

THE BOOK OF SNOBS

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The Book of Snobs by W. M. Thackeray

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W. M. THACKERAY

**THE BOOK
OF SNOBS**

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546d

BY

W. M. THACKERAY,

Author of "Vanity Fair," "The Newcomes," &c.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFATORY REMARKS	1
CHAPTER I.—THE SNOB PLAYFULLY DEALT WITH	4
II.—THE SNOB ROYAL	8
III.—THE INFLUENCE OF THE ARISTOCRACY ON SNOBS	11
IV.—"THE COURT CIRCULAR," AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SNOBS	15
V.—WHAT SNOBS ADMIRE	19
VI.—ON SOME RESPECTABLE SNOBS	22
VII.—ON SOME RESPECTABLE SNOBS	25
VIII.—GREAT CITY SNOBS	30
IX.—ON SOME MILITARY SNOBS	34
X.—MILITARY SNOBS	37
XI.—ON CLERICAL SNOBS	40
XII.—ON CLERICAL SNOBS AND SNOBBISHNESS	43
XIII.—ON CLERICAL SNOBS	47
XIV.—ON UNIVERSITY SNOBS	50
XV.—ON UNIVERSITY SNOBS	54
XVI.—ON LITERARY SNOBS	57
XVII.—A LITTLE ABOUT IRISH SNOBS	60
XVIII.—PARTY-GIVING SNOBS	63
XIX.—DINING-OUT SNOBS	67
XX.—DINNER-GIVING SNOBS FURTHER CONSIDERED	71

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXI.—SOME CONTINENTAL SNOBS	76
XXII.—CONTINENTAL SNOBBERY CONTINUED	79
XXIII.—ENGLISH SNOBS ON THE CONTINENT	82
XXIV.—ON SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	86
XXV.—A VISIT TO SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	90
XXVI.—ON SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	94
XXVII.—A VISIT TO SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	98
XXVIII.—ON SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	101
XXIX.—A VISIT TO SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	108
XXX.—ON SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	109
XXXI.—A VISIT TO SOME COUNTRY SNOBS	113
XXXII.—SNOBBIUM GATHERUM	116
XXXIII.—SNOBS AND MARRIAGE	121
XXXIV.—SNOBS AND MARRIAGE	124
XXXV.—SNOBS AND MARRIAGE	128
XXXVI.—SNOBS AND MARRIAGE	133
XXXVII.—CLUB SNOBS	137
XXXVIII.—CLUB SNOBS	141
XXXIX.—CLUB SNOBS	144
XL.—CLUB SNOBS	147
XLI.—CLUB SNOBS	151
XLII.—CLUB SNOBS	153
XLIII.—CLUB SNOBS	157
XLIV.—CLUB SNOBS	161
CHAPTER LAST	164

THE BOOK OF SNOBS.

BY ONE OF THEMSELVES.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

[The necessity of a work on Snobs, demonstrated from History, and proved by felicitous illustrations:—I am the individual destined to write that work—My vocation is announced in terms of great eloquence—I show that the world has been gradually preparing itself for the work and the MAN—Snobs are to be studied like other objects of Natural Science, and are a part of the Beautiful (with a large B). They pervade all classes—Affecting instances of Colonel Snobley.]

WE have all read a statement, (the authenticity of which I take leave to doubt entirely, for upon what calculations I should like to know is it founded?)—we have all, I say, been favoured by perusing a remark, that when the times and necessities of the world call for a Man, that individual is found. Thus at the French Revolution, (which the reader will be pleased to have introduced so early) when it was requisite to administer a corrective dose to the nation, Robespierre was found a most foul and nauseous dose indeed, and swallowed eagerly by the patient, greatly to the latter's ultimate advantage: thus, when it became necessary to kick John Bull out of America, Mr. Washington stepped forward, and performed that job to satisfaction: thus when the Earl of Aldborough was unwell, Professor Holloway appeared with his pills, and cured his Lordship, as per advertisement, &c., &c. Numberless instances might be adduced to show, that when a nation is in great want, the relief is at hand, just as

in the Pantomime (that microcosm) where when *Clown* wants anything—a warming-pan, a pump-handle, a goose, or a lady's tippet—a fellow comes sauntering out from behind the side-scenes with the very article in question.

Again, when men commence an undertaking, they always are prepared to show that the absolute necessities of the world demanded its completion.—Say it is a railroad: the directors begin by stating that “A more intimate communication between Bathershins and Derrynane Beg is necessary for the advancement of civilisation, and demanded by the multitudinous acclamations of the great Irish people.” Or suppose it is a newspaper: the prospectus states that “At a time when the Church is in danger, threatened from without by savage fanaticism and miscreant unbelief, and undermined from within by dangerous Jesuitism and suicidal Schism, a Want has been universally felt—a suffering people has looked abroad—for an Ecclesiastical Champion and Guardian. A body of Prelates and Gentlemen have therefore stepped forward in this our hour of danger, and determined on establishing the Beadle newspaper,” &c., &c. But one or other of these points at least is incontrovertible. The public wants a thing, therefore it is supplied with it; or the public is supplied with a thing, therefore it wants it.

I have long gone about with a conviction on my mind that I had a work to do—a Work, if you like, with a great W; a Purpose to fulfil; a chasm to leap into, like Curtius, horse & foot; a Great Social Evil to Discover and to Remedy. That Conviction Has Pursued me for Years. It has Dogged me in the Busy Street; Seated Itself By Me in The Lonely Study; Jogged My Elbow as it Lifted The Wine-cup at The Festive Board; Pursued me through the Maze of Rotten Row; Followed me in Far Lands. On Brighton's Shingly Beach, or Margate's Sand; the Voice Outpiped the Roaring of the Sea: it Nestles in my Nightcap, and It Whispers, “Wake, Slumberer, thy Work Is Not Yet Done.” Last Year, By Moonlight, in the Colosseum; the Little Sedulous Voice Came To Me and Said, “Smith, or Jones,” (The Writer's Name is Neither Here nor There) “Smith, or Jones, my fine fellow, this is all very well, but you ought to be at home writing your great work on SNOBS.”

When a man has this sort of vocation it is all nonsense

attempting to elude it. He must speak out to the nations; he must *unbuss* himself, as Jeames would say, or choke and die. "Mark to yourself," I have often mentally exclaimed to your humble servant, "the gradual way in which you have been prepared for, and are now led by an irresistible necessity to enter upon your great labour. First the World was made: then, as a matter of course, Snobs; they existed for years and years, and were no more known than America. But presently,—*ingens patebat tellus*,—the people became darkly aware that there was such a race. Not above five-and-twenty years since, a name, an expressive monosyllable, arose to designate that race. That name has spread over England like railroads subsequently; Snobs are known and recognised throughout an Empire on which I am given to understand the Sun never sets. *Punch* appears at the ripe season, to chronicle their history: and the individual comes forth to write that history in *Punch*.*

I have (and for this gift I congratulate myself with a Deep and Abiding Thankfulness) an eye for a Snob. If the Truthful is the Beautiful: it is Beautiful to study even the Snobbish; to track Snobs through history, as certain little dogs in Hampshire hunt out truffles; to sink shafts in society and come upon rich veins of Snob-ore. Snobbishness is like Death in a quotation from Horace, which I hope you never have heard, "beating with equal foot at poor men's doors, and kicking at the gates of Emperors." It is a great mistake to judge of Snobs lightly, and think they exist among the lower classes merely. An immense per-centage of Snobs, I believe, is to be found in every rank of this mortal life. You must not judge hastily or vulgarly of Snobs: to do so shows that you are yourself a Snob. I myself have been taken for one.

When I was taking the waters at Bagnigge Wells, and living at the Imperial Hotel there, there used to sit opposite me at breakfast, for a short time, a Snob so insufferable that I felt I should never get any benefit of the waters so long as he remained. His name was Lieutenant-Colonel Snobley, of a certain dragoon regiment. He wore japanned boots and moustachios: he lisped, drawled, and left the "r's" out of his words: he was always

* These papers were originally published in that popular periodical.