

**THE FOUR GEORGES:  
SKETCHES OF  
MANNERS, MORALS,  
COURT AND TOWN LIFE**

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The Four Georges: Sketches of Manners, Morals, Court and Town Life by William Makepeace Thackeray

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**WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY**

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JOHN LONG'S CARLTON CLASSICS

## The Four Georges

Sketches of Manners, Morals,  
Court and Town Life

*Edited by* HANNAFORD BENNETT

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# The Four Georges

Sketches of Manners, Morals,  
Court and Town Life

By

William Makepeace Thackeray

With Biographical Introduction

by

Hannaford Bennett



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MCMV

## Biographical Introduction

THE first Thackeray of note was Dr Thomas Thackeray, Headmaster of Harrow, and Archdeacon of Surrey. One of the doctor's sons, William Makepeace Thackeray, entered the Indian Civil Service, and was the father of twelve children, nine of whom settled in the East. Richmond Thackeray, the fourth child, was judge and magistrate at Ranghyr, and subsequently Secretary to the Calcutta Board of Revenue. He married at Calcutta, in October 1810, Anne Becher a reigning beauty. Their only child, called after his grandfather, William Makepeace Thackeray, was born at Calcutta on the 18th of July 1811, a year before his great rival, Charles Dickens.

Richmond Thackeray died in 1816, and the son was shortly afterwards sent home to England to be educated. There was then no Overland Route, and the ship rounded the Cape, touching at St Helena, where the boy saw Napoleon. "That's he," said the black servant in charge of him; "that's Buonaparte. He eats three sheep a day, and all the children he can lay hands on." Thackeray was placed under the care of his aunt, who sent him to a school in Hampshire, thence to one at Chiswick, near Miss

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Pinkerton's celebrated academy described in *Vanity Fair*. While he was at this school his mother married again, and in 1821 she returned to England with her husband, Major Carmichael Smyth, who settled for a time at Addiscombe as Governor of the Military College where the Company's cadets were trained; and Thackeray was sent to Charterhouse. He was not at all happy at the school. George Venables, a school-fellow and lifelong friend, remembers him as "a pretty, gentle and rather timid boy" who never rose high in the class or distinguished himself in the playground. Venables broke the bridge of the future novelist's nose in a school fight. After he left Charterhouse Thackeray refers to having been "licked into indolence" and "bullied into despair."

Thackeray went into residence at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1829, and, like Arthur Pendennis, left without taking a degree. He was a great reader, and displayed much facility in drawing humorous sketches and caricatures. He burlesqued Tennyson's prize poem, *Timbuctoo*, in the students' paper, *The Snob*. "*Timbuctoo*," he wrote, "received much laud. . . . The men knew not the author, but praised the poem; how eagerly I sucked it in. All is Vanity!" In 1831 he took chambers in Hare Court to study law. Next year he came of age and inherited from his father £20,000. His fortune was soon swept away. It is not ascertainable how it was lost; but some of it went in paying Cambridge debts, some in gambling, some in newspaper investments, and some in the failure of an Indian bank. Early in 1833 he became a contributor, and with the nineteenth number, editor, and finally proprietor, of the *National*



*Standard*, a weekly journal issued at twopence. By February 1834 the paper was dead, and its proprietor, being from one cause or another penniless, had to work for his living. His first work, a folio of lithographs, was published in 1836, and in the same year he was appointed Paris correspondent of the *Constitutional*. The paper failed, and Thackeray struggled hard with a variety of hack work: stories, sketches, criticisms, burlesques, poems and newspaper correspondence.

Thackeray's first book, the *Paris Sketch-Book*, a series of reprints, was published in 1840, and it was followed, in 1841, by *Comic Tales and Sketches*. Both works were failures. His connection with *Punch* began in 1842, nearly a year after the famous paper was started, and in 1843 he joined its regular councils. His most notable successes up to the year 1846 were *Jeames's Diary* and the *Snobs of England*, contributed to *Punch*. In January 1847 the first monthly part of *Vanity Fair* was published, and before the last number came out, in July 1848, Thackeray's position in the first rank of novelists was generally recognised. Mrs Carlyle wrote that the last four numbers were "very good indeed—beats Dickens out of the world."

*Vanity Fair* was succeeded by *Pendennis*. In 1851 the novelist lectured in London to supplement his income, and later repeated the lectures in the provinces and in America. Before the American journey was commenced *Esmond* appeared. Trollope, who was no mean critic, thought it the finest novel in the language. In 1853 the *Newcomes* was written; and in 1855 Thackeray undertook a second lecturing tour with the *Four Georges*. In 1857 the *Virginians*

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began to appear. In January 1860 the *Cornhill Magazine* was started with great prestige under Thackeray's editorship, and was a success from the first. His remaining works, *Lovel, the Widower*, the *Adventures of Philip* and the charming *Roundabout Papers* appeared in the magazine, though he relinquished the editorship in April 1862. In the same year he removed to a house at Palace Green, Kensington, which he had built, but he was not to live long there, for on the 24th of December 1863, he was found dead in his bed of an effusion of blood to the brain. He was buried at Kensal Green.

HANNAFORD BENNETT

# The Four Georges

SKETCHES OF MANNERS, MORALS,  
COURT AND TOWN LIFE

## GEORGE I

A VERY few years since, I knew familiarly a lady who had been asked in marriage by Horace Walpole, who had been patted on the head by George I. This lady had knocked at Doctor Johnson's door; had been intimate with Fox, the beautiful Georgina of Devonshire, and that brilliant Whig society of the reign of George III.; had known the Duchess of Queensberry, the patroness of Gay and Prior, the admired young beauty of the Court of Queen Anne. I often thought as I took my kind old friend's hand, how with it I held on to the old society of wits and men of the world. I could travel back for seven score years of time—have glimpses of Brummel, Selwyn, Chesterfield, and the men of pleasure; of Walpole and Conway; of Johnson, Reynolds, Goldsmith; of North, Chatham, Newcastle; of the fair maids of honour of George II.'s Court; of the German retainers of George I.'s; where Addison was Secretary of State; where Dick Steele held a place; whither the great Marlborough came with his fiery spouse; when Pope,