

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE SAXTONS: A
FAMILY PICTURE —
VOLUME 04**

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The Saxtons: A Family
Picture — Volume 04

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The Saxtons: A Family Picture — Volume 04:*

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

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PART IV

CHAPTER I

I was always an early riser. Happy the man who is! Every morning, day comes to him with a virgin's love, full of bloom and purity and freshness. The youth of Nature is contagious, like the gladness of a happy child. I doubt if any man can be called "old" so long as he is an early riser and an early walker. And oh, youth!—take my word of it— youth in dressing-gown and slippers, dawdling over breakfast at noon, is a very decrepit, ghastly image of that youth which sees the sun blush over the mountains, and the dews sparkle upon blossoming hedgerows.

Passing by my father's study, I was surprised to see the windows unclosed; surprised more, on looking in, to see him bending over his books,—for I had never before known him study till after the morning meal. Students are not usually early risers, for students, alas! whatever their age, are rarely young.

Yes, the Great Book must be getting on in serious earnest. It was no longer dalliance with learning; this was work.

I passed through the gates into the road. A few of the cottages were giving signs of returning life, but it was not yet the hour for labor, and no "Good morning, sir," greeted me on the road. Suddenly at a turn, which an over-hanging beech-tree had before concealed, I came full upon my Uncle Roland.

"What! you, sir? So early? Hark, the clock is striking five!"

"Not later! I have walked well for a lame man. It must be more than four miles to—and back."

"You have been to—? Not on business? No soul would be up."

"Yes, at inns there is always some one up. Hostlers never sleep! I have been to order my humble chaise and pair. I leave you today, nephew."

"Ah, uncle, we have offended you! It was my folly, that cursed print—"

"Pooh!" said my uncle, quickly. "Offended me, boy? I defy you!" and he pressed my hand roughly.

"Yet this sudden determination! It was but yesterday, at the Roman Camp, that you planned an excursion with my father, to C—— Castle."

"Never depend upon a whimsical man. I must be in London tonight."

"And return to-morrow?"

"I know not when," said my uncle, gloomily; and he was silent for some moments. At length, leaning less lightly on my arm, he

continued: "Young man, you have pleased me. I love that open, saucy brow of yours, on which Nature has written 'Trust me.' I love those clear eyes, that look one manfully in the face. I must know more of you—much of you. You must come and see me some day or other in your ancestors' ruined keep."

"Come! that I will. And you shall show me the old tower—"

"And the traces of the outworks!" cried my uncle, flourishing his stick.

"And the pedigree—"

"Ay, and your great-great-grandfather's armor, which he wore at Marston Moor—"

"Yes, and the brass plate in the church, uncle."

"The deuce is in the boy! Come here, come here: I've three minds to break your head, sir!"

"It is a pity somebody had not broken the rascally printer's, before he had the impudence to disgrace us by having a family, uncle."

Captain Roland tried hard to frown, but he could not. "Pshaw!" said he, stopping, and taking snuff. "The world of the dead is wide; why should the ghosts jostle us?"

"We can never escape the ghosts, uncle. They haunt us always. We cannot think or act, but the soul of some man, who has lived before, points the way. The dead never die, especially since—"

"Since what, boy? You speak well."

"Since our great ancestor introduced printing," said I, majestically.

My uncle whistled "Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre."

I had not the heart to plague him further.

"Peace!" said I, creeping cautiously within the circle of the stick.

"No! I forewarn you—"

"Peace! and describe to me my little cousin, your pretty daughter,—for pretty I am sure she is."

"Peace," said my uncle, smiling. "But you must come and judge for yourself."

CHAPTER II

Uncle Roland was gone. Before he went, he was closeted for an hour with my father, who then accompanied him to the gate, and we all crowded round him as he stepped into his chaise. When the Captain was gone, I tried to sound my father as to the cause of so sudden a departure. But my father was impenetrable in all that related to his brother's secrets. Whether or not the Captain had ever confided to him the cause of his displeasure with his son,—a mystery which much haunted me,—my father was mute on that score both to my mother and myself. For two or three days, however, Mr. Caxton was evidently unsettled. He did not even take to his Great Work, but walked much alone, or accompanied only by the duck, and without even a book in his hand. But by degrees the scholarly habits returned to him; my mother mended his pens, and the work went on.

For my part, left much to myself, especially in the mornings, I began to muse restlessly over the future. Ungrateful, that I was, the happiness of home ceased to content me. I heard afar the roar of the great world, and roved impatient by the shore.

At length, one evening, my father, with some modest hums and ha's, and an unaffected blush on his fair forehead, gratified a prayer frequently urged on him, and read me some portions of the Great Work. I cannot express the feelings this lecture created,—they were something akin to awe. For the design of

this book was so immense, and towards its execution a learning so vast and various had administered, that it seemed to me as if a spirit had opened to me a new world, which had always been before my feet, but which my own human blindness had hitherto concealed from me. The unspeakable patience with which all these materials had been collected, year after year; the ease with which now, by the calm power of genius, they seemed of themselves to fall into harmony and system; the unconscious humility with which the scholar exposed the stores of a laborious life,—all combined to rebuke my own restlessness and ambition, while they filled me with a pride in my father which saved my wounded egotism from a pang. Here, indeed, was one of those books which embrace an existence; like the Dictionary of Bayle, or the History of Gibbon, or the "Fasti Hellenici" of Clinton, it was a book to which thousands of books had contributed, only to make the originality of the single mind more bold and clear. Into the furnace all vessels of gold, of all ages, had been cast; but from the mould came the new coin, with its single stamp. And, happily, the subject of the work did not forbid to the writer the indulgence of his naive, peculiar irony of humor, so quiet, yet so profound. My father's book was the "History of Human Error." It was, therefore, the moral history of mankind, told with truth and earnestness, yet with an arch, unmalignant smile. Sometimes, indeed, the smile drew tears. But in all true humor lies its germ, pathos. Oh! by the goddess Moria, or Folly, but he was at home in his theme. He viewed man first in the

savage state, preferring in this the positive accounts of voyagers and travellers to the vague myths of antiquity and the dreams of speculators on our pristine state. From Australia and Abyssinia he drew pictures of mortality unadorned, as lively as if he had lived amongst Bushmen and savages all his life. Then he crossed over the Atlantic, and brought before you the American Indian, with his noble nature, struggling into the dawn of civilization, when Friend Penn cheated him out of his birthright, and the Anglo-Saxon drove him back into darkness. He showed both analogy and contrast between this specimen of our kind and others equally apart from the extremes of the savage state and the cultured,— the Arab in his tent, the Teuton in his forests, the Greenlander in his boat, the Finn in his reindeer car. Up sprang the rude gods of the North and the resuscitated Druidism, passing from its earliest templeless belief into the later corruptions of crommell and idol. Up sprang, by their side, the Saturn of the Phoenicians, the mystic Budh of India, the elementary deities of the Pelasgian, the Naith and Serapis of Egypt, the Ormuzd of Persia, the Bel of Babylon, the winged genii of the graceful Etruria. How nature and life shaped the religion; how the religion shaped the manners; how, and by what influences, some tribes were formed for progress; how others were destined to remain stationary, or be swallowed up in war and slavery by their brethren,—was told with a precision clear and strong as the voice of Fate. Not only an antiquarian and philologist, but an anatomist and philosopher, my father brought to bear on all these

grave points the various speculations involved in the distinction of races. He showed how race in perfection is produced, up to a certain point, by admixture; how all mixed races have been the most intelligent; how, in proportion as local circumstance and religious faith permitted the early fusion of different tribes, races improved and quickened into the refinements of civilization. He tracked the progress and dispersion of the Hellenes from their mythical cradle in Thessaly, and showed how those who settled near the sea-shores, and were compelled into commerce and intercourse with strangers, gave to Greece her marvellous accomplishments in arts and letters,—the flowers of the ancient world. How others, like the Spartans; dwelling evermore in a camp, on guard against their neighbors, and rigidly preserving their Dorian purity of extraction, contributed neither artists, nor poets, nor philosophers to the golden treasure-house of mind. He took the old race of the Celts, Cimry, or Cimmerians. He compared the Celt who, as in Wales, the Scotch Highlands, in Bretagne, and in uncomprehended Ireland, retains his old characteristics and purity of breed, with the Celt whose blood, mixed by a thousand channels, dictates from Paris the manners and revolutions of the world. He compared the Norman, in his ancient Scandinavian home, with that wonder of intelligence and chivalry into which he grew, fused imperceptibly with the Frank, the Goth, and the Anglo-Saxon. He compared the Saxon, stationary in the land of Horsa, with the colonist and civilizes of the globe as he becomes when he knows not through what

channels—French, Flemish, Danish, Welsh, Scotch, and Irish—he draws his sanguine blood. And out from all these speculations, to which I do such hurried and scanty justice, he drew the blessed truth, that carries hope to the land of the Caffre, the but of the Bushman,—that there is nothing in the flattened skull and the ebon aspect that rejects God's law, improvement; that by the same principle which raises the dog, the lowest of the animals in its savage state, to the highest after man— viz., admixture of race—you can elevate into nations of majesty and power the outcasts of humanity, now your compassion or your scorn. But when my father got into the marrow of his theme; when, quitting these preliminary discussions, he fell pounce amongst the would-be wisdom of the wise; when he dealt with civilization itself, its schools, and porticos, and academies; when he bared the absurdities couched beneath the colleges of the Egyptians and the Symposia of the Greeks; when he showed that, even in their own favorite pursuit of metaphysics, the Greeks were children, and in their own more practical region of politics, the Romans were visionaries and bunglers; when, following the stream of error through the Middle Ages, he quoted the puerilities of Agrippa, the crudities of Cardan, and passed, with his calin smile, into the salons of the chattering wits of Paris in the eighteenth century, — oh! then his irony was that of Lucian, sweetened by the gentle spirit of Erasmus. For not even here was my father's satire of the cheerless and Mephistophelian school. From this record of error he drew forth the grander as of truth. He showed

how earnest men never think in vain, though their thoughts may be errors. He proved how, in vast cycles, age after age, the human mind marches on, like the ocean, receding here, but there advancing; how from the speculations of the Greek sprang all true philosophy; how from the institutions of the Roman rose all durable systems of government; how from the robust follies of the North came the glory of chivalry, and the modern delicacies of honor, and the sweet, harmonizing influences of woman. He tracked the ancestry of our Sidneys and Bayards from the Hengists, Genseric, and Attilas. Full of all curious and quaint anecdote, of original illustration, of those niceties of learning which spring from a taste cultivated to the last exquisite polish, the book amused and allured and charmed; and erudition lost its pedantry, now in the simplicity of Montaigne, now in the penetration of La Bruyere. He lived in each time of which he wrote, and the time lived again in him. Ah! what a writer of romances he would have been if—if what? If he had had as sad an experience of men's passions as he had the happy intuition into their humors. But he who would see the mirror of the shore must look where it is cast on the river, not the ocean. The narrow stream reflects the gnarled tree and the pausing herd and the village spire and the romance of the landscape. But the sea reflects only the vast outline of the headland and the lights of the eternal heaven.

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