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## FICTION

THE HISTORY OF HENRY ESMOND  
BY WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY  
INTRODUCTION BY WALTER JERROLD

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

"HERE is the best I can do. . . . I stand by this book, and am willing to leave it where I go, as my card." Such were the words which Thackeray himself used about the book which is familiarly known as *Esmond*, but the full title of which runs *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne. Written by Himself*. Upwards of half a century has gone by since the story was first published—printed, in three volumes, in Queen Anne style—and in that period the author's most optimistic estimate of the work has been endorsed by many critics.

This novel stands in a measure somewhat apart from the ranks of ordinary historical fiction, owing to the fact that it is not only a story about the past, but in that it is a story about the past successfully cast in autobiographical form. The author, in other words, is not telling a tale about bygone days and people, but he is setting it forth as the narrative of a man who has lived in those bygone days, and is one of those bygone people. Its success is, of course, all the more remarkable. The author had so thoroughly steeped himself in the very atmosphere—so far as such can be recovered from the written word—that he was able to make it a part of his book without any sense of artificiality. In the elaborate title, and in the dedicatory letter, the period of Queen Anne is first suggested, and throughout the book the local colour—to apply that term to time as well as to place—is rendered with peculiar nicety. Too often the writer who seeks to write as though his pen was guided by a brain that thought in the past is contented with expressing himself more or less in language borrowed from that time, in using archaisms in spelling and in phraseology, but Thackeray had so imbued himself with the thought of the time when he was preparing his *Lectures on the Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, that he was able to write in what has been termed an "essentially false style" without the slightest air of affectation.

The extent to which Thackeray set himself to reproduce the diction of the time of which he wrote has been both

under-estimated and over-estimated—one critic suggesting that he laboriously adhered to early eighteenth-century phraseology, another declaring that he did nothing of the kind, and this with the story in front of them to prove neither extreme wholly in the right.

Closely as Thackeray kept to an eighteenth-century model, there are not wanting in the work one or two anachronisms, certain perversions of history, and some slips. There is a reference (Book I., chap. ii.) to "Lady Dorchester, Tom Killigrew's daughter, whom the King delighted to honour"; but that "ill-favoured Esther" was the daughter, not of the wit and dramatist Killigrew, but of the better-known courtier, wit and dramatist, Sir Charles Sedley. Then again the reference to *The Adventures of Peter Wilkins* (Book III., chap. iv.) antedates that story, which was first published in 1751, by nearly forty years. Another curious slip is that whereas in the preface we are told that Rachel Esmond died before her twin grandchildren were twelve months old, those grandchildren are supposed to append a footnote to Henry Esmond's narrative (Book II., chap. xv.) in which they say, "Our grandmother used to tell us children," etc. It may perhaps be worth noting, too, that the Duke of Hamilton, who is on the eve of marriage with Beatrix when he falls in his duel with Mohun, was a few years older than Thackeray makes him, that he had already been married a second time in 1693, and that his widow survived him some thirty-two years.

*Esmond* is generally accepted as one of the very best of historical novels—far and away ahead, in the manner in which it represents its period, of much that masquerades under that guise merely because it has suited an author's fancy to make historical persons play their part in his story. Apart from "atmosphere" resulting from such a particularly successful combination of language, style, and contemporary references, we have in *Esmond* a number of notable persons of history taking their part and adding to, or detracting from the illusion somewhat according to the readers' point of view. The story of Henry Esmond himself—his love for his kinswoman Beatrix, his noble renunciation, his final union with Beatrix's mother; these things are, of course, the stuff of romance pure and simple, though it is that romance so true to life and character that it might be the representation of actualities. It is in the working out of that romance that we have the introduction of several notable historical characters,

and Thackeray has been taken to task, firstly for introducing, and secondly for his manner of portraying them. The justification of the introduction is, of course, according to the measure of success, and that success depends to a certain extent upon point of view. Henry Esmond is to be taken as writing of things as he saw them, and when he vilifies the Duke of Marlborough—to take a single instance—it is well to remember that he is only expressing opinions and making statements which were assuredly current at the time. For the purpose of the romance the hero is made an officer of General Webb's, and it is only natural that when years later in his Virginian home he wrote his life-story, he should express himself as a partisan. The victor of Blenheim did not by any means escape criticism during his lifetime, and such criticism is perfectly admissible in a story reflecting the life and thought of his period. The hero of Wynendael, General John Richmond Webb, under whom Henry Esmond served on the Continent, was a relative of the Colonel Richmond Webb whose daughter was grandmother of the novelist.

The period in which the active part of Henry Esmond's career is set—from the time when we meet him as a lonely lad twelve years of age to the time when he leaves with his lady for Virginia—extends from 1691 to 1718, so that it covers the whole of the reign of Queen Anne, with the latter portion of her predecessor's reign and the earlier portion of that of her successor. Later Thackeray took up the thread of the eighteenth century in his *Virginians*, and while at work on it he declared it to be "devilish stupid, but at the same time most admirable; but that he intended to write a novel of the time of Henry V., which would be his *capo d'opera*, in which the ancestors of all his present characters, Warringtons, Pendennises and the rest, should be introduced. It would be a most magnificent performance, he said, and nobody would read it." As it was, Thackeray did not take any of his families further back than the days of Queen Anne, a time which had such a peculiar fascination for him that he contemplated writing a history of it.

It has been said that this romance of *Esmond* rose out of the close reading in which Thackeray engaged when preparing his lectures on the eighteenth-century humourists. When finishing *Pendennis* he wrote to a friend saying, "I've got a better subject for a novel than any I've yet had," and that subject was no doubt Henry Esmond. The novel was

written during 1851 and the early part of 1852, largely in circumstances scarcely conducive, it might have been thought, to success in so delicate a piece of work; for it was penned partly at the author's club, partly while going about on a lecturing tour, partly during brief visits to the country, and partly in the British Museum.

The work was completed in the early summer of 1852, for at the beginning of June Edward FitzGerald wrote to a friend saying: "Thackeray I saw for ten minutes: he was just in the agony of finishing a Novel: which has arisen out of the Reading necessary for his Lectures and relates to those Times—of Queen Anne, I mean. He will get £1000 for his Novel." The completion of the story was marked by the author's giving an informal dinner to a few friends to celebrate the event, and it was published in the autumn of the same year just as he was on the point of sailing for America.

The author himself had varying opinions as to the merit of his book, now, as we have seen, looking upon it as his best achievement, now describing it as a "dull, tiresome, well-written book," and again stigmatising his hero as a prig. It may be that there is a certain measure of apparent priggishness in Henry Esmond, but such is more or less necessary when a hero tells his own story. Delightful character as he is, it is not on account of his personality that his "history" maintains its close hold on readers; it is rather on account of the sweet humanity of the whole, the very real way in which a remarkable period of our history is made to live as it might in the pages of a contemporary chronicler who, while showing us the men and women with whom and the events amid which he lived, is able to interweave a deeply interesting romantic story. It is not too much to say that the reader of *Esmond* has impressed upon his mind a picture of the social life of England as it was at the beginning of the eighteenth century, fuller than he would get from the reading of a dozen books professedly giving the history of the time; he has the spirit of scores of such works brought to a focus, so to speak, and novel though it is, the story might well be read as an introduction to the social, literary, and political history of the time. If Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Jonathan Swift are presented without flattery, the reader must recall that they are presented as though by a man who can, of course, only know them within the limits of scanty personal knowledge.

A great change had come over the life of England at the

time to which *Esmond* belongs—the great political parties had come into being, political pamphleteering was a new development of the printing press, periodical literature was making a remarkable beginning, so that the end of Queen Anne's reign of a dozen years seems far removed from the early times of William of Orange—yet the period is a decade less than that which separates us from the Franco-Prussian war. This period of change, of a time when the constitutional monarchy and all it stood for was becoming solidified in England and having its effect on English life, is finely represented in this story, and that although, as it has been pointed out, the author never forgot that he was novelist and not historian. The story gives us historical atmosphere, historical effect, but never to the extent of interfering with the story itself.

Though *Esmond* has thus its real value as a work giving the spirit of history, not its word, and though it is a romance which has gone on gaining popularity, yet there have not been wanting critics who found it unpleasant. The unconventionality of the romance still annoys some readers as it annoyed two distinguished women who were both writers of fiction. George Eliot described *Esmond* as "the most uncomfortable book you can imagine," and Mary Russell Mitford said she thought the book "painful and unpleasant, and false—I mean the love story," and again, "all that love story in *Esmond* is detestable; and, which is still worse, the book seems to me long and tedious." It is well that Thackeray did not have to depend upon these among his fellow fiction-writers for his meed of fame. Charlotte Brontë proved herself a truer critic when she declared, after reading the first portion, "If the continuance be an improvement upon the commencement, if the stream gather force as it rolls, Thackeray will triumph." Thackeray has triumphed, and in this story we not only have the best historical novel dealing with its particular period, but we have by general consent one of the best of all the novels in which the past has been re-created.

WALTER JERROLD.

The following is a list of the published writings of W. M. Thackeray:

The Snob: a Literary and Scientific Journal, not conducted by members of the University, 1829; Elizabeth Brounrigge: a Tale in Two Books (*Fraser*), 1832; Flore et Zephyr: Ballet Mythologique, 1836; The Paris Sketch-Book (includes contributions to *National Standard*, *New Monthly*, *Fraser* and *Corsair*), 1840; Essay on the Genius of George Cruikshank (from *Westminster Review*), 1840; Sketches by Spec: No. 1—Britannia protecting the Drama, 1840; Captain Rook and Mr. Pigeon (Heads of the People), 1840; The Fashionable Authoress; The Artist (ditto), 1841; Comic Tales and Sketches (from *Fraser*—"Yellowplush Papers"—*New Monthly*, *Bentley's Miscellany*, *Cruikshank's Comic Almanack*), 1841; The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond (*Fraser*), 1841, republished 1849; The Second Funeral of Napoleon (in three letters to Miss Smith of London), and Chronicle of the Drum, 1841; The Irish Sketch-Book, 1843; The Luck of Barry Lyndon: a Romance of the Last Century (*Fraser*), 1844, republished *Miscellanies*, 1856; Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Cairo, etc., 1846; Mrs. Perkins's Ball, 1847; Vanity Fair: a Novel without a Hero (monthly numbers, 1847-8); The Book of Snobs (from *Punch*), 1848; Our Street, 1848; The History of Pendennis: his Fortunes and Misfortunes, his Friends and his Greatest Enemy (monthly numbers, 1848-50); Dr. Birch and his Young Friends, 1849; Rebecca and Rowena: a Romance upon Romance (with additions, from *Fraser*), 1850; Sketches after English Landscape Painters, by S. Marcy, with Notices by Thackeray, 1850; The Kickleburys on the Rhine, 1850 (2nd edition with essay "On Thunder and Small Beer," 1851); The History of Henry Esmond, Esq., a Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne, written by himself, 1852; Preface to a Collection of Papers from *Punch*, 1852; The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century, 1853; The Newcomes: Memoirs of a most Respectable Family edited by Arthur Pendennis, Esq. (monthly numbers, 1853-5); The Rose and the Ring, or the History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo: a Fireside Pantomime, etc., 1855; *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (includes former publications and other items from *Comic Almanack*, *Punch*—"Diary of Jeames de la Pluche," "Sketches and Travels in London," etc.—*Fraser*—"Barry Lyndon," "Going to see a Man Hanged," "Fitzboodle Papers," etc.—*Cruikshank's Table-book*), 1855; Ballads (collected edition), 1855; The Virginians: a Tale of the Last Century (monthly parts, 1857-9); Lovel the Widower (from *Cornhill*), 1861; The Four Georges (from *Cornhill*), 1861; The Adventures of Philip on his way through the World: showing who robbed him, who helped him, and who passed him by (from *Cornhill*), 1862; Roundabout Papers (from *Cornhill*), 1863.

POSTHUMOUS.—Denis Duval (from *Cornhill*), 1863; The Orphan of Pimlico, and other Sketches, etc., 1876; A Collection of Letters, 1847-55 (from *Scribner*), 1887; Sultan Stork (from *Ainsworth's Magazine*) and other Stories, now first collected, 1887; Loose Sketches: an Eastern Adventure (from *The Britannia* and *Punch's Pocket-book*) 1894. First Collective Edition (22 vols.), 1867-9; Biographical Edition, with Introduction to each volume by Mrs. Richmond Ritchie (13 vols.), 1898-9; The Collective Editions contain further contributions to *Punch*, *Fraser*, *Quarterly Review*, and other items.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
*WILLIAM BINGHAM, LORD ASHBURTON.*

MY DEAR LORD

The writer of a book which copies the manners and language of Queen Anne's time, must not omit the Dedication to the Patron; and I ask leave to inscribe this volume to your Lordship, for the sake of the great kindness and friendship which I owe to you and yours.

My volume will reach you when the Author is on his voyage to a country where your name is as well known as here. Wherever I am, I shall gratefully regard you; and shall not be the less welcomed in America because I am

Your obliged friend and servant,

W. M. THACKERAY.

LONDON, *October 18, 1852.*



# PREFACE

## *THE ESMONDS OF VIRGINIA*

THE estate of Castlewood, in Virginia, which was given to our ancestors by King Charles the First, as some return for the sacrifices made in His Majesty's cause by the Esmond family, lies in Westmoreland county, between the rivers Potomac and Rappahannoc, and was once as great as an English Principality, though in the early times its revenues were but small. Indeed, for near eighty years after our forefathers possessed them, our plantations were in the hands of factors, who enriched themselves one after another, though a few scores of hogsheads of tobacco were all the produce that, for long after the Restoration, our family received from their Virginian estates.

My dear and honoured father, Colonel Henry Esmond, whose history, written by himself, is contained in the accompanying volumes, came to Virginia in the year 1718, built his house of Castlewood, and here permanently settled. After a long stormy life in England, he passed the remainder of his many years in peace and honour in this country; how beloved and respected by all his fellow-citizens, how inexpressibly dear to his family, I need not say. His whole life was a benefit to all who were connected with him. He gave the best example, the best advice, the most bounteous hospitality to his friends; the tenderest care to his dependants; and bestowed on those of his immediate family such a blessing of fatherly love and protection as can never be thought of, by us, at least, without veneration and thankfulness; and my son's children, whether established here in our Republic, or at home in the always beloved mother country, from which our late quarrel hath separated us, may surely be proud to be descended from one who in all ways was so truly noble.

My dear mother died in 1736, soon after our return from England, whither my parents took me for my education; and where I made the acquaintance of Mr. Warrington, whom my children never saw. When it pleased Heaven, in the bloom of his youth, and after but a few months of a most happy union, to remove him from me, I owed my recovery from the grief

which that calamity caused me, mainly to my dearest father's tenderness, and then to the blessing vouchsafed to me in the birth of my two beloved boys. I know the fatal differences which separated them in politics never disunited their hearts; and as I can love them both, whether wearing the King's colours or the Republic's, I am sure that they love me and one another, and him above all, my father and theirs, the dearest friend of their childhood, the noble gentleman who bred them from their infancy in the practice and knowledge of Truth, and Love, and Honour.

My children will never forget the appearance and figure of their revered grandfather; and I wish I possessed the art of drawing (which my papa had in perfection), so that I could leave to our descendants a portrait of one who was so good and so respected. My father was of a dark complexion, with a very great forehead and dark hazel eyes, overhung by eyebrows which remained black long after his hair was white. His nose was aquiline, his smile extraordinary sweet. How well I remember it, and how little any description I can write can recall his image! He was of rather low stature, not being above five feet seven inches in height; he used to laugh at my sons, whom he called his crutches, and say they were grown too tall for him to lean upon. But small as he was, he had a perfect grace and majesty of deportment, such as I have never seen in this country, except perhaps in our friend Mr. Washington, and commanded respect wherever he appeared.

In all bodily exercises he excelled, and showed an extraordinary quickness and agility. Of fencing he was especially fond, and made my two boys proficient in that art; so much so that when the French came to this country with Monsieur Rochambeau, not one of his officers was superior to my Henry, and he was not the equal of my poor George, who had taken the King's side in our lamentable but glorious War of Independence.

Neither my father nor my mother ever wore powder in their hair; both their heads were as white as silver, as I can remember them. My dear mother possessed to the last an extraordinary brightness and freshness of complexion; nor would people believe that she did not wear rouge. At sixty years of age she still looked young, and was quite agile. It was not until after that dreadful siege of our house by the Indians, which left me a widow ere I was a mother, that my dear mother's health broke. She never recovered her terror

and anxiety of those days, which ended so fatally for me, then a bride scarce six months married, and died in my father's arms ere my own year of widowhood was over.

From that day, until the last of his dear and honoured life, it was my delight and consolation to remain with him as his comforter and companion; and from those little notes which my mother hath made here and there in the volume in which my father describes his adventures in Europe, I can well understand the extreme devotion with which she regarded him—a devotion so passionate and exclusive as to prevent her, I think, from loving any other person except with an inferior regard; her whole thoughts being centred on this one object of affection and worship. I know that, before her, my dear father did not show the love which he had for her daughter; and in her last and most sacred moments, this dear and tender parent owned to me her repentance that she had not loved me enough; her jealousy even that my father should give his affection to any but herself; and in the most fond and beautiful words of affection and admonition, she bade me never to leave him, and to supply the place which she was quitting. With a clear conscience, and a heart inexpressibly thankful, I think I can say that I fulfilled those dying commands, and that until his last hour my dearest father never had to complain that his daughter's love and fidelity failed him.

And it is since I knew him entirely—for during my mother's life he never quite opened himself to me—since I knew the value and splendour of that affection which he bestowed upon me, that I have come to understand and pardon what, I own, used to anger me in my mother's life-time, her jealousy respecting her husband's love. 'Twas a gift so precious, that no wonder she who had it was for keeping it all, and could part with none of it, even to her daughter.

Though I never heard my father use a rough word, 'twas extraordinary with how much awe his people regarded him; and the servants on our plantation, both those assigned from England and the purchased negroes, obeyed him with an eagerness such as the most severe taskmasters round about us could never get from their people. He was never familiar, though perfectly simple and natural; he was the same with the meanest man as with the greatest, and as courteous to a black slave-girl as to the Governor's wife. No one ever thought of taking a liberty with him (except once a tipsy gentleman from York, and I am bound to own that my papa never for-

gave him): he set the humblest people at once on their ease with him, and brought down the most arrogant by a grave satiric way, which made persons exceedingly afraid of him. His courtesy was not put on like a Sunday suit, and laid by when the company went away; it was always the same; as he was always dressed the same, whether for a dinner by ourselves or for a great entertainment. They say he liked to be the first in his company; but what company was there in which he would not be first? When I went to Europe for my education, and we passed a winter at London with my half-brother, my Lord Castlewood and his second lady, I saw at Her Majesty's Court some of the most famous gentlemen of those days; and I thought to myself none of these are better than my papa; and the famous Lord Bolingbroke, who came to us from Dawley, said as much, and that the men of that time were not like those of his youth:—"Were your father, Madam," he said, "to go into the woods, the Indians would elect him Sachem"; and his Lordship was pleased to call me Pocahontas.

I did not see our other relative, Bishop Tusher's lady, of whom so much is said in my papa's Memoirs—although my mamma went to visit her in the country. I have no pride (as I showed by complying with my mother's request, and marrying a gentleman who was but the younger son of a Suffolk Baronet), yet I own to a *decent respect* for my name, and wonder how one who ever bore it should change it for that of Mrs. Thomas Tusher. I pass over as odious and unworthy of credit those reports (which I heard in Europe, and was then too young to understand), how this person, having *left her family* and fled to Paris, out of jealousy of the Pretender betrayed his secrets to my Lord Stair, King George's ambassador, and nearly caused the Prince's death there; how she came to England and married this Mr. Tusher, and became a great favourite of King George the Second, by whom Mr. Tusher was made a Dean, and then a Bishop. I did not see the lady, who chose to remain *at her palace* all the time we were in London; but after visiting her, my poor mamma said she had lost all her good looks, and warned me not to set too much store by any such gifts which nature had bestowed upon me. She grew exceedingly stout; and I remember my brother's wife, Lady Castlewood, saying: "No wonder she became a favourite, for the King likes them old and ugly, as his father did before him." On which papa said: "All women

were alike; that there was never one so beautiful as that one; and that we could forgive her everything but her beauty." And hereupon my mamma looked vexed, and my Lord Castlewood began to laugh; and I, of course, being a young creature, could not understand what was the subject of their conversation.

After the circumstances narrated in the third book of these Memoirs, my father and mother both went abroad, being advised by their friends to leave the country in consequence of the transactions which are recounted at the close of the volume of the Memoirs. But my brother, hearing how the *future Bishop's lady* had quitted Castlewood and joined the Pretender at Paris, pursued him, and would have killed him, Prince as he was, had not the Prince managed to make his escape. On his expedition to Scotland directly after, Castlewood was so enraged against him that he asked leave to serve as a volunteer, and join the Duke of Argyle's army in Scotland, which the Pretender never had the courage to face, and thenceforth my Lord was quite reconciled to the present reigning family, from whom he hath even received promotion.

Mrs. Tusher was by this time as angry against the Pretender as any of her relations could be, and used to boast, as I have heard, that she not only brought back my Lord to the Church of England, but procured the English peerage for him, which the *junior branch* of our family at present enjoys. She was a great friend of Sir Robert Walpole, and would not rest until her husband slept at Lambeth, my papa used laughing to say. However, the Bishop died of apoplexy suddenly, and his wife erected a great monument over him; and the pair sleep under that stone, with a canopy of marble clouds and angels above them—the first Mrs. Tusher lying sixty miles off at Castlewood.

But my papa's genius and education are both greater than any a woman can be expected to have, and his adventures in Europe far more exciting than his life in this country, which was passed in the tranquil offices of love and duty; and I shall say no more by way of introduction to his Memoirs, nor keep my children from the perusal of a story which is much more interesting than that of their affectionate old mother,

RACHEL ESMOND WARRINGTON.

CASTLEWOOD, VIRGINIA,  
November 3. 1778.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	12
DEDICATION . . . . .	XV
PREFACE . . . . .	XVI

## BOOK I

The early Youth of Henry Esmond, up to the Time of his leaving Trinity College, in Cambridge.

CHAP.		
I.	AN ACCOUNT OF THE FAMILY OF ESMOND OF CASTLEWOOD HALL . . . . .	6
II.	RELATES HOW FRANCIS, FOURTH VISCOUNT, ARRIVES AT CASTLEWOOD . . . . .	10
III.	WHITHER, IN THE TIME OF THOMAS, THIRD VISCOUNT, I HAD PRECEDED HIM AS PAGE TO ISABELLA . . . . .	18
IV.	I AM PLACED UNDER A POPISH PRIEST AND BRED TO THAT RELIGION—VISCOUNTESS CASTLEWOOD . . . . .	28
V.	MY SUPERIORS ARE ENGAGED IN PLOTS FOR THE RESTORATION OF KING JAMES THE SECOND . . . . .	34
VI.	THE ISSUES OF THE PLOTS—THE DEATH OF THOMAS, THIRD VISCOUNT OF CASTLEWOOD; AND THE IMPRISONMENT OF HIS VISCOUNTESS . . . . .	44
VII.	I AM LEFT AT CASTLEWOOD AN ORPHAN, AND FIND MOST KIND PROTECTORS THERE . . . . .	57
VIII.	AFTER GOOD FORTUNE COMES EVIL . . . . .	64
IX.	I HAVE THE SMALL-POX, AND PREPARE TO LEAVE CASTLEWOOD . . . . .	73
X.	I GO TO CAMBRIDGE, AND DO BUT LITTLE GOOD THERE . . . . .	90
XI.	I COME HOME FOR A HOLIDAY TO CASTLEWOOD, AND FIND A SKELETON IN THE HOUSE . . . . .	97
XII.	MY LORD MOHUN COMES AMONG US FOR NO GOOD . . . . .	108
XIII.	MY LORD LEAVES US AND HIS EVIL BEHIND HIM . . . . .	117
XIV.	WE RIDE AFTER HIM TO LONDON . . . . .	129

## BOOK II

Contains Mr. Esmond's military Life, and other Matters appertaining to the Esmond Family.

I.	I AM IN PRISON, AND VISITED, BUT NOT CONSOLED THERE . . . . .	147
II.	I COME TO THE END OF MY CAPTIVITY, BUT NOT OF MY TROUBLE . . . . .	155

CHAP.	PAGE
III. I TAKE THE QUEEN'S PAY IN QUIN'S REGIMENT . . .	164
IV. RECAPITULATIONS . . . . .	172
V. I GO ON THE VIGO BAY EXPEDITION, TASTE SALT-WATER, AND SMELL POWDER. . . . .	178
VI. THE 29TH DECEMBER . . . . .	188
VII. I AM MADE WELCOME AT WALCOTE . . . . .	194
VIII. FAMILY TALK . . . . .	203
IX. I MAKE THE CAMPAIGN OF 1704 . . . . .	210
X. AN OLD STORY ABOUT A FOOL AND A WOMAN . . . . .	218
XI. THE FAMOUS MR. JOSEPH ADDISON . . . . .	227
XII. I GET A COMPANY IN THE CAMPAIGN OF 1706 . . . . .	237
XIII. I MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE IN FLANDERS, AND FIND MY MOTHER'S GRAVE AND MY OWN CRADLE THERE . . . . .	242
XIV. THE CAMPAIGN OF 1707, 1708 . . . . .	253
XV. GENERAL WEBB WINS THE BATTLE OF WYNENDAELE . . . . .	260

## BOOK III

Containing the End of Mr. Esmond's Adventures in England.

I. I COME TO AN END OF MY BATTLES AND BRUISES . . . . .	287
II. I GO HOME, AND HARP ON THE OLD STRING . . . . .	299
III. A PAPER OUT OF THE "SPECTATOR" . . . . .	312
IV. BEATRIX'S NEW SUITOR . . . . .	329
V. MOHUN APPEARS FOR THE LAST TIME IN THIS HISTORY . . . . .	339
VI. POOR BEATRIX! . . . . .	351
VII. I VISIT CASTLEWOOD ONCE MORE . . . . .	357
VIII. I TRAVEL TO FRANCE, AND BRING HOME A PORTRAIT OF RIGAUD . . . . .	366
IX. THE ORIGINAL OF THE PORTRAIT COMES TO ENGLAND . . . . .	375
X. WE ENTERTAIN A VERY DISTINGUISHED GUEST AT KENSINGTON . . . . .	388
XI. OUR GUEST QUILTS US AS NOT BEING HOSPITABLE ENOUGH . . . . .	401
XII. A GREAT SCHEME, AND WHO BAULKED IT . . . . .	410
XIII. AUGUST 1ST, 1714 . . . . .	415

## **BOOK I**

**THE EARLY YOUTH OF HENRY ESMOND, UP TO THE  
TIME OF HIS LEAVING TRINITY COLLEGE, IN  
CAMBRIDGE.**



