DURING THE SUMMER OF 1855, WITH "THE Newcomes" completed, Thackeray busied himself preparing another set of historical lectures that had been on his mind for some time, and by the fall of that year he was once more traveling around the eastern seaboard of the United States, this time, as he later wrote, "killing & eating the Georges."¹

This tour took him to the South, especially to Virginia, where, in his usual way, he benefited from association with fellow writers. While he was in Richmond, the consul there happened to be G. P. R. James, a close friend despite "Barbazure." According to contemporary report, the two conversed several times over cigars, but unfortunately what they talked about is not on record. In "The Esmonds of Virginia," the preface to Henry Esmond supposedly penned by Henry's daughter Rachel, readers had been led to expect a sequel involving Rachel's two sons, and perhaps now Thackeray was reminded of James's historical romance Henry Masterton, reprinted earlier in the decade, centering on two brothers of antithetical temperaments who, like George and Harry Warrington of The Virginians, find themselves on opposite sides in a revolution.²

While lecturing in Virginia, Thackeray was friendly also with one of her native writers, John Esten Cooke, whose The Virginia Comedians; or, Old Days in the Old Dominion, a historical romance looking back over the sunset of the Tidewater aristocracy, had been published the year before. With its narrator whose imagination is carried back to the last century by ancestral portraits on his walls, and who purports to be editing a manuscript left behind by one of his
kinfolk, *The Virginia Comedians* anticipates the framework of Thackeray's novel that grew out of his American experience. Also evocative for Thackeray was a book by another of his literary hosts, John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn; or, Days in the Old Dominion*, characterized by its author as "a book of travels, a diary, a collection of letters, a drama, and a history," preserving a rural Virginia that had faded from men's memories, "the mellow, bland, and sunny luxuriance of her old-time society—its good fellowship, its hearty and constitutional companionableness, the thrifty gayety of the people, their dogged but amiable invincibility of opinion, and that overflowing hospitality that knew no ebb" (some of which Thackeray tries to convey, particularly in his chapter entitled "Hospitalities").

While in the last stages of composing *The Virginians*, Thackeray wrote to a friend about "all the trouble I take," and from all accounts it can rate as the most thoroughly researched of his novels. John Reuben Thompson, editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, made available the resources of the Virginia State Library, of which he was director. John Pendleton Kennedy lent him several source books besides conducting him around plantations to give him the feel of the local topography. Suggestions for the Lambert family, whose daughters are courted by George and Harry, have been traced to a book by another friend, the diplomat William Bradford Reed's *The Life of Esther de Berdt*, commemorating an English ancestor who emigrated to America as a young bride. Reed also furnished Thackeray with information about old Virginia families. One of these accounts, concerned with two brothers, George and Bryan Fairfax, the first of whom went back to England in an attempt to take possession of an ancestral estate, supplied him with a part of his narrative line.

A surviving notebook that Thackeray compiled for the novel indicates a passion for fact rivaling Scott's. Here one finds a table of the Hanoverian succession; samples of Queen Caroline's bad French spelling (both taken from Kemble's *State Papers*); notes on such customs as public bathing and the practice of removing boots before approaching the royal family; drawings of a sailor in the year 1761, of the Duke of Cumberland with a pigtail hanging down his back, and of the statesman William Pitt (whom George Warrington glimpses briefly on a visit to Kensington Palace); and notices copied from the *Public Advertiser* of 1756 (a newspaper read also by Harry Warrington) relating to productions at Drury Lane and Covent Garden (attended by George and Harry together with
the Lamberts), a peruke sale in Lombard Street, and an eyewitness account of the execution of Dr. Dodd. A description of Southampton Row in 1759 is transferred from Thomas Gray’s *Letters* to George Warrington’s account of his lodgings near his favorite haunt, the newly opened British Museum (chaps. 59, 63, 67). From Robert Beverley’s *History of Virginia*, Thackeray learns that Charles II was proclaimed king in Virginia by her royal governor before he was crowned in England (a detail used in chap. 3 of *The Virginians*). Bancroft’s *History of the American Republic* provides him with background on schooling in colonial Virginia (useful in connection with the schooling of George and Harry), and acquaints him with the clamor already manifesting itself in the colonies by 1754 for taxation by Parliament rather than by the king. If history tends to swamp story in *The Virginians* (“...here is a third of the great story done equal to two-thirds of an ordinary novel—and nothing has actually happened except that a young gentleman has come from America to England,” he remarked in connection with Harry’s narrative that makes up the first section), a concomitant reward is its solidity of texture and concreteness that accumulated out of painstaking documentation.

Thackeray had the projected sequel to *Esmond* on his mind in a letter he wrote to the publisher George Smith while on his lecture circuit: “On my own account I propose to sell you an edition of ‘The Georges. Sketches of Courts, Manners, and Town Life,’ and if I do a book of travels, I shall bring it to you, but this is hardly likely. I shall more likely do the Esmonds of Virginia, and it will depend on the size to which it goes whether it shall appear in 3 vols, or 20 numbers.” Hence one is not surprised that the research that went into *The Four Georges* also entered, along with Thackeray’s impressions of and reading about America, the ensuing novel, retitled *The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century*, which began to emerge in November 1857 in the familiar yellow wrappers and was not completed until two years later, the author having gathered enough matter to stretch the book out over twenty-four numbers. “Not about battles, about politics, about statesmen and measures of State, did I ever think to lecture: but to sketch the manners and life of the old world: to amuse for a few hours with talk about the old society: and with the result of many a day’s and night’s pleasant reading, to try and while away a few winter evenings for my hearers,” opens the first of the lectures. A good amount of this chat about “manners and life of the old world” is heard in the novel, more even than in *Henry Esmond*, and from a different perspective:
“Of a society so vast, busy, brilliant, it is impossible in four brief chapters to give a complete notion; but we may peep here and there into that byegone world of the Georges, see what they and their Courts were like; glance at the people round about them; look at past manners, fashions, pleasures, and contrast them with our own.”

The lecturer’s vantage point here is precisely that of the narrator of *The Virginians* who is not, like Henry Esmond, of the period he is writing about but apart from it, looking back over a world now dead: “Dear kind reader (with whom I love to talk from time to time, stepping down from the stage, where our figures are performing, attired in the habits and using the parlance of past ages . . .)” (chap. 62). As mediator between then and now, he makes us constantly aware of “that Old World from which we are drifting away so swiftly,” represented by the Warrington brothers, whose papers he is supposedly editing. “And the high-road, a hundred years ago, was not that grass-grown desert of the present time,” he takes occasion to observe in connection with Harry’s visit to the mother country. “It was alive with constant travel and traffic: the country towns and inns swarmed with life and gaiety” (chap. 1). Life was slower moving then: “The ponderous waggon, with its bells and plodding team; the light post-coach that achieved the journey from the ‘White Hart,’ Salisbury, to the ‘Swan with the Two Necks,’ London in two days; the strings of pack-horses that had not yet left the road; my Lord’s gilt post-chaise and six, with the outriders galloping on ahead; the country squire’s great coach and heavy Flanders mares; the farmers trotting to market, or the parson jolting to the cathedral town on Dumpling, his wife behind on the pillion—all these crowding sights and brisk people greeted the young traveller on his summer journey.” He calls attention to outmoded dress: “We must fancy our American traveller to be a handsome young fellow, whose suit of sables only made him look the more interesting.” Charming period “characters” are quickened into life: “The plump landlady from her bar, surrounded by her china and punch-bowls, and stout gilded bottles of strong waters, and glittering rows of silver flagons, looked kindly after the young gentleman as he passed through the inn-hall from the post-chaise, and the obsequious chamberlain bowed him upstairs to the ‘Rose’ or the ‘Dolphin.’ The trim chambermaid dropped her best curtsey for his fee, and Gumbo, in the inn-kitchen, where the townfolk drank their mug of ale by the great fire, bragged of his young master’s splendid house in Virginia.”
"The question of Slavery was not born at the time of which we write," the author reminds his readers in a later chapter, touching on a rife social issue prompted by the recurrent presence of the servile Gumbo. "To be the proprietor of black servants shocked the feelings of no Virginia gentleman. . . . You might have preached negro emancipation to Madam Esmond of Castlewood as you might have told her to let the horses run loose out of her stables; she had no doubt but that the whip and the cornbag were good for both" (chap. 3). In England Harriet Beecher Stowe had spoken to crowds several years before and an Emancipation Bill had been passed more than two decades earlier; in America north of the Mason-Dixon Line the abolition movement was active; south of it planters were still clinging to what the narrator describes as a "patriarchal" and "feudal" society. Thackeray was aware that he was writing to audiences variously disposed on this question, and he made some attempt to avoid ruffled feelings. He is quick to point out: "... nor in truth was the despotism exercised on the negroes generally a savage one." In his first chapter it is made clear that although the Esmonds of Virginia own slaves, they do not favor the slave trade. In reply to an offer by the trader and shipowner Mr. Trail for "any number of healthy young negroes before next fall," Harry declares: "We are averse to the purchase of negroes from Africa. . . . My grandfather and my father have always objected to it, and I do not like to think of selling or buying the poor wretches." (In the manuscript the last phrase originally read "poor devils.") In a much later chapter he notes a greater tolerance on his side of the ocean: "I believe Europe has never been so squeamish in regard to Africa, as a certain other respected Quarter. Nay some Africans—witness the Chevalier de St. Georges, for instance—have been notorious favourites with the fair sex" (chap. 64). However, presumably in deference to his Southern readers, he lined out this passage that follows in the manuscript: "who love contrast doubtless and who rebuke the haughtiness of the owner by their tenderness towards the poor negro: They seem to say to his master: 'Tyrant': They consider this (coloured) gentleman is not only your Man, but he is your brother!"

In England the affairs of the rakish Will Castlewood bring up a topic close to Thackeray's own interest—the shift of sensibility and taste in the area of "pleasures" from the last century to his own: "A hundred years ago his character and actions might have been described at length by the painter of manners: but the Comic Muse, now-a-days, does not lift up Molly Seagrim's curtain; she only indi-
cates the presence of some one behind it, and passes on primly, with expressions of horror, and a fan before her eyes" (chap. 20). "Did you ever hear of such books as 'Clarissa,' 'Tom Jones,' 'Roderick Random': paintings by contemporary artists, of the men and women, the life and society of their day?" he queries his readers at the beginning of a number. "Suppose we were to describe the doings of such a person as Mr. Lovelace, or my Lady Bellaston, or that wonderful 'Lady of Quality' who lost her memoirs to the author of 'Peregrine Pickle.' How the pure and outraged Nineteenth Century would blush, scream, run out of the room, call away the young ladies, and order Mr. Mudie never to send one of that odious author's books again!" (chap. 41).

Such observations lead into the general question: "And in public and private morality? Which is better, this actual year 1858, or its predecessor a century back?" And he answers it in characteristic eclectic fashion:

Do you remember our great theatres thirty years ago? You were too good to go to a play. Well, you have no idea what the playhouses were, or what the green boxes were, when Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard were playing before them! And I, for my children's sake, thank that good Actor in his retirement who was the first to banish that shame from the theatre. No, madam, you are mistaken; I do not plume myself on my superior virtue. I do not say that you are naturally better than your ancestress in her wild, rouged, gambling, flaring tearing days; or even than poor Polly Fogle, who is just taken up for shoplifting, and would have been hanged for it a hundred years ago. Only I am heartily thankful that my temptations are less, having quite enough to do with those of the present century.

In one respect at least he notes a sign of improvement: "Well, at any rate, Art has obtained her letters of naturalization, and lives on terms of almost equality. If Mrs. Thrale chose to marry a music master now, I don't think her friends would shudder at the mention of her name. If she had a good fortune and kept a good cook, people would even go and dine with her in spite of the mésalliance, and actually treat Mr. Thrale with civility."

*The Virginians* slowly unfolds a panorama of social life and manners on both sides of the Atlantic from the middle to the late eighteenth century, but it does not wholly ignore "battles, politics . . . statesmen and measures of State." We can barely hear ancestral voices prophesying war at the outset when Old England and the Old Dominion are still one:

Mr. Esmond called his American house Castlewood, from the patrimonial home in the old country. The whole usages of Virginia,
indeed, were fondly modelled after the English customs. It was a loyal colony. The Virginians boasted that King Charles the Second had been King in Virginia before he had been King in England. English King and English Church were faithfully honoured there. The resident gentry were allied to good English families. They held their heads above the Dutch traders of New York, and the money-getting Roundheads of Pennsylvania and New England. Never were people less republican than those of the great province which was soon to be foremost in the memorable revolt against the British Crown. (Chap. 3)

By the time that George and Harry Warrington have reached full manhood they, along with their fellow colonists, have sung "The Last of God Save the King" (as chap. 67 is entitled), but during their boyhood:

The gentry of Virginia dwelt on their great lands after a fashion almost patriarchal. For its rough cultivation, each estate had a multitude of hands—of purchased and assigned servants—who were subject to the command of the master. Their lands yielded their food, live stock, and game. The great rivers swarmed with fish for the taking. From their banks the passage home was clear. The ships took the tobacco off their private wharves on the banks of the Potomac or the James River, and carried it to London or Bristol,—bringing back English goods and articles of home manufacture in return for the only produce which the Virginian gentry chose to cultivate. Their hospitality was boundless. No stranger was ever sent away from their gates. The gentry received one another, and travelled to each other's houses in a state almost feudal... The food was plenty, the poor black people lazy and not unhappy.

In its amplitude and plenitude, the sprawling new land is likened to the biblical promised land flowing with milk and honey, and at the same time is envisioned as an embryonic society struggling to be born. "It was the period of the culmination of the old social régime," Thackeray had read at the beginning of John Esten Cooke's The Virginia Comedians. Cooke also waxes nostalgic: "A splendid society had burst into flower, and was enjoying itself in the sunshine and under the blue skies of the most beautiful of lands. The chill winds of the Revolution were about to blow, but no one suspected it. Life was easy and full of laughter—of cordial greetings, grand assemblies, and the zest of existence which springs from the absence of care... In town and country life was a pageant." And we can visualize it as this idyll continues: "His Excellency the Royal Governor went in his coach-and-six to open the Burgesses. The youths in embroidered waistcoats made love to the little beauties in curls and roses. The 'Apollo' rang with music, the theatre on Gloucester
Here and there Thackeray affords us a glimpse of the "pageant" of life that Cooke displayed in his romance of these times—such as the grand governor's assemblies in Jamestown attended by Madam Esmond, and General Braddock's levees in Alexandria that George and Harry are invited to. In one of the pictorial initials a youth in embroidered waistcoat is shown kissing the hand of a beauty in curls and roses; in another a magnificently attired Rachel Esmond is shown receiving the young Colonel Washington in the covered gallery of her great house (chap. 8). But generally his picture of pre-Revolutionary Virginia stresses the plainer, more practical side of life. The initial C that opens chapter 2 encloses a sober Colonel Esmond in plain black broadcloth, black hat, black stockings, his young grandsons at his knees. In other initials we see a trapper in rough garb (chap. 7), two negro boys capturing barnyard fowl (chap. 10), an Indian scout peering through a tree (chap. 12), and a galloping post boy sounding his horn (chap. 30). The predominating impression we get of "homely simplicity" and primitivism in the New World falls in with Thackeray's intention of contrasting the vitality of the emergent country with the decadence of the aristocratic society across the sea. Moreover, George's military adventures in the armies of Colonel Washington and General Braddock presage the turbulence to come. The glamorous pageant and sunshine that Cooke described was only "what may be seen on the surface of society . . . but that social organization had reached a stage when the elements of destruction had already begun their work," as he was quick to point out in the introduction to his The Virginia Comedians. To those with an ear to the ground, "new ideas were on the march. The spirit of change was under the calm surface. The political agitation soon to burst forth was preceded by the social. . . . On the surface the era is tranquil, but beneath is the volcano. Passions smoulder under the laughter; the home-spun coat jostles the embroidered waistcoat; men are demanding social equality, as they will soon demand a republic, and the splendid old régime is about to vanish in the storm of the Revolution."16

"I know the fatal differences which separated [my sons] in politics never disunited their hearts; and I . . . can love them both, whether wearing the King's colours or the Republic's," wrote Rachel Esmond in the preface to her father's memoir. So it was foreshadowed that the Revolutionary War would figure in the sequel, and The Four Georges, particularly the lecture "George the
Third," revived this great event in the memories of Thackeray's audiences on both sides of the ocean. Inevitably, then, the affairs of court and camp intrude on the lives of the Esmonds, but by his reliance on family documents, the author does all he can to lend human interest to his chronicle: "Their lot brought them into contact with personages of whom we read only in books, who seem alive, as I read in the Virginians' letters regarding them, whose voices I almost fancy I hear, as I read the yellow pages written scores of years since, blotted with boyish tears of disappointed passion dutifully despatched after famous balls and ceremonies of the grand Old World, scribbled by camp-fires, or out of prison: nay, there is one that has a bullet through it, and of which a greater portion of the text is blotted out with the blood of the bearer" (chap. 1). Appropriately we owe the preservation of these letters not to an archivist or scholar, but to the "affectionate thrift" of the mother of the two young men. So the domestic history promised by Thackeray's original title becomes amalgamated with social, political, and military history.

In his approach to "battles, politics . . . statesmen and measures of state," Thackeray was moving with a trend well exemplified by one of the books promoted through the Virginians Advertiser, Charles Knight's widely read Popular History of England, written with the intent to "connect domestic matters with the course of public events and the political condition of various classes of society—to trace the essential connection between Government and the people, and to study events and institutions not as abstract facts, but as influencing the condition of the whole nation." In The Virginians certainly every effort is made to establish these connections. The social classes are represented both in the mother country and in the colony, from slaves and servants to aristocrats. Of domesticity we get aplenty, beginning with the "training up" of Rachel's two boys, and following through with their flirtations, courtships, and, with George, early married life. We peep inside the homes of the Esmonds in Virginia, the Castlewoods both in town (London, Kensington) and country (Tunbridge Wells), the Miles Warringtons (from the other side of the family), as well as the Lamberts in Oakhurst, learning en route how they dress, furnish their rooms, and amuse themselves. It is left mainly to George and Harry, shunted from home to society to battlefield, to link up "domestic matters" with "the course of public events."

Not only is the domestic sphere enlarged by its absorption into the grand orbit of Anglo-American relations, but with the Esmond
household we can "trace the essential connection between Government and the people," for it in itself constitutes a little nation:

When the boys' grandfather died, their mother, in great state, proclaimed her eldest son George her successor and heir of the estate; and Harry, George's younger brother by half-an-hour, was always enjoined to respect his senior. All the household was equally instructed to pay him honour; the negroes, of whom there was a large and happy family, and the assigned servants from Europe whose lot was made as bearable as it might be under the government of the Lady of Castlewood. (Chap. 3)

Rachel Esmond, moreover, is monarch of all she surveys:

Yonder I fancy [Rachel] enthroned in her principality of Castlewood, the country gentlefolks paying her court, the sons dutiful to her, the domestics tumbling over each other's black heels to do her bidding, the poor whites grateful for her bounty and implicitly taking her doses when they were ill, the smaller gentry always acquiescing in her remarks, and for ever letting her win at backgammon. . . . The truth is, little Madame Esmond never came near man or woman, but she tried to domineer over them. (Chap. 4)

Have we not read how Queen Elizabeth was a perfectly sensible woman of business, and was pleased to inspire not only terror and awe, but love in the bosoms of her subjects? So the little Virginian princess had her favourites, and accepted their flatteries, and grew tired of them, and was cruel or kind to them as suited her wayward imperial humour. There was no amount of compliment she would not graciously receive and take as her due. (Chap. 5)

As with many another tyrant, Rachel Esmond's authority does not go unchallenged. Quite early, in the chapter from which the above quotation is taken (entitled "Family Jars"), we indeed witness a palace revolt when George smashes a family heirloom in defiance of his mother, and Harry strikes their tutor and spiritual counselor who has attempted to cane George in punishment. At this point Rachel capitulates: "Her power over [George] was gone. He had dominated her. She was not sorry for the defeat; for women like not only to conquer, but to be conquered; and from that day the young man was master at Castlewood." In vain does Mr. Ward preach subsequently "on the beauty of subordination, the present lax spirit of the age, and the necessity of obeying our spiritual and temporal rulers" at a time when George and Harry defy both. "'For, my dear friends,' [Ward] nobly asked . . . 'why are governors appointed, but that we should be governed? Why are tutors engaged, but that children should be taught?'" Ward himself leaves Castlewood at the end of this episode, abdicating his spiritual rule
over the boys, just as Rachel has had to give up her temporal authority. The rebellion of youth that engendered the domestic drama of *The Newcomes* takes on a grander significance in this novel. We see enacted on a small scale in this rural Virginia estate the larger, more encompassing political revolution that furnishes the background of the tale in which an emergent young nation finds its own strength and casts off the authority of an old nation.

Setting the coming of age of the prototypical Harry and George Warrington against the tumultuous background of the Seven Years’ War and the War of Independence, *The Virginians* also grafts a novel of education onto a historical romance in the manner that nineteenth-century readers had grown accustomed to since *Waverley*. The opening episodes notified readers immediately that the twin sons of Rachel Esmond Warrington, no less than their counterparts in Thackeray’s “modern” novels, are subjected to tutelage by their elders and others whom they brush against on the skirts of history. In this respect, too, *The Virginians* offers a diverting study in contrasts. Of the worldly Baroness Bernstein née Beatrix Esmond, whom Harry meets for the first time in her dotage on his visit to England, we are told in a delicious understatement: “She was not a rigorous old moralist, nor, perhaps, a very wholesome preceptress for youth” (chap. 28). As an urban libertine she is the direct antithesis to her countrified half sister Rachel, who in the New World has come under the influence of the evangelical pastor Mr. Ward: “To be for ever applying to the Sacred Oracles, and accommodating their sentences to your purpose—to be for ever taking Heaven into your confidence about your private affairs, and passionately calling for its interference in your family quarrels and difficulties—to be so familiar with its designs and schemes as to be able to threaten your neighbour with its thunders, and to know precisely its intentions regarding him and others who differ from your infallible opinion—this was the schooling which our simple widow had received from her impetuous spiritual guide, and I doubt whether it brought much comfort” (chap. 5).

As against the strictness represented by Madam Esmond, her father, Henry, “of a sceptical turn of mind on many points,” leans more on the side of what our age calls permissiveness. If he still would not go along with the moral principles of his erstwhile inamorata Beatrix, and is still more Hebraist than Hellenist in his own code of life, he seems to side with the baroness when it comes to handling the young: “It was Colonel Esmond’s nature, as he
owned in his own biography, always to be led by a woman; and his wife dead, he coaxed and dandled and spoiled his daughter . . . indulging, and perhaps increasing her natural imperiousness of character, though it was his maxim that we can't change dispositions, and only make hypocrites of our children by commanding them over-much" (chap. 3). The ironical consequence of Henry's indulgence of his daughter is to make her a sterner parent.

The account of the revolution among the Esmonds of Virginia is followed by a chapter entitled "The Virginians Begin To See The World" (chap. 6), emphasizing that the most important education received by his two heroes comes when they are released from the guardianship of those three p's—parent, priest, and pedant. From among outsiders, the boys find a patron of permissiveness in, of all people, Rachel Esmond's gentleman caller George Washington, whom she naturally holds up to them as a model for emulation. When Madam Esmond expresses the hope that her son George, about to enter military service, will associate only with "gentlemen of honour and fashion," we learn through the family chronicler that Colonel Washington "had seen the gentlemen of honour and fashion in their cups, and perhaps thought that all their sayings and doings were not precisely such as would tend to instruct and edify a young man on his entrance into life; but he wisely chose to tell no tales out of school, and said that Harry and George, now they were coming into the world, must take their share of good and bad, and hear what both sorts had to say" (chap. 8). In late career, Thackeray is still having his wry way with copybook morality, these presumably being the last words his American readers must have expected to issue from the mouth of Parson Weems's pillar of sobriety and uprightness.20

It is George Washington nevertheless who predicts the course that the education of Harry and George is to take in the school of experience, most explicitly set forth in the chapter entitled "The Way of the World," where Harry luxuriates with his English relatives: "After a fortnight of Tunbridge, Mr. Harry had become quite a personage. He knew all the good company in the place. Was it his fault if he became acquainted with the bad likewise?" (chap. 28). We witness the trials and temptations of both George and Harry, the one initiated in a rough academy, the other in a polished one. While Harry lounges and disports himself among his kin at Castlewood Manor and Tunbridge Wells, George endures the hardships of frontier life in Penn's Woods. One vivid impression of what George goes through is conveyed by a ghastly plate (accom-
panying the false account of his death) showing him being saved from a scalping by a redskin through the timely intervention of a fellow soldier who plunges a sword through the savage's shoulder (chap. 12). In the next volume we learn of George's imprisonment in an Indian village (chap. 51), and a pictorial initial heading a later chapter shows him adrift in an open boat (chap. 56). Harry's ordeals during this period are moral rather than physical—"the perils of gaming" and "the perils of gallantry" as the author puts it. The pictures that head these chapters, accordingly, are more analogical than literal. One depicts a little boy clinging to a tree on a cliff edge, the sign in the distance reading "Man Traps" (chap. 20). Others represent a hand holding playing cards (chap. 25); a group of Hogarthian apprentices, framed by an initial L in the form of a looped snake, dicing over a grave (chap. 27); a youth idling, oblivious to the church tower in the distance (chap. 29). An especially stark one shows a young man being held up by a man in a black mask, the initial T forming a gibbet. Then, by the lottery of life, the situations of the two brothers are reversed, Harry joining Wolfe's forces in America, George remaining behind in the "old Home," "penning sonnets to his mistress' eye-brow, mayhap..." (chap. 66), until he gets briefly caught up once more in military affairs. By the end of their respective adventures, both brothers have been educated, more or less, to perform the offices of both peace and war.

Critics of *The Virginians* commonly complain of its dissipation of interest—the shifting of its center from Harry to George in the midst of things, the change from omniscient to autobiographic point of view toward the end. A greater source of dissatisfaction, from the purely novelistic standpoint, is the slackening of tension in the relations between the two heroes as the tale progresses. In its early chapters, when Harry shows alternately affection, fear, and deference toward George, we are led to expect some conflict to build between this Jacob and Esau (to whom they are likened at one point because of the circumstances of their birth) as they free themselves from apron strings and cassock. But if Thackeray had such an intention he obviously gave it up, for our interest in George and Harry comes to be not so much as clashing personalities as facets of their creator's "humorous ego." Hence the delights of the book really spring from Thackeray's ingenuity in making Harry, on one hand, his instrument for deflating social hypocrisy and stuffiness, and in using George, on the other, as a spokesman for his antiromantic outlook on life and literature.
“Society has this good at least: that it lessens our conceit, by teaching us our insignificance, and making us acquainted with our betters,” interposes the narrator ironically in the midst of Harry’s English adventure, to remind us that this young man is undergoing a course of continuing education in the world. “If you are a young person who reads this, depend upon it, sir, or madam, there is nothing more wholesome for you than to acknowledge and to associate with your superiors” (chap. 23). The naive, convivial Harry, welcomed by the villagers of Castlewood for his “frank, cordial ways and honest face,” is the perfect foil for his corrupt, “civilized” relatives. As we are told in the course of Harry’s conversation with his “preceptress” the Baroness Bernstein at Tunbridge:

... The lad had brought with him from his colonial home a stock of modesty which he still wore along with the honest home-spun linen. Libertinism was rare in those thinly-peopled regions from which he came. The vices of great cities were scarce known or practised in the rough towns of the American Continent. Harry Warrington blushed like a girl at the daring talk of his new European associates: even Aunt Bernstein’s conversation and jokes astounded the young Virginian, so that the worldly old woman would call him Joseph, or simpleton. (Chap. 28)

The life-style of Harry’s English cousins and their circle, to which he rapidly becomes accustomed, is graphically depicted in various plates and cuts that illustrate his capers, such as Harry taking a dancing lesson from Lady Fanny Castlewood, to the accompaniment of Lady Maria at the harpsichord (chap. 14); and Harry accepting a rose from Lady Maria on the terrace of Castlewood Manor beneath a statuette of Cupid (plate entitled “Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May” linking chaps. 17 and 18). The laxity of the age is suggested in the cut showing the convivial Parson Sampson sharing a bottle of burgundy with the rakish young Will Castlewood (chap. 15, “A Sunday at Castlewood”); its corruption by the plate entitled “The Ruling Passion” showing Harry with assorted “gentlemen” gathered around a card table (chap. 28), and by another, ambiguously entitled “The Vice-Queen” (chap. 34), introducing us to a buxom Lady Yarmouth, current mistress of George II, in full regalia.23 “It was not a good time. That old world was more dissolute than ours,” the narrator reminds us. “There was an old king with mistresses openly in his train, to whom the great folks of the land did honour. There was a nobility, many of whom the great folks of the land did honour. There was a nobility, many of whom were mad and reckless in the pursuit of pleasure; there was a
looseness of words and acts which we must note, as faithful historians, without going into particulars, and needlessly shocking present readers” (chap. 28).

The narrator breaks off at a tantalizing point. The real shock, however, to the “present readers” must have been that, despite the analogy with “The Rake’s Progress” (the title of chap. 41), Harry does not go down the inexorable road to perdition. “So if Harry Warrington rides down to Newmarket to the October meeting, and loses or wins his money there; if he makes one of a party at the ‘Shakespeare’ or the ‘Bedford Head’; if he dines at White’s Ordinary, and sits down to maccaroni and lansquenet afterwards; if he boxes the watch, and makes his appearance at the Roundhouse,” concludes the narrator in summing up the round of Harry’s amusements and pleasures of the day, “if he turns out for a short space a wild, dissipated, harum-scarum young Harry Warrington; I, knowing the weakness of human nature, am not going to be surprised; and, quite aware of my own shortcomings, don’t intend to be very savage at my neighbour’s” (chap. 41). Once again he flouts the Grundys in his audience, those “honest readers” who may have expected him to make Harry an example: “O the Truthful, O the Beautiful, O Modesty, O Benevolence, O Pudor, O Morse, O Blushing Shame, O Namby Pamby—each with your respective capital letters to your honoured names!”

Out in the world Harry is certainly not deprived of advice from elders, both of the prudential sort, as with General Lambert and Colonel Wolfe, and the cynical, as with his cousins and his aunt, the Baroness Bernstein. Among those who take him in hand is Parson Sampson, chaplain to the Castlewoods, an earthen vessel, as we quickly recognize, unlike that disciple of George Whitefield, Mr. Ward, “keeper of the undoubted waters of Jordan,” whom Rachel foists on her boys to tame their unruly spirits. We get vivid glimpses of him both on the pulpit: “Mr. Sampson . . . in his chapel in Long Acre . . . gave Sin no quarter; out-cursed Blasphemy with superior anathemas; knocked Drunkenness down, and trampled on the prostrate brute wallowing in the gutter; dragged out conjugal In fidelity, and pounded her with endless stones of rhetoric—”; and off the pulpit: “and, after service, came to dinner at the ‘Star and Garter,’ made a bowl of punch for Harry and his friends at the ‘Bedford Head,’ or took a hand at whist at Mr. Warrington’s lodgings, or my Lord March’s, or wherever there was a supper and good company for him” (chap. 41). However he may fall short as a man of God, Parson Sampson is no hypocrite. “I don’t say, madam,
my practice is good, only my doctrine is sound," he candidly admits to Lady Maria (chap. 35), and his point has already been made in the plate entitled "Preaching and Practice" (preceding chap. 29), where Harry happens upon him at cards with Will. Yet one gathers that with his determination to "speak as a one man of the world to other sinful people, who might be likely to profit from good advice" (chap. 15), Parson Sampson comes closer to Thackeray's own ideal of the "week-day preacher" than some of the more straitlaced clergymen we encounter in his novels and essays. The rub really is the inability of his congregation, particularly Harry, "to profit from good advice." The futility of all sermonizing is perhaps best demonstrated in the episode in "A Sunday at Castlewood," when the Good Parson preaches on the evils of gambling. On this occasion, Sampson piles example upon precept, relating "in a manner startling, terrible, and picturesque" an execution he had witnessed of a horse-thief. He reviews the life history of this culprit who had started life with good prospects but, tempted first by gambling and card playing, was led to crime, a course that eventually carried him down the road to Tyburn. Though the sermon is directed to Harry, with the intention of leaving him contrite, the episode ends with Harry's spirits lifted as he learns that a horse he has bet on against odds has just won that day's race (chap. 15).

The ultimate moral of this tale, as Harry is forced to fend for himself amidst the contradictory advice he receives from his "superiors," is that one learns morality from experience, not from sermons. For a while Harry seems to live a charmed life that earns him the label of The Fortunate Youth, but soon enough he learns that Lady Luck, who smiles on him for a time at the gaming table or the turf, is quick to withdraw her favors. A certain amount of Harry's success, it is true, verifies the wise observation of the wicked fairy of this fable, the Baroness Bernstein: "You are making your entry into the world, and the gold key will open most of its doors to you. To be thought rich is as good as to be rich" (chap. 24). His status as heir presumptive to the estate of the Esmonds of Virginia (the extent of which is magnified by his servant Gumbo) certainly breaks down barriers, accounting for the hospitality he enjoys from his English cousins, including the embarrassing pursuit by the Lady Maria, and the readiness of the society around Tunbridge to dance attendance upon him (even allowing him to win at cards?). Harry does follow one stage of the rake's progress—imprisonment for debt—but this turn of events serves really to expose the deficiencies of his relatives and drinking companions—all of whom let him
down in his need. Naïve as he may be, Harry is clearly morally superior to his worldly companions. He gains something of a pyrrhic victory over them in addition. They become the victims of their own cupidity when Harry reverts to the status of second son with the unexpected appearance of his “dead” elder brother George. The return of George, which dramatically ends what was the first volume of *The Virginians* in its original format, also brings about the timely rescue of Harry from prison. By the caprice of fate, Harry’s economic downfall brings about his moral rehabilitation. A collateral dividend is Harry’s release from his rashly incurred engagement to his middle-aged cousin Maria when George informs her father Lord Castlewood that Harry is a pauper. Fortune, in the form of George, is cruel in order to be kind.

Harry serves to illustrate the observations made much later by F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway: “. . . a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth.” At any rate Harry’s “American” virtues of frankness, kindness, and honesty, together with his “modest blushing timidity,” prove his saving graces, raising him in our esteem above his charming and more cultivated forebears. Having served his purpose of showing up his betters, the active Harry is displaced from center stage in favor of his more contemplative brother. Actually this shift is prepared for earlier. “I want to have a cheerful hero, though this is very difficult, for a cheerful character must have some deeper element to give dignity and interest,” Thackeray confided to one of the most favorable reviewers of *The Newcomes* when he was contemplating its successor. “It is hardly possible to have a hero without a dash of melancholy. I think the cheerful man must be the second character—a good-humoured, pleasant rogue. But people are always complaining that my clever people are rascals and the good people idiots.”

Harry is “good,” but no idiot, as we have seen, and George, the “clever” brother, is no rascal. Essentially George provides the “dash of melancholy” that Thackeray felt was necessary to give dignity to his book, and it is he who lifts it above social comedy to serious commentary.

In some respects Thackeray divided himself between the two brothers, transferring different details from his own background to each. Whereas Harry had the gambling fever and squanders his patrimony, for instance, George is given to sketching, studies law in a desultory way, fritters away time reading novels, and struggles for a literary career. From the temperamental standpoint it is possible to see one aspect of Thackeray in the “good-humoured, pleas-
ant” Harry—the naïve, convivial self that responds naturally to “what was tender, helpless, pretty, or pathetic.” But surely the “peaceful, studious, and silent” George is closer to Thackeray’s introspective, sophisticated, “grave-satirical” self. “I never know whether you are laughing at me or yourself, George... I never know whether you are serious or jesting,” complains Harry at one point. “Precisely my own case, Harry, my dear!” is George’s reply.

In the course of the novel we see something of George as soldier, as student, as courting swain, and as husband; but primarily he presents himself to us as a dramatist, memoirist, and amateur historian, and in these capacities is in a good position to express his creator’s views on history, civilization, and “society in general.” The characteristic iconoclasm asserts itself once more, provoked in this instance by George’s disillusionment with his English cousins:

“Are these the inheritors of noble blood?” thought George, as he went home quite late from his aunt’s house, passing by doors whence the last guests of fashion were issuing, and where the chairmen were yawning over their expiring torches. “Are these the proud possessors of ancestral honours and ancient names, and were their forefathers, when in life, no better? We have our pedigree at home with noble coats-of-arms emblazoned all over the branches, and titles dating back before the Conquest and the Crusaders. When a knight of old found a friend in want, did he turn his back upon him, or an unprotected damsel, did he delude her and leave her? When a nobleman of the early time received a young kinsman, did he get the better of him at dice, and did the ancient chivalry cheat in horseflesh?” (Chap. 54)

George is not inclined to glorify himself either. Although Theo Lambert falls in love with him for the dangers he had passed, he manages to remove all the romance from his imprisonment at Duquesne, as narrated to his brother and the Lambert family. Despite expectations aroused by the Virgilian tags to these chapters (“Conticuere Omnes”; “Intentique Ora Tenebant”), George candidly affirms: “Ladies, I wish I had to offer you the account of a dreadful and tragic escape; how I slew all the sentinels of the fort; filed through the prison windows, destroyed a score or so of watchful dragons, overcame a million of dangers, and finally effected my freedom. But in regard of that matter, I have no heroic deeds to tell of, and own that, by bribery and no other means, I am where I am” (chap. 51). George suits his inaction to his word, his humdrum account (including his rescue from scalping not through his own derring-do but through that of a friend who intervenes out of an obligation incurred at cards) divesting his tale even of the
excitement that Cooper might have brought to it. Furthermore, the Indian maid La Biche, of the “long straight black hair, which was usually dressed with a hair-oil or pomade by no means pleasant to approach,26 with little eyes, with high cheek-bones, with a flat nose, sometimes ornamented with a ring . . . her cheeks and forehead grace fully tattooed, a great love of finery, and inordinate passion for . . . whisky,” seems to possess a closer “fidelity to history” than Cooper’s noble savages, or Chateaubriand’s Atala.27

George tends to look with the same unglazed eyes at “battles, politics . . . statesmen” in the larger world. “How is it, and by what, and whom, that Greatness is achieved?” he asks after reading his brother’s account of the Battle of Montmorenci, which brought General Wolfe glory out of defeat. “Is it Frolic or Fortune? Is it Fate that awards successes and defeats? Is it the Just Cause that ever wins? How did the French gain Canada from the savage, and we from the French, and after which of the conquests was the right time to sing Te Deum?” (chap. 74).

His subsequent animadversions on the American Revolution in the chapter entitled “In Which We Both Fight and Run Away” bring heroism in general under a cold, skeptical glare. One comment could have come out of Cousin’s lecture on “Great Men,” or out of Thackeray’s own “near view” of history: “I pray my children may live to see or engage in no great revolutions, —such as that, for instance, raging in the country of our miserable French neighbours. Save a very few indeed, the actors in those great tragedies do not bear to be scanned too closely; the chiefs are no better than ranting quacks; the heroes ignoble puppets; the heroines anything but pure. The prize is not always to the brave.”28 George, though himself on the Loyalist side, concedes in retrospect that the victory went to the deserving, but even his tribute to the leadership of Washington emphasizes human failings: “His great and surprising triumphs were not in those rare engagements with the enemy where he obtained a trifling mastery; but over Congress; over hunger and disease; over lukewarm friends, or smiling foes in his own camp, whom his great spirit had to meet, and master” (chap. 90). The late war too leads George to philosophize on the fortuity of life’s rewards: “Who has not speculated, in the course of his reading of his history, upon the ‘Has been’ and the ‘Might have been’ in the world? I take my battered old map-book from the shelf, and see the board on which the great contest was played; I wonder at the curious chances which lost it; and, putting aside any idle talk about the respective bravery of the two nations, can’t but
see that we had the best cards, and that we lost the game” (chap. 91). We are persuaded that “the excitement of metaphysics must equal almost that of gambling,” as young Thackeray declared on first reading Cousin’s *Cours de l’histoire*.

From his armchair George has been musing over the volatile half century that Thackeray looked back on from his lectern. “We have to glance over sixty years in as many minutes,” opened the lecture on “George the Third.” As Thackeray reminded his audience: “England has to undergo the revolt of the American colonies; to submit to defeat and separation; to shake under the volcano of the French Revolution.” From this point he plunges ahead to the aftermath of these catastrophic times:

> The old society, with its courtly splendours, has to pass away; generations of statesmen to rise and disappear . . . the old poets who unite us to Queen Anne’s time to sink into their graves; Johnson to die, and Scott and Byron to arise. . . . Steam has to be invented; kings to be beheaded, banished, deposed, restored. Napoleon is to be but an episode, and George III is to be alive through all these varied changes, to accompany his people through all these revolutions of thought, government, society; to survive out of the old world into ours.

*The Virginians* presents us then with one more episode in Thackeray’s saga of “the progress of civilization and the mutations of manners,” but whereas in *Vanity Fair, Pendennis*, and *The Newcomes* we have been witnesses to change taking place, *The Virginians* allows us to review and assess what has already come to pass. Arthur Pendennis’s two histories gave us opportunity to contrast two generations as to ways of life and moral attitudes, but through George Warrington our historic imagination is stretched wider to take in two centuries, two countries, and two distinct cultures.

Toward the end of *The Virginians* George hails, if with some misgivings, the coming of age of the new nation in the midst of the destruction of the old order in Europe. Anne Thackeray has reminded us of the interest her father took in “that later time . . . when George III was king in England, and when America, throwing off kings altogether, preferred to elect Presidents in their place.” The writing of *The Virginians* happened to coincide with Thackeray’s own brief involvement with politics, which renewed his interest in the democratic process. During the summer of 1857, several months before *The Virginians* began to appear, Thackeray ran for the vacated Whig seat in Parliament from Oxford. “With no
feeling but that of good will towards these leading aristocratic families who are administering the chief offices of the State,” he declared in a manifesto addressed to the electors of Oxford, “I believe that it would be benefited by the skill and talents of persons less aristocratic, and that the country thinks so likewise.” He would go even further, to “have the suffrage amended in nature as well as numbers, and hope to see many Educated Classes represented who have now no voice in Elections.” Amidst the steeples and academic towers of this ancient seat of learning he sees a new city emerging, “peopled by thousands of hard-working, honest, rough-handed men,” who “have grown up of late years, and have asserted their determination to have a representative of their own.”

Thackeray apparently hankered at this time for a more resonant platform than the lecture circuit offered him, and to be more conspicuously in the public eye, but he lost out on his one campaign for elective office. He soon reconciled himself to this defeat, determined once more to “retire, and take my place with my pen and ink at my desk.

To the Electors of the City of Oxford Thackeray had promised “to use my utmost endeavour to increase and advance the social happiness, the knowledge and the power of the people,” and something of this populist zeal courses through the pages of The Virginians in which a stream of fresh air from the New World counteracts the odor of decay hanging over the Old. Early in the novel we have witnessed the spirit of revolt personified in young George and Harry throwing off authority; toward its end the new generation asserts its rights once more in the comely person of the countrywoman Lydia van den Bosch, heiress to the fortune of her grandfather, a self-made Dutch trader from New York. Miss van den Bosch exudes brash self-confidence in the plate where we glimpse her with head tossed back, body thrust forward as she “sailed into chapel” on the arm of her cousin George, backed up by two footmen carrying her folio-sized prayer book (chap. 73). This parvenu sails into society with equal alacrity. Her affluence provides her easy access to the abode of the Castlewoods, which she soon makes her own: “Over that apartment, and the whole house, domain and village, the new Countess speedily began to rule with unlimited sway. It was surprising how quickly she learned the ways of command; and if she did not adopt those methods of precedence usual in England among great ladies, invented regulations for herself, and promulgated them, and made others submit”
(chap. 73). By this time she has literally been received into the bosom of the Castlewood family through marriage to Eugene, the eldest of the eligible sons, and proceeds to "take over": "She made the oldest established families in the country—grave baronets and their wives—worthy squires of twenty descents, who rode over to Castlewood to pay the bride and bridegroom honour—know their distance, as the phrase is, and give her the pas. She got an old heraldry book . . . and ere long she jabbered gules and sables, bends and saltires, not with correctness always, but with a volubility and perseverance." Before long she rivals Rachel Esmond as a power to be reckoned with: "She made little progresses to the neighbouring towns in her gilt coach and six, or to the village in her chair, and asserted a quasi-legal right of homage from her tenants and other clodpoles. She lectured the parson on his divinity; the bailiff on his farming; instructed the astonished housekeeper how to preserve and pickle . . . and as for physic, Madam Esmond in Virginia was not more resolute about her pills and draughts than Miss Lydia, the earl's new bride."

In her patronizing way Baroness Bernstein welcomes Miss van den Bosch for her "great fire and liveliness, and a Cherokee manner which is not without its charms." "Nous la formerons cette petite," Beatrix proclaims with her customary assurance to nephew George; "Eugene wants character and vigour, but he is a finished gentleman, and between us we shall make the little savage perfectly presentable." The "little savage," however, has ideas of her own, as demonstrated particularly by her reaction to Harry's news of Wolfe's victory in Canada: " . . . and now we have turned the French king out of the country, shouldn't be at all surprised if we set up for ourselves in America." To her husband's shocked outcry that she is talking treason, she has a ready response: "I'm talking reason anyhow, my lord. I've no notion of folks being kept down, and treated as children forever!" The baroness is sympathetic, admiring the "little Countess's courage and spirit in routing the Dowager and Lady Fanny," but she herself is destined also to go down in defeat. On one occasion Lydia determines to face up to "old Goody," as she calls her. "You are both afraid of her: and I ain't, that's all," she declares to George and Eugene. "I ain't a-going to bite her head off. We shall have a battle, and I intend to win." George and Eugene discreetly remove themselves for some pheasant shooting, clearing the ground for the impending encounter. George's laconic dispatch set down after the event for the edification of his children reads: "Well, then, what happened I know not
on that disgraceful day of panic when your father fled the field, nor dared to see the heroines engage; but when we returned from our shooting, the battle was over. America had revolted and conquered the mother country” (chap. 73).

With this mini-Revolutionary War anticipating things to come, George takes up the popular historian’s obligation to “connect domestic matters with the course of public events.” If his own patrician background makes Lydia’s abrasive commonness somewhat repellent to him, he goes along with her protest against “folks being kept down, and treated as children forever.” This attitude comes out in the somewhat unconventional advice he leaves to his children, and by extension to the rising generation as a whole. “I know that I ought to be very cautious in narrating this early part of the married life of George Warrington, Esquire, and Theodosia his wife,” begins one section of his journal, “—to call out mea culpa, and put on a demure air, and, sitting on my comfortable easy-chair here, profess to be in a white sheet and on the stool of repentance, offering myself up as a warning to imprudent and hot-headed youth” (chap. 81). However, George thwarts the expectations of the parents among his readers by offering encouragement to the “hot-headed.” He has carried his boyhood defiance of his mother into manhood by marrying a bride of his own choice rather than following her dictates. What is more, he has no regrets: “... truth to say, that married life, regarding which my dear relatives prophesied so gloomily, has disappointed all those prudent and respectable people. . . . To marry without a competence is wrong and dangerous, no doubt, and a crime against our social codes; but do not scores of thousands of our fellow-beings commit the crime every year with no other trust but in Heaven, health, and their labour?” In going through the family papers in his retirement, George recalls, “I found docketed and labelled with my mother’s well-known neat handwriting, ‘From London, April, 1760. My son’s dreadful letter.’” He is referring to the letter announcing his engagement to Theo. He proceeds to explain why the letter is no longer extant: “When it came to be mine I burnt the document, not choosing that that story of domestic grief and disunion should remain amongst our family annals for future Warringtons to gaze on, mayhap, and disobedient sons to hold up as examples of foregone domestic rebellions. For similar reasons I have destroyed the paper which my mother despatched to me at this time of tyranny, revolt, annoyance, and irritation” (chap. 78). So his own little declaration of independence disappears without a trace.
The youthful exuberance and rebellion that figure prominently in this "Tale of the Last Century" are harbingers in their small way of the "revolutions of thought, government, society" to come. As amateur historian, George recognizes the inevitability of change, while maintaining a lingering regard for the "Old World from which we are drifting away so swiftly." In the blunt, robust Miss van den Bosch of the "Cherokee manner" and her trading-class grandfather of "talk and appearance somewhat too homely" he shows us something of the less pleasant side of the emergent egalitarianism from the New World. However he may admire her spirit, George certainly does not share the young capitalist's contempt for tradition. "You tell me to respect old people. Why? I don't see nothin' to respect in the old people I know," Lydia protests to George just before her altercation with the baroness. "They ain't so funny, and I'm sure they ain't so handsome. Look at grandfather; look at Aunt Bernstein. They say she was a beauty once! That picture painted from her! I don't believe it nohow." Unlike his insensitive cousin by marriage George is gifted with historical imagination, which enables him to see more in Aunt Bernstein than meets the eye: "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." He rereads her life history as narrated by his grandfather Henry (more accurate, as he discovers, than her own oral account), "and my fancy wandered about in her, amused and solitary, as I had walked about her father's house at Castlewood, meditating on departing glories, and imagining ancient times" (chap. 73). The passing of an era is concentrated in a brief flash in George's mind's eye during his last glimpse of the dying Baroness Bernstein recollecting her youth in her delirium:

Let us draw the curtain round it. I think with awe still of those rapid words, uttered in the shadow of the canopy, as my pallid wife sits by, her Prayer-book on her knee; as the attendants move to and fro noiselessly; as the clock ticks without, and strikes the fleeting hours; as the sun falls upon the Kneller picture of Beatrix in her beauty, with the blushing cheeks, the smiling lips, the waving auburn tresses, and the eyes which seem to look towards the dim figure moaning in the bed. (Chap. 83)

The plangency, mellow wisdom, and leisurely movement of this "Tale of the Last Century" was not destined to catch the crowd. "The Virginians is no doubt not a success," Thackeray wrote in a despondent mood to a friend as it was concluding its run. "It sadly lacks story, and people won't care about the old times, or all the
trouble I take in describing them.” This novel, for which Thackeray initially received four times more than he had for *Vanity Fair*, eventually disappointed his publishers’ hopes, quite possibly for a reason he anticipates in an earlier letter to Mrs. Baxter: “The book’s clever but stupid that’s a fact. I hate story-making incidents, surprises, love-making, &c. more and more every day.” It is true that he makes fewer concessions than ever here to “the lazy, novel-reading, unscientific world.” The “story-making incidents,” such as Harry’s fall from a horse and rescue by the Lamberts and his later imprisonment, tend to be perfunctory, or, as has already been suggested in connection with George’s capture by the Indians, to parody the staples of popular romances set in America. The main “surprise” of the book—George’s return from the “dead”—could not have been so to any reasonably alert reader, being anticipated literally in Rachel’s dream (chap. 13) and ironically in Harry’s delusive prosperity. The “love-making” introduced is mainly of the comic opera sort, like Lady Maria’s pursuit of Harry and her subsequent marriage to the actor Hagan, or materialistic, like the rivalry of the Castlewood brothers for the hand and fortune of Lydia van den Bosch. A hint of romance is provided in such chapter headings as “The Course of True Love” and “Pyramus and Thisbe” (headed by a pictorial initial depicting these legendary lovers separated by a wall). However, interfering cousins rather than the vagaries of Eros slow the path to the altar of George and Theo, and the outcome is never much in doubt. Moreover, their courtship is glossed over in favor of their domestic difficulties (“Res Angusta Domi”) on limited income. The other true love celebrated in the book—the courtship of Harry and Fanny Mountain—is briefly narrated in a letter.

*The Virginians* clearly is not a book one turns to for “story,” as Thackeray surmised, but for much more—its thought and its rich evocation of “the old times.” George as historian is clearly surrogate for Thackeray, torn between past and present, the Old World and the New, “meditating on departed glories, and imagining ancient times,” yet with his double vision looking at once backward and forward, observing humanity “advance over ruins.” George refers toward the end of his memoir to two works in progress—a “History of the American War” and “Travels in Europe.” According to his editor, “Neither of these two projected works of Sir George Warrington were brought, as it appears, to light,” but it is reasonable to suppose that some of the notes for them spill over into the pages of *The Virginians*. Actually Thackeray could just as
well have titled his book *The Anglo-American Sketch Book*, placing it alongside his earlier travel books with which it has much in common in its synthesis of “physical geography” with social and literary criticism, taking in “the history of religion, the history of art, the history of legislation, the history of wealth . . .” that Victor Cousin defined as the scope of the student of humanity.\(^\text{36}\)

As with many another excursion into history, this book offers many attractive side trips. From the literary standpoint there can be no gainsaying Thackeray’s aims as set forth in the opening, where the author explains his function:

> The letters of the Virginians, as the reader will presently see, from specimens to be shown to him, are by no means full. They are hints rather than descriptions—indications and outlines chiefly; it may be, that the present writer has mistaken the forms, and filled in the colour wrongly; but poring over the documents, I have tried to imagine the situation of the writer, where he was and by what persons surrounded. I have drawn the figures as I fancied they were; set down conversations as I think I might have heard them; and so, to the best of my ability, endeavoured to revivify the bygone times and people.

Little as the results may have been appreciated by his contemporaries, Thackeray opens out to view here his formula for the successful collaboration of romancer and scholar in fleshing out the “ephemeral repertories” of life. Historical memory combines with the mimetic arts, graphic (“I have drawn the figures as I fancied they were”) and oral (“set down conversations as I think I might have heard them”). In their ambition “to revivify the bygone times and people,” the “sham” historian and the true come together.

In this most transnational of his novels, fusing *Familienroman*, literary autobiography, and historical romance, Thackeray wrote with a distinct sense of audiences on both sides of the ocean.\(^\text{37}\) In the letter to Mrs. Baxter remarking on the slow pace of the narrative that used up a third of its length to transport Harry from Virginia to England, Thackeray added: “I wish an elderly [gentleman] could do t’other thing, and have the strongest wish to come and see you all.”\(^\text{38}\) As things turned out, Thackeray never again got to the United States to carry out the study and observation “sur les lieux”?\(^\text{39}\) that he had begun during his tour with *The Four Georges*, to the detriment, as he was the first to concede, of the later American episodes, particularly the Revolutionary War, which seem cursory and truncated. Having already admitted to his
readers his relief that Harry, during his tour on the continent, did not join the Prussian forces, "for then I should have had to describe battles which Carlyle is going to paint; and I don't wish you should make odious comparisons between me and that master" (chap. 62). Thackeray, one suspects, was just as happy not to become a rival to American military historians. He obviously feels kinship with George who, after brief participation in the battle of Fort Clinton, is "Satis Pugnae" and content to retire under vine and fig tree and learn war no more. His Anglo-American novel, if not the detailed history that he had originally planned, became nevertheless a substitute fulfillment of his desire "to come and see you all." It is dominated appropriately by a spirit of concord and conciliation epitomized most graphically in the wrapper design (subsequently reproduced on the title page of the second volume) showing an American and a British soldier literally extending hands across the sea. "Now my country is England, not America, or Virginia: and I take, or rather took, the English side of the dispute. My sympathies had always been with home, where I was now a squire and a citizen," George affirms, "but had my lot been to plant tobacco, and live on the banks of the James River or Potomac, no doubt my opinions had been altered. When for instance, I visited my brother at his new house and plantation, I found him and his wife as staunch Americans as we were British" (chap. 86). The "differences which separated them in politics," alluded to by their mother, prove in the long run not to be "fatal" after all.40

"Indeed, Mr. George has a lofty way with him, which I don't see in other people; and, in reading books, I find he chooses the fine noble things always, and loves them in spite of his satire. He certainly is of a satirical turn, but then he is only bitter against mean things and people. No gentleman hath a more tender heart I am sure." This shrewd summing up by Theo Lambert of her future husband can be taken also as Thackeray's apology for himself to his readers. George, alter ego for his creator as mediator between two eras and two generations, also afforded opportunity for Thackeray to view himself simultaneously as struggling young literary aspirant and as middle-aged armchair philosopher, fusing the themes of vitality and superannuation that run through the narrative as countermotifs. Against the comedy of youthful hope, confidence, error, and mishap is posed the pathos of age, represented at one extreme by the stoical Henry Esmond, left with some "bankruptcy of heart" as a result of which he "submitted to life, rather than enjoyed it"; at
the other by his erstwhile lady love Baroness Bernstein who, sans teeth, clings to life ("I still have my cards—thank Heaven, I still have my cards!"). "To stay is well enough, but shall we be very sorry to go?" Thackeray himself wrote to a confidant, Dr. John Brown, late in 1858. "What more is there in life that we haven't tried? What that we have tried is very much worth repetition or endurance?" the letter continues, and proceeds on this tired note: "I have just come from a beefsteak and potatoes 1 f., a bottle of claret 5 f., both excellent of their kind, but we can part from them without a very severe pang. . . . What is a greater pleasure? Gratified ambition, accumulation of money. What? Fruition of some sort of desire, perhaps? when one is twenty, yes; but at 47 Venus may rise from the sea, and I for one should hardly put on my spectacles to have a look. Here I am snarling away on the old poco curante theme."

A certain autumnal aura that suffuses the pages of *The Virginians* reflects Thackeray's sense of time running out. A letter written during the summer of 1859 as he was bringing it to a close, makes his last major book sound almost like his elegy: "There has been nothing to say. We have gone jogging on in the old fashion. We dine out. We go to a few drums. I am ill every 5 weeks or so with my accustomed spasms—get well, plunge about while my number is in gestation—and so the moon fills and wanes, and the world wags. Next month (d.v.) Virginians will be done. Then a little rest: then next year begin again; and tomorrow and tomorrow comes until pallida mors ends them." He did take up his pen again the following year, but the rest of what he had to say to his public came from the retreat of an editorial chair, and under a lengthening shadow.

1. 8 February 1857 to Frederick Cozzens, *Letters*, 4:18. These lectures are anticipated in a satirical poem, "The Georges," that Thackeray contributed to *Punch*, October 1845, on the occasion of the unveiling of statues of these monarchs in the Parliament palace. His interest was renewed during a visit to Germany in 1852.

2. This conversation is mentioned by John Esten Cooke in "An Hour with Thackeray," *Appleton's Journal*, n.s. 22 (September 1879): 251. Cooke indicates that Thackeray had at first intended to make George and Harry rivals in love (as the brothers are in James's novel). In a speech delivered to fellow authors before setting sail for his second tour of America, Thackeray refers to the "kindly old chronicler of the lovely September or November evening when two horsemen were seen" who "serves her Majesty as one of the consuls in the United States, occupying his leisure moments by the composition & delivery of lectures of one of w'h it appears I myself have been the pleasing subject, coming in for a sound whipping as I read in a Virginia paper at the hands of that veteran romancer—and why not?—as Jack said when his 'old woman' boxed his ears—'It amuses her & it doesn't hurt me.' . . ." (MS "Notes for a Literary Fund Speech," Taylor Collection, Princeton University).

It is amusing to note that the lecture "George the Second" opens in the G. P. R. James manner parodied in "Barbazure": "On the afternoon of the 14th of June
1727, two horsemen might have been perceived galloping along the road from Chelsea to Richmond. The foremost, caséd in the jackboots of the period, was a broad-faced, jolly-looking, and very corpulent cavalier. . . . " Thus Thackeray introduces Sir Robert Walpole and his companion on their way to Richmond Lodge to announce the death of George I to the next in line.

3. *The Virginia Comedians* was published both in New York (D. Appleton) and in London in 1854. In the back of the first edition are advertised several of Thackeray’s magazine writings that had been brought out in book form in Appleton’s Popular Library, and the epigraph on the title page is a stanza from Thackeray’s ballad “The End of the Play.” The narrative is supposed to be based on a memoir left by Champ Effingham, the central figure. Cooke also refers to his book as “a family romance,” allying it in genre with *The Virginians*.

4. The article on Kennedy in *Appleton’s Cyclopedia of American Biography* (by John H. B. Latrobe) credits him with the writing of the episode of George’s trip from Fort Duquesne to the coast to embark for England (chap. 52), but Kennedy himself recorded in his diary that Thackeray “partially incorporated” some notes he prepared for this chapter at Thackeray’s request (see Lionel Stevenson, *The Showman of Vanity Fair* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947], p. 554).


6. One of the books that Kennedy lent him, Graydon’s *Memoirs of the Revolution*, apparently suggested a minor episode, the marriage of Lady Maria to the actor Hagan.

7. Esther’s nickname, Hetty, is given to the younger of Major Lambert’s daughters, who does not, however, marry either George or Harry Warrington. In a letter to Mrs. Baxter, Thackeray likened the two Lambert daughters to his own (Letters, 4:81).

8. “Ms. Notebook for *The Virginians*,” in the Beinecke Library, Yale University, passim. Also useful for the background of the novel is the Notebook for the Four Georges, now in the Rosenbach Library. One of the memoirists cited here, Poebnitz, appears in the Tunbridge Wells episode of *The Virginians* (chap. 26).

9. In chap. 16 Maria Castlewood consults “the ‘History of Virginia’ by R. B. Gent.”


11. Letters, 3:471. It concluded its run in October 1859, but the first volume in book form, consisting of the first twelve numbers, was published late in 1858. Bradbury and Evans, not Smith, Elder, were the publishers. The reasons for the change of format and publisher are unknown.

12. “George the First,” *Works*, 7:621. The lectures were eventually published for the first time under the auspices of Smith, Elder in the *Cornhill Magazine* during Thackeray’s editorship (July, August, September, October 1860).

13. In *The Newcomes*, chap. 28, the narrator refers to Lady Ann Newcome as one of those “who signed the address to Mrs. Stowe, the other day, along with thousands more virtuous British matrons.”

14. The extant manuscript (about two-thirds of the novel) is in the Pierpont Morgan Library. It has been utilized by Gerald C. Sorensen in his Ph.D. dissertation, “A Critical Edition of W. M. Thackeray’s *The Virginians* [Part I–III] [with] *The Virginians*, Volumes I and II, London: Bradbury and Evans, 1858” (University of Minnesota, 1966), which I have also drawn upon for its useful bibliographical history and annotation.

15. This sentence echoes the famous words uttered by Charles Yellowplush to a member of the nobility that serve as the caption for a sketch Thackeray drew for *The Book of Snobs*; cf. also the concluding sentence of *Pendennis*.

16. The hero of *The Virginian Comedians*, Champ Effingham, peruked, powered, and patched in his “figured satin waistcoat, point de Venise lace . . . feet caséd in slippers of Spanish leather, adorned with diamond buckles,” surrounded by furniture in the Louis Quatorze style, represents the decadent patrician class still clinging to Old World elegance. He is contrasted with the more virile agitators in the course of the Revolution.
17. Among these surviving letters is one by Horace Walpole to General Conway describing Henry in Tunbridge, not included in Peter Cunningham's then recent edition, this editor hastens to add (chap. 40).

18. Beginning his publishing career as printer to Lord Brougham's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Knight became one of the most famous autodidacts and promulgators of low-priced, serious reading of the Victorian age. His Popular History of England was also published by Bradbury and Evans. A review quoted in the Virginians Advertiser indicates that Knight followed the "familiar" approach to history advocated by Macaulay and Alison: "Mr. Knight prefers the pleasant to the stately. In his hands History lays aside her robes, her crown, and her majestic utterance; she delights to linger by the wayside, under shady branches or by old crosses or ivied porches. . . ."

Uniting the two worlds of The Virginians is another book advertised in no. 18 (and in vol. 2 of the first edition with Knight): Civilized America, by Thomas Colley Grattan, "Late Her Britannic Majesty's Consul for the State of Massachusetts." A quoted review reads: "As a book on the political and social aspects of the States, on government, society, literature, public men, manners, and morals, a very high commendation must be rendered."

19. The MS at this point originally indicated that Rachel succeeded her father in command after his death. This statement is lined out in favor of the present reading: "The management of the house of Castlewood had been in the hands of the active little lady long before the Colonel slept the sleep of the just." ("Active," incidentally, originally read "arbitrary."

20. In chap. 9 he is represented according to the received traditions as "above levity and jokes." Obviously aware of Washington's prestige in America, Thackeray pays tribute to him intermittently through the novel. In chap. 81 George, though less enthusiastic than Harry, is made to say: "Indeed I allow the gentleman every virtue; and in the struggles which terminated so fatally for England a few years since, I can admire as well as his warmest friends, General Washington's glorious constancy and success." In the MS this sentence originally concluded "though I think there were many officers as good as he," but these words are lined out. Despite such tact, Thackeray's treatment of Washington was received with resentment by some of his American readers. They lost sight of the fact that George was supposed to represent Loyalist opinion; nor did they appreciate Thackeray's "familiar" approach to their hero.

In chap. 8 of the MS is deleted a reference to the scandalous past of another American culture hero, Benjamin Franklin.

21. His rescuer is an ancestor of M. Paul de Florac, whom we have met in The Newcomes.

22. There is various evidence of change in direction. Besides the anticipation of rivalry in love (see above, n. 2), Rachel's reference in the preface to Esmond of the "fatal differences" in politics suggests more serious consequences than actually ensue. The military disposition shown by George and Harry in chap. 7 ("Preparations for War") is hardly borne out in the rest of the novel. The situation in this chapter of the elder brother being selected to go to war to uphold the family honor while the younger must stay back is carried to a more tragic denouement by Stevenson in The Master of Ballantrae—a romance in which the influences of G. P. R. James and Thackeray converge.


23. The initial that heads chap. 34 ("In Which Mr. Warrington Treats The Company With Tea And A Ball") shows a clerical figure bent over to kiss the hand of Lady Yarmouth on this occasion.


25. Conversation with the Reverend Whitwell Elwin, reported in Elwin's Some Eighteenth Century Men of Letters (London: Murray, 1902), 1:156–57; quoted in Letters, 3:619 n. Thackeray was accounting here for his decision to abandon his plan for a sequel to The Newcomes centering on the artist J. J. Ridley. In his eventual dispositions:
tion of both George and Harry in *The Virginians*, Thackeray transferred a suggestion that the Reverend Elwin had made for the sequel to *The Newcomes*: "Why don't you describe a domestic family, enjoying the genuine blessings of calm domestic felicity, put in contrast with the vexations and hollowness of fashionable life?" (ibid.).

26. This is modified from the first version in the MS: "... a hair oil or pomade of such an odour that I did not care to approach."

27. George later attributes the failure of his drama *Pocahontas*, based on the best-known incident in the life of Sir John Smith, to its "fidelity to history."

28. Cf. Thackeray's review of *The Private Correspondence of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough* (quoted above, pp. 107-8). Harry's account of the Battle of Saint-Malo, in which he participates, is equally iconoclastic (chap. 64). Military swagger and American chauvinism are both parodied in the last of Thackeray's "Prize Novels" for *Punch*, "The Stars and Stripes. By The Author of 'The Last of the Mulligans,' 'Pilot,' Etc.," obviously aimed at Cooper with its heroes Leatherlegs and Tom Coxswain.


30. Although defeated by only a small margin, Thackeray came to the conclusion that he was not suited for politics. In a late chapter of *The Virginians*, George records in his journal: "I thought I might perhaps succeed to my uncle's seat in Parliament, as well as to his landed property; but I found, I knew not how, that I was voted to be a person of very dangerous opinions. I would not bribe, I would not coerce my own tenants to vote for me in the election of '68" (chap. 85).

31. "Despatched," with its more military connotation, is substituted for "sent" in the MS. Harry follows the course of his elder brother in marrying Fanny Mountain, daughter of his mother's housekeeper, against Rachel's express wishes. The plate that illustrates this episode is labeled "Flat Rebellion" (chap. 84).

32. Unpublished letter of December 1858, continued 16 July 1859, to William Webb Follett Synge. The original (incomplete) is in the Morgan Library.

33. Actually, the book did reasonably well, the main cause for its financial failure being Bradbury and Evans's overestimation of the demand. Apparently on the basis of the sales of the first edition of *The Newcomes*, they printed twenty thousand copies of the first number of *The Virginians* (as against about forty-five hundred of *Vanity Fair* and ninety-five hundred of *Pendennis*). The print order was gradually reduced for successive numbers, tapering off at thirteen thousand for numbers 18 through 24, still bringing the figure above those for individual numbers of both *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*. Most of the sale of *Vanity Fair*, it should be remembered, was achieved in its later cheap edition. *The Virginians* did not go into a cheap edition until 1863. Compounding the economic problem of *The Virginians*, of course, was the generous payment advanced to Thackeray for each number—£250 (reduced voluntarily by Thackeray from £300, when sales lapsed), as against £60 for *Vanity Fair*, £100 for *Pendennis*, and £150 for *The Newcomes*. The publication of *The Virginians* marked Thackeray's parting of the ways with Bradbury and Evans. The most detailed financial account based on an examination of the extant records is Peter L. Shillingsburg, "Thackeray and the Firm of Bradbury and Evans," *Victorian Studies Association Newsletter*, March 1973, pp. 11–14, from which my information is mainly drawn.

34. Some readers, however, may have been misled by the abrupt announcement of George's death at the end of chap. 12 that echoes the famous one of George Osborne's death in the field of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair*.


36. See above, pp. 36–37. In keeping with the documentary solidity of the book is a style of illustration more literal than is characteristic of the earlier novels. Pictorial initials tend toward the scenic rather than the emblematic, the figures in the plates are engraved in finer detail than heretofore, and backgrounds in general seem to be more filled up. The relationship of Thackeray's modes of illustration to his books remains one of the neglected areas of scholarship.


40. A number of antagonistic remarks were deleted from the MS. In chap. 3 after "Ere the establishment of Independence, there was no more aristocratic country in the world than Virginia," the following passage is lined out: "no people more loyal or king loving, no place where the traditions of English home were more fondly cherished. The New England Puritans and Republicans were held in scorn by the cavalier inhabitants of the southern regions." From chap. 7 following upon the reference to the Duke of Cumberland's calling for help from the colonies in the Seven Years' War is lined out a long passage indicating that the provinces were laggard at the time and "seemed inclined to let the British Government fight their battles, fulfilled none of their engagements, and contributed neither men nor money nor horses, nor beef." This passage further states that the Pennsylvania farmers managed to find horses and wagons when Benjamin Franklin informed them that General Braddock would take what he wanted by force if he could not get it by fair means.

My discussion of the MS overlaps in some details that of John Sutherland in chap. 5 of his *Thackeray at Work* (London: Athlone Press, 1974), which I read after this chapter was written. Another detailed examination of the changes Thackeray made is Edgar Harden's "The Growth of *The Virginians* as a Serial Novel," pp. 217-66.

41. 4-10 November 1858, from Paris, *Letters*, 4:115; quoted inaccurately in Anne Thackeray's introduction to *The Virginians*, *Works*, 10:xii-xlii.

42. Unpublished letter of 16 July 1859 to Synge (continued from letter begun December 1858 quoted above, n. 32). Thackeray was apologizing here for the lapse of time between beginning the letter and concluding it. The world-weariness betrayed in this and other letters of this period is attributable in part to Thackeray's exhaustion from his lecture tours with *The Four Georges*, which proved lucrative but exacerbated his ill health and probably contributed to his premature death. Some resurgence of spirit is observable subsequently when he was freshly stimulated by his writing for *Cornhill Magazine*. 