“FURNISH YOURSELF WITH A RICH VARIETY OF ideas; acquaint yourself with things ancient and modern; things natural, civil, and religious; things domestic and national; things of your native land, and of foreign countries; things present, past, and future,” reads an early chapter of *Logic; or, The Right Use of Reason*, by Isaac Watts, one of the eighteenth-century authors who retained a place on Thackeray's library shelves alongside his sets of Swift, Fielding, Smollett, and the *Spectator*. “And above all,” concludes this sentence, “be well acquainted with God and yourselves; learn animal nature, and the workings of your own spirits.”

Watts was standard reading for the young at least through the middle of the nineteenth century, and the 1824 imprint of the copy that Thackeray owned suggests that it may have been one of his school texts. Whether on his own inclination or by the persuasion of the Reverend Watts, he certainly followed out the “General Directions” prescribed by this wise doctor for the education of the mind:

The way of attaining such an extensive treasure of ideas is, with diligence to apply yourself to read the best books, converse with the most knowing and the wisest of men, and endeavour to improve by every person in whose company you are . . . visit other cities and countries, when you have seen your own, under the care of one who can teach you to profit by traveling, and to make wise observations: indulge a just curiosity in seeing the wonders of art and nature, search into things yourselves, as well as learn them from others; be acquainted with men as well as books; learn all things as much as you can from first hand; and let as many of your ideas as possible be the
representation of things; and not merely the representation of other men's ideas; thus your soul, like some noble building, shall be richly furnished with original paintings, and not mere copies.

Universal curiosity clearly is the prime intellectual virtue that Dr. Watts hoped to implant in young souls. According to his scheme,
books are but one means to improve each shining hour—others being stimulating society, cosmopolitan travel, and immersion in “the wonders of art and nature.” All of these were freely engaged in by the youthful William Makepeace Thackeray, who visited many foreign cities and countries in his double pursuit of culture and a livelihood, knew many men as well as many books, conferred with the great (notably Goethe during his lehrjahr in Weimar), and literally attempted “original paintings, and not mere copies.” A number of Thackeray’s fictitious men and women also follow Watts’s program. Colonel Newcome for one believed “It was good for Clive to see men and cities; to visit mills, manufactories, country seats, cathedrals,” and Clive, an apt pupil, “asked a hundred questions regarding all things about him.” In Vanity Fair Dobbin carefully directs Amelia Sedley’s observations on her travels, and one plate in illustrated editions shows her sketching “from the life” with his approval. Watts’s curriculum for self-education, however, is not intended to make one merely a passive observer of life, but to stimulate the powers of reason, on a firm basis of experience. In religion Watts was no mystic (one of his books is called A Humble Attempt towards the Revival of Practical Religion among Christians), and in his logic he tended to follow Locke’s empirical principles. In this respect he anticipates the creed that guided Thackeray’s practice first in painting and was then transferred to his writing. Watts urged on young students what Thackeray repeatedly advised artists to do: “Copy Nature.” Watts’s stress on direct contact with phenomena looks forward to Thackeray’s own doctrine of “originality” in art and literature. His preference for “things” over “ideas” is also suggestive to those who recall Thackeray’s consistent championship of the “real” in favor of the “ideal” in paintings and in books.

Basic also to the cultivation of “right reason” for Watts, and an aid toward understanding the “workings” of the spirit, was a certain critical attitude toward men and things. Cognizant as he was of original sin, he was well prepared for “the disguise and false colours in which many things appear to us in this original state.” He knew how prone men were to take the apparent for the real: “We are imposed upon at home as well as abroad; we are deceived by our senses, by our imaginations, by our passions and appetites; by the authority of men; by education and by custom &c; and we are led into frequent errors, by judging according to these false and flattering principles, rather than according to the nature of things.” Speaking as a practical man, he attributes such aberrations to the
frailty of the flesh, to the slow maturing of judgment, and, speaking as a theologian, to the corruption of our faculties resulting from the primordial fall from grace. Human nature being what it is, we are put on our guard: “There are a thousand things which are not in reality what they appear to be . . . both in the natural and in the moral world.” Just as the sun appears to be both small and flat, the moon the same size as the sun, and the rainbow arched and colored, “so knavery puts on the face of justice; hypocrisy and superstition wear the vizard of piety; deceit and evil are often clothed in the shapes and appearances of truth and goodness. Now Logic helps us to strip off the outward disguise of things and behold them, and judge of them in their own nature.”7

Readers of *Vanity Fair*, to point to the most obvious example, have certainly been made acquainted with the false faces put on by knavery and hypocrisy, and know well how ready Thackeray is to “strip off the outward disguises of things.” In one of his first books, Thackeray styled himself as “foe to humbug in all its shapes and hues . . . his smooth brother hypocrisy, or his sickly sister, sentiment,”8 and his novels all attempt to disentangle the webs men weave, others to deceive. One passage from Watts’s *Logic* entitled “The Springs of False Judgment” could almost serve as an epigraph for *The Book of Snobs*, Thackeray’s hypothetical anatomy of society:

> We are tempted to form our judgments of persons as well as things by these outward appearances: Where there is wealth, equipage and splendor, we are ready to call that man happy, but we see not the vexing disquietudes of his soul; and when we spy a person in ragged garments, we form a despicable opinion of him too suddenly: we can hardly think him either happy or wise, our judgment is so strangely biased by outward or sensible things . . . .

> . . . This prejudice is cured by a longer acquaintance with the world, and a just observation that things are sometimes better and sometimes worse than they appear to be.

> . . . Remember that a grey beard does not make a philosopher; all is not gold that glitters; and a rough diamond may be worth an immense sum.9

The better part of wisdom for Watts, as for the ancient Greeks, was the recognition that appearances are deceiving and seeing is not believing. At the same time, in view of the impure state of the world, he urges us to treat our fellow men with forbearance, not, in short, “to judge in the lump.”

There is scarce anything in the world of nature or of art, in the world of morality or religion, that is perfectly uniform. There is a mixture
of wisdom and folly, vice and virtue, good and evil, both in men and in things. We should remember that some persons have great wit and little judgment; others are judicious, but not witty. Some are good humoured without compliment; others have all the formalities of complaisance, but no good humour. We ought to know that one man may be vicious and learned, while another has virtue without learning. That many a man thinks admirable well, who has a poor utterance; while others have a charming manner of speech, but their thoughts are trifling and impertinent. Some are good neighbours, and courteous, and charitable toward men, who have no piety towards God; others are truly religious, but of morose natural tempers. Some excellent sayings are found in very silly books; and some silly things appear in books of value. We should neither praise or dispraise by wholesale, but separate the good from the evil, and judge them apart; the accuracy of a good judgment consists much in making such distinctions.10

The inability of mankind in general to discriminate in this way is the purport of Fitz-Boodle's address to the reader that ends the first version of Barry Lyndon: "Justice, forsooth! Does human life always exhibit justice . . .? Is it the good always who ride in gold coaches, and the wicked who go to the workhouse? Is a humbug never preferred before a capable man? Does the world always reward merit, never worship cant, never raise mediocrity to distinction? Never crowd to hear a donkey braying from a pulpit, nor ever buy the tenth edition of a fool's book?"11 Thackeray's own "laughable, pathetic jumble" of a world presents us with a heady "mixture of wisdom and folly, vice and virtue, good and evil." He shows us that charm is not always combined with virtue (v. Becky Sharp), or virtue for that matter with intelligence (Amelia), that one may have the spiritual graces without the social ones (as with Dobbin), that a charitable disposition may be joined to unworldliness and pride (Colonel Newcome), that a glib tongue does not necessarily bespeak wisdom (the Reverend Honeyman), and that a vicious nature can easily conceal itself beneath piety and respectability (Barnes Newcome).

The "Right Use of Reason" then, for Watts, meant a guarded skepticism toward men's pronouncements and pretensions, along with circumspection in judging their characters. "The true method of delivering ourselves from . . . prejudice," he preaches in the section on "The Springs of False Judgement," is "to view a thing on all sides; to compare all the various appearances of the same thing with one another, and let each of them have its full weight in the balance of our judgment."12 The ideal corrective to prejudice and misjudgment, then, is "a universal acquaintance with things" that
should both “keep you from being too positive and dogmatical;” and forestall “an excess of credulity and unbelief.” In the judicious assessment of men’s characters and motives that Thackeray attempted in his writings, both fictitious and nonfictitious, he seems to have taken these words to heart.

There is evidence that Thackeray pursued his interest in what Dr. Watts called “the workings of your own spirits” as a student in Paris, in the midst of painting in various ateliers, visits to art museums, avid theatergoing, and dops into “light literature.” In reviewing these years on the basis of a diary he kept, Anne Thackeray singles out three authors who took special hold of her father’s imagination—another prominent eighteenth-century English thinker and two French savants. Apart from novels and plays, she informs us, “He also reads in Gibbon and studies old Montaigne and is absorbed by Cousin’s ‘History of Philosophy.’”

These three figures played their parts in Thackeray’s intellectual development in demonstrable ways. “Gibbon was an infidel; and I would not give the end of this cigar for such a man’s opinion,” fumes Colonel Newcome at Clive and his friends. He is not, we gather, speaking for Thackeray, who was a devotee of this apostle of common sense as far back as his university days. At Cambridge he read the “infidel”’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire along with the histories of Hume and Smollett, and a letter of the 1850s indicates familiarity with the Memoirs. His private library included the Miscellaneous Works, edited by Gibbon’s friend and literary executor, John Lord Sheffield. In his introduction to the set, Sheffield emphasizes the value in particular of Gibbon’s more subjective writings, the Memoirs, as well as of the Letters and Journal: “Few men, I believe, have ever so fully unveiled their own character, by a minute narrative of their sentiments and pursuits as Mr. Gibbon will here be found to have done; not with study and labour—not with an affected frankness—but with a genuine confession of his little foibles and peculiarities, and a good-humoured and natural display of his own conduct and opinions.”

Sheffield based this observation on Gibbon’s own credo expressed at the beginning of his uncompleted autobiography: “Truth, naked, unblushing truth, the first virtue of more serious history, must be the sole recommendation of this personal narrative.” Contributing to the effect of truthfulness is clarity of language, and accordingly the author promises that “the style shall be simple and familiar; but style is the image of character; and the
habits of correct writing may produce, without labour or design, the appearance of art and study.” Although professing no motive for writing this “personal narrative” beyond his own diversion, Gibbon foresees that it might have a more lasting value: “Yet a sincere and simple narrative of my own life may amuse some of my leisure hours; but it will subject me, and perhaps with justice, to the imputation of vanity. I may judge, however, from the experience both of past and of the present times, that the public are always curious to know the men, who have left behind them any image of their minds: the most scanty accounts of such men are compiled with diligence, and pursued with eagerness; and the student of every class may derive a lesson, or an example, from the lives most similar to his own.”

In his apology Gibbon places himself squarely within the tradition of exemplary biography. With no false modesty he speaks of himself as the latest in a long line of illustrious self-portraitists stretching from Pliny the Younger to “the philosophic Hume.” Instructive memoirs, he points out, have been conveyed in a variety of forms: in letters, as with Pliny and Erasmus; in essays, as with Montaigne and Sir William Temple; in sermons, as with Huet; in confessions, as with St. Augustine and Rousseau. All of these men, in their different ways, “disclose the secrets of the human heart.” Moreover, sinners as well as saints, Gibbon feels, can contribute to our moral education, as, for example, Benvenuto Cellini with his “headstrong passions” and Colley Cibber with his “gay follies.”

Thackeray’s affinity for “personal history” as a means of character revelation is conspicuous throughout his canon. Not only did he draw freely upon memoirs, journals, diaries, and letters as sources for his novels; he also tended to disguise his “sham histories” as “true accounts,” as indicated by the titles of such “comicalities and whimsicalities” as Cox’s Diary, The Memoirs of Mr. Charles James Yellowplush, Fütz-Boodle’s Confessions, The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hogarty Diamond, The Diary of C. Jeames De La Pluche, Esq. . . . with His Letters, no less than his serious works, such as The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes . . ., The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., The Newcomes: Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family, and The Roundabout Papers. Along with the form of the memoir, Thackeray cultivated the intimate style of writing favored by Gibbon, with its lucidity, candor, apparent artlessness, and spontaneity. Although he disguised himself behind numerous pseudonyms and alter egos, Thackeray conveyed the “image of character” through language. “Why a man’s books may not always speak the truth, but
they speak his mind in spite of himself," he confessed, looking back over his career in one of his Roundabout essays. He was not hesitant to "lay bare his own weaknesses, vanities, peculiarities," as he confided to his readers in the preface to *Pendennis*.

"My defects...my imperfections, and my natural form, so far as public reverence hath permitted me," was the announced subject of the *Essais* of Montaigne, understandably much admired by Gibbon. "Read in noble old Montaigne," Thackeray recorded in a diary, only one indication of his attraction to the Frenchman's combination of self-centeredness and humility. Montaigne is a bedside book for the meditative Henry Esmond and for the wise Colonel Lambert of *The Virginians*, as he remained for their creator as late as his editorship of *Cornhill Magazine*. Thackeray owned three sets of the *Essays*, two in French, one translated into English "with very considerable amendments and improvements from the most accurate and elegant French edition" of Peter (or Pierre) Coste. Coste was instrumental in the revival of Montaigne's reputation in the early eighteenth century after a period of neglect. First published in 1724, his edition was several times revised and reprinted during the century, and remained in vogue through the early part of the next. Besides addressing himself conscientiously to the editorial tasks of establishing, emending, and annotating the text (which had become badly garbled, as well as obscure to this generation of readers), Coste also set himself up as apologist for the author. Defending the master from a reputation for excessive self-esteem that he had acquired among the general public, Coste, in introducing the *Essays*, stresses the unflagging honesty (in the original, "cette noble candeur...qui ne se dément jamais") that is observable throughout the work. In making himself the subject of his book, affirms Coste, Montaigne displays not mere egoism, but a genuine compassion for the human race; he has written about himself, "not so much out of vanity, as to communicate instruction." The reader, Coste argues, is really as much the subject of the book as the author: "Tis certain...that the picture he has here drawn of himself, is in the nature of a faithful mirror, wherein all men may discover some of their features, if they will but take the trouble to view themselves in it attentively, and with an honest design to see what they are in reality." Against those who complain that Montaigne talks too much about himself, Coste hurls back the essayist's own rejoinder that men do not think enough about themselves. Most men, he adds, turn away from the mirror that Montaigne holds up to them, out of cowardice, self-complacence, or sense of shame. The arduous task
that Montaigne has imposed upon himself of “painting himself without disguise” offers a challenge to all human beings to do likewise, Coste suggests, adding that there have been a few feeble imitators, but the generality lack the courage even to make the attempt.

Thackeray’s latter-day persona Mr. Batchelor cannot be so accused. “I may have been wrong, but I am candid,” he confides. “I tell my misdeeds; some fellows hold their tongues.” In his first novel, *Catherine*, his particularly candid narrator, Ikey Solomons, himself a convicted criminal, upbraids us for a more serious kind of dishonesty, evasion of moral responsibility: “Some call the doctrine of destiny a dark creed; but for me, I would fain try and think it a consolatory one. It is better, with all one’s sins upon one’s head, to deem oneself in the hands of Fate than to think, with our fierce passions and weak repentances, with our resolves so loud, so vain, so ludicrously, despicably weak and frail, with our dim wavering, wretched conceits about virtue, and our irresistible propensity to wrong, that we are the workers of our future sorrow or happiness.”

Solomons here has echoed in harsher voice these words of wisdom of Montaigne relating to Good and Evil: “Fortune does us neither good nor hurt; she only presents us the matter and the seed, which our soul, more powerful than she, turns and applies as best she pleases; the sole cause and sovereign mistress of her own happy or unhappy condition. . . . The things are not so painful and difficult of themselves, but our weaknesses or cowardice makes them so. To judge of great and high matters requires a suitable soul; otherwise we attribute the vice to them which is really our own.”

The fault is in ourselves, not in our stars. It is understandable, then, that the memoir became for Thackeray what the essay was for Montaigne, an opportunity for probing the self. “Reader, thou hast here an honest book: it doth at the outset forewarn thee that, in contriving the same, I have proposed to myself no other than a domestic and private end . . .,” reads Montaigne’s famous prefatory address. “I hope I shall always like to hear men, in reason talk about themselves. What subject does a man know better” declared Thackeray in one of his Roundabout Papers. In some of his “chronicles of small beer,” to be sure, he ridiculed the self-conscious narrator revealing himself like the garrulous illiterate Charles Yellowplush, the pompous George Fitz-Boodle, and the gullible Bob Stubbs, who even echoes Montaigne (“Some poet has observed that if a man could write down what has really happened to him in this mortal life, he would be sure to make a good book”).
but here he was parodying a role that elsewhere he took seriously. The melancholic clown in cockade looking into a cracked glass who greets us on the title page of _Vanity Fair_ in its first publication in book form is a graphic representation of Montaigne's "faithful mirror, wherein all men may discover some of their features."

Montaigne's mirror, however, is supposed to cast its light upon the world, as his editor Coste reminds us in his attempt to justify the egoism of the _Essays_ as a form of altruism. Although Montaigne professes no more than "a domestic and private end," his editor asserts that he is really writing about all humanity, that Socrates' famous dictum "know thyself in order to know your fellow man" can justifiably be applied to his "honest book." Such an identity between writer and audience is attempted by the narrator of _Vanity Fair_. In one chapter, alluding to the famous wrapper design accompanying the monthly parts, he assures his readers that "the moralist who is holding forth on the cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant) professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only the long-eared livery in which his congregation is arrayed" (chap. 8). The preacher on the barrel top descends to the level of his "congregation" rather than attempting to raise them to his own, thus establishing rapport along with intimacy. So he can be confident that, in speaking for himself, he is speaking for them:

"I" is here introduced to personify the world in general—the Mrs. Grundy of each respected reader's private circle—every one of whom can point to some families of his acquaintance who live nobody knows how. Many a glass of wine have we all of us drunk, I have very little doubt, hob-and-nobbing with the hospitable giver, and wondering how the deuce he paid for it. (Chap. 36)

In a word everybody went to wait upon this great man [Lord Steyne]—everybody who was asked: as you the reader (do not say nay) or I the writer thereof would go if we had the invitation. (Chap. 47)

The prophet's admonition "Judge not, lest ye be judged" could well be affixed to Thackeray's books. This spirit of charity and humility joined to moral sensitivity unites him with Montaigne, along with a circuit of response that he sets up through his discourse from narrator to hypothetical personage, to reader, back to narrator:

It is all vanity to be sure: but who will not own to liking a little of it? I should like to know what well-constituted mind, merely because it is transitory, dislikes roast-beef? That is a vanity; but may every man who reads this have a wholesome portion of it through life, I beg; ay,
though my readers were five hundred thousand. Sit down, gentle-
men, and fall to, with a good hearty appetite; the fat, the lean, the
gravy, the horse-radish as you like it—don't spare it. Another glass
of wine, Jones my boy—a little bit of the Sunday side. Yes, let us eat
our fill of the vain thing, and be thankful therefor. And let us make
the best of Becky's aristocratic pleasures likewise—for these too, like
all mortal delights, were transitory. (Chap. 51)

Thackeray apparently agreed that "A free and generous confes-
sion enervates reproach, and disarms slander," as Montaigne ob-
serves in his essay called, as it happens, "On Vanity." Toward the
end of this essay we read: "If other men would consider themselves
at the rate I do, they would, as I do, discover themselves to be full
of inanity and foppery; to rid myself of it, I cannot, without making
myself away. We are steeped in it, as well one as another; but they
who are not aware on't, have somewhat the better bargain; and yet,
I know not, whether they have or no." That Victorian disciple of
Montaigne, Mr. Batchelor, puts it more racily and succinctly: "I
daresay I made a gaby of myself to the world: pray, my good
friend, hast thou never done likewise? If thou hast never been a
fool, be sure thou wilt never be a wise man."26

Thackeray regarded himself as a historian, but, to judge from his
favorite reading, the forms of history that interested him most were
"private history" and "secret history," works of reflection that
helped men and women understand their own natures. "The con-
dition of reflection is memory; and the condition of memory is
time," wrote the philosopher-educator Victor Cousin in his *Cours de
l'histoire de la philosophie*, the book that young Thackeray was "ab-
sorbed by" in the reading room of the Palais Royal in Paris, accord-
ing to his daughter. Thackeray's own remark at the time is laconic,
but enthusiastic: "Read Cousin's History of Philosophy . . . am
much pleased with Cousin his style & his spirit. The excitement of
metaphysics must equal almost that of gambling."27 This was trib-
ute indeed from a young man about town whose own gambling
fever was transferred to the "rooks and pigeons" of his early
magazine stories such as Bob Stubbs, Jack Attwood, Algernon
Deuceace, and Sam Titmarsh, and for whom the casino wheel and
the gaming table attained emblematic significance as prominent as
the stage, the masquerade and the ballroom in his "chronicles of
fate's surprises." Thackeray came to Cousin in his maturity, and,
despite a paucity of references to him in his writing, there is reason
to believe that this philosopher was the most significant of all the
early influences in the shaping of his mental attitude and in provid-
ing a frame of reference for his novels. Thackeray himself invites such conjecture by the words with which his diary entry ends: "... I found myself giving utterance to a great number of fine speeches & imagining many wild theories w' I found it impossible to express on paper."

Contemporary witnesses testify to Cousin's charismatic power as a teacher. The book that Thackeray read grew out of a series of lectures that marked Cousin's resumption of his post at the Faculté des Lettres at the Sorbonne in 1828 after a period of political suppression. When first delivered, these lectures, according to an account by the Scottish philosopher Sir William Hamilton, "excited an unexampled sensation in Paris. ... Two thousand auditors listened in admiration to the eloquent exposition of doctrines unintelligible to the many, and the oral discussion of philosophy awakened in Paris, and in France, an interest unexampled since the days of Abelard." One member of the original audience, the novelist Stendhal, recorded in a notebook that although the professor's ideas were not altogether clear to him, they "électrisent néan­moins tous nos jeunes de vingt ans." Ernest Renan, who had been one of his students in a seminary, extolled M. Cousin as one who "nous enchantait," and believed him to be "un des exciateurs de ma pensée." Balzac and Sainte-Beuve are among other major literary figures who came under his spell, and such eminent intellectuals as Michelet, Quinet, Jouffroy, and Montalembert were drawn into his orbit in one way or another.

Beyond his audience of students and men of letters, Sir William Hamilton tells us, Cousin's readership was extended by newspapers that printed digests of his lectures, and revised versions of the lectures themselves prepared by Cousin were disseminated in weekly parts throughout the provinces. The first translator of the Cours de Vhistoire conveys the impression that the impact of Cousin's ideas was even more far-reaching. In an introduction prepared for his American readers he announced: "It is certain that philosophical views and doctrines are no longer regarded, on the continent of Europe, merely as subjects of literary curiosity or of elegant entertain­ment. For it is well known that they excite strong emotions of sympathy and approbation, and are listened to and read with that attention and respect which is the most satisfactory evidence of a powerful conviction of their rationality and truth, by a very numerous class of intelligent and well informed young men, who may be fairly considered to represent the flowering of the rising generation of their respective countries."
Thackeray is the one among the “very numerous class of intelligent and well informed young men” whom we can account for. Among the entries in his diary for this period is a sentence from Cousin’s lecture on Descartes’s *Discourse on Method*: “Douter c’est croire, car doubter c’est penser, celui qui doute croit il qu’il doute ou doute-t-il qu’il doute—S’il doute qu’il doute Il détruit par cela même son scepticisme—& s’il croit qu’il doute il le détruit encore.” (“To doubt is to believe; for to doubt is to think. Does he who doubts believe that he doubts, or does he doubt whether he doubts or not? If he doubt whether he doubt or not, he destroys his own skepticism; and if he believes that he doubts, he destroys it again.”) The theme of this lecture is brought out in the sentence immediately preceding the one Thackeray copied out, which reads in translation: “What is said of doubt, what Descartes has demonstrated in regard to doubt, applies with greater force to the idea of nothingness.” Cousin’s teachings, we can gather, have a bearing on Thackeray’s own lifelong struggle against cynicism and skepticism—most explicitly dramatized in *Pendennis*, his most personal novel. Other aspects of Cousin’s thought too are reflected in his writing.

Cousin was destined to become particularly influential on the education of the “rising generation” of his own country in a series of administrative posts that followed upon his return to the Sorbonne. Something of a persona non grata during the period of the Restoration because of his liberal views, he emerged as an Establishment figure under the July Monarchy that commenced in 1830, serving variously as State Councillor Extraordinary, member of the Royal Council of Public Instruction, Minister of Public Instruction (under Thiers), and Director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Although his administration did not go unchallenged, he had a virtually monopolistic control over the school system until the overthrow of the regime of Louis Philippe by the Revolution of 1848 and the subsequent coup d’état that brought in the regime of Louis Napoleon. In the purely intellectual realm, his system of thought, known as Eclecticism, dominated French philosophy until it was displaced by the followers of Auguste Comte’s Positivism, demonstrating Cousin’s own theory that “each [idea] serves its time; and, after having been useful, it must give place to another whose turn is come.”

Victor Cousin’s reputation was kept alive after his death in 1867 by a circle of faithful disciples, but it has hardly outlasted his century. In ours there has been a tendency to downgrade him. He “was
not a great philosopher, as is clear from any of his philosophical writings," asserts a modern student. "His language was rhetorical, his thought was naively and pompously idealistic, and his general attitude overbearing." But the very affirmative nature of his thought, deplored by this critic, and the fervor with which it was expressed, account for Cousin’s appeal to the impressionable youth of Thackeray’s generation. His first biographer called him "Resta­ urateur De La Philosophie Spiritualiste Au XIX Siècle," indicative of his importance in the history of ideas. Cousin at first called his philosophy “the new idealism,” signifying his reaction against the materialist tendency of the schools that had preceded him, the sensualistes (notably Condillac) of the Enlightenment, and the rationalist circle known as the idéologues in vogue during the Napoleonic period. It is true, however, that Cousin was not an original philosopher, his contribution to thought being rather as a historian and synthesizer of philosophies. Eclecticism, the overall term he early applied to his system as a whole, puts the emphasis where he wished it, on the process of inquiry itself, rather than on specific doctrines, on aim and purpose, rather than on content. For Cousin the very freedom from absolutism gave philosophy its preeminent position among humane studies. “After having . . . proclaimed the supremacy of philosophy, we hasten to add that it is essentially tolerant,” he concluded his introductory lecture. “In fact philosophy is the understanding and the explanation of all things. Of what, then, aside from error and crime, can it be the enemy?”

Cousin’s “metaphysics” apparently attracted Thackeray by its comprehensiveness and its attitude of general tolerance, what Cousin called “universal sympathy.” For Cousin the primary function of the philosopher in the modern world was to reconcile conflicting positions. As an eclectic he taught “that every system contains a part of the truth; that all systems taken together contain the whole truth, that there is no need to discover truth, only to unite its scattered fragments.” Thackeray himself was praised in his time for just this disinterested frame of mind. According to one of his admirers, he “offends no one by the vehemence of his opinions, nor by dogmatism of manner . . . [he] is not a man to create partizans, he espouses no ‘cause’: has no party.” Another characterized his mind as a “hospitable brain . . . tolerant of contradictions.” Cousin taught that “each system is true by what it affirms and false by what it denies.” Thackeray’s most recent biographer, Gordon Ray, in summing up his accomplishment, has written: “In his comprehensive and impartial appraisal of English life, Thackeray
praised what was good, while he attacked what was bad," a succinct enough statement of the eclectic position.\textsuperscript{37}

We can understand too why Thackeray, with his introspective temperament, responded to the "philosophie spiritualiste" of Cousin. "The study of consciousness is the study of human nature," concludes the lecture on Descartes that Thackeray quoted in his diary. In "restoring" the mind to the primacy from which the "sensualists" had dislodged it, Cousin employed a term that was novel at the time: "Man is a universe in miniature; psychology [la psychologie] is universal science concentrated. Psychology contains and reflects everything, both that which is of God and that which is of the world—under the precise and determinate angle of consciousness; everything is brought within a narrow compass, but everything is there."\textsuperscript{38} In his intuitive way Thackeray became a practitioner of this "universal science." He wrote once in a letter to an editor that he enjoyed the exercise of "the humorous ego," a less exact term than Cousin's "precise and determinate angle of consciousness," but indicating the pleasure he took in the play of mind over what Cousin called "that which is of the world," and which Thackeray referred to simply as "society in general."\textsuperscript{39} What Cousin referred to as "that which is of God" also figures in Thackeray's fictional universe. In \textit{Pendennis} he clearly dissociates himself from the law student Paley to whom "All was dark outside his reading lamp," so that "Love, and Nature, and Art (which is the expression of our praise and sense of the beautiful world of God) were shut out from him" (chap. 29). He is more in accord with Cousin, who affirmed in his lecture "The Idea of Philosophy" that "Philosophy does not cut from art its divine wings, but follows it in its flight, measures its reach and aim, Sister of Religion, it draws, from an intimate connection with her, powerful inspirations."\textsuperscript{40}

Although he conceived of the mind as a microcosm, Cousin saw it as bounded by man's limitations. He distinguished between the "spontaneous reason" that we all share and the "reflective reason" unique to each individual. The "spontaneous reason" when it operates grasps the nature of reality in a flash of insight, but it is inhibited by the "reflective reason," which "considers the elements of thought successively and not all at once... [and] considers each, for a moment at least, in a state of isolation."\textsuperscript{41} In one of his addresses to the reader in \textit{Pendennis}, Thackeray describes this solipsistic condition: "O philosophic reader... a distinct universe walks about under your hat and under mine— all things in nature are different to each—the woman we look at has not the same
features, the dish we eat from has not the same taste to the one and the other—you and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands a little more or less near to us?"42 (chap. 16). The very wrapper design that confronted the first readers of *Pendennis*, showing the hero with chin in hand, puzzled and pondering, torn between the domestic virtues and evil spirits, can be interpreted as an emblem of the "reflective reason" beset with doubts and prone to error.

Because of their limited perspective and their state of isolation, "Men are scarcely ever more than halves and quarters of men; who, unable to understand, accuse each other," Cousin declares in a succeeding lecture. The philosopher, according to Cousin's ideal, transcends these limitations through his capacity to identify himself with all mankind by means of "universal sympathy": "And, do you know the means, gentlemen, by which you may arrive at this tolerance, or rather at this universal sympathy [Cousin addresses his students]? You can arrive at it on one condition only; and that is, that you yourselves get rid of every exclusive prepossession; that you embrace all the elements of thought, and thus reconstruct the whole edifice of humanity in your own minds." This accomplished, Cousin continues: "... whosoever of your fellow creatures may present himself to you, and whatever may be the exclusive idea that prepossesses him... will not be wanting to you; you will therefore, in him, pardon humanity; for you will comprehend it... because you will possess it entirely. This is the only remedy against the malady of fanaticism; which, whatever be its object, proceeds from nothing but the prepossession of the mind by one object exclusively, whilst we are ignorant of, and despise every other."43

Arthur Pendennis, in the course of one of his debates with his friend and fellow law student George Warrington, has his say on what Cousin denounced as "the malady of fanaticism": "Make a faith or dogma absolute, and persecution becomes a logical consequence; and Dominic burns a Jew, or Calvin an Arian, or Nero a Christian, or Elizabeth or Mary a Papist or Protestant; or their father both or either, according to his humour; and acting without any pangs of remorse,—but on the contrary, with strict notions of duty fulfilled. Make dogma absolute, and to inflict or to suffer death becomes easy and necessary" (chap. 61).

To make dogma absolute is, of course, just what Victor Cousin opposes. "I hope that those youths, who for some time will frequent this lecture room, will there contract different habits," he urged in his lecture entitled "Reflection—the Element of Error," that they
will "learn to understand that, as every error should be treated with profound indulgence, and that all those halves of men that we constantly meet with around us, are, nevertheless, fragments of humanity, and that in them, we should still respect that truth and that humanity of which they participate." Arthur Pendennis has taken heed: "'You call me a sceptic because I acknowledge what is,'" continues his colloquy with Warrington; "'and in acknowledging that, be it linnet or lark, or priest or parson; be it, I mean, any single one of the infinite varieties of the creatures of God . . . I say that the study and acknowledgement of that variety amongst men especially increases our respect and wonder for the Creator, Commander, and Ordainer of all these minds so different, and yet so united'" (chap. 61).

The "profound indulgence" toward error that Victor Cousin preached called for an eclectic attitude toward men's opinions as well as toward systems of thought. "The truth, friend! . . . where is the truth?" exclaims Arthur Pendennis in another of his philosophic moods. "Show it me. That is the question between us. I see it on both sides. I see it on the Conservative side of the House, and amongst the Radicals, and even on ministerial benches. . . . If the truth is with all these, why should I take side with any one of them?" (chap. 61). Henry Esmond too is eclectic, on matters both spiritual and temporal:

In the course of his reading (which was neither pursued with that seriousness or that devout mind which such a study requires), the youth found himself at the end of one month, a Papist, and was about to proclaim his faith; the next month a Protestant, with Chillingworth; and the third a sceptic, with Hobbes and Bayle.

. . . Harry brought his family Tory politics to college with him, to which he must add a dangerous admiration for Oliver Cromwell, whose side or King James's by turns, he often chose to take in the disputes which the young gentlemen used to hold in each other's rooms, where they debated the state of the nation, crowned and deposed kings, and toasted past and present heroes or beauties in flagons of college ale.44

Along with his open-mindedness, Henry, it might be added, displays an unusual disposition to "pardon humanity":

I look into my heart and think that I am as good as my Lord Mayor, and know I am as bad as Tyburn Jack. Give me a chain and red gown and a pudding before me, and I could play the part of Alderman very well, and sentence Jack after dinner. Starve me, keep me from books and honest people, educate me to love dice, gin, and pleasure, and put me in Hounslow Heath, with a purse before me and I will
take it. "And I shall be deservedly hanged," say you, wishing to put an end to this prosing. I don't say no. I can't but accept the world as I find it, including a rope's end, as long as it is in fashion.\textsuperscript{45}

The classical motto \textit{Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto} was invoked by Victor Cousin as the theme of his message of tolerance, the very same motto quoted by Thackeray in one of his early articles on popular literature.\textsuperscript{46} Certainly no man was alien to Thackeray as a novelist. His vast gallery of characters, taking in criminals, gamblers, miscreants of various sorts, demireps, the more respectable classes of shopkeepers, professionals, and just ordinary citizens, all the way up to the gentry and the aristocracy, indeed scales the entire "edifice of humanity" from its subbasement to its summit.

In their aggregate Thackeray's novels add up to a cumulative effort on his part to "comprehend" humanity, in Victor Cousin's phrase, to "possess it entirely." His grand company of heroes, heroines, and subsidiary characters, from the naïfs of his early stories to the sophisticates of his later and better known ones, represent diverse "fragments of humanity" each with what Cousin called an "incomplete or partial view of things." He begins at the bottom rung with the ignorant or semiliterate, like Catherine Hayes corrupted by evil companions, and Morgiana (the soubrette of "The Ravenswing," with the voice and brain of a bird), the gullible, like Bob Stubbs, Bob Robinson, and Barber Cox, and assorted primitives, of whom Charles Yellowplush, of the "Cockniack" dialect and outlook on society, remains the most endearing as well as the most enduring. Up the social ladder, but not very far along the scale of intellect, braggarts such as Major Gahagan and Barry Lyndon betray their moral idiocy out of their own mouths. Subtler forms of self-delusion are exposed through the more cultivated or better-educated men and women of the larger books, who are nevertheless hemmed in by various mental blinders: Becky Sharp, a worldling too much in love with her own cleverness; Amelia Sedley, an intransigent sentimentalist; Arthur Pendennis, a selfish epicurean; Henry Esmond, a melancholic; Clive Newcome, who has to learn to discipline his sensibility no less than his father has to learn to curb his pride; Dr. Firmin, charming and gracious, but cold and unfeeling. As omniscient author (or "moral philosopher," as he liked to call himself) Thackeray performs the office of the philosopher that Victor Cousin visualized—to unite the "scattered fragments" of truth possessed by individuals in isolation and to
enlarge their "partial view of things" by a more total conception of reality.

Thackeray's novels in toto amount to a composite of human nature, the truth of things viewed from varied "angles of consciousness" but in a single novel he tends to shift the angle periodically to produce a psychological montage. A concise instance occurs in an episode in *Pendennis* where within a single paragraph we learn the reactions of the various members of the household at Chatteris to young Pen's imminent departure for Oxbridge:

Thus, oh friendly readers, we see how every man in the world has his own private griefs and business, by which he is more cast down or occupied than by the affairs or sorrows of any other person. While Mrs. Pendennis is disquieting herself about losing her son, and that anxious hold she has of him, as long as he has remained in the mother's nest, whence he is about to take flight in the great world beyond—while the Major's great soul chafes and frets, inwardly vexed as he thinks what great parties are going on in London, and that he might be sunning himself in the glances of Dukes and Duchesses, but for those cursed affairs that keep him in a wretched little country hole—while Pen is tossing between his passion and a more agreeable sensation, unacknowledged yet, but swaying him considerably, namely his longing to see the world—Mr. Smirke [Pen's tutor, in love with Mrs. Pendennis] has a private care watching at his bedside, and sitting behind him on his pony; and is no more satisfied than the rest of us. How lonely we are in the world! how selfish and secret, everybody! (Chap. 16).

Thackeray enables us to see not only the same events through different temperaments, but individual characters as well from divers standpoints, through his practice of bringing them back from novel to novel. A simple example is Barry Lyndon, given to swaggering self-amplification in his own story, but exposed as "an Irishman of low extraction" by George Warrington during his brief reappearance in *The Virginians*. A more complex one is Becky Sharp, on whom we get two more slants after she is removed from the spotlight, making it possible for us to contrast the face that she presents to the world with the one that we have already glimpsed behind her mask. Young Clive Newcome, friend to little Rawdon at Gown Boys, replies to an inquirer: "I don't know how his mother—her who wrote the hymns, you know, and goes to Mr. Honeyman's chapel—comes to be Rebecca, Lady Crawley." Later in the same novel, we overhear La Duchesse d'Ivry extolling "La sémillante Becki ... have you heard, Miladi, of the charming Mistress Becki? Monsieur le Duc describes her as the most spirituelle
English woman he ever met.” We may retain our private opinion of Becky, but Beatrix Esmond is allowed to vindicate herself. Long after we have witnessed Henry’s disillusionment with her (“The roses had shuddered out of her cheeks; her eyes were glaring; she looked quite old. . . . As he looked at her, he wondered that he could ever have loved her”), we see her in her dotage, grown coarser and more worldly, but at the same time penitent for her treatment of Henry, and making up for it to an extent by singing his praises to his relatives, for whom she feels undisguised contempt. On the other hand, George Brandon, the dashing libertine of *A Shabby Genteel Story*, when we meet him years later as the suave Dr. Firmin of *The Adventures of Philip*, seen through the eyes of his son Philip, has acquired a more sinister character beneath his glossy exterior. Arthur Pendennis, whose development we watch over a span of three novels, is seen first as an adolescent through the critical mind of a detached narrator in *Pendennis*; speaks for himself as an established writer and devoted family man in *The Newcomes*; and finally in *The Adventures of Philip* completes the cycle by acting as a mentor— if a faulty one— to another growing boy, as his uncle had been to him.

Thackeray’s familiar literary devices—the intrusive narrator, the constantly switching perspectives, his alter egos, recurring characters, as well as what a modern critic has called his “bufferless endings”—can now be recognized among the means by which he impresses upon us the complexity and relativity of truth. He also endeavors to make the crooked straight by setting the life histories contained by his novels in a grander context. Victor Cousin, like Isaac Watts, committed his disciples to large views, suggesting how they could acquire what Dr. Watts called “an extensive treasure of ideas.” Cousin’s prescribed approach to the education of the intellect is at once introspective and panoramic. “Study entire humanity; in yourself first, and in your consciousness, then in that consciousness of the human race which is called history,” he advised. In his lecture entitled “Of the Psychological Method in History,” he establishes the history of civilization as “the pedestal of the history of philosophy.” Just as the mind is a microcosm of the universe, the history of civilization is the history of man writ large. This history is spread out through space and time, and takes in all the elements of culture: “The history of philosophy expresses, in short, the history of religion, the history of art, the history of legislation, the history of wealth, and, to a certain point, physical geography itself; for if the history of philosophy belongs to that of humanity, the history
of humanity belongs to that of nature, the first basis and theatre of humanity, to the constitution of the globe, to its divisions; in a word, to its physical geography."

Man, then, for Cousin, is the proper study of the philosopher, both as individuals with unique consciousnesses and collectively as reflected in their history and in their institutions. Thackeray's historical sense is evident from his first novel, *Catherine*, which opens with a retrospect of continental politics preceding the reign of Queen Anne when this story takes place, giving a grander scope even to this low-life crime story. However, the travel books through which he first reached a substantial readership display at its fullest range his early deep engagement with society and culture. He called these records "Sketch Books," and one tends to look at them now literally as "sketches" for the grand "canvasses" to come. In the first of them, *The Paris Sketch Book*, we are presented immediately with the "theatre of humanity," spectacles of people in the aggregate, all ages and classes thrown together, civilizations intermingling:

The decks have a strange look; the people on them, that is. Wives, elderly stout husbands, nursemaids, and children predominate, of course, in English steamboats. Such may be considered as the distinctive marks of the English gentleman at three or four-and-forty; two or three of such groups have pitched their camps on the deck. Then there are a number of young men, of whom three or four have allowed their moustaches to begin to grow since last Friday; for they are going "on the Continent," and they look, therefore, as if their upper lips were smeared with snuff.

... Yonder is a group of young ladies, who are going to Paris to learn how to be governesses: those two splendidly dressed ladies are milliners from the Rue Richelieu, who have just brought over, and disposed of, their cargo of Summer fashions. Here sits the Rev. Mr. Snodgrass with his pupils, whom he is conducting to his establishment, near Boulogne, where, in addition to a classical and mathematical education (washing included), the young gentlemen have the benefit of learning French among the French themselves.

... There are, of course, many Jews on board. Who ever travelled by steamboat, coach, diligence, eilwagen, vetturino, mule-back, or sledge, without meeting some of the wandering race?

The ordinary "sights" that visitors travel for, Thackeray (or Tittmarsh, to use his passport name) is inclined to leave to the Baedekers; he passes up details about Boulogne, for example, which he points out "have all been excellently described by the facetious Coglan, the learned Dr. Millingen, and by innumerable guidebooks besides." He intends for his readers, like the groups of stu-
dents he observed among his fellow passengers, to learn something from this voyage. They certainly were led to expect something more than meets the eye from a diligence window in the “Allegory” of nine figures designed for the original title page, with its accompanying jingle:

Number 1’s an Ancient Carlist, Number 3 a Paris artist,
Gloomily there stands between them, Number 2 a Bonapartist;
In the middle is King Louis-Phillip standing at his ease,
Guarded by a local Grocer, and a Serjeant of Police;
4’s the people in a passion, 6 a Priest of pious mien,
5 a Gentleman of Fashion, copied from a Magazine.

These members of the Three Estates represent the various areas of civilization that Victor Cousin assigned to the student of “entire humanity”: religion (the “Priest of pious mien”); art (“a Paris artist”); government (the Carlist, the Bonapartist, and the Bourgeois King range along the spectrum of politics, and there is that upholder of the law, “the Serjeant of Police”); and wealth (the “local Grocer” at one end of the scale, the “Gentleman of Fashion” at the other). And indeed the attentive reader of *The Paris Sketch Book*, miscellaneous as are its contents, comes away with an introduction to French cultural history, religious (“The Fetes of July”; “Madame Sand and the New Apocalypse”); political and legal (“Napoleon and His System”), economic (“Meditations at Versailles”), and certainly artistic (“On the French School of Painting,” “Caricatures and Lithography in Paris,” “On Some French Fashionable Novels,” “French Dramas and Melodramas”). Through its pages pass captains and kings, such as Napoleon, Marshal Tallard, and Louis-Philippe; numerous writers, poets, dramatists, and artists; minor functionaries, such as Citizen Schneider (in “The Story of Mary Ancel”); commercial travelers, such as Sam Pogson; shopkeepers, such as the lively but unnamed tradespeople of Paris and Boulogne; servants, such as Beatrice Merger; mountebanks, such as Robert Macaire; jesters, such as Monsieur Poinsinet; gamblers, such as the hapless Jack Attwood; and—out of the sewers of Paris—thieves and murderers, such as Louis Dominic Cartouche and Sebastien Peytel—in short, occupants of every level of M. Cousin’s “edifice of humanity.”

In Titmarsh’s descriptions of the social scene that dominate many of the “sketches,” the shadow of history is rarely absent. Past and present intermingle at the entrance to the capital: “But behold us at Paris! The Diligence has reached a rude-looking gate, or grille, flanked by two lodges; the French Kings of old made their entry by
this gate; some of the hottest battles of the late revolution were fought before it. At present it is blocked by carts and peasants, and a busy crowd of men, in green, examining the packages before they enter, probing the straw with long needles. It is the Barrier of St. Denis, and the green men are the customs-men of the city of Paris.52 The "movements of thought" that accompany the superseding of one generation by another was one great stimulus to the historical imagination for Cousin. In a few sentences Thackeray has managed to personify the transformation of French society from the fall of the Bourbons to the rise of the bureaucrat. In the final sketch, "Meditations at Versailles," he ponders the passing of the glory that was Louis XIV. Noting that "Tailors, chandlers, tin-men, wretched hucksters, and greengrocers are now established in the mansions of the old peers," he checks any impulse he may have for sentimental nostalgia:

Why not mourn over it, as Mr. Burke did over his cheap defence of nations and unbought grace of life; that age of chivalry, which he lamented, à propos of a trip to Versailles, some half a century back?

Without stopping to discuss (as might be done in rather a neat and successful manner) whether the age of chivalry was cheap or dear, and whether in the time of the unbought grace of life, there was not more bribery, robbery, villainy, tyranny, corruption, than exists even in our own happy days—let us make a few moral and historical remarks upon the town of Versailles.53

The essays that come between the opening "Invasion of France" and the closing "Meditations at Versailles" may be characterized as series of "moral and historical remarks" intended not merely to introduce his countrymen to French culture but to carry on a kind of cross-Channel dialogue. Thackeray had frequent occasion to observe how little these two traditionally enemy nations understood one another, and one aim of the survey of French culture that he attempted here seems to have been to remove what Victor Cousin called "the malady of fanaticism." As he sums it up in one essay: "Tea-parties are the same all the world over, with the exception that, with the French, there are more lights and prettier dresses; and with us a mighty deal more tea in the pot."54 Weighing the two countries in the balance, he finds good and bad, right and wrong on both sides.

On matters of ethics, he is quick to point out, John Bull has no reason to be smug. "Talk of English morality!—the worst licentiousness, in the worst period of the French monarchy scarcely equalled the wickedness of this Sabbath-keeping country of ours," he observes in comparing the popular prints of the two. The art of
France also shows up the aesthetic blind spots of the English. "Nothing merely intellectual will be popular among us," he complains, "we do not love beauty for beauty's sake, as the Germans; or wit, for wit's sake, as the French; for abstract art we have no appreciation. . . . In France, such matters are far better managed, and the love of art is a thousand times more keen."⁵⁵ Through the vivid verbal street scenes to which he treats his readers (the colorful Faubourg St. Denis, for example, which is contrasted with a dingy London street), Titmarsh illustrates what he finds to be a finer quality of life on the continent.⁵⁶

In one area, that of politics, he feels the English can claim superiority, inasmuch as, he concludes in his discussion of government, the English have succeeded better than the French in curbing the powers of the monarchy. The English, too, are on the whole a more prosperous people, and yet, ". . . how much better is social happiness understood [in France]; how much more manly equality is there between Frenchman and Frenchman, than between rich and poor in our own country, with all our superior wealth, instruction, and political freedom! There is, amongst the humblest, a gaiety, a cheerfulness, politeness, and sobriety, to which, in England no class can show a parallel: and these, be it remembered, are not only qualities for holidays, but for working days too, and add to the enjoyment of human life as much as good clothes, good beef, or good wages."⁵⁷

Titmarsh's pictures of street life enable us to participate in this "social happiness" at festivals where all classes intermingle in celebration and entertainment. Particularly in his account of the "humbug" ceremonies commemorating the July Revolution he brings out a shared joie de vivre:

The sight which I have just come away from is as brilliant, happy, and beautiful as can be conceived; and if you want to see French people to the greatest advantage, you should go to a festival like this, where the manners and innocent gaiety show a very pleasing contrast to the coarse and vulgar hilarity which the same class would exhibit in our own country—at Epsom racecourse, for instance, or at Greenwich Fair . . . . It does one good to see honest heavy épiciers, fathers of families, playing with them in the Tuileries, or, as to-night, bearing them stoutly on their shoulders, through many long hours, in order that the little ones, too, may have their share of the fun. John Bull, I fear, is more selfish: he does not take Mrs. Bull to the public-house; but leaves her, for the most part, to take care of the children at home.⁵⁸

Amid the gay shops and crowds of the Faubourg St. Denis he finds a more somber sign of French enlightenment in a gloomy-looking
prison, converted from a Lazarist convent, whose inmates, instead of being confined to cells, are set to useful occupations like baking and sewing. "Was it not a great stroke of the legislature to superintend the morals and linen at once," he quips, "and thus keep these poor creatures continually mending?" This humanitarian motif is sustained through some of the tales and vignettes of The Paris Sketch Book—particularly the touching episode of the self-sacrificing servant girl Beatrice Merger—whose effect is to arouse that sympathy with the poor he feels is lacking in his own country, just as the anecdotes of gamblers and criminals bring out the spark of humanity presumably latent in the lowest of creatures.

"With our English notions, our moral and physical constitution, it is quite impossible that we should become intimate with our brisk neighbours," Titmarsh is forced to conclude in one of his contemplative moments. Despite the abundance of writers, the communications gap is as wide as ever, a situation in which he finds both sides equally at fault, if unwittingly. Just as "a Frenchman might have lived a thousand years in England, and never could have written 'Pickwick,'" he observes in connection with his reading of novels, so "an Englishman cannot hope to give a good description of the inward thoughts and ways of his neighbours." His playgoing in Paris convinces him that English naiveté about the French was well matched by French dramatists' ludicrous misconceptions of English life and history. "Would a Chinese playwright or painter have stranger notions about the barbarians than our neighbours, who are separated from us but by two hours of salt-water?" he asks in dismay. Chauvinism and narrow-mindedness, he discovered, were not the exclusive preserve of either nation. On the positive side, he recognized in the arts one means to bridge the gulf between alien societies and cultures.

The Irish Sketch Book (1843) is more truly a travel book than its predecessor in that it records a tour, or series of tours; but here too Thackeray penetrates beyond the conventional visitor's interest in quaint ways and charming people. Ireland, unlike France, was strange and new to him, but it also offers him "opportunity for reflection," as he is quick to inform his readers, not merely scenery and recreation. This Emerald Isle unrolls before his mind's eye as a "strange picture of pleasure and pain, trade, theatre, schools, courts, churches, life and death." The "beauties" of Hibernia are not neglected (in fact, the author takes his readers to task for having ignored them), but these are mainly the backdrop to a cultural pageant. As with France, we are introduced to aspects of Irish civilization in accord with M. Cousin's categories—her religion
("Cork—the Ursuline Convent"); her arts (Carlow cathedral, Mr. Hogan's paintings in the chapels of Dublin and Cork, "Galway-Nights' Entertainments"); her legal institutions ("Roundstone Petty Sessions," the murder trials of Patrick Byrne and John Woods at Tipperary); and her economy ("Cork—the Agricultural Show," the descriptions of the market at Killarney and of the wealth and poverty existing side by side in Dublin). We are taken inside the convent at Cork, living vestige of medieval Christianity across the Irish Sea, with its barren cells, memento mori, and grisly paintings depicting torture and martyrdom. The "smiling beatitude" of the nuns amidst their poverty and mortification leads the philosophical author to ask in awe: "Is it policy, or hypocrisy, or reality?" but he does not stay for an answer. A rainy night at a Galway Inn provides him the chance to relax with some Irish stories and plays, a painless introduction to her bloody history. He was deeply moved by a domestic tragedy, The Warden of Galway, commemorating a righteous mayor, James Lynch Fitzstephen, forced by his conscience to hang his own son, who has been found guilty of murder. The Battle of Aughrim, based on the defeat of James II by William of Orange, brought him closer to the period he was to make his own with Henry Esmond. A lighter side of Gaelic literature that fascinated him were the tall tales, lore of black magic, and legends of bandits, particularly the adventures of that Irish Robin Hood, Captain Freeny, that he utilized for Barry Lyndon, the novel that followed upon the Irish journey.

In his Irish Sketch Book Titmarsh provides us with generous samples of the famed Irish charm and good humor, but he does not shield us from their less admirable qualities. Their "false magnificence" annoys him in particular. "There is something simple in the way in which these good people belord their clergymen, and respect titles real and sham," he writes. "Take any Dublin paper,—a couple of columns of it are sure to be filled with the movements of the small great men of the world. . . . Have the Irish so much reason to respect their lords that they should so chronicle all their movements; and not only admire real lords, but make sham ones of their own to admire them?" He observed a decadent aristocracy clinging to a decayed chivalry here as in France. He assessed his own countrymen against their cousins across the Irish Sea, as he had against their "brisk neighbours" across the Channel. He is ready to concede that the English lack the Irish gusto and wit, "but the bluntness and honesty of the English have well-nigh kicked the fashionable humbug down; and, except perhaps among footmen and about Baker Street, this curiosity about the aristocracy is wear-
ing fast away.” Vanity Fair, which came out four years later, hardly conveys the impression that the English had “kicked the fashionable humbug down,” but then it is set in the Regency. It is more significant perhaps that in the forerunner to Vanity Fair, The Book of Snobs, we get only “A Little about Irish Snobs,” the rest being taken up with English toadying and belording. “Sham Nobility” and true, then, Thackeray seems to have concluded, were pretty evenly divided among the nations of men. Meanwhile, Ireland, like France, furnished him an “improving” journey—“historical,” “topographic,” and “descriptive,” as he characterized it.67

Thackeray’s last travel book, Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo by Way of Lisbon, Athens, Constantinople, and Jerusalem Performed in the Steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Company (1846), is, as its full title indicates, a wide-ranging odyssey by sea and by land into more exotic climes. Titmarsh (still Thackeray’s traveling name) appreciates this voyage back into antiquity but is thankful for the technological advance that has made it possible for him within two months to visit “as many men and cities . . . as Ulysses surveyed and noted in ten years.”68 Before long we are involved in “the theatre of humanity,” as a civilization is brought to life amongst the busy throng of a Malta seaport:

The Strada Reale [of Valetta] has a much more courtly appearance. . . . Here are palaces, churches, court-houses, and libraries, the genteel London shops, and the latest articles of perfumery. Gay young officers are strolling about in shell-jackets much too small for them; midshipmen are clattering by on hired horses; squads of priests, habited after the fashion of Don Basilio in the opera, are demurely pacing to and fro; professional beggars run shrieking after the stranger; and agents for horses, for inns, and for worse places still, follow him and insinuate the excellence of their goods. The houses where they are selling carpet-bags and pomatum were the palaces of the successors of the goodliest company the world ever heard tell of.69

With his eye for the vitality of the life around him, Titmarsh is also alert to signs of time’s ravages. “The present stately houses were built in times of peace and splendour and decay,” he observes of the knightly castles of Malta. The progress of history and the movements of thought carry “the perpetual destruction of systems” with them, Victor Cousin pointed out in one of his lectures.70 Thackeray’s journey to the East furnished him with plentiful human evidence:

There is no cursing and insulting of Giaours now. If a Cockney looks or behaves in a particularly ridiculous way, the little Turks come out and laugh at him. A Londoner is no longer a spittoon for true believ-
ers; and now that dark Hassan sits in his divan and drinks champagne, and Selim has a French watch, and Zuleika perhaps takes Morison's pills, Byronism becomes absurd instead of sublime, and is only a foolish expression of Cockney wonder. . . . The paddle-wheel is a great conqueror. . . . Whole hosts of crusaders have passed and died, and butchered here in vain. But to manufacture European iron into pikes and helmets was a waste of metal: in the shape of piston-rods and furnace-pokers it is irresistible; and I think an allegory might be made showing how much stronger commerce is than chivalry, and finishing with a grand image of Mahomet's crescent being extinguished in Fulton's boiler.\textsuperscript{71}

As he had in France and in Ireland, Thackeray bears witness on these more extended travels to the mortality of power. He reads a typical sermon in stone on some monuments of magnificence in Lisbon:

The churches I saw were of the florid periwig architecture—I mean of that pompous cauliflower kind of ornament which was the fashion in Louis the Fifteenth's time, at which unlucky period a building mania seemed to have seized upon many of the monarchs of Europe, and innumerable public edifices were erected. It seems to me to have been the period in all history when society was the least natural, and perhaps the most dissolute; and I have always fancied that the bloated artificial forms of the architecture partake of the social disorganisation of the time. Who can respect a simpering ninny, grinning in a Roman dress and a full-bottomed wig, who is made to pass off for a hero? or a fat woman in a hoop, and of a most doubtful virtue, who leers at you like a goddess?

The palaces too echo back the tale of Ozymandias. Titmarsh curls his lip at the Allegories on the walls and ceilings of one of them depicting such subjects as Faith, Hope, and Charity restoring Don Juan to the arms of Lusus; Virtue, Valour, and Victory saluting Don Emanuel; the Liberal Arts dancing before Don Miguel. "The picture is there still, at the Ajuda; and ah me! where is poor Mig," he sighs in mock sorrow.

This deflation of pretension and air of irreverence that insinuate themselves through so much of Thackeray's writing can be traced also to Victor Cousin, whose idealism could be tempered now and then by iconoclasm. "All great men, closely examined, remind us of the saying 'There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous,'" declared Cousin quoting Napoleon in one of the last lectures of the \textit{Cours de l'histoire}. "A great man is great, and he is a man: what makes him great is his relation to the spirit of his times, and to his people; what makes him a man is his individuality; but separate these two elements, consider the man in the great man, and the
greatest of men appears small enough.” Thackeray furnishes many a case in point with his general scorn for plaster emperors and saints. An illustration he designed for *The Paris Sketch Book* shows the Sun King, Louis XIV, bald, shrunken, pot-bellied, and bandy-legged, once he has been divested of his wig and robes. In *The Irish Sketch Book* he exposes the “small great” among the decayed Aristocracy of Dublin. In the Seraglio of Constantinople he gives us a closeup of His Highness the Sultan, the Padishah of the realm, looking “like a young French *roué* worn out by debauch; his eyes bright, with black rings round them; his cheeks pale and hollow.” According to Cousin the heroic element, “the part of the great man . . . alone belongs to history,” while the “vulgar part of these great destinies,” the aspect of the hero, that is, that reduces him to a mere man, should be “abandoned to memoirs and biography.” Thackeray’s attraction to memoirs and biographies, Montaigne and Gibbon, as we have noted, to which could be added other favorite reading such as Walpole’s *Letters*, Talleyrand’s *Memoirs*, Wraxall’s *Historical Memoirs of My Own Time*, and a compilation called *Authentic Records of the Court of England*, is evidence that, contrary to Cousin’s advice, he chose the “vulgar part.” His delight in bringing out what Cousin called “the man in the great man” was to find its fullest release in his historical lectures, such as his series on the four Georges, and in his historical romances disguised as autobiography, such as *Henry Esmond* and *The Virginians*.

In general, however, Thackeray was one with Cousin in his basically progressive view of history. Much of what man once believed in has been exposed as folly and self-delusion with the passage of time, Cousin pointed out at the conclusion of his lecture on “Great Men,” but “this spectacle [of “the perpetual destruction of systems”] instead of producing skepticism, should inspire a faith without limits in this excellent human reason, in this admirable humanity, for which all men of genius labor, which profits by their errors, their struggles, their defeats, and their victories, which advances only over ruins, but which continually advances.” The improvement of the human condition wrought by historic change was very much on Thackeray’s mind, as he indicates in particular in a review of a historical study contributed to the *Morning Chronicle* the year before he began work on *Vanity Fair*. “We reverted to the establishment of the Christian religion, the disruption of ancient empires, the origin and growth of modern nations, the progress of civil liberties in such and such states, the growth of despotisms in others,” he writes here. The reading of this book—*Historic Fan-
cies, by the Honorable George Sidney Smythe, M. P.—stirred up his own thoughts also on such cultural phenomena as “the revival of letters and the arts, which led to the destruction of the modern empire of the Popes,” the growth of nationalism, the dissemination of civilization through colonization, the distribution of wealth, the democratization of society in general, all of which led him to conclude that “without at all going deeply into the dogmas of politics and political economy, a young man of sound principles, of generous impulses, and of independent feeling, might indulge in ‘fancies’ by the hour; fancies which could not but prove of interest to those, having only studied history and facts in the beaten track, have been hitherto too apt to apply the principles of the old world to the altered phases of the new.”

In his travels Thackeray witnessed the old world being superseded by the new, and his great novels dramatize the continuous dialectical process of history that Victor Cousin described. A dying generation lingers on in a once elegant section of Mayfair:

Gaunt House occupies nearly a side of the Square. The remaining three sides are composed of mansions that have passed away into Dowagerism;—tall, dark houses, with window-frames of stone, or picked out of a lighter red. Little light seems to be behind those lean, comfortless casements now: and hospitality seems to have passed away from those doors as much as the laced lacqueys and link-boys of old times who used to put out their torches in the blank [black] iron extinguishers that still flank the lamps over the steps. Brass plates have penetrated into the Square—Doctors, the Diddlesex Bank Western Branch—the English and European Reunion, &c. as well as in the rural retreats: “When Colonel Dobbin quitted the service, which he did immediately after his marriage, he rented a pretty little country place in Hampshire, not far from Queen’s Crawley, where, after the passing of the Reform Bill, Sir Pitt and his family constantly resided now. All idea of a Peerage was out of the question, the baronet’s two seats in Parliament being lost. He was both out of pocket and out of spirits by that catastrophe, failed in his health, and prophesied the speedy ruin of the Empire.”

Habitations loom for Thackeray as emblems of social changes like the extension of democracy and the rise of the professional class. A whole village, by its very resistance to change, bears mute testimony to the coming of the Industrial Revolution: “[Rosebury] is situated . . . at some five miles from the town of Newcome; away from the chimneys and smoky atmosphere of that place, in a sweet country of rural woodlands; over which quiet villages, grey church spires, and ancient gabled farm-houses are scattered; still wearing
the peaceful aspect which belonged to them when Newcome was as yet but an antiquated country town, before mills were erected on its river banks, and dyes and cinders blackened its stream." Commerce and industry have ushered in the new bourgeoisie and a shifting environment in which the brand new intermingles with the old:

Twenty years since, Newcome Park was the only great house in that district; now scores of fine villas have sprung up in the suburb lying between the town and the park. Newcome New Town, as everybody knows, has grown round the park gates, and the "New Town Hotel" (where the railway station is) is a splendid structure in the Tudor style, more ancient in appearance than the park itself; surrounded by little antique villas with spiked gables, stacks of crooked chimneys, and plate-glass windows looking upon the trim lawns; with glistening hedges of evergreens, spotless gravel walks, and Elizabethan gig-houses. Under the great railway viaduct of the New Town goes the old tranquil winding London highroad, once busy with a score of gay coaches, and ground by innumerable wheels; but at a few miles from the New Town Station the road had become so mouldy that the grass actually grows on it; and Rosebury, Madame de Montecour's house, stands at one end of a village-green which is even more quiet now than it was a hundred years ago.81

Now and then an individual epitomizes a passing era for Thackeray, as with the Baroness Bernstein, née Beatrix Esmond, seen momentarily through the eyes of her nephew George Warrington:

Sure 'tis hard with respect to Beauty, that its possessor should not have even a life-enjoyment of it, but be compelled to resign it after, at the most, some forty years' lease. As the old woman prattled of her former lovers and admirers . . . I would look in her face, and, out of the ruins, try to build up in my fancy a notion of her beauty in its prime. What a homily I read there! How the courts were grown with grass, the towers broken, the doors ajar, the fine gilt saloons tarnished, and the tapestries cobwebbed and torn! Yonder dilapidated palace was all alive once with splendour and music, and those dim windows were dazzling and blazing with light! What balls and feasts were once here, what splendour and laughter! I could see lovers in waiting, crowds in admiration, rivals furious. I could imagine twilight assignations, and detect intrigues, though the curtains were closed and drawn . . . and my fancy wandered about in her, amused and solitary, as I had walked about our father's house at Castlewood, meditating on departed glories, and imagining ancient times.82

The threnody on "departed glories" sounds its old refrain with variations in Thackeray's novels, where the vestiges of the past and passing leave their traces in deteriorated dwellings, aging belles and beaux, and decadent families, and persist in the clash of generations and ways of life. Thackeray mourns both for what age takes away and what it leaves behind, but there is gain as well as loss. In
the spirit of his mentor Victor Cousin, he shows us that mankind in its stumbling way somehow manages to “advance . . . over ruins.” With the fading of the eighteenth century and the dawn of the Industrial Age, a new breed has come in, from whom Frederick Lightfoot, formerly maître d'hôtel to that seedy aristocrat Lord Clavering, is quick to reap advantage. Under the supervision of this enterprising manager, the old Clavering Arms “has been repaired and decorated in a style of the greatest comfort. Gentlemen hunting with the Dumplingbeare hounds will find excellent stabling and loose boxes for horses. . . . Commercial gentlemen will find the Clavering Arms a most comfortable place of resort: and the scale of charges has been regulated for all, so as to meet the economical spirit of the present times.” As Major Pendennis, a leading champion of the old social regime, concedes, however reluctantly, “We are grown doosid republican. Talent ranks with birth and wealth now, begad.”

As a holdover from the Age of George, the major is one of Thackeray’s most delightful characters, yet one of the most pathetic in his resistance to change. In a moment of reckoning, this habitué of the significantly named Wheel of Fortune Public House “began to own that he was no longer of the present age and dimly to apprehend that the young men laughed at him. Such melancholy musings must come across many a Pall Mall philosopher.” The major deplores the passing of the dandies of his youth: “. . . the breed is gone—there’s no use for ’em; they’re replaced by a parcel of damned cotton-spinners and utilitarians, and young sprigs of parsons with their hair combed down their backs.” At this point his creator adds: “And he was not far wrong; the times and manners which he admired were pretty nearly gone. The gay young men ‘larked’ him irreverently, while the serious youth had a grave pity and wonder at him, which would have been more painful to bear, had the old gentleman been aware of its extent.” Major Pendennis represents the Regency giving way to the Age of Victoria, among whose spokesmen is his nephew Arthur. Old systems, old ways of life, pronounced Victor Cousin, “need a momentary dominion in order to develop all that is in them, and at the same time to show what is not in them,” and once they have served their time, they must yield place to the new. “Young men, you who propose to frequent these lectures, love all that is good, all that is beautiful, all that is honest: here is the basis of all philosophy,” urged Victor Cousin in the peroration to the first lecture of the *Cours de l’histoire.* Arthur Pendennis, one of these
young men, is not disposed, like that "old boy" Major Pendennis, to scorn the "damned cotton-spinners and utilitarians." In one of his philosophical moments, Arthur has a vision of "the earth, where our feet are . . . the work of the same Power as the immeasurable blue yonder, in which the future lies into which we would peer." For him the world of works and days in a source of inspiration, as he confides to his friend Warrington: "'Look, George . . . look and see the sun rise; he sees the labourer on his way a-field; the workgirl plying her poor needle; the lawyer at his desk, perhaps; the beauty smiling asleep upon her pillow of down; or the jaded reveler reeling to bed; or the fevered patient tossing on it; or the doctor watching by it, over the throes of the mother for the child that is to be born into the world—to be born and to take his part in the suffering and struggling, the tears and laughter, the crime, remorse, love, folly, sorrow, rest.'" Along with participation in "both that which is of God, and that which is of the world," Cousin committed his disciples to a stake in mankind's future: "Follow with interest the general movement of the physical sciences and industry. Give to yourselves in them, the instructive spectacle of liberty and human intelligence, marching day by day to the conquest and dominion of the sensible world," reads the ringing conclusion to his lecture entitled "The Idea of Philosophy." Young Arthur seems very much a part of this forward movement as we catch sight of him toward the end of Pendennis on his walk through Clavering Park, "the once quiet and familiar fields of which were flaming with the kilns and forges of the artificers employed on the new railroad works." In reviewing the work of another French man of letters, Victor Hugo, Thackeray wrote: "We have read his description of the multifarious duties and accomplishments imposed upon celui qu'on appelle poète. He is 'to put his hand to the work,' he is 'never to draw back,' he is a part of his 'decisive century.' 'A light for mankind, feeling all their wants, and their passions; labouring, striving, struggling to understand, and when he has understood to explain.'" He was poking gentle fun at Hugo's grandiosity here, but his conception of the writer's place in society as embodied in Arthur Pendennis is close to this ideal. In this same review he evokes the image of "that strange, grotesque, violent, pompous, noble figure of a poet, with his braggart modesty and wonderful simplicity of conceit, his kind heart yearting towards all small things and beauties of nature, small children, birds, flowers, & c., his rich flowing, large eloquence, and his grim humour." Here too he could
be speaking for his own elemental love of "small things" that always lay behind his sweeping critiques of mankind in the large. A famous passage from his lecture on Swift delivered some years later confirms this more "primitive" side of Thackeray: "The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness—your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture—your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost."90

This sentimental aspect of Thackeray—his elevation of the ordinary and the commonplace—tended to counterbalance the satirist in him, the "scorn of imposture," the iconoclasm, the denigration of the self-styled great and mighty. Arthur Pendennis mingling with the multitudes outdoors stands for Thackeray himself, who on his travels fled the churches and palaces of Paris, Dublin, Lisbon, and the Far East for their streets and marketplaces. Here, too, he may have taken his cue from Victor Cousin, who advised his students in their cultivation of philosophy not to neglect "the authority of those general beliefs which constitute the common sense of mankind."91 For Cousin these "general beliefs" derived from the "spontaneous reason" by which he set great store. Thackeray's own frequent echoing of "wise saws" from classical authors, together with folk wisdom drawn from such traditional sources as scripture and fables, led one of his admirers in an obituary tribute to label his "a proverbial mind," prone to lean on "the verdict of popular feeling and shrewd common sense on a given line of conduct."92 The mottoes that make up many of his chapter titles; biblical titles, like his most famous, *Vanity Fair*, taken from Ecclesiastes via *The Pilgrim's Progress*; the humanizing of the bestiaries of Aesop and La Fontaine in *The Newcomes*; the emblematic morals that one can "read" in the historiated initials that head chapters of the novels as originally issued; his frequent Hogarthian allusions—all of these make up a reservoir of "the common sense of mankind," proof against the pretensions and pomposities of civilization.

"In fact what is the philosophy that I teach, but respect for all the elements of humanity and for all things," affirmed Cousin in his concluding lecture. These words probably best express the ultimate aim of Thackeray's inquiries into the "workings" of the souls of men, fictitious and real, historical and contemporary, heroic and commonplace. Eclecticism, as M. Cousin sums it up, "destroys nothing, accepts everything, explains everything, and governs everything." While acknowledging man's fallibility, "our philosophy,
gentlemen, is not a melancholy and fanatical philosophy, which being prepossessed with a few exclusive ideas, undertakes to reform all others upon the same model; it is a philosophy essentially optimistical, whose only end is to comprehend all, and which, therefore, accepts and reconciles all. It seeks to obtain power only by extension; its unity consists only in the harmony of contrarieties. Among Cousin's disciples may be numbered Arthur Pendennis, significantly an aspiring writer, proud of his "sympathy with all conditions of men," who "had his eyes always eagerly open to its infinite varieties and beauties; contemplating with an unflailing delight all specimens of it in all places to which he resorted." Another is Clive Newcome, Thackeray's portrait of himself as young artist, whose "sunny kindly spirit, undimmed by any of the cares, which clouded it subsequently, was disposed to shine on all people alike. The world was welcome to him; the day a pleasure; all nature a gay feast; scarce any dispositions discordant with his own."

In trying to pin down his protean nature, contemporaries of Thackeray used such phrases as "crystal of many facets" and "a strange effervescence of... widely differing elements." His friend George Henry Lewes spoke of him as a "Janus bifrons" with a "predominating tendency to antithesis." All of these come close to "the harmony of contrarieties" that Victor Cousin defined as the task of the moral philosopher and one that Thackeray clearly set for himself. Eclecticism is the term that seems best to describe Thackeray's myriad-mindedness, his adroit, nimble, mercurial disposition, "the variety, the changeableness, the power of rapid transformation which is to be found only in the highest intelligences... by turns humorous, contemptuous, tender," as one of his fellow novelists put it. His peripatetic spirit, his tendency to view life through a series of sliding lenses, his simulation of a wide range of moods from melancholy to jocularity, his wide empathy, all fall into place as his means of appropriating to himself "entire humanity." Thackeray's moral relativism, an attitude that some have attributed to indifference or pocuscurantism on his part, is more properly interpreted as part of his eclectic outlook, his attempt to illuminate man's confusion out of the cumulated wisdom and folly of the ages, to aid humanity, in Cousin's words, "from incomplete view to incomplete view... to arrive at a complete view of itself and of all its substantial elements." Furthermore, what another of his fellow writers called his "literary chameleon" nature indicates that with books too he was eclectic and highly adaptable.
One of Thackeray's admirers went so far to see even in Thackeray's notorious gift for parody evidence of his sympathetic faculty at work, his desire to see the "soul" beneath a work of art, and to "reembody" it in his own. Certainly he learned much from fellow writers, even those he lampooned, showing a remarkable ability, as will appear in later chapters, to extract precious metal from crude ore. That "knowledge of human nature so wide and comprehensive in its nature that it seems unrivalled in the annals of fiction" for which he was praised in the last century was the distillation of a lifetime of self-education spent "with men as well as with books," as one of his first guides, Isaac Watts, advised. But it is evident that from his early years he displayed his special predilection for self-study and confessional writing, curiosity about the vagaries of behavior (those studies known in his time as "mental and moral science"), and a tolerant understanding of human foibles, and that he was further directed in his youth toward the study of man in his social milieu, viewed against the panoramic background of cultural history. Upon this intellectual base he erected, out of his extensive experience—artistic, theatrical, journalistic, literary—the "edifice of humanity" that emerges from his novels.


2. The supplement entitled The Improvement of the Mind (1743) was printed in later editions together with his Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth. An edition of 1822 published in Boston included as an appendix "Questions adapted to the work; for the use of schools and academies." There is on record as late as 1855 a condensation of the entire work entitled Logic for the Young prepared by J. W. Gilbart. In chap. 4 of Pendennis, "Watts' Catechism" is mentioned among Laura's school books.


4. The Newcomes, chap. 15.
5. Vanity Fair, chap. 62.
6. See below, pp. 64, 67.
7. Watts, Logic, "Introduction and General Scheme."
8. Preface to Comic Tales and Sketches (1841).
10. Ibid., sec. 1, iii.


20. After almost a century of frequent publication, the 1669 edition of the *Essays* was the last to appear for fifty-five years. In the eighteenth century Coste had only one rival, Bastien, both of whose editions were frequently reprinted. According to Donald Frame, Montaigne “put such a spotlight on the human psyche as it never had before and was never to lose again. . . . More than anyone else, Montaigne set a whole great literature on the trail of his favorite quarry, human behavior.” Frame cites Thackeray among the most prominent nineteenth-century admirers, in the company of Byron, Hazlitt, Landor, FitzGerald, Stevenson, Pater, and Emerson (*Montaigne: A Biography* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1965], pp. 315-17).


23. “That the relish of good and evil depends in a good measure upon the opinion that we have of them” (*The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton, 3 vols. [London: Bohn, 1913], 1:294).


Some years later Thackeray echoed this passage in reviewing a book on David Hume, “a sceptic and utter worldling, a man entirely without imagination. . . . His life is consistent at least, and he is the same from sixteen to sixty, insensible to a future seemingly, and untroubled by conscience or remorse, or doubt even about his doubts” (review of J. H. Burton’s *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, *Morning Chronicle*, 23 March 1846; *Contributions*, pp. 113-14).
32. Lecture 10, p. 327 (Linberg trans.). Cousin believed that four great systems of thought—sensationalism, idealism, skepticism, and mysticism—alternate from epoch to epoch (Jules Simon, Cousin, p. 52). He thought that his particular age was in need of idealism to offset the sensationalism of the preceding age. Walter M. Simon contends that Cousin and Comte focus the conflict between humanism and scientism in postrevolutionary French thought. See his “The ‘Two Cultures’ in Nineteenth-Century France: Victor Cousin and Auguste Comte,” Journal of the History of Ideas 26 (January 1965): 45–58.

33. Frederic Will, Flumen Historicum: Victor Cousin’s Aesthetic and Its Sources (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 1. Will concedes that Cousin’s teachings “played a large role in the formation of the Romantic temperament in France,” but attributes it to “the post-revolutionary drought of ideas, and . . . the impoverishment of French philosophy at this time.” Donald G. Charlton contends to the contrary: “Posterity has indeed been harsh—too harsh . . . in its judgment of Cousin and his school. . . . His achievements in philosophy are well known, but underrated” (“Victor Cousin,” p. 312).


35. Lecture 1, pp. 26–27 (Wight trans). Cousin’s thought combines elements of Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Kant, Hegel, and (under the influence of his teacher and later colleague Royer-Collard) the Scottish common sense school. Frederic Will traces his aesthetic thought back to the “mythological eclecticism” of the Alexandrians (Flumen Historicum, p. 28).


38. Lecture 5, p. 147 (Linberg); italics mine.


40. Lecture 1, p. 27 (Wight)

41. Lecture 6, p. 176 (Linberg)

42. In one of his literary essays, Thackeray wrote with reference to artists: “Is not individuality the great charm of most works of art? Let any two painters make a picture of the same landscape, and the performance of each will differ of course. The distance appears purple to one pair of eyes which is gray to the other’s, one man’s fields are brown and his neighbour’s green, one insists upon a particular feature and details it, while his comrade slurs it over. . . . Every man has a manner of painting, or seeing, or thinking of his own; and lucky it is for us too, for in this manner of every one’s work is a new one, and books are fresh and agreeable, though written upon subjects however stale” (“The Rhine, by Victor Hugo,” Foreign Quarterly Review, April 1842, p. 80; New Sketch Book, pp. 8–9). The book under review was Hugo’s Le Rhin, lettres à un ami.

43. Lecture 7, pp. 198–200 (Linberg).

44. Henry Esmond, bk. 1, chap. 10.

45. Ibid., opening of bk. 1.


47. The Newcomes, chaps. 13, 33; Henry Esmond, bk. 3, chap. 13; The Virginians, chap. 2.


49. Lecture 4, p. 67 (Wight).

50. Lecture 4, p. 66 (Wight).


52. Ibid., p. 14.

62. Chap. 1, *Works*, 5:282. The quoted words are Titmarsh’s reaction to his sampling of some Irish newspapers.
66. Ibid., p. 476.
67. Chap. 14, *Works*, 5:399. The words describe a fanciful romance concocted by Titmarsh around the Castle of Bunratty that he visits in Limerick.
75. See above, p. 42, and chap. 7 below; *From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, chap. 7, *Works*, 5:643.
76. These are among titles listed in the 1864 catalogue of his library (see above, n. 16). The influence of Cousin’s lecture on “Great Men” on Thackeray’s antiheroic view of history will be taken up further in the chapter on *Henry Esmond*.
77. Conclusion to lecture 10, p. 210 (Wight). Cousin’s theory of history seems to reflect his association with Hegel.
79. *Vanity Fair*, chap. 47; emendation supplied by the editors.
82. *The Virginians*, chap. 73.
83. *Pendennis*, chaps. 75, 44.
84. Ibid., chap. 67.
86. Lecture 1, p. 27 (Wight). This is the preliminary statement of the theme developed in Cousin’s masterwork *Du vrai, du beau, et du bien* (1836; rev. 1853).
87. *Pendennis*, chap. 44.
88. Ibid., chap. 75.
91. Lecture 13, p. 417 (Linberg).
93. Lecture 13, p. 416 (Linberg).
94. Pendennis, chap. 46.
95. The Newcomes, chap. 28.
98. Mrs. Oliphant, "Mr. Thackeray's Sketches," Blackwood's Magazine 119 (February 1876): 235. In her monograph Barbara Hardy describes him, particularly in relation to Vanity Fair, as "an eclectic figure, itself a virtuoso performance, shifting roles with the mercurial adaptability of an Elizabethan character-actor..." (The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray [London: Peter Owen, 1972], p. 72; italics mine).
99. Lecture 6, p. 190 (Linberg). Cousin's influence on Thackeray did not extend to the political sphere. Various essays that he contributed to the National Standard from May 1833 to the end of January 1834 as editor and correspondent indicate that he did not share Cousin's admiration for Louis Philippe or his enthusiasm for the Charter of 1830 (La Charte) that later inspired the Chartist movement in England. Later, as Paris correspondent for the Constitutional, he continuously denounced the July Monarchy for its hypocrisy and tyranny. See Mr. Thackeray's Writings for the "National Standard" and "Constitutional," passim.