THE PHILOSOPHY OF THACKERAY
AS SHOWN IN HIS NOVELS

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The Philosophy of Thackeray as Shown in His Novels.

It is interesting to notice the utter lack of unanimity of the critics in their regard of the writings of Thackeray, from his day down to the present. When Barry Lyndon appeared in 1844, it attracted comparatively little attention; and that little attention was generally of a rather unfavorable nature. It was regarded as a trifle coarse-grained, decidedly cynical, and many of the critics objected to the asides, maintaining that they greatly marred the autobiographical effect. Thackeray evidently regarded this last criticism as a just one, for he omitted a great many of the asides and foot-notes from the later editions of Barry Lyndon,-- and we have thus lost much valuable insight into the early philosophy of the author. Half a century later, we find William Dean Howells saying of Barry Lyndon: "There was something in the art of the last which seemed to me then, and still seems, the farthest reach of the author's great talent."[1] The publication of Vanity Fair (1846-48) brought Thackeray fame and considerable fortune; it lifted him in the estimation of the critics above the staff of Punch, and into the sphere of the great novelists. It was hailed as one of the world's great novels. Has not the prestige of Vanity Fair waned just a little with the passing years? Hardly anyone now-a-days, except myself, still considers Vanity Fair to be Thackeray's greatest novel. Howells says of the novel: "After reading Pendennis I went to Vanity

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[1] W.D.Howells: Thackeray (My Literary Passions), P. 101.

Fair, which I now think the poorest of Thackeray's novels--crude, heavy-handed, caricatured."[1] Howells pronounces Pendennis to be the finest of Thackeray's novels. Tennyson was likewise fond of it. But Edward FitzGerald said that it bored him. Thackeray himself said that he was tired of the novel before he had finished it.[2] The author of the article on Thackeray (it is unsigned) in the Edinburgh Review of January, 1873, makes this pronouncement: "Thackeray rose to the perfection of his art in fiction in The Newcomes.- - - It is the chef d'oeuvre, in our opinion, of its author." H.Heathcote Statham reports having read an article in the Edinburgh Review, which took the position that The Virginians is Thackeray's masterpiece.[3] Thackeray said of Henry Esmond, in spite of the fact that Charlotte Brontë thought it "too much history-- too little story," and George Eliot considered it a "most uncomfortable book": "Here is the very best I can do. - - - I stand by this book, and am willing to leave it where I go as my card."[4]

It seems that one is able, regardless of his choice as to Thackeray's masterpiece, to find some critic who will support the contention. But after all, this somewhat childish game of "picking the masterpiece" is rather futile. We cannot decide such matters in dogmatic fashion, as we would solve a problem in mathematics or toil over a formula in chemistry,--it is the old contention of art versus science. Art is both relative and personal. From one point of view, one

[1] W.D.Howells: Thackeray (My Literary Passions), p.99
[2] Lewis Melville: William Makepeace Thackeray, pp.316-17,v.i.
[3] H.Heathcote Statham: Of the True Greatness of Thackeray. (Fortnightly Review--April, 1904).
[4] Lewis Melville: William Makepeace Thackeray, p.339,v.i.

novel may be a very great novel; while from another point of view, it may be a decidedly second-rate book. For example, I feel that Thackeray carries you closer to a man's soul in Barry Lyndon than in any other of his novels; but Barry Lyndon does not have the perfect structure or re-create for us the atmosphere of a past time, as does Esmond. So we cannot haggle with the critics because they do not agree as to which is Thackeray's finest novel. But, what is of much greater importance, the critics are not in full agreement as to the qualities and methods of Thackeray's writing.

W.J.Dawson makes the statement that Thackeray is a very fine stylist. He says, "Through all the twenty-six volumes of his writings there is not a page which is not technically perfect."[1] Statham points out that the style of Thackeray is decidedly loose, not to say careless. Richard Burton says that the technique of Thackeray is faulty, save in Henry Esmond. He points out, "The technique of Thackeray was more careless than an artist of anything like his calibre would have permitted himself to-day."[2] In an article on Thackeray appearing in the Edinburgh Review of January, 1873, we meet the following statement: "Notwithstanding the multiplicity of his personages, there are no two which in any sense resemble each other." Let us turn back to the Edinburgh Review of October, 1859, where we may read the following statements: "The twins, George and Henry, are a sort of split Pendennis. - - - George bears a strong resemblance to his grandfather, the hero of Esmond." And in the Edinburgh Re-

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[1] W.J.Dawson: Makers of English Fiction (Chap.VII).
[2] Richard Burton: Masters of the English Novel (Chap.IX).

view of January, 1854, Becky and Blanche are compared at great length. In fact, there is only one difference in the two characters pointed out: Becky is endowed with a vast amount of common-sense, while Blanche is full of folly,--this one difference, however, is very much of a difference. Madam Rachel Esmond Warrington loved to think herself very like her dear father, but I think Thackeray intends for us to see that she has inherited much of her mother's jealousy and haughty imperiousness. Although Helen Pendennis is a more gentle character than either Lady Castlewood or Madam Warrington, she has something in common with them: It is something of a narrow mind arising from a rigidly righteous conscience. Both Amelia and Laura are sad, sweet girls,--and a trifle anaemic. Clive and Pen have pretty much the same characters, lead much the same lives, and overcome the same temptations. I think that we must admit, in spite of the opinion of the gentleman of the Edinburgh, that a number of Thackeray's characters are very similar. The article on Thackeray in the Edinburgh Review of January, 1863, stresses the subjectivity of Thackeray's character delineation. The remark is made that Thackeray exists in his characters, and is his characters. You do not see the characters so much as you feel them. Well, Thackeray is his characters to the extent that he makes considerable use of autobiographical material in his novels. But I do not think that we can say that Thackeray is his characters in the sense of his entering into them. On the contrary, as he tells us himself (in "Before the Curtain" and in the closing lines of

Vanity Fair), he regards his characters as puppets; and he stands off to one side to discuss them with the reader in the numerous asides. I think that we see the characters very distinctly. At least they are described in considerable detail. I am sure that Mr. Lionel Barrymore had no trouble with his costume when he created the role of Major Pendennis several years ago, for all of us are very well acquainted with even the intimate details of the toilette of that estimable gentleman. Thackeray stresses the appearance of his characters. I think that he does this for two reasons: In the first place, he wants us to see his characters (for what is life in Mayfair, if one is not to be seen?); secondly, appearances count for so much in the world of fashion. I think that we may say that the characters of George Eliot are personifications of ideas, as Dr. Wilson pointed out in a conference. But this is not nearly so true of Thackeray. George Eliot seems to find her characters for her ideas. The ideas float about the characters of Thackeray like halos.

As the critics have disagreed in many instances as to the relative value of certain works of Thackeray, so have they shown considerable difference of opinion as to his style, technique, and characterization. And likewise has the critical opinion changed with the passing years in regard to the philosophy of Thackeray.

When Barry Lyndon appeared in 1844, it was regarded as being exceedingly cynical. This idea has not entirely vanished even yet. Dr. Beers tells us that he cannot fully

appreciate this work on account of the influence of this feeling.[1] It was the custom for reviewers, during the early part of Thackeray's career, to comment on the latest work from his pen as "another sneer." Sarah N.Cleghorn tells us:

> "FitzGerald regarded Thackeray with affection, even familiarity; but Carlyle and Charlotte Brontë thought him rather fierce and wild, with a good deal of the lion in his composition. - - - E.P.Whipple declared that he looked at life 'with a skeptical eye, sharpened by a wearied heart'."[2]

Edmund Yates passed a very hard sentence on Thackeray:

> "No one meeting him could fail to recognize in him a gentleman: his bearing is cold and uninviting, his style of conversation either openly cynical or affectedly good-natured and benevolent; his bonhommie is forced, his wit biting, his pride easily touched--but his appearance is invariably that of the cool, suave, well-bred gentleman, who, whatever may be rankling within, suffers no surface display of his emotion. - - - No one succeeds better than Mr. Thackeray in cutting his coat according to his cloth: here he flattered the aristocracy, but when he crossed the Atlantic, George Washington became the idol of his worship, the 'Four Georges' the objects of his bitterest attacks. - - - There is a want of heart

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[1] H.A.Beers: Thackeray's Centenary (Yale Review--Oct.,1911)

[2] Sarah N.Cleghorn: Contemporary Opinions of Thackeray. (The Atlantic Monthly--August, 1910).

> in all he writes, which is not to be balanced by the most brilliant sarcasm and the most perfect knowledge of the workings of the human heart."[1]

I think that anyone who has followed the altercation between Dickens and Thackeray (nominally between Thackeray and Yates, and fought out on that ground before the Carrick Club), will not put too much credence in Yates' criticism. But there was unquestionably a grain of truth in the charges which Yates made. It is generally conceded that after the richer, more luxurious years had come, Thackeray grew somewhat cold to a few of his friends of the sparser years, and began to toady after the rich and the titled. Thackeray, in one of his letters, tried to vindicate himself to a friend on the ground that his greatly increased circle of friendships made such demands on his time that it was necessary to spread his attentions more thinly in order to make them go around. The old-time criticism of Thackeray painted him as a cynic and a snob. This was felt when he visited America for the first time in 1852-53. The people suspected that he "carried scalpels concealed in his sleeves, and probes in his waistcoat pockets." There was fear that he "would eat our dinners, pocket our money, and then return to England to write a book about us,--as Dickens had done." But Thackeray had more _savoir faire_ than Dickens. He ate his dinners with such a good grace that so many dinner invitations were pressed upon him as to make his tour "a constant round of indigestion."

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[1] Lewis Melville: _William Makepeace Thackeray_, pp.18-19, v.ii.

Although his lectures were not particularly successful from the financial point of view in Charleston (where Agassiz was lecturing at the time) and in Savannah, he had most pleasant things to say of these places. His American tour was a triumph, and he carried home to England twelve thousand American dollars and the material for The Virginians.[1] Because of his lectures, both in England and America, the reading public began to find out that the man was considerably different from the reputation which the critics had painted for him. It was the old fashion to regard Thackeray as the heartless, scoffing cynic. One of the comparatively few exceptions to this general trend of early criticism was that of Stoddard. He said, when Vanity Fair was being adversely criticized on the charge of cynicism: "Thackeray could not have written Vanity Fair, unless Eden had been shining brightly before his eyes,"[2]--the most lucid bit of criticism that was passed on Thackeray at this period, I think. The later critical attitude toward Thackeray seems to regard him in the light of a sentimental moralist. There are some critics who even go so far as to profess a dislike for Thackeray on the ground that he is over-sentimental: Dr. William Lyon Phelps has taken this attitude in As I Like It; and Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who loves to throw mud-balls at the gods of men, has shown his dislike for Thackeray and Shakespeare on several occasions. It seems to me that there is something

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[1] George William Curtis: Thackeray in America (The Oxford Book of American Essays).

[2] Sarah N. Cleghorn: Contemporary Opinions of Thackeray (The Atlantic Monthly--August, 1910).

Although his listeners were not particularly successful from the financial point of view in comparison [illegible] the returning at the time, and in [illegible], he had much [illegible] things to say of these places. His American tour was a triumph, and he [illegible] home to England [illegible] [illegible] and the [illegible] for his lectures.[1] [illegible] of his lecturers, both in England and America, the reading public began to grasp the fact that the man had considerably more [illegible] than the reputation which the critics had painted for him. It was the old fashion to regard Dickens as the [illegible], [illegible]. One of the [illegible] [illegible] to this general trend of [illegible] the work of Dickens. In fact, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in the story of [illegible]: [illegible] written [illegible], which [illegible] behind the [illegible],[2] [illegible] of Dickens at this period, I think. [illegible]

[illegible]

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[1] [illegible]

[2] [illegible]

paradoxical in one generation's bringing the charge of cynicism, while a succeeding generation finds fault on the score of sentimentalism. A dramatist has given the definition: "A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing."[1] I suppose that we may say that a sentimentalist is one who unduly stresses emotional values. In short, the cynic is over-hard, while the sentimentalist is over-soft. The changing times and tastes have found in Thackeray something that was almost unnoticed in the Thackeray of our grandfather's day. It is also generally admitted that Thackeray does not seem quite the realist that he was once regarded as being. I feel, as Wordsworth pointed out in his famous preface, that there is much in the attitudes which we bring with us in our consideration of a work of literature. Thackeray was writing in a generation that was reading Richardson, Smollet, and Sterne,--I suppose that Fielding was carefully tucked away at this prim period. Dickens, during his lifetime, enjoyed a much greater popularity than did Thackeray. Dickens was presiding gracefully at both public and private dinners, standing god-father for homely brats, and autographing most obligingly his volumes for admiring young ladies,--while Thackeray was still toiling away on the staff of *Punch*, and trying to resolve to write a book which would bring him fame. When *Vanity Fair* appeared, the people were not sure as to how they should take it. It was decidedly different,--very different from Dickens' novels. Dickens and Thackeray are rather

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[1] W.J.Dawson: *Makers of English Fiction* (Chap.VII).

antithetical. "Dickens knows," said Thackeray, "that my books are a protest against him; that if the one set are true, the other must be false."[1]

The critics have disagreed in many instances as to the relative value of certain works of Thackeray, differences of opinion have arisen as to his style, technique, and characterization. The passing of half a century has also shown changing attitudes in regard to his philosophy. Is the philosophy of Thackeray coldly cynical, depressingly materialistic? Or is it softly sentimental, with melodramatic heart-throbs and glycerine tears? Or is it a philosophy which is neither searchingly profound, nor startlingly original; but rather a conventional philosophy, presented in a distinctive, interesting manner?

I suppose that we may say that a person's philosophy is his reactions toward life. But of course it is more than a formula of life, more than a code of conduct. A person's philosophy, in the narrow sense, is a coldly intellectual credo, and is exasperatingly logical. It is primarily a system of morals. It does not ordinarily include aim, and still we must admit that aim is very largely determined by the philosophy behind it. If you subscribe very generously to the Anti-Saloon League, it is reasonable to suppose that you consider whiskey to be one of the roots of evil. Taste, in the higher sense, pre-supposes a differentiation between the good and the bad. If your heart leaps up when you behold a rainbow

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[1] H.A.Beers: Thackeray's Centenary (Yale Review--Oct.,1911).

in the sky, I know that you are endowed with a Wordsworthian appreciation of beauty; but if, on beholding this gorgeous spectacle, your heart remains in its accustomed place, and you merely think of your overshoes and umbrella, then---I may be sure that you are a good business-man. There is a certain connection between the emotions and philosophy. The emotions are the philosophy of the race. Is sentiment a part of philosophy? Sentiment is a high regard for fine things. Sentiment is usually associated with the heart. We think of philosophy as belonging to the head. The head and the heart, aesthetically speaking, should not be very far apart; for it requires a generous portion of both to make art. John Galsworthy says that you can accomplish only one thing in this world without sentiment,--and that is, to make money.[1] Even the method has some connection with philosophy. The way we do a thing is usually determined by what we intend to do; and what we intend to do, is usually arrived at from a consideration of what we think that we ought to do. Harriet Beecher Stowe wished to arouse humanitarian interest in behalf of the negro slave of the South; but instead of simply writing a social tract, which no one would read, she dressed her ideas in the form of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Thackeray has chosen the satirical method for his purposes. He considers that the evils of the world may be flayed with that most terrible of all thongs,--ridicule. He has

[1] John Galsworthy: Cathedrals in Spain (Yale Review--circa January, 1922).

in the way, I hope that you are content with a [illegible] approximation of beauty; but if, on recounting your aggregate satisfaction, your heart remains in the [illegible] place, and you really think of your accounts not unfavorably, then---I may be sure that you are a good [illegible].

There is a curious connection between the machine and philosophy. The machines are the philosophy of the man. It manifests a kind of philosophy. Doubtless it is a sign [illegible] for fine things. The [illegible] is usually connected with the heart. We think of [illegible] as belonging to the head. The head and the heart, [illegible], however, would not be very far apart; for it requires a pleasant portion of both to make art. John Galsworthy says that art has [illegible] only one thing in this world without sentiment,--and that is, to make money.[1] Thus the [illegible] has some connection with philosophy. The way we do a thing is usually determined by what we intend to do; and what we intend to do, is usually governed by such a consideration of what we think that we ought to do. [illegible] somewhere once wished to submit a [illegible] interest in behalf of the [illegible] of the [illegible] and [illegible] of simply writing a [illegible], which we now would call, the [illegible] are given in the form of [illegible].

Thoreau has shown the religious aspect of this passage. He considers that the work of the country may be [illegible] with that most valuable of all things,--religion. He was

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[1] John Galsworthy, [illegible] (New York: [illegible], 1926).

also made rather extensive use of the aside, a device which he borrowed from Fielding. So we have two sources of Thackeray's philosophy as shown in his novels: One source is the characters; and the other source is the asides. The philosophy, as exemplified in the characters, is usually satirically treated. The philosophy, which we find in the asides is usually given in a simple, straightforward manner. It is not always an easy matter to tell just when the characters are speaking in character and when they are spouting the ideas of their master,-- as I shall attempt to show later. I believe that this difficulty is one that is largely responsible for some of the misconceptions which arose in regard to Barry Lyndon, when that work was first published. The critics said that Thackeray was very cynical. It is now generally realized that Barry naïvely and boastfully exaggerates his misdemeanors, in much the same way that a mischievous boy loves to paint himself in the guise of a very bad man. We find another example of this difficulty in the character of Becky: Does she show Amelia the note which she had received at the ball in Brussels because she wishes Amelia to marry Dobbin and to be happy? Perhaps Thackeray is trying to tell us: Even so base a creature as Becky is apt to have a tiny spark of kindliness. But when we remember the character of Becky, we suspect that there is some lurking selfish motive behind the move. In the novels we find two distinct philosophies: One is that of those unhappy, fevered dwellers in Mayfair and Belgravia; the other is that of Thackeray. I

think that Thackeray intensifies this by his references to his characters as puppets, and by his reference to himself as the Master of the Show.

In this show of the children of fashion, much is made of the old institution of love and marriage. Thackeray tells us that _les élégants_ do not allow themselves to become too much perturbed over love,--for that is a passion that was suitable for the pastoral age; but in this day, it is found only among the lowly and among those who are utterly lacking in ambition. There is nothing wrong with love _per se_; the only trouble with love is that it is so fleeting and evanescent. Love in a cottage is subjected to very gruelling trials and all too often pines, sickens, and dies. A mutual understanding is not as ideal as love; it does not possess the ecstatic thrill, perhaps; but it is relatively constant, rather reliable, and so luxuriously easy. Sometimes the very young and the very foolish of Vanity Fair fall under the snare. But their mothers, who are much older and know the world much better, shake such foolish notions out of their silly daughters' pretty heads.

> "And as for this romance of love, this fine picture of Jenny and Jessamy falling in love at first sight, billing and cooing in an arbour, and retiring to a cottage afterwards to go on cooing and billing--Psha! what folly is this! It is good for romances, and for misses to sigh about; but any man who walks through the world with his eyes open knows how senseless is all this rubbish. I don't say that a young man and woman are not to meet, and

think that lovemaking [illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] to his [illegible] as [illegible], [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] as the [illegible] of the [illegible].

In this [illegible] of the [illegible] of [illegible], [illegible] is [illegible] of the old [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible]. [illegible] [illegible] as such [illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible],--the [illegible] of a [illegible] [illegible] was [illegible] for the [illegible] [illegible], but in [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] only among the [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in [illegible]. There is nothing wrong with love and the only trouble with love is that it is so fleeting and [illegible]. Love in a cottage is subjected to many practical trials and all the [illegible] plans, [illegible], and [illegible]. A [illegible] [illegible] is not as [illegible] as love; it does not [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible], perhaps, but it is relatively [illegible], [illegible] [illegible], and so [illegible] only. [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] and the [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible]. [illegible] these [illegible], the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] out of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible] as [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] in [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] and [illegible] in [illegible], and [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] to go on [illegible] and [illegible]--[illegible] [illegible] is [illegible]. It is [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] his [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] with his eyes open [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. I don't say that a young man and woman who are at work, and

> to fall in love that instant, and to marry that day year, and love each other till they are a hundred; that is the supreme lot--but that is the lot which the gods only grant to Baucis and Philemon, and a very, very few besides. As for the rest, they must compromise; make themselves as comfortable as they can, and take the good and the bad together."[1]

We regard the slavish treatment of woman in the Oriental countries as a blot on ~~its~~ their civilization; and yet there is a strong resemblance between it and the marriage customs of Grovesnor Square:

> "I would like to go into an Indian Brahmin's house, - - - and have the mystery of Eastern existence revealed to me; yet I would not choose the moment when the Brahmin of the house was dead, his women howling, his priests doctoring his child of a widow, now frightening her with sermons, now drugging her with bang, so as to push her on his funeral pile at last, and into the arms of that carcase, stupefied, but obedient and decorous. And though I like to walk in an earl's house - - -; yet there are times when the visit is not pleasant; and when the parents in that fine house are getting ready their daughter for sale, and frightening away her tears with threats, and stupefying her grief with narcotics, praying her and imploring her, and dramming her and coaxing

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[1] *The Newcomes,* Chap XXX.

> her and blessing her, and cursing her, perhaps, till they have brought her into such a state as shall fit the poor young thing for that deadly couch upon which they are about to thrust her."[1]

Although the commercialized marriage probably had its inception in the Orient, Thackeray tells us that it has reached its perfection in France:

> "France is the country where that sweet Christian institution of mariages de convenance - - - ~~is~~ most in vogue. There the newspapers daily announce that M.de Foy has a bureau de confiance, where families may arrange marriages for their sons and daughters in perfect comfort and security. It is but a question of money on one side and the other. Mademoiselle has so many francs of dot; Monsieur has such and such rentes or lands in possession or reversion, an étude d'avoué, a shop with a certain clièntele bringing him such and such an income, which may be doubled by the judicious addition of so much capital, and the pretty little matrimonial arrangement is concluded, or broken off, and nobody unhappy, and the world none the wiser."[2]

Thackeray, in no uncertain terms, condemns the malicious practice of the loveless marriage:

> "This ceremony amongst us is so stale and common

[1] The Newcomes, Chap.XXVIII. [2] Ibid, Chap. XXXI.

> Thus man [illegible], and [illegible], they have brought [illegible] the poor young [illegible] they [illegible].[1]

Although the commercialized [illegible] in the [illegible] the [illegible]

> "There is the [illegible] of [illegible] a [illegible] of [illegible] unhappy, and the world [illegible]

Theology, [illegible] of the [illegible]

> "This [illegible]

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[1] [illegible] [2] Ibid., [illegible]

> that to be sure there is no need to describe its rites, and as women sell themselves for what you call an establishment every day, to the applause of themselves, their parents, and the world, why on earth should a man ape at originality and pretend to pity them? Never mind about the lies at the altar, the blaspheming against the godlike name of love, the sordid surrender, the smiling dishonour. What the deuce does a <u>mariage de convenance</u> mean but all this, and are not such sober Hymeneal torches more satisfactory often than the most brilliant love matches that ever flamed and burnt out?"[1]

Even the most worldly of Thackeray's characters regard love as being ideally beautiful, even though a little too impractical for their purposes. The memories of their loves of long ago--which they so bravely conquered!-- linger in a sweetly taunting manner. When old Major Pendennis rushes down to Fairoaks to break up the affair between Pen and the Fotheringay, he remembers the niece of the old Earl. But he was just an under-secretary then; so it could not be.

> "What happened? We returned our letters, sent back our locks of hair; we suffered--but we recovered. She is a baronet's wife with thirteen grown-up children; altered, it is true, in person; but her daughters remind me of what she was, and the third is to be presented early next week."[2]

And Helen Pendennis, while she was remonstrating with Arthur, was doubtless thinking of Francis Bell whom she loved such a

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[1] <u>The Newcomes,</u> Chap. XXVIII. [2] <u>Pendennis,</u> Chap. VII.

long time ago.

> "Round her Laura's neck she had a locket with hair, which Helen had given, ah how many years ago! to poor Francis, dead and buried. This child was all that was left of him, and she cherished, as so tender a creature would, the legacy which he had bequeathed to her."[1]

There are times when Redmond Barry remembers, with a little of regret, sweet Nora Brady of Castle Brady. The Baroness of Bernstein, I think, is kind to Harry, because he is the grandson of the man who once loved her. But in spite of the fact that Barry could feel a little genuine sentiment now and then, he tells us:

> "Five years in the army, long experience of the world, had ere now dispelled any of those romantic notions regarding love with which I commenced life; and I had determined,as is proper with gentlemen (it is only your low people who marry for mere affection), to consolidate my fortune by marriage."[2]

But fortunately the Countess Ida escaped. And we may say of Madam Bernstein, although she realized the failure of her life, she led Harry out into the world to make a brilliant match for him; and she did at least keep him from marrying Maria,--a thing which Madam Warrington was apparently unable to do by means of her peremptory letters from Castlewood. It is very nice to have these little memories of by-gone loves with which to lash yourself into a frenzy of exquisite self-torture; but

[1] Pendennis, Chap. VIII. [2] Barry Lyndon. Chap.X

anyone who has been about the world will tell you that love is a very ideal state, while marriage is grossly materialistic. Too often the illusion of love does not last:

> "When she lighted the lamp and looked at him did Psyche find Cupid out; and is that the meaning of the old allegory? The wings of love drop off at this discovery. The fancy can no more soar and disport in skyey regions, the beloved object ceases at once to be celestial, and remains plodding on earth, entirely unromantic and substantial."[1]

The advocates of the *mariage de convenance* like to think that love-marriages usually end in poverty, suffering, and disillusionment. Lady Kew, who is trying to prod Ethel into making a rich marriage, asks her:

> "Has your Aunt Fanny, who ran away with Captain Canonbury, been happy? They have eleven children, and are starving at Boulogne."[2]

The old lady's aim in life seems to be to marry Ethel to some rich nobleman. Finally Ethel, the only one who has the courage to cross swords withLady Kew, confronts her:

> "Made his fortune, yes, that is the cry. There never were since the world began, people so unblushingly sordid! - - We barter rank against money, and money against rank,

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[1] *The Virginians*, Chap.XXII, Book I. [2] *The Newcomes*, Chap.XV.

> day after day.- - - Will there be no day when this mammon-worship will cease among us?"[1]

At last, as is usually the case under such circumstances, Ethel succumbs to the pleas, threats, and entreaties of her ambitious old grandmamma; and Thackeray does not hesitate to chide her:

> "No, Miss Newcome, yours is not a dignified position in life, however you may argue that hundreds of people in the world are doing like you. O me! what a confession it is, in the very outset of life and blushing brightness of youth's morning, to own that the aim with which a young girl sets out, and the object of her existence, is to marry a rich man; that she was endowed with beauty so that she might buy wealth, and a title with it; that as sure as she has a soul to be saved her business here on earth is to try and get a rich husband. That is the career for which many a woman is bred and trained. A young man begins the world with some aspirations at least; he will try to be good and follow the truth; he will strive to win honours for himself, and never do a base action; he will pass nights over his books, and forego ease and pleasure so that he may achieve a name. - - - But a girl of the world, _bon Dieu!_ the doctrine with which she begins is that she is to have a wealthy husband."[2]

[1] _The Newcomes,_ Chap. XXXII.

[2] _The Newcomes,_ Chap. XLV.

And we suspect that the only thing which kept Ethel from selling herself in the marriage market, was the death of Lady Kew, --the malignant influence was removed, so to speak. In spite of the fact that old Lady Kew insisted that the poor love-marriages were the unhappy ones, we are inclined to believe that the marriage de convenance more often resulted in unhappiness. Take the case of Lady Crawley:

> "She is the second Lady Crawley, and mother of the young ladies. She was an iron-monger's daughter, and her marriage was thought a great match. She looks as if she had been handsome once, and her eyes are always weeping for the loss of her beauty. She is pale and meagre and high-shouldered; and has not a word to say for herself."[1]

It is small wonder that the poor lady died so soon. It even surprised Becky,--one of the only two instances when she failed to have the situation fully in hand. She had lost this chance of a fine marriage! -"If the mere chance of becoming a baronet's daughter can procure a lady such homage in the world, surely we may respect the agonies of a young woman who has lost the opportunity of becoming a baronet's wife."[2] Lady Clara was quite as wretched as "the second Lady Crawley." All of her relations considered her such a sensible girl to forget Jack Belsize and to marry Sir Barnes Newcome. But the heart does not always bend to stern parents' dicta, and we find that

> "More and more sad does the Lady Clara become from day to day; liking more to sit lonely over the fire; careless about the sarcasms of her husband; the prattle of her children. She cries sometimes over the cradle of the

[1] Vanity Fair, Chap. VIII. [2] Ibid.,Chap. XV.

can be supposed that the only thing which [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] their work-ing [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible], was the [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible], --the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], so to speak, [illegible] of the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] when the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] than the [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible].

> "This is the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of the [illegible] [illegible]. [illegible]."[1]

It is [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of a [illegible].

> "Then, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] day to day; [illegible]

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[1] [illegible] [illegible], Chap. VIII.

[2] Ibid., Chap. IV.

> young heir. She is aweary, aweary. You understand, the man to whom her parents sold her does not make her happy, though she has been bought with diamonds, two carriages, several large footmen, a fine country-house with delightful gardens, and conservatories, and with all this she is miserable--is it possible?"[1]

Lady Lyndon was likewise the victim of a loveless marriage, and her later life was a very unhappy one. Barry started browbeating her on the wedding journey:

> "Lady Lyndon was a haughty woman, and I hate pride; and I promise you that in both instances I overcame this vice in her. On the third day of our journey I had her to light my pipe-match with her own hands, and made her deliver it to me with tears in her eyes; and at the Swan Inn at Exeter I had so completely subdued her that she asked me humbly whether I would not wish the landlady as well as the host to step up to dinner with us."[2]

We perceive by the last remark that there was still left within the lady a good bit of fight,--she could at least be saucy; but I dare say that even this died out in time. Becky and Rawdon's marriage was about the most notoriously unsuccessful of the _mariages de convenance_, for its debacle involved the noble Lord Steyne, who, as everybody knows, lived in great style and entertained the fashionables at "Gaunt House, which faces on Gaunt Square," and so on. Of course Clara's escape

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[1] _The Newcomes_, Chap.LII.

[2] _Barry Lyndon_, Chap.XVII

from the tyranny of Sir Brian and her elopement with Jack Belsize was something of a scandal; but Jack Belsize was a younger son without a title,-- so not a great deal was thought of the matter. Sir Francis and Lady Clavering appear on the scene long after their marriage has taken place; but we have an idea that theirs is a marriage of convenience,-- at least it bears some of the earmarks: She is very unhappy, and she is haunted by the past, which stalks into her dinners in most tangible form and with diabolical impudence. These unhappy people must stifle their love, steel their consciences, and face life with a stalwart, not to say brazen, heart. They must think of their position and their wealth.

> "What respectable person in the world will not say he was quite right to avoid a marriage with an ill-educated person of low degree, and whose manners would not become her station?--and what philosopher would not tell him that the best thing to do with these little passions if they spring up, is to get rid of them, and let them pass over and cure themselves; that no man dies about a woman, or vice versa; and that one or the other having found the impossibility of gratifying his or her desire in the particular instance, must make the best of matters, forget each other, look out elsewhere, and choose again."[1]

[1] Pendennis, Chap. LI.

from the tyranny of the Sedleys and her [illegible] which were [illegible] Rebecca was something of a [illegible]; but [illegible] was a pleasure and [illegible] a [illegible] -- [illegible] though of the matter. The [illegible] and [illegible] on the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] by the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of their [illegible] [illegible].

"[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in the world will not be as was quite right to think a marriage with so ill-educated person of the [illegible], and those [illegible] would and [illegible] her [illegible]--[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] with [illegible] the [illegible] to do with [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] if they [illegible], [illegible] all of them, and let them [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] about a [illegible], or [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] parting [illegible] the [illegible] of [illegible] of the [illegible] in the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible], forget each other, [illegible], and [illegible] again."[1]

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[1] Thackeray, Chap. 38.

Although Thackeray pointed out that the mariage de convenance has reached its perfection in France, I think that he has failed to point out that it is a somewhat different institution as practiced in England. In France, the young gentleman calls on the father of the bride-to-be, and discusses the dot in a most thorough business-like manner; then he shows the father his own financial status in a most dispassionate manner. The transaction is a sort of comparing of family balance sheets. But in England, Sir So-and-so surmises that Lady Blank will surely fall heir to so many thousands; and Lady Blank imagines that Sir So-and-so's family is indeed an excellent one,--not yet having seen the skeletons in that gallant gentleman's family closet. In short, the game is played with all the cards on the table in France; while in England, there is very much of a hazard. The English system usually yields a victim. The poor child has imagined that my Lord was in love with her pretty face, only to discover that the attraction is her father's gold. The ceremony of this type of marriage very often proves to be a disillusionment. Neither he nor she is quite what the other had thought. And this disillusionment often proves to be the basis of quarrels and discontent.

> "Much of the quarrels and hatred which arise between married people come in my mind from the husband's rage and revolt at discovering that his slave and bedfellow, who is to minister to all his wishes, and is church-sworn to honour and obey him--is his superior; and that he, and not she, ought to be the subordinate of the

> twain, and in these controversies, I think, lay the cause of my Lord's anger against his lady. - - -After the illumination, when the love-lamp is put out that anon we spoke of, and by the common daylight we look at the picture, what a daub it looks! what a clumsy effigy! How many men and wives come to this knowledge, think you? And if it be painful to a woman to find herself mated for life to a boor, and ordered to love and honour a dullard; it is worse still for the man himself perhaps, whenever in his dim comprehension the idea dawns that his slave and drudge yonder is, in truth, his superior."[1]

When this dreadful hour of disillusionment comes, although the heart may ache and the whole being wish to fly in revolt, milady must present a calm demeanor.

> "'Tis a hard task for women in life, that mask which the world bids them wear. But there is no greater crime than for a woman who is ill-used and unhappy to show that she is so. The world is quite relentless about bidding her to keep a cheerful face; and our women, like the Malabar wives, are forced to go smiling and painted to sacrifice themselves with their husbands; their relations being the most eager to push them on to their duty, and, under their shouts and applause, to smother and hush their cries of pain."[2]

[1] Henry Esmond, Chap.XI, Book I. [2] Ibid.

Thackeray tells us that most young men of any spirit whatever sow a generous crop of "wild oats." But the young ladies give little regard as to their fiances past reckless life. So I suppose that we shall not blame George when "he was a little wild: how many young men are; and don't girls like a rake better than a milksop?"[1] We are told of George

> "He looked like a man who had passions, secrets, and private harrowing griefs and adventures. His voice was rich and deep. He would say it was a warm evening, or ask his partner to take an ice, with a tone as sad and confidential as if he were breaking her mother's death to her, or preluding a declaration of love."[2]

Yes, there is something in a man who has lived and loved, that will attract even a Duse to a D'Annunzio. Clive was rather a gay youth in the haunts of Bohemia. Pendennis led a wild life among the literati,--and it would have probably been a wilder one, had it not been for the restraining influence of "Bluebeard," who had had his fling years before. Lord Castlewood's dissipation very often brought Lady Castlewood to her tears. Sir Francis was drunk and gambling one day, and gambling and drunk the next. Colonel Altamont and Strong were forever swindling someone and guzzling liquor. "Honest Jack Costigan" had a continual thirst for brandy-and-water. Barry Lyndon would have us believe that he was a very

[1] Vanity Fair, Chap.XIII. [2] Ibid., Chap.XXI.

wild and sportive man,--which, in spite of his great and obvious exaggeration, we are inclined to believe. In short, a great many of Thackeray's men sow their "wild oats." And it is worthy of notice that the girls seem to give little regard to such matters in the choice of a husband. Ethel was quite willing to forgive these little indiscretions in the past of the dashing Lord Kew. Beatrix never gave a thought to such matters in regard to the past of the handsome and rich Duke of Hamilton. Lady Clavering must not have thought very seriously of these things when she chose to honour and obey Sir Francis. Lady Lyndon, although a delicate and retiring lady who probably knew little of the world, should have been able to perceive that Redmond Barry was but a rake and a cardsharp. Laura, who suspected the worst of Arthur and little Fanny Bolton and who knew of his affair with the Fotheringay and how badly he was smitten by Blanche, was glad enough to become his wife. The young ladies and the fathers of young ladies of this age, were not plagued with ideas of heredity and eugenics,--as we are in this scientific age; perhaps that is why they were a bit indifferent. I think we must say this in behalf of the youth of this older time: Many things were then regarded as wild which we now merely consider breezy or buoyant. If you attended a boxing match ("bruising," I believe, was the old term,--a very apt one), you were considered among very bad company. If you attended a cock-fight, your fate was perdition. If you wore a gorgeously brocaded waistcoat and drove a fiery horse, the girls' hearts might flutter, but the old heads would wag. Thackeray seems to regard that

"wild oats" in the young and foolish may be excused; but when the "wild oats" are carried over into old age,--well, that is *de trop.* It is a case of folly-in-youth's becoming debauchery in old age. Thackeray's message for the shy and pensive, would-be-married maiden is very largely this: Although you will blush at my telling you so, nearly all young men are inclined to be wild,--that is, if they have any spirit whatever. But this, my dear, is largely farce. Be very careful that the young man of your choice is not one who will carry his wild ways through his maturity into his old age,--for that is tragedy.

Another aspect of marriage which Thackeray presents, is that of the very young man's so often falling in love with a young old lady. We remember that Harry fell a slave to the fast fading charms of Maria; and we also remember that Madam Warrington (or Madam Esmond, as she loved to be called) wrote to Madam Bernstein in regard to the matter:

> "As for my poor Harry's marriage, though I know *too well, from sad experience,* the dangers to which youth is subject, and would keep my boy, *at any price,* from them, though I should wish him to marry a person of rank, as becomes his birth, yet my Lady Maria Esmond is out of the question. Her age is almost the same as mine; and I know my brother Castlewood left his daughters with the very smallest portions. My Harry is so obedient that I know a desire from me will be sufficient to cause him to give up this imprudent match."[1]

[1] *The Virginians,* Chap. XXII, v.ii.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

I think that the reader in this instance, however, feels that the disparity in ages is not really the prime consideration; you cannot but suspect that the Lady Maria would not have been so utterly "out of the question," if only Lord Castlewood had left his daughters with something better than "the very smallest portions." And something which lends humor to the situation is the fact that Madam Warrington is quite apparently in love with Colonel Washington, even though he is in love with the Widow Custis ("Curtis" the book says; I do not know whether it is a typographical error, or intentional on the part of Thackeray); we do not know Madam Warrington's age, but we do know that her twin-sons are nineteen and that Colonel Washington is only twenty-three. Henry Esmond married Lady Castlewood, who was much older than himself,--which, by the way, has been severely censured by the critics, Charlotte Brontë among the number. Pendennis first fell in love with the Fotheringay, who was considerably older than himself; he then fell in love with Blanche, who was likewise older. We remember that Becky was very popular with the young men, as well as with old Lord Steyne. I believe that no one understood the dangers of a young man's marrying a woman older than himself better than did Major Pendennis:

> "Then this fatal woman is ten years older than that silly young scapegrace of an Arthur. What happens in such cases, my dear creature? I don't mind telling you now we are alone: that in the highest state of society, misery, undeviating misery, is the result. Look at Lord

> Clodworthy come into a room with his wife--why, good God, she looks like Clodworthy's mother. What's the case between Lord and Lady Willowbank, whose love-match was notorious? He has already cut her down twice when she has hanged herself out of jealousy for Mademoiselle de Sainte Cunegonde, the dancer; and mark my words, good God, one day he'll *not* cut the old woman down."[1]

Let us turn to a few of the happy marriages in Thackeray, and see if we can determine some of the factors which go to constitute the ideal marriage. We have seen that the *mariage de convenance,* in spite of the contentions of such old worldlings as Lady Kew, may often be a fiasco. We have seen that a crop of "wild oats" does not always produce a harvest of virtue. We remember that Lady Maria finally married a play actor, Mr. Hagan, of neither title nor fortune nor even distinction; and she was forgotten by her set. O,yes, it is a wise idea to marry in your own set, if you intend to live in this snobbish world. And it is not a very sensible idea to marry a woman older than yourself; for in a few years she will look like your grandmother, and people will laugh,--and then you will probably grow a little tired and petulant. Of course there was the case of Henry Esmond's marrying Lady Castlewood, who was so much older than himself; and they were apparently happy. But we even doubt this. We cannot forget that Lady Castlewood acted very ugly about the small-pox; and she straightway blamed Henry when Lord Mohun killed her husband. When the news of Lord Hamilton's

death was brought to Beatrix by Esmond, she at first suspected him of having done the thing,--a trait in Beatrix which you feel she has inherited from her mother. We cannot forget Lady Castlewood's imperious hauteur. A cynical Frenchman has pointed out that love is a case of master and slave,--there is so seldom a reciprocity of affection. With one or the other of the parties, it is all too often the case of allowing one's self to be adored. And this is somewhat the case in this instance. You can not prove it, but you feel that Henry loves Lady Castlewood a great deal more than she does him. Lady Castlewood dies in the interval between *Esmond* and *The Virginians*, so we do not know what their life was in Virginia. And besides, Henry Esmond was too much of a gentleman to have squealed when she henpecked him. So even this somewhat exceptional instance of the young man--old woman combination can not be said to have been entirely successful. *Vanity Fair* ends with the marriage of Amelia and Dobbin, but the reader is supposed to imagine that they lived happy forever and ever. And why do we suppose this to be such a happy marriage? Is it not because it is based on a mutual understanding, a mutual suitability, and a mutual affection? These three desiderata, it seems to me, constitute the basis of the happy marriage in Thackeray. It is a consideration of the characters in the light of these three things, which makes us feel that Amelia and Dobbin, Laura and Pen, Ethel and Clive, Theo and George, and Fanny and Harry are all happy after the last page is read and the book closed.

After an ambitious marriage, I should say that the next dearest thing in the hearts of these people in the Thackeray world, is a fine appearance. It gives them an air of importance, and it assists them in their social climbing. Redmond Barry did not have to travel far into the world to learn the value of an appearance:

> "Seeing my handsome appearance, silver-hilted sword, and well-filled valise, my landlord made free to send up a jug of claret without my asking; and charged, you may be sure, pretty handsomely for it in the bill. No gentleman in those good old days went to bed without a good share of liquor to set him sleeping, and on this my first day's entrance into the world, I made a point to act the fine gentleman completely."[1]

We only fear that Barry over-acted the fine gentleman. Restraint is not one of the qualities of this most respectable gentleman. As we proceed a little farther, we begin to perceive that he is at least a daring *poseur* if not the cultivated *connoisseur*:

> "I had a gentleman to wait upon me, a French *friseur* to dress my hair of a morning; I knew the taste of chocolate as by intuition almost, and could distinguish between the right Spanish and the French before I had been a week in my new position; I had rings on all my fingers, watches

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[1] Barry *Lyndon*, Chap. III.

in both my fobs, canes, trinkets, and snuff-boxes of all sorts, and each outvying the other in elegance. I had the finest natural taste for lace and china of any man I ever knew; I could judge a horse as well as any Jew dealer in Germany; in shooting and athletic exercises I was unrivalled; I could not spell, but I could speak German and French cleverly. I had at the least twelve suits of clothes; three richly embroidered with gold, two laced with silver, a garnet-colored velvet pelisse lined with sable; one of French grey, silver laced and lined with chinchilla. I had damask morning robes. I took lessons on the guitar, and sang French catches exquisitely. Where, in fact, was there a more accomplished gentleman than Redmond de Balibari?"[1]

And as this worthy gentleman's fortune increased in size, his wardrobe increased in brilliance:

> "Why, when I danced with Coralie de Langeac at the fêtes on the birth of the first dauphin at Versailles, her hoop was eighteen feet in circumference, and the heels of her lovely little *mules* were three inches from the ground; the lace of my *jabot* was worth a thousand crowns, and the buttons of my amaranth velvet coat alone cost eighty thousand livres."[2]

[1] *Barry Lyndon,* Chap. IX. [2] Ibid., Chap. XIII.

In a few more chapters, we see that our gentleman of fashion has married the Lady Lyndon,--a lady of considerable fortune, of course. But, as is so often the case, she was wholly without chic, without ton. So the estate must be made over. The first move was to cut the avenue of elms. And the next he started refashioning the old castle:

> "The exterior was, when I first arrived, a quaint composition of all sorts of architecture; of feudal towers, and gable-ends in Queen Bess's style, and rough-patched walls built up to repair the ravages of the Roundhead cannon: but I need not speak of this at large, having had the place new-faced at a vast expense, under a fashionable architect, and the façade laid out in the latest French-Greek and most classical style. There had been moats, and draw-bridges, and outer walls; these I had shaved away into elegant terraces, and handsomely laid out in parterres, according to the plans of M.Cornichon, the great Parisian architect, who visited England for the purpose."[1]

If the elbowing spirit and expensive outlay could make of one a fine gentleman, our Chevalier de Balibari would have been the most gallant of them all. There is something so naïve and blunt about Barry Lyndon's heartless egoism, that his fall does not arouse much sympathy in the reader. But it is different with the case of Lady Clavering. Sir Francis and Lady Clavering could do very well socially in Clavering, but tragedy

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[1] Barry Lyndon, Chap.XVII.

awaited her in London. Her modus operandi in her social campaign in London was much the same as it had been in Clavering: To dazzle the people into adulation through a garish show of opulence.

> "What could equal the chaste splendour of the drawing-rooms?-- the carpets were so magnificently fluffy that your foot made no more noise on them than your shadow: on their white ground bloomed roses and tulips as big as warming-pans: about the room were high chairs and low chairs, bandy-legged chairs, chairs so attenuated that it was a wonder any but a sylph could sit upon them, marqueterie tables covered with marvellous gimcracks, china ornaments of all ages and countries, bronzes, gilt daggers, Books of Beauty, yataghans, Turkish papooshes and boxes of Persian bon-bons. Wherever you sate down there were Dresden shepherds and shepherdesses convenient at your elbow; there were, moreover, light blue poodles and ducks and cocks and hens in porcelain; there were nymphs by Boucher, and shepherdesses by Greuze, very chaste indeed; there were muslin curtains and brocade curtains, gilt cages with parroquets and love-birds, two squealing cockatoos, each out-squealing and out-chattering the other; a clock singing tunes on a console-table, and another booming the hours like Great Tom, on the mantlepiece--there was, in a word, everything that comfort could desire, and the most elegant taste devise."[1]

[1] Pendennis, Chap. XXXVII.

Now we must not regard Lady Clavering's drawing-room from the modern point of view, for if we do, we impose a grave injustice on that good woman's taste. In much the same way that we consider their drawing-rooms horribly cluttered, they would consider ours dreadfully bare. It was a time when moulded-plaster ceilings, numerous Venetian mirrors, and the gilt and roses of Louis Quinze were the fashionable <u>décor.</u> It was a time when luxury meant a superabundance of rich things. So although Lady Clavering's drawing-room may offend our taste, it is very unlikely that the fine ladies and gentlemen felt any aesthetic twinges on entering Lady Clavering's palatial mansion. Incidentally, it is delightful that Thackeray could poke fun at the decorations of this age, when he was writing in an age of horse-hair sofas, black walnut whatnots, antimacassars, velvet-bound family portrait albums, and conch-shell <u>bibelots,</u>--but of course we must not be guilty of the childish <u>tu quoque.</u> But in spite of this expensive outlay, this grand appearance, and her frequent and lavish expenditures, Lady Clavering was a social failure.

> "The Clavering family had indeed made a false start in life, and had got neither comfort, nor position, nor thanks for the hospitalities which they administered, nor a return of kindness from the people whom they entertained. The success of their first London season was doubtful; and their failure afterwards notorious."[1]

[1] <u>Pendennis,</u> Chap.LIX.

The poor Lady Clavering attained something of a social recognition,--but it was a purely objective recognition, not a subjective one. And this sort of social success is more tragic than rank failure. On the other hand, Major Pendennis was a person of very moderate capital. But he was very fastidious in his person:

> "At a quarter past ten the Major invariably made his appearance in the best blacked boots in all London, with a checked morning cravat that never was rumpled until dinner-time, a buff waistcoat which bore the crown of his sovereign on the buttons, and linen so spotless that Mr. Brummel himself asked the name of his laundress, and would probably have employed her had not misfortune compelled that great man to fly the country. Pendennis's coat, his white gloves, his whiskers, his very cane, were perfect of their kind as specimens of the costume of a military man *en retraite*."[1]

And we know that the Major was as meticulous in the privacy of his rooms as when *en promenade*. We remember his brilliant Turkish silk dressing-gown; and we remember that he would have his bare head (in speaking of *un vieux galantin* such as the Major, it would never do to say "bald head") covered with a fine silk handkerchief, while Morgan was brushing the wig. There was no one who could flatter so gracefully; and he could kowtow to the nobles with a majestic ease of manner. I think that there is little wonder that as many as three drawing-rooms of the

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[1] *Pendennis*, Chap. I.

nabobs of Mayfair would see him of an evening. The Major did not have a large fortune with which to provide himself an expensive equipage; but he possessed a fine knowledge of the world, which prompted him to spend his guineas where they would go the farthest. I think that Becky knew the way of the world almost as well as did Major Pendennis. She also had that knack of getting the maximum of effect with the minimum of means. Number 201 of Curzon Street was a modest little house; but it had the deft touch. Its drawing-room did not possess the fine *objets d'art* such as we saw in Lady Clavering's fine house; but it was sweet and simple,--which would connote in the minds of the undiscriminating that its mistress was a sweet and simple woman. Before the enslavement of Lord Steyne's affections, Becky's slender purse forced her to choose a simple costume; but her natural beauty and her inborn grace had no need as yet of a halo to set off her charms; in her modest attire, she could out-dazzle 'the stout countesses of sixty, *decolletée*, painted, wrinkled with rouge up to their drooping eyelids, and diamonds twinkling in their wigs.' But Becky knew the value of a fine appearance in the world of social ambition. So we find her in Chapter LIII dressed in a beautiful gown and covered with Lord Steyne's jewels. When she needs a great coach, she borrows Lord Steyne's. A great deal is made of carriages in *Vanity Fair*. We meet such phrases as: "A travelling chariot with a lozenge on the panels'; "a carriage and four splendid horses, covered with armorial bearings"; "the great family coach of the Osbornes"; "as became a person of rank and fashion travelling in a barouche with four horses'; and "Mrs.

Rawdon's dashing little carriage and ponies." Thackeray seems to use the carriage as the emblem of aristocracy, even more than he makes use of the fine house for this purpose. But we have a number of the fine houses described in considerable detail. I think that we know Queen's Crawley very well,--especially the handsome gate-way with its serpent and dove, to which our attention was called at least three times; I suppose Thackeray was afraid that we might miss that delicate bit of symbolism. We also know the Clavering estate and Castle Lyndon very well. Major Pendennis, in spite of all his urbanity and ambition, did not succeed in marrying Arthur to a rich woman; the Major failed in his aim. Mr. Osborne, in spite of his great coach, his fine house, and his great social ambition, did not succeed in marrying George to the American heiress, Miss Swartz, who "had diamonds as big as pigeon-eggs." Barry Lyndon in spite of his fine pose as a cultured country gentleman, dies of the delirium tremens in Fleet Street Prison. Lady Clavering's first London season was something of a success; but the succeeding seasons brought failure. Even Becky, that _poseuse suprême_, found herself in old age, a painted old woman, wandering about the capitols of the Continent. It seems that Thackeray is telling us: You will always find pleasant people to partake of your dinners,--if they be good ones. People will say that your portrait is capitally done, if it bears the signature of Lely or Kneller or Reynolds. If your carriage is a fine one, they will be glad to go riding with you. If your house was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and its _meubles_ secured from the shop of Mr. Chippendale, why, it is probable

that your butler's salver will be graced with many fine cards. In short, Vanity Fair loves a fine show; and is very apt to smile and be pleasant as long as the show lasts. But when the Bundlecund Bank fails or those foreign securities drop to nothing on Lombard Street,--well, why tear the heart-strings of a trustful humanity? It is really very painful, but you and I know that in such dire times, it is only the Clives and Ethels, and the Amelias and the Dobbins who remain faithful. We may purchase the adulation of Vanity Fair with fine houses and costly equipages, and lavish entertainments and beautiful clothes; but the friendship and the love which endure, are based on finer things.

In addition to the socially ambitious people and the vain people in this fashionable world of Thackeray, we find a great many snobs. The snobbery usually arises from a social, a financial, or a vocational inequality,--but of course all three classes are rather intimately interwoven. Becky had not left Miss Pinkerton's Academy before she had a taste of the world's snobbish spirit:

> "The happiness--the superior advantages of the young women round about her, gave Rebecca inexpressible pangs of envy. 'What airs that girl gives herself, because she is an Earl's grand-daughter!' she said of one. 'How they cringe and bow to that Creole, because of her hundred thousand pounds! I am a thousand times cleverer and more charming than that creature, for all her wealth. I am as well-bred as the Earl's grand-daughter, for all her fine

> pedigree; and yet every one passes me by here. And yet, when I was at my father's, did not the men give up their gayest balls and parties in order to pass the evening with me?' She determined at any rate to get free from the prison in which she found herself, and now began to act for herself, and for the first time to make connected plans for the future."[1]

Probably this was the deciding factor that sent Becky out into the world, bent on a campaign of social conquest. This was when Becky was young, and before the world had had a chance to make its impress on her. Becky was much too clever ever to become an offensive snob; but the hey-day of her social success unquestionably turned her head a little. We remember how patronizing she grew to Amelia. And we have the following paragraph to ponder over:

> "A few days after the famous presentation, another great and exceeding honour was vouchsafed to the virtuous Becky. Lady Steyne's carriage drove up to Mr. Rawdon Crawley's door, and the footman, instead of driving down the front of the house, as by his tremendous knocking he appeared to be inclined to do, relented, and only delivered in a couple of cards, on which were engraved the names of the Marchioness of Steyne and the Countess of Gaunt. If these bits of pasteboard had been beautiful pictures, or had had a hundred yards of Malines lace rolled round them, worth twice the number of guineas,

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[1] *Vanity Fair*, Chap.II.

> Becky could not have regarded them with more pleasure. You may be sure they occupied a conspicuous place in the china bowl on the drawing-room table, where Becky kept the cards of her visitors. Lord! lord! how poor Mrs. Washington White's card and Lady Crackenbury's card, which our little friend had been glad enough to get a few months back, and of which the silly little creature was rather proud once--Lord! lord! I say, how soon at the appearance of these grand court cards, did those poor little neglected deuces sink down to the bottom of the pack."[1]

Lady Castlewood was endowed with a certain hauteur, which is nothing more than a sort of passive snobbery. Madam Warrington had a great deal of this in her make-up; in fact, she at times openly proclaimed her superiority to the colonists, excepting only the colonial governors and lords. But Beatrix was even more snobbish than Madam Warrington:

> "There had been no need to urge upon Esmond the necessity of a separation between himself and Beatrix: Fate had done that completely; and I think from the very moment poor Beatrix had accepted the Duke's offer, she began to assume the majestic air of a Duchess, nay, Queen Elect, and to carry herself as one sacred and removed from us common people."[2]

[1] Vanity Fair, Chap. XLVIII.   [2] Henry Esmond, Chap.VI,BK.III

Before the chapter has closed, the news of the death of the Duke of Hamilton brings the vain creature back to earth: "We knew that her pride was awfully humbled and punished by this sudden and terrible blow; she wanted no teaching of ours to point out the sad moral of her story." Even the Duke of Hamilton had patronized Henry in a most condescending manner, which was little relieved even after Lady Castlewood had informed him of Henry's true merit. Lord Farintosh was almost a boor, and Lord Kew did not hesitate to deal Clive innuendoes. In the early part of Barry Lyndon, we find him smarting under the sting of social inferiority; once he attempted to pass for an Englishman; at another time, he ran a man through who had attempted to snub him. But before the tale is half finished, we find that Redmond Barry has become a snob himself:

> "I think the soul of Harry Barry, my father, who was always so genteel in his turn of mind, must have rejoiced to see the position which I now occupied: all the women anxious to receive me, all the men in a fury; hobnobbing with dukes and counts at supper, dancing minuets with high well-born baronesses (as they absurdly call themselves in Germany), with lovely excellencies, nay, with highnesses and transparencies themselves, who could compete with the gallant young Irish noble? who would suppose that seven weeks before I had been a common --bah! I am ashamed to think of it!"[1]

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[1] Barry Lyndon, Chap. IX.

Fleet Street Prison must have been a bitter fate for this haughty dandy. Harry received a very snobbish welcome, when he arrived in England and proceeded to Castlewood; and it is very likely that he would have received no welcome at all, had it not been for the Baroness de Bernstein. He could not help contrasting the affected manners and the cold hauteur of England with the simple air of hospitality in Virginia.

> "Had any of them ridden up to his house in Virginia, whether the master were present or absent, the guests would have been made welcome, and, in sight of his ancestors' hall, he had to go and ask for a dish of bacon and eggs at a country ale-house!"[1]

Before long, he was the beau of Tunbridge Wells and the pet of the old Baroness; and how their hearts did warm toward him! And when his money was spent and George appeared on the scene, their hearts turned cold again. Even Pendennis, whom we like in spite of his faults, was something of a snob. He had hobnobbed with the bloods of Boniface, and he did not care to associate with the poorer young men who could not afford to dress well.

> "At last came the Degree Examinations. Many a young man of his year whose hob-nailed shoes Pen had derided, and whose face or coat he had caricatured--many a man whom he had treated with scorn in the lecture-room or crushed with his eloquence in the debating club--

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[1] The Virginians, Chap.II, Bk. I.

> many of his own set who had not half his brains, but a little regularity and constancy of occupation, took high places in the honours or passed with decent credit. And where in the list was Pen the superb, Pen the wit and dandy, Pen the poet and orator? Ah, where was Pen, the widow's darling and sole pride? Let us hide our heads, and shut up the page. The lists came out; and a dreadful rumour rushed through the University, that Pendennis of Boniface was plucked."[1]

We are glad to recall that Pen afterwards returned to the University of Oxbridge, and that he passed his courses, and, better still, that he had a more kindly feeling for the sons of Martha. I suppose that Clive might have been something of a snob, if it had not been that he was snubbed himself. Clive had the social misfortune of having chosen painting for his vocation; and we find the Major saying:

> "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 pastrycook, by gad."[2]

But the most amusing instance of snobbery was that of the intellectual Mrs. Newcome.

> "She had not the faintest idea but that the hospi-

[1] Pendennis, Chap.XIX. [2] The Newcomes, Chap. XXIV.

> tality which she was offering to her kinsman was of the most cordial and pleasant kind. She fancied everything she did was perfectly right and graceful. She invited her husband's clerks to come through the rain at ten o'clock from Kentish Town; she asked artists to bring their sketch books from Kensington, or luckless pianists to trudge with their music from Brompton. She rewarded them with a smile and a cup of tea, and thought they were made happy by her condescension. If, after two or three of these delightful evenings, they ceased to attend her receptions, she shook her little flaxen head, and sadly intimated that Mr. A. was getting into bad courses, or feared that Mr. B. found merely *intellectual* parties too quiet for him. Else, what young man in his senses could refuse such entertainment and instruction?"[1]

We remember that Lady Kew would not see Fanny, who had run away with Captain Canonbury, when she came to see her with one of her boys "in yellow stockings from the Bluecoat School." The fine sensibilities of this great lady would not allow her to behold such a bedraggled bit of humanity, even though She was of her own blood; so she went to bed. And when poor Lady Maria, after having been forgotten by Harry, married Mr. Hagan, her family would not see her,--for Mr. Hagan was a play actor. According to Thackeray, we find a great many snobs in society,-especially among the socially ambitious classes. They vary in degree from the unconscious snobbery of Mrs. Newcome to

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[1] *The Newcomes*, Chap.VII.

the studied snubs of that prime ass, Barnes Newcome. Although there are a great many snobs among the characters of Thackeray, there are a number of characters of fine manners. Amelia was in every sense a gentle woman. Ethel has the charm of good breeding. Dobbin is a little awkward, I think, but he is a thorough gentleman. And of Colonel Newcome, Thackeray says:

> "Where did he learn those fine manners which all of us who knew him admired in him? He had a natural simplicity, an habitual practice of kind and generous thoughts; a pure mind, and therefore above hypocrisy and affectation--perhaps those French people with whom he had been intimate in early life had imparted to him some of the traditional graces of their *vieille cour*."[1]

Fine manners are a very fine thing, but we have only to recall the circumstances under which the Colonel sang his last song, in order to know that fine manners are very often bumped and bruised in this world of snobbery and ill-breeding. That old man of the world, Major Pendennis, had just enough of the snob in himself in order to handle snobbery rather well. He tells us:

> "In the world people drop you and take you up every day. You know Lady Cheddar by sight? I have known her husband for forty years. I have stayed with them in the country for weeks at a time. She knows me as well as she knows King Charles at Charing Cross, and a doosid deal

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[1] *The Newcomes*, Chap.XV.

> better, and yet for a whole season she will drop me--pass me by, as if there was no such person in the world. Well, sir, what do I do? I never see her. I give you my word I am never conscious of her existence, and if I meet her at dinner, I'm no more aware of her than the fellows in the play are of Banquo. What's the end of it? She comes round--only last Toosday she came round--and said Lord Cheddar wanted me to go down to Wiltshire. I asked after the family. - - - We shook hands and are as good friends as ever. I don't suppose she'll cry when I die, you know, nor shall I go into *very* deep mourning if anything happens to her."[1]

Someone has defined snobbery as the art of being unkind. And I think it is because of this unkindness that Thackeray holds it up to ridicule. I think it is of incidental interest to note that a number of the critics have pointed out that although Thackeray attacked snobbery in his novels, he grew to be something of a snob himself. I think the charge is not well substantiated by fact. I think that the student of Thackeray will admit that he grew into something of a tuft-hunter; but a tuft-hunter and a snob are not exactly the same thing. A tuft-hunter is one who toadies to the rich or those of a higher social sphere. A snob is one who assumes a superiority toward his equals or inferiors. Tuft-hunting arises from an exaggerated view of the importance of others; snobbery arises from an exaggerated view of the importance of yourself.

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[1] *The Newcomes*, Chap. XXIV.

Of course it is entirely possible for the same person to be a tuft-hunter and a snob as well,--it very often is the case undoubtedly. I think that we may excuse Thackeray's slight tuft-hunting tendencies, for after all, it was perhaps necessary for his art. Dickens was interested in the Lower Tenth. Of course you may show an interest in the Lower Tenth as much as you please, and you will never be accused of tuft-hunting,--you will only be called a big-hearted humanitarian. But if you show an interest in the Upper Tenth, you will doubtless be called a big-headed cynic. But we know Thackeray much better now, and his many 'little acts of kindness and of love' have endeared him to the hearts of the people, and have done much to dispel the old charges of cynicism and snobbery.

Thackeray was interested in the Upper Tenth primarily because the *comédie mondaine* does not flourish in squalid garrets and dark hovels,--there is something about their dingy atmosphere that is too akin to tragedy. He tells us: "It does not follow that all men are honest because they are poor; and I have known some who were friendly and generous, although they had plenty of money."[1] He also tells us indirectly that the homes of the wealthy are not always filled with happiness and fine dreams and high ideals, and that the homes of the poor do not in all cases lack these wonderful things. Sir Barnes and the unhappy Lady Clara are miserable, in spite of their fine house in Belgravia and their lordly estate at Newcome. Sir Francis and Lady Clavering are wretched

[1] *The Newcomes*, Chap. I.

in spite of the fact that they have the finest drawing-room in London. At 201 Curzon Street, we find Becky driving her child from her into the kinder arms of a hired nurse. Lady Kew threatens Ethel, in the case of a love-marriage, not only with poverty, but with eleven children. These cold old hearts in their ice palaces do not love children. Let us turn away to Mrs. Ridley's, where Miss Cann is playing for the little John James:

> "She plays old music of Handel and Haydn, and the little chamber anon swells into a cathedral, and he who listens beholds altars lighted, priests ministering, fair children swinging censers, great oriel windows gleaming in sunset, and seen through arched columns and avenues of twilight marble, - - - Piano, pianissimo! the city is hushed, - - - That great sombre street all in shade, can it be the famous Toledo?--or is it the Corso?--or is it the great street in Madrid, the one which leads to the Escurial where the Rubens and Velasquez are? It is Fancy Street--Poetry Street--Imagination Street--the street where lovely ladies look from balconies, where cavaliers strike mandolins and draw swords and engage, where long processions pass, and venerable hermits, with long beards, bless the kneeling people. - - - All these delights and sights, and joys and glories, these thrills of sympathy, movements of unknown longing, and visions of beauty, a young sickly lad of eighteen enjoys in a little dark room where there is a bed disguised in the shape of a wardrobe, and a little old woman is playing under a gas-lamp on the

> jingling keys of an old piano."[1]

In sketching for us his economic cross-section of London, I think that Thackeray is trying to show that happiness is after all a subjective thing, and cannot be bought with fine houses and brilliant equipages. He does not allow us for one moment, however, to think that wealth is not respected very highly.

> "People in Vanity Fair fasten on to rich folks quite naturally. If the simplest people are disposed to look not a little kindly on great Prosperity (for I defy any member of the British public to say that the notion of Wealth has not something awful and pleasing to him; and you, if you are told that the man next you at dinner has got half a million, not to look at him with a certain interest); --if the simple look benevolently on money, how much more do your old worldlings regard it!"[2]

We remember that Lady Clavering's first season in London was something of a success, or at least the nearest thing to a success which that good lady ever enjoyed. Perhaps the reason was because

> "The legend in London, upon her Ladyship's arrival in the polite metropolis, was, that her fortune was enormous. Indigo factories, opium clippers, banks overflowing with rupees, diamonds and jewels of native princes, and vast sums of interest paid by them for loans contracted by themselves or their predecessors to Lady Clavering's father,

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[1] *The Newcomes*, Chap. XI.

[2] *Vanity Fair*, Chap. XXI.

> were mentioned as sources of her wealth. Her account at her London banker's was positively known, and the sum embraced so many ciphers as to create as many 0's of admiration in the wondering hearer."[1]

In much the same way, Miss Swartz, with her "diamonds as big as pigeon-eggs," was greatly admired and courted. And Miss Van den Bosch, in spite of her Cherokee manner, was very popular. This inordinate adulation of wealth is a great temptation to dissimulate wealth. And many are those who try it, with their extravagant spending and their debts unpaid. The debts grown larger and larger, until one day

> "We read that a nobleman has left for the Continent, or that another noble nobleman has an execution in his house--and that one or other owes six or seven millions, the defeat seems glorious even, and we respect the victim in the vastness of his ruin. But who pities a poor barber who can't get his money for powdering the footmen's heads; or a poor carpenter who has ruined himself by fixing up ornaments and pavilions for my ladies' *déjeuner*; or the poor devil of a tailor whom the steward patronises, and who has pledged all he is worth and more, to get the liveries ready, which my lord has done him the honour to bespeak?--When the great house tumbles down, these miserable wretches fall under it unnoticed: and as they say in the old legends, before a man goes to the devil himself, he sends plenty of other souls thither."[2]

[1] *Pendennis*, Chap. XXXVII.

[2] *Vanity Fair*, Chap. XXXVII.

As a result of these great noblemen's robbing their petty tradesmen, condescending to swindle their poor retainers out of wretched little sums, and cheating for a few shillings, we find much suffering and poverty. This is doubtless one of the reasons why

> "A pauper child in London at seven years old knows how to go to market, to fetch the beer, to pawn father's coat, to choose the largest fried fish or the nicest ham-bone, to nurse Mary Jane of three,--to conduct a hundred operations of trade or housekeeping, which a little Belgravian does not perhaps acquire in all the days of her life. Poverty and necessity force this precociousness on the poor little brat. There are children who are accomplished shoplifters and liars almost as soon as they can toddle and speak."[1]

And the irony of the situation is that these noblemen have brought disgrace to themselves and poverty to others, while what they have been seeking is happiness.--Which is but another illustration of the old idea: Happiness can not be attained directly, for it is an attendant quality; it exists in the realm of the mind and the heart, rather than in the flesh.

Thackeray tells us that wickedness often wears purple and rides in a gilded coach, while virtue is all too often its only reward. We are to suppose that Amelia and Dobbin found great happiness, after the book was closed; but they certainly found no rose-strewn paths during the progress of the novel. Laura

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[1] The Newcomes, Chap.LIII.

is a wonderfully fine little woman; but we doubt if Pendennis quite fully appreciates her: He has shown a preference for the Fotheringay, Blanche, and little Fanny Bolton. But of course these little loves are as dead now as last summer's roses, and Laura is now his Queen of Love and Beauty. Colonel Newcome is the soul of honor; and yet he is entangled in the crash of his bank, he is made the butt of politics, he is snubbed in society, and he dies a pauper in Grey Friars. He has lived such a beautiful life and he died such a beautiful death, that we are assured of his munificent reward in heaven. But heavenly rewards are a little too intangible to be of much service in this very materialistic world. This state of affairs arises from the fact that the world is so superficial and inaccurate in its judgments. Because of this superficial judgment, greedy wolves are able to masquerade in sheep's clothing:

> "From these curious confessions, it would appear that Mr. Lyndon maltreated his lady in every possible way; that he denied her society, bullied her into signing away her property, spent it in gambling and taverns, was openly unfaithful to her; and, when she complained, threatened to remove her children from her. Nor, indeed, is he the only husband who has done the like, and has passed for 'nobody's enemy but his own'; a jovial, good-natured fellow. The world contains scores of such amiable people; and, indeed, it is because justice has not been done them that we have edited this autobiography."[1]

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[1] From the second foot-note of Chapter XVII of Barry Lyndon.

Thackeray's asides are somewhat more pessimistic and fatalistic in regard to his philosophy of the reward of virtue here on this earth than is the motivation of his characters. He tells us in an aside:

> "If the best men do not draw the great prizes in life, we know it has been so settled by the Ordainer of the lottery. We own, and see daily, how the false and worthless live and prosper, while the good are called away and the dear and young perish untimely,--we perceive in every man's life the maimed happiness, the frequent falling, the bootless endeavour, the struggle of Right and Wrong, in which the strong often succumb and the swift fail: we see flowers of good blooming in foul places, as, in the most lofty and splendid fortunes, flaws of vice and meanness, and stains of evil."[1]

When we follow the careers of the characters, we see that, according to Thackeray, virtue is generally rewarded here on earth, but the reward often does not come before life's sun is sinking. At the close of the book, Amelia and Dobbin are rewarded with a happiness which more than compensates for their past trials. At the illness of Colonel Newcome, Ethel and Clive were brought together; and although they were not married until after the Colonel's death, I am sure he could see the way the wind was blowing. This marriage had been a sort of life-aim with the old gentleman; and although he would not see it, its prospect must have

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[1] *Pendennis*, Chap. LXXV.

been a delight. The faint flushes of the dawn are almost as beautiful as the sunrise. In much the same way, Helen Pendennis did not live to see the marriage of Pen and Laura, but she had seen Pen past the crisis. I think that we may say from Thackeray's premises, that the reward of virtue is often a tardy one, but it generally receives its reward. The perception of objective values is elemental and easy. Objective evaluations are therefore apt to be hasty and superficial. The wicked know this, and take advantage of this fact in donning their sheep's clothing. A fine appreciation of subjective values demands a mind that is gifted with introspection and perspicacity,--qualities which the average mind possesses in only a limited degree. So the things on the surface are taken in at a glance, while the fine qualities of mind and soul are perceived more slowly. And this state of things means the final unmasking of sham and vice, and the ultimate reward of virtue.

When Arthur was making ready to set out into the world, old Major Pendennis gave him some advice. And that advice was largely this: Study the peerage. Of course that advice was largely what you would expect from an old and successful tuft-hunter. It not only signified, however, that you should pick the objects of your flatteries and courtesies most carefully, in order to be sure of hunting game which is worth the effort; but you should also know the great families so that you will not find yourself inadvertently gossiping about the incorrigible Lady Blank with your neighbor at the table, Duke So-and-so, whom you find to your chagrin is her brother, Not only is a knowledge of the family trees profitable and

tactful, but it is likewise pleasant.--Genealogy is a subject which is ever dear to the hearts of the aristocrats. As a matter of fact, so the Major tells us, much that you will read about these great families in the peerage is utterly false, and much that they tell you themselves is either false or greatly exaggerated. And the Major adds that really very few of the families which you find in the peerage, are better than his own. He tells us that John Pendennis, "the man of medicine" (who was really an apothecary in Brighton, as we all know), was a very fine country gentleman. Nearly all of the Irish characters tell us that they are "descended from the Hibernian kings." I remember very clearly that Barry told us this a number of times; and "honest Jack Costigan" took a number of opportunities to lay claim to that distinction. The Major also called attention to the fact that a number of the fine families have their family skeleton,--and we remember the skeleton in Lady Clavering's closet, or rather dining-room and drawing-rooms, for he would not stay in the closet like a well-mannered skeleton. Although Thackeray poked fun at that old English institution, The Great Family, we know that he was very fond of the aristocracy. As someone has said, although Thackeray made fun of the conventions, he was at home in them, and he loved them.

It is not unusual to meet the charge that Thackeray created extremes of character. I think that we must admit that the charge is rather well-founded. It is a case of being somewhat reminiscent of a jingle in Mother Goose: 'When they're good, they're very good; and when they're bad, they're horrid.' Becky has not a heart. Barry Lyndon, if we accept him at face

value, is an inhuman monster. Major Pendennis is so worldly, that you feel that he does not have a soul; his shade is probably wandering down Bond Street still, and peering through the windows of the Reform Club and the Garrick. Old Jack Costigan is a wild boy grown into a debauched old man. Rummum Loll is a yellow devil from India. But Amelia is so sweet that she is a little insipid. Dobbin is so good that he is a dull boy. Laura is a twining bit of honey-suckle. Now it does not of course mean that Thackeray necessarily saw life in extremes, merely because he chose to depict his characters in that way. Thackeray chose the satirical method; and satire demands something of exaggeration. Satire is usually concerned with manners and morals, but it may extend to characterization also,--which I think is the case with Thackeray. Of course he flays the wicked because of their wickedness; and I think he ridicules in a rather gentle way the stupidity of the rigidly righteous. When Pen was about to set out into the world, the Major told Helen something like this: 'Let the boy get out into the world where he can see the good and bad; and then let him judge for himself.' I am sure that this advice sounded almost banal to the pink ears of Helen Pendennis; but to long, lean, yellow ears, such as yours and mine, this advice sounds very much like common sense. The worldly are worldly, and the spiritual are of the spirit; but there is a happy medium. Let us seek to know the world, for we live in the world; but let us strive to live elevated just a little above it.

Thackeray tells us that he is not interested in the heroic type. He tells us that Vanity Fair is a novel without a hero.

Pendennis has a hero, but he is not a particularly heroic hero. The swaggering Barry Lyndon struts to the tune of pseudo-heroics. There are no great men of science, no brilliant statesmen, no famous artists, no fine musicians in the pages of Thackeray. The apothecary of Brighton is the most illustrious "man of medicine" that we have. Marlborough is sketched; but he is included merely for the sake of historical atmosphere. Steele and Addison appear for the same reason. Washington stalks across the stage in the early chapters of The Virginians; where, incidentally, he is shown in a very favorable light, in spite of the fact that the author has told us in the second chapter of The Newcomes, "Mr. Washington was heading the Americans rebels with a courage, it must be confessed, worthy of a better cause." We sometimes peep at the portraits of Lely, Kneller, and Reynolds; but we never meet these gentlemen. There is an artistic reason why we never see but little of these really worth-while people: It is difficult to portray successfuly the historically great personage as the central figure in a novel; for this type of character is bound too much by the shackles of fact,--he cannot soar into the realm of the fancy; it becomes a case of history rather than literature. But it seems to me that there is also a philosophical reason behind the fact that we seldom meet really great people in Vanity Fair. The really worth-while people make little sallies into Vanity Fair, like the Delta planter goes to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, but they do not dwell there. They live somewhat apart and above the calcium and the tinsel of Mayfair. It is a case of finding Madame

Curie not at the Chateau Madrid, but in an unostentatious laboratory along the Seine. But in Vanity Fair: we find Clives who daub and dab, but never paint; we find Rosey Mackenzies who know five pretty little roulades, and are learning a sixth; we find Pendennises who write sweet society verses, but never poems; and we find Colonel Newcomes who have their names on bank windows, but are not bankers. It is the dilettantism of Vanity Fair.

When Henry Esmond was young, he was placed under the tutelage of Father Holt. "And his (Father Holt's) delight in their walks was to tell Harry of the glories of his order, of its martyrs and heroes, of its Brethren converting the heathen by myriads, traversing the desert, facing the stake, ruling the courts and councils, or braving the tortures of kings; so that Harry Esmond thought that to belong to the Jesuits was the greatest prize of life and bravest end of ambition; the greatest career here, and in heaven the surest reward; and began to long for the day, not only when he should enter into the one Church and receive his first communion, but when he might join that wonderful brotherhood, which was present throughout all the world, and which numbered the wisest, the bravest, the highest born, the most eloquent of men among its members."[1] But the people at large did not have quite that fine reverence for the Jesuits, for one day "a great mob of people came hooting and jeering around the coach, bawling out, 'The Bishops for ever!' 'Down with the Pope!' 'No Popery! no Popery! Jezebel! Jezebel!' so that my Lord began to laugh, my Lady's eyes to roll with anger, for she was bold as a lioness, and feared nobody; whilst Mr.

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[1] Henry Esmond, Chap. III, Book I.

[illegible] not of the Christian [illegible], but of a [illegible] [illegible] along the [illegible]. [illegible] who [illegible], [illegible]; we find [illegible] who have been pretty little creatures, and now [illegible]; we find [illegible] who write [illegible], but [illegible] pounds; and we find Colonel Newcome who have their [illegible], but [illegible]. It is the distribution of Vanity Fair.

When Henry Esmond was young, he was placed under the care of Father Holt. "Then his (Father Holt's) greatest delight in their walks was to tell Henry of the glories of his order, of its martyrs and heroes, of its Brethren converting the heathen by myriads, traversing the desert, facing the stake, ruling the courts and councils, or braving the tortures of kings; so that Henry Esmond thought that to belong to the Jesuits was the greatest prize of life and bravest end of ambition; the greatest career here, and in heaven the surest reward; and began to long for the day, not only when he should enter into the one church and receive [illegible] first sacraments, but when he might join that wonderful brotherhood, which was present throughout all the world, and which numbered the wisest, the bravest, the highest born, the most eloquent of men among its members." But the people at large did not take quite kindly to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

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[1] Henry Esmond, Bk. III, Chap. I.

Holt, as Esmond saw from his place on the step, sank back with rather an alarmed face, crying out to her Ladyship, 'For God's sake, madam, do not speak or look out of window; sit still'."[1] And although it has nothing to do whatever with religion, I cannot refrain from quoting her Ladyship's command to the coachman: "Flog your way through them, the brutes James, and use your whip." But as Henry grew older, he gradually turned away from the Catholic influence. When he later meets Father Holt in the disguise of a Bavarian officer's uniform, a declaration of religious independence takes place:

> "'A priest in full orders, and with a pair of mustachios, and a Bavarian uniform!'
>
> 'My son,' says Father Holt, turning red, 'in the cause of religion and loyalty all disguises are fair.'
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> 'Yes,' broke in Esmond, 'all disguises are fair, you say; and all uniforms, say I, black or red--a black cockade or a white one--or a laced hat, or a sombrero, with a tonsure under it. I cannot believe that Saint Francis Xavier sailed over the sea in a cloak, or raised the dead --I tried, and very nearly did once, but cannot. Suffer me to do the right, and to hope for the best in my own way.'"[2]

We are gradually given an insight into the plots of the Jesuits, which Henry Esmond, as he looks backward, characterizes as "conspiracies so like murder, so cowardly in the means used, so wicked in the end, that our nation has sure done well in throwing off all allegiance and fidelity to the unhappy family

[1] *Henry Esmond*, Chap. III, Bk. I. [2] Ibid., Chap. XIII, Bk. II.

that could not vindicate its right except by such treachery--by such dark intrigue and base agents."[1] These remarks, even though spoken in character, are scarcely ones which you would expect from the pen of a man leaning toward the Catholic faith. *Esmond* was published in 1852. At this same period, we meet the following anecdote: "When it was rumored that Thackeray was leaning towards the Church of Rome, and someone remarked, 'Why, they are Romanizing old Thackeray,' 'I hope,' said Jerrold, 'I hope they'll begin at his nose'."[2] I should say that the majority of Thackeray's characters are members of the Church of England. Mr. Whitfield and his Methodists were having a hard time at the period of *The Newcomes*; we meet such sneers against them as "calling her an old cat, an old Methodist," and "I dare say her Methodistical ladyship will not care to see the daughter and grandson of a clergyman of the Church of Enland." It was better to be a Methodist, however, than an infidel; for Colonel Newcome tells us: "Gibbon! Gibbon was an infidel, and I would not give the end of this cigar for such a man's opinion." As to the various sects, it seems to be a case of :"Who are the Philistines? The others, the others, the others!" I do not recall that Thackeray joined any denomination but we know from his many references to the Deity that he had rather conventional ideas in regard to religion. Thackeray marvels at the austere religiosity of old:

'Saint Peter of Alacantara - - - passed forty years of

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[1] *Henry Esmond,* Chap. IV, Book II.

[2] Lewis Melville: *William Makepeace Thackeray,* Chap.XV. p. 296, V.I.

> his life sleeping only an hour and a half each day; his cell was but four feet and a half long, so that he never lay down: his pillow was a wooden log in the stone wall: he ate but once in three days: he was for three years in a convent of his order without knowing any one of his brethren except by the sound of their voices, for he never during this period took his eyes off the ground: he always walked barefoot, and was but skin and bone when he died. --I fancy Saint Peter of Alcantara, and contrast him with such a personage as the Incumbent of Lady Whittlesea's Chapel, Mayfair."[1]

And then we meet the Reverend Charles Honeyman, who devours French novels when alone and pours over abstruse works of theology when someone is near, who specializes on sweetly sentimental sermons that make the ladies cry, and who toadies in every way to The Upper Classes. Is he popular? He is Society's very own. Is he deeply religious? Eh bien, c'est une autre question. Another one of these f1ấneurs religieux is the Reverend Sampson, who proves, on close inspection, to be nearly everything save the strong man of God. He delivers us a fine sermon in the Castlewood chapel on some poor devil who "had taken to drinking, card-playing, horse-racing, cock-fighting, and the vices of the age"; and before the chapter is finished, we see that Mr. Sampson is addicted to many of these very vices himself. A lady who has spent many years in England, tells me that the Church is the salvation of the second sons-of-little-promise. Thackeray seems to feel something of this same attitude.

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[1] The Newcomes, Chap. XI.

Most of the people of Vanity Fair are of rather old families, or what comes to the same thing in this connection, they would love to be regarded as of old family; so they are usually Tories. They love the landed nobility, the system of primogeniture, the restricted franchise, and the pomps and glories of a sophisticated court life. In short, the old order of things is dear to their hearts. Thackeray was very much of a clubman; he was a member of the Garrick, the Reform, the Athenaeum, and one or two smaller ones. He loved club life. He even wrote parts of some of his novels at his clubs. He enjoyed good dinners and fine wines. He was exceedingly fond of the theatre. He was skilled in drawing and painting. He was rather lazy, even though he could turn out a vast amount of work under pressure; and he was notoriously unsystematic. He loved luxurious ease. Nothing pleased him better than to loll with the peers, in spite of the fact that he made fun of them in his novels. I am describing for you a Tory; and still Thackeray was not a Tory. In spite of his aristocratic tastes, he had very democratic political ideas, save in regard to slavery. When Henry Esmond is assisting the Prince to gain the throne, he pauses to ask himself: "Had I not best have joined the manly creed of Addison yonder, that scouts the old doctrine of right divine, that boldly declares that Parliament and people consecrate the Sovereign, not bishops, nor genealogies, nor oils, nor coronations?"[1] We find a very similar idea expressed by Thackeray in a speech which he made at Oxford in 1857 in behalf of his candidacy for Parliament:

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[1] <u>Henry Esmond</u>, Chap. IX, Book III.

> "With no feeling but that of goodwill towards those leading aristocratic families who are administering the chief offices of the State, I believe it could be benefitted by the skill and talents of persons less aristocratic, and that the country thinks so likewise. - - - And should you think fit to elect me as your representative, I promise to use my utmost endeavour to increase and advance the social happiness, the knowledge, and the power of the people."[1]

But in spite of Thackeray's fine democracy, he did not meet with success as a politician.

When Thackeray visited the United States in 1853, there was a considerable ferment in the North over the negro question; and Thackeray's democracy was questioned, because he did not choose to attack slavery. When he was asked about the South and slavery, he tactfully replied that he could not find fault with a people who gave him such uncommonly good claret. He took the attitude that slavery, although wrong in principle, was not such an evil in actual practice in the Southern States. Henry Esmond tells us at the end of the book, "Our diamonds are turned into ploughs and axes for our plantations; and into negroes, the happiest and merriest, I think, in all this country." When Harry goes to England to visit the ancestral seat, he tells us that the English do not have as many servants as is the custom in Virginia, but that the English servants are better trained and work harder. The negroes in the colonies are drawn as being

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[1] Lewis Melville: William Makepeace Thackeray, Chap. XIX, p. 16, v.ii.

rather ragged, but well-fed, very happy, and very, very lazy,--which would connote that they were not over-worked. Thackeray does not seem to think that the negro was physically mistreated; but he seems to insinuate that the negro should be accorded more social recognition. He says:

> "Wherever that dusky youth was, he sought comfort in the society of females. Their fair and tender bosoms knew how to feel pity for the poor African, and the darkness of Gumbo's complexion was no more repulsive to them than Othello's to Desdemona. I believe Europe has never been so squeamish in regard to Africa, as a certain other respected quarter. Nay, some Africans--witness the Chevalier de St. Georges, for instance--have been notorious favorites with the fair sex."[1]

--Which, I think, does not speak very well for the European fair sex.

Thackeray regards old age as the great disillusionment; and he regards death as a release from the ache of living. But we make our old age in our youth.

> "We alter very little. When we talk of this man or that woman being no longer the same person whom we remember in youth, and remark - - - changes in our friends, we don't perhaps calculate that circumstances only bring out the latent defects or quality, and does not create it."[2]

[1] The Virginians, Chap. I, v.iii.
[2] Pendennis, Chap. LIX.

Henry Esmond has not centered his ambitions on life's fading and vanishing vanities; and so he can tell us when old age is upon him: "In our Transatlantic country we have a season, the calmest and most delightful of the year, which we call the Indian summer: I often say the autumn of our life resembles that happy and serene weather, and am thankful for its rest and its sweet sunshine."[1] For those who have put great store in worldly things which have now vanished, life is as austere as winter:

> "When cheeks are faded, and eyes are dim, is it sad or pleasant, I wonder, to the woman who is a beauty no more, to recall the period of her bloom? When the heart is withered, do the old live to remember how it once was fresh and beat with warm emotions? When the spirits are languid and weary, do we like to think how bright they were in other days, the hope how buoyant, the sympathies how ready, the enjoyment of life how keen and eager? So they fall,--the buds of prime, the roses of beauty, the florid harvests of summer,--fall and wither, and the naked branches shiver in the winter."[2]

So Becky and Barry and Beatrix find themselves quite alone on this earth, and without anyone's loving them in heaven. They have no treasures of the spirit; they have only a few trinkets in Memory's box. And when the final hour comes, there is Retribution waiting on the other side.--Perhaps that is why Beatrix is plagued with the past on her death-bed.

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[1] *Henry Esmond*, *Chap*.XIII, Book III.
[2] *The Virginians*, Chap.XXII, v.ii.

Perhaps that is why Barry Lyndon dies a horrible death in prison and that is why Becky dies the most horrible of all deaths,-- the wandering death. But with our good characters, death is a peaceful passing and something of a welcome release. "At length the time came when Mr.Esmond was to have done with the affairs of this life, and he laid them down as if glad to be rid of their burden."[1] "Scarsdale is gone now, sir, and is where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest; and I thought then, when we saw him,-- here would be a place for an old fellow when his career was over, to hang his sword up; to humble his soul, and to wait thankfully for the end."[2] "The sainted woman was dead. The last emotion of her soul here was joy, to be henceforth unchequered and eternal. The tender heart beat no more; it was to have no more pangs, no more doubts, no more griefs and trials."[3] "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."[4] To the wicked old age brings bitterness, and death brings despair. But the pure in heart find rest in old age, and escape in death. The frivolous children of the earth base their love on transient things. The salt of the earth lay their store in things which are eternal.

[1] The Virginians, Chap.III, Book I. [2] The Newcomes, Chap.LXXV.

[3] Pendennis, Chap.LVII. [4] The Newcomes, Chap.LXXX.

The philosophy of Vanity Fair is as hedonistic as the wine and roses atmosphere of the Rubáiyát. The philosophy of Thackeray is very well caught in the lines of Lowell:

"For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
Bubbles we buy with the whole soul's tasking:
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking."

The philosophy of Thackeray is the philosophy of worldly disenchantment, without the loss of faith in higher things.

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