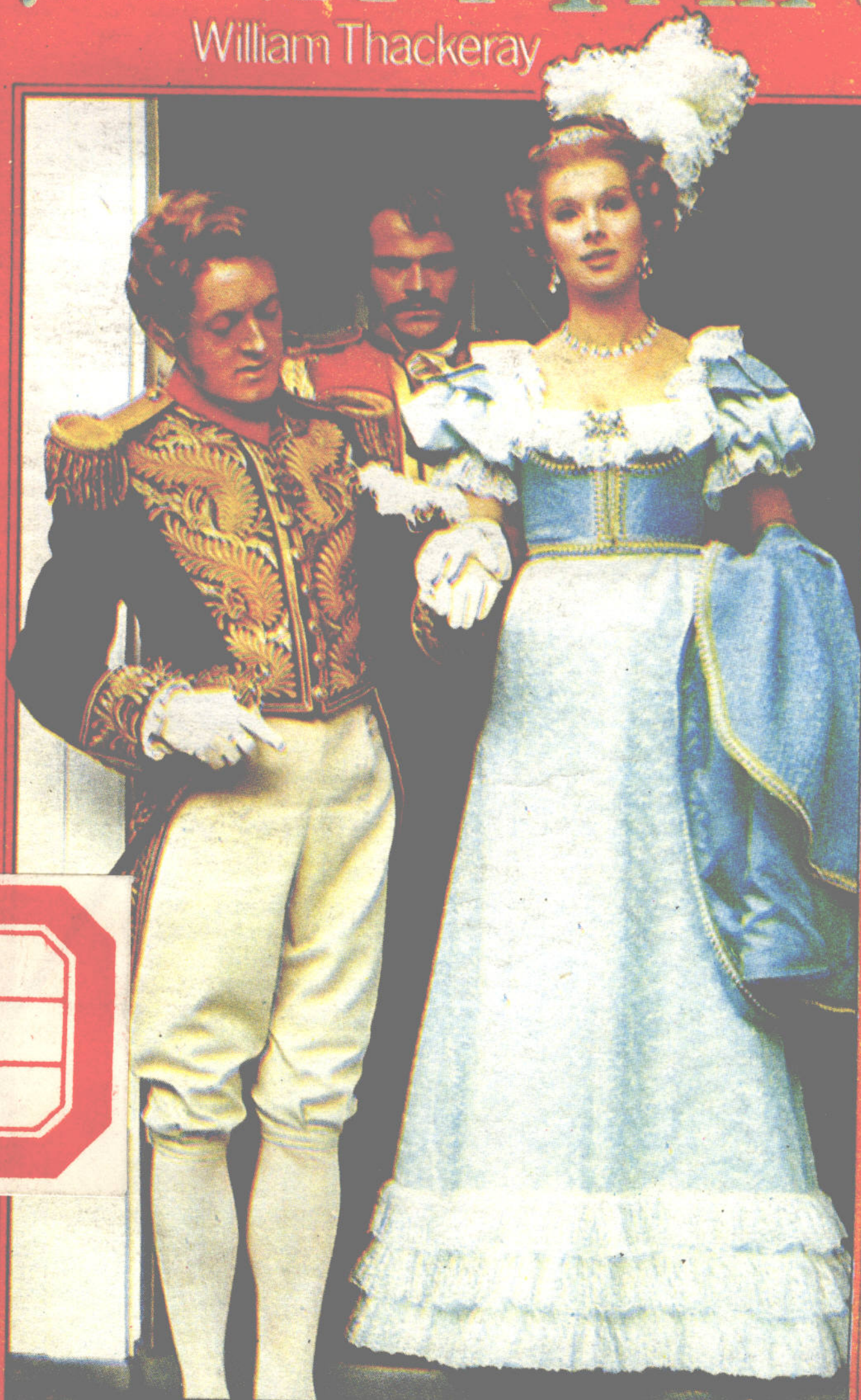


# VANITY FAIR

William Thackeray



Collins English Library



# **Collins English Library**

Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

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# VANITY FAIR

William Thackeray

Abridged and simplified by Viola Huggins

Illustrations by Shirley Bellwood

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## Chapter One

"Sister," said Miss Jemima Pinkerton, "the coach has arrived for Miss Sédley. It's outside the gates now."

On this day in June, 1812, Miss Amelia Sedley was leaving Miss Pinkerton's college for young ladies.

"Thank you, Jemima," said Miss Barbara Pinkerton. "Is everything ready for her departure? Have you prepared everything?"

"Oh yes, I have," replied Jemima.

"Well, now get a copy of Dr Johnson's Dictionary. I shall give it to Amelia when she leaves."

Amelia Sedley's father was a successful merchant in the city of London, and for that reason they thought well of Amelia.

Jemima quietly went to get the famous Dictionary from the cupboard. But she brought back two copies.

Miss Barbara Pinkerton carefully wrote Miss Amelia Sedley's name in the book which her sister handed her. Then Jemima gave her the second Dictionary.

"Jemima!" exclaimed the head of the college.



"Are you out of your senses? Put this Dictionary back in the cupboard. Becky Sharp won't have one, only Amelia."

"Well, sister, Becky is going to stay with Amelia."

"Send Amelia to me now," said Miss Barbara Pinkerton. And her sister hurried away to find Amelia.

Miss Rebecca Sharp – Becky, as she was called – helped teach younger pupils in return for her education. Her father, a poor artist, was dead.

Amelia received her Dictionary, and also some cake and wine, in Miss Pinkerton's sitting room. Meanwhile, Becky Sharp was bringing her own boxes and cases down to the coach outside.

Miss Jemima met her. "You'll go in and say goodbye to Miss Pinkerton, won't you, Becky," she said.

"I suppose I must," said Becky calmly. She knocked at the door of Barbara Pinkerton's room and, entering, said in excellent French, "I have come to say goodbye, Miss Pinkerton."

Miss Pinkerton did not understand French.

"I wish you good morning," she said, coldly.

Outside, at the college gates, the big Sedley carriage was waiting. All the young ladies at the school were outside to say goodbye to Amelia.

Becky entered the coach quietly. No one cried because she was leaving. The carriage door was at last shut, with both young ladies inside.

At that moment, Jemima rushed to the gate with a parcel. "It's some sandwiches, my dear," she said to Amelia. "You may be hungry, you

know. And, Becky Sharp, here's a book for you: Johnson's Dictionary. You mustn't leave without that. Goodbye – drive on, coachman. God bless you both."

And the kind woman went back into the college garden. But, just as the coach drove off, Becky put her face out of the window, and threw the famous Dictionary back into the garden. Jemima nearly fainted with horror, as the coach drove the two young ladies away.

"How could you do that, Becky?" said Amelia as they were driven along.

"I hate the whole house. I've been treated as a servant there."

Becky had indeed had a poor time at the college. Her father was once the teacher of drawing there. He was married to a French singer, who died while Becky was young. And he drank most of his money away. In fact, he drank himself to death. But before doing so, he asked Miss Pinkerton to employ Becky.

Becky was small, pale faced and sandy haired. Her eyes were large and attractive, if she chose to make them so. She looked like a child, but poverty had given her a great deal of worldly knowledge. She had often turned away from her father's door the people to whom he owed money. She had sat with her father and his friends and amused them with her wit.

Thus the world began for these two young ladies. For Amelia Sedley, pretty and pleasant, it was a fresh, bright world. She soon wiped away her tears, and was delighted when a young officer





*Becky put her face out of the window, and threw the famous Dictionary back into the garden.*

riding by their coach noticed her and exclaimed, "A fine girl, I swear!"

At last they arrived at the Sedleys' large house in Russell Square, in the centre of London. Her father and mother and all the servants were at the door to welcome her. And they received Becky very kindly.

The kind Amelia showed Becky over every room in the house, and every one of her cupboards, her books, her piano, her dresses, and her jewellery. She gave Becky one of her rings, and wanted to give her a necklace, which her brother Joseph had brought home for her from India.

"It must be delightful to have a brother," said Becky sadly. The tender hearted Amelia was full of pity.

"Oh, you aren't alone," she said. "You know, Becky, I shall always be your friend and love you as a sister."

"Ah, but to have parents as you have, and a brother, a dear brother. How you must love him!"

Amelia laughed.

"What, you don't love him – you, who say you love everybody?"

"Yes, of course I do. But he's been away so long in India."

"Isn't he very rich?" said Becky. "They say all people from India are very rich."

"I believe he has quite a large income."

"And his wife is a nice pretty woman, I suppose?"

“Oh, Jos isn’t married,” said Amelia, laughing again.

Then the dinner bell rang, and they went downstairs together. Becky was thinking to herself, “If Mr Joseph Sedley is rich and unmarried, why shouldn’t I marry him? I’ve only two weeks here, but there’s no harm in trying.”

## Chapter Two

Amelia led her friend into the drawing room. Joseph, her brother, was sitting by the fire reading the newspaper. Joseph was rather fat, and very nervous, especially of ladies. He jumped up when the two girls entered, and went very red in the face.

“It’s only your sister, Jos,” said Amelia, smiling at him, and shaking the two fingers which he held out. “I’ve come back from school. And this is my friend, Miss Sharp. You’ve heard me mention her.”

“No, never, upon my word,” said Joseph. “Oh, that is, yes . . . What very cold weather, Miss . . .” And Joseph began to put more coal on the fire.

“He’s very handsome,” whispered Becky to Amelia, rather loudly.

“Do you think so?” said Amelia. “I’ll tell him.”

“Darling, not for the worlds,” said Becky.

“I have to go now,” said Joseph, still red in the



face.

Becky kept her eyes down, looking at the floor very hard. It was surprising that she could have found an opportunity of seeing Joseph at all.

At this moment, the door opened and the father of the family, Mr John Sedley, came in. He noticed that Jos's face was red, and asked, "Have you been quarrelling already with Joseph, Amelia?"

"I promised to dine with a friend," said Joseph, "I must go."

But Mr Sedley took them all down to have dinner together.

Joseph was twelve years older than his sister. He worked for the East India Company in Bengal, collecting the Company's money. He had been there for about eight years, but had come home to have medical treatment for a stomach illness. He had his own lodgings in London, and enjoyed his bachelor life. He drove his horses in the park, ate well, dined out and went to the theatre. But he was really a shy man, especially with the ladies.

As they sat down to dinner, Becky was quiet and modest, and kept her green eyes downwards. "I must be quiet," she thought, "and very much interested in India."

Mrs Sedley had prepared a hot Indian dish for the meal.

"It's excellent," said Jos, his mouth full. "Mother, it's as good as it's made in India."

"Oh, I must try some if it's an Indian dish," said Becky. "I'm sure everything must be good that comes from there."

"Give Miss Sharp some, my dear," said Mr Sedley, laughing. Becky had never tasted the dish before, and found it so hot that it burnt her mouth.

"Do you find it as good as everything else from India?" asked Mr Sedley.

"Oh, excellent," said Becky. She was in great pain, because of the pepper in the dish, and she had to ask for water to drink.

"You won't like everything from India now, Miss Sharp," said Mr Sedley.

When the ladies had left them after dinner, Mr Sedley said to his son, "Be careful, Jos, that girl means to get hold of you."

"Nonsense," said Jos. He was secretly quite pleased. But he was rather alarmed by the idea when he thought about it afterwards, and he did not visit his father's house for two or three days.

Becky continued to win all hearts at the Sedleys' home. She was kind to the servants and to everybody she met. "The poor child is all heart," remarked Mrs Sedley to Amelia.

"I wish she could stay with us another week," said Amelia. And Becky was invited to stay for a week longer.

One evening, while Mr and Mrs Sedley were out with friends, Jos and Amelia invited Jos's old school friend, George Osborne, to come to dinner. George was a handsome young man, and in love with Amelia. The Osbornes and the Sedleys had been friendly for years, and it was always expected that George would marry Amelia soon.

"Let's have some music, Amelia," said George, and he led Amelia away to the piano. Becky and Jos talked quietly while the music went on. For the first time in his life Jos was talking quite fearlessly to someone of the opposite sex. Becky asked him a great many questions about India, and he told her interesting stories about elephants and tigers he had hunted.

Now Becky was asked to play the piano and sing, which she did excellently. And she ended with a sad little song about a boy whose father and mother were dead.

As she finished, everyone felt she was thinking of her own situation, as she had no parents and must soon leave her kind friends' house.

The next day, Jos came to Russell Square again with some flowers for Becky. She was sitting quietly knitting with some pretty green wool. George Osborne was there with Amelia, but they left the room, leaving Jos with Becky.

When they came back, they found Jos helping Becky to wind the wool. He was holding out his arms with the wool round his hands.

But he had not asked Becky to marry him yet.

"I'm sure he will ask you soon, dear," said Amelia that evening to Becky.



## Chapter Three

That evening, the young people were going to the famous pleasure gardens at Vauxhall in London. George Osborne was having dinner with them first, and he asked Mrs Osborne if he could bring a friend with him.

"I've asked William Dobbin of my company to come to Vauxhall with us," said George. "He's an excellent fellow."

"That will be quite all right," said Mrs Sedley. "I remember Dobbin. He was that awkward young boy who came to one of our children's parties years ago. He upset a bowl of wine over Mrs Flamingo's red silk dress. But that's a long time ago."

"He hasn't changed," said George Osborne. "There's not a finer fellow in the army, nor a better officer. But he's not an Adonis, certainly." And George looked at his own handsome face in the mirror.

So that evening, Captain William Dobbin arrived at Russell Square and knocked gently on the door.

He was very tall, thin and awkward looking, with large hands and large feet. He wore a soldier's uniform. His face was still yellow from the fever he had recently suffered in the West Indies.

After dinner, the young people all went off in the carriage to Vauxhall Gardens, which was the fashionable London entertainment of the time.

Amelia took George's arm, and Becky took Jos's arm, and poor Dobbin was left alone to carry the coats and bags.

They all met for refreshments – all, that is, except Dobbin. He had some thoughts of joining their table, and walked past. But no one noticed him, so he went off alone again.

All was going well with Becky and Jos, and she really expected that evening he would ask her to marry him. But Jos drank more than was good for him. He began to sing and laugh so loudly that a crowd of people gathered to watch. George Osborne was going to hit one of the rudest of the men in the crowd. Then suddenly, and luckily, Dobbin came on the scene.

“Go away, you fools,” said Dobbin, pushing away a great number of the crowd. The rest ran away when they saw this fierce fellow in military uniform.

“Good heavens, Dobbin, where have you been?” said George. “Make yourself useful and take charge of Jos. I'll take the ladies to the carriage.”

Dobbin managed to get Jos home safely to his lodgings, and George Osborne took the girls home.

“I really believe Jos will ask me to marry him tomorrow,” thought Becky. “He called me darling four times, and he pressed my hand. He will ask me tomorrow.” And Amelia thought so too.

But next morning, poor Jos had the most dreadful headache. There was no headache in the world like that caused by Vauxhall wine.



**"Go away, you fools," said Dobbin, pushing away a great number of the crowd.**