

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE SAXTONS: A
FAMILY PICTURE —
VOLUME 18**

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The Saxtons: A Family
Picture — Volume 18

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

The Caxtons: A Family Picture — Volume 18

PART XVIII

CHAPTER I

Adieu, thou beautiful land, Canaan of the exiles, and Ararat to many a shattered ark! Fair cradle of a race for whom the unbounded heritage of a future that no sage can conjecture, no prophet divine, lies afar in the golden promise—light of Time!—destined, perchance, from the sins and sorrows of a civilization struggling with its own elements of decay, to renew the youth of the world, and transmit the great soul of England through the cycles of Infinite Change. All climates that can best ripen the products of earth or form into various character and temper the different families of man is "rain influences" from the heaven that smiles so benignly on those who had once shrunk, ragged, from the wind, or scowled on the thankless sun. Here, the hard air of the chill Mother Isle,—there, the mild warmth of Italian autumns or the breathless glow of the tropics. And with the

beams of every climate, glides subtle Hope. Of her there, it may be said, as of Light itself, in those exquisite lines of a neglected poet,—

"Through the soft ways of heaven and air and sea,
Which open all their pores to thee,
Like a clear river thou dost glide.
All the world's bravery that delights our eyes
Is but thy several liveries;
Thou the rich dye on them bestowest;
Thy nimble pencil paints the landscape as thou goest."¹

Adieu, my kind nurse and sweet foster-mother,—a long and a last adieu! Never had I left thee but for that louder voice of Nature which calls the child to the parent, and woos us from the labors we love the best by the chime in the sabbath-bells of Home.

No one can tell how dear the memory of that wild Bush life becomes to him who has tried it with a fitting spirit. How often it haunts him in the commonplace of more civilized scenes! Its dangers, its risks, its sense of animal health, its bursts of adventure, its intervals of careless repose,—the fierce gallop through a very sea of wide, rolling plains; the still saunter, at night, through woods never changing their leaves, with the moon, clear as sunshine, stealing slant through their clusters of flowers. With what an effort we reconcile ourselves to the trite cares and

¹ Cowley: Ode to Light.

vexed pleasures, "the quotidian ague of frigid impertinences," to which we return! How strong and black stands my pencil-mark in this passage of the poet from whom I have just quoted before!—

"We are here among the vast and noble scenes of Nature,—we are there among the pitiful shifts of policy; we walk here in the light and open ways of the Divine Bounty,—we grope there in the dark and confused labyrinth of human malice."²

But I weary you, reader. The New World vanishes,—now a line, now a speck; let us turn away, with the face to the Old. Amongst my fellow-passengers how many there are returning home disgusted, disappointed, impoverished, ruined, throwing themselves again on those unsuspecting poor friends who thought they had done with the luckless good-for-nothings forever. For don't let me deceive thee, reader, into supposing that every adventurer to Australia has the luck of Pisistratus. Indeed, though the poor laborer, and especially the poor operative from London and the great trading towns (who has generally more of the quick knack of learning,—the adaptable faculty,—required in a new colony, than the simple agricultural laborer), are pretty sure to succeed, the class to which I belong is one in which failures are numerous and success the exception,—I mean young men with scholastic education and the habits of gentlemen; with small capital and sanguine hopes. But this, in ninety-nine times out of a hundred, is not the fault of the colony, but of the emigrants. It requires not so much intellect as a peculiar turn

² Cowley on Town and Country. (Discourse on Agriculture.)

of intellect, and a fortunate combination of physical qualities, easy temper, and quick mother-wit, to make a small capitalist a prosperous Bushman.³ And if you could see the sharks that swim round a man just dropped at Adelaide or Sydney, with one or two thousand pounds in his pocket! Hurry out of the towns as fast as you can, my young emigrant; turn a deaf ear, for the present at least, to all jobbers and speculators; make friends with some practised old Bushman; spend several months at his station before you hazard your capital; take with you a temper to bear everything and sigh for nothing; put your whole heart in what you are about; never call upon Hercules when your cart sticks in the rut,—and whether you feed sheep or breed cattle, your success is but a question of time.

But whatever I owed to Nature, I owed also something to Fortune. I bought my sheep at little more than 7s. each. When I left, none were worth less than 15s., and the fat sheep were worth

³ How true are the following remarks:—Action is the first great requisite of a colonist (that is, a pastoral or agricultural settler). With a young man, the tone of his mind is more important than his previous pursuits. I have known men of an active, energetic, contented disposition, with a good flow of animal spirits, who had been bred in luxury and refinement, succeed better than men bred as farmers who were always hankering after bread and beer, and market ordinaries of Old England... To be dreaming when you should be looking after your cattle is a terrible drawback... There are certain persons who, too lazy and too extravagant to succeed in Europe, sail for Australia under the idea that fortunes are to be made there by a sort of legerdemain, spend or lose their capital in a very short space of time, and return to England to abuse the place, the people, and everything connected with colonization.—Sydney. Australian Handbook (admirable for its wisdom and compactness).

L1.⁴ I had an excellent shepherd, and my whole care, night and day, was the improvement of the flock. I was fortunate, too, in entering Australia before the system miscalled "The Wakefield"⁵ had diminished the supply of labor and raised the price of land. When the change came (like most of those with large allotments and surplus capital), it greatly increased the value of my own property, though at the cost of a terrible blow on the general interests of the colony. I was lucky, too, in the additional venture of a cattle-station, and in the breed of horses and herds, which,

⁴ Lest this seem an exaggeration, I venture to annex an extract from a manuscript letter to the author from Mr. George Blakeston Wilkinson, author of "South Australia"—"I will instance the case of one person who had been a farmer in England, and emigrated with about L2,000 about seven years since. On his arrival he found that the prices of sheep had fallen from about 30s. to 5s. or 6s. per head, and he bought some well-bred flocks at these prices. He was fortunate in obtaining a good and extensive run, and he devoted the whole of his time to improving his flocks, and encouraged his shepherds by rewards; so that in about four years his original number of sheep had increased from twenty-five hundred (which cost him L700) to seven thousand; and the breed and wool were also so much improved that he could obtain L1 per head for two thousand fat sheep, and 15s. per head for the other five thousand,—and this at a time when the general price of sheep was from 10s. to 16s. This alone increased his original capital, invested in sheep, from L700 to L5,700. The profits from the wool paid the whole of his expenses and wages for his men."

⁵ I felt sure from the first that the system called "The Wakefield" could never fairly represent the ideas of Mr. Wakefield himself, whose singular breadth of understanding and various knowledge of mankind belied the notion that fathered on him the clumsy execution of a theory wholly inapplicable to a social state like Australia. I am glad to see that he has vindicated himself from the discreditable paternity. But I grieve to find that he still clings to one cardinal error of the system, in the discouragement of small holdings, and that he evades, more ingeniously than ingenuously, the important question: "What should be the minimum price of land?"

in the five years devoted to that branch establishment, trebled the sum invested therein, exclusive of the advantageous sale of the station.⁶ I was lucky, also, as I have stated, in the purchase and resale of lands, at Uncle Jack's recommendation. And, lastly, I left in time, and escaped a very disastrous crisis in colonial affairs, which I take the liberty of attributing entirely to the mischievous crotchets of theorists at home who want to set all clocks by Greenwich time, forgetting that it is morning in one part of the world at the time they are tolling the curfew in the other.

⁶ The profits of cattle-farming are smaller than those of the sheep- owner (if the latter have good luck; for much depends upon that), but cattle-farming is much more safe as a speculation, and less care, knowledge, and management are required. L2,000 laid out on seven hundred head of cattle, if good runs be procured, might increase the capital in five years from L2,000 to L6,000, besides enabling the owner to maintain himself, pay wages, etc.—Manuscript letter from G. B. Wilkinson.

Chapter II

London once more! How strange, lone, and savage I feel in the streets! I am ashamed to have so much health and strength when I look at those slim forms, stooping backs, and pale faces. I pick my way through the crowd with the merciful timidity of a good-natured giant. I am afraid of jostling against a man, for fear the collision should kill him. I get out of the way of a thread-paper clerk, and 't is a wonder I am not run over by the omnibuses,— I feel as if I could run over them! I perceive, too, that there is something outlandish, peregrinate, and lawless about me. Beau Brummel would certainly have denied me all pretension to the simple air of a gentleman, for every third passenger turns back to look at me. I retreat to my hotel; send for boot-maker, hatter, tailor, and hair-cutter. I humanize myself from head to foot. Even Ulysses is obliged to have recourse to the arts of Minerva, and, to speak unmetaphorically, "smartens himself up," before the faithful Penelope condescends to acknowledge him.

The artificers promise all despatch. Meanwhile I hasten to re-make acquaintance with my mother-country over files of the "Times," "Post," "Chronicle," and "Herald." Nothing comes amiss to me but articles on Australia; from those I turn aside with the true pshaw supercilious of your practical man.

No more are leaders filled with praise and blame of Trevanion. "Percy's spur is cold." Lord Ulverstone figures only

in the "Court Circular," or "Fashionable Movements." Lord Ulverstone entertains a royal duke at dinner, or dines in turn with a royal duke, or has come to town, or gone out of it. At most (faint Platonic reminiscence of the former life), Lord Ulverstone says in the House of Lords a few words on some question, not a party one, and on which (though affecting perhaps the interests of some few thousands, or millions, as the case may be) men speak without "hears," and are inaudible in the gallery; or Lord Ulverstone takes the chair at an agricultural meeting, or returns thanks when his health is drunk at a dinner at Guildhall. But the daughter rises as the father sets, though over a very different kind of world.

"First ball of the season at Castleton House,"—long description of the rooms and the company; above all, of the hostess. Lines on the Marchioness of Castleton's picture in the "Book of Beauty," by the Hon. Fitzroy Fiddledum, beginning with "Art thou an angel from," etc.: a paragraph that pleased me more, on "Lady Castleton's Infant School at Raby Park;" then again, "Lady Castleton, the new patroness at Almack's;" a criticism, more rapturous than ever gladdened living poet, on Lady Castleton's superb diamond stomacher, just reset by Storr & Mortimer; Westmacott's bust of Lady Castleton; Landseer's picture of Lady Castleton and her children in the costume of the olden time. Not a month in that long file of the "Morning Post" but what Lady Castleton shone forth from the rest of womankind,

"Velut inter ignes Luna minores."

The blood mounted to my cheek. Was it to this splendid constellation in the patrician heaven that my obscure, portionless youth had dared to lift its presumptuous eyes? But what is this? "Indian Intelligence: Skilful retreat of the Sepoys under Captain de Caxton"! A captain already! What is the date of the newspaper!—three months ago. The leading article quotes the name with high praise. Is there no leaven of envy amidst the joy at my heart? How obscure has been my career,—how laurelless my poor battle with adverse fortune! Fie, Pisistratus! I am ashamed of thee. Has this accursed Old World, with its feverish rivalries, diseased thee already? Get thee home, quick, to the arms of thy mother, the embrace of thy father; hear Roland's low blessing that thou hast helped to minister to the very fame of that son. If thou wilt have ambition, take it,—not soiled and foul with the mire of London. Let it spring fresh and hardy in the calm air of wisdom, and fed, as with dews, by the loving charities of Home.

CHAPTER III

It was at sunset that I stole through the ruined court-yard, having left my chaise at the foot of the hill below. Though they whom I came to seek knew that I had arrived in England, they did not, from my letter, expect me till the next day. I had stolen a march upon them; and now, in spite of all the impatience which had urged me thither, I was afraid to enter, —afraid to see the change more than ten years had made in those forms for which, in my memory, Time had stood still. And Roland had, even when we parted, grown old before his time. Then my father was in the meridian of life, now he had approached to the decline. And my mother, whom I remembered so fair, as if the freshness of her own heart had preserved the soft bloom to the cheek,—I could not bear to think that she was no longer young. Blanche, too, whom I had left a child,—Blanche, my constant correspondent during those long years of exile, in letters crossed and recrossed, with all the small details that make the eloquence of letter-writing, so that in those epistles I had seen her mind gradually grow up in harmony with the very characters, at first vague and infantine, then somewhat stiff with the first graces of running-hand, then dashing off free and facile; and for the last year before I left, so formed yet so airy, so regular yet so unconscious of effort, though in truth, as the calligraphy had become thus matured, I had been half vexed and half pleased to perceive a

certain reserve creeping over the style,— wishes for my return less expressed from herself than as messages from others, words of the old child-like familiarity repressed, and "Dearest Sisty" abandoned for the cold form of "Dear Cousin." Those letters, coming to me in a spot where maiden and love had been as myths of the bygone, phantasms and eidola only vouchsafed to the visions of fancy, had by little and little crept into secret corners of my heart; and out of the wrecks of a former romance, solitude and revery had gone far to build up the fairy domes of a romance yet to come. My mother's letters had never omitted to make mention of Blanche,—of her forethought and tender activity, of her warm heart and sweet temper,—and in many a little home picture presented her image where I would fain have placed it, not "crystal seeing," but joining my mother in charitable visits to the village, instructing the young and tending on the old, or teaching herself to illuminate, from an old missal in my father's collection, that she might surprise my uncle with a new genealogical table, with all shields and quarterings, blazoned or, sable, and argent; or flitting round my father where he sat, and watching when he looked round for some book he was too lazy to rise for. Blanche had made a new catalogue and got it by heart, and knew at once from what corner of the Heraclea to summon the ghost. On all these little traits had my mother been eulogistically minute; but somehow or other she had never said, at least for the last two years, whether Blanche was pretty or plain. That was a sad omission. I had longed just to ask that simple question, or to

imply it delicately and diplomatically; but, I know not why, I never dared,— for Blanche would have been sure to have read the letter; and what business was it of mine? And if she was ugly, what question more awkward both to put and to answer? Now, in childhood Blanche had just one of those faces that might become very lovely in youth, and would yet quite justify the suspicion that it might become gryphonesque, witch-like, and grim. Yes, Blanche, it is perfectly true! If those large, serious black eyes took a fierce light instead of a tender; if that nose, which seemed then undecided whether to be straight or to be aquiline, arched off in the latter direction, and assumed the martial, Roman, and imperative character of Roland's manly proboscis; if that face, in childhood too thin, left the blushes of youth to take refuge on two salient peaks by the temples (Cumberland air, too, is famous for the growth of the cheekbone!),—if all that should happen, and it very well might, then, O Blanche, I wish thou hadst never written me those letters; and I might have done wiser things than steel my heart so obdurately to pretty Ellen Bolding's blue eyes and silk shoes. Now, combining together all these doubts and apprehensions, wonder not, O reader, why I stole so stealthily through the ruined court-yard, crept round to the other side of the tower, gazed wistfully on the sun setting slant, on the high casements of the hall (too high, alas! to look within), and shrank yet to enter,— doing battle, as it were, with my heart.

Steps—one's sense of hearing grows so quick in the Bushland!—steps, though as light as ever brushed the dew from the

harebell! I crept under the shadow of the huge buttress mantled with ivy. A form comes from the little door at an angle in the ruins,—a woman's form. Is it my mother? It is too tall, and the step is more bounding. It winds round the building, it turns to look back, and a sweet voice—a voice strange, yet familiar—calls, tender but chiding, to a truant that lags behind. Poor Juba! he is trailing his long ears on the ground; he is evidently much disturbed in his mind: now he stands still, his nose in the air. Poor Juba! I left thee so slim and so nimble,—

"Thy form, that was fashioned as light as a fay's,
Has assumed a proportion more round;"

years have sobered thee strangely, and made thee obese and Primmins-like. They have taken too good care of thy creature-comforts, O sensual Mauritanian! Still, in that mystic intelligence we call instinct thou art chasing something that years have not swept from thy memory. Thou art deaf to thy lady's voice, however tender and chiding. That's right! Come near,—nearer,—my cousin Blanche; let me have a fair look at thee. Plague take the dog! he flies off from her; he has found the scent; he is making up to the buttress! Now—pounce—he is caught, whining ungallant discontent! Shall I not yet see the face? It is buried in Juba's black curls! Kisses too! Wicked Blanche, to waste on a dumb animal what, I heartily hope, many a good Christian would be exceedingly glad of! Juba struggles in vain, and is borne off!

I don't think that those eyes can have taken the fierce turn, and Roland's eagle nose can never go with that voice, which has the coo of the dove.

I leave my hiding-place and steal after the Voice and its owner. Where can she be going? Not far. She springs up the hill whereon the lords of the castle once administered justice,—that hill which commands the land far and wide, and from which can be last caught the glimpse of the westering sun. How gracefully still is that attitude of wistful repose! Into what delicate curves do form and drapery harmoniously flow! How softly distinct stands the lithe image against the purple hues of the sky! Then again comes the sweet voice, gay and carolling as a bird's,— now in snatches of song, now in playful appeals to that dull four-footed friend. She is telling him something that must make the black ears stand on end, for I just catch the words, "He is coming," and "home."

I cannot see the sun set where I lurk in my ambush amidst the brake and the ruins, but I feel that the orb has passed from the landscape, in the fresher air of the twilight, in the deeper silence of eve. Lo! Hesper comes forth; at his signal, star after star, come the hosts,—

"Ch' eran con lui, quando l' amor divino,
Mosse da prima quelle cose belle!"

And the sweet voice is hushed.

Then slowly the watcher descends the hill on the opposite side;

the form escapes from my view. What charm has gone from the twilight? See, again, where the step steals through the ruins and along the desolate court. Ah! deep and true heart, do I divine the remembrance that leads thee? I pass through the wicket, down the dell, skirt the laurels, and behold the face looking up to the stars,—the face which had nestled to my breast in the sorrow of parting years, long years ago; on the grave where we had sat,—I the boy, thou the infant,—there, O Blanche, is thy fair face, fairer than the fondest dream that had gladdened my exile, vouchsafed to my gaze!

"Blanche, my cousin! again, again,—soul with soul, amidst the dead!

Look up, Blanche; it is I."

CHAPTER IV

"Go in first and prepare them, dear Blanche; I will wait by the door.

Leave it ajar, that I may see them."

Roland is leaning against the wall, old armor suspended over the gray head of the soldier. It is but a glance that I give to the dark cheek and high brow: no change there for the worse,—no new sign of decay. Rather, if anything, Roland seems younger than when I left. Calm is the brow,—no shame on it now, Roland; and the lips, once so compressed, smile with ease,—no struggle now, Roland, "not to complain." A glance shows me all this.

"Papoe!" says my father, and I hear the fall of a book, "I can't read a line. He is coming to-morrow,—to-morrow! If we lived to the age of Methuselah, Kitty, we could never reconcile philosophy and man; that is, if the poor man's to be plagued with a good, affectionate son!"

And my father gets up and walks to and fro. One minute more, father, one minute more, and I am on thy breast! Time, too, has dealt gently with thee, as he doth with those for whom the wild passions and keen cares of the world never sharpen his scythe. The broad front looks more broad, for the locks are more scanty and thin, but still not a furrow. Whence comes that short sigh?

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