

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE SAXTONS: A
FAMILY PICTURE —
VOLUME 13**

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The Caxtons: A Family
Picture — Volume 13

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

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PART XIII

CHAPTER I

Saint Chrysostom, in his work on "The Priesthood," defends deceit, if for a good purpose, by many Scriptural examples; ends his first book by asserting that it is often necessary, and that much benefit may arise from it; and begins his second book by saying that it ought not to be called "deceit," but "good management."¹

"Good management," then, let me call the innocent arts by which I now sought to insinuate my project into favor and assent with my unsuspecting family. At first I began with Roland. I easily induced him to read some of the books, full of the charm of Australian life, which Trevanion had sent me; and so happily did those descriptions suit his own erratic tastes, and the free, half-savage man that lay rough and large within that soldierly nature, that he himself, as it were, seemed to suggest my own

¹ Hohler's translation.

ardent desire, sighed, as the careworn Trevanion had done, that "he was not my age," and blew the flame that consumed me, with his own willing breath. So that when at last—wandering one day over the wild moors—I said, knowing his hatred of law and lawyers: "Alas, uncle, that nothing should be left for me but the Bar!" Captain Roland struck his cane into the peat and exclaimed, "Zounds, sir! the Bar and lying, with truth and a world fresh from God before you!"

"Your hand, uncle,—we understand each other. Now help me with those two quiet hearts at home!"

"Plague on my tongue! what have I done?" said the Captain, looking aghast. Then, after musing a little time, he turned his dark eye on me and growled out, "I suspect, young sir, you have been laying a trap for me; and I have fallen into it, like an old fool as I am."

"Oh, sir, I? you prefer the Bar!—"

"Rogue!"

"Or, indeed, I might perhaps get a clerkship in a merchant's office?"

"If you do, I will scratch you out of the pedigree!"

"Huzza, then, for Australasia!"

"Well, well, well!" said my uncle,—

"With a smile on his lip, and a tear in his eye,"—

"the old sea-king's blood will force its way,—a soldier or a rover, there is no other choice for you. We shall mourn and miss you; but who can chain the young eagles to the eyrie?"

I had a harder task with my father, who at first seemed to listen to me as if I had been talking of an excursion to the moon. But I threw in a dexterous dose of the old Greek Cleruchioe cited by Trevanion, which set him off full trot on his hobby, till after a short excursion to Euboea and the Chersonese, he was fairly lost amidst the Ionian colonies of Asia Minor. I then gradually and artfully decoyed him into his favorite science of Ethnology; and while he was speculating on the origin of the American savages, and considering the rival claims of Cimmerians, Israelites, and Scandinavians, I said quietly: "And you, sir, who think that all human improvement depends on the mixture of races; you, whose whole theory is an absolute sermon upon emigration, and the transplanting and interpolity of our species,—you, sir, should be the last man to chain your son, your elder son, to the soil, while your younger is the very missionary of rovers."

"Pisistratus," said my father, "you reason by synecdoche,—ornamental, but illogical;" and therewith, resolved to hear no more, my father rose and retreated into his study.

But his observation, now quickened, began from that day to follow my moods and humors; then he himself grew silent and thoughtful, and finally he took to long conferences with Roland. The result was that one evening in spring, as I lay listless amidst the weeds and fern that sprang up through the melancholy ruins, I felt a hand on my shoulder; and my father, seating himself beside me on a fragment of stone, said earnestly; "Pisistratus, let us talk. I had hoped better things from your study of Robert Hall."

"Nay, dear father, the medicine did me great good: I have not repined since, and I look steadfastly and cheerfully on life. But Robert Hall fulfilled his mission, and I would fulfil mine."

"Is there no mission in thy native land, O planeticose and exallotriote spirit?"² asked my father, with compassionate rebuke.

"Alas, yes! But what the impulse of genius is to the great, the instinct of vocation is to the mediocre. In every man there is a magnet; in that thing which the man can do best there is a loadstone."

"Papoe!" said my father, opening his eyes; "and are no loadstones to be found for you nearer than the Great Australasian Bight?"

"Ah,—sir, if you resort to irony I can say no more!" My father looked down on me tenderly as I hung my head, moody and abashed.

"Son," said he, "do you think that there is any real jest at my heart when the matter discussed is whether you are to put wide seas and long years between us?" I pressed nearer to his side, and made no answer.

"But I have noted you of late," continued my father, "and I have observed that your old studies are grown distasteful to you; and I have talked with Roland, and I see that your desire is deeper than a boy's mere whim. And then I have asked myself what

² Words coined by Mr. Caxton from (Greek word), "disposed to roaming," and (Greek word), "to export, to alienate."

prospect I can hold out at home to induce you to be contented here, and I see none; and therefore I should say to you, 'Go thy ways, and God shield thee,'—but, Pisistratus, your mother!"

"Ah, sir, that is indeed the question; and there indeed I shrink! But, after all, whatever I were,—whether toiling at the Bar or in some public office,—I should be still so much from home and her. And then you, sir, she loves you so entirely that—"

"No," interrupted my father; "you can advance no arguments like these to touch a mother's heart. There is but one argument that comes home there: is it for your good to leave her? If so, there will be no need of further words. But let us not decide that question hastily; let you and I be together the next two months. Bring your books and sit with me; when you want to go out, tap me on the shoulder, and say 'Come.' At the end of those two months I will say to you 'Go' or 'Stay.' And you will trust me; and if I say the last, you will submit?"

"Oh yes, sir, yes!"

Chapter II

This compact made, my father roused himself from all his studies, devoted his whole thoughts to me, sought with all his gentle wisdom to wean me imperceptibly from my one fixed, tyrannical idea, ranged through his wide pharmacy of books for such medicaments as might alter the system of my thoughts. And little thought he that his very tenderness and wisdom worked against him, for at each new instance of either my heart called aloud, "Is it not that thy tenderness may be repaid, and thy wisdom be known abroad, that I go from thee into the strange land, O my father?"

And the two months expired, and my father saw that the magnet had turned unalterably to the loadstone in the Great Australasian Bight; and he said to me, "Go, and comfort your mother. I have told her your wish, and authorized it by my consent, for I believe now that it is for your good."

I found my mother in the little room she had appropriated to herself next my father's study. And in that room there was a pathos which I have no words to express; for my mother's meek, gentle, womanly soul spoke there, so that it was the Home of Home. The care with which she had transplanted from the brick house, and lovingly arranged, all the humble memorials of old times dear to her affections,—the black silhouette of my father's profile cut in paper, in the full pomp of academics, cap and gown

(how had he ever consented to sit for it?), framed and glazed in the place of honor over the little hearth; and boyish sketches of mine at the Hellenic Institute, first essays in sepia and Indian ink, to animate the walls, and bring her back, when she sat there in the twilight, musing alone, to sunny hours, when Sisty and the young mother threw daisies at each other; and covered with a great glass: shade, and dusted each day with her own hand, the flower-pot Sisty had bought with the proceeds of the domino-box on that memorable occasion on which he had learned "how bad deeds are repaired with good." There, in one corner, stood the little cottage piano which I remembered all my life,—old-fashioned, and with the jingling voice of approaching decrepitude, but still associated with such melodies as, after childhood, we hear never more! And in the modest hanging shelves, which looked so gay with ribbons and tassels and silken cords, my mother's own library, saying more to the heart than all the cold wise poets whose souls my father invoked in his grand Heraclea. The Bible over which, with eyes yet untaught to read, I had hung in vague awe and love as it lay open on my mother's lap, while her sweet voice, then only serious, was made the oracle of its truths. And my first lesson-books were there, all hoarded. And bound in blue and gold, but elaborately papered up, Cowper's Poems,—a gift from my father in the days of courtship: sacred treasure; which not even I had the privilege to touch, and which my mother took out only in the great crosses and trials of conjugal life, whenever some words less kind than usual had dropped unawares from her scholar's

absent lips. Ah! all these poor household gods, all seemed to look on me with mild anger; and from all came a voice to my soul, "Cruel, dost thou forsake us?" And amongst them sat my mother, desolate as Rachel, and weeping silently.

"Mother! mother!" I cried, falling on her neck, "forgive me, —it is past; I cannot leave you!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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