

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE SAXTONS: A
FAMILY PICTURE —
VOLUME 01**

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The Saxtons: A Family
Picture — Volume 01

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| PART I. | 4 |
| THE SAXTONS. | 7 |
| CHAPTER I | 7 |
| CHAPTER II | 13 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 15 |

Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

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PART I.

PREFACE

If it be the good fortune of this work to possess any interest for the Novel reader, that interest, perhaps, will be but little derived from the customary elements of fiction. The plot is extremely slight, the incidents are few, and with the exception of those which involve the fate of Vivian, such as may be found in the records of ordinary life.

Regarded as a Novel, this attempt is an experiment somewhat apart from the previous works of the author. It is the first of his writings in which Humor has been employed, less for the purpose of satire than in illustration of amiable characters; it is the first, too, in which man has been viewed, less in his active relations with the world, than in his repose at his own hearth,—in a word, the greater part of the canvas has been devoted to the completion of a simple Family Picture. And thus, in any appeal to the sympathies of the human heart, the common

household affections occupy the place of those livelier or larger passions which usually (and not unjustly) arrogate the foreground in Romantic composition.

In the Hero whose autobiography connects the different characters and events of the work, it has been the Author's intention to imply the influences of Home upon the conduct and career of youth; and in the ambition which estranges Pisistratus for a time from the sedentary occupations in which the man of civilized life must usually serve his apprenticeship to Fortune or to Fame, it is not designed to describe the fever of Genius conscious of superior powers and aspiring to high destinies, but the natural tendencies of a fresh and buoyant mind, rather vigorous than contemplative, and in which the desire of action is but the symptom of health.

Pisistratus in this respect (as he himself feels and implies) becomes the specimen or type of a class the numbers of which are daily increasing in the inevitable progress of modern civilization. He is one too many in the midst of the crowd; he is the representative of the exuberant energies of youth, turning, as with the instinct of nature for space and development, from the Old World to the New. That which may be called the interior meaning of the whole is sought to be completed by the inference that, whatever our wanderings, our happiness will always be found within a narrow compass, and amidst the objects more immediately within our reach, but that we are seldom sensible of this truth (hackneyed though it be in the Schools of all

Philosophies) till our researches have spread over a wider area. To insure the blessing of repose, we require a brisker excitement than a few turns up and down our room. Content is like that humor in the crystal, on which Claudian has lavished the wonder of a child and the fancies of a Poet,—

"Vivis gemma tumescit aquis."

E. B. L.

October, 1849.

THE CAXTONS.

PART I

CHAPTER I

"Sir—sir, it is a boy!"

"A boy," said my father, looking up from his book, and evidently much puzzled: "what is a boy?"

Now my father did not mean by that interrogatory to challenge philosophical inquiry, nor to demand of the honest but unenlightened woman who had just rushed into his study, a solution of that mystery, physiological and psychological, which has puzzled so many curious sages, and lies still involved in the question, "What is man?" For as we need not look further than Dr. Johnson's Dictionary to know that a boy is "a male child,"—i.e., the male young of man,—so he who would go to the depth of things, and know scientifically what is a boy, must be able to ascertain "what is a man." But for aught I know, my father may have been satisfied with Buffon on that score, or he may have sided with Monboddo. He may have agreed with Bishop Berkeley; he may have contented himself with Professor Combe; he may have regarded the genus spiritually, like Zeno, or materially, like Epicurus. Grant that boy is the male young

of man, and he would have had plenty of definitions to choose from. He might have said, "Man is a stomach,—ergo, boy a male young stomach. Man is a brain,—boy a male young brain. Man is a bundle of habits,—boy a male young bundle of habits. Man is a machine,—boy a male young machine. Man is a tail-less monkey,—boy a male young tail-less monkey. Man is a combination of gases,—boy a male young combination of gases. Man is an appearance,—boy a male young appearance," etc., etc., and etcetera, ad infinitum! And if none of these definitions had entirely satisfied my father, I am perfectly persuaded that he would never have come to Mrs. Primmins for a new one.

But it so happened that my father was at that moment engaged in the important consideration whether the Iliad was written by one Homer, or was rather a collection of sundry ballads, done into Greek by divers hands, and finally selected, compiled, and reduced into a whole by a Committee of Taste, under that elegant old tyrant Pisistratus; and the sudden affirmation, "It is a boy," did not seem to him pertinent to the thread of the discussion. Therefore he asked, "What is a boy?" vaguely, and, as it were, taken by surprise.

"Lord, sir!" said Mrs. Primmins, "what is a boy? Why, the baby!"

"The baby!" repeated my father, rising. "What, you don't mean to say that Mrs. Caxton is—eh?"

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Primmins, dropping a courtesy; "and as fine a little rogue as ever I set eyes upon."

"Poor dear woman," said my father, with great compassion. "So soon, too—so rapidly," he resumed, in a tone of musing surprise. "Why, it is but the other day we were married!"

"Bless my heart, sir," said Mrs. Primmins, much scandalized, "it is ten months and more."

"Ten months!" said my father with a sigh. "Ten months! and I have not finished fifty pages of my refutation of Wolfe's monstrous theory! In ten months a child! and I'll be bound complete,—hands, feet, eyes, ears, and nose!—and not like this poor Infant of Mind," and my father pathetically placed his hand on the treatise, "of which nothing is formed and shaped, not even the first joint of the little finger! Why, my wife is a precious woman! Well, keep her quiet. Heaven preserve her, and send me strength—to support this blessing!"

"But your honor will look at the baby? Come, sir!" and Mrs. Primmins laid hold of my father's sleeve coaxingly.

"Look at it,—to be sure," said my father, kindly; "look at it, certainly: it is but fair to poor Mrs. Caxton, after taking so much trouble, dear soul!"

Therewith my father, drawing his dressing-robe round him in more stately folds, followed Mrs. Primmins upstairs into a room very carefully darkened.

"How are you, my dear?" said my father, with compassionate tenderness, as he groped his way to the bed.

A faint voice muttered: "Better now, and so happy!" And at the same moment Mrs. Primmins pulled my father away, lifted a

coverlid from a small cradle, and holding a candle within an inch of an undeveloped nose, cried emphatically, "There—bless it!"

"Of course, ma'am, I bless it," said my father, rather peevishly. "It is my duty to bless it—Bless It! And this, then, is the way we come into the world!—red, very red,—blushing for all the follies we are destined to commit."

My father sat down on the nurse's chair, the women grouped round him. He continued to gaze on the contents of the cradle, and at length said, musingly, "And Homer was once like this!"

At this moment—and no wonder, considering the propinquity of the candle to his visual organs—Homer's infant likeness commenced the first untutored melodies of nature.

"Homer improved greatly in singing as he grew older," observed Mr. Squills, the accoucheur, who was engaged in some mysteries in a corner of the room.

My father stopped his ears. "Little things can make a great noise," said he, philosophically; "and the smaller the thing; the greater noise it can make."

So saying, he crept on tiptoe to the bed, and clasping the pale hand held out to him, whispered some words that no doubt charmed and soothed the ear that heard them, for that pale hand was suddenly drawn from his own and thrown tenderly round his neck. The sound of a gentle kiss was heard through the stillness.

"Mr. Caxton, sir," cried Mr. Squills, in rebuke, "you agitate my patient; you must retire."

My father raised his mild face, looked round apologetically,

brushed his eyes with the back of his hand, stole to the door, and vanished.

"I think," said a kind gossip seated at the other side of my mother's bed, "I think, my dear, that Mr. Caxton might have shown more joy,—more natural feeling, I may say,—at the sight of the baby: and Such a baby! But all men are just the same, my dear,—brutes,—all brutes, depend upon it!"

"Poor Austin!" sighed my mother, feebly; "how little you understand him!"

"And now I shall clear the room," said Mr. Squills. "Go to sleep, Mrs. Caxton."

"Mr. Squills," exclaimed my mother, and the bed-curtains trembled, "pray see that Mr. Caxton does not set himself on fire. And, Mr. Squills, tell him not to be vexed and miss me,—I shall be down very soon,—sha' n't I?"

"If you keep yourself easy, you will, ma'am."

"Pray, say so. And, Primmins—"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Every one, I fear, is neglecting your master. Be sure," and my mother's lips approached close to Mrs. Primmins' ear, "be sure that you—air his nightcap yourself."

"Tender creatures those women," soliloquized Mr. Squills as, after clearing the room of all present save Mrs. Primmins and the nurse, he took his way towards my father's study. Encountering the footman in the passage, "John," said he, "take supper into your master's room, and make us some punch, will you,—"

stiffish!"

CHAPTER II

"Mr. Caxton, how on earth did you ever come to marry?" asked Mr. Squills, abruptly, with his feet on the hob, while stirring up his punch.

That was a home question, which many men might reasonably resent; but my father scarcely knew what resentment was.

"Squills," said he, turning round from his books, and laying one finger on the surgeon's arm confidentially,— "Squills," said he, "I myself should be glad to know how I came to be married."

Mr. Squills was a jovial, good-hearted man,—stout, fat, and with fine teeth, that made his laugh pleasant to look at as well as to hear. Mr. Squills, moreover, was a bit of a philosopher in his way,—studied human nature in curing its diseases; and was accustomed to say that Mr. Caxton was a better book in himself than all he had in his library. Mr. Squills laughed, and rubbed his hands.

My father resumed thoughtfully, and in the tone of one who moralizes:—

"There are three great events in life, sir,—birth, marriage, and death. None know how they are born, few know how they die; but I suspect that many can account for the intermediate phenomenon—I cannot."

"It was not for money, it must have been for love," observed Mr.

Squills; "and your young wife is as pretty as she is good."

"Ha!" said my father, "I remember."

"Do you, sir?" exclaimed Squills, highly amused. "How was it?"

My father, as was often the case with him, protracted his reply, and then seemed rather to commune with himself than to answer Mr. Squills.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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