

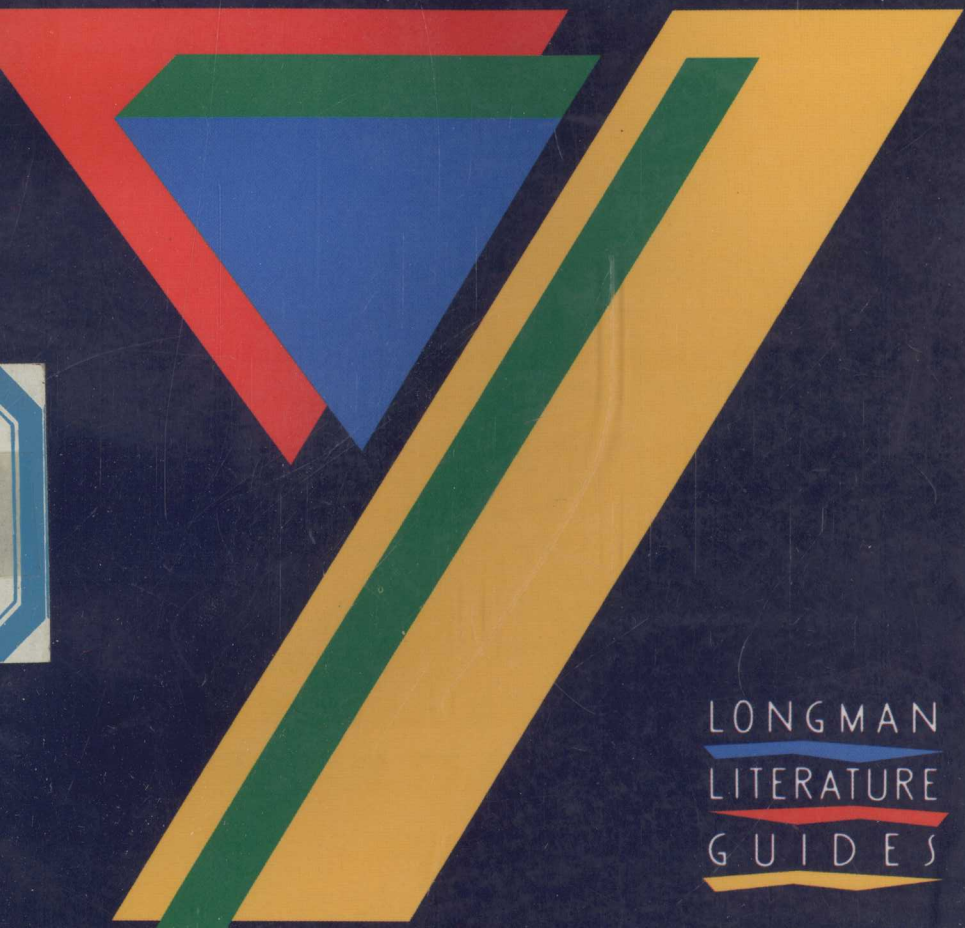
约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

VANITY FAIR

名利场

William Thackeray



LONGMAN
LITERATURE
GUIDES

YORK NOTES

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William Thackeray

VANITY FAIR

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《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

Contents

Part 1: Introduction	<i>page</i> 5
A note on the text	8
Part 2: Summaries	9
A general summary	9
Detailed summaries	10
Part 3: Commentary	48
The characters	48
Narrative technique	58
The world of <i>Vanity Fair</i>	62
Part 4: Hints for study	68
On writing examinations	68
Questions and answers	69
Scenes for special study	75
Part 5: Suggestions for further reading	76
The author of these notes	78



Part 1

Introduction

POLITICAL CHANGE and economic growth, the spread of cities, the explosive, transforming power of technological discoveries—these are things which modern men and women in most parts of the world have come to take for granted. But they have not always been the norm. They first made themselves felt in full strength during the nineteenth century, particularly in England but also in Western Europe. It must have been a confusing time in which to live. The industrial revolution was transforming centuries-old patterns of social organisation and work, and indeed the very landscape. Cities grew where there had been only villages before. The French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath provided unsettling glimpses of the possibility of mass political change on a scale hitherto hardly imagined.

We can think of novels like Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* as attempts to see and understand this changing society. If we compare a great eighteenth-century novel, Fielding's *Tom Jones* for instance, with the best works of Dickens or Thackeray or George Eliot, one thing that stands out unmistakably about the nineteenth-century novels is that they give a much denser, more specific and detailed picture of the societies in which they are set. The portrait is not complete. The attempt to capture the working class in nineteenth-century fiction is a series of honourable failures, and some novels, *Vanity Fair* among them, do not even try. The ultimate aim of such novels is also likely to transcend the depiction of contemporary society. Nonetheless, one of the attractions of a novel such as *Vanity Fair* for contemporary readers must have been the way in which it at least seemed to give a broad, panoramic view of a society which was becoming ever more difficult to understand.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63) was in many respects well situated to give a picture of the middle and upper classes in nineteenth-century England. Socially, he was both an insider and an outsider, which gave him both knowledge of and distance from the society he portrayed. He came from a wealthy family, which sent him to school at Charterhouse and to the University of Cambridge, after which he travelled to Weimar, the 'Pumpnickel' of *Vanity Fair*. All of this makes him sound as if he were a typical son of a prosperous British upper-middle-class family. But his parents were not simply British, they

were (like Jos in *Vanity Fair*) Anglo-Indians. A successful member of the British civil service in India could accumulate a good deal of money in a relatively short time, if only his health stood up to the severe climate. Even when they returned to England, the Anglo-Indians tended to form their own society, partly because they had formed similar habits during their service abroad, partly because normal British society tended to distrust them as members of a newly wealthy class.

In 1833, Thackeray lost the small fortune he had inherited. After leaving Cambridge he had worked in the law and in finance; now he decided to become a painter, which led him to Paris. There he met and in 1836 married Isabella Shawe. Having realised that he would never be a successful painter, he returned to England, intent on making his fortune as a writer. He contributed to several periodicals; increasingly successful, he devoted himself with increasing single-mindedness to his work. This led him to neglect his wife. She was never a strong and stable person, and the various strains in her life finally proved too much for her. She felt unable to run Thackeray's house efficiently or to share his intellectual interests; in 1840, she attempted suicide. Not long after she became incurably insane, reverting to the mental level of a child.

During the early 1840s, Thackeray continued to write prolifically. In 1844, he began a series entitled 'Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society', but dropped it in favour of other projects. In 1846 he returned to the chapters he had written, revised them, and 'Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society' became *Vanity Fair*. During the next decade he produced his greatest novels, including *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, *Henry Esmond*, and *The Newcomes*. Thackeray wrote actively until the end of his life. He died in 1863. .

Like most of the other great nineteenth-century English novels, *Vanity Fair* originally appeared in serial form. It was published in monthly parts or 'numbers' over a period of nineteen months, from January 1847 to July 1848. The final number was, according to customary practice, double the normal length, and thus there are twenty parts in all. Like Dickens, Thackeray wrote his novel as it was being published. Serial publication creates a particularly close relationship between audience and author. The author can see how his story is being received as he writes it. Readers have actually tried to influence the outcome of such works: the classic case involves Charles Dickens, who received anguished letters pleading with him not to kill off one of his characters, Little Nell, in the next number of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. (He did anyway.) Such reactions are extreme, but not really surprising. A story which is read bit by bit, not in a few days or weeks but over a period of several

years, gains a peculiar reality. A reader feels that he or she has been living with the characters. The special kind of reality which serial publication promotes may help to explain a narrative peculiarity in *Vanity Fair*. Toward the end of the novel, the narrator tells us that he met the main characters in the novel personally in the German town of Pumpernickel, just as you or I might meet someone on a vacation. This is certainly an extreme case of treating fictional characters as if they were real people.

It is also worth pointing out that Thackeray drew numerous illustrations for his text. (Some modern editions reproduce these in part or completely, others do not.) Some of the illustrations have the effect of providing yet another layer of commentary on the action of the novel. The final full-page picture, for instance, gives a version of Dobbin and Amelia happening upon Becky at the charity bazaar which is different in detail from the description of the meeting in the novel itself. Amelia's little daughter seems to want to buy something from Becky in the drawing, whereas in the novel what is described is 'the Colonel seizing up his little Janey' and presumably hustling her away.

A more striking example of the importance of Thackeray's drawings involves Jos's death. Thackeray strengthens the hint that Becky may have murdered Jos with an illustration entitled 'Becky's second appearance in the character of Clytemnestra', which depicts Becky grimly clutching something (is it poison?) in her hand, as she hides behind a curtain and overhears the conversation in which Jos begs Dobbin to come to live near him and protect him from her. In Greek legend, Clytemnestra murdered her husband Agamemnon. Becky's first appearance in the role occurs during a set of elaborate charades performed at one of Lord Steyne's parties.

Vanity Fair first appeared in book form in 1848. There was a revised version in 1853, and it has been reprinted many times since.

When *Vanity Fair* first appeared, some readers were surprised at its depth and seriousness. They were more familiar with Thackeray as a writer of comic prose and a satirist who pointed out some of the absurdities and weaknesses of his society. His early works are full of literary parody, in which he mimics and makes fun of the styles of other authors. Some of this side of Thackeray can be seen in *Vanity Fair* itself. He begins Chapter 6, which describes the trip to Vauxhall, with comments on how different kinds of popular novelists might handle the material he is about to present. Our early glimpses of Sir Pitt Crawley are also particularly amusing if we recognise certain literary conventions and stereotypes which Thackeray is parodying. Becky

mistakes Sir Pitt for a porter because of his slovenly dress and vulgar accent. He is certainly not, as Becky remarks in one of her letters to Amelia Sedley, the sort of nobleman who appears in many eighteenth-century novels, since he is neither young, polite, generous, nor handsome. Further parody occurs in Becky's letters themselves, this time at the expense of the great eighteenth-century novelist Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), who invented the 'epistolatory novel' (a novel in which the narration takes the form of letters). In a famous scene in Richardson's first work, *Pamela*, the heroine breaks off her letter abruptly and then resumes to write that a wicked nobleman has just interrupted her as she was writing in her bedroom and made sexual advances to her. Becky interrupts a letter too, but in her case the wicked nobleman has burst into her room for a purpose that is not sexual but economic. Sir Pitt makes her put out her candle, since candles cost money.

These early scenes provide comic entertainment. But as the novel progresses, Thackeray's reference to other works of literature ceases to be mere parody and becomes a serious criticism. In the scene in which Dobbin tells Amelia that she is unworthy of him, Thackeray does not simply upset our conventional expectations about how men and women in novels act, he asks us to consider how such conventional feelings and ideals may have helped to *make* Amelia unworthy of Dobbin—or may distort our own values. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray comes into his own: he becomes a profound commentator on society and on life.

A note on the text

Vanity Fair appeared in twenty separately published monthly parts, the last two issued together, from January 1847 to July 1848; included were thirty-eight full-page drawings and numerous smaller drawings and decorations, drawn by Thackeray himself. The novel first appeared in book form in 1848 and a revised version in 1853, published by Bradbury and Evans, London. Two carefully annotated, reliably edited texts of *Vanity Fair* with good introductions are presently available in paperback, one edited by J. I. M. Stewart, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968, the other edited by Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1963. The Tillotson edition contains all of Thackeray's full-page illustrations and a few of his smaller drawings; the Stewart edition has only one but gives very full notes. For a look at all of the drawings, the student should consult one of the better collected editions of Thackeray's works, such as the one edited by George Saintsbury, Oxford University Press, London, 1908. The text used in the preparation of these notes has been the edition by J. I. M. Stewart, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968.

Part 2

Summaries

of VANITY FAIR

A general summary

Vanity Fair follows the lives of two schoolmates, Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley. Amelia comes from a well-to-do family. She is simple, gentle, and loving. Becky is intelligent, energetic, resilient, and poor. As soon as she leaves school, Becky begins a series of attempts to reach social eminence and financial security. She tries to ensnare Amelia's brother Jos as a husband, but fails. Then she becomes a governess in the family of Sir Pitt Crawley, making herself so agreeable that Sir Pitt finally proposes to her. Unfortunately for Becky she had already secretly married Sir Pitt's younger son, Rawdon, who is an army officer. When the family learn of this, Rawdon is disinherited.

Amelia meanwhile has spent her time dreaming about the day when she will marry George Osborne; they have been promised to each other for years. But Mr Sedley's business fails, the family is reduced to poverty, and old Mr Osborne forbids the marriage. George, who is selfish and unworthy of Amelia's love, seems ready to agree with his father, but his friend and fellow army officer William Dobbin persuades him to act more honourably. George marries Amelia, and his father promptly disinherits him.

The two young couples meet in Brussels, where the English army has arrived to fight Napoleon. Becky flirts with George, who is so infatuated with her that he writes her a letter begging her to run off with him. But the Battle of Waterloo intervenes, and he is killed.

Amelia returns to England, where she gives birth to a son. Her financial situation grows so precarious that she is forced to hand over her young son, George, to his grandfather, old Mr Osborne. He still refuses to have anything to do with her, except to support her and her parents. Becky meanwhile has succeeded in climbing to the top of the social ladder in London. She still does not have any money, but her wit and charm attract the powerful nobleman Lord Steyne, from whom she obtains money and an entrée into the highest society. Her husband Rawdon does not realise that she has been taking money from Steyne. One day Rawdon is arrested for debt, and Becky does nothing to help him. He is able to gain his freedom anyway, and returns home that

evening only to find Steyne and Becky alone together. Rawdon strikes down Steyne as he tries to leave, and vows never to see Becky again. Steyne also never forgives her for this scene. She is a ruined woman. An outcast from English society, she goes to the Continent, where she moves from place to place in search of a social set that will accept her.

As Becky's fortunes fall, Amelia's rise. Her brother Jos had been in India; now he returns and supports Amelia and her parents in a grand style. Old Osborne dies, and Amelia's son George is restored to her. William Dobbin has been in love with Amelia for years, but she refuses to marry him, thinking that she should remain faithful to her dead husband.

Jos, Amelia, and Dobbin take a trip to the Continent, where they happen to meet Becky. She reveals that George had wanted to run off with her before Waterloo. Amelia now realises that George was not worthy of her devotion, and she feels free to marry Dobbin. They return to England, but Jos stays behind. Becky is soon able to gain complete control over him and his finances. He dies, and Becky returns to England, using Jos's money to gain at least a semi-respectable place in society.

The title

Thackeray takes his title from *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), an allegory by John Bunyan (1628–88), which describes a physical journey that stands for man's spiritual journey through life. In this work, 'Vanity Fair' is in literal terms a fair, a place where goods are sold and people are entertained. In allegorical terms, 'Vanity Fair' stands for human society, with its vain concern for pleasure and material objects, the things which one goes to a fair to obtain. This, Thackeray would seem to be saying, is the sort of world his characters inhabit.

Detailed summaries

Chapter 1: Chiswick Mall

Vanity Fair opens as two of the novel's principal characters are about to leave school and enter the adult world, the 'Vanity Fair' of the novel's title. Amelia Sedley is the daughter of a prosperous London merchant. Everyone connected with the boarding school is sorry to see her go. She is gentle, good-natured, pretty, easily moved to tears, and moderately intelligent. She embodies, in short, one nineteenth-century ideal of femininity.

The other girl who is leaving Miss Pinkerton's academy is very different from Amelia Sedley. Becky Sharp was not a fee-paying student. Instead, she was a kind of servant. An orphan whose father used to give drawing lessons for Miss Pinkerton's pupils before he died, Becky was allowed food, lodging, some tuition, and a very small salary in return for speaking French with the younger girls in the school. (She learned the language from her French mother, who had been an opera dancer, a very disreputable profession in the nineteenth century.) Amelia has invited Becky home with her for a short visit before Becky becomes a governess to a noble family.

Thackeray uses the action of the opening chapters to throw into sharp relief the difference between Becky and Amelia. The most graphic example of this involves Johnson's *Dictionary*, the book which Miss Pinkerton traditionally gives to her pupils when they leave the academy. Miss Pinkerton presents the *Dictionary* to Amelia, who accepts it gratefully. She offers nothing to Becky Sharp. Miss Pinkerton loathes Becky, who had earlier refused to teach music at the academy unless she was paid extra for doing so. Becky hates Miss Pinkerton because she values her students according to their financial means, not their intelligence, which puts Becky at the bottom of the scale. Becky has revenged herself on Miss Pinkerton in a variety of ways, among them by speaking French to her. The old lady cannot understand the language, but is embarrassed to admit it.

It is no surprise, then, that Miss Pinkerton does not even consider giving Becky her traditional parting gift of Johnson's *Dictionary*. But Miss Pinkerton has a sister, the kindly, rather stupid Jemima Pinkerton, who is naive enough to think that poor Becky will be crushed if she does not receive the book. Jemima first tries to persuade her sister to give the *Dictionary* to Becky. Of course she fails, but her misdirected, admirable, amusing concern for Becky's feelings causes her to summon up enough courage to steal a copy from her sister's office. She gives it to Becky on the sly, as Becky enters the coach that will carry her and Amelia to Amelia's home. Becky's response is typical. While Amelia is filled with warm, happy thoughts about Miss Pinkerton's academy and her years there, Becky defiantly flings the *Dictionary* back into the courtyard as the coach drives away.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

- Semiramis:** a wise Assyrian princess; the comparison is meant to belittle Miss Pinkerton
- Dr Johnson:** eminent man of letters (1709-84); published his *Dictionary* in 1755
- Mrs Chapone:** (1727-1801) wrote a work on education

12 · Summaries

- Mrs Billington:** a famous opera singer of the day. Throughout *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray refers to singers, dancers, actors, boxers, and the like who were active during the times in which the novel is set
- round-hand:** a style of handwriting taught at schools

Chapter 2: In which Miss Sharp and Miss Sedley Prepare to Open the Campaign

As the carriage rolls on, Becky's excitement at having openly defied Miss Pinkerton leads her to another expression of social defiance. When she screams out '*Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!*', she is being very daring indeed, since, as the narrator tells us, during the time in which the novel is set, England was engaged in a war with Napoleon, who was viewed by conservative public opinion as the devil himself. Becky's enthusiasm is primarily motivated by a desire to be as shocking and rebellious as possible, but her outburst also has a larger significance. Becky wants to be a kind of Napoleon herself: she wants to scale the social heights as he has scaled the political heights. The parallel has its ironies. For all his lowly origins and republican beginnings, Napoleon at last threw his lot in with the upper classes and became an Emperor. For all her rebelliousness, it is clear enough that Becky will have to achieve her rise in a similar way. She has already started on this path by getting herself invited to Amelia's home as well as coercing Miss Pinkerton into finding her a job as a governess in an aristocratic family.

Thus as the two girls leave Miss Pinkerton's academy, they entertain very different thoughts. Amelia feels sad to have left her friends, but is also excited to be entering a new life. Becky is less sentimental. Her principal concern, now and throughout the novel, is to be sure that she takes advantage of every opportunity to climb the social ladder and escape her poverty and dependence on the whims of others.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

- Dr Raine:** Headmaster of Charterhouse 1791–1811
- 'Vive la France! . . .'** (*French*) Long live France! Long live the Emperor!
Long live Bonaparte!
- Mr Lawrence:** Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830) was a famous painter, as was Benjamin West (1738–1820)
- Minerva:** Greek goddess of wisdom, ironically compared to Miss Pinkerton

Chapter 3: Rebecca is in Presence of the Enemy

For a girl in Becky Sharp's position, the only practical way to better her status is to find a man who is willing to marry her and to rise by means of him. Becky has attempted this feat once already in her short life, with a young clergyman who visited Miss Pinkerton's academy. She nearly succeeded, but Miss Pinkerton discovered and put a stop to the budding affair. A second chance presents itself to Becky when she arrives at Amelia's home, in the bulky figure of Amelia's brother Joseph (or Jos) Sedley, home on leave from his job in the East India Company's civil service in India. Becky decides to ensnare him. Jos, however, is a coward, especially where women are concerned. Capturing *him*, the narrator tells us, will be no easy task even for Becky.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

Billingsgate: London fish-market

bon-vivant: (*French*) one who enjoys good food and drink

Chapter 4: The Green Silk Purse

Becky nearly succeeds in her aim; she makes Jos believe that she is fascinated by him and by India. In general, Becky is on her best behaviour with the Sedleys, smiling in return for Mr Sedley's crude practical jokes, ingratiating herself with Mrs Sedley and even with the servants, refusing to be separated from Amelia when Amelia falls ill one afternoon. Perhaps her most cunning ploy is to sing a mournful song about a poor orphan about to leave her friends. She seems so emotionally affected that she cannot finish the song. The Sedleys remember that she is an orphan, and her stay with them is extended.

While all of this is going on, we learn about another love affair. Amelia and George Osborne have been intended for each other by their parents since the two of them were children, and they are very much in love—at least Amelia is in love with George. George is mainly in love with himself, as Becky Sharp with her quick intelligence realises from seeing him glance at himself approvingly in the mirror.

Jos is almost on the point of proposing to Becky, who gives him every opportunity to do so, but he cannot quite bring himself to take such a dramatic step. Then a trip for the two couples is planned. They will visit Vauxhall, the London park where Jos decides he will propose to Becky.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

Exeter 'Change: Exeter Exchange, where there was a circus noted for its elephant

- Boney:** derisive British name for Napoleon
a grand allegorical title: George is thinking of books which depict on their title-pages allegorical figures, such as a woman meant to represent Truth or Virtue
mahout: elephant driver
***Sehnsucht nach der Liebe:* (German)** 'longing for love'
after Cutchery: after Jos has come home for the day from his duties as an Indian magistrate
tiffin: (*Anglo-Indian*) luncheon

Chapter 5: Dobbin of Ours

Will the timid Jos actually propose to Becky? For the moment, Thackeray leaves us in suspense. He breaks the narrative line to introduce a major character whom we have not yet encountered, William Dobbin, and to give us additional insight into George Osborne's character. Thackeray goes back in time to describe the lives of the two men at school. Dobbin was an awkward boy, whom the other students despised for his low class status. His father was a tradesman, and he paid for Dobbin's schooling not with money but with goods. This seemed unspeakably vulgar to the other students, who were sons of gentlemen and in some cases of the nobility.

Dobbin had a miserable time at school until a dramatic event took place. For some reason, he was fond of George Osborne. One day, the most influential and respected boy in the school (who was also a bit of a bully and tyrannised over younger, weaker boys), was in the process of beating George, who had displeased him. Dobbin became enraged and challenged the bully to a fist fight. To the amazement of all, he won, and from that time his situation in the school changed completely. Where he had been jeered at, now he was respected and well treated.

George Osborne's part in the whole affair is revealing. He, it turns out, was the one who had originally let the other boys know that Dobbin's fees were paid in goods and not in money. He was initially embarrassed to have a lower-class boy defend him; after Dobbin became popular, George patronised him and condescended to him. Dobbin for his part continued to idolise George for no very clear reason; so do most other people, including George's own family and Amelia Sedley.

In the years that have passed since his schooldays, Dobbin's social position has altered greatly. His father has become rich and been knighted. Dobbin himself has entered the army, and George Osborne is a member of the same army unit.