

OUCH! – Walter Bagehot

by Reg Green



William Thackeray

How many New English Review readers over the years, I wonder, have switched off their television set at bedtime on Sunday – the posh channel, of course – their minds full of stories from renowned novelists of proud lords, duplicitous bishops and scheming social climbers and sighed at the thought of the paltry office politics they will face in the morning? For them, Walter Bagehot, the British constitutional scholar and editor of *The Economist* in the mid-19th century, had a word of consolation. One of those novelists, William Thackeray, he says, had a compulsion to “amass petty detail to prove that tenth-rate people were ever striving to be ninth-rate.”