

nounced it (with one or two exceptions) inferior as a work of humour. The hitting of little Harry in the eye with a potato was, they admitted, humorous, but hardly anything else. As representing another generation and another point of view, the faithful Dr. John Brown did not wholly like it—Esmond's marriage with Rachel, after his love for Beatrix, being apparently 'the fly in the ointment' to him. Even the author could only plead 'there's a deal of pains in it that goes for nothing', as he says in one of his rare published references to the subject: but he was wrong. Undoubtedly the mere taking of pains will not do; but that is when they are taken in not the right manner, by not the right person, on not the right subject. Here everything was right, and accordingly it 'went for' everything. A greater novel than *Esmond* I do not know; and I do not know many greater books. It may be 'melancholy', and none the worse for that: it is 'grand'.

For though there may not be much humour of the potato-throwing sort in *Esmond*, it will, perhaps, be found that in no book of Thackeray's, or of any one else's, is that deeper and higher humour which takes all life for its province—which is the humour of humanity—more absolutely pervading. And it may be found likewise, at least by some, that in no book is there to be found such a constant inter-twist of the passion which, in all humanity's higher representatives, goes with humour hand in hand—a loving yet a mutually critical pair. Of the extraordinarily difficult form of autobiography I do not know such another masterly presentment; nor is it very difficult to recognize the means by which this mastery is attained, though Heaven knows it is not easy to understand the skill with which they are applied. The success is, in fact, the result of that curious 'doubleness'—amounting, in fact, here to something like *triplicity*—which distinguishes Thackeray's attitude and handling. Thus Henry Esmond, who is on the whole, I should say, the most like him of all his characters