

Leigh Percival

Portraits of Children of The Mobility



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CHILDREN OF THE MOBILITY OF THE MOBILITY IN GENERAL

The Mobility are a variety of the human race, otherwise designated, in polite society, as "The Lower Orders," "The Inferior Classes," "The Rabble," "The Populace,"

"The Vulgar," or "The Common People." Among political philosophers, and promulgators of Useful Knowledge, they are known as "*The People*," "The Many," "The Masses," "The Millions." By persons of less refinement, they are termed "The Riff-raff," and "The Tag-rag-and-bobtail." Figuratively, they are also denominated "The Many-headed;" although in England, in common with the other members of the body politic, they have but one head. May it be long before that one is replaced by another! In some foreign countries, as in America, they change their head very often; and in a neighbouring kingdom (where they are called "The Canaille"), their head is, strange to say, their target.

We write solely for the benefit of the superior classes, that is to say, of the Nobility, Gentry, Clergy, and so many of the Public in general as will condescend to patronise our work. These individuals, if we may so call them, inhabiting a different sphere from that of the Mobility, are not (with the exception, of course, of the Magistracy and the Clergy,) in the habit of meeting them; some account, therefore, of this little-known class, introductory to an exhibition of their offspring, may be reasonably expected of us. Our gentle readers, we apprehend, have but little regarded the Mobility in passing through our public thoroughfares. When employed in taking the air, they move in a loftier line than that of the pavement, and, occupied with the momentous cares of the Senate, the Opera, and the Ball, are too deeply absorbed in meditation to cast their eyes below.

The Mobility are the antipodes to the Nobility: the one race of men being at the top of the world, the other at the bottom of it. The word Mobility is said to be derived from the Latin term *Mobilis*, fickle, or moveable; as Nobility is from *Nobilis*, noble. But what can be more fickle than fashion, what more vulgar than constancy? The heads of society, too, are quite as moveable as its tails. The Nobility are continually in motion; moving in good company, moving in Parliament, moving about the world. If we are to take up the Mobility as vagrants, we must set down the Nobility as tourists;¹ if the former are *moved* by Punch and Shakspeare, the latter are equally so by Rubini and Bellini. There are some who think that Mobility comes from *Mobble*, to dress inelegantly; a surmise more ingenious than correct. The humbler classes were perhaps originally named, as in former times they were governed, by arbitrary power. As to an opinion that the opposite term, Nobility, is derived from *Nob*, a word which in the vocabulary of certain persons signifies head, we only mention it to show the horrid ideas of etymology which some minds are capable of forming.

The property most common to all the Mobility is poverty; that is to say, no property at all. It is not usual to describe them as a respectable body, but they are an influential one, and their influence has, of late years, been much augmented. Perhaps, also, as they constitute the operative part of the community, and its physical force, they may be regarded as being, in a national point of view, of some little importance: but all who have any pretensions to delicacy look upon them as disagreeable persons. Those of them who are, so to speak, at large, inhabit the huts and hovels of our villages, and the fearful dens in the less known and more unpleasant regions of our towns and cities. Here they are chiefly

¹ There are some real travellers among the Mobility, though most of their *journeymen* lead a sedentary life.

to be found, according to medical men and other adventurous travellers, in places analogous to those in which our wine is kept, and where our menials repose, the garrets and cellars. Many thousands of them are contained in ships and barracks, and also in penitentiaries, prisons, workhouses, and other places of punishment for indigence and dishonesty.

The difference between the words Mobility and Nobility is merely a letter. So, between individuals belonging to the two classes, a single letter may constitute a distinction. There are some names peculiar to the Nobility, and some to the Mobility. Jenkins, for example, is one of the names of the Mobility, but it assumes an aristocratic character by being spelt Jenkyns. The addition of a letter, or the addition of one and the alteration of another, is sometimes necessary to effect this change. Thus, Brown and Smith are ennobled by being converted into Browns and Smythe. Persons who have acquired their property by dealing in cheese and so forth, are, some of them, aware of this fact, and hence it is that the butterfly state of a sugar-baker is often denoted by such a transformation, and that Gubbynses and Chubbes enrich the aristocracy of Tooting.

Castlemaine, Mortimer, Percy, Howard, Stanley, Vere and Conyers, are well known as being among the names of the Nobility. In like manner, Tupp, Snooks, Pouch, Wiggins, Blogg, Scroggins, and Hogg, are names characteristic of the Mobility. Dobson, Jobson, and Timson, are appellations of the same order. How shocking it would be to impose any one of them on the hero of a fashionable novel! Johnson may *now*, perhaps, be tolerated; but we think *Johnstone* decidedly preferable.

The names which the Mobility derive from their sponsors may be Christian names; but some of them are, nevertheless, very shocking. No refined grammarian could venture to call them *proper* names; and to dream of disgracing a scutcheon by them would horrify any one but a savage. The mind shrinks, so to speak, at the bare idea of such an association of names as Ebenezer Arlington, Jonathan Tollemache, Moses Montague, Jacob Manners, or Timothy Craven. An attempt to emulate the higher ranks in the choice of Christian names is sometimes made by the Mobility, but their selection is chiefly confined to the theatrical or romantic species; as Oscar Pugsley, Wilhelmina Briggs, Orlando Bung, and the like. The Mobility, moreover, have seldom more than two names; though some of them, under peculiar circumstances, assume several, *pro tempore*, with the intervention of an *alias*. They very generally, too, neglect a practice universally adopted in the exclusive circles, of christening a child by a surname. It is to be wished that they would adopt this custom, for such combinations as Brown Green, Tubb Waters, White Smith, or Bull Bates, would certainly be highly amusing.

The Mobility are also in the habit of using abbreviations in addressing each other, as Jim, Bill, Dick, &c.; an eccentricity which, we are sorry to say, has proved contagious.

It is frequently said of the Mobility that they are houseless and homeless, and so, we believe, many of them are. But all of them are houseless, as contradistinguished from proper characters, and particularly from the Nobility, each of whom can boast of belonging to a house, although no house should belong to him.

Whereas the Nobility, without exception, have coats of arms, the Mobility, with some few exceptions, have none; and the arms of their coats are often out at elbows.

The costume of the Mobility, though not elegant, is in general picturesque; but for this it is indebted, like a ruin, more to the hand of Time than to that of the builder. And, as in the case with ancient edifices, it is diversified by various repairs of a later date, which, while they detract a little from its uniformity, considerably augment its effect. When, too, it is most remote from graceful, it is usually, for an obvious reason, airy.

There is one dreadful omission in point of dress of which the Mobility are universally guilty, that of going about the streets with their hands naked; an enormity which we hope will soon be put a stop to by law. It is not customary with them to dress for dinner; and although they talk of going sometimes to *court*, they do not always on such occasions consider it necessary to change their habiliments; notwithstanding which they aspire to a higher honour than that of kissing *hands*.

The commanding presence, beautiful features, eagle eyes, chiselled lips, aristocratic noses, and silken tresses of the Nobility, are matters of daily observation. In personal appearance the Mobility do not resemble them. Among the lower classes, *lusus naturae* (a Latin phrase which signifies *objects or frights*) are very common. We are inclined to consider these people as a sort of step-children of Nature, who now and then indulges herself in a little jocosity at their expense, for the diversion of the better orders. She gives them funny legs and great hands and feet, she twists their lips about, and makes their eyes converge, with a whimsical look towards the nose, and the latter she turns up in a manner quite ludicrous. In short, to venture a bold expression, she *snubs* them. We beg, however, to observe, that the Nature who is a *step-mother*, is what is said to be a *second* Nature, Use; and that the singularities above mentioned are a kind of heir-looms which the habits of preceding generations have entailed upon their remote posterity. Besides, too many of the Mobility, insensible of the advantages of an agreeable exterior, imprudently venture into chimneys and other places, handle hard and rough substances, and go about in huge heavy boots, from which incautious behaviour their appearance in many respects sustains great detriment.

The use of the Mobility is, to produce food, habitation, and clothing, for the superior classes, and to perform for them those various offices, which, though essential to existence, are not of a dignified quality. Like some of the canine tribes, they are also employed for purposes of defence; for which, with some little drilling and correction, they may be rendered eminently serviceable. During war-time, they are caught and trained for the water; but on the expediency of this proceeding there is some difference of opinion.

The manners of the Mobility are neither sweet nor refined; there is none of the lump-sugar of humanity in them. It is true that one laundress will address another as "Ma'am," and that the driver of a public cabriolet will speak of a locomotive vegetable vender as "that other gentleman;" still people of this description, when they salute one another at all, do so in a very inelegant manner. It is a great pity that they do not take a lesson in this respect from the French, as they would then relinquish their strange practices of nodding and winking, and poking each other in the side. But on points like these we must be brief; a glimpse only of the horrible is always sufficient. Will our readers believe it? the Mobility, in conversation, accuse each other without scruple, in terms not to be mistaken, of wilfully erroneous assertions! and, not content with this, often accompany the insult by a backward movement of the left thumb over the shoulder! But what can be expected of those who smoke pipes of tobacco in the open streets?

The taste of the Mobility is not delicate. As regards aliment, it is one which Louis Eustache Ude never, we are sure, thought of consulting. Their diet is said to include such articles as *tripe*, *cowheel*, (?) &c. if any one knows what those things are. Their literary appetite, that, at least, of those who can read, tends chiefly to certain publications which come out weekly, are mostly sold for the small charge of one penny, and are filled with vituperation of the higher orders. The Mobility are also very fond of "Last Dying Speeches and Confessions;" indeed they regard all information, connected with the administration of the criminal law, with a peculiar interest.

The Mobility have various amusements, most of which are exceedingly low, and which have been in these enlightened times judiciously curtailed by the Legislature. Indeed they can scarcely indulge in any of them without impropriety; for they are supposed, during six days, to be continually occupied, and on the seventh to be enjoying, like the better classes, the sweets of domestic life. Instead of that, they go, on Sundays, to a public-house, provided there may be no pecuniary obstacle to their doing so. There, it is said, they used to play at *skittles*, *bowls*, and *nine pins*; in lieu of which, those games being now illegal on all but working days, they content themselves with getting inebriated. Occasionally, on evenings during the week, some of them repair to the theatres, where those of our readers who may chance to have honoured the performances with their presence may have heard them, high aloft and far back, in a place allotted to them, making a noise. Their leisure, also, when they have any, is sometimes beguiled by dramatic and musical entertainments, paid for on the voluntary

principle, and appropriately performed in the open air. These exhibitions are transferable from place to place; a very fortunate circumstance, as the crowds which collect to view them might otherwise incommode the higher orders, by obstructing their carriages. The Mobility, in certain amusements of theirs, present a curious and humiliating parallel to those of a portion of the Nobility. They are slightly addicted to games of chance, although instead of throwing dice, they usually toss pence, and for rouge et noir, engage in what is termed *blind hookey*. We could mention some persons who appear to have learned one of these delightful sports from them; we mean, the *thimble rig*. They are prone, too, in their way, to the pleasures of the field; for instance, the pursuit of the rat, which, although not a noble recreation, like the chase of the fox, is yet a species of hunting. The badger likewise contributes, occasionally, to their fund of harmless enjoyment. They do not, it is true, perform nocturnal gymnastics on knockers and bell-wires, such presumption on their part being severely punishable; but it must be confessed that at an election or an illumination they evince a strong predilection for very similar exploits.

The language of the Mobility is very incorrect in point of grammar, and rather abounds in strong and forcible, than in soft and elegant terms. Perhaps, in treating of the Children of the Mobility more particularly, we shall unavoidably be forced to quote a little of it; but we shall be as chary as a Poor Law Commissioner of what we put into their mouths, recollecting that those introduced by us are intended as *companions* to the Children of the Nobility. For, as the moralist informs us in the copybook, "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

The Children of the Mobility are distinguished by a remarkable circumstance, at their very birth, from those of the Nobility. The latter are said to enter the world with a certain silver implement in their mouths; at all events, they have one placed there so soon as almost to warrant the idea that it was really bestowed on them by Nature. The former, on the contrary, are endowed with no such thing; and if they were, it would infallibly be transferred, with all possible expedition, to the hands of a particular relative. In short, it would be made a means of procuring the nutriment which a less costly article would serve as effectually to insert.

Further, the Children of the Nobility, justly compared in various poetical effusions to delicate plants and tender flowers, are, with great propriety, reared in a nursery. But the Children of the Mobility, who are the subjects of no effusions but those of indignation at their appetite or their cries, vegetate, many of them, like kitchen stuff, in the open air, and are never grown, if under shelter at all, in any place resembling a *hot-house*.

It is, perhaps, to the supply of moisture which, in consequence of their exposure, they receive, that their preservation is owing; for we might otherwise reasonably question how they are induced to live.

The Children of the Mobility are not, in early infancy, interesting creatures; they are invested with none of those angelic attributes so peculiar to the aristocratic babe. It will be well, therefore, to pass over this period of their lives, and to consider them as they exhibit themselves, at a somewhat more advanced age, in the streets.

Those talented artists who have so laudably devoted their lofty energies to the delineation of the youthful forms of the Children of the Nobility, have correctly represented them as replete, in all their actions, with elegance. Sleeping on banks of flowers, sitting on rocks and musing o'er flood and field, contemplating with youthful but reflective eye, the beauties of a leaf or rose-bud, standing self-enraptured and Narcissus-like in some exquisite attitude before a mirror, or playing, in unconscious boldness, with a large dog, they seem to us like the denizens of a brighter sphere. Such, indeed, they may with truth be said to be; for, in the spacious park, the fragrant *parterre*, and the splendidly furnished drawing-room, their delicious existence glides away. This, together with their innate refinement, accounts, perhaps, for that beautifully indescribable something that mingles with all they do. So, conversely, the inherited bias, and surrounding circumstances incidental to the Children of the Mobility, may be supposed to explain the very opposite "something" so peculiar to

them. We find them perched on stiles and gates, and loitering about lanes and ditches, peering into periwinkles, hopping up and down the steps of door-ways, or setting a couple of mongrels together by the ears. They are not gentle – they are not sylph-like – we search in vain for a nameless grace in their steps, and a depth of hidden meaning in their young eyes. They have never been taught to dance, and their complexions have been sadly neglected.

Aided by Mr. Leech's pictures, we shall now take the liberty of introducing our young plebeians into the drawing-room.

PLATE I. Miss Margaret Flinn, Master Gregory Flinn, Miss Katherine O'Shaughnessy, and Master Donovan

These young persons are the Children of a Mobility said to be the finest in the universe. The scene of their existence is a place denominated the Rookery, a region situated in those obscure territories among which Oxford Street terminates. This district is very appositely named, and we are surprised that there is no corresponding neighbourhood, of an aristocratic character, denominated an Aerie. It is a place remarkable, like an actual abode of rooks, for the noisy, pugnacious, and predatory character of its inhabitants, who however, unlike those birds, are not very active in feeding their young. Their building propensities, however, are just as remarkable. Humble as they are, it cannot be denied that they have much to do in the raising of the noblest houses; and if any part of the Mobility may lay claim to heraldic honours, these, as well as the proudest landlords, are entitled to bear the "Bricklayers' Arms." Their children display a peculiarly imperfect state of costume, owing to a practice, too common among their parents, of devoting the family revenues to the purchase of a certain spirituous liquor, and of converting, for this purpose, their wardrobes into ready money; conduct highly reprehensible, since, if oppressed by *ennui*

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