

# THE SATURDAY READER.

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FIVE CENTS.

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TRANSLATED FOR THE "SATURDAY READER" FROM  
THE FRENCH OF PAUL FEVAL.

## A CHAPTER ON SNOBS.

THE late James Sheridan Knowles, who was a professor of elocution in the earlier part of his life, afterwards a dramatist of considerable merit, and who ended his days as a controversial preacher, used to say, that, when composing his theatrical productions, he carefully avoided reading Shakespeare's plays, lest he might insensibly reproduce any of their thoughts and metaphors. Whether he were wise in thus placing his intellect on half rations, it is not for us to decide; and we are led to withhold our opinion on the matter from the fact that we, ourselves, intending to take a glance at the world of snobdom, have never read Thackeray's book on the same subject, the reason being that before perusing it we lent it to a friend, who, by never returning it, demonstrated to any impartial mind that, if somewhat lax in his ideas of honesty, he at least was no snob.

We may here premise that snobism is an evil of ancient date: we could mention the names of men who stand in the front rank of history, and who, tainted with this social stain, provoked the gilded witticisms of Athens and the epigrammatic satire of Rome; but we refrain from bringing these prototypes of modern snobdom on the stage, lest their imitators in our own days might excuse themselves in following their example, by much the same argument as was used by the semi-intellectual and sentimental young men of the past generation when upbraided with wearing eccentric shirt collars. "Oh, we use them because it was Lord Byron who introduced the fashion." A snob, like the rainbow, a Turkey carpet, or a peacock's tail, is composed of different colours, but with this difference that, in the former case, the diverse lines are orderly, pleasing and natural, while in the latter they are jumbled together, they are repulsive and artificial. Now these colours appertain equally to his mental as well as to his exterior man; and just as in beings of a higher order the mind gives the tone to the manners, to the conversation, to the attire, we shall, in the exercise of an all-embracing charity, suppose for the nonce, that the snob is endowed with a mind of some kind, and that it imparts its characteristics to what we may style his department, and personal bearing. Now, the external signs are those by which this social monstrosity is the more readily discovered; and these signs are easily described. First of all, he seeks to shine in the matter of dress; the clothier's shop is the temple in which he worships, and a mirror, no matter where it is, the shrine at which he most frequently bows. He watches the latest

fashions with all the nervous anxiety with which impulsive young ladies look for the postman's knock in the season of valentines. He is a tailor's walking advertisement, and thinks more of a crease in his coat than a crease in his conscience. He affects the sunny side of the street, and stalks pompously along, as if heedless of ladies being compelled to step into the gutter, and utterly indifferent to the overturning of the apple-woman's basket. Finally, he sports an eye-glass when lounging through the streets, or even when condescending to glance at an object of such microscopic proportions as a horse. The eye-glass like the mark set upon Cain, is a sign by which all men may distinguish the snob: it is, to use a somewhat paradoxical metaphor, the key-stone to the arch of his vanity.

The mental characteristics of the personage we have been describing, are on a level with his outward decorations. He converses in monosyllables, as if afraid of opening the flood-gates of his eloquence, and overwhelming with a torrent of thought, the person to whom he deigns to address himself. He generally lisps, and has a mortal aversion to give the letter "R" that full, rasping enunciation which it receives from an Irishman, a Scotchman and a Frenchman naturally, and from educated Englishmen as a matter of course. The letter "h" he strikes out of the alphabet, or slurs it over with the weakly intonation which sounds as if combined of the mew of an asthmatic kitten, and the chirrup of an unfledged house-sparrow. In society he stands upon the dignity of his silence, and is well informed as to the popular topics of the day as is a South African Bojesman if asked to expound a question in conic sections, or attempt the equally difficult task of explaining the mysteries of Canadian or American politics for the past ten years. But the snob is wise in his day and generation, and knows well enough that a network of jewellery spread over the breast of his vest, a refulgent ring or two, a shining coat, symmetrical pair of boots, hair redolent of perfumes, and capacity to invest in any number of tickets for the opera, will bear him gaily along the sparkling current of "the best society," when a man with ten times his brains, but without his money and gewgaws, would sink at once to the bottom—would be smothered unpitied in the black and fetid mud that often forms the bed of the sparkling current aforesaid.

Now, we would not be understood as saying that we have ever experienced much annoyance at the hands of snobdom, nor do we fear that exclusive class will ever be strong enough in Canada to procure from our Government a special Act of Incorporation. They ought to be watched, however, for bad weeds grow fast; social fungi multiply as rapidly as the fungi of our forests, fields and gardens. But we would not, with all his faults, desire that the snob should be pointed at, or insulted; while there is a chance of reforming him, let him have it, for he is more a subject for pity than for anger. And in spite of his follies and his personal decorations, we would not have him treated like the Bird of Paradise, which, being the most beautiful of all the feathered race, has the misfortune to possess the most unsightly feet, and for this reason its captors cut them off, and tell the unwary European purchaser that, unlike the other birds it never alights anywhere, but lives upon the odours of the cinnamon trees. Now, the snob has many deformities, while the Bird of Paradise has only two; still as he is a man and not a bird, we would neither have his feet amputated, nor one hair removed from the graceful semicircle of his moustache; we would only ply him with a little good-natured banter, for to weak minds ridicule is far more terrible than argument.

We had intended to say something on the female counterpart of the snob—we mean the coquette. We know the ground is a ticklish one upon which we tread; but the way to avoid the sting of a nettle is to grasp it resolutely, and "it soft as silk remains." The coquette is even more dangerous than the snob; and in a future number of the *Reader* we may find time to prove it; but, for the present, we may illustrate our meaning by comparing the one to the rattlesnake that warns you to leave its lair, and the other to the terribly beautiful cobra di capella, the hooded snake of India, that calmly awaits your approach, and without a sign of its presence, strikes at you with the rapidity of lightning and prostrates you almost as instantaneously. The snob and the coquette generally avoid each other—their intuition is marvellous—their natures cold, their calculations wary; and if they approach it is with the calm and watchful attitude with which two practised fencers advance to a duel with the sword. The snob is a kind of social antidote to the coquette, and she to him; and we may all be glad there is more truth than polish in the sentiment:

"Big fleas have little fleas  
Beneath their wings to bite 'em;  
Little fleas have lesser fleas,  
And so on *ad finitum*."

## THE TOILERS OF THE SEA.\*

Although this novel will scarcely add to the laurels which deck Victor Hugo's brow, it is nevertheless a more readable work than "*Les Misérables*." It contains less coarseness, less of digression and detail, in fact, less of that prosiness which characterized the magnificent Frenchman's pen when he wrote his great onslaught on society. The scene is laid in Guernsey, M. Hugo's adopted home, or rather we should say in and around Guernsey; for one of the three parts of which the work is composed is wholly devoted to adventures upon a group of rocks lying some fifteen miles from the coast. It is these adventures which give the book its peculiar character, and justify the title selected by the author.

Our space will only permit us to give a very rapid sketch of the story, and one which we fear will do but scant justice to the peculiarities and beauties of the work. It opens on Christmas day 182—, with an event; the roads were white with snow, an unusual scene in Guernsey. Gilliatt, of whom the author says, "He was only a poor man and knew how to read and write; most likely he stood on the limit which divides the dreamer from the thinker—the thinker wills; the dreamer is passive. Sometimes he had that astonished air I have mentioned, and you might have taken him for a brute; at other times he had in his eye a glance of indescribable profundity." Gilliatt, walking behind a young girl, Déruchette, observed her write with her fingers in the snow, and then turn round smiling. On reaching the spot he discovered that it was his name that she had written. Gilliatt paused, wondered and went away thinking. He was not popular in St. Sampsons, where he dwelt. The house he lived in was unquestionably haunted—he was accused of being a sorcerer; and more than that, he was a stranger, no one knowing from whence he came.

A brave, rugged old sailor, named Lethierry, is next introduced. He had spent his life on the sea, but fortune had smiled upon him in his old age, and he was known as a man of some property. His delight still was to battle with the elements, in endeavours to save the lives of

\* A Novel. By VICTOR HUGO, author of "*Les Misérables*." New York: Harper Bros. Montreal: Dawson Bros.