THACKERAY, William Makepeace (1811-1863), one of the greatest of English authors and novelists, son of Rich­mond Thackeray (Mrs Richmond Thackeray was born Miss Becher), and grandson of W. R. Thackeray of Hadley, Mid­dlesex, was born at Calcutta on July 18, 1811. Both his father and grandfather had been Indian civil servants. His mother, who was only nineteen at the date of his birth, was left a widow in 1816, and afterwards married Major Henry Carmichael Smyth. Thackeray himself was sent home to England from India as a child, and went to Charterhouse, since his time removed to Godaiming from its ancient site near Smithfield. Anthony Trollope, in his book on Thackeray in the *English Men of Letters* series, quotes a letter written to him about Thackeray’s school-days by Mr G. S. Venables. “ He came to school young,” Mr Venables wrote, “ a pretty, gentle, and rather timid boy.” This accords with the fact that all through Thackeray’s writings the student may find traces of the sensitiveness which often belongs to the creative mind, and which, in the boy who does not understand its meaning and its possible power is apt to assume the guise of a shy dispo­sition. To this very matter Mr Venables tersely refers in a later passage of the letter quoted by Trollope : “ When I knew him better, in later years, I thought I could recognize the sensitive nature which he had as a boy.” Another illustration is found in the statement, which will be recognized as exact by all readers of Thackeray, that “ his change of retrospective feeling about his school-days was very characteristic. In his earlier books he always spoke of the Charterhouse as Slaughter House and Smith- field. As he became famous and prosperous his memory softened, and Slaughter House was changed into Grey Friars, where Colonel Newcome ended his life.” Even in the earlier references the bitterness which has often been so falsely read into Thackeray is not to be found. In “ Mr and Mrs Frank Berry” (*Men’s* *Wives*) there is a description of a Slaughter-House fight, following on an incident almost identical with that used in *Vanity Fair* for the fight between Dobbin and Cuff. In both cases the brutality of school life, as it then was, is very fully recognized and described, but not to the exclusion of the chivalry which goes along­side with it. In the first chapter of “ Mr and Mrs Frank Berry, ” Berry himself and Old Hawkins both have a touch of the heroic. In the story which forms part of *Men's Wives* the bully whom Berry gallantly challenges is beaten, and one hears no more of him. In *Vanity Fair* Cuff the swaggerer is beaten in a similar way, but regains his popularity by one well-timed stroke of magnanimity, and afterwards shows the truest kindness to his conqueror.

In February 1829 Thackeray went to Trinity College, Cambridge, and in that year contributed some engaging lines on *Timbuctoo,* the subject for the prize poem, to a little university paper called *The Snob,* the title of which he afterwards utilized in the famous *Snob Papers.* The first stanza has become tolerably well known, but is worth quot­ing as an early instance of the direct comic force afterwards employed by the author in verse and prose burlesques :— In Africa—a quarter of the world—

Men’s skins are black ; their hair is crisp and curled ; And somewhere there, unknown to public view, A mighty city lies, called Timbuctoo.

One other passage at least in *The Snob,* in the form of a skit on a paragraph of fashionable intelligence, seems to bear traces of Thackeray’s handiwork. At Cambridge James Spedding, Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), Edward Fitzgerald, W. H. Thompson (afterwards master of Trinity), and other distinguished persons were among his friends. In 1830 he left Cambridge without taking a degree, and went to Weimar and to Paris. His visit to Weimar bore fruit in the sketches of life at a small German court which appear in *Fitz-Boodlds Confessions* and in *Vanity Fair.* In 1832 he came of age, and inherited a sum which Trollope’s book describes as amounting to about five hundred a year. The money was soon lost,— some in an Indian bank, some in two newspapers which in *Lovel the Widower* are referred to under one name as *The Museum,* in connexion with which our friends Honeyman and Sherrick of *The Newcomes* are briefly brought in. His first regular literary employment after the loss of his patrimony was on *Fraser's Magazine,* in which in 1837-38 appeared *The History of Mr Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond,* a work filled with instances of the wit, humour, satire, pathos, which found a more ordered if not a fresher expression in his later and longer works. For freshness, indeed, and for a fine perception which enables the author to perform among other feats that of keeping up throughout the story the curious simplicity of its supposed narrator’s character, the *Great Hoggarty Diamond* can scarce be surpassed. The characters, from Lady Drum, Lady Fanny, Lady Jane, and Edmund Preston down to Brough, his daughter, Mrs Roundhand, Gus Hoskins, and, by no means least, Samuel Titmarsh’s pious aunt with her store of “ Rosolio, ” are living ; the book is crammed with honest fun ; and, for pure pathos, the death of the child, and the meeting of the husband and wife over the empty cradle (a scene illustrated by the author himself with that suggestion of truth which no shortcoming in drawing could spoil), stands, if not alone in its own line, at least in the company of very few such scenes in English fiction. The *Great Hoggarty Diamond,* oddly enough, met with the fate that afterwards befell one of Lever’s best stories which appeared in a periodical week by week,—it had to be cut short at the bidding of the editor. In the same year in which it appeared Thackeray married Isabella, daughter of Colonel Matthew Shawe. Of the daughters born of the marriage, one, Mrs Richmond Ritchie, has earned distinction as a novelist. Mrs Thackeray, to quote Trollope, “became ill and her mind failed her,” and Thackeray thereupon “ became as it were a widower till the end of his days.” In 1840 came out *The Paris Sketch Book.* Much of it had been written and published at an earlier date, and in the earlier writings there are some very curious divagations in criticism. The book contains also a striking story of card-sharping, afterwards worked up and put into Alta­mont’s mouth in *Pendennis,* and a very powerful sketch of a gambler’s death and obsequies. Three years before, in 1837, Thackeray had begun, in *Fraser,* the *Yellowplush Papers,* with their strange touches of humour, satire, tragedy (in one scene, the closing one of the history of Mr Deuceace), and their sublimation of fantastic bad spelling (M'Arony for macaroni is one of the typical touches of this) ; and this was followed by *Catherine,* a strong story, and too disagreeable perhaps for its purpose, founded closely on the actual career of a criminal named Catherine Hayes, and intended to counteract the then growing prac­tice of making ruffians and harlots prominent characters in fiction. There soon followed *Fitz-Boodle's Confessions and Professions,* including the series *Men's Wives,* already referred to ; and, slightly before these, *The Shabby Genteel Story,* a work interrupted by Thackeray’s domestic affliction and afterwards republished as an introduction to *The Ad­ventures of Philip,* which took up the course of the original story many years after the supposed date of its catastrophe. Tn 1843, and for some ten years onwards according to Trollope, Thackeray was writing for *Punch,* and the list of his contributions included among many others the cele­brated *Snob Papers* and the *Ballads of Policeman X.* In 1843 also came out the *Irish Sketch Book,* and in 1844 the account of the journey *From Cornhill to Grand Cairo,*