

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

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Pelham — Volume 05

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

Pelham — Volume 05

CHAPTER LVIII

Mangez-vous bien, Monsieur?

Oui, et bois encore mieux.

—Mons. de Porceaugnac.

My pamphlet took prodigiously. The authorship was attributed to the most talented member of the Opposition; and though there were many errors in style, and (I now think) many sophisms in the reasoning, yet it carried the end proposed by all ambition of whatever species—and imposed upon the taste of the public.

Sometime afterwards, I was going down the stairs at Almack's, when I heard an altercation, high and grave, at the door of reception. To my surprise, I found Lord Guloseton and a very young man in great wrath; the latter had never been to Almack's before, and had forgotten his ticket. Guloseton, who belonged to a very different set to that of the Almackians, insisted that his word was enough to bear his juvenile companion through. The ticket inspector was irate and obdurate, and having seldom or ever seen Lord Guloseton himself, paid very little respect to his authority.

As I was wrapping myself in my cloak, Guloseton turned to me, for passion makes men open their hearts: too eager for an opportunity of acquiring the epicure's acquaintance, I offered to get his friend admittance in an instant; the offer was delightedly accepted, and I soon procured a small piece of pencilled paper from Lady—, which effectually silenced the Charon, and opened the Stygian via to the Elysium beyond.

Guloseton overwhelmed me with his thanks. I remounted the stairs with him—took every opportunity of ingratiating myself—received an invitation to dinner on the following day, and left Willis's transported at the goodness of my fortune.

At the hour of eight on the ensuing evening, I had just made my entrance into Lord Guloseton's drawing-room. It was a small apartment furnished with great luxury and some taste. A Venus of Titian's was placed over the chimney-piece, in all the gorgeous voluptuousness of her unveiled beauty—the pouting lip, not silent though shut—the eloquent lid drooping over the eye, whose reveille you could so easily imagine—the arms—the limbs—the attitude, so composed, yet so redolent of life—all seemed to indicate that sleep was not forgetfulness, and that the dreams of the goddess were not wholly inharmonious with the waking realities in which it was her gentle prerogative to indulge. On either side, was a picture of the delicate and golden hues of Claude; these were the only landscapes in the room; the remaining pictures were more suitable to the Venus of the luxurious Italian. Here was one of the beauties of Sir Peter Lely; there was an admirable copy of the Hero and Leander. On the table lay the Basia of Johannes Secundus, and a few French works on Gastronomy.

As for the genius loci—you must imagine a middle-sized, middle-aged man, with an air rather of delicate than florid health. But little of the effects of his good cheer were apparent in the external man. His cheeks were neither swollen nor inflated—his person, though not thin, was of no unwieldy obesity—the tip of his nasal organ was, it is true, of a more ruby tinge than the rest, and one carbuncle, of tender age and gentle dyes, diffused its mellow and moonlight influence over the physiognomical scenery—his forehead was high and bald, and the few locks which still rose above it, were carefully and gracefully curled a l'antique: Beneath a pair of grey shaggy brows, (which their noble owner had a

strange habit of raising and depressing, according to the nature of his remarks,) rolled two very small, piercing, arch, restless orbs, of a tender green; and the mouth, which was wide and thick-lipped, was expressive of great sensuality, and curved upwards in a perpetual smile.

Such was Lord Guloseton. To my surprise no other guest but myself appeared.

"A new friend," said he, as we descended into the dining-room, "is like a new dish—one must have him all to oneself, thoroughly to enjoy and rightly to understand him."

"A noble precept," said I, with enthusiasm. "Of all vices, indiscriminate hospitality is the most pernicious. It allows us neither conversation nor dinner, and realizing the mythological fable of Tantalus, gives us starvation in the midst of plenty."

"You are right," said Guloseton, solemnly; "I never ask above six persons to dinner, and I never dine out; for a bad dinner, Mr. Pelham, a bad dinner is a most serious—I may add, the most serious calamity."

"Yes," I replied, "for it carries with it no consolation: a buried friend may be replaced—a lost mistress renewed—a slandered character be recovered—even a broken constitution restored; but a dinner, once lost, is irremediable; that day is for ever departed; an appetite once thrown away can never, till the cruel prolixity of the gastric agents is over, be regained. 'Il y a tant de maitresses, (says the admirable Corneille), 'il n'y a qu'un diner.'"

"You speak like an oracle—like the Cook's Oracle, Mr. Pelham: may I send you some soup, it is a la Carmelite? But what are you about to do with that case?"

"It contains" (said I) "my spoon, my knife, and my fork. Nature afflicted me with a propensity, which through these machines I have endeavoured to remedy by art. I eat with too great a rapidity. It is a most unhappy failing, for one often hurries over in one minute, what ought to have afforded the fullest delight for the period of five. It is, indeed, a vice which deadens enjoyment, as well as abbreviates it; it is a shameful waste of the gifts, and a melancholy perversion of the bounty of Providence: my conscience tormented me; but the habit, fatally indulged in early childhood, was not easy to overcome. At last I resolved to construct a spoon of peculiarly shallow dimensions, a fork so small, that it could only raise a certain portion to my mouth, and a knife rendered blunt and jagged, so that it required a proper and just time to carve the goods 'the gods provide me.' My lord, 'the lovely Thais sits beside me' in the form of a bottle of Madeira. Suffer me to take wine with you?"

"With pleasure, my good friend; let us drink to the memory of the Carmelites, to whom we are indebted for this inimitable soup."

"Yes!" I cried. "Let us for once shake off the prejudices of sectarian faith, and do justice to one order of those incomparable men, who, retiring from the cares of an idle and sinful world, gave themselves with undivided zeal and attention to the theory and practice of the profound science of gastronomy. It is reserved for us, my lord, to pay a grateful tribute of memory to those exalted recluses, who, through a long period of barbarism and darkness, preserved, in the solitude of their cloisters, whatever of Roman luxury and classic dainties have come down to this later age. We will drink to the Carmelites at a sect, but we will drink also to the monks as a body. Had we lived in those days, we had been monks ourselves."

"It is singular," answered Lord Guloseton—"(by the by, what think you of this turbot?)—to trace the history of the kitchen; it affords the greatest scope to the philosopher and the moralist. The ancients seemed to have been more mental, more imaginative, than we are in their dishes; they fed their bodies as well as their minds upon delusion: for instance, they esteemed beyond all price the tongues of nightingales, because they tasted the very music of the birds in the organs of their utterance. That is what I call the poetry of gastronomy!"

"Yes," said I, with a sigh, "they certainly had, in some respects, the advantage over us. Who can pore over the suppers of Apicius without the fondest regret? The venerable Ude [Note: Q.—The venerable Bede—Printer's Devil.] implies, that the study has not progressed. 'Cookery (he says, in the first part of his work) possesses but few innovators.'"

"It is with the greatest diffidence," said Guloseton, (his mouth full of truth and turbot,) "that we may dare to differ from so great an authority. Indeed, so high is my veneration for that wise man, that if all the evidence of my sense and reason were on one side, and the dictum of the great Ude upon the other, I should be inclined—I think, I should be determined—to relinquish the former, and adopt the latter." [Note: See the speech of Mr. Brougham in honour of Mr. Fox.]

"Bravo, my lord," cried I, warmly. "'Qu'un Cuisinier est un mortel divin!' Why should we not be proud of our knowledge in cookery? It is the soul of festivity at all times, and to all ages. How many marriages have been the consequence of meeting at dinner? How much good fortune has been the result of a good supper? At what moment of our existence are we happier than at table? There hatred and animosity are lulled to sleep, and pleasure alone reigns. Here the cook, by his skill and attention, anticipates our wishes in the happiest selection of the best dishes and decorations. Here our wants are satisfied, our minds and bodies invigorated, and ourselves qualified for the high delights of love, music, poetry, dancing, and other pleasures; and is he, whose talents have produced these happy effects, to rank no higher in the scale of man than a common servant? [Note: Ude, verbatim.]

"'Yes,' cries the venerable professor himself, in a virtuous and prophetic paroxysm of indignant merit—'yes, my disciples, if you adopt, and attend to the rules I have laid down, the self-love of mankind will consent at last, that cookery shall rank in the class of the sciences, and its professors deserve the name of artists!'" [Note: Ibid.]

"My dear, dear Sir," exclaimed Guloseton, with a kindred glow, "I discover in you a spirit similar to my own. Let us drink long life to the venerable Ude!"

"I pledge you, with all my soul," said I, filling my glass to the brim.

"What a pity," rejoined Guloseton, "that Ude, whose practical science was so perfect, should ever have written, or suffered others to write, the work published under his name; true it is that the opening part which you have so feelingly recited, is composed with a grace, a charm beyond the reach of art; but the instructions are vapid, and frequently so erroneous, as to make me suspect their authenticity; but, after all, cooking is not capable of becoming a written science—it is the philosophy of practice!"

"Ah! by Lucullus," exclaimed I, interrupting my host, "what a visionary bechamelle! Oh, the inimitable sauce; these chickens are indeed worthy of the honour of being dressed. Never, my lord, as long as you live, eat a chicken in the country; excuse a pun, you will have foul fare."

"'J'ai toujours redoute la volaille perfide,
Qui brave les efforts d'une dent intrepide;
Souvent par un ami, dans ses champs entraine.
J'ai reconnu le soir le coq infortune
Qui m'avait le matin a l'aurore naissante
Reveille brusquement de sa voix glapissante;
Je l'avais admire dans le sein de la cour,
Avec des yeux jaloux, j'avais vu son amour.
Helas! la malheureux, abjurant sa tendresse,
Exercait a souper sa fureur vengeresse.'

"Pardon the prolixity of my quotation for the sake of its value."

"I do, I do," answered Guloseton, laughing at the humour of the lines: till, suddenly checking himself, he said, "we must be grave, Mr. Pelham, it will never do to laugh. What would become of our digestions?"

"True," said I, relapsing into seriousness; "and if you will allow me one more quotation, you will see what my author adds with regard to any abrupt interruption."

"Defendez que personne au milieu d'un banquet,
Ne vous vienne donner un avis indiscret,
Ecartez ce facheux qui vers vous s'achemine,
Rien ne doit deranger l'honnete homme qui dine."

"Admirable advice," said Guloseton, toying with a filet mignon de poulet. "Do you remember an example in the Bailly of Suffren, who, being in India, was waited upon by a deputation of natives while he was at dinner. 'Tell them,' said he, 'that the Christian religion peremptorily forbids every Christian, while at table, to occupy himself with any earthly subject, except the function of eating.' The deputation retired in the profoundest respect at the exceeding devotion of the French general."

"Well," said I, after we had chuckled gravely and quietly, with the care of our digestion before us, for a few minutes—"well, however good the invention was, the idea is not entirely new, for the Greeks esteemed eating and drinking plentifully, a sort of offering to the gods; and Aristotle explains the very word, THoinai, or feasts, by an etymological exposition, 'that it was thought a duty to the gods to be drunk;' no bad idea of our classical patterns of antiquity. Polypheme, too, in the Cyclops of Euripides, no doubt a very sound theologian, says, his stomach is his only deity; and Xenophon tells us, that as the Athenians exceeded all other people in the number of their gods, so they exceeded them also in the number of their feasts. May I send your lordship an ortolan?"

"Pelham, my boy," said Guloseton, whose eyes began to roll and twinkle with a brilliancy suited to the various liquids which ministered to their rejoicing orbs; "I love you for your classics. Polypheme was a wise fellow, a very wise fellow, and it was a terrible shame in Ulysses to put out his eye. No wonder that the ingenious savage made a deity of his stomach; to what known and visible source, on this earth, was he indebted for a keener enjoyment—a more rapturous and a more constant delight? No wonder he honoured it with his gratitude, and supplied it with his peace-offerings;—let us imitate so great an example:—let us make our digestive receptacles a temple, to which we will consecrate the choicest goods we possess;—let us conceive no pecuniary sacrifice too great, which procures for our altar an acceptable gift;—let us deem it an impiety to hesitate, if a sauce seems extravagant, or an ortolan too dear; and let our last act in this sublunary existence, be a solemn festival in honour of our unceasing benefactor."

"Amen to your creed," said I: "edibulatory Epicurism holds the key to all morality: for do we not see now how sinful it is to yield to an obscene and exaggerated intemperance?—would it not be to the last degree ungrateful to the great source of our enjoyment, to overload it with a weight which would oppress it with languor, or harass it with pain; and finally to drench away the effects of our impiety with some nauseous potation which revolts it, tortures it, convulses, irritates, enfeebles it, through every particle of its system? How wrong in us to give way to anger, jealousy, revenge, or any evil passion; for does not all that affects the mind operate also upon the stomach; and how can we be so vicious, so obdurate, as to forget, for a momentary indulgence, our debt to what you have so justly designated our perpetual benefactor?"

"Right," said Lord Guloseton, "a bumper to the morality of the stomach."

The desert was now on the table. "I have dined well," said Guloseton, stretching his legs with an air of supreme satisfaction; "but—" and here my philosopher sighed deeply—"we cannot dine again till to-morrow! Happy, happy, happy common people, who can eat supper! Would to Heaven, that I might have one boon—perpetual appetite—a digestive Hourri, which renewed its virginity every time it was touched. Alas! for the instability of human enjoyment. But now that we have no immediate hope to anticipate, let us cultivate the pleasures of memory. What thought you of the veau a la Dauphine?"

"Pardon me if I hesitate at giving my opinion, till I have corrected my judgment by yours."

"Why, then, I own I was somewhat displeased—disappointed as it were—with that dish; the fact is, veal ought to be killed in its very first infancy; they suffer it to grow to too great an age. It

becomes a sort of hobbydehoy, and possesses nothing of veal, but its insipidity, or of beef, but its toughness."

"Yes," said I, "it is only in their veal, that the French surpass us; their other meats want the ruby juices and elastic freshness of ours. Monsieur L—allowed this truth, with a candour worthy of his vast mind. Mon Dieu! what claret!—what a body! and, let me add, what a soul, beneath it! Who would drink wine like this? it is only made to taste. It is like first love—too pure for the eagerness of enjoyment; the rapture it inspires is in a touch, a kiss. It is a pity, my lord, that we do not serve perfumes at dessert: it is their appropriate place. In confectionary (delicate invention of the Sylphs,) we imitate the forms of the rose and the jessamine; why not their odours too? What is nature without its scents?—and as long as they are absent from our desserts, it is in vain that the Bard exclaims, that—

"L'observateur de la belle Nature,
S'extasie en voyant des fleurs en confiture."

"It is an exquisite idea of yours," said Guloseton—"and the next time you dine here, we will have perfumes. Dinner ought to be a reunion of all the senses—

"Gladness to the ear, nerve, heart, and sense."

There was a momentary pause. "My lord," said I, "what a lusty lusciousness in this pear! it is like the style of the old English poets. What think you of the seeming good understanding between Mr. Gaskell and the Whigs?"

"I trouble myself little about it," replied Guloseton, helping himself to some preserves—"politics disturb the digestion."

"Well," thought I, "I must ascertain some point in this man's character easier to handle than his epicurism: all men are vain: let us find out the peculiar vanity of mine host."

"The Tories," said I, "seem to think themselves exceedingly secure; they attach no importance to the neutral members; it was but the other day, Lord—told me that he did not care a straw for Mr. —, notwithstanding he possessed four votes. Heard you ever such arrogance?"

"No, indeed," said Golouston, with a lazy air of indifference—"are you a favourer of the olive?"

"No," said I, "I love it not; it hath an under taste of sourness, and an upper of oil, which do not make harmony to my palate. But, as I was saying, the Whigs, on the contrary, pay the utmost deference to their partizans; and a man of fortune, rank, and parliamentary influence, might have all the power without the trouble of a leader."

"Very likely," said Guloseton, drowsily.

"I must change my battery," thought I; but while I was meditating a new attack, the following note was brought me:—

"For God's sake, Pelham, come out to me: I am waiting in the street to see you; come directly, or it will be too late to render me the service I would ask of you.

"R. Glanville."

I rose instantly. "You must excuse me, Lord Guloseton, I am called suddenly away."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the gourmand; "some tempting viand—post prandia Callirhoe."

"My good lord," said I, not heeding his insinuation—"I leave you with the greatest regret."

"And I part from you with the same; it is a real pleasure to see such a person at dinner."

"Adieu! my host—'Je vais vivre et manger en sage.'"

CHAPTER LIX

*I do defy him, and I spit at him,
Call him a slanderous coward and a villain—
Which to maintain I will allow him odds.*

—*Shakspeare.*

I found Glanville walking before the door with a rapid and uneven step.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, when he saw me—"I have been twice to Mivart's to find you. The second time, I saw your servant, who told me where you were gone. I knew you well enough to be sure of your kindness."

Glanville broke off abruptly: and after a short pause, said, with a quick, low, hurried tone—"The office I wish you to take upon yourself is this:—go immediately to Sir John Tyrrell, with a challenge from me. Ever since I last saw you, I have been hunting out that man, and in vain. He had then left town. He returned this evening, and quits it to-morrow: you have no time to lose."

"My dear Glanville," said I, "I have no wish to learn any secret you would conceal from me; but forgive me if I ask for some further instructions than those you have afforded me. Upon what plea am I to call out Sir John Tyrrell? and what answer am I to give to any excuses he may create?"

"I have anticipated your reply," said Glanville, with ill-subdued impatience; "you have only to give this paper: it will prevent all discussion. Read it if you will; I have left it unsealed for that purpose."

I cast my eyes over the lines Glanville thrust into my hand; they ran thus:—

"The time has at length come for me to demand the atonement so long delayed. The bearer of this, who is, probably, known to you, will arrange with any person you may appoint, the hour and place of our meeting. He is unacquainted with the grounds of my complaint against you, but he is satisfied of my honour: your second will, I presume, be the same with respect to yours. It is for me only to question the latter, and to declare you solemnly to be void alike of principle and courage, a villain, and a poltroon.

"Reginald Glanville."

"You are my earliest friend," said I, when I had read this soothing epistle; "and I will not flinch from the place you assign me: but I tell you fairly and frankly, that I would sooner cut off my right hand than suffer it to give this note to Sir John Tyrrell."

Glanville made no answer; we walked on till he stopped suddenly, and said, "My carriage is at the corner of the street; you must go instantly; Tyrrell lodges at the Clarendon; you will find me at home on your return."

I pressed his hand, and hurried on my mission. It was, I own, one peculiarly unwelcome and displeasing. In the first place, I did not love to be made a party in a business of the nature of which I was so profoundly ignorant. Besides, Glanville was more dear to me than any one, judging only of my external character, would suppose; and constitutionally indifferent as I am to danger for myself, I trembled like a woman at the peril I was instrumental in bringing upon him. But what weighed upon me far more than either of these reflections, was the recollection of Ellen. Should her brother fall in an engagement in which I was his supposed adviser, with what success could I hope for those feelings from her, which, at present, constituted the tenderest and the brightest of my hopes? In the midst of these disagreeable ideas the carriage stopped at the door of Tyrrel's Hotel.

The waiter said Sir John was in the coffee-room; thither I immediately marched. Seated in the box nearest the fire sat Tyrrell, and two men, of that old-fashioned roue set, whose members

indulged in debauchery, as if it were an attribute of manliness, and esteemed it, as long as it were hearty and English, rather a virtue to boast of, than a vice to disown. Tyrrel nodded to me familiarly as I approached him; and I saw, by the half-emptied bottles before him, and the flush of his sallow countenance, that he had not been sparing of his libations. I whispered that I wished to speak to him on a subject of great importance; he rose with much reluctance, and, after swallowing a large tumbler-full of port wine to fortify him for the task, he led the way to a small room, where he seated himself, and asked me, with his usual mixture of bluntness and good-breeding, the nature of my business. I made him no reply: I contented myself with placing Glanville's billet doux in his hand. The room was dimly lighted with a single candle, and the small and capricious fire, near which the gambler was seated, threw its upward light, by starts and intervals, over the strong features and deep lines of his countenance. It would have been a study worthy of Rembrandt.

I drew my chair near him, and half shading my eyes with my hand, sat down in silence to mark the effect the letter would produce. Tyrrel (I imagine) was a man originally of hardy nerves, and had been thrown much in the various situations of life where the disguise of all outward emotion is easily and insensibly taught; but whether his frame had been shattered by his excesses, or that the insulting language of the note touched him to the quick, he seemed perfectly unable to govern his feelings; the lines were written hastily, and the light, as I said before, was faint and imperfect, and he was forced to pause over each word as he proceeded, so that "the iron had full time to enter into his soul."

Passion, however, developed itself differently in him than in Glanville: in the latter, it was a rapid transition of powerful feelings, one angry wave dashing over another; it was the passion of a strong and keenly susceptible mind, to which every sting was a dagger, and which used the force of a giant to dash away the insect which attacked it. In Tyrrell, it was passion acting on a callous mind but a broken frame—his hand trembled violently—his voice faltered—he could scarcely command the muscles which enabled him to speak; but there was no fiery start—no indignant burst—no flashing forth of the soul; in him, it was the body overcoming and paralyzing the mind. In Glanville it was the mind governing and convulsing the body.

"Mr. Pelham," he said at last, after a few preliminary efforts to clear his voice, "this note requires some consideration. I know not at present whom to appoint as my second—will you call upon me early to-morrow?"

"I am sorry," said I, "that my sole instructions were to get an immediate answer from you. Surely either of the gentlemen I saw with you would officiate as your second?"

Tyrrell made no reply for some moments. He was endeavouring to compose himself, and in some measure he succeeded. He raised his head with a haughty air of defiance, and tearing the paper deliberately, though still with uncertain and trembling fingers, he stamped his foot upon the atoms.

"Tell your principal," said he, "that I retort upon him the foul and false words he has uttered against me; that I trample upon his assertions with the same scorn I feel towards himself; and that before this hour to-morrow, I will confront him to death as through life. For the rest, Mr. Pelham, I cannot name my second till the morning; leave me your address, and you shall hear from me before you are stirring. Have you any thing farther with me?"

"Nothing," said I, laying my card on the table, "I have fulfilled the most ungrateful charge ever entrusted to me. I wish you good night."

I re-entered the carriage, and drove to Glanville's. I broke into the room rather abruptly; Glanville was leaning on the table, and gazing intently on a small miniature. A pistol-case lay beside him: one of the pistols in order for use, and the other still unarranged; the room was, as usual, covered with books and papers, and on the costly cushions of the ottoman, lay the large, black dog, which I remembered well as his companion of yore, and which he kept with him constantly, as the only thing in the world whose society he could at all times bear: the animal lay curled up, with its quick, black eye fixed watchfully upon its master, and directly I entered, it uttered, though without moving, a low, warning growl.

Glanville looked up, and in some confusion thrust the picture into a drawer of the table, and asked me my news. I told him word for word what had passed. Glanville set his teeth, and clenched his hand firmly; and then, as if his anger was at once appeased, he suddenly changed the subject and tone of our conversation. He spoke with great cheerfulness and humour, on the various topics of the day; touched upon politics; laughed at Lord Guloeton, and seemed as indifferent and unconscious of the event of the morrow as my peculiar constitution would have rendered myself.

When I rose to depart, for I had too great an interest in him to feel much for the subjects he conversed on, he said, "I shall write one line to my mother, and another to my poor sister; you will deliver them if I fall, for I have sworn that one of us shall not quit the ground alive. I shall be all impatience to know the hour you will arrange with Tyrrell's second. God bless you, and farewell for the present."

CHAPTER LX

Charge, Chester, charge!

—*Marmion.*

Though this was one of the first mercantile transactions of my life, I had no doubt about acquitting myself with reputation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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