

**AN ESSAY ON THE
GENIUS OF GEORGE
CRUIKSHANK**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649022113

An Essay on the Genius of George Cruikshank by William Makepeace Thackeray

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

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J. N. P. Phillips del.

J. C. Smith

Engraved by W. H. Smith

AN
ESSAY ON THE
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BY
WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

REPRINTED VERBATIM FROM "THE WESTMINSTER REVIEW"

EDITED WITH A PREFATORY NOTE
ON THACKERAY AS AN ARTIST AND ART-CRITIC

BY
W. E. CHURCH
(Secretary of the Urban Club)

WITH UPWARDS OF FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS INCLUDING ALL THE
ORIGINAL WOODCUTS AND A NEW PORTRAIT OF CRUIKSHANK
ETCHED BY F. W. PAILTHORPE

LONDON
GEORGE REDWAY
12 YORK STREET COVENT GARDEN
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D. NORMAN AND SON, PRINTERS, NART STREET,
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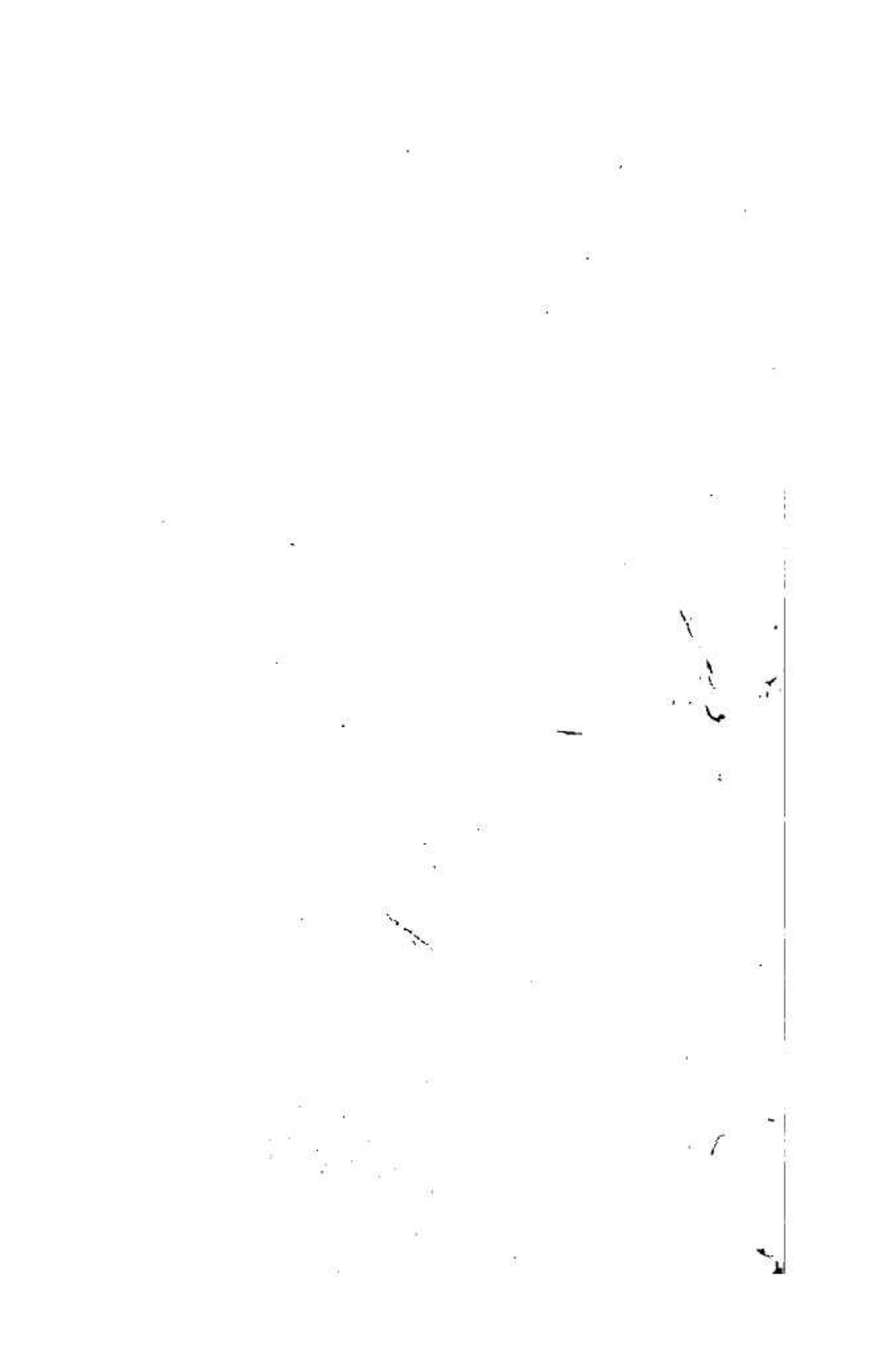
BENJAMIN WARD RICHARDSON, M.D., LL.D., F.R.S.;

FOR MANY YEARS

THE CLOSE FRIEND OF GEORGE CRUKSHANK,

THIS WORK IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

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THACKERAY was one of the best of art critics. He had the true instinct and relish, and the nicety and directness, necessary for just as well as high criticism: the white light of his intellect found its way into this as into every region of his work.—DR. JOHN BROWN.

ALTHOUGH no exhaustive or satisfactory biography of Thackeray has hitherto been published, there can be little doubt that such a book will eventually appear. Whenever it sees the light, the readers of the work probably will find no part of it more interesting than the account of Thackeray's connexion with art. Written with sympathy and accuracy, that account ought to be as entertaining as a novel, and should bring into clearness and prominence many facts previously left in the background.

Since Thackeray's death twenty years ago, a great deal has been written in elucidation of his personal history and genius. These notices, though frequently in all other respects perfectly adequate and satisfactory, are strangely deficient in any estimate of his pictorial work; and several of them contain no allusion to his writings on art. It was not until some three years ago, when the essay by Mr. Russell Sturgis, on "Thackeray as a draughtsman," was published in *Scribner's Monthly Magazine*, that any distinct estimate of his powers as an artist appeared. Dr. John Brown is one of the few critics who have definitely spoken of Thackeray's writings on art, and he has said, "*It would not be easy to imagine better criticisms of art than those from Mr. Thackeray's hand. His art 'has its seat in reason,' and he is more objective, cool, and critical than Mr. Ruskin.*"

It is well known that Thackeray's feeling for art was precocious. At a very early age he drew and painted; the figures of William Wallace, and of Sir Aymer de Valence (from *The Scottish Chiefs*), drawn by him on the title-page of a Latin Grammar when he was a boy, have been copied into *The Cornhill Magazine*. After he attained distinction as an author, his old Charterhouse school-fellows remembered the caricatures and sketches that the "rather pretty timid boy" used to execute on the margins and fly-leaves of books. In the same way subsequently he illustrated his copies of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Rollin's Ancient History*, *Joseph Andrews*, *The Castle of Otranto*, and *Don Quixote*. Many of these illustrations are exceedingly humorous (well conveying the sense of the text they accompany), and show moreover a gift for facile drawing. The element of caricature predominates in Thackeray's early pictorial work, and it was in caricature that his ability as an artist was always shown. He not only drew a great deal professionally, but likewise for mere amusement and for the gratification of his friends. "If I had only," more than one of these exclaimed to the late Anthony Trollope, "kept the drawings from his pen, which used to be chucked about as though they were worth nothing!" Mr. Trollope goes on to speak of an album of drawings and letters, which in the course of twenty years, from 1829 to 1849, were despatched from Thackeray to his old friend Edward Fitzgerald. "Looking at the wit displayed in the drawings," he continues, "I feel inclined to say that had he persisted he would have been a second Hogarth. There is a series of *ballet* scenes, in which *Flore et Zephyr* are the two chief performers, which for expression and drollery exceed anything that I know of the kind." The suggestion of the possibility of the artist becoming another Hogarth had been made by Dr. John Brown, the Scottish humourist, years before Trollope wrote his biography of Thackeray, and Mr. Hayward in 1848 drew attention to Thackeray's Hogarthian talent. "Had he been apprenticed to Raimbach, the engraver," wrote the author of *Rab and his Friends*, "we might have had another and in some ways a subtler Hogarth," and he goes on to extol Thackeray's invention, his clever representation of character, and his pure love