to have been done with vigor and intensity, and within two years we find him reporting important speeches, and writing out his notes as the heavy coach lurched and rolled through the mud of country roads on its dark way to London town. It was largely during this period that he gained his extraordinary knowledge of inns and stables and "horsey" persons, which is reflected in his novels. He also grew ambitious, and began to write on his own account. At the age of twenty-one he dropped his first little sketch "stealthily, with fear and trembling, into a dark letter-box, in a dark office up a dark court in Fleet Street." The name of this first sketch was "Mr. Minns and his Cousin," and it appeared with other stories in his first book, *Sketches by Boz*, in 1835. One who reads these sketches now, with their intimate knowledge of the hidden life of London, can understand Dickens's first newspaper success perfectly. His best known work, *Pickwick*, was published serially in 1836–1837, and Dickens's fame and fortune were made. Never before had a novel appeared so full of vitality and merriment. Though crude in design, a mere jumble of exaggerated characters and incidents, it fairly bubbled over with the kind of humor in which the British public delights, and it still remains, after three quarters of a century, one of our most care-dispelling books.

The remainder of Dickens's life is largely a record of personal triumphs. *Pickwick* was followed rapidly by *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, and by many other works which seemed to indicate that there was no limit to the new author's invention of odd, grotesque, uproarious, and sentimental characters. In the intervals of his novel writing he attempted several times to edit a weekly paper; but his power lay in other directions, and with the exception of *Household Words*, his journalistic ventures were not a marked success. Again the actor came to the surface, and after managing a company of amateur actors successfully, Dickens began to give dramatic readings from his own works. As he was already the most popular writer in the English language, these readings were very successful. Crowds thronged to hear him, and his journeys became a continuous ovation. Money poured into his pockets from his novels and from his readings, and he bought for himself a home, Gadshill Place, which he had always desired, and which is forever associated with his memory. Though he spent the greater part of his time and strength in travel at this period, nothing is more characteristic of the man than the intense energy with which

he turned from his lecturing to his novels, and then, for relaxation, gave himself up to what he called the magic lantern of the London streets.

In 1842, while still a young man, Dickens was invited to visit the United States and Canada, where his works were even better known than in England, and where he was received as the guest of the nation and treated with every mark of honor and appreciation. At this time America was, to most Europeans, a kind of huge fairyland, where money sprang out of the earth, and life was happy as a long holiday. Dickens evidently shared this rosy view, and his romantic expectations were naturally disappointed. The crude, unfinished look of the big country seems to have roused a strong prejudice in his mind, which was not overcome at the time of his second visit, twenty-five years later, and which brought forth the harsh criticism of his *American Notes* (1842) and of *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–1844). These two unkind books struck a false note, and Dickens began to lose something of his great popularity. In addition he had spent money beyond his income. His domestic life, which had been at first very happy, became more and more irritating, until he separated from his wife in 1858. To get inspiration, which seemed for a time to have failed, he journeyed to Italy, but was disappointed. Then he turned back to the London streets, and in the five years from 1848 to 1853 appeared *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, and *Bleak House*, — three remarkable novels, which indicate that he had rediscovered his own power and genius. Later he resumed the public readings, with their public triumph and applause, which soon came to be a necessity to one who craved popularity as a hungry man craves bread. These excitements exhausted Dickens, physically and spiritually, and death was the inevitable result. He died in 1870, over his unfinished *Edwin Drood*, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Dickens's Work in View of his Life. A glance through even this unsatisfactory biography gives us certain illuminating suggestions in regard to all of Dickens's work. First, as a child, poor and lonely, longing for love and for society, he laid the foundation for those heartrending pictures of children, which have moved so many readers to unaccustomed tears. Second, as clerk in a lawyer's office and in the courts,

he gained his knowledge of an entirely different side of human life. Here he learned to understand both the enemies and the victims of society, between whom the harsh laws of that day frequently made no distinction. Third, as a reporter, and afterwards as manager of various newspapers, he learned the trick of racy writing, and of knowing to a nicety what would suit the popular taste. Fourth, as an actor, always an actor in spirit, he seized upon every dramatic possibility, every tense situation, every peculiarity of voice and gesture in the people whom he met, and reproduced these things in his novels, exaggerating them in the way that most pleased his audience.

When we turn from his outward training to his inner disposition we find two strongly marked elements. The first is his excessive imagination, which made good stories out of incidents that ordinarily pass unnoticed, and which described the commonest things — a street, a shop, a fog, a lamp-post, a stagecoach — with a wealth of detail and of romantic suggestion that makes many of his descriptions like lyric poems. The second element is his extreme sensibility, which finds relief only in laughter and tears. Like shadow and sunshine these follow one another closely throughout all his books.

Remembering these two things, his training and disposition, we can easily foresee the kind of novel he must produce. He will be sentimental, especially over children and outcasts; he will excuse the individual in view of the faults of society; he will be dramatic or melodramatic; and his sensibility will keep him always close to the public, studying its tastes and playing with its smiles and tears. If pleasing the public be in itself an art, then Dickens is one of our greatest artists. And it is well to remember that in pleasing his public there was nothing of the hypocrite or demagogue in his make-up. He was essentially a part of the great drifting panoramic crowd that he loved. His sympathetic soul made all their joys and griefs his own. He fought

Dickens and his Public

against injustice; he championed the weak against the strong; he gave courage to the faint, and hope to the weary in heart; and in the love which the public gave him in return he found his best reward. Here is the secret of Dickens's unprecedented popular success, and we may note here a very significant parallel with Shakespeare. The great difference in the genius and work of the two men does not change the fact that each won success largely because he studied and pleased his public.

General Plan of Dickens's Novels. An interesting suggestion comes to us from a study of the conditions which led to Dickens's first three novels. *Pickwick* was written, at the suggestion of an editor, for serial publication. Each chapter was to be accompanied by a cartoon by Seymour (a comic artist of the day), and the object was to amuse the public, and, incidentally, to sell the paper. The result was a series of characters and scenes and incidents which for vigor and boundless fun have never been equaled in our language. Thereafter, no matter what he wrote, Dickens was labeled a humorist. Like a certain American writer of our own generation, everything he said, whether for a feast or a funeral, was supposed to contain a laugh. In a word, he was the victim of his own book. Dickens was keen enough to understand his danger, and his next novel, *Oliver Twist*, had the serious purpose of mitigating the evils under which the poor were suffering. Its hero was a poor child, the unfortunate victim of society; and, in order to draw attention to the real need, Dickens exaggerated the woeful condition of the poor, and filled his pages with sentiment which easily slipped over into sentimentality. This also was a popular success, and in his third novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and indeed in most of his remaining works, Dickens combined the principles of his first two books, giving us mirth on the one hand, injustice and suffering on the other; mingling humor and pathos, tears and laughter, as we find them in life itself. And in order to increase the lights and shadows in his scenes, and to give greater dramatic effect to his narrative, he introduced odious and loathsome characters, and made vice more hateful by contrasting it with innocence and virtue.

We find, therefore, in most of Dickens's novels three or four widely different types of character: first, the innocent little child, like Oliver, Joe, Paul, Tiny Tim, and Little Nell, appealing powerfully to the child love in every human heart; second, the horrible or grotesque foil, like Squeers, Fagin, Quilp, Uriah Heep, and Bill Sykes; third, the grandiloquent or broadly humorous fellow, the fun maker, like Micawber and Sam Weller; and fourth, a tenderly or powerfully drawn figure, like Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*, and Sydney Carton of *A Tale of Two Cities*, which rise to the dignity of true characters. We note also that most of Dickens's novels belong decidedly to the class of purpose or problem novels. Thus *Bleak House* attacks "the law's delays"; *Little Dorrit*, the injustice which persecutes poor debtors; *Nicholas Nickleby*, the abuses of charity schools and brutal schoolmasters; and *Oliver Twist*, the unnecessary degradation and suffering of the poor in English workhouses. Dickens's serious purpose was to make the novel the instrument of morality and justice, and whatever we may think of the exaggeration of his characters, it is certain that his stories did more to correct the general selfishness and injustice of society toward the poor than all the works of other literary men of his age combined.

His Characters

The Limitations of Dickens. Any severe criticism of Dickens as a novelist must seem, at first glance, unkind and unnecessary. In almost every house he is a welcome guest, a personal friend who has beguiled many an hour with his stories, and who has furnished us much good laughter and a few good tears. Moreover, he has always a cheering message. He emphasizes the fact that this is an excellent world; that some errors have crept into it, due largely to thoughtlessness, but that they can be easily remedied by a little human sympathy. That is a most welcome creed to an age overburdened with

social problems; and to criticise our cheery companion seems as discourteous as to speak unkindly of a guest who has just left our home. But we must consider Dickens not merely as a friend, but as a novelist, and apply to his work the same standards of art which we apply to other writers; and when we do this we are sometimes a little disappointed. We must confess that his novels, while they contain many realistic details, seldom give the impression of reality. His characters, though we laugh or weep or shudder at them, are sometimes only caricatures, each one an exaggeration of some peculiarity, which suggest Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*. It is Dickens's art to give his heroes sufficient reality to make them suggest certain types of men and women whom we know; but in reading him we find ourselves often in the mental state of a man who is watching through a microscope the swarming life of a water drop. Here are lively, bustling, extraordinary creatures, some beautiful, some grotesque, but all far apart from the life that we know in daily experience. It is certainly not the reality of these characters, but rather the genius of the author in managing them, which interests us and holds our attention. Notwithstanding this criticism, which we would gladly have omitted, Dickens is excellent reading, and his novels will continue to be popular just so long as men enjoy a wholesome and absorbing story.

What to Read. Aside from the reforms in schools and prisons and workhouses which Dickens accomplished, he has laid us all, rich and poor alike, under a debt of gratitude. After the year 1843 the one literary work which he never neglected was to furnish a Christmas story for his readers; and it is due in some measure to the help of these stories, brimming over with good cheer, that Christmas has become in all English-speaking countries a season of gladness, of gift giving at home, and of remembering those less fortunate than ourselves, who are still members of a common brotherhood. If we read nothing else of Dickens, once a year, at Christmas

time, we should remember him and renew our youth by reading one of his holiday stories, — *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *The Chimes*, and above all the unrivaled *Christmas Carol*. The latter especially will be read and loved as long as men are moved by the spirit of Christmas.

Of the novels, *David Copperfield* is regarded by many as Dickens's masterpiece. It is well to begin with this novel, not simply for the unusual interest of the story, but also for the glimpse it gives us of the author's own boyhood and family. For pure fun and hilarity *Pickwick* will always be a favorite; but for artistic finish, and for the portrayal of one great character, Sydney Carton, nothing else that Dickens wrote is comparable to *A Tale of Two Cities*. Here is an absorbing story, with a carefully constructed plot, and the action moves swiftly to its thrilling, inevitable conclusion. Usually Dickens introduces several pathetic or grotesque or laughable characters besides the main actors, and records various unnecessary dramatic episodes for their own sake; but in *A Tale of Two Cities* everything has its place in the development of the main story. There are, as usual, many characters, — Sydney Carton, the outcast, who lays down his life for the happiness of one whom he loves; Charles Darnay, an exiled young French noble; Dr. Manette, who has been "recalled to life" from a frightful imprisonment, and his gentle daughter Lucie, the heroine; Jarvis Lorry, a lovable, old-fashioned clerk in the big banking house; the terrible Madame Defarge, knitting calmly at the door of her wine shop and recording, with the ferocity of a tiger licking its chops, the names of all those who are marked for vengeance; and a dozen others, each well drawn, who play minor parts in the tragedy. The scene is laid in London and Paris, at the time of the French Revolution; and, though careless of historical details, Dickens reproduces the spirit of the Reign of Terror so well that *A Tale of Two Cities* is an excellent supplement to the history of the period. It is written in

Tale of Two Cities

Dickens's usual picturesque style, and reveals his usual imaginative outlook on life and his fondness for fine sentiments and dramatic episodes. Indeed, all his qualities are here shown, not brilliantly or garishly, as in other novels, but subdued and softened, like a shaded light, for artistic effect.

Those who are interested in Dickens's growth and methods can hardly do better than to read in succession his first three novels, *Pickwick*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Nicholas Nickleby*, which, as we have indicated, show clearly how he passed from fun to serious purpose, and which furnish in combination the general plan of all his later works. For the rest, we can only indicate those which, in our personal judgment, seem best worth reading, — *Bleak House*, *Dombey and Son*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *Old Curiosity Shop*, — but we are not yet far enough away from the first popular success of these works to determine their permanent value and influence.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863)

As the two most successful novelists of their day, it is natural for us, as it was for their personal friends and admirers, to compare Dickens and Thackeray with respect to their life and work, and their attitude toward the world in which they lived. Dickens, after a desperately hard struggle in his boyhood, without friends or higher education, comes into manhood cheery, self-confident, energetic, filled with the joy of his work; and in the world, which had at first treated him so harshly, he finds good everywhere, even in the jails and in the slums, simply because he is looking for it. Thackeray, after a boyhood spent in the best of English schools, with money, friends, and comforts of every kind, faces life timidly, distrustfully, and dislikes the literary work which makes him famous. He has a gracious and lovable personality, is kind of heart, and reveres all that is pure and good in life; yet he is almost cynical toward the world which uses him so well, and finds shams, deceptions, vanities everywhere, because

he looks for them. One finds what one seeks in this world, but it is perhaps significant that Dickens sought his golden fleece among plain people, and Thackeray in high society. The chief difference between the two novelists, however, is not one of environment but of temperament. Put Thackeray in a workhouse, and he will still find material for another *Book of Snobs;* put Dickens in society, and he cannot help finding undreamed-of possibilities among bewigged and bepowdered high lords and ladies. For Dickens is romantic and emotional, and interprets the world largely through his imagination; Thackeray is the realist and moralist, who judges solely by observation and reflection. He aims to give us a true picture of the society of his day, and as he finds it pervaded by intrigues and snobbery he proceeds to satirize it and point out its moral evils. In his novels he is influenced by Swift and Fielding, but he is entirely free from the bitterness of the one and the coarseness of the other, and his satire is generally softened by a noble tenderness. Taken together, the novels of Dickens and Thackeray give us a remarkable picture of all classes of English society in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Life. Thackeray was born in 1811, in Calcutta, where his father held a civil position under the Indian government. When the boy was five years old his father died, and the mother returned with her child to England. Presently she married again, and Thackeray was sent to the famous Charterhouse school, of which he has given us a vivid picture in *The Newcomes*. Such a school would have been a veritable heaven to Dickens, who at this time was tossed about between poverty and ambition; but Thackeray detested it for its rude manners, and occasionally referred to it as the "Slaughterhouse." Writing to his mother he says: "There are three hundred and seventy boys in the school. I wish there were only three hundred and sixty-nine."

In 1829 Thackeray entered Trinity College, Cambridge, but left after less than two years, without taking a degree, and went to Germany and France, where he studied with the idea of becoming an

artist. When he became of age, in 1832, he came into possession of a comfortable fortune, returned to England, and settled down in the Temple to study law. Soon he began to dislike the profession intensely, and we have in *Pendennis* a reflection of his mental attitude toward the law and the young men who studied it. He soon lost his fortune, partly by gambling and speculation, partly by unsuccessful attempts at running a newspaper, and at twenty-two began for the first time to earn his own living, as an artist and illustrator. An interesting meeting between Thackeray and Dickens at this time (1836) suggests the relative importance of the two writers. Seymour, who was illustrating the *Pickwick Papers*, had just died, and Thackeray called upon Dickens with a few drawings and asked to be allowed to continue the illustrations. Dickens was at this time at the beginning of his great popularity. The better literary artist, whose drawings were refused, was almost unknown, and had to work hard for more than ten years before he received recognition. Disappointed by his failure as an illustrator, he began his literary career by writing satires on society for *Fraser's Magazine*. This was the beginning of his success; but though the *Yellowplush Papers*, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, *Catherine*, *The Fitz Boodlers*, *The Book of Snobs*, *Barry Lyndon*, and various other immature works made him known to a few readers of *Punch* and of *Fraser's Magazine*, it was not till the publication of *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848) that he began to be recognized as one of the great novelists of his day. All his earlier works are satires, some upon society, others upon the popular novelists, — Bulwer, Disraeli, and especially Dickens, — with whose sentimental heroes and heroines he had no patience whatever. He had married, meanwhile, in 1836, and for a few years was very happy in his home. Then disease and insanity fastened upon his young wife, and she was placed in an asylum. The whole after life of our novelist was darkened by this loss worse than death. He became a man of the clubs, rather than of his own home, and though his wit and kindness made

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

him the most welcome of clubmen, there was an undercurrent of sadness in all that he wrote. Long afterwards he said that, though his marriage ended in shipwreck, he "would do it over again; for behold Love is the crown and completion of all earthly good."

After the moderate success of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray wrote the three novels of his middle life upon which his fame chiefly rests, — *Pendennis* in 1850, *Henry Esmond* in 1852, and *The Newcomes* in 1855. Dickens's great popular success as a lecturer and dramatic reader had led to a general desire on the part of the public to see and to hear literary men, and Thackeray, to increase his income, gave two remarkable courses of lectures, the first being *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*, and the second *The Four Georges*, — both courses being delivered with gratifying success in England and especially in America. Dickens, as we have seen, was disappointed in America and vented his displeasure in outrageous criticism; but Thackeray, with his usual good breeding, saw only the best side of his generous entertainers, and in both his public and private utterances emphasized the virtues of the new land, whose restless energy seemed to fascinate him. Unlike Dickens, he had no confidence in himself when he faced an audience, and like most literary men he disliked lecturing, and soon gave it up. In 1860 he became editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, which prospered in his hands, and with a comfortable income he seemed just ready to do his best work for the world (which has always believed that he was capable of even better things than he ever wrote) when he died suddenly in 1863. His body lies buried in Kensal Green, and only a bust does honor to his memory in Westminster Abbey.

Works of Thackeray. The beginner will do well to omit the earlier satires of Thackeray, written while he was struggling to earn a living from the magazines, and open *Henry Esmond* (1852), his most perfect novel, though not the most widely known and read. The fine historical and literary flavor of this story is one of its most marked characteristics, and only one who knows something of the history and literature of the eighteenth century can appreciate its value. The hero, Colonel Esmond, relates his own story, carrying the reader through the courts and camps of Queen Anne's reign, and giving the most complete and

Henry Esmond

accurate picture of a past age that has ever appeared in a novel. Thackeray is, as we have said, a realist, and he begins his story by adopting the style and manner of a scholarly gentleman of the period he is describing. He has an extraordinary knowledge of eighteenth-century literature, and he reproduces its style in detail, going so far as to insert in his narrative an alleged essay from the *Tatler*. And so perfectly is it done that it is impossible to say wherein it differs from the style of Addison and Steele.

Realism of Esmond

In his matter also Thackeray is realistic, reflecting not the pride and pomp of war, which are largely delusions, but its brutality and barbarism, which are all too real; painting generals and leaders, not as the newspaper heroes to whom we are accustomed, but as moved by intrigues, petty jealousies, and selfish ambitions; showing us the great Duke of Marlborough not as the military hero, the idol of war-crazed multitudes, but as without personal honor, and governed by despicable avarice. In a word, Thackeray gives us the "back stairs" view of war, which is, as a rule, totally neglected in our histories. When he deals with the literary men of the period, he uses the same frank realism, showing us Steele and Addison and other leaders, not with halos about their heads, as popular authors, but in slippers and dressing gowns, smoking a pipe in their own rooms, or else growing tipsy and hilarious in the taverns, — just as they appeared in daily life. Both in style and in matter, therefore, *Esmond* deserves to rank as probably the best historical novel in our language.

The Plot of Esmond

The plot of the story is, like most of Thackeray's plots, very slight, but perfectly suited to the novelist's purpose. The plans of his characters fail; their ideals grow dim; there is a general disappearance of youthful ambitions. There is a love story at the center; but the element of romance, which furnishes the light and music and fragrance of love, is inconspicuous. The hero, after ten years

of devotion to a young woman, a paragon of beauty, finally marries her mother, and ends with a few pious observations concerning Heaven's mercy and his own happy lot. Such an ending seems disappointing, almost bizarre, in view of the romantic novels to which we are accustomed; but we must remember that Thackeray's purpose was to paint life as he saw it, and that in life men and things often take a different way from that described in romances. As we grow acquainted with Thackeray's characters, we realize that no other ending was possible to his story, and conclude that his plot, like his style, is perhaps as near perfection as a realistic novelist can ever come.

Vanity Fair

Vanity Fair (1847–1848) is the best known of Thackeray's novels. It was his first great work, and was intended to express his own views of the social life about him, and to protest against the overdrawn heroes of popular novels. He takes for his subject that Vanity Fair to which Christian and Faithful were conducted on their way to the Heavenly City, as recorded in *Pilgrim's Progress*. In this fair there are many different booths, given over to the sale of "all sorts of vanities," and as we go from one to another we come in contact with "juggling, cheats, games, plays, fools, apes, knaves, rogues, and that of every kind." Evidently this is a picture of one side of social life; but the difference between Bunyan and Thackeray is simply this, — that Bunyan made Vanity Fair a small incident in a long journey, a place through which most of us pass on our way to better things; while Thackeray, describing high society in his own day, makes it a place of long sojourn, wherein his characters spend the greater part of their lives. Thackeray styles this work "a novel without a hero." The whole action of the story, which is without plot or development, revolves about two women, — Amelia, a meek creature of the milk-and-water type, and Becky Sharp, a keen, unprincipled intriguer, who lets nothing stand in the way of her selfish

desire to get the most out of the fools who largely constitute society. On the whole, it is the most powerful but not the most wholesome of Thackeray's works.

Pendennis

In his second important novel, *Pendennis* (1849–1850), we have a continuation of the satire on society begun in *Vanity Fair*. This novel, which the beginner should read after *Esmond*, is interesting to us for two reasons, — because it reflects more of the details of Thackeray's life than all his other writings, and because it contains one powerfully drawn character who is a perpetual reminder of the danger of selfishness. The hero is "neither angel nor imp," in Thackeray's words, but the typical young man of society, whom he knows thoroughly, and whom he paints exactly as he is, — a careless, good-natured but essentially selfish person, who goes through life intent on his own interests. *Pendennis* is a profound moral study, and the most powerful arraignment of well-meaning selfishness in our literature, not even excepting George Eliot's *Romola*, which it suggests.

The Newcomes

Two other novels, *The Newcomes* (1855) and *The Virginians* (1859), complete the list of Thackeray's great works of fiction. The former is a sequel to *Pendennis*, and the latter to *Henry Esmond;* and both share the general fate of sequels in not being quite equal in power or interest to their predecessors. *The Newcomes*, however, deserves a very high place, — some critics, indeed, placing it at the head of the author's works. Like all Thackeray's novels, it is a story of human frailty; but here the author's innate gentleness and kindness are seen at their best, and the hero is perhaps the most genuine and lovable of all his characters.

Thackeray's Essays

Thackeray is known in English literature as an essayist as well as a novelist. His *English Humorists* and *The Four Georges* are among the finest essays of the nineteenth century. In the former especially, Thackeray shows not only a wide knowledge but an extraordinary understanding of his subject. Apparently this nineteenth-century

writer knows Addison, Fielding, Swift, Smollett, and other great writers of the past century almost as intimately as one knows his nearest friend; and he gives us the fine flavor of their humor in a way which no other writer, save perhaps Lamb, has ever rivaled.[1] *The Four Georges* is in a vein of delicate satire, and presents a rather unflattering picture of four of England's rulers and of the courts in which they moved. Both these works are remarkable for their exquisite style, their gentle humor, their keen literary criticisms, and for the intimate knowledge and sympathy which makes the people of a past age live once more in the written pages.

General Characteristics. In treating of Thackeray's view of life, as reflected in his novels, critics vary greatly, and the following summary must be taken not as a positive judgment but only as an attempt to express the general impression of his works on an uncritical reader. He is first of all a realist, who paints life as he sees it. As he says himself, "I have no brains above my eyes; I describe what I see." His pictures of certain types, notably the weak and vicious elements of society, are accurate and true to life, but they seem to play too large a part in his books, and have perhaps too greatly influenced his general judgment of humanity. An excessive sensibility, or the capacity for fine feelings and emotions, is a marked characteristic of Thackeray, as it is of Dickens and Carlyle. He is easily offended, as they are, by the shams of society; but he cannot find an outlet, as Dickens does, in laughter and tears, and he is too gentle to follow Carlyle in violent denunciations and prophecies. He turns to satire, — influenced, doubtless, by eighteenth-century literature which he knew so well, and in which satire played too large a part.[2] His satire is never personal, like Pope's, or brutal, like Swift's, and is tempered by kindness and humor;

[1] It should be pointed out that the *English Humorists* is somewhat too highly colored to be strictly accurate. In certain cases also, notably that of Steele, the reader may well object to Thackeray's patronizing attitude toward his subject.

[2] See pp. 260–261.

but it is used too freely, and generally lays too much emphasis on faults and foibles to be considered a true picture of any large class of English society.

Besides being a realist and satirist, Thackeray is essentially a moralist, like Addison, aiming definitely in all his work at producing a moral impression. So much does he revere goodness, and so determined is he that his Pendennis or his Becky Sharp shall be judged at their true value, that he is not content, like Shakespeare, to be simply an artist, to tell an artistic tale and let it speak its own message; he must explain and emphasize the moral significance of his work. There is no need to consult our own conscience over the actions of Thackeray's characters; the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice are evident on every page.

Thackeray as a Moralist

Whatever we may think of Thackeray's matter, there is one point in which critics are agreed, — that he is master of a pure and simple English style. Whether his thought be sad or humorous, commonplace or profound, he expresses it perfectly, without effort or affectation. In all his work there is a subtle charm, impossible to describe, which gives the impression that we are listening to a gentleman. And it is the ease, the refinement, the exquisite naturalness of Thackeray's style that furnishes a large part of our pleasure in reading him.

His Style

Mary Ann Evans, George Eliot (1819–1880)

In nearly all the writers of the Victorian Age we note, on the one hand, a strong intellectual tendency to analyze the problems of life, and on the other a tendency to teach, that is, to explain to men the method by which these problems may be solved. The novels especially seem to lose sight of the purely artistic ideal of writing, and to aim definitely at moral instruction. In George Eliot both these tendencies reach a climax. She is more obviously, more consciously a preacher and moralizer than any of her great contemporaries.

Though profoundly religious at heart, she was largely occupied by the scientific spirit of the age; and finding no religious creed or political system satisfactory, she fell back upon duty as the supreme law of life. All her novels aim, first, to show in individuals the play of universal moral forces, and second, to establish the moral law as the basis of human society. Aside from this moral teaching, we look to George Eliot for the reflection of country life in England, just as we look to Dickens for pictures of the city streets, and to Thackeray for the vanities of society. Of all the women writers who have helped and are still helping to place our English novels at the head of the world's fiction, she holds at present unquestionably the highest rank.

Life. Mary Ann (or Marian) Evans, known to us by her pen name of George Eliot, began to write late in life, when nearly forty years of age, and attained the leading position among living English novelists in the ten years between 1870 and 1880, after Thackeray and Dickens had passed away. She was born at Arbury Farm, Warwickshire, some twenty miles from Stratford-on-Avon, in 1819. Her parents were plain, honest folk, of the farmer class, who brought her up in the somewhat strict religious manner of those days. Her father seems to have been a man of sterling integrity and of practical English sense, — one of those essentially noble characters who do the world's work silently and well, and who by their solid worth obtain a position of influence among their fellow-men.

A few months after George Eliot's birth the family moved to another home, in the parish of Griff, where her childhood was largely passed. The scenery of the Midland counties and many details of her own family life are reflected in her earlier novels. Thus we find her and her brother, as Maggie and Tom Tulliver, in *The Mill on the Floss;* her aunt, as Dinah Morris, and her mother, as Mrs. Poyser, in *Adam Bede*. We have a suggestion of her father in the hero of the latter novel, but the picture is more fully drawn as Caleb Garth, in *Middlemarch*. For a few years she studied at two private schools for young ladies, at Nuneaton and Coventry; but the death of her mother called her, at seventeen years of age, to take entire charge of the household. Thereafter her education was gained wholly

by miscellaneous reading. We have a suggestion of her method in one of her early letters, in which she says: "My mind presents an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Milton; newspaper topics, morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology, and chemistry; reviews and metaphysics, all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thickening everyday accession of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations."

When Mary was twenty-one years old the family again moved, this time to Foleshill Road, near Coventry. Here she became acquainted with the family of Charles Bray, a prosperous ribbon manufacturer, whose house was a gathering place for the freethinkers of the neighborhood. The effect of this liberal atmosphere upon Miss Evans, brought up in a narrow way, with no knowledge of the world, was to unsettle many of her youthful convictions. From a narrow, intense dogmatism, she went to the other extreme of radicalism; then (about 1860) she lost all sympathy with the freethinkers, and, being instinctively religious, seemed to be groping after a definite faith while following the ideal of duty. This spiritual struggle, which suggests that of Carlyle, is undoubtedly the cause of that gloom and depression which hang, like an English fog, over much of her work; though her biographer, Cross, tells us that she was not by any means a sad or gloomy woman.

MARY ANN EVANS, GEORGE ELIOT

In 1849 Miss Evans's father died, and the Brays took her abroad for a tour of the continent. On her return to England she wrote several liberal articles for the *Westminster Review*, and presently was made assistant editor of that magazine. Her residence in London at this time marks a turning point in her career and the real beginning of her literary life. She made strong friendships with Spencer, Mill, and other scientists of the day, and through Spencer met George Henry Lewes, a miscellaneous writer, whom she afterwards married.

Under his sympathetic influence she began to write fiction for the magazines, her first story being "Amos Barton" (1857), which was later included in the *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858). Her first long novel, *Adam Bede*, appeared early in 1859 and met with such popular favor that to the end of her life she despaired of ever again repeating her triumph. But the unexpected success proved to be an inspiration, and she completed *The Mill on the Floss* and began *Silas Marner* during the following year. Not until the great success of these works led to an insistent demand to know the author did the English public learn that it was a woman, and not an English clergyman, as they supposed, who had suddenly jumped to the front rank of living writers.

Up to this point George Eliot had confined herself to English country life, but now she suddenly abandoned the scenes and the people with whom she was most familiar in order to write an historical novel. It was in 1860, while traveling in Italy, that she formed "the great project" of *Romola*,—a mingling of fiction and moral philosophy, against the background of the mighty Renaissance movement. In this she was writing of things of which she had no personal knowledge, and the book cost her many months of hard and depressing labor. She said herself that she was a young woman when she began the work, and an old woman when she finished it. *Romola* (1862–1863) was not successful with the public, and the same may be said of *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866) and *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868). The last-named work was the result of the author's ambition to write a dramatic poem which should duplicate the lesson of *Romola;* and for the purpose of gathering material she visited Spain, which she had decided upon as the scene of her poetical effort. With the publication of *Middlemarch* (1871–1872) George Eliot came back again into popular favor, though this work is less spontaneous, and more labored and pedantic, than her earlier novels. The fault of too much analysis and moralizing was even more conspicuous in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), which she regarded as her greatest book. Her life during all this time was singularly uneventful, and the chief milestones along the road were the publication of her successive novels.

During all the years of her literary success her husband Lewes had been a most sympathetic friend and critic, and when he died, in 1878, the loss seemed to be more than she could bear. Her letters of this period are touching in their loneliness and their craving for