

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE SAXTONS: A
FAMILY PICTURE —
VOLUME 02**

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

**The Caxtons: A Family
Picture — Volume 02**

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

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PART II

CHAPTER I

When I had reached the age of twelve, I had got to the head of the preparatory school to which I had been sent. And having thus exhausted all the oxygen of learning in that little receiver, my parents looked out for a wider range for my inspirations. During the last two years in which I had been at school, my love for study had returned; but it was a vigorous, wakeful, undreamy love, stimulated by competition, and animated by the practical desire to excel.

My father no longer sought to curb my intellectual aspirings. He had too great a reverence for scholarship not to wish me to become a scholar if possible; though he more than once said to me somewhat sadly, "Master books, but do not let them master you. Read to live, not live to read. One slave of the lamp is enough for a household; my servitude must not be a hereditary bondage."

My father looked round for a suitable academy; and the fame of Dr.

Herman's "Philhellenic Institute" came to his ears.

Now, this Dr. Herman was the son of a German music-master who had settled in England. He had completed his own education at the University of Bonn; but finding learning too common a drug in that market to bring the high price at which he valued his own, and having some theories as to political freedom which attached him to England, he resolved upon setting up a school, which he designed as an "Era in the History of the Human Mind." Dr. Herman was one of the earliest of those new-fashioned authorities in education who have, more lately, spread pretty numerous amongst us, and would have given, perhaps, a dangerous shake to the foundations of our great classical seminaries, if those last had not very wisely, though very cautiously, borrowed some of the more sensible principles which lay mixed and adulterated amongst the crotchets and chimeras of their innovating rivals and assailants.

Dr. Herman had written a great many learned works against every pre-existing method of instruction; that which had made the greatest noise was upon the infamous fiction of Spelling-Books: "A more lying, roundabout, puzzle-headed delusion than that by which we Confuse the clear instincts of truth in our accursed systems of spelling, was never concocted by the father of falsehood." Such was the exordium of this famous treatise. "For instance, take the monosyllable Cat. What a brazen forehead you must have when you say to an infant, c, a, t,—spell Cat: that is, three sounds, forming a totally opposite compound,—opposite in every detail, opposite in the whole,—compose a poor little monosyllable which, if you would but say the simple truth, the child will learn to spell merely by looking at it! How can three sounds, which run thus to the ear, see-eh-tee, compose the sound cat? Don't they rather compose the sound see-eh-te, or ceaty? How can a system of education flourish that begins by so monstrous a falsehood, which the sense of hearing suffices to contradict? No wonder that the horn-book is the despair of mothers! "From this instance the reader will perceive that Dr. Herman, in his theory of education, began at the beginning,—he took the bull fairly by the horns. As for the rest, upon a broad principle of eclecticism, he had combined together every new patent invention for youthful idea-shooting. He had taken his trigger from Hofwyl; he had bought his wadding from Hamilton; he had got his copper-caps from Bell and Lancaster. The youthful idea,—he had rammed it tight! he had rammed it loose! he had rammed it with pictorial illustrations! he had rammed it with the monitorial system! he had rammed it in every conceivable way, and with every imaginable

ramrod! but I have mournful doubts whether he shot the youthful idea an inch farther than it did under the old mechanism of flint and steel! Nevertheless, as Dr. Herman really did teach a great many things too much neglected at schools; as, besides Latin and Greek, he taught a vast variety in that vague infinite nowadays called "useful knowledge;" as he engaged lecturers on chemistry, engineering, and natural history; as arithmetic and the elements of physical science were enforced with zeal and care; as all sorts of gymnastics were intermingled with the sports of the playground,—so the youthful idea, if it did not go farther, spread its shots in a wider direction, and a boy could not stay there five years without learning something: which is more than can be said of all schools! He learned at least to use his eyes and his ears and his limbs; order, cleanliness, exercise, grew into habits; and the school pleased the ladies and satisfied the gentlemen,—in a word, it thrived; and Dr. Herman, at the time I speak of, numbered more than one hundred pupils. Now, when the worthy man first commenced the task of tuition, he had proclaimed the humanest abhorrence to the barbarous system of corporal punishment. But alas! as his school increased in numbers, he had proportionately recanted these honorable and anti-birchen ideas. He had—reluctantly, perhaps, honestly, no doubt; but with full determination—come to the conclusion that there are secret springs which can only be detected by the twigs of the divining-rod; and having discovered with what comparative ease the whole mechanism of his little government could be carried on by the admission of the birch-regulator, so, as he grew richer and lazier and fatter, the Philhellenic Institute spun along as glibly as a top kept in vivacious movement by the perpetual application of the lash.

I believe that the school did not suffer in reputation from this sad apostasy on the part of the head-master; on the contrary, it seemed more natural and English,—less outlandish and heretical. And it was at the zenith of its renown when, one bright morning, with all my clothes nicely mended, and a large plum-cake in my box, I was deposited at its hospitable gates.

Amongst Dr. Herman's various whimsicalities there was one to which he had adhered with more fidelity than to the anti-corporal punishment articles of his creed; and, in fact, it was upon this that he had caused those imposing words, "Philhellenic Institute," to blaze in gilt capitals in front of his academy. He belonged to that illustrious class of scholars who are now waging war on our popular mythologies, and upsetting all the associations which the Etonians and Harrovians connect with the household names of ancient history. In a word, he sought to restore to scholastic purity the mutilated orthography of Greek appellatives. He was extremely indignant that little boys should be brought up to confound Zeus with Jupiter, Ares with Mars, Artemis with Diana,—the Greek deities with the Roman; and so rigidly did he inculcate the doctrine that these two sets of personages were to be kept constantly contradistinguished from each other, that his cross-examinations kept us in eternal confusion.

"Vat," he would exclaim to some new boy fresh from some grammar-school on the Etonian system—"Vat do you mean by dranslating Zeus Jupiter? Is dat amatory, irascible, cloud-compelling god of Olympus, vid his eagle and his aegis, in the smallest degree resembling de grave, formal, moral Jupiter Optimus Maximus of the Roman Capitol?—a god, Master Simpkins, who would have been perfectly shocked at the idea of running after innocent Fraulein dressed up as a swan or a bull! I put dat question to you vonce for all, Master Simpkins." Master Simpkins took care to agree with the Doctor. "And how could you," resumed Dr. Herman majestically, turning to some other criminal alumnus,— "how could you presume to dranslate de Ares of Homer, sir, by the audacious vulgarism Mars?— Ares, Master Jones, who roared as loud as ten thousand men when he was hurt; or as you vill roar if I catch you calling him Mars again?—Ares, who covered seven plectra of ground? Confound Ares, the manslayer, with the Mars or Mavors whom de Romans stole from de Sabines!— Mars, de solemn and calm protector of Rome! Master Jones, Master Jones, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" And then waxing enthusiastic, and warming more and more into German gutturals and pronunciation, the good Doctor would lift up his hands, with two great rings on his thumbs, and exclaim: "Und Du! and dou, Aphrodite,—dou, whose bert de seasons vel- coined! dou, who didst put

Atonis into a coffer, and den tid durn him into an anemone! dou to be called Venus by dat snivel-nosed little Master Budderfield!—Venus, who presided over Baumgartens and funerals and nasty tinkin sewers!—Venus Cloacina, O mein Gott! Come here, Master Budderfield: I must flog you for dat; I must indeed, liddle boy!" As our Philhellenic preceptor carried his archaeological purism into all Greek proper names, it was not likely that my unhappy baptismal would escape. The first time I signed my exercise I wrote "Pisistratus Caxton" in my best round-hand. "And dey call your baba a scholar!" said the Doctor, contemptuously. "Your name, sir, is Greek; and, as Greek, you will be dood enough to write it, vith vat you call an e and an o,— P,e,i,s,i,s,t,r,a,t,o,s. Vat can you expect for to come to, Master Caxton, if you don't pay de care dat is proper to your own dood name,— de e, and de o? Ach? let me see no more of your vile corruptions! Mein Gott! Pi! ven de name is Pei!"

The next time I wrote home to my father, modestly implying that I was short of cash, that a trap-bat would be acceptable, and that the favorite goddess amongst the boys (whether Greek or Roman was very immaterial) was Diva Moneta, I felt a glow of classical pride in signing myself "your affectionate Peisistratos." The next post brought a sad damper to my scholastic exultation. The letter ran thus:—

My Dear Son,—I prefer my old acquaintances Thucydides and Pisistratus to Thoukudides and Peisistratos. Horace is familiar to me, but Horatius is only known to me as Cocles. Pisistratus can play at trap-ball; but I find no authority in pure Greek to allow me to suppose that that game was known to Peisistratos. I should be too happy to send you a drachma or so, but I have no coins in my possession current at Athens at the time when Pisistratus was spelt Peisistratos.—Your affectionate father, A. CAXTON.

Verily, here indeed was the first practical embarrassment produced by that melancholy anachronism which my father had so prophetically deplored. However, nothing like experience to prove the value of compromise in this world. Peisistratos continued to write exercises, and a second letter from Pisistratus was followed by the trap-bat.

CHAPTER II

I was somewhere about sixteen when, on going home for the holidays, I found my mother's brother settled among the household Lares. Uncle Jack, as he was familiarly called, was a light-hearted, plausible, enthusiastic, talkative fellow, who had spent three small fortunes in trying to make a large one.

Uncle Jack was a great speculator; but in all his speculations he never affected to think of himself,—it was always the good of his fellow-creatures that he had at heart, and in this ungrateful world fellow-creatures are not to be relied upon! On coming of age, he inherited L6,000, from his maternal grandfather. It seemed to him then that his fellow-creatures were sadly imposed upon by their tailors. Those ninth parts of humanity notoriously eked out their fractional existence by asking nine times too much for the clothing which civilization, and perhaps a change of climate, render more necessary to us than to our predecessors, the Picts. Out of pure philanthropy, Uncle Jack started a "Grand National Benevolent Clothing Company," which undertook to supply the public with inexpressibles of the best Saxon cloth at 7s. 6d. a pair; coats, superfine, L1 18s.; and waistcoats at so much per dozen, —they were all to be worked off by steam. Thus the rascally tailors were to be put down, humanity clad, and the philanthropists rewarded (but that was a secondary consideration) with a clear return of thirty per cent. In spite of the evident charitableness of this Christian design, and the irrefragable calculations upon which it was based, this company died a victim to the ignorance and unthankfulness of our fellow-creatures; and all that remained of Jack's L6,000, was a fifty-fourth share in a small steam-engine, a large assortment of ready-made pantaloons, and the liabilities of the directors.

Uncle Jack disappeared, and went on his travels. The same spirit of philanthropy which characterized the speculations of his purse attended the risks of his person. Uncle Jack had a natural leaning towards all distressed communities: if any tribe, race, or nation was down in the world, Uncle Jack threw himself plump into the scale to redress the balance. Poles, Greeks (the last were then fighting the Turks), Mexicans, Spaniards,—Uncle Jack thrust his nose into all their squabbles! Heaven forbid I should mock thee, poor Uncle Jack! for those generous predilections towards the unfortunate; only, whenever a nation is in a misfortune, there is always a job going on! The Polish cause, the Greek cause, the Mexican cause, and the Spanish cause are necessarily mixed up with loans and subscriptions. These Continental patriots, when they take up the sword with one hand, generally contrive to thrust their other hand deep into their neighbor's breeches' pockets. Uncle Jack went to Greece, thence he went to Spain, thence to Mexico. No doubt he was of great service to those afflicted populations, for he came back with unanswerable proof of their gratitude in the shape of L3,000. Shortly after this appeared a prospectus of the "New, Grand, National, Benevolent Insurance Company, for the Industrial Classes." This invaluable document, after setting forth the immense benefits to society arising from habits of providence and the introduction of insurance companies,—proving the infamous rate of premiums exacted by the existent offices, and their inapplicability to the wants of the honest artisan, and declaring that nothing but the purest intentions of benefiting their fellow-creatures, and raising the moral tone of society, had led the directors to institute a new society, founded on the noblest principles and the most moderate calculations,—proceeded to demonstrate that twenty-four and a half per cent was the smallest possible return the shareholders could anticipate. The company began under the fairest auspices; an archbishop was caught as president, on the condition always that he should give nothing but his name to the society. Uncle Jack—more euphoniously designated as "the celebrated philanthropist, John Jones Tibbets, Esquire"—was honorary secretary, and the capital stated at two millions. But such was the obtuseness of the industrial classes, so little did they perceive the benefits of subscribing one-and-ninepence a-week from the age of twenty-one to fifty, in order to secure at the latter age the annuity of L18, that the company dissolved into thin

air, and with it dissolved also Uncle Jack's £3,000. Nothing more was then seen or heard of him for three years. So obscure was his existence that on the death of an aunt, who left him a small farm in Cornwall, it was necessary to advertise that "If John Jones Tibbets, Esq., would apply to Messrs. Blunt & Tin, Lothbury, between the hours of ten and four, he would hear of something to his advantage." But even as a conjurer declares that he will call the ace of spades, and the ace of spades, that you thought you had safely under your foot, turns up on the table,—so with this advertisement suddenly turned up Uncle Jack. With inconceivable satisfaction did the new landowner settle himself in his comfortable homestead. The farm, which was about two hundred acres, was in the best possible condition, and saving one or two chemical preparations, which cost Uncle Jack, upon the most scientific principles, thirty acres of buckwheat, the ears of which came up, poor things, all spotted and speckled as if they had been inoculated with the small-pox, Uncle Jack for the first two years was a thriving man. Unluckily, however, one day Uncle Jack discovered a coal-mine in a beautiful field of Swedish turnips; in another week the house was full of engineers and naturalists, and in another month appeared; in my uncle's best style, much improved by practice, a prospectus of the "Grand National Anti-Monopoly Coal Company, instituted on behalf of the poor householders of London, and against the Monster Monopoly of the London Coal Wharves.

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