Miss Sharp finds so ridiculous; that it was I who laughed good- humouredly at the railing old Silenus of a baronet—whereas the laughter comes from one who has no reverence except for pros­perity, and no eye for anything beyond success. Such people there are living and flourishing in the world—Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless: let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful too, mere quacks and fools; and it was to combat and expose such as those, no doubt, that laughter was made.”

As to another accusation which was brought against the book when it first came out, that the colours were laid on too thick, in the sense that the villains were too villainous, the good people too goody-goody, the best and completest answer to that can be found by anyone who chooses to read the work with care. Osborne is, and is meant to be, a poor enough creature, but he is an eminently human being, and one whose poorness of character is developed as he allows bad influences to tell upon his vanity and folly. The good in him is fully recog­nized, and comes out in the beautiful passage describing his farewell to Amelia on the eve of Waterloo, in which passage may be also found a sufficient enough answer to the statement that Amelia is absolutely insipid and uninteresting. So with the companion picture of Rawdon Crawley’s farewell to Becky Sharp: who that reads it can resist sympathy, in spite of Rawdon’s vices and shady shifts for a living, with his simple bravery and devotion to his wife? As for Becky, a character that has since been imitated a host of times, there is certainly not much to be said in her defence. We know of her, to he sure, that she thought she would have found it easy to be good if she had been rich, and we know also what happened when Rawdon, released without her knowledge from a spunging- house, surprised her alone with and singing to Lord Steyne in the house in Mayfair. After a gross insult from Steyne, “ Rawdon Crawley, springing out, seized him by the neckcloth, until Steyne, almost strangled, writhed and bent under his arm. ‘ You lie, you dog,’ said Rawdon ; ‘ you lie, you coward and villain!’ And he struck the peer twice over the face with his open hand, and flung him bleeding to the ground. It was all done before Rebecca could interpose. She stood there trembling before him. She admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious.” This admiration is, as Thackeray himself thought it, the capital touch in a scene which is as powerful as any Thackeray ever wrote—as powerful, indeed, as any in English fiction. Its full merit, it may be noted in passing, has been curiously accented by an imitation of it in Alphonse Daudet’s *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné.* As to the extent of the miserable Becky’s guilt in the Steyne matter, Thackeray leaves it practically open to the reader to form what conclusion he will. There is, it should be added, a distinct touch of good in Becky’s conduct to Amelia at Ostend in the last chapter of the book, and those who think that too little punishment is meted out to the brilliant adventuress in the end may remember this to her credit. It is supreme art in the treat­ment of her character that makes the reader understand and feel her attractiveness, though he knows her extraordinarily evil qualities; and in this no writer subsequent to Thackeray who has tried to depict one of the genus Becky Sharp has even faintly succeeded. Among the minor characters there is not one—and this is not always the case even with Thackeray’s chief figures—who is incompletely or inconsistently depicted; and no one who wishes fully to understand and appreciate the book can afford to miss a word of it.

*Vanity Fair* was followed by *Pendennis, Esmond* and *The Newcomes,* which appeared respectively in 1850, 1852 and 1854. It might be more easy to pick holes critically in *Pendennis* than in *Vanity Fair.* Pendennis himself, after his boyish passion and university escapades, has disagreeable touches of flabbiness and worldliness; and the important episode of his relations with Fanny Bolton, which Thackeray could never have treated otherwise than delicately, is so lightly and tersely handled that it is a little vague even to those who read between the lines. It can hardly he said that there is adequate preparation for the final announcement that those relations have been innocent, and one can hardly see why it should have been so long delayed. This does not, of course, affect the value of the book as a picture of middle- and upper-class life of the time, the time when Vaux- hall still existed, and the haunt for suppers and songs which Thackeray in this book called the Back Kitchen, and it is a picture filled with striking figures. In some of these, notably in that of Foker, Thackeray went, it is supposed, very close to actual life for his material, and in that particular case with a most agreeable result. As for the two “ umbrae ” of Lord Steyne, it is difficult to believe that they were intended as caricatures of two well-known persons. If they were, for once Thackeray’s hand forgot its cunning. Here, as in the case of Amelia Sedley (*Vanity Fair),* the heroine has been thought a little insipid; and there may be good ground for finding Laura Pendennis dull, though she has a spirit of her own. In later books she becomes, what Thackeray’s people very seldom are, a tiresome as well as an uninviting person. Costigan is unique, and so is Major Pendennis, a type which, allowing for differences of periods and manners, will exist as long as society exists, and which has been seized and depicted by Thackeray as by no other novelist. The Major’s two encounters, from both of which he comes out victorious, one with Costigan in the first, the other with Morgan in the second volume, are true touches of genius. In opposition to the worldliness of the Major, with which Pendennis does not escape being tainted, we have Warrington, whose nobility of nature has come unscathed through a severe trial, and who, a thorough gentleman if a rough one, is really the guardian of Pendennis’s career. There is, it should be noted, a characteristic and acknowledged confu­sion in the plot of *Pendennis,* which will not spoil any intelligent reader’s pleasure.

Probably most readers of *The Newcomes* (1854) to whom the book is mentioned think first of the fine, chivalrous and simple figure of Colonel Newcome, who stands out in the relief of almost ideal beauty of character against the crowd of more or less imperfect and more or less base personages who move through the novel. At the same time, to say, as has been said, that this book “ is full of satire from the first to the last page ” is to convey an impression which is by no means just. There is plenty of kindliness in the treatment of the young men who, like Clive Newcome himself and Lord Kew, possess no very shin­ing virtue beyond that of being honourable gentlemen; in the character of J. J. Ridley there is much tenderness and pathos, and no one can help liking the Bohemian “ F. B.,” and looking tolerantly on his failings. It may be that there is too close an insistence on the fiendish temper of Mrs Mackenzie and on the sufferings she inflicts on the colonel; but it must be remembered that this heightens the singular pathos of the closing scenes of the colonel’s life. It has seemed convenient to take *The Newcomes* after *Pendennis,* because Pendennis and his wife reappear in this book as in *The Adventures of Philip·,* but *Esmond* (1852) was written and published before *The Newcomes.* To some students *Esmond* seems and will seem Thackeray’s capital work. It has not been rivalled as a romance repro­ducing with unfailing interest and accuracy the figures, manners and phrases of a past time, and it is full of beautiful touches of character. But Beatrix, upon whom so much hinges, is an unpleasing character, although one understands fully why men were captivated by her insolent beauty and brilliancy; and there is some truth in Thackeray’s own saying, that “ Esmond was a prig.” Apart from this, the story is, like the illusion of a past time in the narrative, so complete in all its details, so harmoniously worked out, that there is little room for criticism. As to Esmond’s marriage with the lady whom he has served and loved as a boy, that is a matter for individual judgment. Beatrix, it has been indicated above, is wonderfully drawn: and not the least wonderful thing about her is her reappearance as the jaded, battered, worldly, not altogether unkindly, Baroness in *The Virginians.* It was just what Beatrix must have come to, and her decline is handled with the lightest and finest touch.

In 1851 Thackeray had written *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century,* delivered as a series of lectures at Willis’s