

may have had something to do with this rare abstemiousness.

It is, therefore, more as a notice of Thackeray's works than of his life that this book attracts our attention. Mr. Trollope is, himself, a veteran novelist, and we might well expect some interesting remarks from his pen upon the subject of Thackeray's novels. In this we are, however, a little disappointed. He gives us, it is true, a careful list of Thackeray's numerous works, and a more detailed analysis of the more important ones. He tells us the current objections that have been raised to his author's views of life, especially to the heroic interest so conspicuously absent in 'Vanity Fair.' But he does not defend Thackeray's choice with that ardour which, when tempered by discretion, is so befitting to a biographer. Thackeray refused to pander to the public taste by depicting the Londoner of his day as a hero. He would not wilfully idealise what he saw conclusively to be mean, paltry, and commonplace. The heroism which he *did* see and recognise, and before which the heart of this so-called cynic did homage, was the heroism of a slovenly, awkward, misshapen man like Dobbin, in whom the Respectabilities and the Vanities found nothing heroic, but a good deal to laugh at. The result of this abstemiousness (so to speak) was that his pictures, though dark as a whole, gleamed in parts with the concentrated light of a Rembrandt when he pours the full flood of day upon one corner of his canvass and glorifies the meanest object that it falls upon.

Dickens was a more popular man in his day, and will remain so with the masses. But his novels were idealised romances, the creatures of his own brain, except in so far as the machinery was concerned. Little Nell was as purely a figment of the British novelist as Antigone was of the Greek dramatist. Quilp, in the same tale, was as entirely an embodiment of everything that is evil. Esther, in 'Bleak House,' is an impossibly perfect character in a different condition of life. Now Thackeray looked around him with as keen an insight as Dickens, and he confessed the melancholy truth that there were no Little Nells visible on the street horizon as he walked the town at night. Many a girl

there was, kind and self-denying to aged father or decrepit mother,—but truth bids him declare that far less provocation than Nell suffered would make the best of them fly out into a tantrum and that often the family patience is ruffled by unseemly squabbings arising about the young man who is paying his attentions. Thackeray, too, found no such villains as Quilp. He saw plenty of rogues walking about and drew them with a wonderful variety of circumstance, but you might meet and be introduced to any of them and yet not recognise the cloven hoof for a day or a week—a process one cannot imagine with regard to Quilp.

To sum up our comparison:—What gratitude will not after ages feel on reading Thackeray, to find in his pages the life of Englishmen and women as they really existed, not as people imagined them in the first half of the nineteenth century? The ideal style may be good as showing what were the standards of heroism at such a period; but as a matter of history it is far more important to know to what a nation attained, than at what it aimed.

In his remarks on some of the minor pieces Mr. Trollope falls into a curious error. He says, speaking of the De la Pluche papers, that the erratic spelling in which that character indulged was the working out of an idea already exhausted by Sheridan in the person of Mrs. Malaprop. Surely this is an entire misconception. Mrs. Malaprop speaks on the stage, and we know nothing of her spelling. Her errors were caused by her catching up and using hurriedly a word of one meaning in the place of another of an utterly different signification but of similar sound, thus, 'allegory' for 'alligator,' 'epitaphs' for 'epithets.' This is quite distinct from the phonetic wanderings of an uneducated and conceited man, who spell 'except' 'igsept,' and 'pheasants' 'feznts.' The fun, such as it is, in Plush's bad spelling consists in the strangeness of the written word to the eye and its perfect familiarity to the ear as soon as we translate it into sound. The hidden sarcasm on the fashionable dialects which are capable of being successfully aped by a flunkey lies below the surface and is quite independent of the spelling.