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## Thackeray as a critic of non-fiction books

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## Thackeray as a Critic of Non-Fiction Books

The evaluation of Thackeray as literary critic would not be complete, if we omitted from our account his reviews of non-fiction books, which form, as far as their quantity is concerned, a substantial part of his critical legacy. The most detailed assessment of this side of Thackeray's criticism has so far been presented by Enzinger,<sup>1</sup> but his analysis is by no means exhaustive, for he naturally could include in it only those reviews which had been found and attributed to Thackeray by the time he wrote and which were published in Melville's edition of Thackeray's *Works* (in the volume *Critical Papers in Literature*). As I have pointed out in the Introduction, however, since Enzinger's time several further reviews have been discovered, including those of non-fiction books, and therefore this aspect of Thackeray's work as reviewer deserves reconsideration. I do not intend to present such a detailed analysis of these reviews as I did of those concerned with fiction, poetry, and drama, for I do not regard this part of his criticism as so important and besides it mostly concerns works which have fallen into oblivion, so much so indeed that I have not succeeded in obtaining some of them. I shall therefore concentrate upon a summary evaluation in which I shall deal mainly with the basic critical principles on which Thackeray's judgments are founded and with the value of his reviews as criticism.

The non-fiction books which Thackeray reviewed during his professional critical career and for a few years after its close mostly lie within the sphere of his special personal interest and may be divided into several groups according to their themes — 1) historical works (whether formal history or memoirs, diaries, or essays, and including letters written by historical personages), 2) biographies, autobiographies and literary critical works, 3) political works, 4) travel-books, 5) works which cannot be easily classified.

### 1. Historical Works

Thackeray's reviews of historical works, memoirs, diaries etc. represent one of the largest groups in his criticism of non-fiction books, which of course fully corresponds with what we know about his deep, lively and constant interest in the history of his own country, as well as in that of some other countries of Europe. The reviews to be considered here are the following:

"*The French Revolution*. By Thomas Carlyle", *The Times*, August 3, 1837, (reprinted in *Works*).

"Duchess of Marlborough's Private Correspondence", *The Times*, January 6, 1838 (reprinted in *Works*).

"A Diary Relative to George IV and Queen Caroline" (By Lady Charlotte Bury), *The Times*, January 11, 1838, and *Fraser's Magazine*, March 1838 (both reprinted in *Works*, the second under the title "Skimmings from 'The Dairy of George IV'").

<sup>1</sup> See op. cit., vol. 21, No. 2, p. 148.

- “Memoirs of Holt, the Irish Rebel”, *The Times*, January 31, 1838 (reprinted in *Works*).
- “Tyler’s Life of Henry V.”, *The Times*, October 19 and 25, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver), *The Times*, November 12, 1838 (reprinted in *Critical Papers*)<sup>1</sup>.
- “Count Valerian Krasinski’s History of the Reformation in Poland”, *The Times*, November 27, 1838 (reprinted in *Critical Papers*) and *The Times*, March 5, 1840 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- “Le Duc de Normandie”, *Fraser’s Magazine*, February 1839 (not reprinted)<sup>2</sup>.
- “England under the Reigns of Edward VI. and Mary” (By Patrick Fraser Tytler), *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839 (not reprinted)<sup>3</sup>.
- “The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford”, *The Times*, March 10, 1840 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- “Ranke’s History of the Popes. Translated by Mrs. Austin”, *The Times*, June 10, August 11 and 18, 1840 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- “Gisquet’s Memoirs”, *Fraser’s Magazine*, May 1841 (not reprinted)<sup>4</sup>.
- “The Last Fifteen Years of the Bourbons”, *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1842 (a summary review of Louis Blanc: *L’Histoire de dix ans, 1830—1840*, M. Capefigue: *Histoire de la Restauration, et des causes qui ont amené la chute de la branche aînée des Bourbons*, M. Léonard Gallois: *Continuation de l’Histoire de France d’Anquetil*, and Emile Renard: *Histoire de la Restauration, suivie d’un Précis de la Révolution de Juillet*; not reprinted).
- “Mr. Macaulay’s Essays”, *The Pictorial Times*, April 1, 1843 (reprinted in *Works*).
- “Historic Fancies” (By the Hon. George Sidney Smythe), *The Morning Chronicle*, August 2, 1844 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Moore’s History of Ireland; from the earliest Kings of that Realm down to its last Chief”, *The Morning Chronicle*, August 20, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay”, *The Morning Chronicle*, September 25, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).

In the first place, we should point out that in these reviews Thackeray shows considerable erudition in and intimate knowledge of several historical epochs: from French history the period of the Revolution and the last fifteen years of the Bourbon monarchy, as well as the July Revolution of 1830 and the rule of Louis Philippe, and from the history of his own country especially the early 15th century and the Queen Anne period which — and notably the latter — very much attracted him, too, as a novelist.

In the second place, his reviews of historical works indirectly reflect his own conception of history, for he naturally praises those works which more or less

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted, too, in *The Centenary Biographical Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, vol. XXV.

<sup>2</sup> Identified by Geoffrey C. Stokes in “Thackeray as Historian: Two Newly Identified Contributions to *Fraser’s Magazine*”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 22, December 1967, No. 3, pp. 281—288. I have not yet been able to read this review (nor that of Gisquet’s *Memoirs*, identified by Stokes in the same study) and have therefore to rely on information provided by this scholar.

<sup>3</sup> Lela Winegarner has suggested the possibility of this review being by Thackeray, and her evidence seems to me very convincing.

<sup>4</sup> Identified by Stokes; see note 2 above.

correspond to it and criticize those which do not. Yet there is one interesting discrepancy. Although there is plenty of evidence, including that adduced in the present study, that Thackeray in his mature years dissociated himself from Carlyle's heroic conception of history, in his early review of *The French Revolution* he prefers Carlyle's approach as equally impartial but much loftier than that of Thiers. While for Carlyle "the little actors of this great drama are striving but towards a great end and moral", for Thiers the story of the Revolution is "but a bustling for places — a list of battles and intrigues — of kings and governments rising and falling" — he never draws "a single moral from it" and is therefore merely "the *valet de chambre* of this history", which "can never be a hero to him", for "he is too familiar with its deshabille and off-scourings". It seems to me that the cause of this discrepancy might be found in Thackeray's whole-hearted approval of Carlyle's interpretation of the French Revolution. He is not entirely uncritical, as we shall yet see, dissociates himself both from the historian's detractors and "idolaters", confesses that in reading the first few pages he was "not a little inclined to adopt" the opinion of the former, and emphasizes that he assesses the book from the point of view of a "worldly" man, uninitiated in Kantian and Carlylean philosophy. Yet what he can read through the "dim spectacles" of an uninitiated person is evaluated by him very positively. Carlyle's philosophy is characterized by him as "sound" and "hearty" (except, as he adds and I have already quoted, "certain transcendentalisms" which he does not "pretend to understand"<sup>5</sup>) and he welcomes the book as a timely warning which might frighten his own country, then tossed by the storms of Chartism, away from revolution and prevent the English Radicals (i.e. the Chartists, whom he sharply condemns as demagogues leading the English people to destruction) to repeat the same dire tragedy in England:

"The hottest Radical in England may learn by it that there is something more necessary for him even than his mad liberty — the authority, namely, by which he retains his head on his shoulders and his money in his pocket, which privileges that by-word 'liberty' is often unable to secure for him" (*Works* I, 77).

In propagating moderation and maintenance of order and rejecting anarchy and revolution Thackeray is very near to Carlyle, but in his defence of the sanctity of property he goes beyond this historian, for whom the only important property was the soul and who protested against the laws protecting "breaches-pocket property".<sup>6</sup>

Typically Thackerayan is the attitude our critic assumes when considering another approach to history — in the letters of its direct participants. As he writes in the introduction to his review of the *Duchess of Marlborough's Correspondence*, the acquaintance with history from this point of view is a disenchantment for those who study it from orthodox historical books:

"The dignity of history sadly diminishes as we grow better acquainted with the materials which compose it. In our orthodox history-books the characters move on as a gaudy playhouse procession, a glittering pageant of kings and warriors, and stately ladies, majestically appearing and passing away. Only he who sits very near to the stage can discover of what stuff the spectacle is made. The kings are poor creatures, taken from the dregs of the company; the noble knights are dirty dwarfs in tin foil; the fair ladies are painted

<sup>5</sup> For the quotations see *Works* I, 68–69, 67, 68, 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Essays* IV, 164.

hags with cracked feathers and soiled trains. One wonders how gas and distance could ever have rendered them so bewitching" (*Works* I, 79).

He does not mind being thus disenchanting, however; on the contrary, the authentic information about the seamy side of history which he could draw from the historical documents of this kind — the dirty political intrigues, profiteering, bribery, egotism and meanness of which even the greatest figures appearing in the Duchess's *Correspondence* were guilty of — confirmed his own conclusions about the real face of history and was at the same time more suggestive for the future novelist in him. On the other hand he sharply protests, whenever in a historical work or a memoir he encounters a tendency in the author to present scandalous histories and dirty gossip about the private lives of the personages involved, as I have shown in detail when assessing his two reviews of Charlotte Bury's *Diary* in the chapter dealing with his criticism of the Silver-Fork novelists.

From what we know of his conception of history in *Esmond* and of the sources of his inspiration, it cannot surprise us that the interpretation which he finds most acceptable is that of Macaulay. In his review of this historian's *Critical, and Historical Essays* he points out that these volumes embrace such a vast range of reading and wide variety of theme that not every reader will subscribe to all the opinions which the author pours from him "with such astounding prodigality", yet he is convinced that whether the reader agrees or not, he will be forced to admire. Besides many other merits, with which we shall be concerned later, he finds warm words of praise especially for Macaulay as, in his opinion, a great and successful fighter for the cause of Liberalism, who "has brought thousands and thousands . . . to acknowledge (as who shall not that ever read in a history book?) the constant progress of the world, and how at the close of every century, it is in something, at least, more free, wise, or happy than at its beginning".<sup>7</sup> His identification with Macaulay's conception of history became even more complete after 1849,<sup>8</sup> when he became personally acquainted with the historian and when he himself stepped out upon the road leading towards his compromise with the society of his time. As his marginal comments upon Macaulay's greatest work, *The History of England* (1848—1855), suggest (and the above quotation confirms), he gradually identified himself with the "preposterous optimism" (as Praz calls it) with which the historian "saw the epoch in which he was living as the culminating point and justification of the whole preceding course of history" and England of his day as "an inexhaustible source of pride".<sup>9</sup> Thackeray must have also approved of the mainspring of this work of Macaulay's, which is, as Praz has formulated it, "the traditional English conception of political freedom as the guarantee of the enjoyment of private property, which, in the Victorian bourgeois, Macaulay,

<sup>7</sup> For the quotations see *Works* VI, 315, 317.

<sup>8</sup> For his enthusiastic or at least positive comments on Macaulay the historian, but also Macaulay the critic, see *Works* VI, 375—376, 568, VIII, 40, 246, 268, 370, X, 612, XII, 444, XIII, 524—525, 528, XVII, "Nil Nisi Bonum", especially p. 358 and pp. 470, 624, *Letters* II, 591n., III, 38, 537, *The Biographical Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, XIII, lxxiii, Wilson, op.cit., I, 181, 238—239. For his eulogies of Macaulay the politician see "Letters from a Club Arm-Chair", pp. 224, 227, 229 and "Nil Nisi Bonum", especially *Works* XVII, 362.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., p. 107.

assumes an almost lyrical intensity",<sup>10</sup> for we do possess evidence that in 1860 he seriously contemplated accepting Smith's offer to write a continuation of Macaulay's *History* throughout the reign of Queen Anne, though this plan was circumvented by his death.<sup>11</sup> To all this I should add, however, that Thackeray was not entirely uncritical and found the individual volumes of Macaulay's *History* unequal in quality, discovering some blemishes in the style.<sup>12</sup> Even his identification with Macaulay's optimism could not have been absolute, at least not until the last few years of his life, for the point of view he reveals in the great novels of the 1850s, *Esmond*, *The Newcomes* and to some extent *The Virginians*, is still very far from being optimistic and remains, on the contrary, pessimistic and critical. One reason for Thackeray's admiration of the historian may also be found in the strong impression made on him by the success of Macaulay in political life and society, which led him to see in him a precedent and example which would make what he attained for himself "easier for others":

"He is the first literary man in this country who has made himself honourably and worthily the equal of the noblest and wealthiest in it: this may be no cause for respect with the reader, perhaps, but with every *writer* it should be, who is glad to see in another his own profession advanced, and success and honour bestowed at last upon one of a body of men who were but a few score years since begging guineas from my lord for a dedication; the byword for poverty, the theme for sneering wits" (*Works* VI, 316).

When, however, a historian's conception is entirely unacceptable to him, Thackeray does not hesitate to pronounce a negative judgment. Thus he pays detailed attention to the weak points of Smythe's work, from which he had expected the revelation of the character and mission of the Young England party and a deeper analysis of the historical roots of its doctrine, and he does not hide his disappointment when his expectations are not fulfilled. Although he finds in the book also some good points, as we shall see, his general assessment is negative: he rebukes the author for the lack of unity and sustained purpose in the design of his work, for the "*incoherences of expression and inconsistencies of sentiment*", to which the author himself confesses and which Thackeray regards as fatal defects in a historical essayist, pointing out that the reader will not derive from the book "any very important truths of principle" and that some of those principles which might be drawn are either no principles at all or have no practical application, and criticizing these "desultory" sketches as "having little or no foundation in absolute recorded incidents".<sup>13</sup>

It is worth noticing that in assessing works concerned with the history of another country than his own Thackeray reveals political views which are upon the whole more progressive than those we know from his reviews of Carlyle and Macaulay. This is obvious especially in his summary review "The Last Fifteen Years of the Bourbons" (which is rather a synopsis of the works noticed, with many reflections of the reviewer, than a regular review), in which Thackeray accepts the interpretation of the legitimist historian Capefigue only with reservations, rejecting in particular his opinion that the French nation made

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>11</sup> See *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 372.

<sup>12</sup> See *Letters* III, 538, 542.

<sup>13</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 59, 64, 59, 62.

great advances during the Bourbon reign and emphatically condemning "that fatal race" of the Bourbons, with their religious bigotry and despotism. His critical opinion of the Legitimists is also revealed in his review of Gisquet's *Memoirs*, in which he presents a summary of the movement, characterized by Stokes in the following words:

"Here Thackeray rises above the journeyman-historian in expressing his anti-war (and anti-French) feelings with an understated distaste that is Swiftian, while pointing up the ludicrous side of the Legitimist cause with a witty play on words."<sup>14</sup>

Yet there is a curious discrepancy between the two reviews, not noticed by Stokes. In the later "Bourbon" review Thackeray warmly sympathizes with the hate and scorn of the people for the Bourbon dynasty and enthusiastically welcomes the July Revolution, writing with genuine admiration of the Republican soldiers fighting and dying on the barricades, though he has some feeling, too, for "their brethren who fell on the opposite side". He even tries to make Blanc's "strongly republican" tendencies acceptable to the English readers, who are, as he writes, prejudiced against the French and especially against French republicanism and liberalism, by comparing the French Republicans, as far as their intelligence and respectability is concerned, with the Republicans (Chartists) in his own country to the latter's detriment. In his review of Gisquet, however, he treats the position of the French Republicans, as Stokes has it, "in a rather straightforward manner":

"All the faults of the French government have been exaggerated but the efforts of these romantic, suffering Republicans are passed over in silence or in pity. M. Gisquet has been at the pains of gathering together a number of documents which give a very good notion of their history; nor, perhaps, could the French government do better than publish a similar account, shewing, under the patriots' own signatures, their opinion of the sanctity of murder, the propriety of insurrection, the rights of robbery, — upon all which points they have not only spoken, but acted. Such a book containing the facts, and certain very simple arguments to be drawn from them, might be the means of keeping many a wavering *prolétaire* at his workshop, and of damping the Republican ardour of the young patriots of the schools."<sup>15</sup>

The political opinions Thackeray expresses in his "Bourbon" review are not, however, wholly unobjectionable, at least from my point of view. As I have pointed out in my previous study, his views on the historical role of the middle classes in France are much more conservative than those expressed by Blanc — in his opinion, the bourgeoisie is not a natural enemy of the working class, but rather a source for its pride, being recruited from its ranks and thus opening up a way to all the talented *prolétaires*.

But whether Thackeray finds the conception of history presented in the works he assesses acceptable or not, what he always does demand is reliable instruction about the period dealt with, preferably based on scholarly research, as truthful and exact information as possible not only about the described events, but especially about the protagonists, about the life of people in past epochs. Thus in his review "Le Duc de Normandie" he pays, as Stokes has it, "a constant attention to the quality of historical evidence", devoting the body of his article "chiefly to a summation and consideration of the narrator's

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 284.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

claims". As the quoted scholar concludes, it is "primarily from such preoccupation with evidence that we may see in this article early indications of Thackeray's interest in history", while "this article, along with 'Gisquet's Memoirs' and 'The Last Fifteen Years of the Bourbons', allows us to see Thackeray's development from a layman with a strong sense of historical scholarship to a serious historian".<sup>16</sup> In his review of Carlyle's *French Revolution* Thackeray praises the author for possessing "most extraordinary powers — learning, observation, and humour" and highly commends him for successfully evoking the sombre atmosphere of the period and giving it "reality", "that gloomy, rough, Rembrandt-kind of reality which is Mr. Carlyle's style of historic painting".<sup>17</sup> He finds warm words of praise, too, for Carlyle's portraits of the prominent participants in the revolutionary events, portraits pervaded by grim humour. The *Essays* of Macaulay, too, are praised for their great erudition, "the amazing variety and extent of learning", "the extraordinary powers" of the author's "brilliant intellect", his power and variety of memory, vividness of depiction and "delightful grace of scholarship".<sup>18</sup>

For presenting a faithful account of the given historical period, as well as a deep insight into the character of the historical personages, he highly appreciates two letter-writers, Madame D'Arblay and Horace Walpole, whose works possessed for him the additional interest of being concerned with his beloved 18th-century England. Among the great charms of Walpole's *Letters* is for him "the insight he gives us into the characters of individuals", as well as his portraits "written in a lively and entertaining manner".<sup>19</sup> *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay* are praised for their "unquestioned authenticity", for the writer's ability to set before the reader convincing portraits of individual personages of her time, depicted with remarkable liveliness and truth, and for the way she brings back to life the vanished society of the period immediately preceding Thackeray's own.<sup>20</sup>

Worthy of note in this connection, too, are Thackeray's reviews of Tyler's *Life of Henry V*, for this particular historical period interested him almost as much as the 18th century, as his unfinished novel *The Knights of Borsellen* testifies. Saintsbury, who negatively assesses the third review of this work, along with the reviews of Fraser's travel-book and Krasinski's *History*, as "respectable paste-and-scissors work" having no intrinsic interest whatever and therefore not deserving to be reprinted, points out that it "has the quite extrinsic interest of having possibly suggested, if only afar off, the idea of writing an historical novel on its period which Thackeray seems to have conceived very late, but which (almost beyond question fortunately) he never carried out".<sup>21</sup> Upon the whole Thackeray reprehends Tyler for being "too much of the antiquary, and too little of the narrator", for taking too much care of small accessories, so that the general effect is lost, and failing thus to satisfy those readers, who "in reading history, like to draw their own conclu-

<sup>16</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 285, 287.

<sup>17</sup> For the quotations see *Works* I, 77, 70—71.

<sup>18</sup> For the quotations see *Works* VI, 315.

<sup>19</sup> For the quotations see *Gulliver*, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>20</sup> See especially *Contributions*, 183, 184, 186. Thackeray drew upon Madame D'Arblay's *Diary and Letters in The Four Georges*; see especially *Works* XIII, pp. 778—779, 795—797.

<sup>21</sup> *Works* X, xx.



sions, and are willing rather to have a comprehensive view of the whole than of the numberless minute particles which compose it".<sup>22</sup> He positively evaluates, however, the author's art of convincingly drawing the portraits of historical personages, which give the reader a perfect idea of the customs and manners of people who lived more than four hundred years ago. The second review possesses an additional interest because Thackeray compares in it Tyler's interpretation of the period with Shakespeare's depiction, and the third is interesting because he confronts Tyler's account with that presented in the authentic old sources (the old English and French chronicles), in some cases preferring the information provided by these old books as far more touching than all the remarks of Mr. Tyler.

Krasinski's work is praised by Thackeray for enabling the reader to "draw a great deal of instruction" from the author's research, while Ranke's book is recommended by him for "the importance of the information which it conveys". Tytler is highly appreciated as "a keen antiquarian and conscientious stickler for accuracy and truth" and his approach commended especially because "accuracy among historians is almost equally rare with purity of motive in politicians".<sup>23</sup>

What deserves special praise is Thackeray's capacity for highly evaluating the accuracy of information, even if it throws adverse light upon the political personages or policy of his own country. From this point of view he warmly appreciates Tytler for not allowing himself to be swayed by prejudice in treating even such points in English history "which have become part of the national belief" and yet are erroneously interpreted, and for not being afraid of breaking up "such old strongholds without mercy". Thus he especially values Tytler's truthful revelation of the chain of evil deeds and violent punishments by which the brief reigns of Edward VI and Mary Tudor were characterized. The same holds good for his review of Moore's *History of Ireland*, which he characterizes as "a frightful document as against ourselves — one of the most melancholy stories in the whole world of insolence, rapine, brutal, endless persecution on the part of the English master; of manly resistance, or savage revenge and cunning, or plaintive submission, all equally hopeless and unavailing to the miserable victim".<sup>24</sup>

What Thackeray appreciates most, however, is such an interpretation which provides not only instruction but also entertainment, which presents to the reader an interesting, vivid and amusing account of the past, concentrating more on the personages involved than upon events. Thus for instance in evaluating Tytler's work, Thackeray praises the author's "new mode of treating old papers", which threw important light upon some hitherto very obscure portions of history (especially upon the second downfall and ultimate trial and execution of the duke of Somerset), and defends this historian's untraditional approach to his materials against the persecution on the part of the persons connected with the State-paper office, who were said to have used their utmost efforts "to prevent his having freedom of access in future" to the materials

<sup>22</sup> Gulliver, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>23</sup> For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 229, 233, and *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839, pp. 592, 593.

<sup>24</sup> *Contributions*, 164; see also *ibid.*, p. 166. For the preceding quotations see *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839, p. 593.

reposed in this office. He points out that Tytler succeeded in avoiding the dullness "often engendered by researches into a mass of archaeological materials" and in replacing it by "a playful *naïveté*", humour and facetiousness, so that "his work, although principally made up of old documents", is "as easily readable and almost as entertaining as the pages of a *Waverley* novel".<sup>25</sup> Of the other works Thackeray praises Madame D'Arbly's *Letters* as pleasant and amusing and positively appreciates the interesting, lively and "very curious pictures of human life and manners"<sup>26</sup> to be found in Holt's *Memoirs*, and the quantity of novel information in the work of Krasinski. He pronounces his hearty thanks for the pleasure and enjoyment provided for him by reading Ranke's *History of the Popes*, highly assesses new information presented in Moore's *History* regarding Tyrone and finds much to interest and amuse him also in Smythe's work, even if he has some reservations as to this historian's conclusions. His highest praise is reserved, however, for Carlyle and especially for Macaulay. He appreciates those descriptions of the significant events of the French Revolution into which Carlyle has managed to instil a breathless interest — descriptions which are written in an uncouth and picturesque style, but in spite of which, or just for that very reason, the author succeeds in depicting these events more emphatically and even more sensibly than more sober writers. Macaulay's *Essays* are warmly praised by Thackeray for being comprehensible and accessible to all types of readers and for not requiring any "more science than may be had from a circulating library or a Scott's novel to be delighted with narratives not less exciting than the best fictions of the novelist".<sup>27</sup>

As we have to some extent seen, Thackeray most highly evaluates those historians who were "scholars and gentlemen" and whose approach to their material was impartial and objective. Thus Tytler is highly assessed for his great erudition, learning and accuracy, and for writing "with a mind entirely free from party prejudices, either religious or political, and uninfluenced by self-interest", Macaulay praised as an independent man of firm principles, who "never became the follower of any patron, or truckled to great man or mob" and, though allied with a party, "always bore himself above it", Krasinski commended for his wide education, research, impartiality and the fine feeling exhibited throughout the work, and Ranke admired for his genius, learning and industry, but especially for his "just and liberal views of the times and men which [his book] describes" and "the benevolent justice of the spirit" in which it is written.<sup>28</sup>

When the author under discussion is not a scholar and a gentleman according to Thackeray's conception, as for instance Holt, the Irish rebel, and yet the work otherwise does fulfil some of the reviewer's expectations, he at least appreciates the writer's "natural kindliness and generosity". On the other hand, however, he reprehends Holt for the inaccuracy of some information and for too great a reverence for himself, and his book for being somewhat too long.<sup>29</sup> The character of Gisquet, the Parisian Prefect of Police, however, fails in coming

<sup>25</sup> For the quotations see *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839, pp. 618, 591, 590.

<sup>26</sup> *Works* I, 98; see also *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> *Works* VI, 315.

<sup>28</sup> For the quotations see *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839, p. 591, *Works* VI, 316, Gulliver, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>29</sup> For the quotation see *Works* I, 100; see also *ibid.*, pp. 98, 99.

up to his standard. As Stokes points out, Thackeray reveals a respect for the "professional skills" of the subject of the *Memoirs*, yet at the same time shows his "sense of the ridiculous" in his comment upon Gisquet's self-appraisal, as well as a "tendency to puncture the mild pomposity of the French police". According to the quoted scholar, Thackeray has succeeded in pointing out in his review "both the book's literary inferiority and historical importance":

"This work, although it contains little that is new, and though that little is written in not the most lively style, has made a considerable sensation at Paris, because the facts thus brought together cannot fail to make an impression."<sup>30</sup>

In his reviews of historical works Thackeray always devotes attention to the style. He highly appreciates the manliness and simplicity of Krasinski's style, especially because it comes from the pen of a foreigner, "the grace and beauty" of Moore "which belong to every page that comes from his famous pen", the "well-written prose" and "really beautiful poetry" which he finds in Smythe's work (praising at the same time the author's "good sense and good feeling" and the brilliant passages in which he courageously defends Saint-Just and Robespierre), but reserves his highest praise for the immense clarity of Macaulay's splendid style, seeing its main charm in that it "is as warm and kindly as it is bright, and engages the reader's heart by its affectionate sympathy, as it delights his taste by its brilliancy, poetry, and wit".<sup>31</sup>

If the style of the historian or memorialist does not come up to his expectations, he still finds words of praise, if it is in harmony with the content of the work and the author's purpose. Thus in his review of Holt's book he appreciates that the simple language and rough style render the description of this rebel's dangers and escapes "doubly impressive".<sup>32</sup> Particularly worthy of notice is his assessment of Carlyle's style, which he feels to a certain extent mars the historian's subject and dims his genius:

"It is stiff, short, and rugged, it abounds with Germanisms and Latinisms, strange epithets, and choking double words, astonishing to the admirers of simple Addisonian English, to those who love history as it gracefully runs in Hume, or struts pompously in Gibbon — no such style is Mr. Carlyle's" (*Works* I, 67).

Yet he admits that the hardships which the reader suffers become lighter when he grows accustomed to Carlyle's manner of presentation and when he begins to discover "the real beauty which lurks among all these odd words and twisted sentences, living, as it were, in spite of the weeds". In Thackeray's opinion a sensitive reader of this sort "speedily learns to admire and sympathize; just as he would admire a Gothic cathedral in spite of the quaint carvings and hideous images on door and buttress".<sup>33</sup>

As far as the value of his reviews as criticism is concerned, we may say that all of them are intelligent critical work, if not deeply scholarly or philosophically founded. He himself confesses to his limitations in the following passage from his review of Ranke's work:

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<sup>30</sup> Op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>31</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 163, 59, 58, *Works* VI, 315.

<sup>32</sup> *Works* I, 103.

<sup>33</sup> For the quotations see *Works* I, 72, 67.

"Deeper critics and theologians will no doubt find faults with the work that we ourselves did not care and did not know how to seek for; a very ordinary critic, however, cannot fail to see how carefully arranged Mr. Ranke's facts and opinions are, and how benevolent and philosophical is his tone. Small as his reading may be, the perusal of a very few English histories will convince him where the German's merits lie — in those points which so few English works have — impartiality, gentleness, and research."<sup>34</sup>

Only in a very few cases is Thackeray the dispenser of pure praise and in most of these his praise is well placed. Thus he finds nothing to blame in Ranke's book, which was also positively reviewed by Macaulay in October 1840 for the *Edinburgh Review*, and points out that it "cannot fail of doing great benefit in a country where parties are so bitter as they are amongst us". Similarly he welcomes and thanks Krasinski as a foreigner "who has really rendered a service to the literature of our own country", and highly commends Tytler's book as deserving "of a place in every library of entertainment or instruction".<sup>35</sup> In one case, however, he is too lavish with his praises — in that of Macaulay, whose *Essays* he considerably overestimates. His approval of Macaulay's conception of history, along with the lesser positive qualities of the work of this historian — a clear style and expression, vividness of descriptions and skilfulness in the depiction of individual historical personages — blinded him to such an extent that he was unable to see the limitations of Macaulay's approach which were criticized by competent critics of Thackeray's time and are confirmed by those of our own — lack of originality, shallowness of thought and no superior merit but neatness of expression (Carlyle), deficiency in the imaginative and speculative power (in the critical essays) requisite for real criticism (Lewes), the limitation of his horizon, the absence of philosophical profundity, the "elegant" simplifications of facts, the showy perfection (Praz).<sup>36</sup> His review of Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, on the other hand, is essentially just, his praise and blame well placed and his appreciation of Carlyle's genius generous. Most of his judgments in this case have been confirmed by posterity, for the book is still admired for some of the positive qualities Thackeray discerned in it — for its freshness and narrative skill, as well as for its author's keenness in evaluating people and events. The review is also positively assessed by Saintsbury and Clapp, the former critic characterizing it as remarkable if we consider the reviewer's youth and pointing out that "the total estimate is surprisingly near the truth — things, times, and persons considered".<sup>37</sup>

In these reviews we can also recognize Thackeray's familiar idiosyncracies, such as his deep interest in 18th-century England, his negative attitude to Jesuitism and the Catholic clergy (expressed most convincingly in "The Last Fifteen Years of the Bourbons" and in his review of Ranke's work), his highly critical opinion of the Middle Ages (vented in his reviews of the works of Moore and Smythe), his prejudices against the French (in "The Last Fifteen Years of the Bourbons" and the review of Gisquet's *Memoirs*), etc. The reviewing of historical

<sup>34</sup> Gulliver, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>35</sup> For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 233, *Critical Papers*, p. 176, *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839, p. 595.

<sup>36</sup> For Carlyle's views see *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, II, 120; for Lewes's "Macaulay", *The British Quarterly Review* IX, 1849 (quoted by Greenbut, op. cit., pp. 130—131); for the views of Praz see op. cit., pp. 102, 109, 115, 116, etc.

<sup>37</sup> *A Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 23; for the views of Clapp see "Critic on Horseback", p. 289.

works provided him also with the opportunity of expressing his own opinions upon some topical problems of his own time — on the Irish question (review of Moore), on Chartism (review of Carlyle), on the doctrine of the Young England party (Smythe), etc. When reading these reviews we also recognize Thackeray the splendid stylist and great satirist, who does not hesitate to use his irony and satire, witty metaphors, similes and subtle ironical hints whenever the occasion warrants it. As Lela Winegarner has pointed out, he often takes the opportunity, in evaluating historical works, to “direct his satire at his own generation”.<sup>38</sup> Thus in his review of Tytler’s work (unearthed and identified by the quoted scholar) he points out that the book under review “affords a text” from which long discourses might be preached, for the author’s revelations of the moral turpitude, treachery, venality and vindictive malevolence in the great political personages of the sixteenth century are well applicable to his own time and its politicians. He also accepts the reviewed author’s statement that the same corruption exists in their own time, but that it is hidden under the mask of greater refinement and politeness and the base tricks are played and dirty jobs managed much more elegantly.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Biographies, Autobiographies and Literary Critical Works

A considerable item in Thackeray’s criticism of non-fiction books is also represented by the following reviews of biographical, autobiographical and literary critical works:

- “Characteristics of Goethe. From the German of Falk, Von Muller &c. By Sarah Austin”, *The National Standard*, May 25, June 8, 1833 (not reprinted).
- “Étude sur Mirabeau par Victor Hugo”, *The National Standard*, February 1, 1834 (reprinted in *Works*).
- “Mr. Carlyle’s Lectures”, *The Times*, May 1 and 22, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- “The Works of Ben Jonson. With a Memoir of his Life and Writings, by Barry Cornwall”, *The Times*, December 28, 1838 (not reprinted).
- “A New Spirit of the Age” (By R. H. Horne), *The Morning Chronicle*, April 2, 1844 (reprinted in *Works and Contributions*).
- “The Life of George Brummell, Esq. By Captain Jesse”, *The Morning Chronicle*, May 6, 1844 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Stanley’s Life of Dr. Arnold”, *The Morning Chronicle*, June 3, 1844 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “A Brother of the Press on the History of a Literary Man, Laman Blanchard, and the Chances of the Literary Profession” (review of Laman Blanchard: *Sketches from Life. With a Memoir of the Author by Sir Bulwer Lytton*), *Fraser’s Magazine*, March 1846 (reprinted in *Works*).
- “Life and Correspondence of David Hume” (By J. H. Burton), *The Morning Chronicle*, March 23, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “The Novitiate; or, A Year among the English Jesuits. By Andrew Steinmetz”.

<sup>38</sup> Op. cit., p. 245.

<sup>39</sup> See *The British and Foreign Review*, October 1839, pp. 590, 594, 597.

*The Morning Chronicle*, April 11, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).  
"Life at the Water Cure" (By E. J. Lane), *The Morning Chronicle*, September 1, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).  
"The Life of Sterling by Thomas Carlyle", *The Times*, November 1, 1851 (reprinted in the *Centenary Biographical Edition*, vol. XXV).

As far as the biographical works are concerned, Thackeray's primary demand is again that they should provide truthful information about the subject of the biographical enquiry and that their account should be interesting and well written. He is fully satisfied only with a very few of the books enumerated above, but especially with those which deal with the lives of some outstanding or at least interesting personages of the 18th century (Hume, Brummell). As we have partly seen when considering his review of Madame D'Arblay's *Diary and Letters*, when Thackeray reviews books of this kind, his lively historical imagination awakes, historical persons long dead appear as living people before his inner eye (if, indeed, they are vividly and convincingly portrayed by their biographers) and he makes them "walk the world again". He makes full use of this opportunity in the reviews of the works concerned with Hume and Brummell and enters upon reflections of his own about the society in which these personages lived. Thus in his review of Jesse's biography of Brummell he describes the fashionable society of the late 18th century, bringing "the disreputable ghosts" of that time, the aristocratic dandies and their imitators, "up from 'limbo'"<sup>1</sup> and making them appear as real and convincing personages before the reader. His review of Jesse's book has yet an additional interest. Brummell's course of life makes Thackeray consider the social position of this hero of fashion, who was only the grandson of a footman,<sup>2</sup> but surpassed even his king, George IV, by his much finer taste, elegance, and "neat impudence and presence of mind." In Thackeray's opinion the book "has a moral with it — the moral of 'the Rake's Progress'": the life of this great discoverer of starched neckcloths was perfectly empty and useless, and yet, for this very reason, he flourished "in a society of which it may be said that it was worthy of him". Thackeray's sketch of Brummell's character, as he sums it up from the book reviewed and enlarges by his own conclusions, is pervaded by his profound contempt for the fashionable society of Brummell's time, which elevated this great dandy to honour, even if he was "heartless, and a swindler, a fool, a glutton, and a liar".<sup>3</sup> This contempt is of course typically Thackerayan, being familiar to us especially from *Esmond*. It is motivated by Thackeray's highly critical attitude to the fashionable society of his own time, which pervades all his writings dealing with that society, and is the unifying theme especially of *Vanity Fair*. Thackeray is of course aware that the book would not have provoked him to such conclusions, if it had not been well written, and he therefore addresses the following words of praise to Brummell's biographer:

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<sup>1</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 31.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* Brummell is said to have been grandson of William Brummell, a confidential servant of Mr. Charles Monson, brother of the first Lord Monson. According to Melville, however, the Beau's grandfather was a small tradesman who let lodgings (see op. cit., I, 268n.). The two possibilities are not, of course, mutually exclusive.

<sup>3</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 33, 31—32, 36.

"The story is narrated by a manly, jovial historian, quite alive to the moral of the tale, while he gives its details very agreeably, in the tone of a man to whom the usages of good society are familiar, and who, no doubt, has taken his share of the pleasures of the world which he describes."<sup>4</sup>

He adds, however, that "perhaps, for a moral purpose, it would have been as well that the narrative of this great man's life had been shortened, not enlivened with gaiety and anecdote, but told with the gravity and simplicity becoming such a theme".<sup>5</sup>

Burton's biography of Hume attracts Thackeray's attention for similar reasons as that of Jesse does. As he points out, it "contains much to stimulate literary curiosity", for most "of the great names of the last century appear here in intimate relation with the subject of the biography" and a "hundred old acquaintance from the dead world arise and play their parts", their appearance relieving "the graver portions of Mr. Burton's work with details that are exceedingly lively, pleasant, and curious".<sup>6</sup> Thackeray is, however, equally fascinated by the personality of David Hume himself, especially by the contradiction between his philosophical scepticism and his amiable and trustworthy personal character.<sup>7</sup> He considers the philosopher's life such "a model of prudence, amenity, and decorum" and his disposition so kindly playful and agreeable that he "finds himself almost as much attached to Hume at the end of the biography as Robertson and Blair were ninety years ago" and is convinced that every reader must feel the same. For this reason he praises the biographer for not excommunicating "the sceptic of the last century" and emphasizes that no one "but the most orthodox of haters and men" will "exclude this most amiable of worldly philosophers from the pale of fellowship". Hume was such a generous, simple and honest man that no reader of his biography can hate him, even if some may be sorry for him, as Thackeray believes, and regret "his deplorable undoubted mental incapacity"<sup>8</sup> to doubt about his doubts. Thackeray has no critical reservations as to the work of the biographer and estimates it as "an excellent and most amusing contribution to literary history, most carefully compiled by a competent scholar".<sup>9</sup>

Another personality which attracts Thackeray, though of an entirely different cast, is the subject of Stanley's biography, Dr. Arnold. Thackeray feels such a great respect and admiration for the famous headmaster of Rugby that he finds the columns of a newspaper ill-suited to the examination of the biography of such a personality, and intends only to "recommend the serious reader" to study the work, and himself to record "the feelings of admiration and affectionate reverence" awakened in him by the great personality of Dr. Arnold, "a character the most noble and the most wise — the most just, manly, benevolent, and thoughtful".<sup>10</sup> His review in fact fulfils this purpose, consisting only of an account of Arnold's life with several enthusiastic tributes inter-

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> As Ray points out in a footnote to this review, Thackeray "reproduced this combination of skepticism and good-nature in Mr. Binnie of *The Newcomes*" (*Contributions*, 114n.).

<sup>8</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 114, 115.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>10</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, p. 51.

polated and containing no critical comments whatever upon the strong or weak points of the biographer's approach. Thackeray is of course aware of what he is doing, as the following comment shows:

"Any criticism upon such a life can be but an encomium; nor perhaps can the reader understand the warmth with which such a book must be spoken of, until he himself has perused it."<sup>11</sup>

We can indeed understand his enthusiasm and the warmth of his tone, for Dr. Arnold undoubtedly was a remarkable personality, near to Thackeray in his Liberal political views, for which he was subjected to much obloquy, as his reviewer remarks with sorrow. But Thackeray is certainly led by his personal sympathies to overestimate the importance of Arnold, so much so indeed that he ceases to be a critic and changes into a eulogist, which is upon the whole a rare case in his criticism.

Thackeray's basic demands are in his opinion fulfilled, too, by the "Müller" part of Mrs. Austin's book, which consists of "three discourses, pronounced over the graves of his sovereign, Carl August, the Grand-duchess Amelia, and Goethe, the last and greatest of all". Thackeray emphasizes that the courtier Müller had good causes for praise and much skill in praising, and appreciates his discourses for being "written with a truth, a dignity and simplicity, which are perfectly suitable to the occasions on which they were pronounced, and the characters for whom they were composed". The second biographer of Goethe, on the other hand, whose work is attached to Mrs. Austin's work, J. D. Falk, entirely fails to fulfil Thackeray's requirements. The reviewer characterizes him as "a loquacious old gentleman", who was admitted to Goethe's society and, "having the example of Boswell before his eyes, diligently committed to writing every word which fell from the lips of the great genius". Thackeray regards it as very questionable that Goethe should expose to Falk his real thoughts and is rather inclined to believe that the poet's intention, in many of the recorded conversations, might have been to mystify his biographer. He measures Falk by the standard of Boswell and finds him wanting in every respect, reprehending him especially for intruding his own personality upon the readers, who certainly find it much less interesting than anything, be it ever so trifling, connected with the great poet. In spite of all his reservations, however, Thackeray expresses his regret that the world does not possess more of even such faulty records of the great poet's conversation:

"However, it is a pity that a dozen more of the hangers-on of Goethe should not publish books, and tell all they knew of this wonderful old man; their disquisitions, moral, sentimental, and philosophical, might be of little value, but one would willingly wade through these to obtain some glimpses of his private character and feelings."<sup>12</sup>

Only partial satisfaction is derived by Thackeray from Hugo's essay on the character and life of Mirabeau. As I have pointed out in greater detail in my study on his criticism of French literature, in this review Thackeray leveled his critical shafts especially at Hugo's style and at the political beliefs propagated in the book, but one of his rebukes concerns, too, the French writer's "graphic

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> For all the quotations see *The National Standard*, June 8, 1833, p. 356.



and fantastic description of Mirabeau the orator", upon which Thackeray comments in the following way:

"Here our readers have him, — a lion, an elephant, a god, and a gorgon! Walk up, ladies and gentlemen; walk up, and see this wonderful animal! Surely such a beast was never before stirred by the poetic pole of so intellectual a showman!" (*Works* I, 52).

This criticism of the bombastic way in which Hugo describes the subject of his biography is certainly justifiable, yet Thackeray has no comment to offer on the gravest defect of the reviewed work — its author's failure to deal properly with the ideas of the famous orator of the Revolution.

Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* is assessed by Thackeray as unsatisfactory in many respects.<sup>13</sup> The predominant part of the review is devoted to the writer's sharp criticism of Carlyle's attack upon contemporary society (to be dealt with later) and in consequence only very little space is left for the evaluation of the work itself. Thackeray finds words of admiration for Carlyle's remarkable personality, for "the exquisite manner of the narrative portion of this book" and, in spite of all his critical reservations, also for "the valour of the man who, single-handed, undertakes to thrash the whole world".<sup>14</sup> Thackeray also justifiably points out that thanks to Carlyle's genius the book will be eagerly read, even if it would not otherwise attract attention for a moment, since Sterling's personality and work do not interest the English public and do not justify the importance given to it by Carlyle's work and the preceding memoir of Archdeacon Hare.

If the subject of the biography is a literary man and the biographer also presents an assessment of his works, Thackeray never fails to pay attention to the critical judgments which have thus come under his notice. He finds himself in entire agreement with Mrs. Austin's evaluation of Goethe and so too at the same time with some conclusions of Carlyle upon which the authoress to a great extent relies, as she herself confesses. The whole work is assessed by Thackeray as "very delightful" and "highly creditable to the taste and diligence of the author".<sup>15</sup>

Barry Cornwall's *Memoir of Jonson*, attached to the new edition of Jonson's *Works*, however, altogether fails to come up to Thackeray's expectations. He welcomes the new edition, which is correctly printed, neatly bound and moderate in price, for the works of the great dramatist, "owing to the high price and the voluminous form in which they have hitherto appeared, have remained to this day almost unknown to the mass of the reading public". In his opinion, however, the general value of this edition is detracted from by the memoir prefixed to it: he regrets that this task was entrusted to "one who has shown himself utterly incapable of doing it justice", and announces his intention of proving in his review two points:

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<sup>13</sup> Thackeray's predominantly negative evaluation of Carlyle's book is in contradiction to his positive critical comment upon it, expressed in his letter to Lady Stanley (see *Letters* II, 808). But according to Gordon N. Ray, on the evidence of a letter of Thackeray's daughter Anne of 1871 (quoted in *Letters* II, 808n.), there is no doubt about Thackeray's authorship of this review.

<sup>14</sup> For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 93, *The Centenary Biographical Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, XXV, 373.

<sup>15</sup> *The National Standard*, June 8, 1833, p. 357.

"first, the writer's ignorance with regard to the facts of Ben Jonson's life, exemplified in several blunders of more or less consequence; secondly, his gross want of taste in the critical judgments he takes upon himself to pass on this great old classic's immortal works. His offences against general propriety of thought and elegance of style it would be but waste of time to number up, these being matters to which the unfortunate readers of this writer's compositions have long learned to despair of."

As far as the first point is concerned, Thackeray's rebukes are well substantiated, for he does find several blunders and inaccuracies in Cornwall's biography, the most serious being the incorrect account of Jonson's visit to Drummond and of its consequences. In discussing the second point Thackeray is most generous and just to Jonson, as we have seen when analysing his criticism of drama, but very severe to Cornwall, whom he accuses of being unfair to the great dramatist, as we have also seen in the preceding chapter, calling him a "tasteless railer" and taking exception to his erroneous evaluation of *Sejanus*, disparaging comments on *Every Man in His Humour* and the masques, as well as to his way of quoting indifferent passages "as if they were the gems of the plays, and in a manner to make it appear as if the writer had never read through one of them". As I have pointed out in the preceding chapter, the author of this review is reprimanded by Hunt for treating Barry Cornwall "with a very unjustifiable air of scorn and indignation, both as if he had no right to speak of Ben Jonson at all, and as if he possessed no merit as a writer himself". Hunt does not think it necessary to defend a writer whom "such critics as Lamb and Hazlitt have admired" and emphasizes that the author of the beautiful *Dramatic Sketches* and a great number of excellent songs "has surely every right in the world, dramatic and lyrical, to speak of Ben Jonson". He has some understanding, however, for the reviewer's attitude and at least in one respect acknowledges him to be correct:

"But the 'Times' critic has been led perhaps to this depreciation of the new editor, by thinking he has greatly undervalued a favourite author; while, on the other hand, we ourselves cannot but think that Mr. Cornwall, with all his admiration of him, has yet somewhat depreciated Ben Jonson in consequence of his over-valuation by others."<sup>16</sup>

Thackeray does not find his demands entirely fulfilled, either, by Bulwer's *Memoir* of Laman Blanchard, attached to the posthumous edition of that writer's book *Sketches from Life*. His assessment is not, however, wholly negative. He realizes that Bulwer's estimation of the literary work of his (and Thackeray's own) friend was motivated by the critic's regard for the late author, but he highly appreciates the praise bestowed by Bulwer on Blanchard as well-placed and the evaluation as just,<sup>17</sup> expressing his conviction that the *Memoir* will be read by all Blanchard's friends with pleasure, "and by the world as a not uncurious specimen of the biography of a literary man". He has, however, several well-founded objections to this work. In the first place, he reprimands Bulwer for writing his *Memoir* in a style "which is a little too funereally encomiastic",<sup>18</sup> with its not entirely justified laments over the deplorable fate of this writer, who died in poverty and the end of whose life was very melancholy,<sup>19</sup> as Thackeray

<sup>16</sup> For the quotations see *Men, Women and Books*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>17</sup> He has warm words of praise, too, for Bulwer's admirable and delicate generosity towards Blanchard, revealed in one of Blanchard's letters.

<sup>18</sup> For the quotations see *Works* VI, 555; see also *ibid.*, p. 549.

<sup>19</sup> Blanchard committed suicide in a delirium caused by his illness (paralysis).

admits, but who during his lifetime enjoyed considerable popularity and was himself, "generally speaking, very decently satisfied with his condition".<sup>20</sup> Thackeray also takes exception to Bulwer's statement that Blanchard would have written a great work, if he had not been obliged to fritter away his genius in fugitive publications:

"I think his education and habits, his quick, easy manner, his sparkling, hidden fun, constant tenderness and brilliant good humour were best employed as they were" (*Works* VI, 554).

His second rebuke concerns Bulwer's failure to make his biography "a little more particular and familiar, so as to give the public a more intimate acquaintance with one of the honestest and kindest of men who ever lived by pen",<sup>21</sup> and to present a more detailed account of Blanchard's early history:

"It would have been worth while to tell this tale more fully; not to envelop the chief personage in fine words, as statuariers do their sitters in Roman togas, and, making them assume the heroic-conventional look, take away from them that infinitely more interesting one which Nature gave them" (*Works* VI, 560).

As far as Blanchard's work itself is concerned, Thackeray evaluates it only in a few brief comments, praising his essays as "often wise, and always witty and kindly" and pointing out that they "give no idea of the powers of the author, or even of his natural manner, which, as I think, was a thousand times more agreeable". The best quality of Blanchard's art Thackeray considers to be his playful and genial wit and he praises him as a good-natured satirist who has "the wonderful knack of never hurting anybody" and who "makes fun so generously that it is a pleasure to be laughed at by him".<sup>22</sup> His criticism of Blanchard's work is essentially just and proportionate to the significance of this author. Thackeray was himself aware that his review of the work of a writer and man for whom he felt deep sympathy did not in general sound very laudatory, yet he was convinced that his assessment was not unjust, as follows from his letter to his mother of 1846:

"I have brought down here poor Blanchard's Life and Works to make a notice of: the misfortune is that the works are of a very small-beer and amiable kind: unsusceptible of much praise: hence the tone in which the Critic speaks of them must seem forced & cold" (*Letters* II, 230).

The rest of this review is devoted, as Thackeray himself formulated it, to "random speculations upon matters connected with the literary profession", "suggested by reading the works and the biography of a literary friend of ours, lately deceased".<sup>23</sup>

Only two of the reviews in our list concern pure literary critical works — those of Carlyle's literary lectures and of Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age*. The two *Times* reviews which Thackeray devoted to Carlyle's lectures (if indeed we can accept his authorship which Gulliver regards only as probable) are very brief, but reveal the reviewer's respect for the lecturer's "strong and ardent individual character" and his "generous, imaginative, and soul-fraught writings".

<sup>20</sup> *Works* VI, 557.

<sup>21</sup> *Works* VI, 555.

<sup>22</sup> For the quotations see *Works* VI, 564, 554, 565.

<sup>23</sup> *Works* VI, 548.

He welcomes the opportunity of being able to listen to the lectures of a man "who has evidently not inherited his views, or caught them by contagion, but has been urged by an insatiable thirst for truth, and has won it for himself, and his own inmost cravings, by hard contentions and the perilous labours of mental mining" and adds, summing up the impression which Carlyle's first lecture made upon him:

"When the result of such efforts has been not merely the attainment of a devout faith in reason and conscience, and of a large and pure humanity, but also of a comprehensive and guiding knowledge as to the whole progress and all the achievements of man's nature, the utterances of his affectionate wisdom in the midst of London, in point of wealth and combined labour the metropolis of the world's history, becomes at once curious to all, and to the better minds we will add precious, nay pathetic."<sup>24</sup>

In his first review Thackeray does not pay any attention to the content of Carlyle's first lecture, evaluating it merely as "a very remarkable exhibition of a description of mind not common in our age and country" and taking notice of the manner in which it was delivered — "often rough, broken, wavering, and sometimes almost weak and abortive; but full throughout of earnest purpose, abundant knowledge, and a half suppressed struggling fire of zeal and conviction". In the second review he assesses Carlyle's three last lectures and notices a marked improvement in the ease and force of the lecturer's manner and expression and his "freer and more serene command" of his subject. He positively evaluates "the great spectacle of the Middle Ages" which these lectures have presented "in bold forms and startling light" and especially Carlyle's thorough and delightfully intelligible description of Dante and Cervantes, concluding his assessment as follows:

"The few words which we have here set down can at best give no conception of the inimitable earnestness and humane glowing sincerity of the lecturer's discourse, which perpetually break out in touches of high eloquence and the deepest pathos, and would, in our estimate, amply excuse far more than his imperfections in the purely technical part of oratory."<sup>25</sup>

Thackeray's review of Horne's book *A New Spirit of the Age* is interesting especially because the reviewer measures this work by the high standard of Hazlitt's book of similar title, by which Horne was avowedly inspired, and because it shows Thackeray's great admiration for the Romantic critic, with which we are already familiar from the chapter on his conception of criticism. Even measured by this high standard, the book in Thackeray's opinion is not entirely devoid of merits: he praises the author for his easy candour, generosity, honesty, good humour, and especially for admiring "rightly, and not mean persons nor qualities". After awarding this praise, however, the reviewer "finds himself at a loss for further subjects of commendation, nay, may feel himself called upon to elevate his voice in tones akin to reproof". In his opinion it is not sufficient if the critic is honest and well-meaning — should he wish to earn the right of assuming the critical office, he must also have "something novel, or striking, or witty, or profound to make his works agreeable or useful to the world".<sup>26</sup> Horne's model Hazlitt possessed such qualifications in abundance:

<sup>24</sup> Gulliver, op. cit., p. 198; for the above quotations see *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> For this and the above quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 198, 199.

<sup>26</sup> For the quotations see *Works* VI, 417.

"In the old *Spirit of the Age* you cannot read a page that does not contain something startling, brilliant — some strange paradox, or some bright dazzling truth. Be the opinion right or wrong, the reader's mind is always set a-thinking — amazed, if not by the novelty or justness of the thoughts, by their novelty and daring. There are no such rays started from the lantern of Horne. There are words — such a cornucopia of them as the world has few examples of; but the thoughts are scarce in the midst of this plentifulness, the opinions for the most part perfectly irreproachable, and the ennui caused by their utterance profound" (*Works* VI, 418—419).

Using quotations of two most elaborate (though not the best) passages from Horne's work, concerned with the assessment of Dickens and Tennyson, Thackeray then demonstrates the vagueness of Horne's interpretation and the "persevering flatulence of words" in which this critic wraps his "little stale truths". In Thackeray's opinion Horne, in contradistinction to Hazlitt, lacks yet another important qualification indispensable for a good critic — the capacity for getting angry and attacking sharply, if he is dealing with a real trespasser:

"Hazlitt used sometimes to be angry; Horne never is. Twice in the course of his lectures he lays 'an iron hand', as he calls it (perhaps leaden would have been the better epithet; but Mr. Horne is, as we have said, a judge of his own metal), upon unlucky offenders; but it is in the discharge of his moral duties, and his pleasure, clearly, is to preach rather than to punish" (*Works* VI, 420).

One of the offenders upon whom Horne lays "an iron hand" is Ainsworth, but to the severe and certainly just judgment delivered in this case Thackeray does not refer, though he must have found himself in agreement with it. He has much to say, however, on the second unlucky trespasser, to whom he refers only as to "an amusing poet", but who is in fact Richard Harris Barham, the author of *The Ingoldsby Legends*. Horne attacks this poet with uncommon ruthlessness, sharply condemning his harmless collection of mock-ballads as immoral and revolting, exciting vicious and injurious emotions which may be counted "among the very worst kind of influences that could be exercised upon a rising generation".<sup>27</sup> Thackeray sharply criticizes this denunciation of Ingoldsby's book (which Saintsbury also condemns as hopelessly inept, though Hollingsworth finds himself in agreement with it<sup>28</sup>) in the following comment, in the last words of which he echoes the concluding remark of Horne's evaluation, addressed to Barham:<sup>29</sup>

"So as he deals with others ought he to be done by; and as in these volumes he has not hesitated to lay hold of an amusing poet, and worry his harmless phantasies as if they were the gravest and deepest crimes; and as he has taken to himself the title formerly adopted by the most brilliant of critics, and as he has no business to be left in possession of that dignity of spirit of the age; and as he mistakes words for meanings, and can see no further into a millstone than other folk, so let the critic, imitating his words to the unlucky wag in question, lay a friendly hand on his shoulder and say, yawning, 'Friend, a great deal too much of this'" (*Works* VI, 426).

As G. N. Ray points out, "Horne many years later entered a defense against Thackeray's 'critique', which had obviously been written, so he contended,

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> See *A Consideration of Thackeray*, pp. 102—103, Hollingsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>29</sup> "Wherefore an iron hand is now laid upon the shoulder of Thomas Ingoldsby, and a voice murmurs in his ear, 'Brother! — no more of this!'" (*op. cit.*, p. 106).

'in a half-cynical, half-rollicking, Royster-Doyster mood' ".<sup>30</sup> In spite of this and other protests of Horne,<sup>31</sup> however, in spite of the fact that he did possess talent which even Thackeray did not entirely deny him and which was recognized by the Brownings, Lewes, Carlyle and even by the Chartist critics,<sup>32</sup> and in spite of the fact that Horne undertook, as Hollingsworth has pointed out, to supply the deficiency of "disinterested criticism" devoting himself "to literature as craft and art" and that his book "was notable in its attempt to judge by high standards and to avoid personal bias",<sup>33</sup> Thackeray's criticism is essentially just. Despite his talent, zeal and energy Horne failed to seize the spirit of his age, for, as even Hollingsworth admits, "he lacked originality and scope of mind", as well as "the intellectual qualities necessary in an instructor of the writers".<sup>34</sup> According to Saintsbury, Thackeray remarkably well grasped the basic defects of the book, especially its author's oracular platitudes, the ineptitude of his praise and blame and the tediousness of his interpretation which can bore the reader "to extinction". At the same time, however, Saintsbury rightly points out that Horne's book "does not entirely deserve the severe contrast which Thackeray drew between it and its original as given by Hazlitt" and that the critic "takes the great axe to it" rather disproportionately — the review in Saintsbury's opinion "would be no great loss but for the Hazlitt passage, which is a gem":

"Too many men are ungenerous to their contemporaries; but want of generosity to immediate predecessors is unfortunately rather the rule than the exception. In both respects Thackeray is blameless."<sup>35</sup>

In evaluating the two autobiographical works in our list, Lane's *Life at the Water Cure* and Steinmetz's *A Year among the Jesuits*, Thackeray stands out rather as a dispenser of praise than of blame. The first book is praised by him for presenting a vivid portrait of the author and "a complete picture of life at the water-cure at Malvern". The author's good-natured character, "prattling simplicity" and benevolent mind reconcile Thackeray even to the main demerit of the book, which is the author's perseverance in describing in laborious minuteness of detail all the cures he underwent and all the trivial circumstances of his life at the spa. Yet even his trivialities and digressions are found acceptable by the reviewer, for they make the reader acquainted "with a very honest and kindly Christian".<sup>36</sup>

The subject of Steinmetz's book is the author's personal experiences of a year's stay in a Jesuit seminary. Thackeray is aware that, for decency's sake, Steinmetz should have held his tongue and not have criticized the Jesuits who

<sup>30</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Richard Hengist Horne*, ed. S. R. Townshend Mayer, 2 vols., London, 1877, II, 274-279; quoted in *Contributions*, xvi note.

<sup>31</sup> For information about these see Walter Jerrold's introduction to Horne's book, pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>32</sup> For the opinion of Miss Barrett (who was one of Horne's assistants in this book and author of some chapters) see *ibid.*, pp. xiv-xv; for the views of Lewes and Carlyle see *ibid.*, p. x; for the opinion of the Chartist critics see *The Labourer*, 1847 (quoted in *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*, p. 312).

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>35</sup> For the quotations see *A History of Criticism*, III, 514n. and *A Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 175, 174, 178.

housed him and fed him for a whole year, but he points out that if the author had not "peached", "the public would have lost a very singular and useful book":

"He seems to be a perfectly honest and credible informer, and his testimony may serve to enlighten many a young devotional aspirant, who is meditating 'submission' to Rome and the chain and scourge system."

The reviewer also appreciates that the author's attitude is impartial, that there "is nothing in the least resembling invective in the volume, nor does it contain any of those charges of monstrous craft and cruelty with which one is accustomed to meet among enemies of the order". The book contains even some positive portraits of the Jesuits, though the general picture it presents is "inexpressibly sad and disheartening".<sup>37</sup>

Steinmetz's reminiscences make Thackeray develop his own reflections upon the "miserable moral and bodily discipline" prevailing in Jesuit seminaries and express his extreme distaste for the "infernal ingenuity" of the training at that institution which eradicates everything human and kindly in the novitiates and subjects them to unheard of spectacles of humility. In the other reviews discussed in this sub-chapter Thackeray's favourite subjects, which always make him vent his own opinions, can be discerned as well. Besides his already quoted reflections upon 18th-century English society, we find, in his review of Stanley's book, a typically Thackerayan negative comment on Cardinal Newman and his followers, and a longer reflection upon the negative aspects of the English system of education, based upon his own personal experiences. Worthy of special remark in this connection is his review of Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, for it reflects a later phase of Thackeray's relationship to the great historian and philosopher. As we have seen earlier, Thackeray's attitude to Carlyle was never entirely uncritical and his indebtedness to him never absolute, yet in the 1830s and 1840s he was undoubtedly deeply impressed by the writer's personality, his energetic fight against falseness and hypocrisy in the life of English society, his sharp attacks on social injustice and his endeavour to awaken the sense of social duty in the indifferent ruling classes by revealing to them the terrible condition of the working class. At the beginning of the 1850s, however, his relationship to Carlyle begins to change, he comments upon the philosopher as no longer being "the Prophet he used to be considered"<sup>38</sup> and openly dissociates himself from Carlyle's later prophecies, condemning their eccentricity and the exaggerated rage in which they were pronounced (in not very different words from those of Marx and Engels, but in an entirely different spirit), and criticizing the vagueness of the positive programme Carlyle proposed. As early as the beginning of 1848 he writes to FitzGerald about Carlyle being "immensely grand and savage", and proceeds:

"I declare it seems like insanity almost his contempt for all mankind, and the way in which he shirks from the argument when called upon to précis his own remedies for the state of things" (*Letters* II, 366).

His later standpoint is, however, most clearly expressed in his review of the *Life of Sterling*, in which he characterizes Carlyle's angry assaults on "the

<sup>37</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>38</sup> *Letters* I, cviii.

absolute rottenness of all existing things” and on corruption in all the professions of the world, notably in the clerical, as “violent and all but unintelligible gibberish”. His anger is especially aroused by Carlyle’s failure to present any constructive suggestions as to the improvement of the situation, and he is even convinced that the philosopher’s wild outbursts hinder “practical and serviceable labour” done by professional men and clergymen for the world. Thackeray’s review at the same time reflects the changes which were taking place in his own consciousness since 1848: he sharply criticizes Carlyle for his social criticism and vehemently defends English society, for his own attitude to it has by this time grown much mellowed than it had previously been, though it has not yet become uncritical, as is proved especially by his fiction:

“But we altogether deny the wild and incoherent, yet very grave accusations which Mr. Carlyle brings against Society — accusations which he finds much easier to make than to justify. The age in which we live is *not* the very worst since the fall of man.”<sup>39</sup>

In one respect, of course, Thackeray’s anger is quite justifiable, for the society of the early 1850s, with all its deep contradictions, was certainly not worse than the Middle Ages, the times, as Thackeray has it, towards which Carlyle’s “sickly fancy yearns, when men suffered in the body for freedom of thought, and when independence of soul brought with it social degradation”. Characteristic of Thackeray’s attitude is also his sharp protest against Carlyle’s attacks on Christian religion and the clergy, which he regards as “the very worst feature of the whole book”. He reprehends the author for mocking at every faith except his own, which he renders, however, “wholly unintelligible even to his disciples”.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Political Works

The reviews of purely political works represent only a very small group in Thackeray’s reviews of non-fiction books:

“Speeches of Henry, Lord Brougham, &c.”, *The British and Foreign Review*, April 1839 (reprinted in *Stray Papers*).

“Napoleon and His System. On Prince Louis Napoleon’s Work” (*Idées Napoléoniennes*), *The Paris Sketch Book*, 1840 (reprinted in *Works*).

“Ireland and its Rulers, since 1829” (By D. Owen Madden), *The Morning Chronicle*, March 20, 1844 (reprinted in *Contributions*).

“L’Inde Anglaise en 1843 (British India in 1843). Par Le Comte Edouard de Warren”, *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, April 1844 (not reprinted).

From the authors of political books Thackeray in the first place demands truth, but what sort of truth this should be depends on purely subjective criteria which do not always coincide with what is, from the historical perspective, objective truth — on his own political beliefs, which were at this period of his life quite progressive but at the same time marked by deep contradictions.

<sup>39</sup> *The Centenary Biographical Edition*, XXV, 376; for the preceding quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 374, 375.

<sup>40</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 377, 381, 382.



Thus in two of his reviews which do not immediately concern England (those of the works of Louis Napoleon and Madden) and in one which does (that dealing with Brougham's work) he proclaims views which are in my opinion much more acceptable from the present-day point of view than those he propagates in his review of de Warren's work, concerned with the British rule in India.

In the review of the *Speeches of Lord Brougham*, Thackeray takes particular exception to some defects in this politician's personal character, as they are reflected in his work — his egotism, vanity, lack of principle in his political conviction and especially the untruthfulness of some facts which he presents. "All is not true that he tells you about the world and himself", he insists and expresses his conviction that very few people "would be disposed to take his ideas for their own, and to believe implicitly in his story". The shafts of Thackeray's criticism are especially aimed at Brougham's praise of Queen Caroline as an ornament of polished society and he points out that the charges against her were entirely justified (though her accuser, George IV, was, as he adds, probably a relentless persecutor and a heartless profligate himself). He also sharply criticizes some other statements pronounced by Brougham, using even such strong words as "monstrous impudence" and "astonishing falsehood", and characterizing Brougham as a bad lawyer and a bad judge. His critical attacks are not, however, motivated by anger but by sorrow, for he has quite a high opinion of this politician's talent and merits and is convinced that Brougham, whom he overestimates as one of the greatest men of the country, could have achieved moral eminence and gained the admiration of everybody, if he had not condescended to stoop to the level of the mean political coteries by which he was surrounded. As Thackeray sees it, this politician is a victim of the political machinery of his time and of the party-manoeuvres motivated by envy and "blind hatred of more fortunate men" on the part of the most active participants, and by "stupid credulity and attachment"<sup>1</sup> on the part of the greater number of party-members:

"We attack in him what a demoralising and debasing system has created; not the strong heart and head of the individual man, but the tricks, the intrigues, the charlatanerie of the political adventurer."<sup>2</sup>

Just because Thackeray recognizes some of this politician's merits, notably his "noble" genius and the original purity and goodness of his views, and realizes that "he is no more of a rogue . . . than other men of other parties", he sets him up as a warning example to other aspirants to a political career, who may learn from his *Speeches* (which he assesses as brilliant for wit and interest, though containing some errors) what to avoid. In this review Thackeray shows himself to be a sharply critical observer of the practices of the political parties ruling in his country, and an uncommitted observer, who expresses his thankfulness for immunity from the corrupting influence of their dirty political game:

"The man who cares not for politics may be thankful that his inclinations or his sense of duty have kept him from such a science, where, to attain eminence, so many sacrifice

<sup>1</sup> For the quotations see *Stray Papers*, pp. 116, 115, 148, 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

conscience, happiness, ease, peace of mind; where genius, instead of being free as she should be, must become a poor truckling slave of party or of political expediency; and honesty must run into temptations, or very likely perish altogether."<sup>3</sup>

His criticism of the book itself is in my opinion upon the whole just, though he tends to overestimate the brilliance of the politician's wit. Brougham was certainly not a good writer (however good an orator he may have been) and his *Speeches*, essays and articles have almost no literary value.<sup>4</sup>

Thackeray's article "Napoleon and His System" is not a regular review of Louis Napoleon's book *Idées Napoléoniennes*, but a dissertation on the theme provided by this work regarding the political programme propagated by the nephew of the great Emperor, on the political situation in France and on the hatred of the French for the English, which was one of the inseparable parts of the new imperial programme of the Prince. I shall therefore deal with this article only very briefly, concentrating upon its most interesting points. The first is Thackeray's assessment of the Prince's programme, which, in my opinion justifiably, he sharply condemns as "imperial quackery" based on the doctrines and ideas of Louis Napoleon's great uncle, but lacking such strong arguments in its favour as were the cannon-balls and fixed bayonets which Napoleon used to aid his opinions. This earlier attitude of Thackeray to Louis Napoleon (along with that he reveals in his satirical pamphlet *The History of the Next French Revolution, Punch*, 1844) is in its substance politically progressive and considerably differs from his later more acceptant and hence not so progressive views of this statesman's policy, dating from the time when Louis Napoleon was elected President (but even these are not wholly reactionary from my point of view and become increasingly contradictory after Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* of December 2, 1851).

The second point of interest lies in Thackeray's opinions of Napoleon, which he juxtaposes here to the eulogies of the Emperor published by his nephew, opinions which are, from my point of view, acceptable. He sharply criticizes the despotism with which Napoleon relentlessly paved his road to power and does not see in him an "executor" of the Revolution, but its "executioner", the betrayer of its heritage:

"In Vendémiaire, the military Tartuffe, he threw aside the Revolution's natural heirs, and made her, as it were, *alter her will*; on the 18th of Brumaire he strangled her, and on the 19th seized on her property, and kept it until force deprived him of it" (*Works* II, 128).

Thackeray entirely disposes of the Napoleonic legend and sees Napoleon's guilt in gaining power by violence and annulling the democratic achievements of the Revolution by establishing a military dictatorship. He recognizes, however, Napoleon's merits as administrator, legislator, constructor of public works and skilful financier:

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163; for the preceding quotations see *ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Thackeray attacked Brougham even more sharply in *Punch* in "Leaves from the Lives of the Lords of Literature", where he presented a brief humorous biography of this politician and a description of his political career, ironically inveighing against the many-sidedness of his literary and scientific interests (see Spielmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-39).

"Whether the Emperor composed his famous code, or borrowed it, is of little importance; but he established it, and made the law equal for every man in France, except one. His vast public works, and vaster wars, were carried on without new loans, or exorbitant taxes; it was only the blood and liberty of the people that were taxed, and we shall want a better advocate than Prince Louis to show us that these were not most unnecessarily and lavishly thrown away" (*Works* II, 138).

As far as the Prince's book itself is concerned, Thackeray evaluates it as presenting not very startling facts and as not being particularly brilliant in style, containing many "blundering metaphors, blundering arguments, and blundering assertions", "big phrases" and "grand round figures of speech".<sup>5</sup>

Madden's book *Ireland and its Rulers, since 1829* (the first two of its three parts) is assessed by Thackeray as "a somewhat irregular history of Irish politics, from the passing of the Catholic Relief Bill to the time of the Mulgrave government, interspersed with original observations and sketches of prominent public men". He finds in the book many commendable but at the same time not a few objectionable traits, but points out that "good or bad, it is certain to be pretty widely read, for it is very able, very personal, and very bitter". What he especially approves of is Madden's vivid and spirited narrative of the political struggles in Ireland, which in Thackeray's opinion presents "curious and valuable illustrations of Irish political life", and the brilliant portraits of individual politicians, which reveal the author's keen powers of observation and minute knowledge of the period he deals with and which in Thackeray's opinion represent the best part of the book. Thackeray bestows his praise especially upon Madden's portrait of Chief Baron Woulfe, which is in his opinion "equally true and beautiful", and rather surprisingly takes exception to the author's "sarcastic and very unjust depreciation of Mr. Sheil", namely of that very Irish politician whom he himself attacked many years ago in a satirical poem ("Irish Melody"). Thackeray characterizes Madden's approach to his materials as being marked "by freedom and force, both of thought and of style", as well as by a not very common mixture "of earnest feeling with philosophical reflectiveness", and pays some attention, too, to the author's own political views, assessing them as opinions "rather of an isolated thinker than of an active partizan" in the struggle between the Protestants and the Catholics in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> In the conclusion he sums up the main positive and negative aspects of the book:

"We have no space for further reference to various topics contained in *Ireland and its Rulers*, but we may say generally that we remember no recent work on Irish politics written with half so much ability. The wilfulness with which the author launches his sarcasms on all sides, and the dogmatic style in which he is apt to announce his decisions, are sometimes painful, and often provoking enough; but they do not prevent us from recognising a pervading earnestness and honesty of purpose, or from admiring the knowledge of life, penetration, and eloquence which the work displays."<sup>7</sup>

Thackeray's indignation is thoroughly aroused, however, by Count de Warren's book *L'Inde Anglaise* and in this case he does not in my opinion prove himself to be such an enlightened politician as he did in the reviews of the above-discussed works. The book is entirely rejected by him as an "offspring of

<sup>5</sup> For the quotations see *Works* II, 134.

<sup>6</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 9, 11, 13, 9, 9-10, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

ignorance, vanity, and vengeance", inconsistent in its aims and the political programme it propagates, a wild "rhapsody . . . abounding everywhere with the grossest caricature, with wilful perversions of fact, with evidences of unpardonable ignorance", the most remarkable of these perversions being Warren's "audacious misrepresentations of the East India Company's government, and his impudent libel on the native Indian army". Thackeray, whose father, stepfather and several other relatives both on his father's and mother's side had served in the East India Company, obviously cannot bear any slurs cast upon this institution, even if they are well-founded (as several of M. de Warren's certainly are, as far as I can judge from Thackeray's comments and the extracts he quotes from the book which I unfortunately could not lay hands on), or upon the British rule in India in general. Thackeray is not entirely uncritical, for he is, as he himself says, "far from contending that the Company's policy has invariably been just and upright" and even admits that there have been errors and faults. The body of his review, however, which is devoted to the refutation of Count de Warren's accusations, is in its substance an almost uncritical eulogy of the beneficial influences of the British "paternal" government on the society, economy and commerce of India and a spirited defence of the East India Company as a "humane, considerate, and equitable" institution.<sup>8</sup> In one point of his argument, however, Thackeray's indignation is more justified, and that is when he refutes Warren's libel upon the native Indian army. As he demonstrates by analysing the author's views and quoting from the book, Warren's purpose was to encourage the Russians to invade India (though the author himself denies this) by representing the native Indian soldiers as *canaille* wholly destitute of courage and thus diminishing "the difficulties and dangers they [i.e. the Russians — LP] will have to encounter in the attempt to subjugate", and even by suggesting to them how they should acquire the help of the natives on the basis of false promises. The latter suggestions are reasonably condemned by Thackeray as monstrous:

"Only think of seducing one hundred and fifty-eight millions of men into rebellion against their lawful rulers by the distribution of incendiary proclamations, promising them deliverance and independence, but resolving all the while to fix upon their necks a yoke a thousand times more galling than that from which we originally emancipated them! Yet this is the ethical achievement seriously recommended to the Emperor Nicholas by M. de Warren."<sup>9</sup>

In Thackeray's opinion the author adheres to truth only in one point "which, coming under the observation of all mankind, he could not successfully misrepresent" — when he gives praise to "the splendid equipment, matchless discipline and indomitable valour of the English army".<sup>10</sup> Thackeray uses this opportunity to sing eulogies of the British soldiers in India and elsewhere, which indeed sound strange from the mouth of the author of the "Military Snobs", "The Chronicle of the Drum", *Barry Lyndon* and many other works in which he proved himself to be an inveterate anti-militarist and sharp critic of the abuses prevalent in the British army (though, to be sure, he also created

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<sup>8</sup> For the quotations see *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, April 1844, pp. 215, 217, 215, 217.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229; for the preceding quotation see *ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>10</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 215—216.

characters who are protagonists of his positive ideals in this sphere — Major Dobbin, Esmond and the perfect Anglo-Indian officer, Colonel Newcome).

The review bears traces, too, of Thackeray's prejudices against the French, which are in this case stronger than in his review of Louis Napoleon's work. He attributes all the critical attacks of the French on the British rule in India to pure envy, consciousness of inferiority and national prejudice, suspects the French politicians of being bribed by Russian gold and accuses French foreign and colonial policy of being motivated by mere cupidity and "fierce desire of self-aggrandisement". It is true that he does not regard M. de Warren's voice as the voice of France, accusing this writer of going too far in his representation of the French people as "a horde of base mercenaries, from whose minds every trace of magnanimity, justice, equity, and every other virtue, has been utterly erased" and France as being "swayed entirely by selfishness", and emphasizing that "although the French have never been remarkable for their disinterestedness, they are still not wholly unsusceptible of generous feelings, and may occasionally, therefore, suffer themselves to be swayed by them". On the other hand, however, he accuses the reading public in France of credulity and "aptitude to be duped" by every absurd belief and contemptible rhodomontade, "because of the national inaptitude to reason, and proneness to be carried away by whatever flatters its prejudices or its vanity, or ministers to its unappeasable hatred of Great Britain".<sup>11</sup> His final verdict is summed up in the concluding passage of the review:

"We blush for our demi-countryman [de Warren was Irish by origin — LP]. Let him hasten to change his name, that when he writes again, his page may have no trace upon it to show that he has drawn one drop of his blood from Ireland. The Irish will repudiate him to a man; for if Hindūstan be invaded, he may be sure that there will be thousands of Irishmen there, and that they will fight as valiantly as the best among their neighbours, in defence of that great and glorious empire which they have so mainly aided in building up."<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Travel-Books

As I have pointed out in the first chapter, Thackeray was an enthusiastic traveller and visited several countries in Europe and Asia, as well as the United States of America. To this I should add here that he also published several travel-books or sketch books describing his travel experiences<sup>1</sup> and wrote some travel notes which he did not publish in book form, but in some of the magazines to which he contributed, or which were not reprinted until after his death.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore not surprising that he liked to read travel-books (notably those written by foreigners visiting England, as he himself confessed<sup>3</sup>) and that these represent, too, the greatest part of his reviews of non-fiction

<sup>11</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 214, 217, 218, 217.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>1</sup> *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840), *The Irish Sketch Book* (1842), *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846).

<sup>2</sup> Several items in *The Fat Contributor Papers*, (*Punch*, 1844—1847), "Little Travels and Roadside Sketches", (*Fraser's Magazine*, 1844—1845), "A Roundabout Journey: Notes of a Week's Holiday" (*The Cornhill Magazine*, November 1860), "Cockney Travels" (*The Cornhill Magazine*, July 1911), "Notes of a Tour in the Low Countries during August 1843" (*Letters II*, 831—839).

<sup>3</sup> See *Works VIII*, 372.

books, as the following list confirms. Not all the books assessed in these reviews are pure travel-books, for some of them (especially those by Hugo, Dumas and Ledru-Rollin) contain much political matter, but as they are not entirely political works of the type discussed in the preceding sub-chapter, I have decided to consider them in this place. My list should have also contained Thackeray's satirical review of Lady Londonderry's travel-diary, "Lady L.'s Journal of a Visit to Foreign Courts", but as I have discussed it in the chapter on his criticism of the Silver-Fork School, I shall not include it here.

- "City of the Czar. By Thomas Raikes", *The Times*, August 30 and September 7, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- "Lord Lindsay's Travels in Egypt and The Holy Land", *The Times*, September 25, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- "Elliott's Travels in Austria, Russia, and Turkey", *The Times*, October 2 and 4, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- "How to Observe — By Harriet Martineau", *The Times*, October 9, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver).
- "Fraser's Winter Journey to Persia" (by James Baillie Fraser), *The Times*, November 16, 1838 (reprinted in *Critical Papers* and the *Centenary Biographical Edition*, vol. XXV).
- "Winter Studies and Summer Sketches in Canada" (By Anna Brownell Jameson), *The Times*, January 1839?<sup>4</sup> (not reprinted).
- "Manners and Society in St. Petersburg", *The British and Foreign Review*, January 1839 (a summary review of 1) *The City of the Czar*. By Thomas Raikes, 2) *Recollections of a Tour in the North of Europe in 1836—1837*. By the Marquis of Londonderry, 3) *Erinnerung's Skizzen aus Russland, der Turkei, und Griechenland*. By Legationsrath Tietz, 4) *Sketches of Petersburg*. By a Prussian Counsellor of Legation; not reprinted)<sup>5</sup>.
- "Turnbull's Austria", *The Times*, March 16, 1840 (not reprinted).
- "The Rhine. By Victor Hugo", *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, April 1842 (reprinted in *Works*).
- "The German in England", *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1842 (a review of *Mittheilungen aus dem Reisetagebuche eines Deutschen Naturforschers. England*; reprinted in *Works*).
- "Dumas on the Rhine", *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, October 1842 (a review of *Excursions sur les Bords du Rhin*, by Alexandre Dumas-père; reprinted in *Works*).

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<sup>4</sup> On the basis of Thackeray's letter of uncertain date (referred to in note 1 to Chapter VI) G. N. Ray has suggested that the "attack on Mrs. Jameson" mentioned by Thackeray may have concerned the review of this book. I have been unable, however, to find this review and cannot therefore consider it here. I have not even succeeded in getting hold of the work itself, but according to Horne (see op. cit., pp. 295—296) it is not a pure travel-book, for it contains Mrs. Jameson's own reflections on the emancipation of woman. This is perhaps the only place where I can say a few words about Harriet Martineau's work which I found very difficult to deal with in the text, for it too is impure in *genre*. As Thackeray also points out (if, indeed, he is the author of the review), it is too heavily cumbered with "the Martineauian social science" (Gulliver, p. cit., p. 225) and mainly for this reason it is judged by him rather stringently.

<sup>5</sup> This and the following review were discovered and attributed to Thackeray by Lela Winegarner.

- “Grant in Paris”, *Fraser’s Magazine*, December 1843 (a review of *Paris and its People*, by James Grant; reprinted in *Works*).
- “New Accounts of Paris”, *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, January 1844 (a summary review of 1) *Lettres Parisiennes*, par Madame Delphine Corinne de Girardin [Vicomte de Launay], 2) *Paris im Frühjahr, 1843*, von L. Rellstab, 3) *Paris and its People*, by James Grant; reprinted in *Works*).
- “Ireland. By J. Venedey”, *The Morning Chronicle*, March 16, 1844 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “The Three Kingdoms. By the Vicomte d’Arlincourt”, *The Morning Chronicle*, April 4, 1844 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Angleterre. By Alfred Michiels”, *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1844 (reprinted in *Works*).
- “Egypt under Mehemet Ali. By Prince Puckler Muskau”, *The Morning Chronicle*, March 27, 1845 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Carus’s Travels in England”, *The Morning Chronicle*, March 16, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Travels in the Punjab. By Mohan Lal, Esq.”, *The Morning Chronicle*, April 6, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “On an Interesting French Exile”, *Punch*, June 15, 1850 (a critical notice of Ledru-Rollin’s work *De la décadence de l’Angleterre*; reprinted in *Works*).

As in his evaluation of other non-fiction books, so too in assessing travel-books Thackeray is appreciative if their authors are scholars or gentlemen, preferably both. From this point of view he praises Turnbull as “a gentleman of considerable information and experience, a good scholar, a lover of many sciences, and an old traveller who has seen much of the best society”. Also Lord Londonderry is in his opinion a “generous, manly, kind-hearted, and honest” gentleman, “where his politics will allow him to be so” (though he is not a scholar, Madame Girardin an accomplished author whose unintentional malice is “gentlemanlike and not too ill-natured”, and Raikes a keen, good-humoured, pleasant and gentleman-like observer, “a tory in politics, but a tory of a very mild and polite caste”. Lindsay’s book is appreciated by Thackeray as revealing the author’s extensive reading, enthusiasm for his theme, a fine feeling for art and natural beauty and especially his intimate acquaintance with the Bible. Some authors are praised by Thackeray as very pleasant and interesting *compagnons de voyage* — the anonymous German for his honesty, lack of affectation, kind heart and especially his love of England, Fraser for presenting “a most amusing and lively record of his tour” and for being “active, gay, determined, skilful both with the pen and the pencil”, Hugo for his remarkable personality which is “a strange mixture of good and bad, and quite worth the examining”.<sup>6</sup>

From all the authors of travel-books Thackeray requires intimate knowledge of the described countries and a faithful depiction of the given society and its individual members. Thus he praises Raikes’s unpretending manner and his real and lifelike descriptions of life in Russia, which give us perhaps “clearer

<sup>6</sup> For the quotations see *The Times*, March 16, 1840, p. 3; *The British and Foreign Review*, January 1839, p. 56; *Works* V, 507; *The British and Foreign Review*, January 1839, p. 34; *Critical Papers*, p. 167; *Works* V, 375.

notions of men and manners, than we could gain from studying the orthodox quartos of historians". He finds a great deal to interest and instruct him, too, in Turnbull's book, prepared "with much care and impartiality", and highly evaluates Fraser's vivid and picturesque account of the life of the Persian people, "this merry nation of boasters and swindlers", as he writes, "whose qualities, like Falstaff's, are always amusing, though they may not perhaps be very high", "of whom, for a wonder, the English have very little knowledge, and whom, perhaps, in no very distant day, it may be important to know". As we have seen in the chapter concerned with his criticism of the Silver-Fork School, Thackeray highly appreciates the authentic, witty and amusing picture of French fashionable society presented by Madame de Girardin, which confirmed the generalisations he himself drew from his own observation of the same milieu in his own country. Elliott's book seems to him to be "the most uncomfortable book of travels" that he recollects ever having read, for it presents very dismal accounts of the Russian dominions, but he appreciates that the author's vivid descriptions completely succeed "in conveying to the reader some of the dismal impressions" which the author himself experienced.<sup>7</sup>

As partly follows from the above, the information provided by travel-books should be in Thackeray's opinion not only truthful, but also interesting and amusing. Besides Madame de Girardin he therefore praises Fraser's "strange and lively pictures of manners and men" which "follow each other in amusing succession", Prince Pückler-Muskau's entertaining sketches, the "monkey mischievousness" of which outweighs in his opinion even some weak points of the book, and Raikes's "curious and lively, though not very pleasing picture" of Russian society, while he finds much to interest or amuse him in the books of Turnbull, Lindsay, Elliott and Venedey. Lord Londonderry, on the other hand, writes quite seriously, but amuses Thackeray by the "admirable *naïveté*" with which his unintentional jokes are delivered, "which renders [them] only the more delightful, and adds a more exquisite polish to the keen edge of satire".<sup>8</sup>

"One may laugh at him sometimes, and differ from him always; but one can never manage to be angry with this simple good-humoured marquis, who has such a loyal fervour of king-worship, and such droll notions of the parts which kings and noblemen are called upon to play."<sup>9</sup>

Also in his reviews of travel-books, like in those of fiction, Thackeray always lays stress upon the social aspect and impact of the book assessed. This is most clearly shown in his summary review "Manners and Society in St. Petersburg", in which he does not intend to argue with the political opinions of the authors whose works he considers, each of whom "is more or less a partisan of the powers that at present be in Russia", for he realizes that their main purpose is not politics, but description of the manners of Russian society. But in spite of this he draws from their account a wholesome political lesson and also expresses his own opinions of the Czarist *régime*. Of all the books he assesses

<sup>7</sup> For the quotations see *The British and Foreign Review*, January 1839, p. 34; *The Times*, March 16, 1840, p. 3; *Critical Papers*, pp. 168, 166; *Gulliver*, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>8</sup> For the quotations see *Critical Papers*, p. 172; *Contributions*, 24; *The British and Foreign Review*, January 1839, pp. 36, 43.

<sup>9</sup> *The British and Foreign Review*, January 1839, p. 46.



he finds that of Raikes most impartial and objective, praises this author's truthful depiction of the oppressive atmosphere of tyranny and fear in Russia (on the painful effects of which upon Russian society he has also much to say for himself<sup>10</sup>), but rebukes him for admiring the Czar as a man and discovering some positive personal qualities in this ruthless tyrant. The other authors, however, Lord Londonderry and especially Legationsrath Tietz, are reprimanded by him for being rapturous panegyrists of the Czar. He is willing, however, to forgive much to the first-mentioned writer, for he understands that the Marquis was deceived by laborious hospitality, having been "provided with a pair of court-blinkers as it were" and "being only allowed to hear and see what was arranged for his amusement by the imperial master of the show".<sup>11</sup> And thus, although Thackeray by no means subscribes to the noble marquis's "rapturous encomiums" upon the Czar, the whole Imperial family and the Russian army, and assesses the work as "almost as bad a book as can be conceived about Russia, or indeed any other country", he parts with Lord Londonderry in good humour, pointing out that even if erroneous, at least the marquis's opinions "are honest, and formed from the peculiar circumstances of his life, and according to that degree of intellect with which Providence has endowed him".<sup>12</sup> He is not so good-humoured, nor is he inclined to forgive anything to Legationsrath Tietz, who in his opinion had produced the very worst book on Russia that was ever written. Thackeray is especially exasperated by Tietz's abject servility to the Czar, for which he finds no excuses whatever:

"He is not a gentleman, like the noble marquis, but on the contrary atrociously vulgar and mean in his thoughts and in his style; he has not a whit more imagination or erudition than Lord Londonderry, but, unlike the noble lord, (who writes like a plain man) he clothes his dullness in words so absurdly pompous and affected that they would put Bayes to the blush. He has not had the opportunities which were enjoyed by Lord Londonderry to witness the manners and splendours of the court; but he chronicles this court 'small-beer', without ever having had the felicity to taste it, and worships and wonders, and licks the dust from the imperial shoes — not because he has been dazzled by the attentions, cajoled by the fair words, or affected by the actual kindness of the emperor, but from sheer abjectness and love of dust-kissing. We will not suppose that the man had any other motive, or that his journeys from Petersburg to Constantinople were made with the money and for the service of any other government but his own."<sup>13</sup>

As follows from the above, when Thackeray assesses the works of authors who in his opinion are neither scholars nor gentlemen and whose books reflect their biased opinions or negative traits of their personal character, he does not fail to use the sharp shafts of his irony and satire. His anger is aroused whenever he finds traces of vulgarity, vanity, affectation and conceit in any author, as he does for instance in Grant, Carus and Lal as well as in Tietz. D'Arincourt is in his eyes a gentleman, but he lacks the talent of Pückler-Muskau to make his narrative interesting:

"He is but polite and good-natured, and consequently insipid. His blandness is his bane, and hangs like a millstone round his two volumes."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, especially pp. 36–37, 38, 40–41; for the preceding quotation see pp. 33–34.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> For the quotations see *ibid.*, pp. 36, 56–57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> *Contributions*, 24.

In some cases, however, Thackeray is able to forgive the author for being conceited, if his book has some other conspicuous merits. On Prince Pückler-Muskau for instance he writes:

"The prince is altogether a pleasant travelling companion — a little conceited, a little egotistical, a little too fond of keeping the reader continually in mind that he is a prince, and has a suite, and travels with Mehemet Ali — but he is also intelligent, persevering and energetic."<sup>15</sup>

Thackeray's indignation is thoroughly aroused, however, whenever in his reviewing he comes across stupidity, lack of education or ignorance of the milieu described. He pursues with sarcastic ridicule or at the least makes a sharp attack on those writers who present untruthful information about a foreign country which they have visited only for a short time or — which is of course much worse — in which they have resided (besides Londonderry and Tietz he finds such offences in Hugo, Dumas, Lal, Lindsay, Michiels, Carus, Grant, Rellstab, and Ledru-Rollin). And he is especially irritated if the authors of travel-books revile a country in which they were hospitably treated or even have the effrontery to legislate for it, prescribe its policy or prophesy its future. Thus he is especially exasperated, as I have shown in greater detail in my study on his criticism of French literature, by the attempts of Hugo and Dumas to play in their travel-books the roles of statesmen and politicians, to pronounce great mystical prophecies regarding the future of the Rhineland (Hugo) or to write in "absurd warlike spirit" about the future conquests of France (Dumas). Both writers are also reprehended for their exaggerated patriotism and their disparaging attitude to the Germans, and especially for their inability to use the normal method of observation, which they replace by prophetic visions (Hugo), distorted facts (Dumas), or by details stolen from historical works or guide-books without quoting these sources (both). As I have also shown in the quoted study, Thackeray's criticism of Ledru-Rollin's work on England is motivated by his anger against the author who reviles the country which provided him with a refuge when his own native ground had become too hot for him; he condemns the author's depictions of England as false and malevolent. The fourth French offender is Michiels, whom Thackeray criticizes for the same main demerits as he does Ledru-Rollin — an entirely false depiction of English reality. In this case, however, the reviewer uses much sharper weapons — he relentlessly pursues this writer with biting irony and sarcasm, creating thus a brilliant ironic *étude* on the theme "the great Michiels". In all these four reviews of French "travellers" we may find strong traces of Thackeray's national prejudices towards the French, but in various degrees of intensity. Dumas, for instance, does not offend Thackeray's national feelings so much as Michiels and Ledru-Rollin, for the description of Waterloo to be found in his book is in the reviewer's opinion written, for a Frenchman, in an uncommonly fair spirit. The whole review of Hugo's work is pervaded by Thackeray's biased opinion of the French national character, but his anger is aroused on behalf of another nation than his own — the German. Michiels and Ledru-Rollin attack his own country, however, and repay for its hospitality by addressing it with veiled threats, and it is therefore not surprising that

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

Thackeray's national feelings are offended and that his prejudices, too, are more strongly revealed. In spite of this, however, I do not think that the latter are the main motives of his attacks upon these writers. This is proved, on the one hand, by his ability to treat leniently a French visitor to England, if he honestly tries to depict what he has seen in the country and does not indulge in the "amateur incendiarism" of Ledru-Rollin or Michiels, but, on the contrary, is polite to the country the guest of which he is — as for instance D'Arlincourt. On the other hand, Thackeray is incensed to the same degree as he was in the case of the two French writers, if his own country is maltreated by a foreign visitor not French by origin, or if any other country is reviled by any visitor of any nationality.

Thus he very ruthlessly treats the learned German Doctor Carus, on whose travel-book on England he writes another splendid ironic *étude*, treating "this laboriously imbecile and educated man of science" as "one of the greatest humorists that ever lived", who provokes laughter not by wit and ingenuity like other humorous writers, but by his dullness and imbecility. In spite of his unmerciful attacks upon this writer, however, and of the great boredom he had to undergo when reading his "absolutely stale, and entirely stupid and vacuous" book, Thackeray cannot help feeling grateful for being provided with so much amusement:

"Heavy pages to write, and, indeed, to read; but how delightful to think on afterwards, and to muse over that which has been achieved with so much difficulty!"<sup>16</sup>

The same approach and method are characteristic of Thackeray's first review of a book by an English visitor to Paris, James Grant, which is written with irresistible wit and humour. Thackeray composes this piece of his criticism with great gusto, using the ironic method of extolling non-existent merits and positively evaluating the worst demerits of the book, and expresses his thankfulness to the author for providing him with so much amusement:

"Blessings on him — my James — my Jim — my dear, dear friend! I don't know him; but as I write about him, and think about him, I love him more and more" (*Works* VI, 375).

In his later review of the same book by Grant, in "New Accounts of Paris", Thackeray does not use the ironic method, but attacks the author directly. He deals here in more detail with the eulogies of the book published in the English press, and tries to rectify them for the sake of the literary profession and the reputation of English writers in France.<sup>17</sup>

Thackeray criticizes also those authors of travel-books who present a onesided evaluation of some phenomena or events in the countries they have visited. He rebukes the German anonymous author of *England* for being disposed to praise

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110; for the preceding quotations see *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> See especially *Works* V, 528. Besides the two reviews considered here Thackeray attacked Grant in several other contributions (especially in "Important Promotions! Merit Rewarded!", *Punch*, vol. VI, 1844, No. 130, p. 15, and "The Last Insult to Poor Old Ireland", *Punch*, vol. VII, 1844, No. 161, p. 95 and in marginal comments (see e.g. *Works* VII, 73n., VIII, 2). Grant's book *The Great Metropolis* provoked him, by its pompous style, snobbishness and inaccuracies, to write a satirical pamphlet "Leaves from the Lives of the Lords of Literature", to which I have already referred several times and in which, through the mouth of Grant and in his style, he ironically extols some second-rate popular writers (see Spielfmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 34—40).

everything in this country too much and to speak of France "with contempt much too savage and bitter".<sup>18</sup> Venedey in his opinion idealizes the Irish and exaggerates his criticism of the English, even if the latter is basically justified:

"Accordingly, all through his book the English are the dullest, most prosaic, cold hearted, melancholy, mechanical, diabolical sort of bodies in existence; whilst brother Paddy, to the German's eyes, is an angel of goodness, jollity, virtue, and what not. There may be some truth at the bottom of all this, but in the book before us it is exaggerated into all the monstrosity of error."<sup>19</sup>

The reviewed travel-books enable Thackeray, as usual, to express his own views on the problems discussed in them. As we have partly seen, in his review "Manners and Society in St. Petersburg" he has much to say on absolute monarchy in general and on the Czarist *régime* in particular, as well as on the militarist spirit prevailing at the Emperor's court (to this we should add that in discussing the latter he reveals himself, in contradistinction to his previously considered review of Count de Warren's book, as the convinced anti-militarist we are familiar with from the majority of his writings). In his earlier *Times* review of Raikes's book he again reflects on England's policy towards Russia and rebukes the British government, and especially Lord Palmerston, for lack of decisive action, for not doing anything more effective to check the Russian expansion than pouring out "floods of abuse against the monster who governs all the Russias, of whining cant over the fallen Poles — of sham sympathy for the brave Circassians". He sharply condemns the government for abandoning "every friend in the hour of need, and every principle, upon the sacred and honourable plea of self-preservation" and writes with deep disdain of "all the ignorance and the carelessness — all the blundering cowardice and foolish shuffling — all the mean, vague, palpable dissimulation of English diplomacy".<sup>20</sup> Worth noticing are also the reflections in his review of Turnbull's *Austria*, which are another convincing proof of Thackeray's negative attitude to absolute monarchy. He reprehends the author for too much praise of the manner in which the Austrian government is administered and for describing too respectfully the personal characters of both the late and present monarchs, Joseph and Francis. What he especially resents is Turnbull's view that the secret of the Austrian monarchy is reverence and the tendency to present this monarchy as a common family headed by a father possessing "a power theoretically absolute and uncontrolled, but founded practically on the willing obedience of those over whom it is exerted". He maintains that even if the Austrian people are disposed to accept willingly all the restrictions of the *régime*, including the censorship of the press, "at least let us speak of their system in the simplest, shortest, downrightest words that we can find", and concludes:

"We only quarrel with Mr. Turnbull's premises, or rather with the manner in which he chooses to define the principles of the government about which he writes, for to do him justice, he speaks of its acts and ordinances in detail with a proper English impartiality."<sup>21</sup>

Some of the books reviewed enable Thackeray, too, to express his own views on the problems which occupied his mind in the more important field of his

<sup>18</sup> *Works* V, 409; see also *ibid.*, pp. 410, 417.

<sup>19</sup> *Contributions*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> For the quotations see *Gulliver*, *op. cit.*, pp. 218, 219, 218.

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, March 16, 1840, p. 3.

activity, in the writing of fiction. Thus for instance he has much to say on the snobbishness of the English middle classes ("The German in England" and the review of Madame de Girardin's book), on class differences in English society (Girardin), on fashionable society in England, France and Russia (Girardin and "Manners and Society in St. Petersburg"). It is also not surprising that between 1844 and 1846, when his Irish tour of 1842 was still fresh in his memory and his mind full of the thoughts connected with the writing of *Barry Lyndon*, the Irish question stood in the centre of his interest. Two of his *Morning Chronicle* reviews of travel-books concern the contemporary situation in Ireland (Venedey, D'Arlincourt), and they, like the previously discussed books of Madden and Moore concerning the history of that country, display his wide knowledge of the Irish national problem, his acquaintance with the literature of the subject and his serious and responsible attitude towards it. The Irish question should be, as he emphasizes, "a matter of historical research" and should never be treated "as a romance",<sup>22</sup> as for example in Venedey's travel-book. Other digressions of his concern French foreign policy and the attitude of Europe to France ("The German in England"), the differences between the social position of the Parisian journalist and that of his colleague in London (Girardin), French literature in the first three decades of the century (D'Arlincourt), the English and French cuisine (Girardin, "The German in England"), the situation in Egypt under the rule of Mehemet Ali (Pückler-Muskau), etc. We also recognize Thackeray the moralist, to a certain extent influenced by the moral prejudices of his time and society. This moral aspect of his criticism is most clearly manifested in his review of Madame de Girardin's book, in which he reprehends the authoress for the graceful levity with which she approaches vice and passion. At the same time, however, he admits that she only depicts morals as she finds them and merely reproduces the attitude of the whole French *beau monde* to such matters.

In his reviews of all the above-discussed travel-books Thackeray stands out in my opinion as a just critic. His explicitly negative evaluation of a few works (those by Tietz, Grant, Rellstab, Michiels, Carus, Lal and Ledru-Rollin) is really deserved. As far as his two attacks upon Grant are concerned, Saintsbury also believes that they are entirely justified, though he considers they are unduly vehement:

"Still, he was hardly worth so much powder and shot, and perhaps the particular powder and shot were sometimes such as Thackeray had better not have used."<sup>23</sup>

It has been pointed out by the same scholar and also by Garnett that the criticism of Michiels is well-substantiated, for this author, as Saintsbury emphasizes, "most thoroughly deserved" Thackeray's attack (Saintsbury regards the review of Michiels's book as the best of all those Thackeray published in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*<sup>24</sup>). Only one book is given, and entirely justly, an explicitly positive evaluation — Raikes's *The City of the Czar*; in the rest Thackeray finds some demerits, but never omits duly to emphasize also their positive aspects. I can find myself in agreement with Saintsbury and Garnett, who

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<sup>22</sup> *Contributions*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *A Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 91; for Garnett's views see *op. cit.*, pp. 321—323.

maintain that the criticism of Hugo's *Rhin* is essentially just, for the book really contains many absurdities and much grandiloquence, which Thackeray exposed, as Saintsbury puts it, "with admirable humour and even with considerable leniency".<sup>25</sup> I cannot quite agree with the opinion of Garnett, however, who inclines to rebuke Thackeray for preferring the German naturalist's impressions of travel to the poet's (Hugo's) and for praising the former writer "a bit too highly, to the disparagement of some friends across the Channel". Yet even Garnett seems partly to realize that no other attitude could be expected from the great realist:

"The truth is that Thackeray preferred the matter of fact to the poetic when with the latter he suspected the existence of an admixture of humbug."<sup>26</sup>

Worth noticing is also Thackeray's evaluation of Prince Pückler-Muskau, in which he succeeds in pointing out not only the acceptable features of the works of this "brilliant vagabond", as Brandes calls him,<sup>27</sup> features which had ensured the temporary but enormous popularity of both his famous *Letters* and his volumes of travel, but also the inadequacy of the Prince's approach to his material, which is the reason why these travel-books lost much of their former popularity after 1840 and nowadays leave us quite cold.

And last but not least, in the reviews of the books discussed in this sub-chapter Thackeray also stands out as a guardian of the purity of his mother tongue, as is most clearly apparent in his reviews of Grant's book.

## 5. Books with a Variety of Subject-Matter

The last group of non-fiction books which Thackeray reviewed contains books dealing with a variety of subject-matter and also those which cannot be easily classified (N. P. Willis's *Dashes at Life with a Free Pencil*, 1845, a collection of stories which, however, are not pure in *genre*, standing on the boundary between the story and the sketch; to this book I shall also add another work of the same writer, which could have been in fact discussed in the previous chapter, the travel-book or book of reminiscences *People I have Met*, but which I include here for practical reasons — so as to treat his criticism of Willis as a whole). In this sub-chapter I should have also included Thackeray's reviews of Skelton's book on etiquette and of Mrs. Gore's *Sketches of English Character*, but as I have dealt with them in the chapter concerned with his criticism of the Silver-Fork novelists, I shall not consider them here. The reviews to be discussed are then the following:

"*Lardner's Cyclopaedia* volume 93", *The Times*, December 11, 1837 (suggested by Gulliver, not reprinted).

"South America and the Pacific, by Hon. P. C. Scarlett", *The Times*, February 6, 1838 (reprinted by Gulliver).

"Half-a-Crown's Worth of Cheap Knowledge", *Fraser's Magazine*, March 1838 (a review of fifteen penny and twopenny publications; reprinted in *Works*).

<sup>25</sup> *A Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 90; for Garnett's views see op. cit., pp. 244–245.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>27</sup> George Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, 6 vols., Vol. VI. *Young Germany*, William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1923, p. 334; see also *ibid.*, p. 336.

- “Dashes at Life with a Free Pencil” (By N. P. F. Willis), *The Edinburgh Review*, October 1845 (reprinted in *Works*).
- “Barmecide Banquets with Joseph Bregon and Anne Miller”, *Fraser’s Magazine*, November 1845 (a review of *The Practical Cook, English and Foreign* by Joseph Bregon and Anne Miller; reprinted in *Works*).
- “Haydon’s Lectures on Painting and Design”, *The Morning Chronicle*, June 19, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “The Gastronomic Regenerator”, *The Morning Chronicle*, July 4, 1846 (a review of Alexis Soyer’s book; reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “Royal Palaces. F. W. Trench”, *The Morning Chronicle*, October 5, 1846 (reprinted in *Contributions*).
- “On an American Traveller”, *Punch*, June 29, 1850 (a review of N. P. Willis’s book *People I have Met*; reprinted in *Works*).

Of all the works Thackeray critically considers in these reviews he positively evaluates only two — the cookery book by Bregon and Miller, the reading of which provided him, a great lover of good eating, with much enjoyment, and Scarlett’s book, which aroused his interest especially by the author’s proposal of cutting a canal across the isthmus of Panama and of the establishment of a line of steam-boats along the shores of the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> In his evaluation of the books by Soyer and Dr. Lardner, and of Haydon’s lectures, Thackeray uses again the ironic method — he good-humouredly ridicules the *chef-d’œuvre* of the famous *chef* of the Reform Club<sup>2</sup>, and not so good-humouredly derides Dr. Lardner and criticizes Haydon, the latter especially for the vanity and egotism with which he makes his own person the central point of interest in his lectures. On the other hand, however, Thackeray justly appreciates the positive points in the painter’s book, especially his entertaining and curious sketches from the life of the painters, his “grim humorous way of narrating” and his ability to praise “heartily and generously”.<sup>3</sup> As we know from his art criticism, Thackeray’s attitude to Haydon’s pictures was very critical. Also in his review he points out that this painter writes better than he paints and expresses the conviction that many a page of Haydon’s literary performances will outlive his paintings. His final assessment is the following:

“In all of his generous, rambling discourses there is much that is sound and useful, and a great deal that is amusing; the biographical and anecdotic matter, especially, queer, interesting, and pleasant.”<sup>4</sup>

In Trench’s book on the royal palaces, however, Thackeray does not find any merits. He criticizes this author for his personal conceit, not very good style, lack of originality in his proposal for the building of the new royal palace, a proposal in which Trench, moreover, regards only the interest of his own firm, not to mention his lack of consideration for those London inhabitants

<sup>1</sup> He has much to say on this proposal, too, in his later notice of the same book, “Steam Navigation in the Pacific”, *The Times*, November 8, 1838.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis Soyer served Thackeray, too, as one of the prototypes for creating the character of Mirobolante in *Pendennis*.

<sup>3</sup> For the quotations see *Contributions*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

whom it would deprive of their possibilities of recreation (Trench proposes to build the new royal palace on the site of one portion of Kensington Gardens).

Thackeray reveals himself as a critic of uncompromising principle especially in his reviews of two books by the American journalist and editor Nathaniel Parker Willis,<sup>5</sup> *Dashes at Life with a Free Pencil*<sup>6</sup> and *People I have Met*. In reviewing the first of these works, Thackeray concentrates first and foremost on Willis's untruthful pictures of the life of English aristocratic society and on the excessive conceit with which the author depicts himself in the heroes of his sketches as an irresistible conqueror of women describing in detail all his love affairs. In spite of all his sharp attacks upon Willis (which were originally much sharper, as we know from his complaint to the editor, quoted in the first chapter, in which he mourned over his mutilated review), Thackeray is willing to admit that this author "has actually written some rather clever books, occasionally marked by traits of genius",<sup>7</sup> though he adheres to his opinion that the book he is reviewing is not good. The justness of his criticism is in my opinion rightly emphasized by Garnett:

"Of this book no more need be said than that it is a farrago of absurdity, in which the author is the principal, almost the sole, male character under various aliases. He is pleasantly compared to Christopher Sly and Bottom the Weaver by the reviewer, who gives him a merciless and well deserved castigation for his vanity and presumption, little more being required for this purpose than the copious extracts which form the bulk of the review."<sup>8</sup>

Willis's conceit concerning his conquests in love and society, as it is reflected in the second of the two works mentioned above, is pilloried by Thackeray in his later essay "On an American Traveller", published in *Punch* in the *Proser Papers* under the pseudonym Dr. Solomon Pacifico. Whereas in his first review Thackeray admits that Willis's approach to his materials has also some positive aspects, especially certain traces of the truth of life in some stories, and is willing to forgive Willis some errors concerning England as to a young "republican visiting a monarchical country for the first time",<sup>9</sup> in his second review he is no longer so generous. He confesses that he eagerly bought the book hoping to find in it a more favourable account of England than he did a short time before in Ledru-Rollin's work, but he is cruelly disappointed and does not hide his disappointment. His critical shafts are again levelled at Willis's inaccurate depiction of English customs and manners and at his self-complacent and insolent behaviour in the country he was visiting, but he is also grateful to the writer for revealing to him the "secrets" of English aristocratic life and thus providing him with much amusement:

"Parker Willis is no other than that famous and clever N. P. Willis of former days, whose reminiscences have delighted so many of us, and in whose company one is always sure to find amusement of some sort or the other. Sometimes it is amusement at the writer's

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<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Parker Willis was also the editor of the American magazine the *Corsair*, to which Thackeray contributed at the dawn of his literary career.

<sup>6</sup> Originally published in the *New York Mirror* and in 1835 in a curtailed edition in England, where it was sharply criticized by the *Quarterly Review*, *Fraser's Magazine* and other periodicals.

<sup>7</sup> *Works* VI, 509; see also *Letters* II, 213, *Works* V, 312.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>9</sup> *Works* VI, 520 (he is quoting Willis).



wit and smartness, his brilliant descriptions, and wondrous flow and rattle of spirits; sometimes it is wicked amusement, and, it must be confessed, at Willis's own expense — amusement at the immensity of N. P.'s blunders, amusement at the prodigiousness of his self-esteem; amusement always, with him or at him; with or at Willis the poet, Willis the man, Willis the dandy, Willis the lover — now the Broadway Crichton, once the ruler of fashion, and heart-enslaver of Bond Street, and the Boulevard, and the Corso, and the Chiaja, and the Constantinople Bazaar" (*Works VIII*, 372—373).

Thackeray made Willis the butt of his criticism and satire also outside his reviews — burlesqued his style, Yankee prejudice and naïveté in "Notes on the North What-d'ye-Call'em Election" (*Fraser's Magazine*, September 1841), as Ray has pointed out,<sup>10</sup> criticized him in marginal comments in his other contributions.<sup>11</sup> ranked him among the literary snobs in his *Book of Snobs*<sup>12</sup>, and may have depicted him, as Garnett and Scudder believe, as John Paul Jefferson Jones in *Vanity Fair*, a writer "titularly attached to the American Embassy, and correspondent of the *New York Demagogue*".<sup>13</sup> The American scholar Scudder expresses his regret "that so kindly a man as Thackeray could not have been more sympathetically understanding" of this writer, who was "so zestful of life, so eager to share with his readers the interesting things he was seeing, and so obviously innocent of any intent to hurt", and adds:

"But Thackeray was not, and perhaps in the journalistic school he had been reared in, could not be expected to be."<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand Stevenson, also an American, presents in my opinion a more correct explanation of Thackeray's negative criticism:

"Willis's inflated style, his absurd ideas about English aristocratic life, and the conceit that made him obviously delineate himself in the hero of every story, showed all the faults of Bulwer's society novels and none of their virtues."<sup>15</sup>

To all this we should add that Thackeray eventually came to look upon Willis more kindly, as he did upon all the writers he criticized in his earlier years (though we possess one piece of later evidence that he never became completely uncritical — his parody of Willis's style of foreign correspondence in *The Adventures of Philip*<sup>16</sup>). When he was in the United States, he spoke kindly of this author and his works and we have also evidence that Willis highly appreciated Thackeray's lectures and spoke kindly of the novelist after his death, expressing his "admiration for his writings and skill as an artist".<sup>17</sup>

In the reviews of this last group of non-fiction books Thackeray only rarely enters upon longer reflections of his own. Thus in his review of Scarlett's book we find a sharp attack on the English government for indulging in "puddling politics" and being purblind to the author's extremely valuable project:

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<sup>10</sup> It is due to Ray that this contribution has been definitely attributed to Thackeray (see *Letters II*, 27n. and *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 271).

<sup>11</sup> See *Works V*, 251, 267n., 303, 312, 402; *Letters I*, 406n. and 407n., II, 214.

<sup>12</sup> See *Works IX*, 329.

<sup>13</sup> *Works XI*, 615—616.

<sup>14</sup> Harold H. Scudder, "Thackeray and N. P. Willis", *PMLA*, vol. LVII, 1942, p. 589.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> See *Works XVI*, 377—378.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *op. cit.*, I, 204; see also *ibid.*, pp. 43, 220—222.

"The plan cannot fail of being ultimately acted upon, but it will receive no encouragement or assistance from the chandler's-shop statesmen who at present misdirect the helm of government."<sup>18</sup>

The greatest number of digressions may be found in his review of the cookery book by Bregon and Mrs. Miller — there is a prefatory reflection where Fitz-Boodle laments over the lack of appreciation of his books and expresses his conviction that at least this review of his will be read by everybody, for it concerns eating and drinking; several charming and witty passages describing the enjoyment to be derived from good meals and drinks; reflections on the fictitious banquets in great literary works and on the English and French cuisine, and even a short humorous story about Fitz-Boodle's friend Mortimer Delamere, who separated from his wife and began to lead a dissipated life, on account of her having neglected to give him a decent dinner.

A great opportunity for digressing was offered to him, however, when he was reviewing the cheap London periodicals (in "Half-a-Crown's Worth of Cheap Knowledge"). Here we find his reflections (upon some of which I drew in the preceding chapters) on the poor man's land in London, a *terra incognita* for the higher social classes and for contemporary fiction, and especially on the influence, in his opinion not always beneficial, of the spreading of cheap literature. Here we also come across his negative attitude to the Chartist leaders (whom he calls "Radicals"), especially to those representing the left wing of the movement who proclaimed the necessity of using physical force, though he tended in this review, as well as in his marginal comments in his other contributions and in his letters,<sup>19</sup> to condemn all the leaders of this movement (except William Lovett, for whom he felt genuine respect<sup>20</sup>) as swindling incendiaries and demagogues; by their demands for universal suffrage and the removal of peers and bishops, they instigate the hungry workers to sedition, thus play into the hands of the Conservatives, and would destroy the victorious Revolution by their "bigotry" and change it into tyranny. In condemning the Chartist leaders Thackeray (in conformation to erroneous public opinion) often regarded as adherents of violence even those Chartists who really were not (for instance James Bronterre O'Brien, and Henry Vincent after 1842) and treated them all (except Lovett) as if they were of the same feather as Radicals of the type of the banker Thomas Attwood, a skilful politician and demagogue, who supported the Charter only because he saw in it a means for the promotion of his own plans for financial reform and who left the movement when he was disappointed in his hopes.

The main point Thackeray wants to clarify in his assessment of the fifteen cheap London periodicals and publications is the truth of the Radical claim that the great spreading of cheap literature is "the proof of the 'intelligence of the working classes', and the consequence of the meritorious efforts of 'the schoolmaster abroad'":

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<sup>18</sup> Gulliver, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> See *Letters* I, 411, 425, 458, *Works* I, 77-78, 131n., 132, 135, II, 137 and the chapter "On Radical Snobs" in the *Book of Snobs* (especially *Works* IX, 355).

<sup>20</sup> See *Letters* I, 421. His attitude to Lovett was probably positive because this Chartist was the main representative of the party of "moral force" and separated from the Chartist movement as early as 1839.

"These are the three cant terms of the Radical spouters [the third is the 'March of Intellect' — LP]: any one of these, tagged to the end of any sentence, however lame, never fails to elicit a shout of approbation at White Conduit House or the Crown and Anchor. To listen to Wakley, Vincent, or O'Connor,<sup>21</sup> one would imagine that the aristocracy of the country were the most ignorant and ill-educated part of its population — the House of Lords an assembly of ninnies — the Universities only seminaries where folly and vice are taught. The wisdom and honesty of the country rests with the working men, whose manly labour sharpens their intelligence, and who are educated in very different schools from those effete and effeminate places of learning in which the higher classes fritter their youth and intellect away" (*Works* I, 131–132).

This is not, of course, what we are accustomed to hear from Thackeray, the sharp critic of the English system of education and of the outlived institution of the House of Lords, who had a genuine respect for the intelligence of the English working classes, as we know from other comments of his and as I have pointed out before. This attitude of his is not wholly unexpected, however, for he was provoked to it by what he regarded as the exaggerated claims of the Radicals and confirmed in it by his fear of any revolutionary changes in the existing social order, the danger of which he clearly realized when listening to the Chartist speakers and observing the rapid growth and strength of "this great devouring monster of Chartism".<sup>22</sup> He does not wish to plunge his readers into a political dissertation, however, but intends "to examine the case merely in a literary point of view, and ascertain, as well as [he] can, what are the literary tastes of the lower class, and how this intelligence, which is boasted of so often and so loudly, displays itself".<sup>23</sup>

Based upon such a premise and upon limited material, his investigation cannot of course be fair and objective. In the first place, he reflects on the fate of the Penny Gazettes (mentioning Cleave's *Gazette* and the Chartist *Dispatch* published by Hetherington) which were enormously popular and "flooded the town with treason", but have disappeared since the change of the stamp-duty. He comes to the conclusion that their enormous popularity was due not only to their contents, their "furious attacks upon the king and nobility — upon the factory owner — upon the magistrate and the policeman — upon all who interfered with the presumed liberties, the amusements, or the pockets of the people", but also to the fact that they defied the law and to their low price. The Radicalism which they preached is according to Thackeray not opinion but hatred, though he does not intend to argue with it and admits that "it is supported by many able and honest men". He believes, however, that it is not accepted by the whole country and proves this by mentioning the extinction of three Radical papers (one of them being his own *Constitutional*), thus confusing bourgeois Radicalism, of which the three papers were exponents, and Chartism. The fate of these magazines, as well as the contents of the fifteen periodicals he evaluates (in which he finds "nothing of a grave, doctrinal character, and no sort of sober discussion regarding the first principles of that creed which, as we are told, they prize so highly") lead him to the conclusion that "pure Radicalism is not the belief of the people; nay, that politics of any sort, except the Bloody Bludgeon-man, Bloody Red Slave-Mark, Bloody Poor-

<sup>21</sup> Thackeray had a negative attitude, too, to Feargus O'Connor, though his mother, as Beddingfield has informed us, admired this Chartist leader (see *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 214).

<sup>22</sup> *Letters* I, 411.

<sup>23</sup> *Works* I, 132.

grinding Aristocracy kind, have no interest for them". Thackeray's catalogue is of course not fairly representative (as he only to a certain extent realizes<sup>24</sup>), for it does not include the best Chartist paper the *Northern Star*, though it does contain the *Poor Man's Friend*, published by Hetherington, and mention is made, as we have seen, of the extinct *London Dispatch*, the organ of the first Chartist organization of the London Working Men's Association, which was published by the same editor and was an energetic propagator of the ideas of the working class. In Thackeray's opinion, based, however, exclusively on the contents of the one number he read, the *Poor Man's Friend*, though it is one of the only two papers of the whole lot "which pretend to instruct the reader", "is neither more nor less than a *humbug*; he is no more the poor man's friend than the gentleman in the street who inserts small printed bills into your hand is the sick man's friend; he only works for his employer, the Radical or medical quack, as the case may be".<sup>25</sup> More to his taste is *Livesey's Moral Reformer*, because it propagates temperance among the poor and charity among the rich, and quotes Christ:

"He tells the poor how it is good to be sober, and the rich that it is right to be charitable. And he quotes from the words of A Certain Great Philanthropist, Who lived before him, and Who taught that men might be happy even though they were loyal to Caesar, and contented though they were poor" (*Works* I, 137).

This quotation shows very clearly why Thackeray could not accept the content of the Chartist papers which propagated class war and gave expression to the natural hatred of the lower classes towards the higher.

Of the rest of the periodicals Thackeray more or less positively appreciates only two — the *Wars of Europe*, which is in his opinion the very best publication of the whole catalogue, and contains entertaining, though not original contributions, and the *Penny Story-Teller* in which he found a very good story in the Boz style. All the other magazines are more or less sharply criticized by him, some unjustly and some justly. Unjust is certainly his ridicule of the *Penny Age* and the *Star of Venus* for providing information as to the inns and taverns of London in which the low classes may hear some good singing and music, though he may be justified in criticizing the former magazine for boasting that some of these "vocal establishments" in many instances surpass the official theatres. I do not think he is fair, either, when he writes with a strong undertone of irony about the varied and singular information relating to the poor quarters of London, its gin-shops, clubs, pawnbrokers, gambling-houses and dancing-rooms, with which the magazine the *Town* abounds, even if his irony is not malicious, but rather good-natured. Entirely justified, however, are his attacks upon several obscene periodicals, the *Penny Age*, the *Fly*, and the *Star of Venus*, for much of the contents of these papers was really indefensible and certainly could not exercise a good influence upon the morals of the working classes, as Thackeray also maintains.

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<sup>24</sup> See *Works* I, 131, 133.

<sup>25</sup> For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* I, 134, 135, 137.

As I have paid sufficient attention to the critical value of Thackeray's reviews of non-fiction books in the individual sub-chapters, I shall present only a very brief final evaluation to bring this chapter to its conclusion. As we have seen, in this part of his criticism Thackeray does not commit any very serious critical blunders, though he is not an infallible judge and does err in a few instances, his errors being mostly the outcome of his national, political or class prejudices. In my opinion, at least, he gives Macaulay more than his due, is unduly severe to Count de Warren and to some extent also to Dumas and Hugo, and is entirely unjust in his evaluation of the Chartist periodicals. In all the other instances, however, he excels in the justice of his conclusions. He bestows ungrudging praise upon anything good he finds in the books he reviews — accuracy of information, original observations, earnestness and honesty of purpose — and severely castigates all those authors in whose books he finds traces of their egotism, lack of intelligence or of familiarity with their subject or whose works bore him to extinction. In the last case he makes the authors the butts of his irony and his greatest achievements in this respect are his reviews of the books by Grant, Michiels and Carus. These three authors are not, however, the only victims of his critical attacks, for he levels the shafts of his irony also against several others, whose works deviated in some way from the standards by which he measured and provoked him by their naïveté, shallowness or pretentiousness. If the subject of the book criticized is congenial to him, Thackeray never misses this opportunity for throwing new light upon it by original observations of his own, in which we recognize his familiar idiosyncracies and which are written, as also all the reviews are, in his characteristic brilliant style.