CHAPTER II.

The Novel continued—Thackeray.

I. The novel of manners in England multiplies, and for this there are several reasons: first, it is born there, and every plant thrives well in its own soil; secondly, it is a natural outlet: there is no music in England as in Germany, or conversation as in France; and men who must think and feel find in it a means of feeling and thinking. On the other hand, women take part in it with eagerness; amidst the stagnation of gallantry and the coldness of religion, it gives scope for imagination and dreams. Finally, by its minute details and practical counsels, it opens up a career to the precise and moral mind. The critic thus is, as it were, swamped in this copiousness; he must select in order to grasp the whole, and confine himself to a few in order to embrace all.

In this crowd two men have appeared of superior talent, original and contrasted, popular on the same grounds, ministers to the same cause, moralists in comedy and drama, defenders of natural sentiments against social institutions; who, by the precision of their pictures, the depth of their observations, the succession and bitterness of their attacks, have renewed, with other views and in another style, the old combative spirit of Swift and Fielding.
One, more ardent, more expansive, wholly given up to rapture, an impassioned painter of crude and dazzling pictures, a lyric prose-writer, omnipotent in laughter and tears, plunged into fantastic invention, painful sensibility, vehement buffoonery; and by the boldness of his style, the excess of his emotions, the grotesque familiarity of his caricatures, he has displayed all the forces and weaknesses of an artist, all the audacities, all the successes, and all the oddities of the imagination.

The other, more contained, better informed and stronger, a lover of moral dissertations, a counsellor of the public, a sort of lay preacher, less bent on defending the poor, more bent on censuring man, has brought to the aid of satire a sustained common sense, a great knowledge of the heart, consummate cleverness, powerful reasoning, a treasure of meditated hatred, and has persecuted vice with all the weapons of reflection. By this contrast the one completes the other; and we may form an exact idea of English taste, by placing the portrait of William Makepeace Thackeray by the side of that of Charles Dickens.

§ 1.—The Satirist.

II.

No wonder if in England a novelist writes satires. A gloomy and reflective man is impelled to it by his character; he is still further impelled by the surrounding manners. He is not permitted to contemplate passions as poetic powers; he is bidden to appreciate them as moral qualities. His pictures become sentences; he is a counsellor rather than an observer, a
judge rather than an artist. We see by what machinery Thackeray has changed novel into satire.

I open at random his three great works—*Pendennis*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Newcomes*. Every scene sets in relief a moral truth: the author desires that at every page we should form a judgment on vice and virtue; he has blamed or approved beforehand, and the dialogues or portraits are to him only means by which he adds our approbation to his approbation, our blame to his blame. He is giving us lessons; and beneath the sentiments which he describes, as beneath the events which he relates, we continually discover rules for our conduct and the intentions of a reformer.

On the first page of *Pendennis* we see the portrait of an old major, a man of the world, selfish and vain, seated comfortably in his club, at the table by the fire, and near the window, envied by surgeon Glowry, whom nobody ever invites, seeking in the records of aristocratic entertainments for his own name, gloriously placed amongst those of illustrious guests. A family letter arrives. Naturally he puts it aside and reads it carelessly last of all. He utters an exclamation of horror; his nephew wants to marry an actress. He has places booked in the coach (charging the sum which he disburses for the seats to the account of the widow and the young scapegrace of whom he is guardian), and hastens to save the young fool. If there were a low marriage, what would become of his invitations? The manifest conclusion is: Let us not be selfish, or vain, or fond of good living, like the major.

Chapter the second: Pendennis, the father of the young man in love, had "exercised the profession of apothecary and surgeon," but, being of good birth, his "secret ambition had always been to be a gentleman." He comes
into money; is called Doctor, marries the very distant relative of a lord, tries to get acquainted with high families. He boasts to the last day of his life of having been invited by Sir Pepin Ribstone to an entertainment. He buys a small estate, tries to sink the apothecary, and shows off in the new glory of a landed proprietor. Each of these details is a concealed or evident sarcasm, which says to the reader: "My good friend, remain the honest John Tomkins that you are; and for the love of your son and yourself, avoid taking the airs of a great nobleman."

Old Pendennis dies. His son, the noble heir of the domain, "Prince of Pendennis and Grand Duke of Fairoaks," begins to reign over his mother, his cousin, and the servants. He sends wretched verses to the county papers, begins an epic poem, a tragedy in which sixteen persons die, a scathing history of the Jesuits, and defends church and king like a loyal Tory. He sighs after the ideal, wishes for an unknown maiden, and falls in love with an actress, a woman of thirty-two, who learns her parts mechanically, as ignorant and stupid as can be. Young folks, my dear friends, you are all affected, pretentious, dupes of yourselves and of others. Wait to judge the world until you have seen it, and do not think you are masters when you are scholars.

The lesson continues and lasts as long as the life of Arthur. Like Le Sage in *Gil Blas*, and Balzac in *Le Père Goriot*, the author of *Pendennis* depicts a young man having some talent, endowed with good feelings, even generous, desiring to make a name, whilst, at the same time, he falls in with the maxims of the world; but Le Sage only wished to amuse us, and Balzac only wished to stir our passions: Thackeray, from beginning to end, labours to correct us.
This intention becomes still more evident if we examine in detail one of his dialogues and one of his pictures. We will not find there impartial energy, bent on copying nature, but attentive thoughtfulness, bent on transforming into satire objects, words, and events. All the words of the character are chosen and weighed, so as to be odious or ridiculous. It accuses itself, is studious to display vice, and behind its voice we hear the voice of the writer who judges, unmask, and punishes it. Miss Crawley, a rich old woman, falls ill. Mrs. Bute Crawley, her relative, hastens to save her, and to save the inheritance. Her aim is to have excluded from the will a nephew, Captain Rawdon, an old favourite, presumptive heir of the old lady. This Rawdon is a stupid guardsman, a frequenter of taverns, a too clever gambler, a duellist, and a roué. Fancy the capital opportunity for Mrs. Bute, the respectable mother of a family, the worthy spouse of a clergyman, accustomed to write her husband's sermons! From sheer virtue she hates Captain Rawdon, and will not suffer that such a good sum of money should fall into such bad hands. Moreover, are we not responsible for our families? and is it not for us to publish the faults of our relatives? It is our strict duty, and Mrs. Bute acquits herself of hers conscientiously. She collects edifying stories of her nephew, and therewith she edifies the aunt. He has ruined so and so; he has wronged such a woman. He has duped this tradesman; he has killed his husband. And above all, unworthy man, he has mocked his aunt! Will that generous lady

1 *Vanity Fair.* [Unless the original octavo edition is mentioned, the translator has always used the collected edition of Thackeray's works in small octavo, 1855-1868, 14 vols.]
continue to cherish such a viper? Will she suffer her
numberless sacrifices to be repaid by such ingratitude
and such ridicule? We can imagine the ecclesiastical
eloquence of Mrs. Bute. Seated at the foot of the bed,
she keeps the patient in sight, plies her with draughts,
enlivens her with terrible sermons, and mounts guard
at the door against the probable invasion of the heir.
The siege was well conducted, the legacy attacked so
obstinately must be yielded up; the virtuous fingers of
the matron grasped beforehand and by anticipation the
substantial heap of shining sovereigns. And yet a
carping spectator might have found some faults in her
management. Mrs. Bute managed rather too well. She
forgot that a woman persecuted with sermons, handled
like a bale of goods, regulated like a clock, might take
a dislike to so harassing an authority. What is worse,
she forgot that a timid old woman, confined to the
house, overwhelmed with preachings, poisoned with pills,
might die before having changed her will, and leave all,
alas, to her scoundrelly nephew. Instructive and for-
midable example! Mrs. Bute, the honour of her sex,
the consoler of the sick, the counsellor of her family
having ruined her health to look after her beloved sister-
in-law, and to preserve the inheritance, was just on the
point, by her exemplary devotion, of putting the patient
in her coffin, and the inheritance in the hands of her
nephew.

Apothecary Clump arrives; he trembles for his dear
client; she is worth to him two hundred a year; he is
resolved to save this precious life, in spite of Mrs. Bute.
Mrs. Bute interrupts him, and says: "I am sure, my
dear Mr. Clump, no efforts of mine have been wanting
to restore our dear invalid, whom the ingratitude of her
nephew has laid on the bed of sickness. I never shrink from personal discomfort; I never refuse to sacrifice myself. . . . I would lay down my life for my duty, or for any member of my husband’s family.”  

The disinterested apothecary returns to the charge heroically. Immediately she replies in the finest strain; her eloquence flows from her lips as from an over-full pitcher. She cries aloud: “Never, as long as nature supports me, will I desert the post of duty. As the mother of a family and the wife of an English clergyman, I humbly trust that my principles are good. When my poor James was in the small-pox, did I allow any hireling to nurse him? No!” The patient Clump scatters about sugared compliments, and pressing his point amidst interruptions, protestations, offers of sacrifice, railings against the nephew, at last hits the mark. He delicately insinuates that the patient “should have change, fresh air, gaiety.” “The sight of her horrible nephew casually in the Park, where I am told the wretch drives with the brazen partner of his crimes,” Mrs. Bute said (letting the cat of selfishness out of the bag of secrecy), “would cause her such a shock, that we should have to bring her back to bed again. She must not go out, Mr. Clump. She shall not go out as long as I remain to watch over her. And as for my health, what matters it? I give it cheerfully, sir. I sacrifice it at the altar of my duty.” It is clear that the author attacks Mrs. Bute and all legacy-hunters. He gives her ridiculous airs, pompous phrases, a transparent, coarse, and blustering hypocrisy. The reader feels hatred and disgust for her the more she speaks. He would unmask her; he is pleased to see her assailed.

1 *Vanity Fair*, ch. xix.
driven into a corner, taken in by the polished manœuvres of her adversary, and rejoices with the author, who tears from her and emphasises the shameful confession of her tricks and her greed.

Having arrived so far, satirical reflection quite the literary form. In order the better to develop itself, it exhibits itself alone. Thackeray now attacks vice himself, and in his own name. No author is more fertile in dissertations; he constantly enters his story to reprimand or instruct us; he adds theoretical to active morality. We might glean from his novels one or two volumes of essays in the manner of La Bruyère or of Addison. There are essays on love, on vanity, on hypocrisy on meanness, on all the virtues, all the vices; and turning over a few pages, we shall find one on the comedies of legacies, and on too attentive relatives:

"What a dignity it gives an old lady, that balance at the banker's! How tenderly we look at her faults, if she is a relative (and may every reader have a score of such), what a kind, good-natured old creature we find her! How the junior partner of Hobbs and Dobbs leads her smiling to the carriage with the lozenge upon it, and the fat wheezy coachman! How, when she comes to pay us a visit, we generally find an opportunity to let our friends know her station in the world! We say (and with perfect truth) I wish I had Miss MacWhirter's signature to a cheque for five thousand pounds. She wouldn't miss it, says your wife. She is my aunt, say you, in an easy careless way, when your friend asks if Miss MacWhirter is any relative! Your wife is perpetually sending her little testimonies of affection; your little girls work endless worsted baskets, cushions, and foot-stools for her. What a good fire there is in her room when she comes to pay you a visit, although your wife takes her stays without one! The house during her stay assumes a festive, neat, warm, jovial, snug appearance not visible at other
seasons. You yourself, dear sir, forget to go to sleep after dinner, and find yourself all of a sudden (though you invariably lose) very fond of a rubber. What good dinners you have—game every day, Malmsey-Madeira, and no end of fish from London! Even the servants in the kitchen share in the general prosperity; and, somehow, during the stay of Miss MacWhirter's fat coachman, the beer is grown much stronger, and the consumption of tea and sugar in the nursery (where her maid takes her meals) is not regarded in the least. Is it so, or is it not so? I appeal to the middle classes. Ah, gracious powers! I wish you would send me an old aunt—a maiden aunt—an aunt with a lozenge on her carriage, and a front of light coffee-coloured hair—how my children should work workbags for her, and my Julia and I would make her comfortable! Sweet—sweet vision! Foolish—foolish dream!"

There is no disguising it. The reader most resolved not to be warned, is warned. When we have an aunt with a good sum to leave, we shall value our attentions and our tenderness at their true worth. The author has taken the place of our conscience, and the novel transformed by reflection, becomes a school of manners.

III.

The lash is laid on very heavily in this school; it is the English taste. About tastes and whips there is no disputing; but without disputing we may understand, and the surest means of understanding the English taste is to compare it with the French taste.

I see in France, in a drawing-room of men of wit, or in an artist's studio, a score of lively people: they must be amused, that is their character. You may speak to them of human wickedness, but on condition of di-

1 Vanity Fair, ch. ix.
verting them. If you get angry, they will be shocked; if you teach a lesson, they will yawn. Laugh, it is the rule here—not cruelly, or from manifest enmity, but in good humour and in lightness of spirit. This nimble wit must act; the discovery of a clean piece of folly is a fortunate hap for it. As a light flame, it glides and flickers in sudden outbreaks on the mere surface of things. Satisfy it by imitating it, and to please gay people be gay. Be polite, that is the second commandment, very like the other. You speak to sociable delicate, vain men, whom you must take care not to offend, but whom you must flatter. You would wound them by trying to carry conviction by force, by dint of solid arguments, by a display of eloquence and indignation. Do them the honour of supposing that they understand you at the first word, that a hinted smile is to them as good as a sound syllogism, that a fine allusion caught on the wing reaches them better than the heavy onset of a dull geometrical satire. Think, lastly (between ourselves), that, in politics as in religion, they have been for a thousand years very well governed, over governed; that when a man is bored he desires to be so no more; that a coat too tight splits at the elbows and elsewhere. They are critics from choice; from choice they like to insinuate forbidden things; and often, by abuse of logic, by transport, by vivacity, from ill humour, they strike at society through government, at morality through religion. They are scholars who have been too long under the rod; they break the windows in opening the doors. I dare not tell you to please them: I simply remark that, in order to please them, a grain of seditious humour will do no harm.
I cross seven leagues of sea, and here I am in a great unadorned hall, with a multitude of benches, with gas burners, swept, orderly, a debating club or a preaching house. There are five hundred long faces, gloomy and subdued; and at the first glance it is clear that they are not there to amuse themselves. In this land a grosser mood, overcharged with a heavier and stronger nourishment, has deprived impressions of their swift nobility, and thought, less facile and prompt, has lost its vivacity and its gaiety. If we rail before them, we must think that we are speaking to attentive, concentrated men, capable of durable and profound sensations, incapable of changeable and sudden emotion. Those immobile and contracted faces will preserve the same attitude; they resist fleeting and half-formed smiles; they cannot unbend; and their laughter is a convulsion as stiff as their gravity. Let us not skim over our subject, but lay stress upon it; let us not pass over it lightly, but impress it; let us not dally, but strike; be assured that we must vehemently move vehement passions, and that shocks are needed to set these nerves in motion. Let us also not forget that our hearers are practical minds, lovers of the useful; that they come here to be taught; that we owe them solid truths; that their common sense, somewhat contracted, does not fall in with hazardous extemporisations or doubtful hints; that they demand worked out refutations and complete explanations; and that if they have paid to come in, it was to hear advice which they might apply, and satire founded on proof. Their mood requires strong emotions; their mind asks for precise demonstrations. To satisfy

\[1\] Thackeray, in his *Book of Snobs*, says: "Their usual English expression of intense gloom and subdued agony."
their mood, we must not merely scratch, but torture vice; to satisfy their mind, we must not rail in sallies, but by arguments. One word more: down there, in the midst of the assembly, behold that gilded, splendid book, resting royally on a velvet cushion. It is the Bible; around it there are fifty moralists, who a while ago met at the theatre and pelted an actor off the stage with apples, who was guilty of having the wife of a citizen for his mistress. If with our finger-tip, with all the compliments and disguises in the world, we touch a single sacred leaf, or the smallest moral conventionalism, immediately fifty hands will fasten themselves on our coat collar and put us out at the door. With Englishmen we must be English, with their passion and their common sense adopt their leading-strings. Thus confined to recognise truths, satire will become more bitter, and will add the weight of public belief to the pressure of logic and the force of indignation.

IV.

No writer was better gifted than Thackeray for this kind of satire, because no faculty is more proper to satire than reflection. Reflection is concentrated attention, and concentrated attention increases a hundredfold the force and duration of emotions. He who is immersed in the contemplation of a vice, feels a hatred of vice, and the intensity of his hatred is measured by the intensity of his contemplation. At first anger is a generous wine, which intoxicates and excites; when preserved and shut up, it becomes a liquor burning all that it touches, and corroding even the vessel which contains it. Of all satirists, Thackeray, after
Swift, is the most gloomy. Even his countrymen have reproached him with depicting the world uglier than it is.\(^1\) Indignation, grief, scorn, disgust, are his ordinary sentiments. When he digresses, and imagines tender souls, he exaggerates their sensibility, in order to render their oppression more odious. The selfishness which wounds them appears horrible, and their resigned sweetness is a mortal insult to their tyrants: it is the same hatred which has calculated the kindliness of the victims and the harshness of the persecutors.\(^2\)

This anger, exasperated by reflection, is also armed by reflection. It is clear that the author is not carried away by passing indignation or pity. He has mastered himself before speaking. He has often weighed the rascality which he is about to describe. He is in possession of the motives, species, results, as a naturalist is of his classifications. He is sure of his judgment, and has matured it. Hepunishes like a man convinced, who has before him a heap of proofs, who advances nothing without a document or an argument, who has foreseen all objections and refuted all excuses, who will never pardon, who is right in being inflexible, who is conscious of his justice, and who rests his sentence and his vengeance on all the powers of meditation and equity. The effect of this justified and contained hatred is overwhelming. When we have read to the end of Balzac's novels, we feel the pleasure of a naturalist walking through a museum, past a fine collection of specimens and monstrosities. When we have read to the end of Thackeray, we feel the shudder of a stranger brought

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1 *The Edinburgh Review.*
2 See the character of Amelia in *Vanity Fair,* and of Colonel Newcome in *The Newcomes.*

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before a mattress in the operating room of an hospital, on the day when cautery is applied or a limb is taken off.

In such a case the most natural weapon is serious irony, because it bears witness to concentrated hatred: he who employs it suppresses his first feeling; he feigns to be speaking against himself, and constrains himself to take the part of his adversary. On the other hand, this painful and voluntary attitude is the sign of excessive scorn; the protection which apparently is afforded to an enemy is the worst of insults. The author seems to say: "I am ashamed to attack you; you are so weak that, even supported, you must fall; your reasonings are your shame, and your excuses are your condemnation." Thus the more serious the irony, the stronger it is; the more you take care to defend your adversary, the more you degrade him; the more you seem to aid him, the more you crush him. This is why Swift's grave sarcasm is so terrible; we think he is showing respect, and he slays; his approbation is a flagellation. Amongst Swift's pupils, Thackeray is the first. Several chapters in the Book of Snobs—that, for instance, on literary snobs—are worthy of Gulliver. The author has been passing in review all the snobs of England; what will he say of his colleagues, the literary snobs? Will he dare to speak of them? Certainly:

"My dear and excellent querist, whom does the Schoolmaster flog so resolutely as his own son? Didn't Brutus chop his offspring's head off? You have a very bad opinion indeed of the present state of Literature and of literary men, if you fancy that any one of us would hesitate to stick a knife into his neighbour penman, if the latter's death could do the State any service.

"But the fact is, that in the literary profession there are
Snobs. Look round at the whole body of British men of letters, and I defy you to point out among them a single instance of vulgarity, or envy, or assumption.

"Men and women, as far as I have known them, they are all modest in their demeanour, elegant in their manners, spotless in their lives, and honourable in their conduct to the world and to each other. You may occasionally, it is true, hear one literary man abusing his brother; but why? Not in the least out of malice; not at all from envy; merely from a sense of truth and public duty. Suppose, for instance, I good-naturedly point out a blemish in my friend Mr. Punch's person, and say Mr. P. has a hump-back, and his nose and chin are more crooked than those features in the Apollo or Antinous, which we are accustomed to consider as our standards of beauty; does this argue malice on my part towards Mr. Punch? Not in the least. It is the critic's duty to point out defects as well as merits, and he invariably does his duty with the utmost gentleness and candour. . . ."

"That sense of equality and fraternity amongst Authors has always struck me as one of the most amiable characteristics of the class. It is because we know and respect each other, that the world respects us so much; that we hold such a good position in society, and demean ourselves so irreproachably when there.

"Literary persons are held in such esteem by the nation, that about two of them have been absolutely invited to Court during the present reign; and it is probable that towards the end of the season, one or two will be asked to dinner by Sir Robert Peel.

"They are such favourites with the public, that they are continually obliged to have their pictures taken and published; and one or two could be pointed out, of whom the nation insists upon having a fresh portrait every year. Nothing can be more gratifying than this proof of the affectionate regard which the people has for its instructors.

"Literature is held in such honour in England, that there is
a sum of near twelve hundred pounds per annum set apart to pension deserving persons following that profession. And a great compliment this is, too, to the professors, and a proof of their generally prosperous and flourishing condition. They are generally so rich and thrifty, that scarcely any money is wanted to help them."  

We are tempted to make a mistake; and to comprehend this passage, we must remember that, in an aristocratical and monarchical society, amidst money-worship and adoration of rank, poor and low-born talent is treated as its low-birth and poverty deserve? What makes these ironies yet stronger, is their length; some are prolonged during a whole tale, like the Fatal Boots. A Frenchman could not keep up a sarcasm so long. It would escape right or left through various emotions; it would change countenance, and not preserve so fixed an attitude—the mark of such a decided animosity, so calculated and bitter. There are characters which Thackeray develops through three volumes—Blanche Amory, Rebecca Sharp—and of whom he never speaks but with insult; both are base, and he never introduces them without plying them with tendernesses: dear Rebecca! tender Blanche! The tender Blanche is a sentimental and literary young creature, obliged to live with her parents, who do not understand her. She suffers so much, that she ridicules them aloud before everybody; she is so oppressed by the folly of her mother and father-in-law, that she never omits an opportunity of making them feel their folly. In good conscience, could she do otherwise?

1 *The Book of Snobs*, ch. xvi.; on Literary Snobs

2 Stendhal says: L'esprit et le génie perdant vingt-cinq pour cent de leur valeur en abordant en Angleterre."
Would it not be on her part a lack of sincerity to affect a gaiety which she has not, or a respect which she cannot feel? We understand that the poor child is in need of sympathy. When she gave up her dolls, this loving heart became first enamoured of Treurnor, a high-souled convict, the fiery Sténio, Prince Djalma, and other heroes of French novels. Alas! the imaginary world is not sufficient for wounded souls, and to satisfy the craving for the ideal, for satiety, the heart at last gives itself up to beings of this world. At eleven years of age Miss Blanche felt tender emotions towards a young Savoyard, an organ-grinder at Paris, whom she persisted in believing to be a prince carried off from his parents; at twelve an old and hideous drawing master had agitated her young heart; at Madame de Carmel’s boarding-school a correspondence by letter took place with two young gentlemen of the College Charlemagne. Dear forlorn girl, her delicate feet are already wounded by the briars in her path of life; every day her illusions shed their leaves; in vain she puts them down in verse, in a little book bound in blue velvet, with a clasp of gold, entitled Mes Larmes. In this isolation, what is she to do? She grows enthusiastic over the young ladies whom she meets, feels a magnetic attraction at sight of them, becomes their sister, except that she casts them aside to-morrow like an old dress: we cannot command our feelings, and nothing is more Beautiful than the natural. Moreover, as the amiable child has much taste, a lively imagination, a poetic inclination for change, she keeps her maid Pincott at work day and night. Like a delicate person, a genuine dilettante
and lover of the beautiful, she scolds her for her heavy
eyes and her pale face:

"Our muse, with the candour which distinguished her, never
failed to remind her attendant of the real state of matters. 'I
should send you away, Pincott, for you are a great deal too weak,
and your eyes are failing you, and you are always crying and
snivelling, and wanting the doctor; but I wish that your parents
at home should be supported, and I go on enduring for their
sake, mind,' the dear Blanche would say to her timid little
attendant. Or, 'Pincott, your wretched appearance and slavish
manner, and red eyes, positively give me the migraine; and
I think I shall make you wear rouge, so that you may look a
little cheerful;' or, 'Pincott, I can't bear, even for the sake of
your starving parents, that you should tear my hair out of my
head in that manner; and I will thank you to write to them
and say that I dispense with your services.'" ¹

This fool of a Pincott does not appreciate her good for-
tune. Can one be sad in serving such a superior being
as Miss Blanche? How delightful to furnish her with
subjects for her style! for, to confess the truth, Miss
Blanche has not disdained to write "some very pretty
verses about the lonely little tiring-maid, whose heart
was far away," "sad exile in a foreign land." Alas! the
slightest event suffices to wound this too sensitive
heart. At the least emotion her tears flow, her feelings
are shaken, like a delicate butterfly, crushed as soon
as touched. There she goes, aerial, her eyes fixed on
heaven, a faint smile lingering round her rosy lips, a
touching sylphide, so consoling to all who surround
her, that every one wishes her at the bottom of a well.

¹ These remarks are only to be found in the octavo edition of
Pendennis.—Tr.
caricature. Here, as before, the author pleads the rights of his neighbour; the only difference is, that he pleads them with too much warmth; it is insult upon insult. Under this head it abounds in Thackeray. Some of his grotesques are outrageous: for instance, M. Alcide de Mirobolant, a French cook, an artist in sauces, who declares his passion to Miss Blanche through the medium of symbolic dishes, and thinks himself a gentleman; Mrs. Major O'Dowd, a sort of female grenadier, the most pompous and talkative of Irishwomen, bent on ruling the regiment, and marrying the bachelors will they nill they; Miss Briggs, an old companion born to receive insults, to make phrases and to shed tears; the Doctor, who proves to his scholars who write bad Greek, that habitual idleness and bad construing lead to the gallows. These calculated deformities only excite a sad smile. We always perceive behind the oddity of the character the sardonic air of the painter, and we conclude that the human race is base and stupid. Other figures less exaggerated, are not more natural. We see that the author throws them expressly into palpable follies and marked contradictions. Such is Miss Crawley, an old maid, without any morals, and a free-thinker, who praises unequal marriages, and falls into a fit when on the next page her nephew makes one; who calls Rebecca Sharp her equal, and at the same time bids her "put some coals on the fire;" who, on learning the departure of her favourite, cries with despair, "Gracious goodness, and who's to make my chocolate?" These are comedy scenes, and not pictures of manners. There are twenty such. You see an excellent aunt, Mrs. Hoggarty, of Castle Hoggarty, settling down in the house of her nephew Titmarsh, throw him into vast
expenses, persecute his wife, drive away his friends, make his marriage unhappy. The poor ruined fellow is thrown into prison. She denounces him to the creditors with genuine indignation, and reproaches him with perfect sincerity. The wretch has been his aunt’s executioner; she has been dragged by him from her home, tyrannised over by him, robbed by him, outraged by his wife. She writes:

"Such waist and extravagance never, never, never did I see. Butter waisted as if it had been dirt, coles flung away, candles burned at both ends; . . . and now you have the andassaty, being placed in prison justly for your crimes, for cheating me of £3000. . . . You come upon me to pay your debts! No, sir, it is quite enough that your mother should go on the parish, and that your wife should sweep the streets, to which you have indeed brought them; I, at least . . . have some of the comforts to which my rank entitles me. The furnitur in this house is mine; and as I presume you intend your lady to sleep in the streets, I give you warning that I shall remove it all to-morrow. Mr. Smithers will tell you that I had intended to leave you my intire fortune. I have this morning, in his presents, solamly tear up my will, and hereby renounce all connection with you and your beggarly family. P.S.—I took a viper into my bosom, and it stung me." ¹

This just and compassionate woman finds her match, a pious man, John Brough, Esquire, M.P., director of the Independent West Diddlesex Fire and Life Insurance Company. This virtuous Christian has sniffed from afar the cheering odour of her lands, houses, stocks, and other landed and personal property. He pounces upon the fine property of Mrs. Hoggarty, is sorry to see that

¹ The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond. ch. xi.
it only brings that lady four per cent, and resolves to double her income. He calls upon her at her lodgings when her face was shockingly swelled and bitten by —never mind what:

"'Gracious heavens!' shouted John Brough, Esquire, 'a lady of your rank to suffer in this way!—the excellent relative of my dear boy, Titmarsh! Never, madam—never let it be said that Mrs. Hoggarty of Castle Hoggarty should be subject to such horrible humiliation, while John Brough has a home to offer her—a humble, happy Christian home, madam, though unlike, perhaps, the splendour to which you have been accustomed in the course of your distinguished career. Isabella, my love!—Belinda! speak to Mrs. Hoggarty. Tell her that John Brough's house is hers from garret to cellar. I repeat it, madam, from garret to cellar. I desire—I insist—I order, that Mrs. Hoggarty of Castle Hoggarty's trunks should be placed this instant in my carriage!'"  

This style raises a laugh, if you will, but a sad laugh. We have just learned that man is a hypocrite, unjust, tyrannical, blind. In our vexation we turn to the author, and we see on his lips only sarcasms, on his brow only chagrin.

V.

Let us look carefully; perhaps in less grave matters we shall find subject of genuine laughter. Let us consider, not a rascality, but a misadventure; rascality revolts, a misadventure might amuse. But amusement alone is not here; even in a diversion the satire retains its force, because reflection retains its intensity. There is in English fun a seriousness, an effort, an application that is marvellous, and their comicalities are composed

1 The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond, ch. ix.
with as much knowledge as their sermons. The powerful attention decomposes its object in all its parts, and reproduces it with illusive detail and relief. Swift describes the land of speaking horses, the politics of Lilliput, the inventors of the Flying Island, with details as precise and harmonious as an experienced traveller, an exact inquirer into manners and countries. Thus supported, the impossible monster and the literary grotesque enter upon actual existence, and the phantoms of imagination take the consistency of objects which we touch. Thackeray introduces this imperturbable gravity, this solid conception, this talent for illusion, into his farce. Let us study one of his moral essays; he wishes to prove that in the world we must conform to received customs, and he transforms this commonplace into an Oriental anecdote. Let us count up the details of manners, geography, chronology, cookery, the mathematical designation of every object, person, and gesture, the lucidity of imagination, the profusion of local truths: we will then understand why his raillery produces so original and biting an impression, and we will find here the same degree of study and the same attentive energy as in the foregoing ironies and exaggerations: his humour is as reflective as his hatred; he has changed his attitude, not his faculty:

"I am naturally averse to egotism, and hate self-laudation consumedly; but I can't help relating here a circumstance illustrative of the point in question, in which I must think I acted with considerable prudence.

"Being at Constantinople a few years since—(on a delicate mission)—the Russians were playing a double game, between ourselves, and it became necessary on our part to employ an extra negotiator—Leckerbiss Pasha of Roumelia, then Chief
Galeongee of the Porte, gave a diplomatic banquet at his summer palace at Bujukdere. I was on the left of the Galeongee; and the Russian agent Count de Diddloff on his dexter side. Diddloff is a dandy who would die of a rose in aromatic pain: he had tried to have me assassinated three times in the course of the negotiation: but of course we were friends in public, and saluted each other in the most cordial and charming manner.

"The Galeongee is—or was, alas! for a bow-string has done for him—a staunch supporter of the old school of Turkish politics. We dined with our fingers, and had flaps of bread for plates; the only innovation he admitted was the use of European liquors, in which he indulged with great gusto. He was an enormous eater. Amongst the dishes a very large one was placed before him of a lamb dressed in its wool, stuffed with prunes, garlic, assafetida, capsicums, and other condiments, the most abominable mixture that ever mortal smelt or tasted. The Galeongee ate of this hugely; and, pursuing the Eastern fashion, insisted on helping his friends right and left, and when he came to a particularly spicy morsel, would push it with his own hands into his guests' very mouths.

"I never shall forget the look of poor Diddloff, when his Excellency, rolling up a large quantity of this into a ball, and exclaiming, "Buk Buk" (it is very good), administered the horrible bolus to Diddloff. The Russian's eyes rolled dreadfully as he received it: he swallowed it with a grimace that I thought must precede a convulsion, and seizing a bottle next him, which he thought was Sauterne, but which turned out to be French brandy, he drank off nearly a pint before he knew his error. It finished him; he was carried away from the dining-room almost dead, and laid out to cool in a summer-house on the Bosphorus.

"When it came to my turn, I took down the condiment with a smile, said "Bismillah," licked my lips with easy gratification, and when the next dish was served, made up a ball myself so dexterously, and popped it down the old Galeongee's mouth with so much grace, that his heart was won. Russia was put out of
At once, and the treaty of Kabobanopé was signed. As for Diddloff, all was over with him; he was recalled to St. Petersburg, and Sir Roderick Murchison saw him, under the No. 3967, working in the Ural mines.¹

The anecdote is evidently authentic; and when De Foe related the apparition of Mrs. Veal, he did not better imitate the style of an authenticated account.

VI.

Such attentive reflection is a source of sadness. To amuse ourselves with human passions, we must consider them as inquisitive men, like shifting puppets, or as learned men, like regulated wheels, or as artists, like powerful springs. If we only consider them as virtuous or vicious, our lost illusions will enchain us in gloomy thoughts, and we will find in man only weakness and ugliness. This is why Thackeray deprecates our whole nature. He does as a novelist what Hobbes does as a philosopher. Almost everywhere, when he describes fine sentiments, he derives them from an ugly source. Tenderness, kindness, love, are in his characters the effect of the nerves, of instinct, or of a moral disease. Amelia Sedley, his favourite, and one of his masterpieces, is a poor little woman, snivelling, incapable of reflection and decision, blind, a superstitious adorer of a coarse and selfish husband, always sacrificed by her own will and fault, whose love is made up of folly and weakness, often unjust, accustomed to see falsely, and more worthy of compassion than respect. Lady Castlewood, so good and tender, is enamoured, like Amelia, of a drunken and imbecile

¹ The Book of Snobs, ch. 1.; The Snob playfully dealt with.
boor; and her wild jealousy, exasperated on the slightest suspicion, implacable against her husband, giving utterance violently to cruel words, shows that her love springs not from virtue but from mood. Helen Pendennis, a model mother, is a somewhat silly country prude, of narrow education, jealous also, and having in her jealousy all the harshness of Puritanism and passion. She faints on learning that her son has a mistress: it is "such a sin, such a dreadful sin. I can't bear to think that my boy should commit such a crime. I wish he had died, almost, before he had done it." 1 Whenever she is spoken to of little Fanny, "the widow's countenance, always soft and gentle, assumed a cruel and inexorable expression." 2 Meeting Fanny at the bedside of the sick young man, she drives her away, as if she were a prostitute and a servant. Maternal love, in her as in the others, is an incurable blindness: her son is her idol; in her adoration she finds the means of making his lot unbearable, and himself unhappy. As to the love of the men for the women, if we judge from the pictures of the author, we can but feel pity for it, and look on it as ridiculous. At a certain age, according to Thackeray, nature speaks: we meet Somebody; a fool or not, good or bad, we adore her; it is a fever. At the age of six months dogs have their disease; man has his at twenty. If a man loves, it is not because the lady is loveable, but because it is his nature so to do. "Do you suppose you would drink if you were not thirsty, or eat if you were not hungry?" 3

He relates the history of this hunger and thirst with a bitter vigour. He seems like an intoxicated man grown sober, railing at drunkenness. He explains at

1 Pendennis, ch. liv. 2 Ibid. ch. ili. 3 Ibid. ch. iii.
length, in a half sarcastic tone the follies which Major Dobbin commits for the sake of Amelia; how the Major buys bad wines from her father; how he tells the postillions to make haste, how he rouses the servants, persecutes his friends, to see Amelia more quickly; how after ten years of sacrifice, tenderness, and service, he sees that he is held second to an old portrait of a faithless, coarse, selfish, and dead husband. The saddest of these accounts is that of the first love of Pendennis—Miss Fotheringay, the actress, whom he loves, a matter-of-fact person, a good housekeeper, who has the mind and education of a kitchen-maid. She speaks to the young man of the fine weather, and the pie she has just been making: Pendennis discovers in these two phrases a wonderful depth of intellect and a superhuman majesty of devotion. He asks Miss Fotheringay, who has just been playing Ophelia, if the latter loved Hamlet. Miss Fotheringay answers:

"'In love with such a little ojous wretch as that stunted manager of a Bingley?' She bristled with indignation at the thought. Pen explained it was not of her he spoke, but of Ophelia of the play. 'Oh, indeed; if no offence was meant, none was taken; but as for Bingley, indeed, she did not value him—not that glass of punch.' Pen next tried her on Kotzebue. 'Kotzebue! who was he?' 'The author of the play in which she had been performing so admirably.' 'She did not know that—the man's name at the beginning of the book was Thompson,' she said. Pen laughed at her adorable simplicity.

'How beautiful she is,' thought Pen, cantering homewards. 'Pendennis, Pendennis—how she spoke the word! Emily, Emily! how good, how noble, how beautiful, how perfect she is!' "

The first volume runs wholly upon this contrast; it

1 Pendennis, ch. v.
seems as though Thackeray says to his reader: "My dear brothers in humanity, we are rascals forty-nine
days in fifty; in the fiftieth, if we escape pride, vanity,
wickedness, selfishness, it is because we fall into a hot
fever; our folly causes our devotion."

VII.

Yet, short of being Swift, a man must love some-
thing; he cannot always be wounding and destroying;
and the heart, wearied of scorn and hate, needs repose
in praise and tenderness. Moreover, to blame a fault is
to laud the contrary quality; and a man cannot
sacrifice a victim without raising an altar: it is cir-
cumstance which fixes on the one, and which builds up
the other; and the moralist who combats the dominant
vice of his country and his age, preaches the virtue
contrary to the vice of his age and his country. In an
aristocratical and commercial society, this vice is
selfishness and pride! Thackeray therefore extols
sweetness and tenderness. Let love and kindness be
blind, instinctive, unreasoning, ridiculous, it matters
little: such as they are, he adores them; and there is
no more singular contrast than that of his heroes and
of his admiration. He creates foolish women, and
kneels before them; the artist within him contradicts
the commentator: the first is ironical, the second
laudatory; the first represents the pettiness of love, the
second writes its panegyric; the top of the page is a
satire in action, the bottom is a dithyramb in periods.
The compliments which he lavishes on Amelia Sedley,
Helen Pendennis, Laura, are infinite; no author ever
more visibly and incessantly paid court to his female
creations; he sacrifices his male creations to them, not once, but a hundred times:

"Very likely female pelicans like so to bleed under the selfish little beaks of their young ones: it is certain that women do. There must be some sort of pleasure which we men don't understand, which accompanies the pain of being sacrificed.¹ . . . Do not let us men despise these instincts because we cannot feel them. These women were made for our comfort and delectation, gentlemen,—with all the rest of the minor animals.² . . . Be it for a reckless husband, a dissipated son, a darling scapegrace of a brother, how ready their hearts are to pour out their best treasures for the benefit of the cherished person; and what a deal of this sort of enjoyment are we, on our side, ready to give the soft creatures! There is scarce a man that reads this, but has administered pleasure in that fashion to his woman-kind, and has treated them to the luxury of forgiving him."³

When he enters the room of a good mother, or of a young honest girl, he casts down his eyes as on the threshold of a sanctuary. In the presence of Laura resigned, pious, he checks himself:

"And as that duty was performed quite noiselessly—while the supplications which endowed her with the requisite strength for fulfilling it, also took place in her own chamber, away from all mortal sight,—we, too, must be perforce silent about these virtues of hers, which no more bear public talking about than a flower will bear to bloom in a ball-room."⁴

Like Dickens, he has a reverence for the family, for tender and simple sentiments, calm and pure contentments, such as are relished by the fireside between a

¹ *Pendennis*, ch. xxi. This passage is only found in the octavo edition.—Tr.
³ *Ibid.* ch. xxi. These words are only found in the octavo edition.
child and a wife. When this misanthrope, so reflective and harsh, lights upon a filial effusion or a maternal grief, he is wounded in a sensitive place, and, like Dickens, he makes us weep.¹

We have enemies because we have friends, and aversions because we have preferences. If we prefer devoted kindliness and tender affections, we dislike arrogance and harshness; the cause of love is also the cause of hate; and sarcasm, like sympathy, is the criticism of a social form and a public vice. This is why Thackeray's novels are a war against aristocracy. Like Rousseau, he praised simple and affectionate manners; like Rousseau, he hated the distinction of ranks.

He wrote a whole book on this, a sort of moral and half political pamphlet, the Book of Snobs. The word does not exist in France, because they have not the thing. The snob is a child of aristocratical societies; perched on his step of the long ladder, he respects the man on the step above him, and despises the man on the step below, without inquiring what they are worth, solely on account of their position; in his innermost heart he finds it natural to kiss the boots of the first, and to kick the second. Thackeray reckons up at length the degrees of this habit. Hear his conclusion:

"I can bear it no longer—this diabolical invention of gentility, which kills natural kindliness and honest friendship. Proper pride, indeed! Rank and precedence, forsooth! The table of ranks and degrees is a lie and should be flung into the fire. Organise rank and precedence! that was well for the masters of ceremonies of former ages. Come forward, some great marshal, and organise Equality in society."

¹ See, for example, in the Great Hoggarty Diamond, the death of the little child. The Book of Snobs ends thus: "Fun is good, Truth is still better, and Love best of all."
Then he adds, with common sense, altogether English bitterness and familiarity:

"If ever our cousins the Smigsmags asked me to meet Lord Longears, I would like to take an opportunity after dinner, and say, in the most good-natured way in the world:—Sir, Fortune makes you a present of a number of thousand pounds every year. The ineffable wisdom of our ancestors has placed you as a chief and hereditary legislator over me. Our admirable Constitution (the pride of Britons and envy of surrounding nations) obliges me to receive you as my senator, superior, and guardian. Your eldest son, Fitz-Heehaw, is sure of a place in Parliament; your younger sons, the De Brays, will kindly condescend to be post-captains and lieutenant-colonels, and to represent us in foreign courts, or to take a good living when it falls convenient. These prizes our admirable Constitution (the pride and envy of, etc.) pronounces to be your due; without count of your dulness, your vices, your selfishness; of your entire incapacity and folly. Dull as you may be (and we have as good a right to assume that my lord is an ass, as the other proposition, that he is an enlightened patriot);—dull, I say, as you may be, no one will accuse you of such monstrous folly, as to suppose that you are indifferent to the good luck which you possess, or have any inclination to part with it. No—and patriots as we are, under happier circumstances, Smith and I, I have no doubt, were we dukes ourselves, would stand by our order.

"We would submit good-naturedly to sit in a high place. We would acquiesce in that admirable Constitution (pride and envy of, etc.) which made us chiefs and the world our inferiors; we would not cavil particularly at that notion of hereditary superiority which brought so many simple people cringing to our knees. May be we would rally round the Corn-Laws; we would make a stand against the Reform Bill; we would die rather than repeal the acts against Catholics and Dissenters; we would, by our noble system of class-legislation, bring Ireland to its present admirable condition.
"But Smith and I are not Earls as yet. We don't believe that it is for the interest of Smith's army, that young De Bray should be a Colonel at five-and-twenty, of Smith's diplomatic relations, that Lord Longears should go ambassador to Constantinople,—of our politics, that Longears should put his hereditary foot into them.

"This bowing and cringing Smith believes to be the act of Snobs; and he will do all in his might and main to be a Snob, and to submit to Snobs no longer. To Longears he says, 'We can't help seeing, Longears, that we are as good as you. We can spell even better; we can think quite as rightly; we will not have you for our master, or black your shoes any more.'" ¹

Thackeray's opinion on politics only continues his remarks as a moralist. If he hates aristocracy, it is less because it oppresses man than because it corrupts him; in deforming social life, it deforms private life; in establishing injustice, it establishes vice; after having made itself master of the government, it poisons the soul; and Thackeray finds its trace in the perversity and foolishness of all classes and all sentiments.

The king opens this list of vengeful portraits. It is George IV., "the first gentleman in Europe." This great monarch, so justly regretted, could cut out a coat, drive a four-in-hand nearly as well as the Brighton coachman, and play the fiddle well. "In the vigour of youth and the prime force of his invention, he invented Maraschino punch, a shoe-buckle, and a Chinese pavilion, the most hideous building in the world:"

"Two boys had leave from their loyal masters to go from Slaughter House School where they were educated, and to appear on Drury Lane stage, amongst a crowd which assembled there to greet the king. THE KING? There he was. Beef-

¹ The Book of Snobs, last chapter.
eaters were before the august box: the Marquis of Steyne (Lord
of the Powder Closet) and other great officers of state were
behind the chair on which he sate, He sate—florid of face, portly
of person, covered with orders, and in a rich curling head of hair
—How we sang God save him! How the house rocked and
shouted with that magnificent music. How they cheered, and
cried, and waved handkerchiefs. Ladies wept: mothers clasped
their children: some fainted with emotion. . . . Yes, we saw
him. Fate cannot deprive us of that. Others have seen
Napoleon. Some few still exist who have beheld Frederick the
Great, Doctor Johnson, Marie Antoinette, etc.—be it our
reasonable boast to our children, that we saw George the Good,
the Magnificent, the Great."

Dear prince! the virtues emanating from his heroic
throne spread through the hearts of all his courtiers.
Whoever presented a better example than the Marquis
of Steyne? This lord, a king in his own house, tried to
prove that he was so. He forces his wife to sit at table
beside women without any character, his mistresses. Like
a true prince, he had for his special enemy his eldest son,
presumptive heir to the marquisate, whom he leaves to
starve, and compels to run into debt. He is now making
love to a charming person, Mrs. Rebecca Crawley, whom
he loves for her hypocrisy, coolness, and unequalled insen-
sibility. The Marquis, by dint of debasing and oppressing
all who surround him, ends by hating and despising
men; he has no taste for anything but perfect rascailities.
Rebecca rouses him; one day even she transports him
with enthusiasm. She plays Clytemnestra in a charade,
and her husband Agamemnon; she advances to the bed,
a dagger in her hand; her eyes are lighted up with a

1 *Vanity Fair*, ch. xlvi. This passage is only found in the original
octavo edition.—Thr.
smile so ghastly, that people quake as they look at her; Brava! brava! old Steyne’s strident voice was heard roaring over all the rest, “By ——, she’d do it too!” We can hear that he has the true conjugal feeling. His conversation is remarkably frank. “I can’t send Briggs away,” Becky said.—“You owe her her wages, I suppose,” said the peer.—“Worse than that, I have ruined her.”—“Ruined her? then why don’t you turn her out?”

He is, moreover, an accomplished gentleman, of fascinating sweetness; he treats his women like a pacha, and his words are like blows. Let us read again the domestic scene in which he gives the order to invite Mrs. Crawley. Lady Gaunt, his daughter-in-law, says that she will not be present at dinner, and will go home. His lordship answered:

“‘I wish you would, and stay there. You will find the bailiffs at Bareacres very pleasant company, and I shall be freed from lending money to your relations, and from your own damned tragedy airs. Who are you to give orders here? You have no money. You’ve got no brains. You were here to have children, and you have not had any. Gaunt’s tired of you; and George’s wife is the only person in the family who doesn’t wish you were dead. Gaunt would marry again if you were. . . . You, forsooth, must give yourself airs of virtue. . . . Pray, madame, shall I tell you some little anecdotes about my Lady Bareacres, your mamma?’”

The rest is in the same style. His daughters-in-law, driven to despair, say they wish they were dead. This declaration rejoices him, and he concludes with these words: “This Temple of Virtue belongs to me. And if I invite all Newgate or all Bedlam here, by ——, they

1 "Family Fair," ch. xlix.
shall be welcome." The habit of despotism makes despots, and the best means of implanting despots in families, is to preserve nobles in the State.

Let us take rest in the contemplation of the country gentleman. The innocence of the fields, hereditary respect, family traditions, the pursuit of agriculture, the exercise of local magistracy, must have produced these upright and sensible men, full of kindness and probity, protectors of their county, and servants of their country. Sir Pitt Crawley is a model; he has four thousand a year and two parliamentary boroughs. It is true that these are rotten boroughs, and that he sells the second for fifteen hundred a year. He is an excellent steward and shears his farmers so close that he can only find bankrupt-tenants. A coach proprietor, a government contractor, a mine proprietor, he pays his subordinates so badly, and is so niggard in outlay, that his mines "are filled with water; and as for his coach-horses, every mail proprietor in the kingdom knew that he lost more horses than any man in the country;" the Government flung his contract of damaged beef upon his hands. A popular man, he always prefers the society of a horse-dealer to the company of a gentleman. "He was fond of drink, of swearing, of joking with the farmers' daughters; ... would cut his joke and drink his glass with a tenant, and sell him up the next day; or have his laugh with the poacher he was transporting with equal good humour." He speaks with a country accent, has the mind of a lackey, the habits of a boor. At table, waited on by three men and a butler, on massive silver, he inquires into the dishes, and the beasts which have furnished them. "What ship was it, Horrocks, and when did you kill?" "One of the
black-faced Scotch, Sir Pitt: we killed on Thursday.” “Who took any?” “Steel of Mudbury took the saddle and two legs, Sir Pitt; but he says the last was too young and confounded woolly, Sir Pitt.” “What became of the shoulders?” The dialogue goes on in the same tone; after the Scotch mutton comes the Black Kentish pig: these animals might be Sir Pitt’s family, so much is he interested in them. As for his daughters, he lets them stray to the gardener’s cottage, where they pick up their education. As for his wife, he beats her from time to time. If he pays his people one farthing more than he owes them he asks it back. “A farthing a day is seven shillings a year: seven shillings a year is the interest of seven guineas. Take care of your farthings, old Tinker, and your guineas will come quite nat’ral.” “He never gave away a farthing in his life,” growled Tinker. “Never, and never will: it is against my principle.” He is impudent, brutal, coarse, stingy, shrewd, extravagant; but is courted by ministers, is a high-sheriff, honoured, powerful, he rolls in a gilded carriage, and is one of the pillars of the State.

These are the rich; probably money has corrupted them. Let us look for a poor aristocrat, free from temptations; his lofty mind, left to itself, will display all its native beauty. Sir Francis Clavering is in this case. He has played, drunk, and supped until he has nothing more left. Transactions at the gambling-table speedily effected his ruin; he had been forced to sell out of his regiment; had shown the white feather, and after frequenting all the billiard-rooms in Europe, been thrown into prison by his uncourteous creditors. To get out he married a good-natured Indian widow, who outrages spelling, and whose money was left her by her father, a disre
putable old lawyer and indigo-smuggler. Clavering ruins her, goes on his knees to obtain gold and pardon, swears on the Bible to contract no more debts, and when he goes out runs straight to the money-lender. Of all the rascals that novelists have ever exhibited, he is the basest. He has neither resolution nor common sense; he is simply a man in a state of dissolution. He swallows insults like water, weeps, begs pardon, and begins again. He debases himself, prostrates himself, and the next moment swears and storms, to fall back into the depths of the extremest cowardice. He implores, threatens, and in the same quarter of an hour accepts the threatened man as his intimate confidant and friend:

"Now, ain't it hard that she won't trust me with a single tea-spoon; ain't it ungentlemanlike, Altamont? You know my lady's of low birth—that is—I beg your pardon—hem—that is, it's most cruel of her not to show more confidence in me. And the very servants begin to laugh—the dam scoundrels! . . . They don't answer my bell; and—and my man was at Vauxhall last night with one of my dress shirts and my velvet waistcoat on, I know it was mine—the confounded impudent blackguard!—and he went on dancing before my eyes, confound him! I'm sure he'll live to be hanged—he deserves to be hanged—all those infernal rascals of valets!" ¹

His conversation is a compound of oaths, whines, and ravings; he is not a man, but the wreck of a man: there survive in him but the discordant remains of vile passions, like the fragments of a crushed snake, which, unable to bite, bruise themselves and wriggle about in their slaver and mud. The sight of a bank-note makes him launch blindly into a mass of entreaties and lies. The future has disappeared for him, he sees but the

¹ Pindar, ch. lx.
present. He will sign a bill for twenty pounds at three months to get a sovereign. His degradation has become imbecility; his eyes are shut; he does not see that his protestations excite mistrust, that his lies excite disgust, that by his very baseness he loses the fruit of his baseness; so that when he comes in, a man feels a violent inclination to take the honourable baronet, the member of parliament, the proud inhabitant of a historic house, by the neck, and pitch him, like a basket of rubbish, from the top of the stairs to the bottom.

We must stop. A volume would not exhaust the list of perfections which Thackeray discovers in the English aristocracy. The Marquis of Farintosh, twenty-fifth of his name, an illustrious fool, healthy and full of self-conceit, whom all the women ogle and all the men bow to; Lady Kew an old woman of the world, tyrannical and corrupted, at enmity with her daughter, and a match-maker; Sir Barnes Newcome, one of the most cowardly of men, the wickedest, the falsest, the best abused and beaten who has ever smiled in a drawing-room or spoken in Parliament. I see only one estimable character, and he is not in the front rank—Lord Kew, who, after many follies and excesses, is touched by his Puritan old mother, and repents. But these portraits are sweet compared to the dissertations; the commentator is still more bitter than the artist; he wounds more in speaking than in making his personages speak. We must read his biting diatribes against marriages for the sake of money or rank, and against the sacrifice of girls; against the inequality of inheritance and the envy of younger sons; against the education of the nobles, and their traditionary insolence; against the purchase of commissions in the
army, the isolation of classes, the outrages on nature and family, invented by society and law. Behind this philosophy is shown a second gallery of portraits as insulting as the first: for inequality, having corrupted the great men whom it exalts, corrupts the small men whom it degrades; and the spectacle of envy or baselessness in the small, is as ugly as that of insolence or despotism in the great. According to Thackeray, English society is a compound of flatteries and intrigues, each striving to hoist himself up a step higher on the social ladder and to push back those who are climbing. To be received at court, to see one’s name in the papers amongst a list of illustrious guests, to give a cup of tea at home to some stupid and bloated peer; such is the supreme limit of human ambition and felicity. For one master there are always a hundred lackeys. Major Pendennis, a resolute man, cool and clever, has contracted this leprosy. His happiness to-day is to bow to a lord. He is only at peace in a drawing-room, or in a park of the aristocracy. He craves to be treated with that humiliating condescension wherewith the great overwhelm their inferiors. He pockets lack of attention with ease, and dines graciously at a noble board, where he is invited twice in three years to stop a gap. He leaves a man of genius or a woman of wit, to converse with a titled fool or a tipsy lord. He prefers being tolerated at a Marquis’ to being respected at a commoner’s. Having exalted these fine dispositions into principles, he inculcates them on his nephew, whom he loves, and to push him on in the world, offers him in marriage a basely acquired fortune and the daughter of a convict. Others glide through the proud drawing-rooms, not with parasitic manners, but on account of
their splendid balance at the banker's. Once upon a time in France, the nobles manured their estates with the money of citizens; now in England the citizens ennoble their money by marrying a lady of noble birth. For a hundred thousand pounds to the father, Pump, the merchant, marries Lady Blanche Stiffneck, who, though married, remains my Lady. Naturally young Pump is scorned by her, as a tradesman, and moreover, hated for having made her half a woman of the people. He dare not see his own friends in his own house; they are too vulgar for his wife. He dare not visit the friends of his wife; they are too high for him. He is his wife's butler, the butt of his father-in-law, the servant of his son, and consoles himself by thinking that his grandsons, when they become Lord Pump, will blush for him and never mention his name. 1 A third means of entering the aristocracy is to ruin oneself, and never see any one. This ingenious method is employed by Mrs. Major Ponto in the country. She has an incomparable governess for her daughters, who thinks that Dante is called Alighieri because he was born at Algiers, but who has educated two marchionesses and a countess.

"Some one wondered we were not enlivened by the appearance of some of the neighbours.—We can't in our position of life, we can't well associate with the attorney's family, as I leave you to suppose—and the Doctor—one may ask one's medical man to one's table, certainly: but his family.—The people in that large red house just outside of the town.—What! the château-calicot. That purse-proud ex-linendraper—The parson—Oh! he used to preach in a surplice. He is a Puseyite!"

1 The Book of Snobs, ch. viii.; Great City Snobs.
This sensible Ponto family yawns in solitude for six months, and the rest of the year enjoys the gluttony of the country-squires whom they regale, and the rebuffs of the great lords whom they visit. The son, an officer of the hussars, requires to be kept in luxury so as to be on an equality with his noble comrades, and his tailor receives above three hundred a year out of the nine hundred which make up the whole family income.\footnote{The Book of Snobs, ch. xxvi.; On Some Country Snobs.} I should never end, if I recounted all the villainies and miseries which Thackeray attributes to the aristocratic spirit, the division of families, the pride of the ennobled sister, the jealousy of the sister who has not been ennobled, the degradation of the characters trained up from school to reverence the little lords, the abasement of the daughters who strive to compass noble marriages, the rage of snubbed vanity, the meanness of the attentive offered, the triumph of folly, the scorn of talent, the consecrated injustice, the heart rendered unnatural, the morals perverted. Before this striking picture of truth and genius, we need remember that this injurious inequality is the cause of a wholesome liberty, that social injustice produces political welfare, that a class of hereditary nobles is a class of hereditary statesmen, that in a century and a half England has had a hundred and fifty years of good government, that in a century and a half France has had a hundred and fifty years of bad government, that all is compensated, and that it is possible to pay dearly for capable leaders, a consistent policy, free elections, and the control of the government by the nation. We must also remember that this talent, founded on intense reflection, concentrated in moral prejudices, could not but have
transformed the picture of manners into a systematic and combative satire, exasperate satire into calculated and implacable animosity, blacken human nature, and attack again and again with studied, redoubled, and natural hatred, the chief vice of his country and of his time.

§ 2.—The Artist.

VIII.

In literature as well as in politics, we cannot have everything. Talents, like happiness, do not always follow suit. Whatever constitution it selects, a people is always half unhappy; whatever genius he has, a writer is always half impotent. We cannot preserve at once more than a single attitude. To transform the novel is to deform it: he who, like Thackeray, gives to the novel satire for its object, ceases to give it art for its rule, and the complete strength of the satirist is the weakness of the novelist.

What is a novelist? In my opinion he is a psychologist, who naturally and involuntarily sets psychology at work; he is nothing else, nor more. He loves to picture feelings, to perceive their connections, their precedents, their consequences; and he indulges in this pleasure. In his eyes they are forces, having various directions and magnitudes. About their justice or injustice he troubles himself little. He introduces them in characters, conceives the dominant quality, perceives the traces which this leaves on the others, marks the discordant or harmonious influences of temperament, of education, of occupation, and labours to manifest the invisible world of inward inclinations and dispositions by the visible world of outward words
and actions. To this is his labour reduced. Whatever these bents are, he cares little. A genuine painter sees with pleasure a well-shaped arm and vigorous muscles, even if they be employed in knocking down a man. A genuine novelist enjoys the contemplation of the greatness of a harmful sentiment, or the organised mechanism of a pernicious character. He has sympathy with talent, because it is the only faculty which exactly copies nature: occupied in experiencing the emotions of his personages, he only dreams of marking their vigour, kind, and mutual action. He represents them to us as they are, whole, not blaming, not punishing, not mutilating them; he transfers them to us intact and separate, and leaves to us the right of judging if we desire it. His whole effort is to make them visible, to unravel the types darkened and altered by the accidents and imperfections of real life, to set in relief grand human passions, to be shaken by the greatness of the beings whom he animates, to raise us out of ourselves by the force of his creations. We recognise art in this creative power, impartial and universal as nature, freer and more potent than nature, taking up the rough-drawn or disfigured work of its rival in order to correct its faults and give effect to its conceptions.

All is changed by the intervention of satire; and more particularly, the part of the author. When in an ordinary novel he speaks in his own name, it is to explain a sentiment or mark the cause of a faculty; in a satirical novel it is to give us moral advice. It has been seen to how many lessons Thackeray subjects us. That they are good ones no one disputes; but at least they take the place of useful explanations. A third of
a volume, being occupied by warnings, is lost to art. Summoned to reflect on our faults, we know the character less. The author designedly neglects a hundred delicate shades which he might have discovered and shown to us. The character, less complete, is less lifelike; the interest, less concentrated, is less lively. Turned away from it instead of brought back to it, our eyes wander and forget it; instead of being absorbed, we are absent in mind. And, what is worse, we end by experiencing some degree of weariness. We judge these sermons true, but repeated till we are sick of them, we fancy ourselves listening to college lectures, or handbooks for the use of young priests. We find similar things in books with gilt edges and pictured covers, given as Christmas presents to children. Are we much rejoiced to learn that marriages for the sake of money or rank have their inconveniency, that in the absence of a friend we readily speak evil of him, that a son often afflicts his mother by his irregularities, that selfishness is an ugly fault? All this is true; but it is too true. We listen in order to hear new things. These old moralities, though useful and well spoken, smack of the paid pedant, so common in England, the clergyman in the white tie, standing bolt upright in his room, and droning, for three hundred a year, daily admonition to the young gentlemen whom parents have sent to his educational hothouse.

This regular presence of a moral intention spoils the novel as well as the novelist. It must be confessed, a volume of Thackeray has the cruel misfortune of recalling the novels of Miss Edgeworth or the stories of Canon Schmidt. Here is one which shows us Pendennis proud, extravagant, hair-brained, lazy, shamefully plucked
at his examination; whilst his companions, less intellectual but more studious, take high places in honours or pass with decent credit. This edifying contrast does not warn us; we do not wish to go back to school; we shut the book, and recommend it like medicine, to our little cousin. Other puerilities, less shocking, end in wearying us just as much. We do not like the prolonged contrast between good Colonel Newcome and his wicked relatives. The Colonel gives money and cakes to every child, money and shawls to all his cousins, money and kind words to all the servants; and these people only answer him with coldness and coarseness. It is clear, from the first page, that the author would persuade us to be affable, and we kick against the too matter-of-course invitation; we don’t want to be scolded in a novel; we are in a bad humour with this invasion of pedagogy. We wanted to go to the theatre; we have been taken in by the outside bill, and we growl sotto voce, to find ourselves at a sermon.

Let us console ourselves: the characters suffer as much as we; the author spoils them in preaching to us; they, like us, are sacrificed to satire. He does not animate beings, he lets puppets act. He only combines their actions to make them ridiculous, odious, or disappointing. After a few scenes we recognise the spring, and thenceforth we are always foreseeing when it is going to act. This foresight deprives the character of half its truth, and the reader of half his illusion. Perfect fooleries, complete mischances, unmitigated wickednesses, are rare things. The events and feelings of real life are not so arranged as to make such calculated contrasts and such clever combinations. Nature does not invent these dramatic effects; we soon see
that we are before the foot-lights, in front of bedizened actors, whose words are written for them, and their gestures arranged.

To bring before our mind exactly this alteration of truth and art, we must compare two characters step by step. There is a personage, unanimously recognised as Thackeray's masterpiece, Becky Sharp, an intriguing and a bad character, but a superior and well-mannered woman. Let us compare her to a similar personage of Balzac, in *Les Parents pauvres*, Valérie Maruelle. The difference of the two works will exhibit the difference of the two literatures. As the English excel as moralists and satirists, so the French excel as artists and novel-writers.

Balzac loves his Valérie; this is why he explains and magnifies her. He does not labour to make her odious, but intelligible. He gives her the education of a prostitute, a "husband as depraved as a prison full of galley-slaves," luxurious habits, recklessness, prodigality, womanly nerves, a pretty woman's dislikes, an artist's rapture. Thus born and bred, her corruption is natural. She needs elegance as she needs air. She takes it no matter whence, remorselessly as we drink water from the first stream. She is not worse than her profession; she has all its innate and acquired excuses, of mood, tradition, circumstances, necessity; she has all its powers, *abandon*, charms, mad gaiety, alternations of triviality and elegance, sudden audacity, comical devices, magnificence and success. She is perfect of her kind, like a proud and dangerous horse, which we admire while we fear it. Balzac delights to paint her only for the sake of his picture. He dresses her, lays on for her her patches, arranges her garments, trembles before her dancing-girl's motions. He details her gestures
with as much pleasure and truth as if he were her waiting-woman. His artistic curiosity is fed on the least traits of character and manners. After a violent scene, he pauses at a spare moment, and shows her idle, stretched on her couch like a cat, yawning and basking in the sun. Like a physiologist, he knows that the nerves of the beast of prey are softened, and that it only ceases to bound in order to sleep. But what bounds! She dazzles, fascinates; she defends herself successively against three proved accusations, refutes evidence, alternately humiliates and glorifies herself, rails, adores, demonstrates, changing a score of times her voice, her ideas, tricks, and all this in one quarter of an hour. An old shopkeeper, protected against emotions by trade and avarice, trembles at her speech: "She sets her feet on my heart, crushes me, stuns me. Ah, what a woman! When she looks cold at me, it is worse than a stomach-ache. . . . How she tripped down the steps, making them bright with her looks!" Everywhere passion, force, atrocity, conceal the ugliness and corruption. Attacked in her fortune by a respectable woman, Mad. Marnette gets up an incomparable comedy, played with a great poet's eloquence and exaltation, and broken suddenly by the burst of laughter and coarse triviality of a porter's daughter on the stage. Style and action are raised to the height of an epic. "When the words 'Hulot and two hundred thousand francs' were mentioned, Valérie gave a passing look from between her two long eyelids, like the glare of a cannon through its smoke." A little further, caught in the act by one of her lovers, a Brazilian, and quite capable of killing her, she blenched for an instant; but recovering the same moment, she checked her tears. "She came to him.
and looked so fiercely that her eyes glittered like daggers.” Danger roused and inspired her, and her excited nerves propel genius and courage to her brain. To complete the picture of this impetuous nature, superior and unstable, Balzac at the last moment makes her repent. To proportion her fortune to her vice, he leads her triumphantly through the ruin, death, or despair of twenty people, and shatters her in the supreme moment by a fall as terrible as her success.

Before such passion and logic, what is Becky Sharp? A calculating plotter, cool in temperament, full of common sense, an ex-governess, having parsimonious habits, a genuine woman of business, always proper, always active, unsexed, void of the voluptuous softness and diabolical transport which can give brilliancy to her character and charm to her profession. She is not a prostitute, but a petticoated and heartless barrister. Nothing is more fit to inspire aversion. The author loses no opportunity of expressing his own; through two-thirds of the book he pursues her with sarcasms and misfortunes; he puts only false words, perfidious actions, revolting sentiments, in her mouth. From her coming on the stage, at the age of seventeen, treated with rare kindness by a simple-minded family, she lies from morning to night, and by coarse expedients tries to fish there for a husband. The better to crush her, Thackeray himself sets forth all this baseness, these lies, and indecencies. Rebecca ever so gently pressed the hand of fat Joseph: “It was an advance, and as such, perhaps, some ladies of indisputable correctness and gentility will condemn the action as immodest; but, you see, poor dear Rebecca had all this work to do for herself. If a person is too poor to keep a servant, though ever so elegant, he must
sweep his own rooms: if a dear girl has no dear mamma to settle matters with the young man, she must do it for herself."¹ Whilst Becky was a governess at Sir Pitt Crawley's, she gains the friendship of her pupils, by reading to them the tales of Crébillon the younger, and of Voltaire. She writes to her friend Amelia: "The rector's wife paid me a score of compliments about the progress my pupils made, and thought, no doubt, to touch my heart—poor, simple, country soul¹ as if I cared a fig about my pupils."² This phrase is an imprudence hardly natural in so careful a person, and the author adds it gratuitously to her part, to make it odious. A little further Rebecca is grossly adulatory and mean to old Miss Crawley; and her pompous periods, manifestly false, instead of exciting admiration, raise disgust. She is selfish and lying to her husband, and knowing that he is on the field of battle, busies herself only in getting together a little purse. Thackeray designedly dwells on the contrast: the heavy dragoon "went through the various items of his little catalogue of effects, striving to see how they might be turned into money for his wife's benefit, in case any accident should befall him." "Faithful to his plan of economy, the captain dressed himself in his oldest and shabbiest uniform" to get killed in:

"And this famous dandy of Windsor and Hyde Park went off on his campaign . . . with something like a prayer on the lips for the woman he was leaving. He took her up from the ground, and held her in his arms for a minute, tight pressed against his strong beating heart. * His face was purple and his eyes dim, as he put her down and left her. . . . And Rebecca, as we have said, wisely determined not to give way to unavail-

¹ Vanity Fair, ch. iv. ² Ibid. ch. xi.
ing sentimentality on her husband's departure. . . . 'What a fright I seem,' she said, examining herself in the glass, 'and how pale this pink makes one look.' So she divested herself of this pink raiment; . . . then she put her bouquet of the ball into a glass of water, and went to bed, and slept very comfortably.' 1

From these examples judge of the rest. Thackeray's whole business is to degrade Rebecca Sharp. He convicts her of being harsh to her son, robbing tradesmen, deceiving everybody. And after all, he makes her a dupe; whatever she does, comes to nothing. Compromised by the advances which she has lavished on foolish Joseph, she momentarily expects an offer of marriage. A letter comes, announcing that he has gone to Scotland, and presents his compliments to Miss Rebecca. Three months later, she secretly marries Captain Rawdon, a poor dolt. Sir Pitt Crawley, Rawdon's father, throws himself at her feet, with four thousand a year, and offers her his hand. In her consternation she weeps despairingly. " Married, married, married already!" is her cry; and it is enough to pierce sensitive souls. Later, she tries to win her sister-in-law by passing for a good mother. "Why do you kiss me here?" asks her son; "you never kiss me at home." The consequence is, complete discredit; once more she is lost. The Marquis of Steyne, her lover, presents her to society, loads her with jewels, banknotes, and has her husband appointed to some island in the East. The husband enters at the wrong moment, knocks my lord down, restores the diamonds, and drives her away. Wandering on the Continent, she tries five or six times to grow rich and appear honest. Always, at the moment of success, accident brings her to the

1 Vanity Fair, ch. xxx.
ground. Thackeray sports with her, as a child with a cockchafer, letting her hoist herself painfully to the top of the ladder, in order to pluck her down by the foot and make her tumble disgracefully. He ends by dragging her through taverns and greenrooms, and pointing his finger at her from a distance, as a gamester, a drunkard, is unwilling to touch her further. On the last page he installs her vulgarly in a small fortune, plundered by doubtful devices, and leaves her in bad odour, uselessly hypocritical, abandoned to the shadiest society. Beneath this storm of irony and contempt, the heroine is dwarfed, illusion is weakened, interest diminished, art attenuated, poetry disappears, and the character, more useful, has become less true and beautiful.

IX.

Suppose that a happy chance lays aside these causes of weakness, and keeps open these sources of talent. Amongst all these transformed novels appears a single genuine one, elevated, touching, simple, original, the history of Henry Esmond. Thackeray has not written a less popular nor a more beautiful story.

This book comprises the fictitious memoirs of Colonel Esmond, a contemporary of Queen Anne, who, after a troubled life in Europe, retired with his wife to Virginia, and became a planter there. Esmond speaks; and the necessity of adapting the tone to the character suppresses the satirical style, the reiterated irony, the bitter sarcasm, the scenes contrived to ridicule folly, the events combined to crush vice. Thenceforth we enter the real world; we let illusion guide us, we rejoice in a varied spectacle, easily unfolded, without
moral intention. We are no more harassed by personal advice; we remain in our place, calm, sure, no actor's finger pointed at us to warn us at an interesting moment, that the piece is played on our account, and to do us good. At the same time, and unconsciously, we are at ease. Quitting bitter satire, pure narration charms us; we take rest from hating. We are like an army surgeon, who, after a day of fights and manoeuvres, sits on a hillock and beholds the motion in the camp, the procession of carriages, and the distant horizon softened by the sombre tints of evening.

On the other hand, the long reflections, which seem vulgar and out of place under the pen of the writer, become natural and interesting in the mouth of the chief character in this novel. Esmond is an old man, writing for his children, and remarking upon his experience. He has a right to judge life; his maxims are suitable to his years: having passed into sketches of manners, they lose their pedantic air; we hear them complacently, and perceive, as we turn the page, the calm and sad smile which has dictated them.

With the reflections we endure the details. Elsewhere, the minute descriptions appear frequently puerile; we blamed the author for dwelling, with the preciseness of an English painter, on school adventures, coach scenes, inn episodes; we thought that this intense studiousness, unable to grasp lofty themes of art, was compelled to stoop to microscopical observations and photographic details. Here everything is changed. A writer of memoirs has a right to record his childish impressions. His distant recollections, mutilated remnants of a forgotten life, have a peculiar charm; we accompany him back to infancy. A Latin lesson, a
soldiers' march, a ride behind some one, become important events embellished by distance; we enjoy his peaceful and familiar pleasure, and feel with him a vast sweetness in seeing once more, with so much ease and in so clear a light, the well-known phantoms of the past. Minute detail adds to the interest in adding to the naturalness. Stories of campaign life, random opinions on the books and events of the time, a hundred petty scenes, a thousand petty facts, manifestly useless, are on that very account illusory. We forget the author, we listen to the old "Colonel, we find ourselves carried back a hundred years, and we have the extreme pleasure, so uncommon, of believing in what we read.

Whilst the subject obviates the faults, or turns them into virtues, it offers for these virtues the very finest theme. A powerful reflection has decomposed and reproduced the manners of the time with a most astonishing fidelity. Thackeray knows Swift, Steele, Addison, St. John, Marlborough, as well as the most attentive and learned historian. He depicts their habits, household, conversation, like Walter Scott himself; and, what Walter Scott could not do, he imitates their style so that we are deceived by it; and many of their authentic phrases, inwoven with the text cannot be distinguished from it. This perfect imitation is not limited to a few select scenes, but pervades the whole volume. Colonel Esmond writes as people wrote in the year 1700. The feat, I was going to say the genius, is as great as the attempt of Paul Louis Courier, in imitating successfully the style of ancient Greece. The style of Esmond has the calmness, the exactness, the simplicity, the solidity of the classics. Our
modern temerities, our prodigal imagery, our jostled figures, our habit of gesticulation, our striving for effect, all our bad literary customs have disappeared. Thackeray must have gone back to the primitive sense of words, discovered their forgotten shades of meaning, recomposed an obliterated state of intellect and a lost species of ideas, to make his copy approach so closely to the original. The imagination of Dickens himself would have failed in this. To attempt and accomplish this, needed all the sagacity, calmness, and power of knowledge and meditation.

But the masterpiece of the work is the character of Esmond. Thackeray has endowed him with that tender kindliness, almost feminine, which he everywhere extols above all other human virtues, and that self-mastery which is the effect of habitual reflection. These are the finest qualities of his psychological armoury; each by its contrast increases the value of the other. We see a hero, but original and new, English in his cool resolution, modern by the delicacy and sensibility of his heart.

Henry Esmond is a poor child, the supposed bastard of Lord Castlewood, brought up by his heirs. In the opening chapter we are touched by the modulated and noble emotion which we retain to the end of the work. Lady Castlewood, on her first visit to the castle, comes to him in the "book-room or yellow gallery;" being informed by the house-keeper who the little boy is, she blushes and walks back; the next instant, touched by remorse, she returns:

"With a look of infinite pity and tenderness in her eyes, she took his hand again, placing her other fair hand on his head, and saying some words to him, which were so kind, and said in
a voice so sweet, that the boy, who had never looked upon so
much beauty before, felt as if the touch of a superior being or
angel smote him down to the ground, and kissed the fair pro-
tecting hand as he knelt on one knee. To the very last hour of
his life, Esmond remembered the lady as she then spoke and
looked, the rings on her fair hands, the very scent of her robe,
the beam of her eyes lighting up with surprise and kindness, her
lips blooming in a smile, the sun making a golden halo round
her hair.\footnote{The History of Henry Esmond, bk. i. ch. i.} There seemed, as the boy thought, in every look
or gesture of this fair creature, an angelical softness and bright
pity—in motion or repose she seemed gracious alike; the tone
of her voice, though she uttered words ever so trivial, gave him
a pleasure that amounted almost to anguish. It cannot be
called love, that a lad of twelve years of age, little more than a
menial, felt for an exalted lady, his mistress; but it was wor-
ship.\footnote{Ibid. bk. i. ch. vii.}

This noble and pure feeling is expanded by a series
of devoted actions, related with extreme simplicity;
in the least words, in the turn of a phrase, in a chance
conversation, we perceive a great heart, passionately
grateful, never tiring of doing a kindness, or a service,
sympathising, friendly, giving advice, defending the
honour of the family and the fortune of the children.
Twice Esmond interposed between Lord Castlewood
and Mohun the duellist; it was not his fault that the
murderer's weapon did not reach his own breast. When
Lord Castlewood on his deathbed revealed that Esmond
was not a bastard, but that the title and fortune of
Castlewood were lawfully his, the young man, with-
out a word, burned the confession which would have
rescued him from the poverty and humiliation in which
he had so long pined. Insulted by the Lady Castle-
wood, sick of a wound received by his kinsman's side, accused of ingratitude and cowardice, he persisted in his silence with the justification in his hand: "And when the struggle was over in Harry's mind, a glow of righteous happiness filled it; and it was with grateful tears in his eyes that he returned thanks to God for that decision which he had been enabled to make." Later, being in love, but sure not to marry if his birth remained under a cloud in the eyes of the world, having repaid his benefactress, whose son he had saved, entreated by her to resume the name which belonged to him, he smiled sweetly, and gravely replied:

"'It was settled twelve years since, by my dear lord's bedside,' says Colonel Esmond. 'The children must know nothing of this. Frank and his heirs after him must bear our name. Tis his rightfully; I have not even a proof of that marriage of my father and mother, though my poor lord, on his deathbed, told me that Father Holt had brought such a proof to Castlewood. I would not seek it when I was abroad. I went and looked at my poor mother's grave in her convent. What matter to her now? No court of law on earth, upon my mere word, would deprive my Lord Viscount and set me up. I am the head of the house, dear lady; but Frank is Viscount of Castlewood still. And rather than disturb him, I would turn monk, or disappear in America.'

"As he spoke so to his dearest mistress, for whom he would have been willing to give up his life, or to make any sacrifice any day, the fond creature flung herself down on her knees before him, and kissed both his hands in an outbreak of passionate love and gratitude, such as could not but melt his heart, and make him feel very proud and thankful that God had given him the power to show his love for her, and to prove it by some little sacrifice on his own part. To be able to bestow benefits

1 The History of Henry Esmond, bk. ii ch. i.
or happiness on those one loves is sure the greatest blessing conferred upon a man—and what wealth or name, or gratification of ambition or vanity, could compare with the pleasure Esmond now had of being able to confer some kindness upon his best and dearest friends?

"'Dearest saint,' says he, 'purest soul, that has had so much to suffer, that has blest the poor lonely orphan with such a treasure of love. 'Tis for me to kneel, not for you: 'tis for me to be thankful that I can make you happy. Hath my life any other aim? Blessed be God that I can serve you!'" ¹

This noble tenderness seems still more touching when contrasted with the surrounding circumstances. Esmond goes to the wars, serves a political party, lives amidst dangers and bustle, judging revolutions and politics from a lofty point of view; he becomes a man of experience, well informed, learned, farsighted, capable of great enterprises, possessing prudence and courage, harassed by his own thoughts and griefs, ever sad and ever strong. He ends by accompanying to England the Pretender, half-brother of Queen Anne, and keeps him disguised at Castlewood, awaiting the moment when the queen, dying and won over to the Tory cause, should declare him her heir. This young prince, a true Stuart, pays court to Lord Castlewood’s daughter Beatrix, whom Esmond loves, and gets out at night to join her. Esmond, who waits for him, sees the crown lost and his house dishonoured. His insulted honour and outraged love break forth in a proud and terrible rage. Pale, with set teeth, his brain on fire by four sleepless nights of anxiety, he keeps his mind clear, and his voice calm; he explains to the prince with perfect etiquette,

¹ *The History of Henry Esmond*, bk. iii. ch. ii.
and with the respectful coldness of an official messenger, the folly which the prince has committed, and the villany which the prince contemplated. The scene must be read to see how much superiority and passion this calmness and bitterness imply:

"'What mean you, my lord?' says the Prince, and muttered something about a quel-à-pens, which Esmond caught up.

"'The snare, Sir,' said he, 'was not of our laying; it is not we that invited you. We came to avenge, and not to compass, the dishonour of our family.'

"'Dishonour! Morbleu! there has been no dishonour,' says the Prince, turning scarlet, 'only a little harmless playing.'

"'That was meant to end seriously.'

"'I swear,' the Prince broke out impetuously, 'upon the honour of a gentleman, my lords'—

"'That we arrived in time. No wrong hath been done, Frank,' says Colonel Esmond, turning round to young Castlemoord, who stood at the door as the talk was going on. 'See! here is a paper whereon his Majesty hath deigned to commence some verses in honour, or dishonour, of Beatrix. Here is, "Madame" and "Flamme," "Cruelle" and "Rebelle," and 'Amour' and 'Jour,' in the Royal writing and spelling. Had the Gracioso lover been happy, he had not passed his time in sighing.' In fact, and actually as he was speaking, Esmond cast his eyes down towards the table, and saw a paper on which my young Prince had been scrawling a madrigal, that was to finish his charmer on the morrow.

"'Sir,' says the Prince, burning with rage (he had assumed his Royal coat unassisted by this time), 'did I come here to receive insults?'

"'To confer them, may it please your Majesty,' says the Colonel, with a very low bow, 'and the gentlemen of our family are come to thank you.'

"'Malédiction!' says the the young man, tears starting into
his eyes with helpless rage and mortification. 'What will you with me, gentlemen?'

"'If your Majesty will please to enter the next apartment,' says Esmond, preserving his grave tone, 'I have some papers there which I would gladly submit to you, and by your permission I will lead the way;' and taking the taper up, and backing before the Prince with very great ceremony, Mr. Esmond passed into the little Chaplain's room, through which we had just entered into the house:—'Please to set a chair for his Majesty, Frank,' says the Colonel to his companion, who wondered almost as much at this scene, and was as much puzzled by it, as the other actor in it. Then going to the crypt over the mantel-piece, the Colonel opened it, and drew thence the papers which so long had lain there.

"'Here, may it please your Majesty,' says he, 'is the Patent of Marquis sent over by your Royal Father at St. Germain's to Viscount Castlewood, my father: here is the witnessed certificate of my father's marriage to my mother, and of my birth and christening; I was christened of that religion of which your sainted sire gave all through life so shining example. These are my titles, dear Frank, and this what I do with them: here go Baptism and Marriage, and here the Marquisate and the August Sign-Manual, with which your predecessor was pleased to honour our race.' And as Esmond spoke he set the papers burning in the brazier. 'You will please, sir, to remember,' he continued, 'that our family hath ruined itself by fidelity to yours; that my grandfather spent his estate, and gave his blood and his son to die for your service; that my dear lord's grandfather (for lord you are now, Frank, by right and title too) died for the same cause; that my poor kinswoman, my father's second wife, after giving away her honour to your wicked perjured race, sent all her wealth to the King, and got in return that precious title that lies in ashes, and this inestimable yard of blue riband. I lay this at your feet, and stamp upon it: I draw this sword, and break it and deny you; and had you completed the wrong
you designed us, by Heaven I would have driven it through your heart, and no more pardoned you than your father pardoned Monmouth." ¹

Two pages later he speaks thus of his marriage to Lady Castlewood:

"That happiness which hath subsequently crowned it, cannot be written in words; 'tis of its nature sacred and secret, and not to be spoken of, though the heart be ever so full of thankfulness, save to Heaven and the One ear alone—to one fond being, the truest and tenderest and purest wife ever man was blessed with. As I think of the immense happiness which was in store for me, and of the depth and intensity of that love which, for so many years, hath blessed me, I own to a transport of wonder and gratitude for such a boon—nay, am thankful to have been endowed with a heart capable of feeling and knowing the immense beauty and value of the gift which God hath bestowed upon me. Sure, love vincit omnia, is immeasurably above all ambition, more precious than wealth, more noble than name. He knows not life who knows not that: he hath not felt the highest faculty of the soul who hath not enjoyed it. In the name of my wife I write the completion of hope, and the summit of happiness. To have such a love is the one blessing, in comparison of which all earthly joy is of no value; and to think of her, is to praise God."

A character capable of such contrasts is a lofty work; it is to be remembered that Thackeray has produced no other; we regret that moral intentions have perverted these fine literary faculties; and we deplore that satire has robbed art of such talent.

¹ The History of Henry Esmond, bk. iii. ch. xiii.
X.

Who is he; and what is the value of this literature of which he is one of the princes? At bottom, like every literature, it is a definition of man; and to judge it, we must compare it with man. We can do so now; we have just studied a mind, Thackeray himself; we have considered his faculties, their connections, results, their different degrees; we have before our eyes a model of human nature. We have a right to judge of the copy by the model, and to control the definition which his novels lay down by the definition which his character furnishes.

The two definitions are contrary, and his portrait is a criticism on his talent. We have seen that in him the same faculties produce the beautiful and the ugly, force and weakness, success and failure; that moral reflection, after having provided him with every satirical power, debases him in art; that, after having spread over his contemporary novels a tone of vulgarity and falseness, it raises his historical novel to the level of the finest productions; that the same constitution of mind teaches him the sarcastic and violent, as well as the modulated and simple style, the bitterness and harshness of hate with the effusion and delicacy of love. The evil and the good, the beautiful and the ugly, the repulsive and the agreeable, are in him then but remoter effects, of slight importance, born of changing circumstances, acquired and fortuitous qualities, not essential and primitive, different forms which different streams present in the same current. So it is with other men. Doubtless moral qualities are of the first rank; they are the motive-power of civilisation, and constitute the
nobleness of the individual; society exists by them alone, and by them alone man is great. But if they are the finest fruit of the human plant, they are not its root; they give us our value, but do not constitute our elements. Neither the vices nor the virtues of man are his nature; to praise or to blame him is not to know him; approbation or disapprobation does not define him; the names of good or bad tell us nothing of what he is. Put the robber Cartouche in an Italian court of the fifteenth century; he would be a great statesman. Transport this nobleman, stingy and narrow-minded, into a shop; he will be an exemplary tradesman. This public man, of inflexible probity, is in his drawing-room an intolerable coxcomb. This father of a family, so humane, is an idiotic politician. Change a virtue in its circumstances, and it becomes a vice; change a vice in its circumstances, and it becomes a virtue. Regard the same quality from two sides; on one it is a fault, on the other a merit. The essential man is found concealed far below these moral badges: they only point out the useful or noxious effect of our inner constitution: they do not reveal our inner constitution. They are safety or advertising lights attached to our names, to warn the passer-by to avoid or approach us; they are not the explanatory chart of our being. Our true essence consists in the causes of our good or bad qualities, and these causes are discovered in the temperament, the species and degree of imagination, the amount and velocity of attention, the magnitude and direction of primitive passions. A character is a force, like gravity, or steam, capable, as it may happen, of pernicious or profitable effects, and which must be defined otherwise than by the amount of the
weight it can lift or the havoc it can cause. It is therefore to ignore man, to reduce him, as Thackeray and English literature generally do, to an aggregate of virtues and vices; it is to lose sight in him of all but the exterior and social side; it is to neglect the inner and natural element. We will find the same fault in English criticism, always moral, never psychological, bent on exactly measuring the degree of human honesty, ignorant of the mechanism of our sentiments and faculties; we will find the same fault in English religion, which is but an emotion or a discipline; in their philosophy, destitute of metaphysics; and if we ascend to the source, according to the rule which derives vices from virtues, and virtues from vices, we will see all these weaknesses derived from their native energy, their practical education, and that kind of severe and religious poetic instinct which has in time past made them Protestant and Puritan.