

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

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06

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Pelham — Volume 06

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

Pelham — Volume 06

CHAPTER LXVI

And now I'm the world alone,

.....

*But why for others should I groan,
When none will sigh for me?*

—Byron.

The whole country was in confusion at the news of the murder. All the myrmidons of justice were employed in the most active research for the murderers. Some few persons were taken up on suspicion, but were as instantly discharged. Thornton and Dawson underwent a long and rigorous examination; but no single tittle of evidence against them appeared: they were consequently dismissed. The only suspicious circumstance against them, was their delay on the road; but the cause given, the same as Thornton had at first assigned to me, was probable and natural. The shed was indicated, and, as if to confirm Thornton's account, a glove belonging to that person was found there. To crown all, my own evidence, in which I was constrained to mention the circumstance of the muffled horseman having passed me on the road, and being found by me on the spot itself, threw the whole weight of suspicion upon that man, whoever he might be.

All attempts, however, to discover him were in vain. It was ascertained that a man, muffled in a cloak, was seen at Newmarket, but not remarkably observed; it was also discovered, that a person so habited had put up a grey horse to bait in one of the inns at Newmarket; but in the throng of strangers, neither the horse nor its owner had drawn down any particular remark.

On further inquiry, testimony differed; four or five men, in cloaks, had left their horses at the stables; one ostler changed the colour of the steed to brown, a second to black, a third deposed that the gentleman was remarkably tall, and the waite swore solemnly he had given a glass of brandy and water to an unked looking gentleman, in a cloak, who was remarkably short. In fine, no material point could be proved, and though the officers were still employed in active search, they could trace nothing that promised a speedy discovery.

As for myself, as soon as I decently could, I left Chester Park, with a most satisfactory dispatch in my pocket, from its possessor to Lord Dawton, and found myself once more on the road to London!

Alas! how different were my thoughts! How changed the temper of my mind, since I had last travelled that road. Then I was full of hope, energy, ambition—of interest for Reginald Glanville—of adoration for his sister; and now, I leaned back listless and dispirited, without a single feeling to gladden the restless and feverish despair which, ever since that night, had possessed me. What was ambition henceforth to me? The most selfish amongst us must have some human being to whom to refer—with whom to connect—to associate—to treasure the triumphs and gratifications of self. Where now was such a being to me? My earliest friend, for whom my esteem was the greater for his sorrows, my interest the keener for his mystery, Reginald Glanville, was a murderer! a dastardly, a barbarous felon, whom the chance of an instant might convict!—and she—she, the only woman in the world I had ever really loved—who had ever pierced the thousand folds of my ambitious and scheming heart—she was the sister of the assassin!

Then came over my mind the savage and exulting eye of Thornton, when it read the damning record of Glanville's guilt; and in spite of my horror at the crime of my former friend, I trembled

for his safety: nor was I satisfied with myself at my prevarication as a witness. It is true, that I had told the truth, but I had concealed all the truth; and my heart swelled proudly and bitterly against the miniature which I still concealed in my bosom.

Light as I may seem to the reader, bent upon the pleasures and the honours of the great world, as I really was, there had never, since I had recognized and formed a decided code of principles, been a single moment in which I had transgressed it; and perhaps I was sterner and more inflexible in the tenets of my morality, such as they were, than even the most zealous worshipper of the letter, as well as the spirit of the law and the prophets, would require. Certainly there were many pangs within me, when I reflected, that to save a criminal, in whose safety I was selfishly concerned, I had tampered with my honour, paltered with the truth, and broken what I felt to be a peremptory and inviolable duty. Let it be for ever remembered, that once acknowledge and ascertain that a principle is publicly good, and no possible private motive should ever induce you to depart from it.

It was with a heightened pulse, and a burning cheek, that I entered London; before midnight I was in a high fever; they sent for the vultures of physic—I was bled copiously—I was kept quiet in bed for six days, at the end of that time, my constitution and youth restored me. I took up one of the newspapers listlessly: Glanville's name struck me; I read the paragraph which contained it—it was a high-flown and fustian panegyric on his genius and promise. I turned to another column, it contained a long speech he had the night before made in the House of Commons.

"Can such things be?" thought I; yea, and thereby hangs a secret and an anomaly in the human heart. A man may commit the greatest of crimes, and (if no other succeed to it,) it changes not the current of his being—to all the world—to all intents—for all objects, he may be the same. He may equally serve his country—equally benefit his friends—be generous—brave—benevolent, all that he was before. One crime, however heinous, makes no revolution in the system—it is only the perpetual course of sins, vices, follies, however insignificant they may seem, which alters the nature and hardens the heart.

My mother was out of town when I returned there. They had written to her during my illness, and while I was yet musing over the day's journal, a letter from her was put into my hand. I transcribe it.

"My Dearest Henry,

"How dreadfully uneasy I am about you: write to me directly. I would come to town myself, but am staying with dear Lady Dawton, who wont hear of my going; and I cannot offend her for your sake. By the by, why have you not called upon Lord Dawton? but, I forgot, you have been ill. My dear, dear child, I am wretched about you, and now pale your illness will make you look! just too, as the best part of the season is coming on. How unlucky! Pray, don't wear a black cravat when you next call on Lady Roseville; but choose a very fine baptiste one—it will make you look rather delicate than ill. What physician do you have? I hope, in God, that it is Sir Henry Halford. I shall be too miserable if it is not. I am sure no one can conceive the anguish I suffer. Your father, too, poor man, has been laid up with the gout for the last three days. Keep up your spirits, my dearest child, and get some light books to entertain you; but, pray, as soon as you are well, do go to Lord Dawton's—he is dying to see you; but be sure not to catch cold. How did you like Lady Chester? Pray take the greatest care of yourself, and write soon to

"Your wretched, and most

"Affectionate Mother,

"F. P.

"P.S. How dreadfully shocking about that poor Sir John Tyrrell!"

I tossed the letter from me. Heaven pardon me if the misanthropy of my mood made me less grateful for the maternal solicitude than I should otherwise have been.

I took up one of the numerous books with which my table was covered; it was a worldly work of one of the French reasoners; it gave a new turn to my thoughts—my mind reverted to its former projects of ambition. Who does not know what active citizens private misfortune makes us? The public is like the pools of Bethesda—we all hasten there, to plunge in and rid ourselves of our afflictions.

I drew my portefeuille to me, and wrote to Lord Dawton. Three hours after I had sent the note, he called upon me. I gave him Lord Chester's letter, but he had already received from that nobleman a notification of my success. He was profuse in his compliments and thanks.

"And, do you know," added the statesman, "that you have quite made a conquest of Lord Guloseton? He speaks of you publicly in the highest terms: I wish we could get him and his votes. We must be strengthened, my dear Pelham; every thing depends on the crisis."

"Are you certain of the cabinet?" I asked.

"Yes; it is not yet publicly announced, but it is fully known amongst us, who comes in, and who stays out. I am to have the place of—."

"I congratulate your lordship from my heart. What post do you design for me?"

Lord Dawton changed countenance. "Why—really—Pelham, we have not yet filled up the lesser appointments, but you shall be well remembered— well, my dear Pelham, be sure of it."

I looked at the noble speaker with a glance which, I flatter myself, is peculiar to me. If, thought I, the embryo minister is playing upon me as upon one of his dependant characters; if he dares forget what he owes to my birth and zeal, I will grind myself to powder but I will shake him out of his seat. The anger of the moment passed away.

"Lord Dawton," said I, "one word, and I have done discussing my claims for the present. Do you mean to place me in Parliament as soon as you are in the cabinet? What else you intend for me, I question not."

"Yes, assuredly, Pelham. How can you doubt it?"

"Enough!—and now read this letter from France."

Two days after my interview with Lord Dawton, as I was riding leisurely through the Green Park, in no very bright and social mood, one of the favoured carriages, whose owners are permitted to say, "Hic iter est nobis," overtook me. A sweet voice ordered the coachman to stop, and then addressed itself to me.

"What, the hero of Chester Park returned, without having once narrated his adventures to me?"

"Beautiful Lady Roseville," said I, "I plead guilty of negligence—not treason. I forgot, it is true, to appear before you, but I forget not the devotion of my duty now that I behold you. Command, and I obey."

"See, Ellen," said Lady Roseville, turning to a bending and blushing countenance beside her, which I then first perceived—"See what it is to be a knight errant; even his language, is worthy of Amadis of Gaul—but— (again addressing me) your adventures are really too shocking a subject to treat lightly. We lay our serious orders on you to come to our castle this night: we shall be alone."

"Willingly shall I repair to your bower, fayre ladie; but tell me, I beseech you, how many persons are signified in the world 'alone?'"

"Why," answered Lady Roseville, "I fear we may have two or three people with us; but I think, Ellen, we may promise our chevalier, that the number shall not exceed twelve."

I bowed and rode on. What worlds would I not have given to have touched the hand of the countess's companion, though only for an instant. But— and that fearful but, chilled me, like an ice-bolt. I put spurs to my horse, and dashed fiercely onwards. There was rather a high wind stirring, and I bent my face from it, so as scarcely to see the course of my spirited and impatient horse.

"What ho, Sir!—what ho!" cried a shrill voice—"for God's sake, don't ride over me before dinner, whatever you do after it!"

I pulled up. "Ah, Lord Guloseton! how happy I am to see you; pray forgive my blindness, and my horse's stupidity."

"'Tis an ill wind," answered the noble gourmand, "which blows nobody good. An excellent proverb, the veracity of which is daily attested; for, however unpleasant a keen wind may be, there is no doubt of its being a marvellous whetter of that greatest of Heaven's blessings—an appetite. Little, however, did I expect, that besides blowing me a relish for my saute de foie gras, it would also blow me one who might, probably, be a partaker of my enjoyment. Honour me with your company at dinner to-day."

"What saloon will you dine in, my Lord Lucullus?" said I, in allusion to the custom of the epicure, by whose name I addressed him.

"The saloon of Diana," replied Guloseton—"for she must certainly have shot the fine buck of which Lord H. sent me the haunch that we shall have to-day. It is the true old Meynell breed. I ask you not to meet Mr. So- and-so, and Lord What-dye-call-him: I ask you to meet a saute de foie gras, and a haunch of venison."

"I will most certainly pay them my respects. Never did I know before how far things were better company than persons. Your lordship has taught me that great truth."

"God bless me," cried Guloseton, with an air of vexation, "here comes the Duke of Stilton, a horrid person, who told me the other day, at my petit diner, when I apologized to him for some strange error of my artiste's, by which common vinegar had been substituted for Chili—who told me—what think you he told me? You cannot guess; he told me, forsooth, that he did not care what he eat; and, for his part, he could make a very good dinner off a beef-steak! Why the deuce, then, did he come and dine with me? Could he have said any thing more cutting? Imagine my indignation, when I looked round my table and saw so many good things thrown away upon such an idiot."

Scarcely was the last word out of the gourmand's mouth before the noble personage so designated, joined us. It amused me to see Guloseton's contempt (which he scarcely took the pains to suppress) of a person whom all Europe honoured, and his evident weariness of a companion, whose society every one else would have coveted as the summum bonum of worldly distinction. As for me, feeling any thing but social, I soon left the ill-matched pair, and rode into the other park.

Just as I entered it, I perceived, on a dull, yet cross-looking pony, Mr. Wormwood, of bitter memory. Although we had not met since our mutual sojourn at Sir Lionel Garratt's, and were then upon very cool terms of acquaintance, he seemed resolved to recognize and claim me.

"My dear Sir," said he, with a ghastly smile, "I am rejoiced once more to see you; bless me, how pale you look. I heard you had been very ill. Pray have you been yet to that man who professes to cure consumption in the worst stages?"

"Yes," said I, "he read me two or three letters of reference from the patients he had cured. His last, he said, was a gentleman very far gone; a Mr. Wormwood."

"Oh, you are pleased to be facetious," said the cynic, coldly—"but pray do tell me about that horrid affair at Chester Park. How disagreeable it must have been to you to be taken up on suspicion of the murder."

"Sir," said I, haughtily, "what do you mean?"

"Oh, you were not—wern't you? Well, I always thought it unlikely; but every one says so—"

"My dear Sir," I rejoined, "how long is it since you have minded what every body says? If I were so foolish, I should not be riding with you now; but I have always said, in contradiction to every body, and even in spite of being universally laughed at for my singular opinion, that you, my dear Mr. Wormwood, were by no means silly, nor ignorant, nor insolent, nor intrusive; that you were, on the contrary, a very decent author, and a very good sort of man; and that you were so benevolent, that you daily granted to some one or other, the greatest happiness in your power: it is a happiness I am now about to enjoy, and it consists in wishing you 'good bye!'" And without waiting for Mr.

Wormwood's answer, I gave the rein to my horse, and was soon lost among the crowd, which had now began to assemble.

Hyde Park is a stupid place; the English make business an enjoyment, and enjoyment a business—they are born without a smile—they rove about public places like so many easterly winds—cold, sharp, and cutting; or like a group of fogs on a frosty day, sent out of his hall by Boreas for the express purpose of looking black at one another. When they ask you, "how you do," you would think they were measuring the length of your coffin. They are ever, it is true, labouring to be agreeable; but they are like Sisyphus, the stone they roll up the hill with so much toil, runs down again, and hits you a thump on the legs. They are sometimes polite, but invariably uncivil; their warmth is always artificial—their cold never, they are stiff without dignity, and cringing without manners. They offer you an affront, and call it "plain truth;" they wound your feelings, and tell you it is manly "to speak their minds;" at the same time, while they have neglected all the graces and charities of artifice, they have adopted all its falsehood and deceit. While they profess to abhor servility, they adulate the peerage—while they tell you they care not a rush for the minister, they move heaven and earth for an invitation from the minister's wife. There is not another court in Europe where such systematized meanness is carried on,—where they will even believe you, when you assert that it exists. Abroad, you can smile at the vanity of one class, and the flattery of another: the first, is too well bred to affront, the latter, too graceful to disgust; but here, the pride of a noblesse, (by the way, the most mushroom in Europe,) knocks you down in a hail-storm, and the fawning of the bourgeois makes you sick with hot water. Then their amusements—the heat—the dust—the sameness—the slowness of that odious park in the morning; and the same exquisite scene repeated in the evening, on the condensed stage of a rout-room, where one has more heat, with less air, and a narrower dungeon, with diminished possibility of escape!—we wander about like the damned in the story of Vathek, and we pass our lives, like the royal philosopher of Prussia, in conjugating the verb, *Je m'ennuie*.

CHAPTER LXVII

In solo vivendi causa palato est.

—*Juvenal.*

They would talk of nothing but high life, and high-lived company; with other fashionable topics, such as pictures, taste, Shakspeare, and the musical glasses.

—*Vicar of Wakefield.*

The reflections which closed the last chapter, will serve to show that I was in no very amiable or convivial temper, when I drove to Lord Guloseton's dinner. However, in the world, it matters little what may be our real mood, the mask hides the bent brow and the writhing lip.

Guloseton was stretched on his sofa, gazing with upward eye at the beautiful Venus which hung above his hearth. "You are welcome, Pelham; I am worshipping my household divinity!"

I prostrated myself on the opposite sofa, and made some answer to the classical epicure, which made us both laugh heartily. We then talked of pictures, painters, poets, the ancients, and Dr. Henderson on Wines; we gave ourselves up, without restraint, to the enchanting fascination of the last-named subject, and our mutual enthusiasm confirming our cordiality, we went down stairs to our dinner, as charmed with each other as boon companions always should be.

"This is *comme il faut*," said I, looking round at the well filled table, and the sparkling spirits immersed in the ice-pails, "a genuine friendly dinner. It is very rarely that I dare entrust myself to such extempore hospitality—*miserum est aliena vivere quadra*;—a friendly dinner, a family meal, are things from which I fly with undisguised aversion. It is very hard, that in England, one cannot have a friend on pain of being shot or poisoned; if you refuse his familiar invitations, he thinks you mean to affront him, and says something rude, for which you are forced to challenge him; if you accept them, you perish beneath the weight of boiled mutton and turnips, or—"

"My dear friend," interrupted Guloseton, with his mouth full, "it is very true; but this is no time for talking, let us eat."

I acknowledged the justice of the rebuke, and we did not interchange another word beyond the exclamations of surprise, pleasure, admiration, or dissatisfaction, called up by the objects which engrossed our attention, till we found ourselves alone with our dessert.

When I thought my host had imbibed a sufficient quantity of wine, I once more renewed my attack. I had tried him before upon that point of vanity which is centered in power, and political consideration, but in vain; I now bethought me of another.

"How few persons there are," said I, "capable of giving even a tolerable dinner—how many capable of admiring one worthy of estimation. I could imagine no greater triumph for the ambitious epicure, than to see at his board the first and most honoured persons of the state, all lost in wonder at the depth, the variety, the purity, the munificence of his taste; all forgetting, in the extorted respect which a gratified palate never fails to produce, the more visionary schemes and projects which usually occupy their thoughts;—to find those whom all England are soliciting for posts and power, become, in their turn, eager and craving aspirants for places—at his table;—to know that all the grand movements of the ministerial body are planned and agitated over the inspirations of his viands and the excitement of his wine—from a haunch of venison, like the one of which we have partaken to-day, what noble and substantial measures might arise? From a saute de foie, what delicate subtleties of finesse might have their origin? from a ragout a la financiere, what godlike improvements in taxation? Oh, could

such a lot be mine, I would envy neither Napoleon for the goodness of his fortune, nor S—for the grandeur of his genius."

Guloseton laughed. "The ardour of your enthusiasm blinds your philosophy, my dear Pelham; like Montesquieu, the liveliness of your fancy often makes you advance paradoxes which the consideration of your judgment would afterwards condemn. For instance, you must allow, that if one had all those fine persons at one's table, one would be forced to talk more, and consequently to eat less; moreover, you would either be excited by your triumph, or you would not, that is indisputable; if you are not excited you have the bore for nothing; if you are excited you spoil your digestion: nothing is so detrimental to the stomach as the feverish inquietude of the passions. All philosophies recommend calm as the to kalon of their code; and you must perceive, that if, in the course you advise, one has occasional opportunities of pride, one also has those of mortification. Mortification! terrible word; how many apoplexies have arisen from its source! No, Pelham, away with ambition; fill your glass, and learn, at last, the secret of real philosophy."

"Confound the man!" was my mental anathema.—"Long life to the Solomon of sautes," was my audible exclamation.

"There is something," resumed Guloseton, "in your countenance and manner, at once so frank, lively, and ingenuous, that one is not only prepossessed in your favour, but desirous of your friendship. I tell you, therefore, in confidence, that nothing more amuses me than to see the courtship I receive from each party. I laugh at all the unwise and passionate contests in which others are engaged, and I would as soon think of entering into the chivalry of Don Quixote, or attacking the visionary enemies of the Bedlamite, as of taking part in the fury of politicians. At present, looking afar off at their delirium, I can ridicule it; were I to engage in it, I should be hurt by it. I have no wish to become the weeping, instead of the laughing, philosopher. I sleep well now—I have no desire to sleep ill. I eat well—why should I lose my appetite? I am undisturbed and unattacked in the enjoyments best suited to my taste—for what purpose should I be hurried into the abuse of the journalists and the witticisms of pamphleteers? I can ask those whom I like to my house—why should I be forced into asking those whom I do not like? In fine, my good Pelham, why should I sour my temper and shorten my life, put my green old age into flannel and physic, and become, from the happiest of sages, the most miserable of fools? Ambition reminds me of what Bacon says of anger—'It is like rain, it breaks itself upon that which it falls on.' Pelham, my boy, taste the Chateau Margot."

However hurt my vanity might be in having so ill succeeded in my object, I could not help smiling with satisfaction at my entertainer's principles of wisdom. My diplomatic honour, however, was concerned, and I resolved yet to gain him. If, hereafter, I succeeded, it was by a very different method than I had yet taken; meanwhile, I departed from the house of this modern Apicius with a new insight into the great book of mankind, and a new conclusion from its pages; viz. that no virtue can make so perfect a philosopher as the senses; there is no content like that of the epicure—no active code of morals so difficult to conquer as the inertness of his indolence; he is the only being in the world for whom the present has a supream gratification than the future.

My cabriolet soon whirled me to Lady Roseville's door; the first person I saw in the drawing-room, was Ellen. She lifted up her eyes with that familiar sweetness with which they had long since began to welcome me. "Her brother may perish on the gibbet!" was the thought that curdled my blood, and I bowed distantly and passed on.

I met Vincent. He seemed dispirited and dejected. He already saw how ill his party had succeeded; above all, he was enraged at the idea of the person assigned by rumour to fill the place he had intended for himself. This person was a sort of rival to his lordship, a man of quaintness and quotation, with as much learning as Vincent, equal wit, and—but that personage is still in office, and I will say no more, lest he should think I flatter.

To our subject. It has probably been observed that Lord Vincent had indulged less of late in that peculiar strain of learned humour formerly his wont. The fact is, that he had been playing another

part; he wished to remove from his character that appearance of literary coxcombry with which he was accused. He knew well how necessary, in the game of politics, it is to appear no less a man of the world than of books; and though he was not averse to display his clerkship and scholastic information, yet he endeavoured to make them seem rather valuable for their weight, than curious for their fashion. How few there are in the world who retain, after a certain age, the character originally natural to them! We all get, as it were, a second skin; the little foibles, propensities, eccentricities, we first indulged through affectation, conglomerate and encrust till the artificiality grows into nature.

"Pelham," said Vincent, with a cold smile, "the day will be your's; the battle is not to the strong—the whigs will triumph. 'Fugere Pudor, verumque, fidesque; in quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolique insidioeque et vis et amor sceleratus habendi.'"

"A pretty modest quotation," said I. "You must allow at least, that the amor sceleratus habendi was also, in some moderate degree, shared by the Pudor and Fides which characterize your party; otherwise, I am at a loss how to account for the tough struggle against us we have lately had the honour of resisting."

"Never mind," replied Vincent, "I will not refute you,

"'La richesse permet une juste fierte, Mais il faut etre souple avec la pauvrete.' It is not for us, the defeated, to argue with you the victors. But pray, (continued Vincent, with a sneer which pleased me not), pray, among this windfall of the Hesperian fruit, what nice little apple will fall to your share?"

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