THE HUMOR OF THACKERAY

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ELIZABETH POTTER SMITH

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Elizabeth Potter Smith

Approved for the Major Department

Harold M. Priest

Approved for the Graduate Council

Edwin L. Mason

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INTRODUCTION

An interesting problem in the field of English literature is one concerned with the nature of the humor of William Makepeace Thackeray. The main problem of this study will center upon the qualities and subject matter of Thackeray's humor. Satire and humor are very closely connected and it will be necessary to consider criticisms of Thackeray that include satire when such criticisms also concern Thackeray as a humorist. Other qualities of Thackeray such as his training or intellectual qualities, or his skill in plot, or his tendency toward realism, or his power of characterization will not be considered except as they add something definite to the study of his humor.

In obtaining the material presented, the writer has scanned all of Thackeray's works, and has selected and read many of them carefully and studiously, analyzing their value in relation to the problem. Many histories of English literature, essays on Thackeray, and criticisms bearing on his work were read. The chosen criticisms contain the essence of adverse and favorable opinion.

In pursuing this study, it became evident that, first, a knowledge of the existing criticisms of Thackeray's work that had a bearing upon his humor would be of great value; second, that what Thackeray, himself, thought concerning humor would give a still clearer insight into the nature of his humor; and, third, that representative examples of humorous passages from his work be presented to aid in the establishment of independent judgment of Thackeray's humor.

The first chapter of the thesis will give a brief digest of several of the criticisms found, whether they were adverse or favorable to Thackeray's work, and it will show that two divergent schools of criticism developed among the critics, and that the passage of time and greater knowledge of the man and his work gradually resolved these opinions. The second chapter will present material from Thackeray's writings that will show what he thought concerning humor and what he was trying to accomplish in his task as a writer. The third chapter will offer enough of the best examples of humor found in Thackeray's work to allow a reader to form for himself an opinion as to the nature of that humor.

Certain limitations are apparent in the thesis. It has been impossible to analyze minutely, within this inquiry, the vast amount of material available, particularly in the field of criticism on Thackeray, comprising chapter one, and in the field of Thackeray's practice, comprising chapter three; chapter two dealing with Thackeray's expressions is more nearly complete, for his ideas are rather fully presented. In chapter one, the criticisms that will be reported have been considered representative of the thought and opinion concerning Thackeray. Not all the criticisms read will be included for many are repetitions in different phrasing of similar ideas. They will be extensive, but it is not claimed that they exhaust all such criticism available. It will also be shown that two different schools of thought developed, and the theories of each group will be reported. Chapter two will be devoted to Thackeray's own statements concerning humor and humorists, and will present adequately

his main theories. All of his works have been examined and his non-fiction has been studied carefully, as being the more fertile field of literary discussion and comment on humor. In this section Thackeray will reveal himself and unwittingly bring testimony that will bear upon the problem formed by the divergent opinions of the critics. In Thackeray's works, comprising many volumes, the same ideas concerning humor occur more than once. The essential features of his theories will be given. Chapter three will consist of passages illustrative of Thackeray's humor and the analysis of these. The selections are limited to representative ones, for the obvious reason that every example of humor could not be given. The task of quoting every instance of humor would be impossible in consideration of the large volume of Thackeray's output and the richness of the field of his humor. The present purpose, that of considering the nature of the humor, is served by making a careful selection. Chapter three presents a choice of the best examples of Thackeray's humor and the analysis of these. Thus no attempt is made to make the study exhaustive. Such treatment would more properly belong to a greater and longer exposition.

The findings of this investigation, however, may prove to be a real contribution to the study of Thackeray, for no inquiry into the nature of Thackeray's humor has been thus directly made, nor have his own declarations concerning humor been brought together before. The discussions of these factors have heretofore been incidental in the treatment of Thackeray's general literary qualities.

The conclusion will sum up the findings of the investigation.

CHAPTER I

THE CRITICS' ESTIMATE OF THACKERAY AS A HUMORIST

A search through many histories of English literature and analytical studies of Thackeray reveals that Thackeray has a high place in English letters as a humorist. Just what are the essential characteristics of that humor is not so easy to determine, for the different critics place emphasis upon different qualities. That Thackeray's clever sketches and essays were frequently disliked by the readers of his own day is known. He mentions in his letters to Mrs. Brookfield certain criticism that hurt him; yet he received much praise from all quarters.[1]

When the criticism available was studied, it was found that two views unfolded in regard to Thackeray's work. The fact that among the many favorable expressions was some adverse criticism, raised a problem at the very beginning of the study. Whether or not this criticism represented the majority opinion, and whether or not it lost its strength as the years went by, had to be determined. In his History of English Literature, H. A. Taine, the eminent French critic, indicted the satire of Thackeray severely. Because his discussion included most of the points in the adverse criticism, and was the most unfriendly exposition

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[1] Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield, Drawings and Caricatures, A List of Thackeray's Characters. Vol. 32, p. 12, p. 179, p. 191.

of Thackeray's satire that was found, it will be given at some length. Walter Bagehot, not so harsh as Taine, also was unfavorable in his analysis of Thackeray's satire.

Taine presented Thackeray as a man full of hate, vindictive in a planned way, a man using his intelligence and cleverness to deepen the bite of his satire. He called him gloomy and misanthropic. He declared that he created wicked characters without any redeeming features and then heaped insults upon them. He felt that Thackeray must have hated all mankind. He particularly disliked Thackeray's method of interrupting the narrative to stress in his own character a moral point he was making. With Thackeray's qualities other than his satire, he dealt more kindly and accorded him a high place in English letters.

Taine wrote his Modern Authors during the lifetime of some of the writers he discussed; Dickens, Thackeray, Macaulay, and Mill were still alive. Taine's purpose was to show the general direction, the tendencies, and common features of the public mind. The habit of Thackeray to teach a moral lesson, he declared, was characteristic of the Victorian period. Taine did not call Thackeray a humorist, but a satirist. Although there were many sides to Taine's discussion, the aspect of Thackeray as a satirist will be summarized.

> Thackeray, more contained (than Dickens), better informed and stronger, a lover of moral dissertations, a counselor 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.[2]

Taine discussed at length evidences of satire in three of the great novels--Pendennis, Vanity Fair, and The Newcomes. Thackeray's reflective nature and intelligence fitted him for bitter, logical satire. Contemplation of a vice, could bring hatred of the vice. Thackeray, after Swift, was the most gloomy of all satirists.[3]

> 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 reflective nature of Thackeray shut out too much emotion or passing indignation. His satire had been weighed and was the result of mature judgment.

> When we have read to the end of Thackeray, we feel the shudder of a stranger brought before a mattress in the operating room of a 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.[4]

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[2] H. A. Taine, History of English Literature. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1896.) Vol. 2, pp. 441-442.

[3] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 449.

[4] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 450.

Swift's grave sarcasm was the kind that flayed and punished; Taine said that Thackeray was Swift's first pupil. Decided animosity, calculated and bitter, was shown by the length of the ironies which sometimes ran through a whole tale. Taine declared that Thackeray never spoke of Becky Sharp through the course of three volumes but with insult. Serious irony leads to serious caricature. Thackeray heaped insult upon insult. The "grotesques," as Taine called Mirobolant, Mrs. Major O'Dowd, Miss Briggs, and the Doctor, he thought were outrageous and that they were calculated deformities.

> Behind the oddity of the character is the sardonic air of the painter, and we conclude the human race is base and stupid.[5]

Taine did not find amusement even in misadventure or diversion; for him the force of the satire remained. Thackeray's raillery produced a biting impression; he depreciated our whole nature; he derived fine sentiment from an ugly source. He displayed bitter strength of expression, was a misanthrope, reflective and harsh; his commentaries were bitter. The biting diatribes were thrust by the author into the narrative unwarrantedly. Taine claimed that thus one third of a volume was lost to art by these lessons of the author.[6] "Regular presence of a moral intention spoils the novel as well as the novelist."[7] Becky's treatment was a "storm of irony and contempt, the heroine is dwarfed, illusion is

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[5] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 463.

[6] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 470.

[7] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 478.

weakened, interest diminished, art attentuated, poetry disappears, and the character, more useful, has become less true and beautiful."[7a]

> We regret that moral intentions have perverted these fine literary faculties; and we deplore that satire has robbed art of such talent.[8]

This sums up Taine's adverse criticism of Thackeray's satire. It has been given at this length because it contains practically all the adverse criticism of Thackeray.

Bagehot in a study of Sterne and Thackeray,[9] written in 1864 soon after Thackeray's death, spoke of Thackeray's ability to write of people and life as he saw it, and of his evident sympathetic attitude toward humble persons. His adverse criticism was that he found no indication in the writings that Thackeray had any personal enjoyment in life. He felt that Thackeray was too sensitive to petty pains and impressions from the world around him. The Snob papers, he thought, showed too much thought for social inequalities, too much indignation over minor faults, and too much irritability. The idea was too insistent, too frequent, too harsh a judgment. Bagehot called Thackeray "an uncomfortable writer."[10] He acknowledged that he was too close to Thackeray's own day, that a "certain distance is needful for a just criticism."[11] Nowhere in his study of Thackeray did Bagehot mention him as a Humorist; however in

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[7a] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 478.

[8] Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 481.

[9] Walter Bagehot, "Sterne and Thackeray," Literary Studies. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., n.d.) Vol. II, pp. 94-129.

[10] Ibid., p. 128.

[11] Loc. cit.

the paper on Charles Dickens, he did say of Thackeray:

> The delicate touches of our great satirist have. . . not only the charm of wit, but likewise the interest of valuable information; he tells them of the topics which they want to know.[12]

W. Robertson Nicoll considered both sides of the question "Was Thackeray a cynic?"[13] and based his negative answer upon a definition of cynic. In the sense of meaning 'of a dog, currish,' or ill-conditioned and snarling, and being savage, or refusing to believe good of anything or anybody,

> In that sense assuredly Thackeray was no cynic, either in his books or in himself. He was not a cynic delighting in the evil rather than in the good.[14]

On the other side, however, he believed that Thackeray's satire was of a severe type and that his attention was concentrated upon "flaws and blots";[15] that, because of unfortunate personal experiences in early life, such as loss of fortune and his broken home life, Thackeray carried with him "a lacerating sense of wrong, of cheating, of lying, even of villainy,";[16] that he could always see the weaknesses in character and in the intellect of others at the same time that he saw their more noble qualities. Nicoll is on the dividing line in respect to his criticism of Thackeray as a satirist. In the matter of Thackeray

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[12] Ibid., "Charles Dickens." p. 165.

[13] W. Robertson Nicoll, A Bookman's Letters. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913.) Fourth Edition. pp. 51-58.

[14] Ibid., p. 55.

[15] Ibid., p. 56.

[16] Ibid., p. 54.

writing with too great attention to minor faults, his criticism agreed with Taine; in the matter of finding Thackeray a cynic exhibiting hatred and bitterness, it disagreed, for he declared that the man was very noble and greatly beloved by many, that he was full of kindness and true and quiet tenderness. On the negative side as to Thackeray's being a cynic he quoted from Tom Taylor, an editor of Punch:

> He was a cynic! By his life all wrought
> Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways;
> His heart wide open to all kindly thought,
> His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!
>
> He was a cynic! You might read it writ
> In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair,
> In those blue eyes, with childlike candour lit,
> In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear.
>
> He was a cynic! By the love that clung
> About him from his children, friends, and kin;
> By the sharp pain light pen and gossip tongue
> Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within![17]

The criticisms reported have been somewhat adverse in tone, mainly holding that Thackeray was a bitter satirist, was cynical in an undesirable fashion, and paid too much attention to minor faults in society. Close study reveals that the term cynic may vary considerably in meaning, some critics using it in an unfavorable light, others attaching no stigma when they apply it. Many critics of Thackeray's time and most of the later critics did not agree with Taine's views. As they read Thackeray more carefully, learned Thackeray's own theories of what humor is and knew more about the gentle nature of the man himself, they saw his innate kindness and tenderness.

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[17] Ibid., p. 58.

William Samuel Lilly was one who disagreed with Taine. He answered Taine's charges in his Four English Humourists of the Nineteenth Century.

Lilly began his lecture with Thackeray's own description of an humorist.

> The humourous writer proposes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness, - your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture - your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all ordinary actions and passions of life almost. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak.[18]

Lilly elaborated upon this definition and then gave his own.

> The humourist is an artist who playfully gives us his intuition of the world and human life.[19]

He thought that Thackeray was one of the first to use the word in this large sense. Lilly found that in this age the novel was the most ordinary vehicle of humor. The endowment of philosophy seemed the predominant quality in Thackeray's humor; so Lilly discussed him as a philosopher who expressed himself humorously. Lilly took up the indictments of Taine against Thackeray which appeared to Lilly quite wrong. He answered the charges of misanthropy, of cynicism, of the insignificance of Thackeray's characters. He approved the ethical emphasis found in Thackeray's novel and insisted that the novel and ethics belong together, that the author is concerned with men as animated by mind and soul; that conscience

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[18] William Samuel Lilly, Four English Humourists of the Nineteenth Century (London: John Murray, 1895.) (Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in January and February, 1895) pp. 3-4.

[19] Ibid., p. 9.

cannot be ignored, nor the power of volition, the moral sentiments, moral habits and moral responsibility. The novelist needs the perception of truth. The impression that a novel leaves on a healthy mind is the true test of its worth. Thackeray's accompanying moral lessons are all to the good of the age.[20]

The charge of Taine that Thackeray wanted to level society and reduce it to uniformity, Lilly refuted and said that The Book of Snobs, a series of papers appearing one in each issue of Punch for a year, would give a different effect if read at intervals as originally published, than when read all at once as a book. Lilly considered the papers a masterpiece of humor, calling the playfulness satiric but keen and vivacious. The exaggeration and caricature were substantially true. "It is a very direct, a very amusing,--a very philosophical indictment" of an English vice, "the reasonable deference for artificial superiorities."[21] Lilly insisted that Taine was wrong in thinking that Thackeray would reduce society to uniformity, and expressed the opinion that The Book of Snobs did much good.

Thackeray's "books are his experiences of life...and he is ever a moral philosopher."[22] He had a serious view of life and while Taine thought that was a blemish, Lilly did not agree and thought it a peculiar merit.

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[20] Ibid., p. 43.

[21] Ibid., p. 56.

[22] Ibid., p. 61.

Thackeray was not a misanthrope; he saw life clearly and wrote of what he saw. Lilly saw nothing in common between the savage hate of Swift and the genial humor of Thackeray. He saw the nature of Thackeray overflowing with kindness. He quoted the line that concludes The Book of Snobs:

> If Fun is good, Truth is still better, and Love is the best of all.[23]

The charge that Thackeray's good characters were uninteresting was not sustained, Lilly thought, when Colonel Newcome, George Warrington, and Arthur Pendennis, or Amelia Sedley, Laura Bell, and Ethel Newcome were known. He objected to Taine's undesirable implication that Thackeray turned the novel into satire. He thought that there was too much tenderness and pathos underlying the satire in the novels to make it the gloomy and biting satire that Taine saw. That Thackeray was a cynic was held by people who did not understand what a cynic is; Thackeray appealed to sympathies, beliefs and instincts of the better kind.

James T. Fields, who knew Thackeray personally, believed that Thackeray was a man of great faith in humanity and he refuted the charges of cynicism and hatred in these words:

> Overhearing me say one morning something about the vast attractions of London to a greenhorn like myself, he broke in with, "Yes, but you have not seen the grandest one yet! Go with me today to St. Paul's and hear the charity children sing." So we went, and I saw the "head cynic of literature," the "hater of humanity," as a critical dunce in the Times once called him, hiding his bowed face, wet with tears,

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[23] Ibid., p. 63.

while his whole frame shook with emotion, as the children of poverty rose to pour out their anthems of praise. Afterwards he wrote in one of his books this passage, which seems to me perfect in its feeling and tone:--

> "And yet there is one day in the year when I think St. Paul's presents the noblest sight in the whole world; when five thousand charity children, with cheeks like nosegays, and sweet, fresh voices, sing the hymn which makes every heart thrill with praise and happiness. I have seen a hundred grand sights in the world,--coronations, Parisian splendors, Crystal Palace openings, Pope's chapels with their processions of long-tailed cardinals and quavering choirs of fat soprani,--but think in all Christendom there is no such sight as Charity Children's day. Non Anglei, sed angeli. As one looks at that beautiful multitude of innocents; as the first note strikes; indeed one may almost fancy that cherubs are singing."[24]

Saintsbury recognized Thackeray as a man of genius, but did not mention his humor directly. He called the early work of Thackeray "extravaganza," and "miscellaneous style."[25]

Long, in discussing Thackeray, said:

> He turns to satire,--influenced, doubtless, by the eighteenth-century literature which he knew so well, and in which satire played too large a part. His satire is never personal, like Pope's, or brutal, like Swift's, and is tempered by kindness and humor; but it is used too freely, and generally lays too much emphasis on faults and foibles to be considered a true picture of any large class of English society.[26]

He added that Thackeray was essentially a moralist, definitely aiming to produce a moral impression.

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[24] James T. Fields, Yesterdays With Authors. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925.) pp. 33-34.

[25] George Saintsbury, The English Novel. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1919.) p.

[26] William J. Long, English Literature. (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1919.) pp. 503-504.

F. J. Foakes-Jackson estimated Thackeray as follows:

> I cheerfully bow before the genius of England's master of fiction. His characters are my friends, his kindly wisdom my delight, his pathos can move me almost to tears, his cynicism is a constant stimulant.[27]
>
> To be as great a satirist as he, a man must feel deeply and have a saeva indignatio against a great evil. This, like all his predecessors, Thackeray had. He saw the hardness that the spirit of his age engendered.[28]

Walter S. Hinchman said that the intellectual quality of Thackeray's work appealed to the older reader; that he did not picture the fun of society so much as he made fun of society. He did not find him a fault finder, but one who detested shams and vanities, one who laughed rather than scoffed at mankind. He believed that Thackeray had a great sympathetic heart. His characters

> appeal to the reader who is impatient of exaggerations, who likes to study pictures painted with a fine brush, who prefers 'that form of fiction which exposes the follies and hypocrisy of mankind rather than its vices and great virtues.' Such readers prefer, too, the quiet, subtle humour, of which Thackeray was a master, to the more boisterous fun of Dickens.[29]

A. G. Newcomer asserted that at first people misunderstood Thackeray. They thought he was

> satirical which he certainly was, and cynical, which he was not, at least not as they thought him, and misanthropic, which he was not at all.[30]

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[27] F. J. Foakes-Jackson, Social Life in England, 1750-1850. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916.) p. 266.

[28] Ibid., p. 298.

[29] Walter S. Hinchman, A History of English and American Literature. (New York: The Century Company, 1918.) p. 392.

[30] Alphonso Gerald Newcomer, English Literature. (Scott: Foresman and Company, 1905.) p. 329.

He loved wisely, and saved himself from cynicism.

> And certainly, in the generosity of his own spirit, Thackeray, the severe satirist, scarcely less than Dickens, the indulgent sentimentalist, has contributed to enlarge the office of sympathy and strengthen the ties of human love.[31]

Hugh Walter characterized Thackeray's humor thus:

> Both (Thackeray and Dickens) are humourists; but the humour of Thackeray is permeated through and through with satire; that of Dickens has not infrequently a touch of satire, but its essential principle is pure fun, and it is largely burlesque.....Thackeray was a master of burlesque too,... but it is a totally different burlesque. That of Dickens moves to laughter, and the laughter is frequently uproarious; Thackeray only excites a smile and a chuckle of intellectual enjoyment.[32]

Thackeray's intellect controlled his sentiment. His satire was effective, because he kept himself aloof; he was the critical superior. Of a reflective nature, he stayed his story to ponder critically. He did not deal with types for characters, but with individuals, as Becky, Major Pendennis, and Beatrix. The more bitter satirist dealt with types.[33]

Henry A. Beers treated Thackeray as a humorist.[34] He wrote that

> He has been called a cynic, but the boyish playfulness of his humour and his kindly spirit are incompatible with

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[31] Ibid., p. 332.

[32] Hugh Walter, The Age of Tennyson. (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1914.) pp. 93.

[33] Ibid., pp. 93-98.

[34] Henry A. Beers, From Chaucer To Tennyson. (New York: Flood and Vincent, 1894.) pp. 201-206.

> cynicism..... Thackeray's pen was driven by love, and it was not in bitterness but in sadness that (he) laid bare the wickedness of the world..... Behind his satiric mask he concealed the manliest tenderness, and a reverence for everything in human nature that is good and true.[35]

The article on Thackeray in Warner's Library of the World's Best Literature states:

> It has become superfluous at the present day to point out that he was very far from being the cynic he passed for with many readers during his lifetime.[36]

Hattie Tyng Griswold called him "the great humorist." She recognized the criticism of previous writers that thought of him as a cynic, a hater of his kind, a misanthropist, a bitter satirist, a hard, ungenial man and she declared that he had been cleared of the charges by his friends; that he was one of the tenderest and kindest men, soft-hearted and full of sensibilities, a genial and kindly companion. She felt that Thackeray had an unusual capacity for enjoying life. He was great, loving, and noble. In his private life he was known for keen, subtle remarks on life; he flung out little off-hand sketches of character and descriptive touches of men and things. He frequently indulged in doggerel, caricature and parody. He did these easily and without seeming effort. Many were the jests he made when the company was small and intimate. It afforded relaxation from the more serious work on his books.[37]

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[35] Ibid., p. 203.

[36] W. C. Brownell, "William Makepeace Thackeray," in (Library of the World's Best Literature, edited by Charles Dudley Warner. 31 Vols.) Vol. 25, p. 14564.

[37] Hattie Tyng Griswold, Home Life of Great Authors. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1888.) pp. 322-334.

> He is the One, the Only. Such pathos, such wit, such wisdom, will not dawn upon us again--in time.[38]

Lewis Melville ended his book, Some Aspects of Thackeray, by placing him as the one who will go down to posterity as the author of Vanity Fair, Pendennis, and Henry Esmond, the greatest historical novel written by an Englishman, and as the most humorous of the nineteenth century novelists.[39] He found much fun, wit, and humor in Thackeray's verse,[40] and in the illustrations which Thackeray drew for his own writings.[41]

The foremost artist of English prose and one of the greatest of humorists was what W. C. Brownell called Thackeray in Victorian Prose Masters.[42] He thought that the artist and satirist were fused in perfection. He paid tribute to Thackeray's love of truth,

> The love of truth was with him, indeed, less a sentiment than a passion. It absorbed his mind and inspired its activity. To the moral temperament thus attested falsehood of all kinds seemed the one thing in the universe worth the evocation of militant energy.[43]

to his amiability and friendliness,

> His high spirits are astonishing. They are the source of the infectiousness of his humour as well as responsible for its occasional triviality. And their undercurrent is a melancholy that is as native as they.[44]

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[38] Ibid., p. 333.

[39] Lewis Melville, Some Aspects of Thackeray. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1911.) pp. 280-81.

[40] Ibid., pp. 49-81.

[41] Ibid., pp. 97-123.

[42] W. C. Brownell, Victorian Prose Masters. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.) pp. 3-46.

[43] Ibid., p. 17-18.

[44] Ibid., p. 20.

Brownell enjoyed the fun found in the caricatures that illustrate Thackeray's books. He called Thackeray a realist, moralist, and a philosopher of life, who emphasized the importance of building character.

Some consideration is due to Thackeray's verse as so much of it is humorous. William Trent acknowledged the merit of it and held a high opinion of it. He said that the fun and wit and humor were brilliant and ranked Thackeray with Prior and Hood (on the comic side). Thackeray always had a keen sense of fun. He wrote a ballad, The Willow Tree, that was pronounced good by many of the critics; then "simply that he might render his work absurd wrote a parody on it." Professor Matthews said "that the author of The Pen and The Album frequently achieved the 'rare balance of fun and sentiment which is expected in familiar verse.'"[45] Trent closed with saying,

> In the main he is brief, brilliant, and buoyant, as the critics tell us a poet should be, and he combines humor and sentiment in a most felicitous manner.[46]

Another description of Thackeray's humor was given by Justin McCarthy.[47]

> Thackeray's manners were in general quiet, grave, and even gentle, and his most humourous utterances, which were as frequent as they were delightful, had an air of restraint about them as if the great satirist wished rather to repress than to indulge his amusing and sarcastic sallies of wit.[48]

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[45] William Peterfield Trent, Longfellow, and Other Essays. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1910.) pp. 175-185.

[46] Ibid., p. 185.

[47] Justin McCarthy, Portraits of the Sixties. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903.) pp. 22-33.

[48] Ibid., p. 23.

More definite was the account of Thackeray's humor by Oliver Elton. He considered Thackeray more of a mime than any other great English author; the ability to catch the styles and accents of other writers was expressed in some very amusing burlesques. Travesty and mimicry and a bent for parody accompanied Thackeray through life. Queer spelling as in the Yellowplush Papers, the wit of the funny drawings that illustrated the intent of author so perfectly, the mocking note in the verse, ironic farce, nonsense heroics, all were pure expressions of the inborn humor of Thackeray.[49]

Anthony Trollope, a friend of Thackeray and his family, wrote a careful analytical study of the man and his work.

> The feeling of fun would quickly come to him, and the queer rhymes would be poured out as plentifully as the sketches were.
>
> In attempting to understand his character it is necessary for you to bear within your own mind the idea that he was always, within his own bosom, encountering melancholy with buffoonery, and meanness with satire. The very spirit of burlesque dwelt within him,--a spirit which does not see the grand the less because of the travesties which it is always engendering.[50]

As to Thackeray being a cynic, Trollope protested that he was far removed from it. He was too generous, too charitable. He was not a cynic but, Trollope said, a satirist, putting his foot upon a foible to stamp it, but never wanting to give pain. He regarded Thackeray as one of the

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[49] Oliver Elton, Survey of English Literature. (London: Edward Arnold, 1920.) Vol. 4, pp. 231-258.

[50] Anthony Trollope, Thackeray. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1901.) pp. 31-32.

> most soft-hearted of human beings, sweet as Charity itself, who went about the world dropping pearls, doing good, and never wilfully inflicting a wound.[51]

Thackeray fought against the humbug of anything, the pretence, the falseness of affected sentiment. He declared that all humbug was odious and that he would laugh it down to the extent of his capacity. Trollope insisted that the object of a novel should be to instruct in morals while it amused. He called Thackeray a prince among humorists and that in his verses as in his prose,

> The charm of Thackeray's work lies in the mingling of humour with pathos and indignation. There is hardly a piece that is not satirical; - and in most of them, for those who will look a little below the surface, there is something that will touch them. Thackeray, though he rarely uttered a word, either with his pen or his mouth, in which there was not an intention to reach our sense of humour, never was only funny. When he was most determined to make us laugh, he had always a further purpose; some pity was to be extracted from us on behalf of the sorrows of men, or some indignation at the evil done by them.[52]

It was deemed worthwhile at the beginning of this study to ascertain the critics' estimate of Thackeray as a humorist. A large number of opinions were given in digest form. A summary of those opinions is as follows:

Taine was unfavorable in his treatment of Thackeray as a satirist. His most important charges were that Thackeray was bent on censuring man; was exceedingly clever and intellectual, gifted with powerful reasoning

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[51] Ibid., p. 60.

[52] Ibid., p. 166.

ability, but lashed the English public and wrote with hatred and bitterness and gloom. Taine condemned Thackeray's treatment of Rebecca Sharp. He thought that the terms of tenderness used in describing Becky heightened the insulting tone of the author, which was always sarcasm. Bagehot was also unfavorable in tone, his main charge being that Thackeray paid too much attention to minor faults and showed no evidence of possessing a happy nature. Nicoll was inclined to agree with Bagehot in believing that Thackeray paid too much attention to minor flaws in human nature but added favorable comment by denying that Thackeray was bitter and snarling in temperament. He saw more of love and tenderness than hate in the character of Thackeray.

Lilly undertook to refute Taine in his main arguments and was definitely favorable to Thackeray in his criticism. He denied the charges against him of misanthropy and of cynicism. He denied also the charge of mistreatment of characters. He felt that moral teaching or ethics had a positive place in literature, which Taine did not feel. He perceived the nature of Thackeray as overflowing with kindness and loving truth. Lilly was most appreciative of Thackeray. Fields thought that the charge of cynicism was absurd and offered in refutation an incident concerning Thackeray's love for the singing of the charity children of St. Paul's. Saintsbury recognized Thackeray's genius. Long thought the satire was used too freely but did not consider it brutal. Foakes-Jackson spoke in terms of high praise of Thackeray's wit, wisdom, and pathos, and declared that Thackeray's characters were choice friends. Hinchman believed that Thackeray was not a fault finder, that his humor was quiet

and subtle as he made fun of society. Newcomer asserted that the first critics of Thackeray's own day misunderstood him and that he was not at all misanthropic nor was he cynical in the manner they had described. Walker denied the charge that Thackeray was a bitter satirist. Henry A. Beers declared that Thackeray was actuated by love, not bitterness, and that he revered everything that was good and true in human nature. Warner's Library gave an account of Thackeray that was favorable to his humor in its tone. Hattie Tyng Griswold spoke in high praise of the humorist as did Lewis Melville and W. C. Brownell, William Trent, and Justin McCarthy. Oliver Elton's criticism praised the wit and humor of Thackeray and cited examples of his clever mimicry, of his burlesques, his parody, and verse. Anthony Trollope in a careful analytical study of his friend and fellow novelist refuted the charges of misanthropy and cynicism and declared Thackeray to be a prince of humorists.

This brief summary of the criticisms indicates that two divergent opinions developed in regard to Thackeray as a humorist. One group of critics, foremost of whom was Taine, believed him to be a bitter, gloomy, misanthropic satirist. The opposing group instead, found him to be a gentle humorous teacher full of love and kindness and wit. Their analyses pointed out that a high place among English men of letters was accorded Thackeray. He appealed to the intelligent reader who thought about society with its good and evil tendencies. His intentions were always kindly; his nature generous and charitable. He believed firmly that the novelist held a moral obligation in his relation with his reader and that

humorous expression was effective in pointing out foibles and vices. He was always sincere. His style was witty, clever, and varied, showing him to be a master of language. He expressed himself easily in parody, burlesque, verse, and journalistic articles, as well as in the greater form of the novel.

CHAPTER II

THACKERAY'S EXPRESSIONS CONCERNING HUMOR

A study of Thackeray's expressions concerning humor revealed a definite pattern. The same ideas as to what humor is, its subject matter and its character, occurred again and again.

Thackeray did not write analytically on humor but mentioned it frequently. For this study his expressions regarding humor have been searched out as they appear in his writings. They have been gleaned from all his works, including his novels, his lectures, his many miscellaneous essays written for Fraser's Magazine, Punch and other periodicals, and from his letters to the Brookfields not written for publication at all. Nowhere was the subject of humor the main theme of the work except, perhaps, in the lecture on Charity and Humor, which, after all, had a different purpose than to be an exposition of humor alone, seeking rather to establish that the humorist was philanthropic, benevolent, and sympathetic, contributing to the charities of the world in his own way.

No change in the nature of the ideas through the period of years was discernible. The same ideas although expressed in different words were found in articles that were written years apart. The thought that humor and melancholy have a close association was expressed more strongly in the earlier writings, but, as this time corresponded to the beginning of a period of deep personal grief in Thackeray's own life, it was

probably a natural expression. Thackeray's sorrow and loneliness never left him in his lifetime, and the idea of the close connection of humor and sadness was a persistent one in his work.

Thackeray defined humor as a mixture of love and wit,*[1] repeating the definition later in similar words. With his insistence upon love as an attribute of humor he built up the concept with the inclusion of the qualities of kindliness and sympathy.

The subjects that Thackeray chose for his humorous treatment were taken from every day life around him, from his reading, from anything that arrested his attention, such as the vanities and foibles of society, vices, sentimentality. He wrote as a spectator and commentator of life much as Addison wrote one hundred and thirty some years before him, although Thackeray revealed more indignation and preached more zealously than did Addison.

Through all of Thackeray's work, the novels, the stories, the essays, ran a strong theme of moral teaching. He aimed definitely to teach moral lessons and sincerely believed that the humorous writer, who was also a daily commentator upon affairs had this duty to perform.

A more detailed analysis of Thackeray's expressions regarding humor--what it is, what topics are suitable for it and what its character is, follows.

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[1] "Mr. Brown's Letters to His Nephew," Sketches and Travels in London, Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo, Vol. 21, p. 46.

* In this study all references to Thackeray's works are to The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray. Kensington Edition. 32 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

THE QUALITIES OF HUMOR

A number of literary critics in discussing humor expressed themselves in terms that are similar to Thackeray's expressions. Philo M. Buck, a modern critic, in his discussion of comedy in its varying phases wrote:

> When sympathy with the ludicrous or grotesque object is felt, the tone of the laughter changes and we have what we call humor.[2]

He cited the ludicrous characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and others, for whom a degree of sympathy is felt, and at whom we laugh, even while we love them. Buck recognized sympathy as a quality of humor. Sympathy was a part of Saintsbury's definition. He wrote "It is a feeling and presentation of the ludicrous, including sympathetic, or at least meditative, transcendency."[3]

Pathos was spoken of by Coleridge in the phrase, "congruity of humor with pathos."[4] Pity and tears are elements given by Pater in the phrase, "laughter which blends with tears, and even with the subtleties of the imagination, and which in its most exquisite motive is one with pity."[5] Werner said that "true humour is never divorced

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[2] Philo M. Buck, Jr., Literary Criticism (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), p. 293.

[3] Ibid., pp. 293-294.

[4] Ibid., p. 294.

[5] Ibid., p. 294.

from pathos; and it is usually allied with the power of seeing the poetry in common things."[6]

Humanity of the humorist was stressed by Scherer:

> The perception of the contrasts of human destiny by a man who does not sever himself from humanity, but who takes his own short-comings and those of his dear fellow-creatures cheerfully--that is the essence of humour.[7]

Truth as a quality is found in a quotation from L'Estrange:

> Many humorous sayings..... fail for want of foundation. That would-be wit which has no element of truth is always a failure, and may appear romantic, dull or ludicrous--or simply nonsensical. In... humour... the imperfection must refer to some kind of right or truth...[8]

These elements--love, sympathy, pity, pathos, tears, humanity, truth--were all included in the Thackeray extracts; some were mentioned again and again.

Attention is now turned directly to Thackeray's own words, in the endeavor to clarify and formulate an idea as to Thackeray's theories of humor.

Thackeray realized that England in the 1850's had refined her humor, her morals and manners greatly over those of the eighteenth century; and where Swift and Steele could laugh and make jokes at a hanging, for instance, and Gay write merry ballads about one, Thackeray

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[6] A. Werner, The Humour of Italy (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, n.d.), p. 295.

[7] Edmond Scherer, Essays on English Literature (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 165.

[8] A. G. L'Estrange, History of English Humour Vol. II (London: Hurst and Blackett, n.d.), p. 295.

himself could not. Indeed, he once, July, 1840, went to a hanging to study his own reactions together with those displayed by the crowd around him and came home greatly depressed and disturbed. A melancholy accompanied him that remained with him many days.[9]

> A hundred years back, people crowded to see that last act of a highwayman's life, and made jokes on it. Swift laughed at him, grimly advising him to provide a Holland shirt and white cap crowned with a crimson or black ribbon for his exit, to mount the cart cheerfully--shake hands with the hangman, and so--farewell. Gay wrote the most delightful ballads, and made merry over the same hero. Contrast these with the writings of our present humourists! Compare those morals and ours--those manners and ours![9a]

Now the whole truth concerning these could not be told.

Thackeray noted another change in the humor of preceding times and of his own day, and that was in the treatment of women in comedies. He found pleasure in the fact that Steele treated women with more respect and decency than was usual with his fellow writers or predecessors. He traced briefly the place that women have been given in comedy. Steele was the first writer who really seemed to admire and respect women. In Shakespearean plays women had but a small part in the dialogue. Congreve could pay them splendid compliments but looked upon them as "mere instruments of gallantry."[10] Swift "utterly scorned women" and treated them with "insolent patronage and vulgar protection."[11]

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[9] "Going To See a Man Hanged." Sketches and Travels in London, Notes of a Journey From Cornhill To Grand Cairo, Vol. 21, pp. 233-255.

[9a] "Steele." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 233.

[10] "Steele." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 250.

[11] Op. cit.

He thought women fools. "Addison laughs at women equally; but, with the gentleness and politeness of his nature, smiles at them and watches them, as if they were harmless, half-witted, amusing, pretty creatures, only to be men's playthings."[12] Steele was the first to admire sincerely women's goodness and understanding.

> In his comedies, the heroes do not rant and rave about the divine beauties of Gloriana or Statira, as the characters were made to do in the chivalry romances and the high-flown dramas just going out of vogue; but Steele admires women's virtue, acknowledges their sense, and adores their purity and beauty, with an ardour and strength which should win the good-will of all women to their hearty and respectful champion. It is this ardour, this respect, this manliness, which makes his comedies so pleasant and their heroes such fine gentlemen.[13]

Having noted certain changes in the development of humor Thackeray stated tersely what he believed humor to be. In an article appearing in Punch about 1848, he observed of the novel David Copperfield and of Dickens:

> How beautiful it is--how charmingly fresh and simple! In those admirable touches of tender humour--and I should call humour, Bob, a mixture of love and wit--who can equal this great genius?[14]

There is his short brief definition, humor is "a mixture of love and wit."

Several years later he repeated this, using almost the same words, in a lecture given in New York City.

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[12] Op. cit.

[13] Ibid., p. 251.

[14] "Mr. Brown's Letters to his Nephew," Sketches and Travels in London, Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo Vol. 21, p. 46.

> I have said myself somewhere, I do not know with what correctness (for definitions never are complete), that humour is wit and love; I am sure, at any rate, that the best humour is that which contains most humanity, that which is flavoured throughout with tenderness and kindness.[15]

Thackeray stressed his wish for sincerity and truth. He wrote from Paris in 1849, in a letter to Mrs. Brookfield in England:

> . . . . If I mayn't tell you what I feel, what is the use of a friend? That's why I would rather have a sad letter from you, or a short one if you are tired and unwell, than a sham-gay one--and I don't subscribe at all to the doctrine of "striving to be cheerful." A quoi bon, convulsive grins and humbugging good-humour? Let us have a reasonable cheerfulness, and melancholy too, if there is occasion for it--and no more hypocrisy in life than need be.[16]

Faith and simplicity are qualities closely connected with truth and sincerity. The kindly nature of the man shows itself in the impulse to feel pity rather than mirth at seeing a failure result from an enterprise entered into with earnestness and faith. Thackeray, commenting upon an exceedingly large picture of Mr. Haydon, was reminded of a stout gentleman who

> fully believed that he could walk upon the water, and set off in the presence of a great concourse of people upon his supermarine journey. There is no need to tell you that the poor fellow got a wetting and sank amidst the jeers of all beholders. I think somehow they should not have laughed at that honest ducked gentleman, they should have respected the faith and simplicity which led him unhesitatingly to venture upon that watery experiment; and so, instead of

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[15] "Charity and Humour," The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech. Vol. 26, p. 404.

[16] Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield, Drawings and Caricatures, A List of Thackeray's Characters. Vol. 32, p. 84.

> laughing at Haydon, which you and I were just about to do, let us check our jocularity and give him credit for his great earnestness of purpose. I begin to find the world growing more pathetic daily, and laugh less every year of my life. Why laugh at idle hopes, or vain purposes, or utter blundering self-confidence? Let us be gentle with them henceforth; who knows whether there may not be something of the sort chez nous?[17]

In the English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Thackeray discussed among the humor of others that of Addison. He approved its qualities, its gentleness and kindliness. Addison's wit flowed from a happy heart and spirit. He observed small faults and mannerisms and foibles for his subjects, he commented amusingly about them and laughed at them kindly. Thackeray admired Addison, whose humor was somewhat like his own.

> We come now to a humour that flows from quite a different heart and spirit--a wit that makes us laugh and leaves us good and happy; to one of the kindest benefactors that society has ever had; and I believe you have divined already that I am about to mention Addison's honoured name.[18]

> It is as a Tatler of small talk and a Spectator of mankind, that we cherish and love him, and owe as much pleasure to him as to any human being that ever wrote. He came in that artificial age, and began to speak with his noble, natural voice. He came, the gentle satirist, who hit no unfair blow; the kind judge, who castigated only in smiling. While Swift went about, hanging and ruthless--a literary Jeffreys--in Addison's kind court only minor cases were tried: only peccadilloes and small

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[17] "Picture Gossip." Miscellaneous Essays, Sketches and Reviews. Vol. 30, p. 329.

[18] "Congreve and Addison." Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, pp. 209-210.

> sins against society: only a dangerous libertinism in tuckers and hoops: or a nuisance in the abuse of beaux' canes and snuff-boxes. It may be a lady is tried for breaking the peace of our sovereign lady Queen Anne, and ogling too dangerously from the side-box; or a Templar for beating the watch, or breaking Priscian's head: or a citizen's wife for caring too much for the puppet-show, and too little for her husband and children: every one of the little sinners brought before him is amusing, and he dismisses each with the pleasantest penalties and the most charming words of admonition.[19]

> Having good-will and kindness..... he looks on the world and plays with the ceaseless humours of all of us--laughs the kindest laugh--points our neighbour's foible or eccentricity out to us with the most good-natured, smiling confidence; and then, turning over his shoulder, whispers our foibles to our neighbour.[20]

Thackeray found humor in both vanities and virtues. Of Sir Roger de Coverley

> What is ridiculous is delightful in him; we are so fond of him because we laugh at him so. And out of that laughter, and out of that sweet weakness, and out of those harmless eccentricities and follies, and out of that touched brain, and out of that honest manhood and simplicity-- we get result of happiness, goodness, tenderness, pity, piety; such as, if my audience will think their reading and hearing over, doctors and divines but seldom have the fortune to inspire.[21]

That is Thackeray speaking--Thackeray, the humorist of a century and a quarter later. In the above comments on Addison may be read Thackeray's own convictions concerning humor.

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[19] Ibid., pp. 221-222.

[20] Ibid., p. 225.

[21] Ibid., p. 226.

Thackeray was very careful that his jokes and fun should not hurt any one, and certainly not wound a friend.

> My Dear Mrs. Brookfield:
> Now that it is over and irremediable I am thinking with a sort of horror of a bad joke in the last number of Vanity Fair, which may annoy somebody whom I wouldn't wish to displease. Amelia is represented as having a lady's maid, and the lady's maid's name is Payne. I laughed when I wrote it, and thought that it was good fun, but now, who knows whether you and Payne and everybody won't be angry, and in fine, I am in great tremor. The only way will be, for you I fear to change Payne's name to her Christian one. Pray don't be angry if you are, and forgive me if I have offended. You know you are only a piece of Amelia, my mother is another half, my poor little wife--y est pour beaucoup.
>
> and I am
> Yours most sincerely
> W. M. Thackeray.
>
> I hope you will write to say that you forgive me.[22]
> (1848)

He disapproved of jokes that hurt other people; jokes that made fun of deformities were low forms of wit and were funny only to dull people. A pamphlet attacking Pope carried a frontispiece of a hunchback labeled "Pope." Thackeray said:

> This kind of rude jesting was an evidence not only of an ill nature, but a dull one. When a child makes a pun, or a lout breakes out into a laugh, it is some very obvious combination of words, or discrepancy of objects, which provokes the infantine satirist, or tickles the boorish wag; and many of Pope's revilers laughed, not so much because they were wicked, as because they knew no better.[23]

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[22] Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield; Drawings and Caricatures; A List of Thackeray's Characters. V. 32, p. 26.

[23] "Prior, Gay and Pope." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 313.

He declared that humorous incidents should be used sparingly in order to obtain the greatest effect. The main part of a book should be calm with the incidents, causing laughter, appearing only occasionally; then would they sparkle the more because of their rarity. Writing as Mr. Titmarsh, critic, of published press accounts wherein provincial critics used phrases such as "we have literally roared with laughter over the last number," or "absolutely burst with cachinnation," or "been obliged to call in two printer's devils to hold the editorial sides" while reading funny stories, Thackeray said:

> let the reader be assured that he has fallen upon critical opinions not worth the having.... It is impossible to yell with laughter through thirty-two pages. Laughter, to be worth having, can only come by fits and now and then. The main body of your laughter-inspiring book must be calm.[24]

He repeated that passages of humor must not be too frequent.

> That collision of ideas, which provokes the one or the other, must be occasional.... And so the writer's jokes and sentiment, his ebullitions of feeling, his outbreaks of high spirits, must not be too frequent. One tires of a page of which every sentence sparkles with points, of a sentimentalist who is always pumping the tears from his eyes or your own. One suspects the genuineness of the tear, the naturalness of the humour; these ought to be true and manly in a man, as everything else in his life should be manly and true; and he loses his dignity by laughing or weeping out of place, or too often.[25]

Thackeray often mentioned the close association of humor and

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[24] "Box of Novels." Miscellaneous Essays and Reviews, Vol. 30. p. 61.

[25] "Charity and Humour." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 405.

melancholy and said that he was often at his best in being funny while sadness was with him. He declared that a humorous letter might not be forthcoming for he was on a vacation at the seashore where he was quite contented and happy. In 1849, he wrote to Mrs. Brookfield from Brighton:

13 July 1849

From Brighton.

> Now for to go to begin that long letter which I have a right to send you, after keeping silence, or the next thing to silence, for a whole week. As I have nothing to tell about, it is the more likely to be longer and funnier--no, not funnier, for I believe I am generally most funny when I am most melancholy,--and who can be melancholy with such air, ocean and sunshine? not if I were going to be hanged tomorrow could I afford to be anything but exceedingly lazy, hungry and comfortable.[26]

Then he wrote a long happy letter full of humorous happenings.

In a review of certain Irish writers, Thackeray expressed his belief that there was a very close connection between humor and melancholy, between laughter and tears, between gayety and sadness. He asserted that extreme melancholy was a characteristic of the Irish people.

> All Irish stories are sad, all humorous Irish songs are sad; there is never a burst of laughter excited by them but, as I fancy, tears are near at hand; and from 'Castle Rackrent' downwards, every Hibernian tale that I have read is sure to leave a sort of woeful tender impression. Mr. Carleton's books--and he is by far the greatest genius who has written of Irish life--are pre-eminently melancholy. Griffin's best novel, 'The Collegians' has the same pain-

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[26] Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield, Drawings and Caricatures, A List of Thackeray's Characters, Vol. 32, p. 67.

> ful character; and I have always been surprised, while the universal English critic has been laughing over the stirring stories of 'Harry Lorrequer,' that he has not recognized the fund of sadness beneath. The most jovial song that I know of in the Irish language is 'The Night before Larry was stretched;' but, along with the joviality, you always carry the impression of the hanging the next morning. 'The Groves of Blarney' is the richest nonsense that the world has known since the days of Rabelais; but is it not very pathetic nonsense? The folly is uttered with a sad look, and to the most lamentable wailing music: it affects you like the jokes of Lear's fool.... The romance-writers and dramatists have wronged the Irish cruelly (and so has every Saxon among them, the O'Connellites will say) in misrepresenting them as they have done. What a number of false accounts, for instance, did poor Power give to English playgoers, about Ireland! He led Cockneys to suppose that all that Irish gaiety was natural and constant; that Paddy was in a perpetual whirl of high spirits and whisky; for ever screeching and whooping mad songs and wild jokes; a being entirely devoid of artifice and calculation: it is only after an Englishman has seen the country that he learns how false these jokes are; how sad these high spirits, and how cunning and fitful that exuberant joviality, which we have been made to fancy are the Irishman's every-day state of mind. There is, for example, the famous Sir Lucius O'Trigger of Sheridan, at whose humours we all laugh delightfully. He is the most real character in all that strange company of profligates and swindlers who people Sheridan's play, and I think the most profoundly dismal of all. The poor Irish knight's jokes are only on the surface. He is a hypocrite all through the comedy, and his fun no more real than his Irish estate. He makes others laugh, but he does not laugh himself, as Falstaff does, and Sydney Smith, and a few other hearty humourists of the British sort.[27]

While Thackeray found much that was pathetic in the lives of those around him, he hated sentimentality and was quick to ridicule it.

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[27] Miscellaneous Essays, Sketches and Reviews, Vol. 30, pp. 63-65.

> I have said before I am growing more inclined to the pathetic daily, but let us in the name of goodness make a stand somewhere, or the namby-pamby of the world will become unendurable; and we shall melt away in a deluge of blubber. This drivelling hysterical sentimentality it is surely the critic's duty to grin down, to shake any man roughly by the shoulder who seems dangerously affected by it, and, not sparing his feelings in the least, tell him he is a fool for his pains; to have no more respect for those who invent it, but expose their error with all the downrightness that is necessary.[28]

The emotional qualities of humor and of song are of a similar nature. When found together they are irresistible; and in song, love and tenderness may be keenly felt. Tears come easily with song, bringing sympathy, compassion, and suddenly laughter and as quickly tears. He stressed the closeness of humor and tears.

> When humour joins with rhythm and music, and appears in song, its influence is irresistible, its charities are countless, it stirs the feelings to love, peace, friendship, as scarce any moral agent can. The songs of Beranger are hymns of love and tenderness; I have seen great whiskered Frenchmen warbling the "Bonne Vieille," the "Soldats, au pas, au pas," with tears rolling down their mustachios. At a Burn's Festival I have seen Scotchmen singing Burns, while the drops twinkled on their furrowed cheeks; while each rough hand was flung out to grasp its neighbor's; while early scenes and sacred recollections, and dear and delightful memories of the past came rushing back at the sound of the familiar words and music, and the softened heart was full of love, and friendship, and home. Humour; if tears are the alms of gentle spirits, and be counted, as sure they may, among the sweetest of life's charities,--of that kindly sensibility, and sweet emotion, which exhibits itself at the eyes, I know no such provocative as humour. It is an irresistible sympathiser; it surprises you into compassion: you are laughing and disarmed, and suddenly

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[28] Ibid., p. 333.

> forced into tears..... Humour! humour is the mistress of tears; she knows the way to the fons lachrymarum, strikes in dry and rugged places with her enchanting wand, and bids the fountain gush and sparkle. She has refreshed myriads more from her natural springs than ever tragedy has watered from her pompous old urn.[29]

Thackeray believed that there was a difference between humor and satire and expressed that difference in various statements in his works as follows. Humor is pleasant and true in its mirth without the greater excitement and intoxication of satire. The after effect of humor is quieting and soothing; the after effect of satire is disturbing and troublesome, mainly because of the element of kindness that is to be found in humor as contrasted with the element of unkindness or the hurting undeservedly of someone that is to be found in satire. He believed that sarcasm and ridicule should not be used upon children, and that many older people, also, do not understand and do not like jokes. Some women think laughter and raillery are annoying and offensive. These prefer frilly poetry, sentiment, and gushing eloquence. This added to the difficulty of editing a magazine which was to carry some humorous work. Satire which sneered was too hard for everyone to understand. Humor that jarred or was gloomy as was the satire of Swift, would repel many; it lacked the friendliness and sympathy that Thackeray insisted upon. True humor should not be born of hatred, savagery, or brutality.

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[29] "Charity and Humour." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, George Crulkshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 413.

Thackeray, writing as Mr. Titmarsh, found that his friend Mr. Yorke had grown peaceful in old age; that he had

> Imbibed much of that sweet and wholesome milk of human kindness..... For of all diets good-humour is the most easy of digestion; if it does not create that mad boisterous flow of spirits which greater excitement causes, it has yet a mirth of its own, pleasanter, truer, and more lasting than the intoxication of sparkling satire; above all, one rises the next morning without fever or headache, and without the dim and frightful consciousness of having broken somebody's undeserving bones in a frolic, while under the satirical frenzy.[30]

Thorns in the Cushion
Roundabout Papers.
1860-1863.

In these last words I am supposing the respected reader to be endowed with a sense of humour, which he may or may not possess; indeed, don't we know many an honest man who can no more comprehend a joke than he can turn a tune. But I take for granted, my dear sir, that you are brimming over with fun--you mayn't make jokes, but you could if you would--you know you could; and in your quiet way you enjoy them extremely. Now many people neither make them, nor understand them when made, nor like them when understood, and are suspicious, testy, and angry with jokers. Have you ever watched an elderly male or female--an elderly "party," so to speak, who begins to find out that some young wag of the company is "chaffing" him? Have you ever tried the sarcastic or Socratic method with a child? Little simple he or she, in the innocence of the simple heart, plays some silly freak, or makes some absurd remark, which you turn to ridicule. The little creature dimly perceives that you are making fun of him, writhes, blushes, grows uneasy, bursts into tears,--upon my word it is not fair to try the weapon of ridicule upon that innocent young victim. The awful objurgatory practice he is accustomed to. Point out his fault, and lay bare the dire consequences thereof; expose it roundly, and give him a proper, solemn, moral whipping,--but do not attempt to castigare ridendo. Do not laugh at him writhing, and cause all the other boys in the school to laugh. Remember your own young days at school, my friend--the tingling cheeks, burning ears,

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[30] "Box of Novels." Miscellaneous Essays, Sketches and Reviews, Vol. 30, p. 61.

> bursting heart, and passion of desperate tears, with which you looked up, after having performed some blunder, whilst the doctor held you to public scorn before the class, and cracked his great clumsy jokes upon you--helpless, and a prisoner! Better the block itself, and the lictors, with their fasces of birch-twigs, than the maddening torture of those jokes!
>
> Now with respect to jokes--and the present company of course excepted--many people, perhaps most people, are as infants. They have little sense of humour. They don't like jokes. Raillery in writing annoys and offends them. The coarseness apart, I think I have met very, very few women who liked the banter of Swift and Fielding. Their simple, tender natures revolt at laughter. Is the satyr always a wicked brute at heart, and are they rightly shocked at his grin, his leer, his horns, hoofs, and ears? Fi donc, le vilain monstre, with his shrieks, and his capering crooked legs! Let him go and get a pair of well-wadded black silk stockings, and pull them over those horrid shanks; put a large gown and bands over beard and hide; and pour a dozen of lavender-water into his lawn handkerchief, and cry, and never make a joke again. It shall all be highly-distilled poesy, and perfumed sentiment, and gushing eloquence; and the foot shan't peep out, and a plague take it. Cover it up with the surplice. Out with your cambric, dear ladies, and let us all whimper together.[31]
>
> It requires an effort, of which all minds are not capable, to understand Don Quixote; children and common people still read Gulliver for the story merely. Many more persons are sickened by Jonathan Wild than can comprehend the satire of it. Each of the great men who wrote those books was speaking from behind the satiric mask I anon mentioned. Its distortions appal many simple spectators; its settled sneer or laugh is unintelligible to thousands, who have not the wit to interpret the meaning of the vizored satirist preaching from within.[32]

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[31] "Thorns in the Cushion." Roundabout Papers, Little Travels and Roadside Sketches, Vol. 27, pp. 51-52.

[32] "Charity and Humour." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 412.

Thackeray analyzed Swift's humor as furious, sarcastic, and deadly logical; a genius bright and dazzling and strong, flashing upon falsehood and scorching it and withering it. Surprising humor and deadly satire is Gulliver's Travels; "it is truth topsy-turvy, entirely logical and absurd." "His laugh jars on one's ear after seven score years." Swift had a great and gloomy heart.[33]

SUBJECTS FOR HUMOR

Thackeray declared that subjects chosen for humorous treatment come from common life, with its joys and griefs, aversions and sympathies, laughter and tears.

> Dick Steele took comedy from behind the fine lady's alcove, or the screen where the libertine was watching her. He ended all that wretched business of wives jeering at their husbands, of rakes laughing wives, and husbands too, to scorn. That miserable, roughed, sparkling, hollow-hearted comedy of the Restoration fled before him, and, like the wicked spirit in the Fairy-books, shrank, as Steele let the daylight in, and shrieked, and shuddered and vanished. The stage of humourists has been common life ever since Steele's and Addison's time; the joys and griefs, the aversions and sympathies, the laughter and tears of nature.[34]

Thackeray found a stream of invitations to family dinners funny; they would afford topics for humourous articles in Punch. He wrote in a letter from Paris:

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[33] "Swift." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech. Vol. 26, pp. 174-189.

[34] "Charity and Humour." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 410.

> I am undergoing the quarantine of family dinners with the most angelic patience. Yesterday being the first day, it was an old friend and leg of lamb. I graciously said to the old friend, "Why the deuce wouldn't you let me go and dine at a restaurant, don't you suppose I have leg of lamb at home?" To-day with an aunt of mine, where we had mock turtle soup, by Heavens! and I arranged with my other aunt for another dinner. I knew how it would be; it must be; and there's my cousin to come off yet, who says, "you must come and dine. I haven't a soul, but will give you a good Indian dinner." I will make a paper in Punch about it, and exhale my griefs in print. I will tell you about my cousin when I get home,--when I get to Portman Street that is... What brought me to this place? Well I am glad I came, it will give me a subject for at least six weeks in Punch, of which I was getting so weary that I thought I must have done with it.[35]

Another time Thackeray saw in a case of domestic trouble, wherein one side of the story was so exaggerated as to distort the facts away from all truth, material for humorous treatment.

> EMMA is free. The great Catastrophe has happened--last night she and her mother fled from the infamous R. and took refuge at Mrs. Proctor's..... R. had treated his wife infamously; R. had assailed her with the most brutal language and outrages;--that innocent woman Madame G.-- poor thing, who meddled with nothing and remained all day in her own garret so as to give no trouble, was flung out of the house by him--indeed only stayed to protect her daughter's life. The brute refused to allow the famous picture to be exhibited--in fact is a mad-man and ruffian. Procter and I went off to make peace, and having heard R.'s story, I believe that he has been more wronged than they.
>
> The mother-in-law is at the bottom of the mischief. It was she who made the girl marry R., and, the marriage made, she declined leaving her daughter; in fact, the poor devil, who has a bad temper, a foolish head--an

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[35] Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield, Drawings and Caricatures, A List of Thackeray's Characters, Vol. 32, p. 43.

> immense vanity--has been victimised by the women and I pity him a great deal more than them. O! what a comedy it would make! but the separation I suppose is final, and it will be best for both parties. It will end no doubt in his having to pay a 4th of his income for the pleasure of being a month married to her, and she will be an angelic martyr, &c.....[36]

Thackeray felt strongly the necessity for pointing out undesirable traits in society and laughing them out of existence or at least curbing them. Through his writings in Punch he laughed at snobbishness of all kinds, and strove always to be honest, truthful, and fair. His Book of Snobs, papers in Punch running through a year, February, 1846, to February, 1847, concentrated upon vices and foibles of many kinds, dealing playfully with such subjects as Peerage worship, ostentatious living, table manners, arrogance, the Court Circular, the struggle to be fashionable, and all those who meanly admire mean things.

> I am sick of Court Circulars. I loathe haut-ton intelligence. I believe such words as Fashionable, Exclusive, Aristocratic, and the like, to be wicked, unchristian epithets, that ought to be banished from honest vocabularies. A Court system that sends men of genius to the second table, I hold to be a Snobbish system. A society that sets up to be polite, and ignores Arts and Letters, I hold to be a Snobbish society. You, who despise your neighbour, are a Snob; you, who forget your own friends, meanly to follow after those of a higher degree, are a Snob; you, who are ashamed of your poverty, and blush for your calling, are a Snob; as are you who boast of your pedigree, or are proud of your wealth.
>
> To laugh at such is Mr. Punch's business. May he laugh honestly, hit no foul blow, and tell the truth when at his

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36 Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield, Drawings and Caricatures, A List of Thackeray's Characters, Vol. 32, pp. 49-50.

very broadest grin--never forgetting that if Fun is good, Truth is better, and Love best of all.[37]

Thackeray ridiculed the snobbishness in high political circles and found amusement in lords and ladies seeking places close to the throne. Such positions he called "Lady of the Powder-Closet," "Pewter-Stick in Waiting," "Groom of the Dust Pan." He found something ludicrous in the character of a flunkey, (but no absurdity or incongruity in decent service). A glorified flunkey in lace, plush, bouquets, powdered hair he found funny and foolish. The bedecked and stiff footman and the lord and lady in waiting and all ceremonious strutting and pageantry he claimed did not inspire respect because they were not genuine and he ridiculed them.

> What is it makes us all laugh at the picture in the last number.... of "Punch presenting ye Tenth Volume to ye Queene"? The admirable manner in which the Gothic art and ceremony is ridiculed; the delightful absurdity and stiffness; the outrageous aping of decorum; the cumbrous ludicrous nonsensical splendour. Well; the real pageant is scarcely less absurd--the Chancellor's wig and mace almost as old and foolish as the Jester's cap and bauble. Why is any Chancellor, any Stage-Manager, any Pewter-Stick, any John called upon to dress himself in any fancy dress, or to wear any badge? I respect my Bishop of London, my Right Reverend Charles James, just as much since he left off a wig as I did when he wore one. I should believe in the sincerity of his piety, even though a John, in purple raiment (looking like a sort of half-pay Cardinal), didn't carry his lordship's prayer-books in a bag after him to the Chapel Royal; nor do I think Royalty would suffer, or Loyalty be diminished, if Gold, Silver, and Pewter-Sticks were melted, and if the grandes charges a la Cour--Ladies of the Powder-Closet, Mistresses of the Pattens, and the like, were abolished in saecula saeculorum.

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[37] "Chapter Last." The Book of Snobs, Character Sketches, Stories, Vol. 22, pp. 265-266.

> And I would lay a wager, that by the time Punch has published his eightieth volume, the ceremonies whereof we have been treating will be as dead as the Corn Laws, and the nation will bless Punch and Peel for destroying both.[38]

THE NATURE OF THE HUMORIST AND HIS MORAL OBLIGATION

Thackeray steeped himself in the literature of the eighteenth century. He knew and loved it well. In writing Henry Esmond he not only laid the scene and plot in the eighteenth century but also wrote in the very phraseology of the time. The great writers of a hundred years before him Thackeray knew thoroughly. He prepared a series of lectures upon some writers, choosing Swift, Congreve, Addison, Steele, Prior, Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith. Thackeray, himself a great humorist of the nineteenth century, called his lectures "English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century" and then chose to show what manner of men these writers were, rather than what their books were. He well knew that Harlequin was a very different man beneath his mask from the part he played, much more sober and serious. He found and presented in his lectures the men as he believed them truly to be beneath the satire and humor and gayety of their written and published works. In doing so Thackeray often expressed himself clearly and distinctly on the subject of humor, although these passages came inadvertently as it were in the exposition of his subject. He

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[38] "On Some Political Snobs." The Book of Snobs, Character Sketches, Stories, Vol. 22, p. 276-277.

found more in humor than laughter or the sense of ridicule. Thackeray felt strongly that the duty of the humorist was a moral one.

> If Humour only meant laughter, you would scarcely feel more interest about humourous writers than about the private life of poor Harlequin just mentioned, who possesses in common with these the power of making you laugh. But the men regarding whose lives and stories your kind presence here shows that you have curiosity and sympathy, appeal to a great number of our faculties, besides our mere sense of ridicule. The humourous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness--your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture--your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak. Accordingly, as he finds, and speaks, and feels the truth best, we regard him, esteem him--sometimes love him.[39]

Thackeray's humor was kept clean and moral even as his own life was clean and moral. He asserted that the French way of jesting and French comedy were rather immoral and awful.

> If one may read the history of a people's morals in its jokes, what a queer set of reflections the philosophers of the twentieth century may make regarding the characters of our two countries in perusing the waggeries published on one side and the other![40]

He noted that there was a difference in the things satirized and that English Punch in many published volumes contained "so much cause for laughing, and so little for blushing; so many jokes, and so little harm."

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[39] "Swift." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, pp. 149-150.

[40] "Two or Three Theatres at Paris." Contributions to Punch (not previously reprinted), Vol. 31, p. 271.

The English laughed in the company of their wives and children; they tolerated no indecorum; they had a high sense of morality.

The French had "been joking against marriage ever since writing began..."

> After going to these theatres, seeing the houses all full, and hearing the laughter ringing through every one of them, one is puzzled to know what the people respect at all, or what principle they do believe in. They laugh at religion, they laugh at chastity, they laugh at royalty, they laugh at the Republic most pitilessly of all; when France, in the piece called the "Foire aux Idees," says she is dying under nine hundred doctors, to each of whom she is paying a daily fee of five-and-twenty francs, there was a cheer of derision through the house. The Communists and their schemes were hooted with a still more hearty indignation; there is a general smash and bankruptcy of faith; and what struck me perhaps most as an instance of the amazing progress of the national atheism, is to find that the theatre audiences have even got to laugh at military glory.....
>
> Sir these funny pieces at the plays frightened me more than the most bloodthirsty melodrama ever did, and inspired your humble servant with a melancholy which is not to be elicited from the most profound tragedies. There was something awful, infernal almost, I was going to say, in the gaiety with which the personages of these satiric dramas were dancing and shrieking about among the tumbled ruins of ever so many ages and traditions. I hope we shall never have the air of "God Save the King" set to ribald words amongst us--the mysteries of our religion, or any man's religion, made the subject of laughter, or of a worse sort of excitement. In the famous piece of "La Propriete c'est le Vol," we had the honour to see Adam and Eve dance a polka, and sing a song quite appropriate to the costume in which they figured. Everybody laughed and enjoyed it--neither Eve nor the audience ever thought about being ashamed of themselves; and for my part, I looked with a vague anxiety up at the theatre roof, to see that it was not falling in,

> and shall not be surprised to hear that Paris goes the way of certain other cities some day.[41]

Thackeray believed that humor must be decent in its morals. His criticism of Congreve was that Congreve left no moral legacy; that he had no feeling in his comedies. He was likeable personally but his business was not ethics. So also with Gay and Prior, who laughed and sang. Addison, a gentleman, courteous, deferential and kindly, was admired and approved on moral grounds. Congreve's humor lacked the moral quality and led nowhere.

> We have seen in Swift a humourous philosopher, whose truth frightens one, and whose laughter makes one melancholy. We have had in Congreve a humourous observer of another school, to whom the world seems to have no moral at all, and whose ghastly doctrine seems to be that we should eat, drink, and be merry when we can, and go to the deuce (if there be a deuce) when the time comes.[42]

Humor must have the humanity which was flavoured of tenderness and kindness.

> And so with a loving humour: I think, it is a genial writer's habit of being; it is the kind gentle spirit's way of looking out on the world--that sweet friendliness, which fills his heart and his style. You recognize it, even though there may not be a single point of wit, or a single pathetic touch in the page; though you may not be called upon to salute his genius by a laugh or a tear.[43]

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[41] "Two or Three Theatres at Paris." Contributions to Punch (not previously reprinted), Vol. 31, pp. 272-273.

[42] "Congreve and Addison." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, pp. 209.

[43] "Charity and Humour." The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 405.

The business of the humorist was to take the side of the weak against the strong, the humble against the great.

> Popular humour, and especially modern popular humour and the writers, its exponents, are always kind and chivalrous, taking the side of the weak against the strong.[44]

A wicked aristocrat pummelled by a champion of the people; the king treated as ruining the tradesmen's families; the aristocracy lashed; a wicked lord kicked out of the window; all brought gales of laughter from a popular audience.

> Popular fun is always kind: it is the champion of the humble against the great. In all popular parables, it is Little Jack that conquers, and the Giant that topples down. I think our popular authors are rather hard upon great folks. Well, well! their lordships have all the money, and can afford to be laughed at.[45]

In a lecture upon Charity and Humour given in New York City, Thackeray used almost word for word a phrase he used in the lectures of the preceding year, (the lectures had been repeated in America in 1852 so the material was fresh in his mind) that the humorist was really a week-day preacher. He stressed the nature of the humorist who must be philanthropic, sensitive, appreciative, and sympathetic.

The humorous writer who contributed to our happiness harmless laughter and amusement, who taught scorn of falsehood and pretence,

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[44] Charity and Humour. The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 414.

[45] Ibid., p. 416.

hatred of hypocrisy, love of honesty, and who tried to guide people through life, was really a week-day preacher using the same causes and themes that the preacher in the pulpit on Sunday used. The commentator on every day life and manners tried to confer happiness and do good.[46] Thackeray defined the nature of an humorist.

> A literary man of the humouristic turn is pretty sure to be of a philanthropic nature, to have a great sensibility, to be easily moved to pain or pleasure, keenly to appreciate the varieties of temper of people around about him, and sympathise in their laughter, love, amusement, tears.[47]

THE QUESTION OF FUTURITY

Thackeray believed that the light and trivial in daily life was needed and that laughing and honest stories were good for people. Creating laughter was not the highest occupation and being amused and appreciating wit and laughter did not call for the greatest intellect, but the average man had a right to such books. Wit that did not hurt anyone, that was genial, simple and kindly, and was pleasant, that wit Thackeray praised and declared to have a rightful place in life. He expressed himself as follows:

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[46] Charity and Humour. The Four Georges, The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, Reviews, George Cruikshank, John Leech, Vol. 26, p. 401.

[47] Ibid., p. 403.

> Laughing is not the highest occupation of a man, very certainly; or the power of creating the height of genius.[48]

He found that many trades were performed well and honestly, that most men worked for daily bread and hire, from some necessity, that not all men were capable of appreciating genius, and that these had a right to have books supplied for them as well as the most polished critics. He said that Blanchard produced under necessity and probably would not have written work of a higher class had he written with leisure and in more favorable circumstances. His criticism of Laman Blanchard follows:

> His wit, which was always playing and frisking about the company, had the wonderful knack of never hurting anybody. He had the most singular art of discovering good qualities in people; in discoursing of which the kindly little fellow used to glow and kindle up, and emphasize with the most charming energy. Good-natured actions of others, good jokes, favorite verses of friends, he would bring out fondly, whenever they met, or there was question of them; and he used to toss and dandle their sayings or doings about, and hand them to the company, as the delightful Miss Slowboy does the baby in the last Christmas Book. What was better than wit in his talk was, that it was so genial. He enjoyed thoroughly, and chirped over his wine with a good-humour that could not fail to be infectious. His own hospitality was delightful; there was something about it charmingly brisk, simple, and kindly. How he used to laugh! As I write this, what a number of pleasant hearty scenes come back! One can hear his jolly, clear laughter; and see his keen, kind beaming Jew face,--a mixture of Mendelssohn and Voltaire.[49]

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[48] "A Brother of the Press on the History of a Literary Man, Laman Blanchard, and the Chances of the Literary Profession." Miscellaneous Essays, Sketches and Reviews, Vol. 30, p. 129.

[49] Ibid., pp. 134-135.

In a discussion of Dickens, Thackeray touched upon the question of futurity, the kind of humor that would live. After saying that Dickens was the master of all the English humorists then alive, he declared that humor that lived must be of the harmless variety full of kindness and love; as in the case of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who for three hundred years have moved laughter and awakened affection, so probably Dickens' humourous characters, Pickwick and Weller, who were gentle and benevolent, would make the readers of future centuries happy.

> Think of all we owe Mr. Dickens since those half-dozen years, the store of happy hours that he has made us pass, the kindly and pleasant companions whom he has introduced to us; the harmless laughter, the generous wit, the frank, manly, human love which he has taught us to feel..... Don't they (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza) move laughter and awaken affection now as three hundred years ago? And so with Don Pickwick and Sancho Weller, if their gentle humours, and kindly wit, and hearty benevolent natures, touch us and convince us, as it were, how, why should they not .... make the twenty-fifth century happy, as they have the nineteenth?[50]

These extracts from Thackeray's writings express clearly his belief regarding humor. They do not include every statement he made upon the subject but they do contain the essence of his theories, and show the nature of the man as well. There is no evidence in these statements of any cynicism or hatred of mankind, rather the opposite is revealed, that Thackeray was a man of great charity, love and tenderness. These expressions gathered with the single idea of ascertaining

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50 "Box of Novels." Miscellaneous Essays, Sketches and Reviews, Vol. 30, pp. 86-88.

Thackeray's theories of humor tend to disprove any charges of misanthropy and cynicism. A brief summary of Thackeray's expressions concerning humor may be made as follows:

First, humor must contain certain qualities such as love and wit, pathos, sympathy, truth, sincerity and kindness; there is a close connection between humor and melancholy, gayety and sadness, laughter and tears; ridicule that hurts is to be avoided, as well as satire that stings and is savage and brutal.

Second, the humorist may find his material round about him. Subjects of humor are the foibles and vanities of common life and its joys and griefs.

Third, a strong moral obligation rests upon the humorist to point out follies and laugh away pretensions, falseness, and baseness; to awaken love, pity, kindness; to foster truth and happiness. He must take the side of the weak against the strong.

Fourth, humor has a rightful place in life, and humor that will live into future ages will be of the kind that is full of humanity, tenderness, and love.

CHAPTER III

THACKERAY'S PRACTICE OF HUMOR

An examination of some of the humorous passages in Thackeray's works is necessary to determine whether he carried out in practice the theories he so frequently stated, whether there was justification for the charges of Taine and the critics represented by him or whether the critics more favorable to Thackeray were to be upheld. Was his satire unjustifiably bitter and was he a hater of mankind and also of his own characters, or did he show behind his satire a kindly humorous purpose in which the extracts in Chapter II indicated he believed?

The material presented in this chapter was chosen as representing notable and varied examples of Thackeray's use of humor. The selections were made without regard to the fact that a difference of opinion existed and without bias on the point of Thackeray's misanthropy and cynicism. A study of extracts in this chapter will show whether or not Thackeray carried out his theories in the practice of humor. First, the humorist must maintain a kindly and genial spirit; his satire must not be bitter nor savage, nor full of hate; and his humor must contain qualities such as love and wit, pathos, sympathy, truth, sincerity and kindness. Second, the targets for satire are the vices and foibles of mankind, pride, folly, love of money, love of rank, the Englishman's deference to class. Anything that seemed to Thackeray to be a flaw in

private or national character, he satirized. Third, he claimed to be a week-day preacher, teaching scorn for falseness and pretension, taking the side of the unhappy and oppressed. He believed that by humorous treatment undesirable traits of character could be laughed away.

In the record this study has made of Thackeray's expression as to what humor is and how it is presented, Thackeray made no mention of several devices that he often employed to attain his purpose, namely: broad burlesques, parody, mimicry, nomenclature of characters, dialect, and queer spelling. He used all of these forms to express with wit and humor what he wished to say.

The examples that follow are representative of Thackeray's purposes and manner, and of his methods. Many other selections might have been included had the limits of this study permitted, because instances of his practice of humor are abundant in all his works.

The passages selected include satire and humor from the novels, showing Thackeray's ability to ridicule follies of human nature kindly and his deft turn of phrase when he wants to make some point quickly, and showing how he built up comedy material through scene after scene to a climax and quick fall; the burlesques, where he ranges for comic effect from mild understatement of fact to gross exaggeration; parody and humorous verse.

SATIRE AND HUMOR FROM THE NOVELS

In Vanity Fair Thackeray chose the human comedy for his theme. Through the characters, Rawdon Crawley and Becky Sharp, he exposed the vices of mankind and satirized them. His characters were not wholly bad nor were they wholly good, but were as he saw people in life around him.

A good example of his treatment is that passage where Becky went to meet Sir Pitt Crawley. The contrast between Becky's high hopes and what she actually met is the basis of the humourous extract where Becky was introduced to Sir Pitt Crawley, in whose family she was to serve as governess.

Becky and Sir Pitt Crawley

Becky dreamed of the splendid family she was about to know. She wondered if the baronet would wear a star and decided that at any rate he would be dressed in a very handsome court suit, with ruffles, and would wear his hair powdered and would be very grand and proud. At least she would be living among aristocratic people and already Becky felt a little contemptuous of the wealthy merchant's family which she had just left after a rather humiliating failure to contract marriage with the Sedley son and heir.

John, the coachman of the Sedley's, was a little rude to her as he drove the carriage from the Sedley house, where Becky had been the guest of his employers, to Gaunt House where she would meet Sir Pitt.

John mused that her place was no better than that of a sort of head servant in the baronet's household.

Becky's introduction to Sir Pitt Crawley, in whose family she was to serve as governess, follows:

> John, the groom, who had driven the carriage alone, did not care to descend to ring the bell; and so prayed a passing milk-boy to perform that office for him. When the bell was rung, a head appeared between the interstices of the dining-room shutters, and the door was opened by a man in drab breeches and gaiters, with a dirty old coat, a foul old neck-cloth lashed around his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling grey eyes, and a mouth perpetually on the grin.
>
> "This Sir Pitt Crawley's?" says John, from the box.
>
> "Ees," says the man at the door, with a nod.
>
> "Hand down these 'ere trunks then," said John.
>
> "Hand'n down yourself," said the porter.
>
> "Don't you see I can't leave my hosses? Come, bear a hand, my fine feller, and Miss will give you some beer," said John, with a horse-laugh, for he was no longer respectful to Miss Sharp, as her connexion with the family was broken off, and she had given nothing to the servants on coming away.
>
> The bald-headed man, taking his hands out of his breeches pockets, advanced on this summons, and throwing Miss Sharp's trunk over his shoulder, carried it into the house.
>
> "Take this basket and shawl, if you please, and open the door," said Miss Sharp, and descended from the carriage in much indignation.....
>
> Two kitchen chairs, and a round table, and an attenuated old poker and tongs were, however, gathered round the fire-place, as was a saucepan over a feeble sputtering fire. There was a bit of cheese and bread and a tin candlestick on the table and a little black porter in a pint-pot.
>
> "Had your dinner, I suppose? It is not too warm for you? Like a drop of beer?"
>
> "Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?" said Miss Sharp majestically.
>
> "He, he! I'm Sir Pitt Crawley. Reklect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! Ask Tinker if I aynt. Mrs. Tinker, Miss Sharp; Miss Governess, Mrs. Charwoman. Ho, ho!"[1]*

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1 Vanity Fair. Vol. I, pp. 96-99.

* In this study all references to Thackeray's works are to The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray. Kensington Edition. 32 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

Becky was in a state of high tension. She was about to start her independent road to fortune. She built up ambitious hopes about this aristocratic family she was to enter. The situation looked like the beginning of a better and more interesting life for Becky. So the reader, too, is carried along with the high imagination of Becky and feels elation and uncertainty but expects that the new situation will be all Becky desires. Then the deflation of high spirits is complete when the meeting with Sir Pitt actually occurs. What is found is so unexpectedly different from what had been hoped for that we laugh. However, we have no feeling that Becky has been mistreated or abused by the author. No bitterness is apparent in the episode. It seems an audacious portrayal of a little pushing, ambitious girl and a slovenly baronet, told with instinctive appreciation of fun.

Miss Crawley and Her Fortune

One of the main elements of comedy in Vanity Fair lies in the struggle of the various branches of the Crawley family to gain first place in Miss Crawley's regard in hope of becoming heir to the large fortune which she possessed. Thackeray laid bare human nature that is covetous and fawning over money. The characters add to the comedy by their own attempted rationalization of their actions. Thackeray built the incidents through suspense to a great climax and a hard fall for Rawdon.

At the opening of the story, Rawdon Crawley held his place as favorite in seeming security. However, Miss Crawley was greatly angered

when Rawdon and Rebecca announced their marriage and she refused to see them. The hysterical old lady took to her bed, but Becky was confident she could win her over. The comedy is built up through scene after scene and the suspense maintained to the last comical conclusion of the affair.

Just as Miss Crawley had collapsed, Mrs. Bute Crawley arrived to build the fences for her side of the family. The time was more propitious than she could have hoped. Rawdon was in disgrace and firmly excluded from the presence.

> When Mrs. Bute Crawley, numbed with midnight travelling, and warming herself at the newly crackling parlour fire, heard from Miss Briggs the intelligence of the clandestine marriage, she declared it was quite providential that she should have arrived at such a time to assist poor dear Miss Crawley in supporting the shock--that Rebecca was an artful little hussy of whom she had always had her suspicions; and that as for Rawdon Crawley, she never could account for his aunt's infatuation regarding him, and had long considered him a profligate, lost, and abandoned being. And this awful conduct, Mrs. Bute said, will have at least this good effect, it will open poor dear Miss Crawley's eyes to the real character of this wicked man. Then Mrs. Bute had a comfortable hot toast and tea; and as there was a vacant room in the house now, [Becky had just fled from hers] there was no need for her to remain at the Gloster Coffee House where the Portsmouth mail had set her down, and whence she ordered Mr. Bowls's aide-de-camp the footman to bring away her trunks.[2]

As has been said Miss Crawley went into fits of hysterics, one after another; the doctor was sent for and the apothecary came.

> Mrs. Bute took up the post of nurse by her bedside. "Her relations ought to be round about her," that amiable woman said.[3]

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[2] Vanity Fair, Vol. 1, p. 240.

[3] Ibid., p. 243.

Mrs. Bute Crawley began her siege.

In the meantime, Rawdon and Becky waited for forgiveness and a summons from Miss Crawley.

> "Suppose the old lady doesn't come to," Rawdon said to his little wife, as they sate together in the snug little Brompton lodgings. She had been trying the new piano all the morning. The new gloves fitted her to a nicety; the new shawls became her wonderfully; the new rings glittered on her little hands, and the new watch ticked at her waist; "suppose she don't come round, eh, Becky?"
>
> "I'll make your fortune," she said; and Delilah patted Samson's cheek.
>
> "You can do anything," he said, kissing the little hand. "By Jove, you can; and we'll drive down to the Star and Garter, and dine, by Jove."[4]

Mrs. Bute, as nurse, began her work in Miss Crawley's household. She had sought out all the information she could secure concerning Rawdon and Becky, and relayed it to the old aunt, trying to create a proper hatred in her for all of the wickedness of her former favorite.

> She imparted these stories gradually to Miss Crawley; gave her the whole benefit of them; felt it to be her bounden duty as a Christian woman and mother of a family to do so; had not the smallest remorse or compunction for the victim whom her tongue was immolating; nay, very likely thought her act was quite meritorious, and plumed herself upon her resolute manner of performing it. Yes, if a man's character is to be abused, say what you will, there's nobody like a relation to do the business.[5]

Mrs. Bute gained access to the letters and papers of the Sharp family and gleaned information there that was more ammunition for her siege. Thackeray at the end of a digression upon the follies that are put upon paper remarked:

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[4] Ibid., p. 244.

[5] Ibid., p. 282.

> The best ink for Vanity Fair use would be one that faded utterly in a couple of days, and left the paper clean and blank, so that you might write on it to somebody else.[6]

But Mrs. Bute managed too well and made the old lady so ill that it appeared she might never recover. The devoted relative denied herself fresh air, sleep, dinner, exercise, all in her duty to the patient and to the apothecary she pointed out her own sacrifices. He agreed that she was an excellent nurse; he said that he and the doctor had with great care considered Miss Crawley's case and felt that some change in the treatment would be better. Mrs. Bute Crawley and the apothecary seemed intent upon saving Miss Crawley's life. Thackeray developed carefully the ironical situation. On the surface of affairs Miss Crawley was desperately sick. In reality she had been made so by her sister-in-law, who, afraid to have her out of her sight because the old lady might meet her favorite, Rawdon, had kept her in bed practically a prisoner; at the same time Mrs. Bute assumed the role of most careful and sacrificing nurse. Then the apothecary learned that Miss Crawley might actually die if she were not released from such close confinement, and alarmed, because if she did die he would lose, in the loss of her business, fees amounting to two hundred pounds a year, he immediately began to work on Mrs. Bute. He advised her that a change in the treatment was absolutely necessary. But he did not succeed in his efforts until he bluntly told Mrs. Bute Crawley that if the old woman did die,

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[6] Ibid., p. 283.

Captain Crawley would be certain to get the money.

The selfish desires of the apothecary concerned with his fees and of the sister-in-law concerned with the will at last come out into the open, after having been long glossed over under a mask of service.

> "What I was going to observe, my dear Madam,"--here the resolute Clump once more interposed with a bland air--"what I was going to observe when you gave utterance to sentiments which do you so much honour, was that I think you alarm yourself needlessly about our kind friend, and sacrifice your own health too prodigally in her favour."
>
> "I would lay down my life for my duty, or for any member of my husband's family," Mrs. Bute interposed.
>
> "Yes, Madam, if need were; but we don't want Mrs. Bute Crawley to be a martyr," Clump said gallantly. "Dr. Squills and myself have both considered Miss Crawley's case with every anxiety and care, as you may suppose. We see her low-spirited and nervous; family events have agitated her."
>
> "Her nephew will come to perdition," Mrs. Crawley cried.
>
> "Have agitated her; and you arrived like a guardian angel, my dear Madam, a positive guardian angel, I assure you, to soothe her under the pressure of calamity. But Dr. Squills and I were thinking that our amiable friend is not in such a state as renders confinement to her bed necessary. She is depressed, but this confinement perhaps adds to her depression. She should have change, fresh air, gaiety; the most delightful remedies in the pharmacopoeia," Mr. Clump said, grinning and showing his handsome teeth. "Persuade her to rise, dear Madam; drag her from her couch and her low spirits; insist upon her taking little drives. They will restore the roses too to your cheeks, if I may so speak to Mrs. Bute Crawley."
>
> "The sight of her horrid 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."
>
> "Upon my word, Madam," Mr. Clump now said bluntly, "I won't answer for her life if she remains locked up in that dark room. She is so nervous that we may lose her any day; and if you wish Captain Crawley to be her heir, I warn you frankly, Madam, that you are doing your very best to serve him."

"Gracious mercy! is her life in danger?" Mrs. Bute cried. "Why, why, Mr. Clump, did you not inform me sooner?"

The night before, Mr. Clump and Dr. Squills had had a consultation (over a bottle of wine at the house of Sir Lapin Warren, whose lady was about to present him with a thirteenth blessing,) regarding Miss Crawley and her case.

"What a little harpy that woman from Hampshire is, Clump," Squills remarked, "that has seized upon old Tilly Crawley. Devilish good Madeira."

"What a fool Rawdon Crawley has been," Clump replied, "to go and marry a governess! There was something about the girl, too."

"Green eyes, fair skin, pretty figure, famous frontal development," Squills remarked. "There is something about her; and Crawley was a fool, Squills."

"A d--- fool--always was," the apothecary replied.

"Of course the old girl will fling him over," said the physician, and after a pause added, "She'll cut up well, I suppose."

"Cut up," says Clump with a grin; "I wouldn't have her cut up for two hundred a year."

"That Hampshire woman will kill her in two months, Clump, my boy, if she stops about her," Dr. Squills said. "Old woman; full feeder; nervous subject; palpitation of the heart; pressure on the brain; apoplexy; off she goes. Get her up, Clump; get her out; or I wouldn't give many weeks' purchase for your two hundred a year." And it was acting upon this hint that the worthy apothecary spoke with so much candour to Mrs. Bute Crawley.[7]

Mrs. Bute had tried to have the old lady alter her will but had failed. The idea of death terrified the sick woman, and the thought of writing a new will added to the terror. It was necessary to take the patient out occasionally and get her into a more cheerful spirit before a change in the will could be forced.

Brighton seemed a safe place, so there the household removed. Immediately Rawdon and Becky, all whose messages and envoys to the

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[7] Ibid., pp. 286-288.

aunt had been turned away at the door, settled themselves at Brighton also. When their carriages met on the drive Rawdon and Becky were cut dead.

The bill collectors were constantly about their door. "If aunty does not relent, what shall we do?" However they lived well.

> Long custom, a manly appearance, faultless boots and clothes, and a happy fierceness of manner, will often help a man as much as a great balance at the banker's.[8]

Finally luck stepped in on Rawdon's and Becky's side. Mrs. Bute was called home by family affairs. A wedge was forced in by way of the companion to Miss Crawley, a letter was sent. Miss Crawley relented somewhat and an interview followed. The affair was managed with great strategy, Becky planning every move. But the aunt shied off.

> "To seize upon me the very day after Mrs. Bute was gone," the old lady prattled on; "it was too indecent. Briggs, my dear, write to Mrs. Crawley, and say she needn't come back. No--she needn't--and she shan't--and I won't be a slave in my own house--and I won't be starved and choked with poison. They all want to kill me--all--all--" and with this the lonely old woman burst into a scream of hysterical tears.[9]

Rawdon received a letter thanking him for coming to Brighton and begging him not to stay longer on Miss Crawley's account. It also informed him that if he would call upon her lawyer in London he would find a communication there for him.

Army duties also called them to London.

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[8] Ibid., p. 331.

[9] Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 28-29.

"I should have liked to see the old girl before we went," Rawdon said. "She looks so cut up and altered that I'm sure she can't last long. I wonder what sort of a cheque I shall have at Waxy's. Two hundred--it can't be less than two hundred,--hey, Becky?"

In consequence of the repeated visits of the aides-de-camp of the Sheriff of Middlesex, Rawdon and his wife did not go back to their lodgings at Brompton, but put up at an inn. Early the next morning, Rebecca had an opportunity of seeing them as she skirted that suburb on her road to old Mrs. Sedley's house at Fulham, whither she went to look for dear Amelia and her Brighton friends. They were all off to Chatham, thence to Harwich, to take shipping for Belgium with the regiment--kind old Mrs. Sedley very much depressed and tearful, solitary. Returning from this visit, Rebecca found her husband, who had been off to Gray's Inn, and learnt his fate. He came back furious.

"By Jove, Becky," says he, "she's only given me twenty pound!"

Though it told against themselves, the joke was too good, and Becky burst out laughing at Rawdon's discomfiture.[10]

In this story of a race for the favor of the wealthy aunt the satire is directed against selfish people driven by mercenary motives. They fawned over the aunt and assumed devoted roles. They were fooled. Becky and Rawdon were a little more honest in their approach to the aunt but were just as eager for the money as the rest of the relatives. It is noticeable, however, that when Becky and Rawdon lost, she faced the fact with courage and gay spirit and laughed at the joke on themselves.

Amelia and George

Thackeray often said that it was his purpose to laugh at the vanities he saw in the world around him. His treatment of the love

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[10] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

affair of Amelia and George is a good example of irony used in a kindly and sympathetic manner. He portrayed Amelia as a good woman loving with all her heart handsome, selfish George Osborne. George was not bad or vicious, but in dexterous phrases Thackeray showed his vanity and selfishness.

Captain Dobbin sensed that Amelia was unhappy at George's failure to visit her in several days. She made excuses for him, imagined that he was busy, that his army duties were strenuous, or that he was occupied with studying the art of war. She

> strove to peep into the barracks where George was..... All things considered, I think it was as well the gates were shut, and the sentry allowed no one to pass; so that the poor little white-robed angel could not hear the songs those young fellows were roaring over the whiskey-punch.[11]

Captain Dobbin protested to George about his neglect of Amelia. In a day or so George prepared to go to town. He borrowed some money from the generous Captain Dobbin to buy a present for Amelia. But again vanity caught him up; he could not resist a handsome shirt-pin in a jeweller's window and after its purchase, he had too little money left to spare for a gift.

Amelia, who, as usual, was watching at the window, started up and when George entered the drawing room,

> went fluttering to Lieutenant George Osborne's heart as if it was the only natural home for her to nestle in.

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[11] Vanity Fair, Vol. 1, p. 178.

> Oh thou poor panting little soul!... .. In the meanwhile George kissed her very kindly on her forehead and glistening eyes, and was very gracious and good; and she thought his diamond shirt-pin (which she had not known him to wear before) the prettiest ornament ever seen.[12]

The next passage in the text is an example of Thackeray's tendency to halt the narrative while he moralizes a little to build up the point he is making. He comes back to the story, and with a clever twist to the thought clinches in a phrase the whole matter.

> The observant reader, who has marked our young Lieutenant's previous behavior, and has preserved our report of the brief conversation which he has just had with Captain Dobbin, has possibly come to certain conclusions regarding the character of Mr. Osborne. Some cynical Frenchman has said that there are two parties to a love-transaction; the one who loves and the other who condescends to be so treated. Perhaps the love is occasionally on the man's side; perhaps on the lady's. Perhaps some infatuated swain has ere this mistaken insensibility for modesty, dullness for maiden reserve, mere vacuity for sweet bashfulness, and a goose, in a word, for a swan. Perhaps some beloved female subscriber has arrayed an ass in the splendour and glory of her imagination; admired his dullness as manly simplicity; worshipped his selfishness as manly superiority; treated his stupidity as majestic gravity, and used him as the brilliant fairy Titania did a certain weaver at Athens. I think I have seen such comedies of errors going on in the world. But this is certain, that Amelia believed her lover to be one of the most gallant and brilliant men in the empire; and it is possible Lieutenant Osborne thought so too.[13]

Irony and pathos both lurk in the sentence where we are told she admired the new stick-pin. George had bought it for himself with money borrowed purposely to buy a gift for her. She thought him a

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[12] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 179.

[13] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 179-180.

most gallant and brilliant gentleman. The clever unexpectedness of the ending of the passage "and it is possible Lieutenant Osborne thought so too" humorously illuminates the character of the handsome lover.

Ethel Newcome and Marriage

A scene from The Newcomes illustrates neatly one type of Thackeray's use of satire. The Newcomes is a satire upon the vanities of society. Barnes Newcome represents the too sharp business man; Clive Newcome, the ambitious person, but one too idle to achieve success; Lady Kew, the aristocrat, determined to contract for her niece, Ethel, a good marriage, one that will bring more money and higher rank into the family--indeed all of the English society in the novel holds this view of marriage. A brief illustration will suffice. Humour and pathos are combined.

Ethel Newcome was engaged to marry her cousin, Lord Kew. He was an admirable man, she was an intelligent and beautiful girl; the match seemed perfect, but there was no real love between them. One day Ethel was taken by Lady Kew, who ruled over all her family, to visit the Water-color Exhibitions. One drawing, in particular, attracted their attention. They stood a long time gazing at it. The old lady was an excellent judge and was appreciative of this picture.

> Ethel laughed; and her grandmother, looking up from her stick on which she hobbled about, saw a very sarcastic expression in the girl's eyes.
>
> "You have no taste for pictures, only for painters, I suppose," said Lady Kew.

"I was not looking at the picture," said Ethel, still with a smile, "but at the little green ticket in the corner."

"Sold," said Lady Kew. "Of course it is sold; all Mr. Hunt's pictures are sold. There is not one of them here on which you won't see the green ticket. He is a admirable artist. I don't know whether his comedy or tragedy are the most excellent."

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

Grandmamma only said, "Ethel, you are a fool," and hobbled on to Mr. Cattermole's picture hard by.

. . . . . .

On that same evening, when the Newcome family assembled at dinner in Park Lane, Ethel appeared with a bright green ticket pinned in the front of her white muslin frock, and when asked what this queer fancy meant, she made Lady Kew a curtsey, looking her full in the face, and turning round to her father, said, "I am a tableau-vivant, papa. I am Number 46 in the Exhibition of the Gallery of Painters in Water-colours."

"My love, what do you mean?" says mamma; and Lady Kew, jumping up on her crooked stick with immense agility, tore the card out of Ethel's bosom, and very likely would have boxed her ears, but that her parents were present, and Lord Kew was announced.[14]

The passage shows Thackeray's ironical treatment of the material attitude toward marriage; yet he made Ethel, who realized the bought and sold nature of the marriage contract, jest in a light-hearted manner concerning it. Beneath the jest the girl's pathetic protest is apparent.

Some time later Ethel again protested to her grandmother. She cried out that a fortune seemed to be all important, that children were

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[14] The Newcomes, Vol. 2, pp. 46-48.

bought and sold as much as Turkish women were. She wanted to revolt against such slavery, yet being intelligent, she realized that she belonged to a family and a society that believed in the importance of wealth, rank, fine houses and titles, and that she, too, loved the world; but, she exclaimed that she would rather be at the plough like the women she saw in Europe.

> "No, you wouldn't, Ethel," replies the grandmother, dryly. "These are the fine speeches of school-girls. The showers of rain would spoil your complexion--you would be perfectly tired in an hour, and come back to luncheon--you belong to your belongings, my dear, and are not better than the rest of the world: very good-looking, as you know perfectly well, and not very good-tempered. It is lucky that Kew is. Calm your temper, at least before marriage; such a prize does not fall to a pretty girl's lot every day. Why, you sent him away quite scared by your cruelty; and if he is not playing at roulette, or at billiards, I dare say he is thinking what a little termagant you are, and that he had best pause while it is yet time. Before I was married, your poor grandfather never knew I had a temper; of after-days I say nothing; but trials are good for all of us, and he bore his like an angel."....
>
> "Why do you desire this marriage so much, grandmother?" the girl asked.... ....
>
> "Why, my dear? Because I think young ladies who want to go and work in the fields, should make hay while the sun shines; because I think it is high time that Kew should ranger himself; because I am sure he will make the best husband, and Ethel the prettiest Countess in England."[15]

And Ethel again submitted.

The quest of a marriage bringing material benefits such as higher rank or greater fortune occupied many of the characters in The Newcomes. One instance is that of Ethel Newcome whose family rejected Clive.

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[15] Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 126-127.

Another is that of Clive who, when rejected by Ethel, deliberately decided to accept wealth in a loveless marriage that offered itself. Still another case is that of Lady Clara, who, loving another, married Barnes Newcome at her family's command. Both marriages developed unhappy endings. Thackeray pointed out the obvious reasons all the way. His satire showed no bitterness on his part, but rather sadness at the folly of men and women who struggle so hard for the vanities of life. Perhaps his protest in The Newcomes made Englishman aware of their material outlook upon marriage. Such a subject could be treated in tragic fashion but, as in the passage above, Thackeray chose humorous comment and jest and satire. Ethel Newcome gaily pinned on herself a green ticket to show that she was sold to a future owner and Lady Kew with pointed, clever comments brought Ethel into obedience again.

Pendennis

In Pendennis the follies of a man who, as a youth, was very selfish are satirized. The first love affair of Arthur Pendennis with the actress, Miss Fotheringay, would be excellent comedy on any stage. The characters include the blustering, bragging, whiskey-indulging Costigan, the clever Major Pendennis who managed all parties concerned, the foolish, romantic, chivalric lad, Arthur, and the not too intelligent, beautiful, and practical actress who is twelve years older than Arthur.

Mirobolant

Another comic story in Pendennis, that is not essential to the plot, is that of Mirobolant, the French chef of the Claverings. He was very vain and thought that any member of the feminine world would adore him. The Claverings, with their servants, had driven up to the Park gates and were going up the steps of the Hall.

> Monsieur Mirobolant had looked at the procession from one of the lime-trees in the avenue. "Elle est la," he said, laying his jewelled hand on his richly-embroidered velvet waistcoat with glass buttons, "Je t'ai vue; je te benis, O ma sylphide, O mon ange!" and he dived into the thicket, and made his way back to his furnaces and saucepans.[16]

He was in love with the daughter of the house, Blanche Amory. He prepared special dishes just for her, seeking to express his love in the language of his culinary art.

To a friend Alcide Mirobolant described his dinner:

> Her lovely name is Blanche. The veil of the maiden is white; the wreath of roses which she wears is white. I determined that my dinner should be as spotless as the snow. At her accustomed hour, and instead of the rude gigot a l'eau which was ordinarily served at her too simple table, I sent her up a little potage a la Reine-a la Reine Blanche I called it, as white as her own tint--and confectioned with the most fragrant cream and almonds. I then offered up at her shrine a filet de merlan a l'Agnes, and a delicate plat, which I have designated as Eperlan a la Sainte Therese, and of which my charming Miss partook with pleasure. I followed this by two little entrees of sweet-bread and chicken; and the only brown thing which I permitted myself in the entertainment was a little roast of lamb, which I laid in a meadow of spinaches, surrounded with croustillons, representing sheep, and ornamented with daisies and other savage flowers. After this came my second service: a pudding a la Reine Elizabeth (who....was a maiden princess);

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[16] Pendennis, Vol. I, p. 343.

> a dish of opal-coloured plovers' eggs, which I called Nid de tourtereaux a la Roucoule; placing in the midst of them two of those tender volatiles, billing each other, and confectioned with butter; a basket containing little gateaux of apricots, which, I know, all young ladies adore; and a jelly of marasquin, bland, insinuating, intoxicating as the glance of beauty. This I designated Ambroisie de Calypso a la Souveraine de mon Coeur. And when the ice was brought in--an ice of plombiere and cherries--how do you think I had shaped them,...? In the form of two hearts united with an arrow, on which I had laid, before it entered, a bridal veil in cut-paper, surmounted by a wreath of virginal orange-flower. I stood at the door to watch the effect of this entry. It was but one cry of admiration.[17]

Mirobolant was convinced that Blanche understood his messages of love sent thus to her and that she responded to his affection. Thackeray remarked:

> Whether Alcide was as irresistible a conqueror as his namesake, or whether he was simply crazy, is a point which must be left to the reader's judgment. But the latter, if he has had the benefit of much French acquaintance, has perhaps met with men amongst them who fancied themselves as invincible; and who, if you credit them, have made equal havoc in the hearts of les Anglaises.[18]

A ball in the vicinity of the country estate of the Claverings was open to all young persons of the county. Mirobolant attended, wearing on his breast a blue ribbon and three-pointed star. With his general French appearance he seemed a very grand gentleman.

An unfortunate collision on the ball room floor caused Pen and Blanche, who were dancing together, to up-set. She was in a rage and Pen, too, was furious. Everybody laughed at them. Pen "was one of those sarcastic young fellows that did not bear a laugh at his own

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[17] Ibid., pp. 363-364.

[18] Ibid., p. 366.

expense, and of all things in the world feared ridicule most."

> Miss Amory in a pet said she was very much hurt indeed, and she would not take another turn; and she accepted with great thanks a glass of water which a cavalier, who wore a blue ribbon and a three-pointed star, rushed to fetch for her when he had seen the deplorable accident. She drank the water, smiled upon the bringer gracefully, and turned her white shoulder at Mr. Pen in the most marked and haughty manner, besought the gentleman with the star to conduct her to her mamma; and she held out her hand to take his arm.
>
> The man with the star trembled with delight at this mark of favour; he bowed over her hand, pressed it to his coat fervidly and looked around him with triumph.
>
> It was no other than the happy Mirobolant whom Blanche had selected as an escort. But the truth is, that the young lady had never fairly looked in the artist's face since he had been employed in her mother's family, and had no idea but it was a foreign nobleman on whose arm she was leaning. As she went off, Pen forgot his humiliation in his surprise, and cried out, "By Jove, it's the cook!"[19]

The affair almost resulted in a duel. Self-love, fear of ridicule, and pride of rank are follies that in themselves are ridiculous and should be laughed to scorn.

THE BURLESQUES

In the use of burlesque Thackeray was a master. His manner of setting forth extravagant episodes with the greatest gravity tends to excite laughter. He ridicules chivalry, heroic exploits in battle, or pretentious sentiment as represented in the literature of his day.

The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan, as told by the Major, exceeded those of the Baron Munchausen or any other of the famous

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[19] Ibid., pp. 411-412.

travellers. "Truth is strange, stranger than fiction" is the waggish heading of the amazing exploits. Major Gahagan was a man of tremendous stature and, as he himself said, the handsomest officer serving her majesty. The tale is full of daring deeds, battles, and hand-to-hand encounters in which the Major always came out with great honor. Exaggeration and braggadocio is the tone of the burlesque, then suddenly mild understatement is thrust in, resulting in ludicrous effect.

The Major had found that his troop had gone ahead of him while the enemy was very close to him.

> I had got into the very middle of the road before I made this discovery, so that the fellows had a full sight of me, and whizz! came a bullet by my left whisker before I could say Jack Robinson. I looked round--there were seventy of the accursed malvados at the least, and within, as I said, a hundred yards. Were I to say that I stopped to fight seventy men, you would write me down a fool or a liar; no, sir, I did not fight, I ran away.
>
> I am six feet four--my figure is as well known in the Spanish army as that of the Count de Luchana, or my fierce little friend Cabrera himself. "Gahagan!" shouted out half-a-dozen scoundrelly voices, and fifty more shots came rattling after me. I was running--running as the brave stag before the hounds--running as I have done a great number of times before in my life, when there was no help for it but a race.[20]

Of The Legend of the Rhine Thackeray himself gave the setting. It was in the days of chivalry, of castles on the Rhine, of strong portcullis and steel, silken banners, men-at-arms, "I warrant me there

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[20] "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan," Burlesques, Vol. 23, p. 256.

were ladies and knights, to revel in the great halls, and to feast, and to dance, and to make love there."[21] "Ho, seneschal! fill me a cup of liquor! put sugar in it, good fellow--yea, and a little hot water; a very little, for my soul is sad, as I think of those days and knights of old."[22]

The Novels by Eminent Hands are written in the style and manner of certain authors as Bulwer-Lytton, G. P. R. James, and Charles Lever, Disraeli. Codlingsby is considered by Trollope[23] the best of these. In Phil Fogarty, the famous jump that ends the yarn is illustrated with a clever sketch of horse and rider sailing over the heads of the Emperor and his white horse with the astonished army looking on.

> There was a shriek of terror from the whole of the French army, and I should think at least forty thousand guns were levelled at me in an instant. But as the muskets were not loaded, and the cannon had only wadding in them, these facts, I presume, saved the life of Phil Fogarty from this discharge.
>
> Knowing my horse, I put him at the Emperor's head, and Bugaboo went at it like a shot. He was riding his famous white Arab, and turned quite pale as I came up and went over the horse and the Emperor, scarcely brushing the cockade which he wore.
>
> "Bravo!" said Murat, bursting into enthusiasm at the leap.
>
> "Cut him down," said Sieyes, once an Abbe, but now a gigantic Cuirassier; and he made a pass at me with his sword. But he little knew an Irishman on an Irish horse. Bugaboo cleared Sieyes, and fetches the monster a slap with his near hind hoof which sent him reeling from his saddle,--and away I went, with an army of a hundred and seventy-three thousand eight hundred men at my heels.****[24]

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[21] "A Legend of the Rhine," Burlesques, Vol. 23, p. 323.

[22] Ibid., p. 324.

[23] Trollope, op. cit., p. 77.

[24] "Phil Fogarty," Burlesques, Vol. 23, p. 63.

Also in the volume of Burlesques is found that amusing character, Jeames, of Buckley Square.[25] There were many readers of Punch who were well acquainted with Jeames before they knew Thackeray at all. James Plush, Esq. is a burlesque of the footman class and also of the manners of the aristocracy through the eyes of those who serve them. Jeames, his expressions, his great dignity, his spelling, his own rise into a position of affluence through the "exasize of my own talince and ingeanuity," the "kitastrafy" resulting from the "Panniok" and how his "& rifewses to cronniole the misfortns which lassarated my bleeding art in Hoctober last," all these are capital fun.

Rebecca and Rowena

A burlesque that fairly rollicks along its way is Rebecca and Rowena. Every page contains many laughs and nearly every sentence, a smile. Thackeray imagines the story of Ivanhoe carried on after his marriage to Rowena.

As a matron Rowena became what her girlhood had promised she would be, cold, stately, faultless, carrying on her duties correctly, and most seriously interested in her church. She never forgot that Ivanhoe had been interested in Rebecca and never missed an opportunity to remind him of it; as for Ivanhoe he was frankly bored with life.

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[25] "The Diary of C. Jeames de la Pluche, Esq.," Burlesques, Vol. 23, pp. 131-218.

He missed the adventures and excitements of the wars, and marriage with Rowena palled. He was wan, listless, and domineered over completely by Rowena. The story begins at Rotherwood.

Wamba had become most melancholy, but was unfortunate enough to talk too loud, disturbing a discussion Rowena was having with a churchman. She ordered three dozen lashes to be given him. Wamba turned appealingly to Ivanhoe.

> "I got you out of Front-de-Boeuf's castle," he said,.."
> and canst thou not save me from the lash?"
> "Yes, from Front-de-Boeuf's castle, where you were locked up with the Jewess in the tower!" said Rowena,...
> "Gurth, give him four dozen!"[26]

She never missed an opportunity to throw the Rebecca affair at him.

Ivanhoe began to long to go to the wars again. Too easily he obtained Rowena's consent to join Richard. Accompanied by Wamba on his mule, "he turned the tail of his war-horse upon the castle of his fathers."[27] As he was leaving he met Athelstane journeying toward Rotherwood, Ivanhoe hesitated a moment and then kissed a locket he drew out of his waistcoat and spurred on his horse.

He joined King Richard who was besieging the castle of Chalus. In camp there was much singing, with the king taking the lead and claiming that he had composed both words and melody of many of the

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[26] "Rebecca and Rowena." Burlesques, Vol. 23, p. 411.

[27] Ibid., p. 420.

songs. One original heroic melody sung by the king had a chorus which was,

"Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the sea,
For Britain never, never, never slaves shall be," etc.[28]

Ivanhoe rather glumly stayed aloof, but when questioned by the king, said he thought he had heard "something very like the air and words elsewhere."

This happened two or three times, and the king in a fury, hurled his guitar at Ivanhoe's head. Ivanhoe caught it gracefully with one hand, made the king a bow, and began to sing the ballad of King Canute.

Later, when the battle was on, Ivanhoe and the king were always first in the fray, indeed, occasionally Ivanhoe had to hold himself back to let the king be first, and when all manner of missiles were hurled over the walls upon their heads, and a coal scuttle had caught on the king's visor and a mahogany wardrobe would have crushed the king, Ivanhoe skillfully warded it off.

The tale goes on. Ivanhoe after accounting for many of the enemy was sorely wounded. Wamba thought him dead and fled. The news was carried back to England where Rowena after deep mourning had her marriage annulled and speedily married the slow, ale-drinking Athelstane. She was much infatuated, even allowing Athelstane to smoke cigars in the drawing-room.

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[28] Ibid., p. 429.

Ivanhoe, as in all good historical tales, was saved by a famous elixir, plus a hermit's care, and after six years serious illness and convalescence, returned in disguise to Rotherwood. The scene was much like that in Scott's romance when the disguised palmer came to Cedric's hall. Wamba was the only person who recognized the knight. But the domestic scene of the married pair at Rotherwood was too much for Ivanhoe and he and Wamba left, to wander again on adventures.

In the meantime, King John, now on the throne, was displeased with Athelstane and Rowena, and attacked the castle. Athelstane was killed and Ivanhoe, who had not gone to help while Athelstane lived, then rushed to the rescue of Rowena and her son. He out-distanced all his followers and arrived at the battle all alone. He was wounded again, and Rowena and the boy were carried away as prisoners of the king. Ivanhoe did not care much and did not search for her very seriously. He was more interested in inquiring about Jewish families.

After a year or so a letter reached him from Rowena. In response to it, Ivanhoe was taken to her where she lay in prison starving to death.

> Fancy Ivanhoe's entrance--their recognition--the faint blush upon her worn features--the pathetic way in which she gives little Cedric in charge to him, and his promises of protection.
>
> "Wilfred, my early loved," slowly gasped she, removing her grey hair from her furrowed temples, and gazing on her boy fondly, as he nestled on Ivanhoe's knee--" promise me, by St. Waltheof of Templestowe--promise me one boon!"
>
> "I do," said Ivanhoe, clasping the boy, and thinking it was to that little innocent the promise was intended to apply.
>
> "By St. Waltheof?"

> "By St. Waltheof!"
> "Promise me, then," gasped Rowena, staring wildly at him, "that you never will marry a Jewess?"
> "By St. Waltheof," cried Ivanhoe, "this is too much Rowena!"--But he felt his hand grasped for a moment, the nerves then relaxed, the pale lip ceased to quiver--she was no more![29]

Ivanhoe placed the boy in a boarding school, arranged his family affairs and roamed off again, chopping off heads, performing tremendous feats, and inquiring about Jews. He went to Spain to fight the Moors, there he met Isaac who lived in Valencia and from him heard that Rebecca was dead. Despairingly, he rushed out and killed in combat fifty-thousand Mohammedans and then felt better.

But Rebecca was not dead. She had displeased her father by refusing to marry any of the numerous suitors he had provided, saying that she would marry only one of her own faith [she had secretly become a Christian]. So Isaac locked her up in the kitchen giving her only bread and water. She had been there four years, three months and twenty-four days when Ivanhoe found her. Of course they were at last married. Thackeray thinks they were not boisterously happy but were very solemn and probably died rather early.

The fun is riotous yet harmless. The original story of Scott is not spoiled in any way nor did Thackeray purpose to destroy it. The tendency of heroic figures to be always first in all exploits, and the ease with which they perform great feats of strength are made fun of adroitly. The ridiculousness of so many of the miraculous cures found

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[29] "Rebecca and Rowena," Burlesques, Vol. 23, pp. 464-465.

in the stories of chivalric romance and which provided for a hero's return just at the moment his presence was most needed is as casually treated. The made-up names, as Sir Roger de Backbite, the warrior of King Richard who through jealousy stabbed Ivanhoe in battle; the anachronisms, as the salver "chased by the Florentine, Benvenuto Cellini," on which Rowena's breakfast was served, or the cigars which were smoked, or the spectacles which were worn to assist in a disguise, add much to the unexpectedness of Thackeray's playfulness. The sentences often have an unexpected twist to them. Humorous examples of some of these devices follow:

> "After a day's fighting, Gurth and Wamba used to pick the arrows out of their intrepid master's coat-of-mail, as if they had been so many almonds in a pudding."[30]

> "What, Wilfrid of Templestowe, Wilfrid the married man, Wilfrid the henpecked!" cried the King with a sudden burst of good humour, flinging away the culverin from him, as though it had been a reed (it lighted three hundred yards off, on the foot of Hugo de Bunyon, who was smoking a cigar at the door of his tent, and caused that redoubted warrior to limp for some days after).[31]

> During this delirium, (in which Ivanhoe dreamed of Rebecca) what were politics to him or he to politics![32]

> Ivanhoe spurred on his horse Bavieca madly up the chestnut avenue. The castle was before him; the western tower was in flames; the besiegers were pressing at the southern gate; Athelstane's banner, the bull rampant, was still on the northern bartizan. "An Ivanhoe, an Ivanhoe!" he bellowed out, with a shout that overcame all the din of battle:

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[30] "Rebecca and Rowena," Burlesques, Vol. 23, p. 425.

[31] Ibid., p. 424.

[32] Ibid., p. 456.

> "Nostre Dame a la recousse!" And to hurl his lance through the midriff of Reginald de Bracy, who was commanding the assult--who fell howling with anguish--to wave his battle-axe over his own head, and cut off those of thirteen men-at-arms, was the work of an instant. "An Ivanhoe, an Ivanhoe!" he still shouted, and down went a man as sure as he said "hoe!"[33]

Humorous passages are without number, as Rowena's speech, wherein she speaks of a woman loving only once; as the fact that Ivanhoe was really leader of the knights who forced the king to sign the Magna Charta; and again as a party where the Sir Roger De Coverly was danced. Quite horrible and bloody deeds of the fighters are recounted casually and agreeably in order to enhance the prowess and reputation of the heroes, and are received without offense.

PARODY

Thackeray sometimes employed a literary pleasantry that had a great vogue among writers in the nineteenth century and was popular in the pages of Punch. Parody was an art which tested the skill of the writer as to the facility with which he could imitate the style of another. James Hogg, Thomas Hood, Bayard Taylor, Lewis Carroll, and many others mimicked the language or sentiment of another author. Lewis Carroll's well known parodies in Alice in Wonderland are How doth the little Crocodile from Isaac Watts, Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat from Jane Taylor and You are Old, Father William from Southey's The Old Man's Comforts, And How he Gained Them.

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[33] Ibid., p. 459.

Letitia Elizabeth Landon's Violets became parodied in Thackeray's Cabbages.

Charles Lever's Did Ye Hear of the Widow Malone became Larry O'Toole, the first stanza of which is given.

Larry O'Toole

You've all heard of Larry O'Toole,
Of the beautiful town of Drumgoole;
He had but one eye,
To ogle ye by--
Oh, murther, but that was a jew'l!
A fool
He made of de girls, dis O'Toole.[34]

A popular song of the day Wapping Old Stairs provided the parodies, The Almack's Adieu and The Knightly Guerdon by Thackeray.

Thackeray had declared that he would laugh at pretense, and the highly sentimental pathos in the literature popular in his day affected him as false. It did not seem to him to present a true picture of the men and women he knew. He enjoyed verse; it seemed to come to him easily and his Willow-Tree ballad in itself is considered good--"so good that if left by itself it would create no idea of absurdity or extravagant pathos in the mind of the ordinary reader."[35] Then to create that very absurdity he wrote a parody on his Willow-Tree.

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34 Walter Jerrold and Rm M. Leonard, ed. A Century of Parody and Imitation. (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1913.) p. 411.

35 Trollope, op. cit., p. 66.

The Willow-Tree

Know ye the willow-tree
  Whose grey leaves quiver,
Whispering gloomily
  To yon pale river;
Lady, at even-tide
  Wander not near it,
They say its branches hide
  A sad, lost spirit!

Once to the willow-tree
  A maid came fearful,
Pale seemed her cheek to be,
  Her blue eye tearful;
Soon as she saw the tree,
  Her step moved fleeter,
No one was there--ah me!
  No one to meet her!

Quick beat her heart to hear
  The far bell's chime
Toll from the chapel-tower
  The trysting time:
But the red sun went down
  In golden flame,
And though she looked round,
  Yet no one came!

Presently came the night,
  Sadly to greet her,--
Moon in her silver light,
  Stars in their glitter;
Then sank the moon away
  Under the billow,
Still wept the maid alone--
  There by the willow!

Through the long darkness,
  By the stream rolling,
Hour after hour went on
  Tolling and tolling.
Long was the darkness,
  Lonely and stilly;
Shrill came the night-wind,
  Piercing and chilly.

Shrill blew the morning breeze,
  Biting and cold,
Bleak peers the grey dawn
  Over the wold.
Bleak over moor and stream
  Looks the grey dawn,
Grey, with dishevelled hair,
Still stands the willow there--
  THE MAID IS GONE!

Domine, Domine!
  Sing we a litany,--
Sing for poor maiden-hearts broken and weary;
  Domine, Domine!
Sing we a litany,
  Wail we and weep we a wild Miserere![36]

The Willow-Tree

(Another Version)

I.

Long by the willow-trees
  Vainly they sought her,
Wild rang the mother's screams
  O'er the grey water:
"Where is my lovely one?
  Where is my daughter?

II.

"Rouse thee, sir constable--
  Rouse thee and look;
Fisherman, bring your net,
  Boatman your hook.
Beat in the lily-beds,
  Dive in the brook!"

III.

Vainly the constable
  Shouted and called her;
Vainly the fisherman
  Beat the green alder,
Vainly he flung the net,
  Never it hauled her!

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36 Ballads and Tales, Vol. 25, pp. 157-158.

IV.

Mother beside the fire
  Sat, her nightcap in;
Father, in easy chair,
  Gloomily napping,
When at the window-sill
  Came a light tapping!

V.

And a pale countenance
  Looked through the casement.
Loud beat the mother's heart,
  Sick with amazement,
And at the vision which
  Came to surprise her,
Shrieked in an agony--
  "Lor! it's Elizar!"

IV.

Yes, 'twas Elizabeth--
  Yes, 'twas their girl;
Pale was her cheek, and her
  Hair out of curl.
"Mother!" the loving one,
  Blushing, exclaimed,
"Let not your innocent
  Lizzy be blamed.

VII.

"Yesterday, going to aunt
  Jones's to tea,
Mother, dear mother, I
  Forgot the door-key!
And as the night was cold
  And the way steep,
Mrs. Jones kept me to
  Breakfast and sleep."

VIII.

Whether her Pa and Ma
  Fully believed her,
That we shall never know,
  Stern they received her;

And for the work of that
  Cruel, though short, night,
Sent her to bed without
  Tea for a fortnight.

IX.

Moral

Hey diddle diddlety,
  Cat and the Fiddlety,
Maidens of England take caution by she!
  Let love and suicide
  Never tempt you aside,
And always remember to take the door-key. [37]

VERSE

Some of Thackeray's drollery was expressed through the medium of dialect, a dialect he formed in imitation of the Irish in England. The many Ballads of Policeman X are in this Thackerayan language.

Nearly all of Thackeray's verse was written with the intention of making some point in a humorous fashion.

> They are all readable, almost all good, full of humour, and with some fine touches of pathos, most happy in versification, and with a few exceptions, hitting well on the head the nail which he intended to hit.[38]

In The Sorrows of Werther he burlesqued a sentimental classic most successfully. In the poem, The Cane-Bottomed Chair, wit and love are combined in delightful humorous, almost pathetic verse. The Mahogany Tree is a sparkling poem suggesting a happy mood of the author.

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[37] Ibid., pp. 159-161.

[38] Trollope, op. cit., p. 165.

Sorrows Of Werther

Werther had a love for Charlotte
  Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
  She was cutting bread and butter.

Charlotte was a married lady,
  And a moral man was Werther,
And, for all the wealth of Indies,
  Would do nothing for to hurt her.

So he sighed and pined and ogled
  And his passion boiled and bubbled,
Till he blew his silly brains out,
  And no more was by it troubled.

Charlotte, having seen his body
  Borne before her on a shutter,
Like a well-conducted person,
  Went on cutting bread and butter.[39]

The Cane-Bottom'd Chair

In tattered old slippers that toast at the bars,
And a ragged old jacket perfumed with cigars,
Away from the world and its toils and its cares,
I've a snug little kingdom up four pair of stairs.

He describes the room and its furnishings of old knicknacks, keepsakes, books, and treasures of all kinds dear to him. The furniture is old and shabby and some of it is broken, but all is most comfortable. Wonderful talks with friends have been held in this pleasant chamber. He goes on:

But of all the cheap treasures that garnish my nest,
There's one that I love and I cherish the best:
For the finest of couches that's padded with hair
I never would change thee, my cane-bottom'd chair.

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[39] Ballads and Tales, Vol. 25, p. 69.

'Tis a bandy-legg'd, high-shoulder'd worm-eaten seat,
With a creaking old back, and twisted old feet:
But since the fair morning when Fanny sat there,
I bless thee and love thee, old cane-bottom'd chair.

If chairs have but feeling, in holding such charms,
A thrill must have pass'd through your wither'd old arms:
I look'd, and I long'd, and I wish'd in despair;
I wish'd myself turn'd to a cane-bottom'd chair.

It was but a moment she sat in this place,
She'd a scarf on her neck, and a smile on her face:
A smile on her face, and a rose in her hair,
And she sat there, and bloom'd in my cane-bottom'd chair.

And so I have valued my chair ever since,
Like the shrine of a saint, or the throne of a prince;
Saint Fanny, my patroness sweet I declare,
The queen of my heart and my cane-bottom'd chair.

When the candles burn low, and the company's gone,
In the silence of night as I sit here alone--
I sit here alone, but we yet are a pair--
My Fanny I see in my cane-bottom'd chair.

She comes from the past and revisits my room;
She looks as she then did, all beauty and bloom;
So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair,
And yonder she sits in my cane-bottom'd chair.[40]

The Mahogany Tree

Christmas is here:
Winds whistle shrill,
Icy and chill,
Little care we:
Little we fear
Weather without,
Sheltered about
The Mahogany Tree.

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40 Ibid., pp. 59-61.

Once on the boughs
Birds of rare plume
Sang, in its bloom;
Night-birds are we:
Here we carouse,
Singing like them,
Perched round the stem
Of the jolly old tree.

Here let us sport,
Boys, as we sit;
Laughter and wit
Flashing so free.
Life is but short--
When we are gone,
Let them sing on,
Round the tree.

Evenings we knew,
Happy as this;
Faces we miss,
Pleasant to see.
Kind hearts and true,
Gentle and just,
Peace to your dust!
We sing round the tree

Care, like a dun,
Lurks at the gate:
Let the dog wait;
Happy we'll be!
Drink, every one;
Pile up the coals,
Fill the red bowls,
Round the old tree!

Drain we the cup.--
Friend, art afraid?
Spirits are laid
In the Red Sea.
Mantle it up;
Empty it yet;
Let us forget,
Round the old tree.

Sorrows, begone!
Life and its ills,
Duns and their bills,
Bid we to flee.
Come with the dawn,
Blue-devil sprite,
Leave us to-night,
Round the old tree.[41]

In the prose fairy tale The Rose and the Ring[42] published in 1854 as a Christmas Book--these were books brought out by the publishers expressly for the Christmas trade--one may be fortunate enough to find two almost hidden bits of waggishness among all the rest of the fun in the story. One is the blank verse in which the king speaks, almost as Shakespeare's kings argued and reasoned their courses of conduct. It is not written in the form of blank verse, but the rhythm of blank verse is there.

> "But oh!" he went on, (still sipping, I am sorry to say,) "ere I was king, I needed not this intoxicating draught; Once I detested the hot brandy wine, and quaffed no other fount but nature's rill. It dashes not more quickly o'er the rocks, than I did, as blunder-buss in hand, I brushed away the early morning dew, and shot the partridge, snipe, or antlered deer! Ah! well may England's dramatist remark, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!" Why did I steal my nephew's, my young Giglio's--? Steal! said I? no, no, no, not steal, not steal. Let me withdraw that odious expression. I took, and on my manly head I set, the royal crown of Paflagonia; I took, and with my royal arm I wield the sceptral rod of Paflagonia; I took, and in my out-stretched hand I hold, the royal orb of Paflagonia! Could a poor boy, a snivelling, drivelling boy--was in his nurse's arms but yesterday, and cried for sugar--plums and puled for pap--bear up the awful weight of crown, orb, sceptre? gird on the sword my royal fathers wore, and meet in fight the tough Crimean foe?"[42]

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[41] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[42] "The Rose and the Ring," Christ as Books, Vol. 24, pp. 197-326.

[43] Ibid., p. 203.

The other amusing device is the rhyming of the lines at the head of each page, the lines that suggest the matter discussed in that particular page. In the prelude to The Rose and The Ring, Thackeray states that the tale was written to amuse his own children and the other children of English families[44] spending the Christmas season at a certain city on the continent. The customary pantomime could not be obtained, so this story was made up for their entertainment. It must have been royal fun for all. As the page headings are read rapidly, the story evolves in poetry.

I

HERE BEGINS THE PANTOMIME
ROYAL FOLKS AT BREAKFAST TIME
AWFUL CONSEQUENCE OF CRIME!
AH, I FEAR, KING VALOROSA,

II

THAT YOUR CONDUCT IS BUT SO-SO!
HERE BEHOLD THE MONARCH SIT,
WITH HER MAJESTY OPPOSITE.
HOW THE MONARCH RULED HIS NATION.
GRUFFANUFF, AND WHAT HER STATION.
BEWARE OF PRIDE WITHOUT A CAUSE.

III

WHO THE FAIRY BLACKSTICK WAS.
FAIRY ROSES FAIRY RINGS,
TURN OUT SOMETIMES TROUBLESOME THINGS.
FLATTERING COURTIERS MAKE POOR MARTYRS.
WHO WAS KING OF THE CRIM TARTARS.

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[44] Christmas Books, Vol. 24, p. vi. "The Christmas party of children was in Rome in 1853, and Thackeray's own daughters, the Brownings' boy, and the children of others in the English and American colony were its members."

IV

GRUFFANUFF IS SILENCED QUITE.
DON'T YOU THINK SHE SERVED HIM RIGHT?
ALL YE FOOTMEN RUDE AND ROUGH,
WARNING TAKE BY GRUFFANUFF!

V

HOW THE PRINCESS AS SHE PLAYED,
MET A LITTLE BEGGAR-MAID.
HOW THIS LITTLE BEGGAR-BABY
DANCED AND SANG, AS DROLL AS MAY BE.
OF THE MISTRESS AND THE MAID,
WHILST ONE WORKED, THE OTHER PLAYED.

VI

SHOWS HOW GIGLIO EVINCES
IDLE TASTES LIKE OTHER PRINCES.
HOW HIS PRETTY COUSIN MEETS HIM
AND HOW SAUCILY SHE TREATS HIM.
MUCH I FEAR, WHEN HEARTS ARE ILL,
SMALL'S THE GOOD OF DOCTOR'S PILL.
FOLKS WITH WHOM WE'RE ALL ACQUAINTED
AREN'T SO HANDSOME AS THEY'RE PAINTED.
O YOU PAINTER, HOW YOU FLATTER!
SURE HE MUST BE LAUGHING AT HER!

Ninety-two more pages follow before the closing head-lines.

SO OUR LITTLE STORY ENDS.
MERRY CHRISTMAS, GOOD MY FRIENDS.

The examples which have been given are representative and broad enough in character to show that the later criticism of Thackeray as set forth in Chapter I furnishes a truer picture of the man and his humor than the earlier criticism as summarized by Taine. They also follow in subject matter and in treatment the statements made by Thackeray concerning humor as reported in Chapter II.

The passages verify Thackeray as a master of humor, as "an artist who playfully gives us his intuition of the world and human life,"[45] imbued at the same time with an ardent desire to do his best to make men and women want to build into their lives truth, sympathy, kindness and moral responsibility. When he portrays vice and wickedness he makes them qualities to be shunned, and not desirable qualities to be cultivated. His satire is all directed with the same purpose. In none of the examples given is there any hint of misanthropy on Thackeray's part. There may be sorrow but there is no evidence of hatred or meanness in his nature; instead, many of the examples show his great geniality and light heartedness. All show clear thinking and great facility of expression.

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[45] Lilly, op. cit., p. 9.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The problem discussed in this study has been the nature of Thackeray's humor. The solution of the problem took its way, first, through many critical discussions of Thackeray's work; second, through Thackeray's own incidental discussions concerning humor; and third, through numerous illustrative extracts taken from various sources in Thackeray's writings. It is necessary before closing to summarize the material of the three chapters.

Chapter I devoted itself to the critics' estimate of Thackeray as a humorist. Out of many discussions read, representative extracts were presented. An analysis of these expressions revealed that a sharp difference of opinion existed. Some critics thought of Thackeray as a bitter satirist, while others considered him a most genial humorist. Taine, with Bagehot, was representative of the school of unfavorable criticism. Taine's main charges against Thackeray were that he was misanthropic and cynical, a hater of mankind, and that he paid too much attention to minor faults in society and overemphasized these. However, Taine thought of Thackeray as a satirist and not as a humorist. On the other hand, a larger group of critics made up the opposite school. They were favorable in their analysis of Thackeray's humor. They denied the charges of misanthropy and cynicism. Robertson Nicoll felt that

while Thackeray's satire might be severe, yet the nature of the man was mild and sympathetic. Lilly answered Taine's argument's at length and offered a sound basis for differing with him. Foakes-Jackson spoke approvingly of the wisdom, genius, and kindliness of Thackeray. Walter Hinchman declared that Thackeray laughed at mankind but did so with kindness. A. G. Newcomer recognized the early disapproval of Thackeray, refuted the arguments again and praised Thackeray's contributions to society. Hugh Walker, Henry Beers, W. C. Brownell, Hattie Tyng Griswold, Lewis Melville, William Peterfield Trent are other critics who wrote in praise and appreciation of Thackeray's humor.

Chapter II was devoted to Thackeray's own pronouncements on humor and humorists, in an effort to ascertain what Thackeray believed humor to be. All his works were read and any sentence that related to humor was carefully studied. The miscellaneous extracts chosen were sorted into four groups. Naturally there is some overlapping of ideas, for Thackeray wrote of humor not analytically but incidentally, usually with some other subject foremost in his mind. When the material was brought together and studied certain facts stood out clearly. First that the essential qualities of humor are love and wit, pathos, sympathy, truth, sincerity and kindness; that there is a close connection between humor and melancholy; that satire must be kindly and never be savage or brutal. Second, the subjects of humor are to be found in life and in society; and follies, vanities, and evils are to be laughed away. Third, the humorist has a strong moral obligation resting upon him to

try to make society better. Fourth, there is a proper place for humor in man's life and the humor that will last into future ages will be of the kind that is full of humanity, tenderness, and love.

In Chapter III Thackeray's actual practice of humor was considered. Examples were given and in part were analyzed. The examples were from the novels, the burlesques, the parodies, and humorous verse. The extract concerning Becky and Sir Pitt Crawley was an example of humor caused by an unexpected element in the episode, and satire was directed against Becky's selfish ambition and also against an aristocrat who was delinquent in the expected culture pertaining to his rank. The satire of the story of Miss Crawley and her money was directed against covetous and fawning human nature, against people who assumed an unselfish appearance while being driven by mercenary motives as Mrs. Bute Crawley and the apothecary revealed. A wealth of humor was to be found in the long story of the rich aunt and the race for her favor. The episode of Amelia and George was chosen to show the practice of irony and pathos and humor used in a kindly and sympathetic manner. The episode chosen from the Newcomes illustrated Thackeray's practice of hitting at the vanity and folly of society. He treated Ethel Newcome, who was the victim of her family's love of rank and money, with the greatest sympathy and understanding. He jested at the Englishman's demand for a marriage of material advantage. An extract from Pendennis was chosen to show Thackeray's use of almost boisterous comedy in character development. He jested at personal pride, self-love, fear of ridicule. He

laughed heartily at his own creation, Mirobolant.

The examples from the burlesques, Major Gahagan, The Legend of the Rhine, Phil Fogarty, Jeammes of Buckley Square, Rebecca and Rowena, showed many instances of Thackeray's humor as he ridiculed the pretentious sentimentality in the literature of the time, the extravagant chivalry found in the stories, the daring deeds of heroic figures. His humor was abundant in all the burlesques; anachronisms, spelling, names, the very phrasing revealed his laughter as he wrote.

The parodies were further examples of Thackeray's versatility in humorous expression and his drollery and fun constantly appeared in his verse. The selections The Sorrows of Werther, The Cane-Bottomed Chair, and The Mahogany Tree were chosen to illustrate his humor and pathos and the happy spirit apparent in his writing. His love of children and his ability to entertain them cleverly and humorously is aptly shown in the prose fairy tale The Rose and the Ring.

The examples gathered and presented show the variety of Thackeray's humor and are representative of the rich wise humor with which his work abounds. This study can not claim to be exhaustive for the field was too large and abundant; but it does claim to be indicative of the nature of Thackeray as a humorist.

CONCLUSION

This study of Thackeray was carried on through many months during which the writer concentrated on Thackeray's ideas on humor and his incidental writings on the subjects and during which certain passages from his works were read many times. Never in all that period was any feeling aroused that Thackeray was as Taine described him. The writer preferred to judge Thackeray by his own words and felt that he strove always to be what he believed a humorist should be, and so found nothing but kindness and love in his humor. It is true that he hated sham and humbug and wickedness and vice but not true that he hated mankind. The large variety of examples of humor presented from Thackeray's writings in themselves constitute a refutation of Taine's estimate of the humorist. Thackeray himself commented upon the differences between a Frenchman's humor and that of an Englishman and perhaps it is as Elbert Hubbard wrote:

> A Frenchman cannot comprehend a joke that is not accompanied by grimace and gesticulation; and so M. Taine chases Thackeray through sixty solid pages, berating him for what he is pleased to term "bottled hate."...The fun is too deep for Monsieur.[1]

The materials of Chapter II, consisting of Thackeray's own theories of humor, and of Chapter III, consisting of a variety of examples of Thackeray's humor, were gathered on the basis of their own merit in relation to the subject of humor and without regard to

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[1] Elbert Hubbard, Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895.) p. 253.

any literary critic's pronouncements. The evidence in the light of such selection shows nothing to justify the bitterness and misanthropy in the harsh charge of Taine.

No survey was made as whether there is too much of preaching, of philosophizing in the author's own person thrust into the narrative, but the writer's impression was that much humor was imbedded in these side remarks of Thackeray's, and that these were an integral part of Thackeray's personality, pleasing and revealing.

The reader may judge for himself from the original material offered. The writer believes this study has indicated that Thackeray, in following his own sincere beliefs, won for himself a place as one of the greatest of English humorists.

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