgate, and Farintosh adequately represent the young nobility of England. Lady Ann and Maria Newcome, married to the brothers, Sir Brian and Hobson, picture the difference in social station between the families of a first-born son and of a younger brother. The assembly of scholars at Maria's board fails to fill the gap left by titled heads, whose carriages are all at Lady Ann's door.

63. Ibid., p. 96.

Rummun Loll, Indian merchant posing as a prince, furnishes a satirical slant at the London girls who hang about his fake highness, dangle their golden curls on his shoulder, and worship the precarious fortune he has amassed by very doubtful means. J. J. Ridley, James Binnie, and Fred Bayham are very true-to-life associates of Clive, the Colonel and Honeyman, who, knowing their man and his world intimately enough to prevent the catastrophe toward which he is headed, are nevertheless helpless to deflect the course of events.

The panorama is filled in, this time, with crowds of artists from the studios of Smee and Gandish, the Colonel's cronies from the Oriental Club, the belles and dandies of society's balls, the workers and voters of Newcome Borough, governesses and nurses, poor relations, and tale-bearing servants.

Sir George Tufto and Dobbin return for a moment from Vanity Fair, and four of the principal characters of that novel are resurrected in a conversation between a tall grey-headed Englishman who knew Sir Rawdon Crawley and Clive Newcome whose report shows the indomitable Becky still in character and wearing the title denied to her after the catastrophe of Vanity Fair:

> 'He [Sir Rawdon Crawley] was in Gown Boys, I know,' says the boy; 'succeeded his uncle Pitt, fourth Baronet. I don't know how his mother -- her who wrote the hymns, you know, and goes to Mr. Honeyman's chapel -- comes to be Rebecca, Lady Crawley. His father, Colonel Rawdon Crawley, died

> at Coventry Island, in August 182--, and his uncle, Sir Pitt, not till September here. I remember, we used to talk about it at Grey Friars, when I was quite a little chap; and there were bets whether Crawley, I mean the young one, was a Baronet or not.'[64]

Captain Costigan reappears from Pendennis, more tipsy than ever, singing the ribald song that brought the fury of Colonel Newcome down upon the Cave of Harmony. Arthur and Laura Pendennis enjoy considerable prominence in their idealistic home which becomes a haven for Ethel, Clara and Clive. Major Pen speaks his last worldly advice, admits that Laura's way of life is best after all, and passes away inconspicuously. Friend Warrington makes a good match for jovial Fred Bayham. Lord Steyne lives again in his sister, Lady Kew.

The Duc d'Ivry's loyalty to the Bourbons and his kinsman's cheerful oath of fidelity to Louis Phillipe lend the authenticity of historical background to the verisimilitude of the characters of The Newcomes. Current superstition and curiosity about Popery and Jesuitry and scorn for Methodistry among the members of the Established Church add further weight to their reality.

Thackeray may have had some prescience that this was to be his last complete and indisputably great novel of nineteenth century manners, so crowded is it with people

64. Ibid., p. 142.

from all walks of life and with ideas about these people. His satire has grown more serious and his pictures a little darker, but his world is more surely the very one in which he himself walked and talked. For the poor mortals, none of whom are happy in this world, he has added a Fable-land for the happy endings predestined by the settlement of characters and the turn of events just before its boundary is crossed.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: SOCIAL GENERALIZATIONS DERIVED FROM A STUDY OF THACKERAY'S CHARACTERS

Though Thackeray was possessed of the "vast kinetic power" and his works of the "crowded accomplishment" typical of the Victorian age, in many respects he does not fit the Victorian frame.[1] He makes but vague reference to the religious-philosophical-scientific upheavals of the day. The Oxford Movement is noted in a single obscure passage in Pendennis.[2] Thackeray's simple faith was not disturbed by the despair that settled upon the Victorians' inability to reconcile intelligence with belief. Indifferent to matters of dogma, he handled the problems of creed by impartially including in his panorama, both earnest and hypocritical representatives from all the sects prominent in English society.

The Thackeray novels are not built on the political dissensions or economic reforms which inspired most of the great writers of this age. There is an underlying awareness in his works of the gigantic growth of manufacture, of the

1. Dodds, "Thackeray In The Victorian Frame," Sewanee Review, XLVIII, 466.
2. Wells, op. cit., p. 185.

resultant increase in urban population, of demands for improvements in housing and sanitation, of the rise of popular education, of the expansion of commerce, of the bills for home-rule, of the pleas for Catholic Emancipation, and of the agitation for the extension of suffrage. His characters are concerned with these problems more or less, according to their personal station and means of livelihood, but they never become rabid revolutionists nor ever exhibit signs of inner disturbance at the inequalities and miseries about them. Thackeray, in broad terms, was for justice and against oppression. He was a supporter of policies rather than of men. To the solution of these urgent problems of the day, he contributed an awakening of self-knowledge in man and in society. His remedy was right though it was remote and slow, on the scale of eternity rather than of expediency.

In his conformity to the standard of fitness to be read aloud in the family, Thackeray is completely Victorian. Though he was plainer on sex situations than many of his contemporaries and though he repeatedly expressed annoyance at the restrictions demanded by his age, his selection of details for the scene between Becky and Steyne and for that of Pen's affair with Fanny Bolton was the result, not of forced adherence to custom, but of his own character composition as a Victorian. Allowing Pendennis his chastity in the face of damaging evidence was not hypocrisy, as many critics insist, but the author's true respect for the

prayerfulness and purity of the mother and foster-sister whose influence he intended should avail this young man in just such crises.

Though Thackeray draws the veil over the act of sin, he is none the less conscious of its effectiveness in the world of high society. His characters picture the triumphs of self-indulgence over feminine modesty, of rage over patience, of cruelty over kindheartedness, of rebellion over obedience, of envy over resignation, of gambling and swindling over honest industry, of persistence in sin over repentance, in short, of compromise over integrity. These triumphs, however, are short-lived. Ultimate peace and happiness are awarded consistently to the honest and courageous.

Often, the lovable and affectionate men and women in Thackeray's novels are allowed to look ridiculous or tiresome as they were in fact to their less loyal associates. Dobbin, loaded up with wraps from Sedley, Osborne, Amelia and Becky, and left with the check at Vauxhall for his pains to be near Amelia, is funny but pitiful too. Clive Newcome, begging invitations to great balls where, with good luck, he might have the pleasure of a single waltz with Ethel under the frowning watchfulness of Lady Kew, is scarcely less wistful. Amelia was admittedly foolish in her choice between Dobbin and George, and Helen and Laura tiresome in their exaggerated esteem of Pen and in their effusive affection for each other, but they are true

portraits of Victorian womanhood.

The "exchange of land barons for trade barons"[3] forms the central motive of Thackeray's novels of Victorian life. He sees in this overthrow, with wise amusement, the incongruity of vulgarly-bred merchants and their wives invading the social sphere of lords and ladies and of idle aristocrats intruding on the scene of highly-organized business. His foresight provided a few samples of successful merging of the two spheres in the children of mixed parentage, with the sensible provision that there is not yet any depth to their stability. Mr. Brian Newcome's marriage to Lady Ann, with Barnes and Ethel as resultant products, is his clearest illustration.

The old aristocracy of England appears at a ludicrous disadvantage in the persons of Lord Steyne, who must suffer a slap in the face from an inferior; Sir Pitt, who is taken for a footman by his new governess; stately Sir Charles Mirabel, who must wear for life an ornament from the theatre which the boyish Pendennis was persuaded to cast away; and Sir Francis Clavering, who cringed in the hands of two managers, one employed to save him from the other. More pitiful than these gentlemen of the nobility are the neglected or abused wives at Gaunt House, Queen's Crawley and Clavering Manor.

3. Wells, op. cit., p. 184.

The English clergy fared little better in the drawing-room dandy, Charles Honeyman, and sports enthusiast, Reverend Bute Crawley. The most earnest representative of the Established Church, Dr. Portman of Clavering St. Mary, lost his congregation to the Low Church Chapel of Ease because he would not sacrifice his love for the play and his rubber of whist.

The Middle Class loses its wit and its poise when it attempts to ape the dinners and balls of its social superiors. Aunt Maria Newcome's gloves are always dirty, though her carriage is as splendid as Lady Ann's. Lady Clavering has to suffer the insolence of her low-bred children even before company. Harry Foker's ineptness at conversation among the cultured exposes a lack of breeding otherwise well hidden under the wealth and munificence of his father's brewery. Blanche Amory just manages success in the social world only to lose her place for want of that fine aristocratic ability to discriminate among her admirers.

The proletariat, with the advantage of knowing all the secrets of their masters and mistresses, have the clearest chance for happiness in Thackeray's social scene. Having no pretenses to live up to, they may deal honestly and save their slender earnings. Sometimes they actually grow richer than their employers. When this happens, however, if they attempt to throw over their station for a higher one, Thackeray inevitably dooms them to failure. When

Charles Raggles, risen from footman to shopman, presumes to purchase a handsomely furnished apartment in Mayfair, he is promptly swindled out of his lodgings by the Rawdon Crawleys. Fanny Bolton, the porter's daughter, upset her placid happiness when she began to dream of being Mrs. Arthur Pendennis. Morgan, the obsequious valet, reduces himself to an absurdity when he presumes to tower over the Major.

The weaknesses which Thackeray points out in the social structure of the upper middle class tend to show that, with these people, living had become a pose rather than an application of principle. The harking back to the grand days of Mr. Fox and the adoption of the Liberal cause by the leading voices of the drawing-room had no conviction of the mind behind their opportuneness. Society's tastes in literature and art were the fads of the times rather than the objective judgments of thinking individuals. Since the estimation of a piece of work was artificial, sincere appreciation of its author was impossible, so, unless the journalist or artist had additional merits of the sort society could understand, he was relegated to a lower caste.

If the modest Amelia, Helen, and Laura are pushed off-stage by bold Becky, Blanche and the Duchesse d'Ivry, and if Ethel in a haughty rage steals the show from Ethel in meek renunciation, it is because this society found virtue dull and self-indulgence lively. Women who were good at pretense and at pushing their way were assured of a bevy

of admirers. To kiss their children tenderly on the promenade may have been their only attention to maternal duties, yet in society's eye they passed as fond mothers. A furious temper and back-biting tongue won more invitations than mild disinterestedness.

In a society with so shallow a sense of values, it is not surprising to find honest men imposed upon and dupes taken in by religious roguery. If school boys neglected their studies to pursue courses not mentioned in the curriculum, it was because society's ideal for young manhood was the dandy, and the military ranks the easiest entrance to popularity. Blood was better paid than brains. To have fought a duel to the death was to have established one's honor. The sowing of wild oats, so long as it did not incur any lasting penalties, was regarded as a desirable preparation for a manly life.

The Peerage was society's Bible. It was studied assiduously by the Campaigner, the man-about-town, the social climber, the young girl to be presented, the schoolboy, and even by the servants, for they were the best sources of information regarding the actual status of one's neighbor, and were often given the name of the family they served.

The Peerage was society's Bible; wealth and birth, its idols; and flattery, its code. If wit or learning were to win a place in the opera box or at the dinner table, it had first to assume the habiliments of luxury and idleness.

But behind the scenes, the actors were sorry and weary spectacles. Aristocracy donned its splendor only to impress visitors. Parliamentary peers were often mean little figures in private life. The British system of patronage permitted Lord Steyne to pay his debt of honor by conferring the Governorship of Coventry Island upon Rawdon Crawley, C.B., who, to merit the promotion, became at once a "distinguished Waterloo officer." British law put money into Barnes's pocket, when it granted his divorce, and heaped shame upon the outcast head of the wife he had criminally mistreated.

British commerce made fortunes abroad by capitalizing upon the innocence and ignorance of far-flung peoples. The British constitution provided prisons for debtors but no protection from loan sharks or creditors who systematically led their victims to ruin. The Established Church counted its success, by society's standard, in the number of titled heads in its pews; and with society's code, failed to touch the hearts below which had been brought to chapel not to lose their infamy or to find their God, but because society ordained that this was the thing to do.

Thackeray's faults as a novelist have been seized upon and embellished by critics since he himself first admitted that Pendennis dragged a little in the middle. His merits have not been so thoroughly appreciated. The life and abundance of his characters are inexhaustible fields of study; his constant humor, the reward of close acquaintance.

His understanding of human nature, his verisimilitude in character presentation, and his insistence on common sense place him with Fielding, his master, among the first-ranking humorists of English literature.

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