1937

War and peace concepts in the works of Thackeray

Kenneth Spaulding

The University of Montana

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WAR AND PEACE CONCEPTS

in

THE WORKS OF THACKERAY

by

Kenneth Spaulding
B.A., State University of Montana, 1936

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

State University of Montana
1937

Approved:

[Signatures]

Chairman of Board of Examiners.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to determine Thackeray's feelings on and attitudes toward war and peace. That he must have had some feeling about war will be plain to those who knew his works. War plays an important part in several of his stories; the army supplies many of his characters. It seems most unlikely that he could have occupied his mind so thoroughly with martial scenes without, if, indeed, he did not already have, some feeling about the propriety of war's place in the functions of the world.

It will be necessary to consider Thackeray's attitudes in conjunction with the attitudes of his times. Did his concepts match those of most of his contemporaries, and was he therefore able to speak freely? Or was he so opposed to the feelings of most of his readers that he had to write only a small part of what he felt, in order to please his public and to make a living? What had he been reared to feel was the right belief? We all respond to the thoughts of our times, often without realizing that we are being influenced. Certain feelings about ways of doing things are with us from the time we are born, and we can no more escape them than we can escape breathing.
A resume of the events and movements of Thackeray's day has been given in the **INTRODUCTION**, in order that he may be seen as a part of his times, rather than as a solitary figure who developed entirely from within himself. Depending as a man's shaping does upon external forces as well as those from within, he may be understood only when he is considered as an organic part of a whole; to view him in any other way is to ignore the reasons for his being what he is, and to prevent his being understood.

It is important that Thackeray's attitudes be distinguished from his opinions. One's opinions, being conclusions drawn from facts, are likely to change. The facts may be apparent in a different light, or new ones may appear. Changes in data will, of course, change the opinion. But attitudes go deeper; one does not very often change his feeling about a thing, for only a deep experience will make him discard a viewpoint that has given direction to many of his thoughts and determined a number of his conclusions. Too many ways of thinking must be changed; too many evaluations must be altered. Our ways of looking at things, coming as they do from significant personal experiences and the thought currents of our times, often change and shape our opinions. The reverse is seldom true.
A brief sketch of Thackeray's life will be given in the *Introduction*, in order that the reader may know whether the events of his life were likely to have affected his feelings on war. Knowledge of Thackeray as a man is essential if one is to achieve a satisfactory understanding of his thought.

In the evaluation of material, two distinct types of sources have been recognized. The first consists of the personal comments that Thackeray tucks in here and there. The second deals with opinions given by characters. It has been felt that the sincerity of the first group does not have to be questioned. However, care has been taken to determine whether they represent attitudes, or whether they are only opinions.

With the second group, the matter is not so simple. Here, the nature of each character must be considered. Does Thackeray put words in the mouth of the person who speaks them in order to make him appear in character? Is it the character who is talking, or is Thackeray speaking through him? What does Thackeray want the reader to think of the character: that is, has he shown him to be intelligent, honest and honorable? Or is he a liar and a rogue?

It has been considered a safe assumption that Thackeray did not wish to deceive his readers as to the true nature of
his feelings. That is, if he gave a character a speech that
evented what Thackeray felt to be the proper attitude, the
character would have been previously shown in a light that
would have warned the reader not to accept everything he says.
However, this is an assumption which ought not to be followed
blindly. All ages have their taboos; and a professional
writer cannot very well ignore them, whatever his private
opinion may be. As Thackeray himself says in *Vanity Fair*:

... we must pass over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley's
biography with a lightness and delicacy which the world
demands— the moral world, that has perhaps no particular
objection to vice, but an insuperable repugnance to hear-
ing vice called by its proper name.
INTRODUCTION

As Frank Swinnerton has pointed out, it would be a mistake to consider Thackeray as independent of his times. Although he had a clear vision, it was the vision of a Victorian. He saw through many things that his contemporaries did not—and then judged them by the Victorian standards of virtue. However he may have been irked by the taboos on literary portrayals of vice, he did not ignore them. He saw discrepancies about him, but he considered them as resulting from failure to adhere to the basic beliefs of his day.

Yet Thackeray was, compared to his contemporaries, a thorough realist. Ladies wrote him letters asking him to please consider whether it was essential to create such characters as are found in Catherine. People censured him for describing such vulgar scenes. To such reactions he would retort that everyone knew that they existed, so why shouldn't one be honest about them?

... It is time to begin telling the truth, I think. Lady Ashburton says not. Our Lord spoke it, and was killed for it, and Stephen, and Paul who slew Stephen.

Thackeray was born in Calcutta, in 1811. Eight years later, he left his young mother and went off to England to go to school. His early school days were not happy ones. While attending a school in Chiswick Mall, he tried to run away. His days at Charterhouse School seem to have been happier, although he was never a very earnest scholar. The two years spent at Cambridge were filled with the usual undergraduate activities. As a student, he distinguished himself neither by success nor failure. In fact, he seems to have been almost a typical Cambridge man, except for his decided interest in writing.

His formal education completed, he toured for two years in Europe. At Weimar he met Goethe. Whether the meeting was significant or not is not known. Thackeray preferred the works of Schiller even to Goethe’s Faust. (but this was probably not due to the meeting).

In 1831 Thackeray entered the Middle Temple. He was an unindustrious law student, and seems to have spent most

of his time in enjoying himself. Occasionally he wrote something for a newspaper or magazine.

Very soon after he came of age, Thackeray was swindled out of his patrimony. Just how this came about is unknown. It is thought that unwise investments and card sharpers relieved him of most of it. At any rate, he now turned to journalism for sustenance. The necessity of earning his bread does not seem to have plagued him much. He took misfortune cheerfully, and after the failure of two newspaper ventures was desirous of embarking on the third.

During the last days of the Constitutional, one of his newspaper ventures, Thackeray married Isabella Shawe. About five years after their marriage, his wife bore him their third child. She never recovered entirely, although the family visited several watering places in hopes that her health might be restored. It was discovered that her mind had been affected, and a few years later she had to be confined to an asylum. This was a blow from which Thackeray did not completely recover. It is said that when Trollope's groom twitted him on having written a book showing the Irish in an unfavorable light, he, thinking of his Irish wife, replied that all he loved best in the world was Irish.
After his wife was taken away, Thackeray returned to his work, turning out the same prodigious quantities that he had before. From this time on, the thought of his two girls was his incentive. He even gave lectures, an activity which his shyness made detestable, in order that they might be well provided for. They were the remnants of his domestic life, and his only reasons for being. His work was unrecognized.

He did not bury his talent in sentimental sadness or, like Swift, excoriate the universe. There was in him a fine sanity, and it bore him through the terribly lonely period that followed his wife's departure.

Five years later (1846), *Vanity Fair* was published. From that time on, his fortune improved. Fame came on at an increasing pace, and when he died, in 1863, he was well known.

Thackeray wrote during an interesting era. During the time measured by the publication of *Catherine* in 1838 and his death in 1863, John Stuart Mill, Ruskin, Carlyle, Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell and Bulwer-Lytton were writing. Peel, Disraeli, the Earls of Derby, O'Connell, Bright, Palmerston,
Cobden and Gladstone were important figures in the House of Commons. In 1846, the year that saw *Vanity Fair* published, the Corn Laws were repealed and the potato famine rose in Ireland. The later books were paralleled in date by the steps through which England solidified the British Empire. The wars of Crimea, Africa and New Zealand occurred during this period, and Victoria was made sovereign of India a year after the publication of the *Virginians* (1857). New ideas were appearing, and old ones were being supplanted. Rather than being the staid century that many present day people are fond of imagining it, it was a time of fresh thought and changing ways.

The most prominent doctrine of the day was Utilitarianism. The growth of industry fostered the belief of the English people in the theories of the Mills. It was a time of trade, a time of manufacturing and selling. People were interested in practical things, in objects that would produce. Hence, the idea of valuing a thing on the basis of its utility became popular. It was a concept ideally suited to the manufacturing class of people who came into power in the earlier part of the Nineteenth Century. It was then that the great middle classes began to take the lead in English affairs. The works of James and John Stuart Mill became popular all over England.
War was not compatible with Utilitarian thought. It interfered with trade, and drained the national resources. The middle classes had had to contribute not only men but also money and supplies when England was engaged in struggles with other nations. Furthermore, international strife was an activity that furthered no one in a material way. Its utility was non-existent, but its cost was high. They didn't want it.

The reader will recall that the people who supported Utilitarianism did not have the traditions of the gloriousness of warfare that were a part of the traditions of the nobility. The glory of having their names perpetuated in stone for action in some famous victory had always gone to members of the upper classes. The great military heroes were from the aristocracy. Decorations and honors were seldom given to small tradesmen.

Even the peasants had in the past received more benefits from the struggles of the nations than the merchant class did. They could go to war in the hope that the spoils to be gathered would make the venture worth their while. They would not bear the burden of increased taxes, for they had nothing that was taxable. Until the Seventeenth Century, when it became impossible for the individual fighting man
to secure enough plunder to make soldiering personally profitable, war had not been an unmixed evil for the lower classes. And some of the concepts formed during the Renaissance were probably present in the English lower classes of the Nineteenth Century. But the middle classes had no similar feelings.

British imperialism, which really began in the Fourteenth Century, attained its fullest growth during the Nineteenth. However, it was not so much a period of acquiring new territory as a time of consolidating and unifying what had previously been obtained. In 1858, the rule of the British East India Company over India was terminated, and Queen Victoria was made sovereign. The Suez canal was purchased by England in order that she might have a more direct route to Indian country, including the East Indies. The Crimean War was fought in the belief that it was a necessary move if Russia was to be restrained from swallowing England's Mediterranean colonies. The heterogeneous elements of England's possessions were to be welded into one vast empire.

However, the concept of unity did not enter British foreign policies until the latter half of the century. It was even suggested in the Thirties and the Forties that India ought to be given up. and that the colonies were more
productive of difficulties than benefits. But it was too late to withdraw. Too many valuable investments had been made. English people had gone to the colonies to live. Factories had been established. Could the government ignore the great trading companies that had been formed under her protection and with her encouragement? Obviously not, even though much middle class thought favored such a move. It was too late to go back, and it was when this situation became apparent that Imperialism really got under way.

Democracy was the dominant political belief of the era. The democratic idea had been brought from France during the late Eighteenth Century and had been accepted by such unorthodox English thinkers as the young Wordsworth, Shelley and Godwin. It was considered a very radical belief at the beginning of the century. However, with the rise of the middle class philosophy, its acceptance grew wider and wider until it was the accepted doctrine at the end of the period.

The Nineteenth Century seems to have been a time of faith. There are no evidences of the courtly cynicism of the Sixteenth, or the profound pessimism of the Seventeenth, Centuries. People believed in God, and they believed in
man. If Thackeray exposed idiosyncrasies, it was to laugh at their perpetrators, rather than to revile them. And he seems, in his interest in *Vanity Fair*, to have set forth the representative attitude of his day.

There was, in the Nineteenth Century, a shifting of the sources of ideals. Prior to this time the nobility had furnished the standards. But the day of a functional aristocracy was over. At some time in the early part of the period, the concepts of the middle class began to take hold of the public mind. People began to want to make money, to live comfortably and securely, rather than gloriously. The goals of a democracy, rather than those of a monarchy, began to be prized. The *Practical Man* of modern society had put to rout the *Ideal Man* of monarchical tradition.

At that time, as well as any other, there were attitudes afloat. Ruskin and Carlyle certainly opposed war. So did the Utilitarians. On the other hand there was, following the acceptance of the Darwin theory, the belief that war was the primary instrument of natural selectivity; and this was substantiated by the idea that without it humanity would stagnate. The majority of the
people probably trailed after the beliefs of the middle class leaders of society. If such were the case, they must have seen war from a Utilitarian slant.

If the size of the army is any criterion for the general attitude toward war, Victorian England could not have been very strongly inclined to enter into a struggle with another nation. The apparent opinion was that its condition was not of much importance, and hence, the army was an excellent place to economize.

One ought not to infer the whole status of war from the attitude of the people toward the army. Still, from the fact that the British soldier had undergone some forty

1. Sir John Fortescue tells us that Parliament regarded the army as a fine object on which to economize. At one time only four regiments were kept in the British Isles. He regards the numbers of troops in the colonies as quite inadequate to meet the strenuous demands made upon them. And they were deficient in more than numbers. Under the usual mess system the only meals served were breakfast and lunch. And it was nineteen hours between lunch and breakfast. The British soldier developed a tendency to substitute cheap and plentiful liquor for the missing evening meal. The army's living conditions were so bad that on the west coast of Africa as high as seventy-five or eighty per cent of the men died from diseases that would at least have been alleviated by ordinary sanitation measures. But in spite of the sad condition of the army, neither Parliament nor the Treasury could be induced to make larger allowance for the protection of colonial possessions or the maintenance of the army.
years of neglect when the Crimean War broke out in 1854, it ought to be safe to say that the average Englishman did not feel that there was much danger of his country's being involved in an important struggle with another nation. Had such an activity been contemplated, the army would probably have been more favorably considered. There were brief flurries of interest on a few occasions when French governmental affairs took a turn that England did not like. But for the most part people seemed to feel that war was a thing which was quite unnecessary; and when the Crimean War came, it was quite unpopular at home. It was considered unnecessary and expensive, and it interfered with trade. The attitude seemed to be that there was business to be carried on, and that John Bull ought to be concerning himself with more profitable exercises than the making of war on Russians.
CHAPTER I

How much did Thackeray use the subject of war? The extent to which he occupied himself with this subject will to some extent be an index to his interest in it.

Burlesques and Yellowplush Papers came out in 1839. These were satires on social customs, and appeared in Fraser's Magazine in serial form. The quotation used comes from the mouth of Wamba, a character in Thackeray's Rebecca and Rowena. Rebecca and Rowena is a satire on Scott's Ivanhoe, with Wamba again playing the wise fool.

The Paris Sketch-book (1840) is an account of a visit to the French capital. While there, Thackeray saw the celebration of one of the famous anniversaries of the Revolution. This brought him to consider just what the gains of the struggle had been and whether or not any war ever achieved anything worth the price paid.

The Chronicle of the Drum (1841) is a long poem protesting the deification of the soldier and pointing out his failure to accomplish anything of worth. The first part is the imagined tale of an old drummer who has followed the wars all his life. The second consists of Thackeray's reaction to such an existence.
**Little Travels and Roadside Sketches** (1841) is an account of a trip through the Netherlands and Belgium. Accompanying the travel notes are a number of thoughts that occurred to Thackeray during various stages of the journey. The section on Waterloo is enriched by his reflections on the causes and consequences of the battle which took place there.

The material for the **Irish Sketch-book** (1843) was likewise gathered on a journey. With the exception of the page-length comment on Cromwell's activities in Ireland, it contains little mention of war.

**Cornhill to Grand Cairo** (1844) is the account of Thackeray's Egyptian travels. It contains a humorous conclusion as to the impermanence of conquests by war as compared to those made by peaceful means, but appertains in no other way to the subject at hand.

**Barry Lyndon**, which also came out in 1844, is full of martial scenes and expresses many ideas about war. It is the story of a young Irish rake who takes to military life in order to escape the consequences of a supposed murder. Caught by the "recruiting" officers of Frederic the Great and impressed into the service of that worthy, he spent several years in helping him prosecute the Seven Years' War. During
the time that he was serving the Emperor he had ample opportunity to observe and rationalize the various aspects of the soldier's life. This work has been the source of more material on the war question than any other of Thackeray's works.

The Book of Snobs (1846) is divided into sections, each dealing with one variety of snob. One of the types portrayed is the Army Snob. Only two of the sections present any aspect of war.

In Vanity Fair (1846) there is a description of a portion of the Battle of Waterloo. This is the only part of the book that involves itself with the war problem.

Henry Esmond (1852) has for a good part of its setting the Wars of the Spanish Succession. The title character serves under Marlborough in the Netherlands and, in consequence, the reader gets several pictures of warfare. Several of the characters make comments on warfare, as well. This book has been second only to Barry Lyndon in the furnishing of material.

In spite of the fact that Colonel Newcome is an important character, the Newcomes (1854) contains almost no reference to the soldier or the war process. The nearest it comes to such
a comment is in stating some of the difficulties of the British soldiers in rearing families in the colonies.

The **Virginians** (1857) recounts events from both the French and Indian wars and the American Revolution. However, they occupy a much smaller part of the book than do the corresponding scenes in **Barry Lyndon** and **Henry Esmond**. Consequently, the book has furnished less material.

The 1869-1886 edition includes forty-five of Thackeray's works. Considering these as his major pieces of writing, it will be noted that he has mentioned war in about one-fourth of his works. This would indicate a real, but not absorbing, interest in the subject.

Lewis Melville has said that Thackeray clearly had an old head on young shoulders. This seems to have been true enough in the light of his opinions on war. At least, the beliefs expressed during the early part of his writing career are very similar to those found in the later books. For instance, in the Paris Sketch-book (1840) he makes the following statement:

---
... One may hope, soon, that if a man shows decent courage and energy in half a dozen amusets, he will get promotion and a premium.

And in the Virginians (1857) he says:

... The men are punished, and the drummers are always at their work.

As the reader may have guessed, both the first quotation, made about two years after the publication of his first important work, and the second, made about six years before his death, lament the inequality existing between officers and men.

And it was not in this one aspect alone that his opinions were unwavering. Rather, it is typical of his views on the war problem.

Although only about thirty per cent of his books touch on war, the twelve dealing with it are dated from 1838 to 1867, with intervals of from one to six years between them. This would indicate that his interest, though not great, was constant. Although not a deep student of the problems of war, he probably had an intelligent man's interest in it as one of the greatest sociological problems a people has to face.

Thackeray felt that if people knew the actual duties of the fighting man, they wouldn't admire him as they did. It was, he thought, the fact that they were ignorant of what actually went on in battle that allowed them to picture war as something grand and noble. Glory, honor and bravery were
fine issue, but they were rarely found in the bloody mire of the battle field. Were the people of England to know what duties they were sending their sons to perform, they would never make so much of the troops at large nor be so willing to see their own sons go. The fighting man would, in war or peace, no longer represent the noble traditions and worthy attributes with which he was associated. People would be more inclined to look upon him as an unpleasant fellow who handled a job fit only for the lowest than they would to see him as the preserver of his country's virtue. He would be shunned, rather than revered and exalted.

Or so Thackeray thought. Twentieth-Century observers are not so sure. Since the last war the peoples of various nations have been deluged with literature on the horrors of international conflict. Sincere doubt has been raised by students of psychology on the efficacy of such measures to arouse in humanity the desire to prevent such occurrences in the future. But the science of psychology was not very highly developed during the middle years of the Nineteenth Century, so he is hardly to be blamed for reaching the conclusion that he did. It was entirely logical.

It is interesting to note that Thackeray considered literary men to have an obligation to present war in such
That Thackeray did not see the causal relationship of the egotistic feeling developed from past wars toward wars of the future is perhaps strange. However, he might have seen it without mentioning that fact in his works. After all, he wrote stories—not essays on the war question. He was not bound to use all his sociological ideas in his books. They would only appear in so far as they fitted into a plot or setting, unless, as sometimes happened, he saw fit to interpolate some of his own ideas into the tale.

It would be well for the reader to bear in mind that, while Thackeray had a good mind, he did not pretend to be a scholar. Whether he was aware of the work of Adam Smith, the Mills, Godwin, Bechehot and other scholars of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries is not certain, for no evidence of their thought appears in his writings. His approach was almost entirely what present-day newspapermen call the "human interest angle". He wanted to discover the effect of an event upon the individual, rather than upon society. Although the scope of his books was often large, he accomplished this latitude by using a great number of characters, rather than by surveying a whole group in order to determine the result of an action on the mass of the people. The individual, rather than the group, was his unit.
CHAPTER II

One of the most vicious effects of war was, to Thackeray, its degradation of the soldier. He was lacking in the emotions that made for a humane world and a civilized environment. War, Thackeray thought, fostered the bestial elements of men's natures. Greed was rampant on the battlefield. Murder, rapine and plunder were commonplaces in the activities of a marauding army:

1 . . . When my kind friend Fagan was shot, a brother captain, and his very good friend, turned to Lieutenant Rawson and said, "Fagan's down; Rawson, there's your company." It was all the epitaph my brave patron got. "I should have left you a hundred guineas, Redmond," were his last words to me, "but for a cursed run of ill luck last night at faro." And he gave me a faint squeeze of the hand; then, as the word was given to advance, I left him. When we came back to our old ground, which we presently did, he was lying there still; but he was dead. Some of our people had already torn off his epaulets, and, no doubt, had rifled his purse. Such knaves and ruffians do men in war become! 1

Far from being an occasion for noble action and fine comradeship, Thackeray saw war as a place where soldiers stole from the bodies of friend and foe alike. The criminal impulses held in check by the forces of law during peace times were here free to flourish as they would, without restraint or even discouragement. It was easy to steal, and the only result was

that those who practiced thievery prospered, while those who were honest did not. Murder was the business of the soldier and had become an act of patriotism. Rape and arson went unnoticed. They were part of the technique of subduing an invaded country. What a knave's paradise it was!

To Thackeray, the soldier who excelled in his profession was the man who put aside his human elements and became an animal. As Barry Lyndon puts it:

I had formed myself to the condition of the proper fighting beast: on a day of action I was savage and happy; out of the field I took all the pleasure I could get; and was by no means delicate as to its quality or the manner of procuring it.

The best fighting man was the one who had suppressed all of his decent qualities, in order that he might become merely a fighting beast—a thing without mercy, chivalry or honor. The dark lusts after blood, destruction and carnal pleasures were the dominant elements of the successful fighting man.

As he says in the *Chronicle of the Drum*:

Your orthodox historian puts
In foremost rank the soldier thus,
The red-coat bully in his boots,
That hides the march of men from us.

---

Go to! I hate him and his trade:
Who bade us so to cringe and bend
And all God's peaceful people made
To such as him subservient? 1

For this man who had stripped himself of the qualities
of civilization Thackeray had little use. He saw him as a
person who had deliberately put aside his better nature in
order to allow the worst of human elements to rise in him.
He had made his choice and it was a bad one.

And yet Thackeray would not blame the participants.
Or, at least, he would not place all the blame with them.
He saw that the situation was such that most individuals
would respond to it by lowering their morals. Temptation
was strong. The whole environment was admirably suited to
rogues' tastes and pastimes. A man apparently had the
choice of being a villain or a fool. He could either put
his morals aside and gain measurably by the act, or he could
be righteous and poor. As his character Barry Lyndon says
of the Seven Years' War:

... It is well for men to talk of the age of
chivalry; but remember the starving brutes whom they
lead—men nursed in poverty, entirely ignorant, made
to take a pride in deeds of blood—men who can have
no amusement but in drunkenness, debauchery, and plun-
der. 2

Such men naturally took to anything that would improve their condition. Most of them left their military careers with at least a small profit. Sometimes, however, they were able to gain small fortunes through such wretched activities. Thackeray states that the Vigo expedition, for example, made well-to-do men out of some of the participants. In fact, one of England’s more notorious criminals gave out the information that he had taken part in the battle, selecting this means as a logical way to explain a sudden increase in his wealth. Such was the temptation that was sometimes with the soldier. When one considers his usual poverty, it is not surprising that he should be glad to have any kind of chance to better himself.

Thackeray was keenly aware of the callousness that war produced in the soldier. Despite the fact that most of these men were young, they had already learned to look upon scenes of horror with unseeing eyes. In the evenings they could forget the day’s events and be happy around the campfire. They were acclimatized to death and suffering. Such things had lost their significance; the senses had been too often overwhelmed by such sights to react as a civilian’s would. The character Henry Esmond says:

Great God! what a scene of murder is here within a mile of us; what hundreds and thousands have faced danger today; and here are these lads singing over their cups, and the same moon that is shining over yonder field is looking down on Walcote very likely, while my lady sits and thinks about her boy that is at the war.

Thackeray saw the soldier as being definitely brutalized by his frequent contact with such horrifying scenes. The natural repulsion which man feels for such things was reduced to indifference. The soldier, by becoming less humane, had also become less human.

Thackeray saw what happened to the soldier, but he apparently did not understand why it came about. That is, he failed to see such an attitude in the light of a protection. He did not understand that the soldier could not go day after day being horrified by what he saw, if he were to maintain his mental equilibrium. The soldier had to take an attitude of indifference toward what he saw, but Thackeray still saw him as a man making a choice.

When Thackeray was looking at the soldier, rather than at an individual combatant, he saw him as one who turned quite easily to beastlike behavior when the situation allowed. Henry Esmond recalls:

There was a peculiar element in the theory's allure.

and mind were swept aside.

The passions were present, the feelings were in contrast.

not onlyLiterature but also other areas of

notable part in the part of war as many bravery and

courage, the army's part PUBLIC the opposite, hope and action were, to

soldiers. The line between sentiment a completely generalized

was a fine character in the eyes of the theory, but the

Henry Besmond, the individual, who happened to be a soldier,
when the battle is under way. They at once reach a stature
which they never approach at any other time.

Perhaps this is because none of Thackeray's military
characters is a coward. Most of his rogues, in fact, are
notable for their audacity; and apart from possible treachery,
an audacious rascal might make a better soldier than a
cautious man of character. At any rate, Barry Lyndon battles
as valiantly as Henry Esmond.

And yet, when Thackeray was talking about soldiers
per se, his judgment was just about the opposite. Soldiers
by and large were not much of an asset to the world either
in war or peace. In peace they accomplished nothing; in
war their only achievement was destruction.

The fact that only one of these heroes was not an
officer seems to bear out the implication of the smug re­
mark made by his son-in-law about his being a gentleman,
and being capable of recognizing quality. The fact of the
matter is, Thackeray seems to have been not only an ardent
clubman but also, as he candidly admits in the Snob Papers,
a bit of a snob himself. And it ought to be remembered

1. It ought to be noted that Thackeray's characters
are static. Their natures are established at the begin­
ning of a book and are the same throughout. Consequently,
one does not find heroic figures becoming cowards when they
enter battles. Too, Thackeray wanted a good story. He
wanted his heroes to be involved in action, to have advent­
ures. Hence, he carried them into the thick of the fighting.
Courage in his characters was a necessity if he was to
achieve the desired results.
that, though Barry Lyndon was not an officer, he was a
member of the ragged fringe of the gentry, and would
probably have been an officer, had he not been under the
conditions of a fugitive from justice.

Yet these exceptions cannot obliterate Thackeray's
idea of the ordinary soldier. And even when he looked upon
the man whom he regarded as the typical officer, he found
no pleasure. His snobbishness evidently required something
more than a certain position in life, for he stated in the
Snob Papers:

"... I have had the honor of meeting once or twice
an old gentleman, whom I look upon to be a specimen
of army training, and who has served in crack regi­
ments, or commanded them, all his life. I allude to
Lieutenant-General the Honorable Sir George Granby
manners are irreproachable generally; in society he
is the perfect gentleman, and a most thorough snob.
... It is difficult to say what virtues this
prosperous gentleman possesses. He never read a book
in his life, and with his old, gouty gingers, still
writes a schoolboy hand. He has reached old age and
gray hairs without being in the least venerable. He
dresses like an outrageously young man to the present
moment, and laces and pads his old carcass as if he
were still handsome George Tufto of 1800. He is
selfish, brutal, passionate, and a glutton ... .
Perhaps, had he been bred to another profession, he
would not have been the disreputable old creature he
now is. But what other? He was fit for none.
... When he dies of apoplexy, the Times will have
a quarter of a column about his services and battles—
four lines of print will be wanted to describe his
titles and orders alone—and the earth will cover one
of the wickedest and dullest old wretches that ever
strutted over it. 1

1. William Thackeray, Works, Book of Snobs, VI, p. 307f
Nor was the soldier an object of Thackeray's admiration during times of peace. He was then a man of no occupation --no good one, at least--who gave himself airs and strutted about in clothing like the plumage of a gaudy tropical bird:

... We laugh at poor Jocko, the monkey, dancing in uniform; or at poor James, the flunkey, with his quivering calves and plush tights; or at the nigger Marquis of Marmaluke, dressed out with sabre and epaulets, and giving himself the airs of a field marshal. Lo! is not one of the Queen's Pyebalds, in full fig, as great and foolish a monster? 1

This loud fellow was prone to spend his time ogling the ladies or gambling away his inheritance. Gaming, making love, and drinking were his pastimes. He was present at any sort of match which promised the opportunity to lay a wager, and would back with cash or credit any event in the nature of a contingency. If he were in need of money himself, he might draw against his father's account, or secure credit by using a relative's name. Or if, like Captain Deuceace, he developed considerable skill at a game of chance, he might find profitable employment in fleecing the younger members of the regiment.

Thackeray seems to have had an intense dislike for war's methods. In the *Chronicle of the Drum* he asks:

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Tell me what we find to admire
In epaulets and scarlet coats.
In men because they load and fire,
And know the art of cutting throats? 1

But he seems to have felt even more strongly the evils of
its aftermath. Henry Esmond comments:

The pursuit, and a dreadful carnage which ensued
(for the dregs of a battle, however brilliant, are ever
a base residue of rapine, cruelty, and drunken plunder)
was carried far beyond the field of Ramillies. 2

It was in these last, bitter dregs that Thackeray saw
the essence of the battle. Here was the residuum of the
struggle—men, dead and dying; horses mutilated; property
scattered and broken. But worse, perhaps, was the maddened
lusting horde of the victors. And all this was part of the
soldier's trade.

In commenting on one of Cromwell's battles in Ireland
Thackeray has suggested another result of military actions—
the hatred aroused in both the surviving warriors and the
civilians of the defeated cause:

After twice being beaten back by the divine assistance
he [Cromwell] was enabled to succeed in a third assault;
he "knocked on the head" all the officers of the garrison;
he gave orders that none of the men should be spared.
"I think" says he, "that night we put to the sword two
thousand men; and one hundred of them having taken
possession of St. Peter's steeple and a round tower
next the gate, called St. Sunday's, I ordered the steeple

of St. Peter's to be fired, when one in flames was heard to say, "God confound me, I burn, I burn!" The Lord General's history of "this great mercy vouchsafed to us" concludes with appropriate religious reflections; and prays Mr. Speaker to remember that "it is good that God alone have all the glory". Is not the recollection of this butchery almost enough to make an Irishman turn rebel? 1

The last sentence clearly indicates Thackeray's knowledge of the way that such an event can rankle in the hearts of humiliated people.

One phase of the war feeling that he well knew was the love of every nationality of seeing itself as a great war people. He saw how the men of all countries revelled in the belief that they were a conquering horde. They fed avidly on anything that would let them believe in their physical prowess, precisely as do the uncivilized groups of the world's population. But instead of having the deeds of the heroes sung by bards in the light of campfires, they were printed in song books, poetry albums, novels and the newspapers. Histories fostered the desire for a glorious past, and the people loved it.

Thackeray saw clearly the apolectic connotations of such worship of ancestral prowess. And he at least sensed its savage origin:

Let an Englishman go see that field (Waterloo) and he never forgets it. . . . I will wager that there is not one of them but feels a glow as he looks at the place and remembers that he, too, is an Englishman. It is a wrong, egotistical, savage, un-Christian feeling, and that's the truth of it. A man of peace has no right to be dazzled by that red-coated glory, and to intoxicate his vanity with those remembrances of carnage and triumph. The same sentence which tells us that on earth there ought to be peace and good-will amongst men, tells us to whom GLORY belongs.

The tendency to revel in the warring ability of past generations would, Thackeray thought, be ended if people were to know the nature of the deeds they so revered. If they knew what the battles of the past had actually been like, there would be no desire to commemorate them. There would be no celebrations and no memorials. The tribal cult of victory worship would be abolished by universal repulsion. There would be no more religious pilgrimages to scenes of bygone slaughters. People would begin to act as civilized, Christian beings ought and the anomalous custom of going to battle fields to rejoice in the ability of one's nation to inflict suffering and death would vanish.

Another phase of war worship that he thought would vanish with enlightenment was the adulation of the soldier. Were the people of England to know what duties they were sending their sons to perform, they would neither make so

1. William Thackeray, Works, Little Travels and Roadside Chats.
much of the troops at large nor be so willing to see their own sons go. The fighting man would, in war or peace, no longer represent the noble traditions and worthy attributes with which he was associated. People would be more inclined to see him as an unpleasant fellow who handled a job fit only for the lowest, rather than as a savior of the country's virtue. His duties would mark him as one of the lowest of civilized men, and he would be shunned rather than emulated.

Thackeray's opinion of the habit of regarding soldiers as heroes is made clear in *Henry Esmond*:

... Mr. Esmond beheld another part of military duty: our troops entering the enemy's territory, and putting all around them to fire and sword; burning farms, wasted fields, shrieking women, slaughtered sons and fathers, and drunken soldiers, cursing and carousing in the midst of tears, terror and murder... You, gentlemen of England, who live at home at ease, and compliment yourselves in the songs of triumph with which our chieftains are bepraised--

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1. Or so Thackeray thought. Twentieth Century observers are not so sure. Since the last war the people of the various have been deluged with literature on the horrors of international conflict. Sincere doubt has been raised by students of psychology on the efficacy of such measures to arouse in humanity the desire to prevent such occurrences in the future. But since the science of psychology was not very highly developed during the middle years of the Nineteenth Century, he is hardly to be blamed for reaching the conclusion that he did. It was entirely logical.
Here again is the belief that knowledge of the actual process of battle would bring about a different attitude toward one of its factors. People would not find the military profession attractive if they knew the steps by which its objectives were accomplished. Knowledge of war conditions would remove the attractiveness of the army career, and fathers would no longer regard fighting as a fit pursuit for their sons. No longer would the soldier be regarded as a gentle member of society.

Before leaving the chapter it would be well to examine the quotations used. For, unless the student selects his excerpts with an eye to the conditions of their use, he can reach almost any conclusion he wants. He must choose them with a full knowledge of their relationship to the rest of the narrative.


2. The greatest number of quotations comes from Barry Lyndon.
The purpose of this chapter has been to point out what Thackeray saw to be the effect of war upon the men involved. The next shall take up his conception of its influence on those whom the soldier left behind.

Lyndon (1844). They are, in an unusual way, a puzzle. There is no question of Thackeray's meaning; he is, as always, perfectly lucid. But why Barry Lyndon, a rogue if there ever was one, should break suddenly into so noble sentiments as an aside ever used, is another matter. Barry is a thorough scoundrel at both the beginning and the end of the book. But in the middle he discourses as finely as any confirmed humanitarian could have.

One might suspect that Thackeray was making a satirist of him. But that is not so. The language used is as serious as that which Thackeray himself might have used in discussing the same subject. Moreover, the ideas are those which he might have used. In fact, the reader feels that this must be Thackeray himself, speaking through the lips of Barry Lyndon.

But if such a surmise be the true one, why didn't he just step into the story, as he did in many of his other works? Why alter the character of Barry Lyndon in order to give his ideas expression? Perhaps it was because Thackeray, the consum
CHAPTER III.

Thackeray frequently refers to the nervous strain placed on soldiers' families. It seemed unfair to him that women, who had had no part in causing the war, should have to suffer from it. Of all people, he reasoned, they had the least to do with business and government. They were entirely removed from the agencies which caused strife and ought not, therefore, to suffer from it. He says in the Virginians:

A man of peace myself, and little intelligent in the practice or the details of war, I own I think less of the engaged troops than of the people they leave behind. Jack the Guardsman and La Tulipe of the Royal Bretayne are face to face, and striving to knock each other's brains out. Both! It is their nature to—like the bears and the lions—we will not say heaven, but some power or other has made them so to do. But the girl of Tower Hill, who hung on Jack's neck before he departed; and the lass at Quimper, who gave the Frenchman his brule-gueule and tobacco box before he departed on the noir trajet? What have you done, poor little tender hearts, that you should grieve so? My business is not with the army but with the people left behind. 1

The chief source of anxiety to one who had relations at war was the lack of news. Much time frequently passed between the receipt of letters. Carriers

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were apt to be interrupted. Distances were long and traveling was expensive. News was often entrusted to wounded men; in fact, this was often the only means of transport. Apart from the possibility of many events occurring between the sending and the receipt of information, the sources were often unreliable. Someone had seen the man in question in a caravan of the wounded, or he was all right when last heard of. Thackeray seems quite justified in remarking:

> What must have been the continued agonies of fears and apprehensions which wracked the gentle breasts of wives and mothers in those dreadful days, when every Gazette brought accounts of deaths and battles, and when the present anxiety was over, and the beloved person escaped, the doubt still remained that a battle might be fought, possibly of which the next Flanders letter would bring the account; so they, the poor tender creatures, had to go on sickening and trembling through the whole campaign.

A peculiarly English aspect of family conditions was brought about through the maintenance of troops in India. It was the custom for army families stationed there to send their children back to England for schooling and background. As soon as they were old enough

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for school, they were packed off on the long trip to the home country. To Thackeray, this was a tragic situation. That mothers and young children should be separated was entirely wrong:

... What a strange pathos seems to me to accompany all our Indian story! Besides that official history which fills Gazettes, and embroiders banners with names of victory; which gives moralists and enemies cause to cry out at English rapine; and enables patriots to boast of invincible British valour— besides the splendour and conquest, the wealth and glory, the crowned ambition, the conquered danger, the vast prize, and the blood shed freely in winning it— should not one remember the tears too? 

think of the women, and the tribute they perforce must pay to these victorious achievements ... In America it is from the breast of the poor slave that a child is taken; in India it is from the wife... of a splendid proconsul. 1

As Thackeray knew from personal experience, this was indeed a situation both ironic and pitiful.

Thackeray saw that women had nothing to occupy their minds and to crowd out the unpleasant aspects of war, as men in action often did. Soldiers could engross themselves in details and find oblivion therein.

But it was not so with those who stayed behind. There was plenty of time for them to think. As he says when describing a marching soldier:

... Jack or Donald marches away to glory with his knapsack on his shoulder, stepping out briskly to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me". It is she who remains and suffers— and has the leisure to think, and brood, and remember. 1

When the young recruits went marching off with their heads full of heroic dreams, they were indulging in a phase of war that did not offer itself to women. No imagination-stirring actions were open to them. Fancy brought only the hideous elements of combat to mind. Courage, to them, was not the stirring emotion that led one to valorous deeds and fine medals. It was a grim stimulus to keep nerves from breaking, to withstand continued strain. Heroes received honors, but heroines were unnoticed. Thackeray states:

Then these two lads went off to Slaughters', and . . . sat down and write off... letters full of love and heartiness, and pluck and bad spelling. Ah! there were many anxious hearts beating through England at that time; and mothers' prayers and tears flowing in many homesteads. 2

2. Ibid., p. 333.
Thackeray was a good bit a sentimentalist on the subject of women. Many a modern writer would not detach womanhood so completely from the causal elements of war. Present day scholars point out that heroes have always returned from victory to the arms of love. This theme is found not only in the Greek but also in practically every literature that has followed. Woman sends the warrior out to battle and welcomes his victorious return with submission. She, if she is not the instigator of strife, at least fosters the tradition and rewards the victor.

Few today can share Thackeray's apparent belief that women derived no pleasant reactions from war. Modern thought would indicate that they have always been at least vicarious participants in group struggles. It would seem, that Thackeray, like so many of his contemporaries, has drawn women in a war phase flattering light.

If he failed to see women realistically in observing their relation to war, he did observe the major aspects of the feminine situation during times of international struggle. Thackeray saw that woman's part was one of anxious waiting and of repression of fears. The nervous
strain that she underwent was clear to him. And he understood that, while man's emotions found quite adequate outlet in the business of fighting, woman lacked such a release. All her feelings had to be shut up. Who would want to say that women enjoyed the emotional excitement of war more than they regretted their sons' and husbands' danger? Although Thackeray drew an over-refined picture of women, he was right in picturing them as a class who gained little from war while suffering much.
CHAPTER IV

It was on the trip to Cairo (1844) that Thackeray found the conquests of war to be less permanent than those of peace. That developments in transportation and a zest for trade can accomplish more on many occasions than invasions by military forces was borne home to him as he looked at the old battle grounds of the Mamelukes and Napoleon Bonaparte. All the efforts of the French, all the money put forth, and all the lives lost had not prevented Great Britain from obtaining the valuable markets of Egypt for the sale of her cotton goods. Or, as he puts it in From Cornhill to Grand Cairo:

But what are his wonders compared to Waghorn? Nap massacred the Mamelukes at the Pyramids: Wag has conquered the Pyramids themselves; dragged the unwieldy structures a month nearer than they were, and brought the country along with them. All the trophies and captives that ever were brought to Roman triumph were not so enormous and wonderful as this. All the heads Napoleon ever caused to be struck off (as George Cruickshank says) would not elevate him a monument as big. Be ours the trophies of peace! O my country! O Waghorn! Has tibi erunt artes. When I go to the Pyramids I will sacrifice in your name, and pour out libations of bitter ale and Harvey sauce in your honor. 1

1. William Thackeray, Works, From Cornhill to Grand Cairo, VII, 422.
Furthermore, England seemed likely to keep her grip on Egypt's wealth. How ironic it was that little Nagh dorm should be able to conquer the Napoleonic forces, and that England should benefit so greatly from his services while France gained nothing by the tremendous efforts of the Emperor. The conquests of peace were evidently more lasting than those of war.

To Thackeray it seemed unfair that common men should be turned out to fight for the aggrandizement of kings or emperors. The vast pomp of courts, the blowing of trumpets and the ponderous trappings of royalty: they weren't worth the misery of the people, the pain and sadness out of which they were born. That so many should suffer in order that a few might live in great estate and put on a magnificent display was preposterous. And who, knowing what was behind it, could enjoy such a spectacle? As Barry Lyndon remarks:

It is with these shocking instruments (starved and debauched soldiers) that your great warriors and kings have been doing their murderous work in the world; and while, for instance, we are at the present moment admiring the "Great Frederick", as we call him, and his philosophy and his liberality, and his military genius, I, who have served him and been, as it were, behind the scenes of which that great spectacle is composed, can only look at it with horror. What a number of items of human crime, misery, slavery, go to form that sum total of glory! 1

What a welter of misery to be gone through by the poor in order that the ruler of the country might live in the most exorbitant splendor! In Barry Lyndon (1844) a rumor that Frederick the Great had disposed of Silesia in order to buy his mistress a diamond necklace is remarked, and that such a belief should come into being is indicative of the whole gilded superstructure that had been imposed on the muck of suffering and misery in which the population lay. And to Thackeray, war was the instrument with which it was built.

The cold-blooded attitude of Frederick toward his subjects was anathema to Thackeray. When Barry Lyndon was defending the rebellion of a band of soldiers in the Emperor's army, he turned directly to the reader to ask:

I shall have, doubtless, some readers who will cry out at this, that I am encouraging insubordination and advocating murder. If these men had served as privates in the Prussian army from 1760 to 1765, they would not be so apt to take objection. This man destroyed two sentinels to get his liberty; how many hundreds of thousands of his own and the Austrian people did King Frederick kill because he took a fancy to Silesia? It was the accursed tyranny of the system that sharpened the axe which brained the two sentinels of Neisse; and so let officers take warning, and think twice are they visit poor fellows with the scab. 1

And equally unfair to the wretches who were caught in
the lower ranges of such a system was, to Thackeray, the
fact that officers were rewarded frequently, while the men,
however noteworthy their activities might have been, went
unnoticed. Anonymity was the reward for the common soldier;
only bad conduct brought him any notice. Canning was the
customary punishment for many misdemeanors, and it seems
to have been applied with some frequency. F.E. Whitton
reports that in 1846 a British soldier died as the result
of a flogging. The death of Private White brought the
British nation to a very abrupt realization of what was
happening in its army:

The maximum number of lashes, often inflicted, was
300; and, frightful though this punishment appeared,
many people were horrified to realize for the first
time that not so very far back soldiers had been
flayed alive by the administration of 1000 lashes
or more. 1

He remarks further that there was about the same social
difference between an officer and a private as that ex-
isting between a warden and a convict gang in the prison
shops. It is interesting to note that, as a result of
popular feeling, the maximum number of lashes was reduced
to fifty.

1. Nineteenth Century Magazine, "Thackeray and the Army",
November, 1931, p. 623.
The business of flogging filled Thackeray with sickness and disgust, as it would have any other sensitive person. He refers to it more than once when describing the army of Frederic the Great in *Barry Lyndon*, but he brings the matter closer home in the *Virginiens*. George Rossmond fighting in the Indian wars as a volunteer in the British forces, writes a letter to his brother, telling of the laxness of the behavior of the officers and the stringency with which the men are punished for moral lapses. In his words:

The men are punished, and the drummers are always at work. Oh, Harry, but it made one sick to see the first blood drawn from a great strong white back, and to hear the piteous yell of the poor fellow.2

Obviously, he was repelled by this situation as well as aware of it.

A circumstance hardly less galling to Thackeray was that while the men, as has been suggested, received no

1. Sir John Fortesque has given an opinion on the Nineteenth Century British Army that almost coincides with Thackeray's. The lot of the private soldier as shown by Fortesque is quite as bad. The lack of rewards for any but officers, and the wretched living conditions of the men are brought out even more strongly in Fortesque's work. Thackeray's conception of the British soldier was evidently accurate. Sir John Fortesque, *The Army*, quoted in *Early Victorian England*, edited by G.H. Young, Vol. 1 (London, 1934).
reward for their bravery, officers were frequently honored. Further, officers were sometimes praised as the result of the activities of their men. The boy cornet, swept along by the veterans whom he commanded, might well be knighted for his services while they went unnoticed:

But live or die, win or lose, what do they get? English glory is too genteel to meddle with those humble fellows. She does not condescend to ask the names of the poor devils whom she kills in her services . . . . But come, let us away and drop a tear over the Marquis of Anglesea's leg! 1

To one who saw the common soldier as the most important element in deciding a war, such an attitude would be exasperating; and Thackeray believed that the men had considerably more to do with triumphs and defeats than their commanders did.

Nor, according to Thackeray, did the literary men do anything to correct the over-sight. Rather, they followed along in the wake of the crowd, scribbling the praises of some member of the nobility who had had nothing to do with the outcome. Instead of correcting the injustice, they deepened it. In Henry Esmond he remarks:

1. Thackeray, Works, Travels and Roadside Sketches, VIII, p.418
there were men at Blenheim as good as the leader, whom neither knights nor senators applauded, nor voices plebian or patrician favored, and who lie there forgotten, under the clods. What poet is there to sing them?

The literary figures, instead of bringing honor to those to whom it could come in no other way, were only intent on adding their wreathes to the great piles of greenery already smothering the national heroes. They might have mingled a little justice with their wild praises; they sang as stupidly as the rest.

To Thackeray, there seemed to be an unethical phase as well. Writers were deceiving the public. It was not honest to present war in such a flattering light. As Thackeray caused Esmond to say to Addison in Henry Esmond:

You hew out of your polished erases a stately image of smiling victory; I tell you 'tis uncouth, distorted, savage idol; hideous, bloody, and barbarous. You great poets should show it as it is—ugly, and made terribly horrible, not beautiful and serene. Oh, sir, had you made the campaign believe me, you would never have sung it so.

To which Addison replies that no other kind of picture would have been acceptable. The patrons and the public had to be pleased, and so the writer would present the subject as they wanted it, rather than as it was. Nor was such a method of presentation confined to the Eighteenth Century. Thackeray's indictment of Scott, a

2. Ibid., 224.
contemporary, was just as thorough. He did not care at all for Scott's glossing over of gory details in order to make a perfectly innocuous tale out of some bloody event in Britain's history. In *Rebecca and Rowena* he concludes a statement by remarking:

... as in the battles which are described by the kindly chronicler, of one of whose works this present masterpiece is professedly a continuation, everything passes off agreeably—the people are slain, but without any unpleasant sensation to the reader; may, some of the most savage and blood-stained characters of history, such is the indomitable good-humor of the great humorist, become amiable, jovial companions, for whom one has a hearty sympathy. 1

Thackeray felt that there was a duty on writers to bring about a more realistic treatment of war. He thought that, by portraying it as it actually was, they could make war unpopular. People would, he thought, be revolted and want to be rid of such a barbaric activity. The author himself steps into *Henry Esmond* to enquire:

... Why does the stately Muse of History, that delights in describing the valor of heroes and the grandeur of conquest, leave out these scenes, so brutal, mean, and degrading, that yet form by far the greater part of the drama of war? ... You, gentlemen, of England, who live at home at ease, and compliment yourselves in songs of triumph with which your chieftains are bepraised—... do you take account of these items that go to make up the amount of the triumph you admire, and form the duties of the heroes you fondle?2

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Revelation, he thought, of the unpleasant side of war would bring reaction against it. Men would see that it had no place in the Nineteenth Century. It belonged to a savage time and race.

One element of war that struck Thackeray as being particularly ironic was the forgetfulness, after the victory, by the victors of what they had fought for. The essentials were forgotten, and the public mind seized upon something attractive to its imagination and exalted it out of all proportion to its real social value. This is what Thackeray had in mind when, speaking of a celebration of the French Revolution, he remarked:

It is, you will allow, a little difficult to say:—there is, however, one benefit that the country has gained (as for liberty of press, or person, diminished taxation, a juster representation, who ever thinks of them?) —one benefit they have gained, or nearly—abolition de l'aspeine-de-mort pour delit politique: no more wicked guillotining for revolutions. A Frenchman must have his revolution.

If the French Revolution had bettered the condition of the people, they had forgotten their gains and were making a great deal of noise about something quite unimportant. As far as remembrance went, their sacrifices had been for nothing of any worth. Or so it seemed to Thackeray, as he watched the celebration.

He saw the dark growth of hatred that rose in France after Waterloo, and realized that it helped to beget wars of the future. Thackeray sensed also the great desire of the French people to overcome the blow to their national ego. They clutched it to their breasts, saying in effect, "We will yet show you that we are mightier warriors than you are." Like an individual who will hold to a humiliation so that he can preserve his anger until he has an opportunity to reverse the "affront to his honor", the French nation was in no mood to forget. A winner can easily be magnanimous; for the loser, it is almost impossible.

... They pant for the opportunity of revenging that humiliation; and if a contest, ending in a victory on their part, should ensue, exacting them in their turn, and leaving its cursed legacy of hatred and rages behind to us, there is no end to the so-called glory and shame, and to the alterations of successful and unsuccessful murder, in which two high-spirited nations might engage. Centuries hence, we Frenchmen and Englishmen might be boasting and killing each other still, carrying out bravely the Devil's code of honor. 1

And so they might. It would not be the first time in history that two nations, or even these two, had done so.

The only other idea that Thackeray put forth on the causes of war was one sometimes held to be of modern origin: that is, that wars come from the desire to gain or to protect foreign markets, or otherwise maintain or better the
combatant nation's economic status through conquest. That this idea should be found during a time when interest in trade was great is not surprising, particularly when one considers that it was not even new in the Nineteenth Century. However, to a generation accustomed to think of itself as the first to see war as an outgrowth of economic activity, the fact that Thackeray put forth the same idea in 1848 ought to be interesting.

His idea was that the wars of the Nineteenth Century were fought for trade rights and for the securing of raw materials for home industries. That is, wars resulted from trade struggles and their ensuing rivalries. Should free trade be achieved, goods could pass freely from country to country and the struggles for supremacy would cease.

. . . . Perhaps ere a very long day, England may be acting that part towards the world, which Gibraltar performs towards Spain now; and the last war in which we shall ever engage may be a custom-house war. For once establish and abolish preventive duties through Europe, and what is there left to fight for? 1

Thackeray felt that with customs abolished, it would matter very little what country people lived in, that statesmen

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1. Thackeray, Works, Cornhill to Cairo, VII, p. 381.
would have little to do, and that the army would be only a police force. Everything would be settled, for the *casus belli* would have been removed forever.

This idea occurs only once in Thackeray's works. Further, it was written early in his career (1844). Apparently he did not feel this idea to be so important as some of his other ideas. At least, he did not do much with it.

Thackeray's failure to note the psychological factors of war might be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the language of that science. But actually his neglect of this element of character portrayal goes deeper than that. Where he really failed was in not penetrating the skins of his characters. He shows, for example, considerably less understanding of what was going on in the minds of his people than do the playwrights of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Since he worked on a broad canvas, he probably did not care to probe the minds of the people he was painting; breadth, rather than depth, was perhaps his objective. The characters of the coward and the woman at home, which would be exhausted today, are not touched by him.
But whatever may have been the reason, it ought to be noted that Thackeray does not pay much attention to the part that the deeper processes of men's minds and emotions play in the causation of war. He did note the externalized results of these factors, but he did not try to follow them to their sources.
CHAPTER V

Thackeray approached the war question through four large divisions. The first of these was the injustice found in army life. It will be recalled that he had bitter things to say about the results of the rigid caste system found in the army. Officers usually got the rewards, whether they deserved them or not, and the men customarily received nothing, however praiseworthy their activities. This was unfair, and Thackeray resented it.

His second major criticism was that war degraded the participants. Soldiers became brutal and inhuman during the struggle. Fine ideals were cast aside, and many activities severely censured in peace times were given free rein. They were all part of the fighting.

Thackeray's third objection to war was the effect it had on women who had husbands, fathers or brothers involved. According to his view, they suffered torments equivalent to those of combatants without having the compensation of bright uniforms, fine speeches and such physical activities as might sometimes allow them to forget the nature of the thing in which they were engaged. All they could do was to sit and hope.
The last great exception that Thackeray took to international strife was its futility. It accomplished nothing of any permanent worth. Every war that was lost meant that the loser would eventually retaliate; and every gain would, hence, be sooner or later nullified. The achievements of peace were more lasting.

F.W. Whitton has concluded, in an article written for the Nineteenth Century Magazine, that Thackeray actually had a warm spot in his heart for the British Army. His conclusion is contrary to that maintained in this work. Colonel Whitton has explained Thackeray's unfavorable comments on army people by attributing them to an unfortunate incident, and concludes his paper with the idea that Thackeray's emotional response to the happening was of short duration and not representative of his general attitude at all.

Colonel Whitton states:

. . . . The whole aspect of Thackeray towards the army and military life was undoubtedly coloured by a distressing incident which occurred in the year in question. In 1846 a private named John White, of the 7th Hussars, died in the military hospital at Hounslow as the result of a flogging administered for insubordinate conduct . . . . He Thackeray appealed to the Prince Consort to use his influence to abolish the infernal torture of the "cat".

"Rather let us lose a battle than flog a soldier." 1

However, contrary to Colonel Whitton's assertion, Thackeray's remarks against war extend fairly evenly through his works, from the publication of Burlesques and Yellowplush Papers, in 1838, to the appearance of The Virginians, in 1857. If his assertions about war are centered anywhere, Barry Lyndon must surely be the book containing the nucleus. It certainly contains more, and stronger, statements on the subject than any of his other works. Yet it came out in 1844. And the Snob Papers, Punch's Prize Novelists, the Legend of the Rhine, Cox's Diary, the Fatal Boots and Rebecca and Rowena, all of which came out in 1846 (comprising with the beginning of Vanity Fair his output for that year), have nothing that will compare, either in number or in vehemence, with the allusions in Barry Lyndon. It seems hardly possible, therefore, that Thackeray's attitude toward war could have resulted chiefly from the single incident to which Whitton alludes.

1 Whitton, op. cit.
Early in this work the life of Thackeray was briefly surveyed, with the idea of discovering whether any of the incidents included in it could have influenced him in regard to his attitudes toward war and peace. Only his being born and reared during his early years in India seems to have been of possible significance. There is a passage in the Virginians about army officers' children being torn from their parents' arms at an early age to be sent off to England to school that recalls Thackeray's own unhappy boyhood. Apart from this single, unimportant instance, nothing relating to his own experiences was discovered.

Because of his viewpoint his characters do not change during the course of the action. They well represent what 1 Edwin Muir calls static characters--almost types. Consequently, we find nothing in his works to compare with modern war literature, which chiefly highlights the effect of war on the individual by presenting him as he is being changed, and pointing out the causes.

Thackeray tells us that war changes men, but his heroes, upon whom the spotlight is turned, remain unchanged. And we are only informed by Thackeray's statements that the men who make up the backdrop are being affected. The heroes stand forth from the rest of the characters like actors standing before a steadily moving strip of canvas on which is painted the background. The minor figures change, but the major characters are precisely the same at the beginning as they are at the end.

It has been the purpose of this thesis to discover the way that Thackeray felt toward war and peace. To that end, an attempt has been made to present all factors bearing on the question without regard to what they tended to show. Two conclusions seem to be safely deducible: first, Thackeray felt that war was an evil and peace a benefit; second, he did not feel the question at all deeply and had apparently hardly thought about it at all.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


