

**CORRECTED  
IMPRESSIONS: ESSAYS  
ON VICTORIAN WRITERS**

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Corrected Impressions: Essays on Victorian Writers by George Saintsbury

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**GEORGE SAINTSBURY**

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## PREFACE.

THESE Critical Notes differ a little in scheme and aim from anything that their writer has hitherto attempted. The shape which they take was partly suggested, as is observed in one of them, by some remarks of Mr. A. J. Balfour's at the Literary Fund Dinner of 1893, in London. It occurred to me then that a kind of foreshortened review of the impressions, and the corrections of them, which the great Victorian writers had produced or undergone in my own case during the last thirty years might not be an absolutely uninteresting sample of "how it has struck a contemporary." It was not practically possible to execute this

without some reference to the progress of general as well as of individual opinion. But care has been taken to maintain as far as possible the genuineness of the individual impression, past as well as present. To do this it was necessary rather to give heads of a study of the authors than the completed study itself, and rather to say too little than to say too much; but at the same time not to refrain from a certain amount of personal detail. Some of the earlier papers have appeared in the *Indian Daily News*, and the four last in the *New York Critic*; but none have been printed in England.

G. S.

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## CORRECTED IMPRESSIONS

### I.

#### THACKERAY.

**I**N a certain now rather antiquated school of theology, the word "use" was employed with a special application, denoting the adjustment of a given text, fact, or other thing to beneficent moral purposes. I like to make a use of critical humility out of the fact that there was a time when I did not like Thackeray. It was a very short time in itself, and it was a very long time ago; but from about, so far as I can remember, my fifteenth year to my seventeenth, it existed. The circumstances were extenuating. It so happened that, almost ever since I could read, I had been brought up on Dickens, and had known little or nothing of his great rival in the English fiction of the middle of the century, except that he was his rival. I believe

the first thing that I ever read of Mr. Thackeray's was "Philip," as it came out in the *Cornhill*; the next, "Vanity Fair." Neither, it will probably be admitted, was the best possible introduction to the subject for a green taste. I now think considerably better of "Philip" than some professed Thackerayans do; but I should hardly quarrel very fiercely with anybody who failed to relish it. And I do not think that any boy — at least any boy who is genuine, and has not prematurely learnt to feign liking for what he thinks he ought to like — can really enjoy "Vanity Fair." The full beauty of Becky (I can honestly say that I always saw some of it) is necessarily hidden from him; he cannot taste the majesty of the crowning scene with Lord Steyne, or the even finer, though less dramatic, negotiations which avert the duel; his knowledge of life is insufficient to allow him to detect the magnificent thoroughness and the more magnificent irony of the general treatment. On the other hand, he is sure, if he is good for anything, to be disgusted with the namby-pambyness of Amelia,

with the chuckle-headed goodness of Dobbin, with the vicious nincompoopery and the selfishness of George Osborne. For these are things which, though experience may lead to the retraction of an opinion that any of the three is unnatural, leave on some tolerably mature judgments the impression that they are one-sided and out of composition, if not of drawing.

But this could not last long: after a few months, "Pendennis" came in my way. I took it, I remember very well after thirty years, out of a certain school library, and I read it, or began to read it (an exceedingly reprehensible practice) on my way home, which lay through Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. If any of the persons into whose arms I walked are still alive, I humbly ask their pardon. Even if they had not now mostly been changed long ago for others, it would be superfluous to extend forgiveness to the Park seats which avenged these innocents on my own knees. It may to some people seem odd, and to others shocking, that "The Newcomes" threw me at first rather back. It had its revenge later,